

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE FIGURE AND FIGURATION OF WOMAN IN THE HEBREW BIBLE:

FEMALE BODY AND VOICE IN SONG OF SONGS,

PROVERBS 1-9, 31, AND LAMENTATIONS 1-2

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*For Aaron and Isaac*

“Indeed, if woman had no existence save in the fiction written by men, one would imagine her a person of the utmost importance; very various; heroic and mean; splendid and sordid; infinitely beautiful and hideous in the extreme; as great as a man, some think even greater. But this is woman in fiction... A very queer, composite being thus emerges. Imaginatively she is of the highest importance; practically she is completely insignificant. She pervades poetry from cover to cover; she is all but absent from history... Some of the most inspired words, some of the most profound thoughts in literature fall from her lips; in real life she could hardly read, could scarcely spell, and was the property of her husband... [S]he is a vessel in which all sorts of spirits and forces are coursing and flashing perpetually.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

“The only points in which I differ from ecclesiastical teaching is that I do not believe that any man ever saw or talked with God, I do not believe that God inspired the Mosaic code, or told the historians what they say he did about woman, for all the religions on the face of the earth degrade her, and so long as woman accepts the position that they assign her, her emancipation is impossible. Whatever the Bible may be made to do in Hebrew or Greek, in plain English it does not exalt and dignify woman.”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction: Thinking with Women in the Hebrew Bible.....	1
Chapter 2: Woman as Landscape in the Song of Songs.....	52
Chapter 3: Women, Wisdom, and the Landscape of Life in Proverbs 1-9 and 31.....	132
Chapter 4: The Tragedy of Woman Jerusalem in Lamentations 1 and 2.....	233
Conclusion.....	305
Bibliography.....	311

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In gratitude for the joy and love that Aaron and Isaac foster in my life, I dedicate this dissertation to them.

Kelli A. Gardner  
New York City

## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Thinking With Women in the Hebrew Bible

This dissertation examines why and, especially, *how* feminine literary imagery is utilized repeatedly, across biblical texts and genres, to figure the collective identity and values of Israel-Judea—its people, land, and resources. While the image of personified Israel or Jerusalem, often portrayed as battered wife of Yahweh, found in the prophetic texts (e.g., Hos 1-3; Jer 2-4; Ezek 16 and 23), will likely come to mind first, this project expands the range of texts, modes of figuration, and forms of identity usually analyzed. Here I will look beyond the prophetic texts to discover a more diverse and extensive female figuration that makes use of not only the female body but also the female voice. Unlike the prophetic portrayals of personified Israel or Jerusalem, these constructed female figures speak. They give voice to community values, such as romantic love (Song of Songs) and wisdom (Proverbs 1-9, 31), as well as their relationship with Yahweh (Lamentations 1 and 2). The purpose of this study, then, is to examine these speaking female figures of the Hebrew Bible, analyzing how they have been constructed and to what literary function they have been put.

This study, then, relies on, but also attempts to build on, feminist biblical scholarship, which has hosted some of the most concerned and dedicated readers of these female figures. The various feminist movements experienced in the western world over the past two centuries have especially energized this trend in scholarship. Ever since Elizabeth Cady Stanton, intellectual leader of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Women's Rights Movement and driving force behind the first feminist biblical critical project, *The Woman's Bible*, realized that women would never gain equality

without undermining the (divine!) source of female subordination—the Bible—this work has been tied to two major issues: the political and social rights of women and the authority of the biblical text in both religious and secular spheres.<sup>1</sup> Different scholars have dealt with these issues differently depending on their own commitments and interests, but in nearly every case this modern political agenda is apparent. As a result of these commitments, often feminist critical work is more concerned with readers of the Bible today than with the historical realities and literary imaginaries of the society that produced the Bible. This seems to be the reason for the persistence of evaluative readings in feminist critical work—the concern is with either saving the

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1. Modern feminist biblical criticism was born with the Women's Rights Movement of the second half of the nineteenth century when Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an intellectual leader of the movement since its beginnings at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, whose radical views on women's equality stretched the limits of even her own fellow suffragists, decided it was high time for women to read the Scriptures for themselves to evaluate its position on women. This revolutionary idea first occurred to her in 1886 but it was nearly a decade before the project came to fruition; the first volume of *The Woman's Bible* was published in 1895 and was met with intense controversy (Huber, "They Weren't Prepared to Hear," 271-273). Stanton organized a group of 25 women, a "Revising Committee," some of whom could read the original Hebrew and Greek but none of whom were trained in the relatively new "higher criticism" of biblical scholarship (though female scholars with this learning were invited to participate, none would for fear of damaging their scholarly reputation, according to Stanton [*The Woman's Bible*, 1:9]), to read through the entire Bible and cut out every passage that related to women. They pasted these passages into a blank book and then wrote commentaries on each passage discussing the presentation of women and evaluating them from their perspective as women who believed in the inherent equality of the sexes. Many passages they condemned as biased and derogatory towards the female sex, but others they praised for the presentation of equality between the sexes.

The revolutionary spirit behind this project is remarkable. Stanton, seeing that the Bible was repeatedly used (by women as well as men) to defend and justify the inferior position of women as divine providence, understood that these texts would need to be addressed directly if women were ever to gain equality. What is more, Stanton saw the Bible as a human (and specifically male) endeavor, declaring the texts written, preserved, translated, and interpreted by men and "inspired by the natural love of domination in the historians" (*The Woman's Bible*, 1:8). While she never wholly dismissed the Bible, she believed that women should be able to read, translate, and interpret scriptures for themselves without the intervention of men; otherwise women would never be able to combat the scriptural justification for women's subordination. Stanton writes, "I do not believe that any man ever saw or talked with God, I do not believe that God inspired the Mosaic code, or told the historians what they say he did about woman, for all the religions on the face of the earth degrade her, and so long as woman accepts the position that they assign her, her emancipation is impossible" (*The Woman's Bible*, 1:12). And later, "Now, to my mind, the Revising Committee of 'The Woman's Bible,' in denying divine inspiration for such demoralizing ideas, shows a more worshipful reverence for the great Spirit of All Good than does the Church" (*The Woman's Bible*, 2:8).

text for women today by unearthing positive portrayals of biblical women or condemning the text as wholly patriarchal and therefore, in the more extreme formulations, obsolete, uninspired, or dangerous.

What is more, an antagonism has developed for some between feminist and traditional approaches. Feminist critics are more likely to reject more traditional approaches to biblical criticism as androcentric and contrary to their own goals and perspectives.<sup>2</sup> As a result of this antagonism, work on women in the Bible is seen (and often maintained) as peripheral, segregated from the work of mainstream biblical scholarship.<sup>3</sup> This perspective has diminished the whole enterprise of biblical studies: how can we understand a set of texts when, for example, one of the most dominant recurring images is an abused female body that is dismissed as “just a metaphor,”<sup>4</sup> or worse, if we limit the scholarly community and/or methodologies that can legitimately approach these texts? Feminist biblical criticism has done the most extensive and thorough work on female imagery in the Bible and must be a part of any examination of these images, but this approach does tend to limit the kinds of investigations performed. A review of

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2. For example, see “Brenner,” “On Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Feminist Woman.”

3. For example, from the feminist perspective, see Brenner’s “A Personal Forward: *The Israelite Woman* in the Life of this Israeli (and Dutch) Woman” in the second edition of her book, *The Israelite Woman*, where she discusses how this perceived antagonism resulted in many career obstacles for her and continues to persist. From the other perspective, see Moshe Greenberg’s Anchor Bible commentary, *Ezekiel 21-37*, where he claims that feminist critical work “differs [so] fundamentally from the (quixotic?) historical-philological search for the primary, context-bound sense of Scripture that is the project of this commentary” that he does not engage with any of this scholarship in the course of his commentary on Ezekiel (494). See too, Koller, “Pornography or Theology?” 407, who also points to this example as a “great loss for readers of the Bible” (407). Another place to observe this scholarly conflict explicitly and collegially, is Robert Carroll’s “Desire under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets – a Response.” Carroll responds here to the work of Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes on prophetic pornography (see discussion below) in their book *On Gendering Texts*. Carroll’s response is published in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*, along side excerpts from Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes’ book.

4. See, for example, Moughtin-Mumby’s critique of traditional scholarship that takes a substitutionary approach to metaphor (that is, assuming a literal word can replace the metaphorical one and maintain the same meaning) (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 6-13).

recent work on prophetic female imagery, a central area of inquiry for feminist scholars and where most of the work on female figures and figuration occurs, will demonstrate some of the contributions of feminist work as well as inherent interpretive problems and how approaches to gendered imagery have begun to change.

### ***The Study of Female Imagery in the Prophetic Texts***

Feminist concerns prompted an explosion of scholarship on female imagery in the prophetic texts in particular. Motivated by the question of how modern day (female) readers should (if at all) read, interpret, and make sense of texts that, for example, depict the deity as an abusive husband and Jerusalem as his adulterous wife, feminist scholars rolled up their sleeves and set to work. While the explicitness of this question and the degree to which it dictates methods, text choices, and conclusions vary from scholar to scholar, the power and danger of this imagery is always an undercurrent. I will review here recent work on female imagery in the prophetic texts in order to highlight significant patterns of investigation that will be crucial in the chapters to follow. I will also identify pitfalls that I will seek to avoid as I extend analysis to female figures outside of prophetic literature.

There are a few dominant trends in how scholars have chosen to deal with this challenging imagery. First, several scholars have responded by exposing patriarchal (for some misogynistic) perspectives in the biblical texts by applying contemporary feminist theory on pornography. A second trend in scholarship is the attempt to mitigate the damaging effect of this imagery for the modern reader by identifying it as part of a cohesive narrative that stretches across the biblical texts. And third, many scholars seek to explain this imagery by

contextualizing it within the ancient Near Eastern milieu. These trends are not mutually exclusive and all or some may appear in the same study. Lastly, I will examine what can no longer be called a trend, but a primary theoretical mode for addressing imagery, feminine and otherwise, in biblical texts: the application of metaphor theory. This survey of recent scholarship will not only highlight the extensive work done on this imagery in the prophetic texts (and the lack of a more comprehensive examination of the female figure in biblical texts), but will also allow me to begin to differentiate my own approach to this imagery.

One of the earliest trends in how the female prophetic imagery was addressed was through the lens of contemporary feminist theory on pornography. This approach aligned well (both in terms of ideology and chronology) with the emergence of the feminist biblical critical movement at the end of the 20th century and was focused on exposing the underlying patriarchal and, for some, misogynistic, attitudes in these biblical texts. A concern with the authority of the texts and the impact of this imagery on modern readers is always central to these analyses. The application of pornography to the prophetic texts was first made by T. Drorah Setel who published “Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea” in one of the early collections of feminist writings on the Bible in 1985.<sup>5</sup> She argues that prophetic texts “seem to be the first to use objectified female sexuality as a symbol of evil” and identifies an “interesting congruence” with modern pornography.<sup>6</sup> Setel outlines feminist theory on female objectification and pornography, summarizing the features, function, definitions, and causes identified.<sup>7</sup> In her

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5. This piece was also republished eight years later in the Brenner’s first book in her *Feminist Companion to the Bible: A Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, 143-155.

6. Setel, “Prophets and Pornography,” 86.

7. Setel, “Prophets and Pornography,” 87-88. Setel draws on the work of Andrea Dworkin, *Our Blood and Pornography*, Susan Griffin, *Women and Nature*, Laura Lederer (ed.), *Take Back the Night*, and Robin Morgan (ed.), *Going Too Far*.

summary she emphasizes the negativity around female sexuality (versus a positive or neutral male sexuality), male domination, control, and possession, and the degradation and sexual abuse of the female body. After a brief overview of the historical background to female sexuality in the prophets (noting especially the priestly purity laws around female bodies as well as concerns around reproduction and paternity),<sup>8</sup> she examines the female sexual imagery in Hosea (primarily the first three chapters but with references to later chapters as well, e.g. Hos 9:12, 14; 11:1-4). While the application of the feminist theory on pornography serves more as an illuminating framework than a central organizing methodology, she identifies the positive and controlling role of the male/god and the negative and passive presentation of the female Gomer/Israel as well as her degradation.<sup>9</sup> In other words, Setel only suggests the pornographic nature of the prophetic texts and does not assert it. She concludes with the question of how “contemporary religious feminists” should deal with these texts, acknowledging that for some “the ‘pornographic’ nature of female objectification may demand that such texts not be declared the ‘word of God’ in a public setting.”<sup>10</sup> Setel’s concern with the modern reception of these texts is central to her work.

Setel’s published work on the connections between modern pornography and the prophetic use of female sexuality stopped there; however, this idea proved to be very influential on the burgeoning field of feminist biblical criticism in the early 1990s.<sup>11</sup> Both Fokkelien van

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8. Setel does not give an explanation of how she understands the chronology of the texts, but rather seems to take their canonical order as chronological (e.g., priestly texts were written before the prophetic texts, and so on).

9. Setel, “Prophets and Pornography,” 92-94.

10. Setel, “Prophets and Pornography,” 95.

11. This influence can also be seen in the *Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible* series, which features 20 volumes published between 1993-2001 and was arguably the beating heart of the feminist biblical critical movement at the time. These volumes, edited by Althaya Brenner (sometimes with a co-editor), collected and published feminist readings about nearly every book in the Bible from a wide group of “womanly readers” (Brenner, “On Reading the Hebrew Bible,” 13). The series begins with a volume on the Song of Songs, but, significantly, includes Setel’s article, “Prophets and Pornography” in a section entitled “Intertextual Connections and the Critique of Patriarchy.” All the pieces in this section consider

Dijk-Hemmes and Athalya Brenner published pieces that use Setel's description of pornography and her suggestion of its application to prophetic texts as their starting point.<sup>12</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes in "The Metaphorization of Woman in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23" assigns an "androcentric-pornographic character" to Ezek 23 and pays special attention to moments when she identifies a "denial or misnaming of female experience" in service of male domination (one of Setel's functions of pornography). For example, in Ezek 23:3 when the sisters' experience in Egypt is described as "play[ing] the harlot" (van Dijk-Hemmes' translation of זגה) she points out that their role in the activity was receptive and not active. Van Dijk-Hemmes translates "There their breasts were squeezed/There the teats of their maidenhood were pressed" and as a result suggests this experience would be more fairly translated as "They were sexually molested in

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the Song of Songs in conversation with other texts (primarily, Genesis 2-3 and Hosea), but notably, only Setel's piece does not actually address the Song of Songs. (It does immediately precede a piece by Fokkeliën van Dijk-Hemmes that compares the Song and Hos 2: "The Imagination of Power and the Power of Imagination: An Intertextual Analysis of Two Biblical Love Songs: The Song of Songs and Hosea 2"). Brenner explains its inclusion in the introduction to the volume by asserting that Setel's "unmasking' of male attitudes" in the prophetic texts stands in stark comparison to (and, it would seem, therefore supports) "the plausible definition of the SoS as a predominantly female composition," an argument put forward elsewhere in the collected volume (Brenner, "On Feminist Criticism," 33-34). Although Brenner does not mention the comparison with pornography in her summary of Setel's article, by the time Brenner puts together *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets* (two years later), the concept of pornoprophetic is central to the volume (see part 2 of the volume, entitled: "On the Pornoprophetics of Sexual Violence" pp. 244-352). Brenner even includes her own piece on pornography in Jeremiah in this volume (see discussion above). Her concern with modern readers of these texts is always foregrounded. She writes in her introduction to the volume: "...[T]he textual anger and verbal violence are undeniable. It is difficult for any reader, even a resisting or suspicious reader, not to be affected by the recurrent, negative images of woman which are coded into the religio-political propaganda. The verbal violence of the marriage and other metaphors contains many references to females 'prostituting' themselves, which is also the regular practice of pornography. This recurrent accusation is socially devastating" ("Introduction," 34). Moreover, six years later, Brenner published the final volume in the Feminist Companion second series: *A Feminist Companion to the Prophets and Daniel*, and again used pornoprophetic as an organizing concept, but with some awareness of the shifting controversy around this idea and its terminology: section IC is entitled "The Pornoprophetic (?) 'Marriage' Metaphor" (pp. 87-225).

12. Both pieces were originally published in their book, *On Gendering Texts* and reprinted two years later in *A Feminist Companion to the Latter Prophets*. The page references here refer to the *Feminist Companion* printing.

Egypt, in their youth they were sexually abused.”<sup>13</sup> She explains: “This way, justice would have been done to the fate of these metaphorical women, and the audience would not have been seduced into viewing women or girls as responsible for and even guilty of their own violation. In short, there would have been no question of ‘blaming the victim.’”<sup>14</sup> Van Dijk-Hemmes argues that it is through the metaphorization of woman that the prophet was able to convey his message of hopelessness and humiliation to his male audience due to their infidelity in both religious and political realms.<sup>15</sup> She, however, notes that while a male audience is offered an escape to this shameful identification (through the image of the “wronged and revengeful husband” or the righteous (male) judges who appear in Ezek 23:45), female readers have no such escape.<sup>16</sup> As with Setel, van Dijk-Hemmes’ work, then, is also driven by a primary concern with the modern “womanly” reader of these texts.

While Brenner also relies on Setel and her outline of pornography, she takes it further, expanding the discussion of pornography to include the idea of fantasy and connecting it explicitly to the prophetic propaganda. While Setel and van Dijk-Hemmes identify pornographic elements in Hosea and Ezekiel 23, respectively, Brenner explicitly argues that the “husband-wife metaphor” in Jeremiah (as well as in Hosea and Ezekiel, she suggests) is pornographic and not “just” erotic imagery.<sup>17</sup> She even includes a modern intertext, a discussion of the pornographic novel, *The Story of O*, as a “so-called control text” to her consideration of Jeremiah (especially

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13. Van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Metaphorization of Woman,” 250.

14. Van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Metaphorization of Woman,” 251.

15. Van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Metaphorization of Woman,” 254.

16. Van Dijk-Hemmes concludes that Ezek 23 performs a “violent speech act...[that] simultaneously shapes and distorts women’s (sexual) experience” (“The Metaphorization of Woman,” 255).

17. Brenner, “On Prophetic Propaganda,” 258.

Jer 2:23-25 where the woman is metaphorized as a “wild she-ass”<sup>18</sup>).<sup>19</sup> She concludes that both texts describe a kind of sadomasochistic fantasy. While in *The Story of O* this fantasy is represented as reciprocal (although problematically), in Jeremiah “[a] (male) fantasy of (male) domination is acted out by equating divine authority with male power. The (male) fantasy of (female) submission becomes definitive.”<sup>20</sup> Brenner further develops these ideas in a subsequent piece, “Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections,” where she responds to critiques that her negative perspective on pornography and its application to the prophetic texts is unfair and overwrought.<sup>21</sup> She reasserts her view that these texts are pornographic by way of arguing for their status as propaganda, specifically “porno-religious propaganda.”<sup>22</sup> She does so by describing ten techniques of persuasion used in propaganda and then demonstrating how each of these techniques is also found in pornographic media—citing both modern and biblical examples.<sup>23</sup> Brenner clarifies that pornography is not just sexual fantasy but “violent sexual fantasy”<sup>24</sup> that “advertises an ideology of female bondage.”<sup>25</sup> While she admits that it is unlikely that these texts are “consciously misogynistic,” Brenner asserts that “[t]he ideology of male supremacy is indispensable to the husband/wife metaphor: without this ideology the metaphor will not be understood, even less be acted upon.”<sup>26</sup> For Brenner, then, the way to deal with these problematic pornoprophetic texts is “to expose and then reject them.”<sup>27</sup>

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18. Brenner, “On Prophetic Propaganda,” 262-264.

19. Brenner, “On Prophetic Propaganda,” 268.

20. Brenner, “On Prophetic Propaganda,” 270.

21. This piece was first published in the *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* and reprinted and recontextualized a year later in her book, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 153-174. The page references here refer to the original printing.

22. Brenner, “Pornoprophetics,” 66.

23. Brenner, “Pornoprophetics,” 66-68, 74-77.

24. Brenner, “Pornoprophetics,” 70.

25. Brenner, “Pornoprophetics,” 76.

26. Brenner, “Pornoprophetics,” 77.

27. Brenner, “Pornoprophetics,” 85.

The work of Setel, van Dijk-Hemmes, and Brenner on the prophetic texts, is paradigmatic of much of feminist biblical critical work. Their motivating concern is with the modern implications, especially for women, that these sacred, authoritative texts carry. They recognize the persuasive power of this imagery that could be read as legitimizing (male to female) spousal abuse, justifying sexual violence against “sinful” women, and depicting women as inherently polluted, unfaithful, and evil. While these motivating feminist concerns shape their approach and conclusions, all three of these scholars also contribute to our understanding of how metaphor, rhetoric, and propaganda work in these ancient literary texts.

Another dominant trend in scholarship on prophetic female imagery is the impulse to craft or identify a cohesive chronological narrative that develops across the prophetic texts.<sup>28</sup> For example, several scholars have argued for a coherent development of “the marriage metaphor” or “the Daughter Zion figure” across texts, analyzing how this imagery is borrowed, reused, transformed, innovated, and so on.<sup>29</sup> Explicitly or implicitly, this work often seeks to construct a narrative about this abused female figure and her relationship with the male deity and, in doing

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28. Studies that exhibit this trend include: Baumann, *Love and Violence*; Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*; Weems, *Battered Love*; Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*; Stienstra, *YHWH is the Husband of His People*; Abma, *Bonds of Love*.

29. Sharon Moughtin-Mumby explicitly critiques scholars who refer to “the marriage metaphor” as if there is a single underlying metaphor at work that (should) always work the same way (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 23-25). One of the central arguments of Moughtin-Mumby’s work is the variety of this metaphorical language, which is clear once free from the limitations of thinking about a single “marriage metaphor” (24, 48). She asserts that this assumption is seen not only in references to “the marriage metaphor” but also in the idea that all prophets who use this imagery after Hosea are adapting, transforming, and/or expanding Hosea’s “marriage metaphor” for their own use (25). She points to Galambush’s *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel* and Weems’ *Battered Love* as examples of this kind of work. It seems to me, however, that any scholar tracing the developmental trajectory of this imagery (e.g., Baumann and Maier) relies at least in part on this assumption.

so, locate a happy ending for the female figure or, at the very least, a justification for her suffering by way of narrativized resolution.<sup>30</sup>

For example, Gerlinde Baumann in *Love and Violence: Marriage Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* attempts to be comprehensive in her analysis of the marital imagery.<sup>31</sup> She reviews each text, moving in chronological order from Hosea to Jeremiah to Ezekiel to Lamentations to Isaiah<sup>32</sup> to Micah, Nahum, and Malachi.<sup>33</sup> She refers to Hosea as the “primal text” for this imagery and Ezekiel as the “climax” and then finds in Isaiah and especially the Book of the Twelve (minus Hosea) a resolution in the shifting imagery. She argues that in Malachi “the use of the marriage imagery reaches its end: In an exchange of roles YHWH now takes the female and Judah the male part. This travesty of the prophetic marriage imagery leads to a shift in reference points: Now YHWH’s most important partner is no longer his land (Hosea), his people, or his city (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Lamentations), but, much as in Trito-Isaiah, each individual Israelite, male and female.”<sup>34</sup> In

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30. See too Moughtin-Mumby, who suggests that many scholars who analyze the “marriage metaphor” in prophetic texts presume a stable story-line (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 26-30). See discussion below.

31. Published in English in 2003 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press) but was originally published as *Liebe und Gewalt. Die Ehe als Metapher für das Verhältnis JHWH-Israel in den Prophetenbüchern* by the Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, Stuttgart, SBS 185 (2000).

32. Baumann acknowledges that the book of Isaiah has material that extends over a 500 year period and treats the books in its conventional three sections (chs 1-39\* from “the royal period”; chs 40-55\* from “the exilic period”; chs 56-66 from “the post-exilic” period); however, Baumann still discusses them all in the same chapter in large part because, she explains, the marriage imagery “scarcely appears at all in Proto-Isaiah” (*Love and Violence*, 175).

33. Baumann also acknowledges that the Book of the Twelve reflects a long period of composition and is challenging to date. She suggests “these few passages are brief and unconnected” (*Love and Violence*, 203). Despite this awareness, she deals with it last, considering the imagery in the book as a whole (minus Hosea) and then looking at each text in canonical order. Thus, the fitting conclusion to the narrative of the marriage imagery that Baumann has been tracing is found in a canonical (not historical) ending.

34. Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 225. See pages 223-225 for whole summary of this narrative. It is also important to note that Baumann in no way sees this narrative as “neat” (in fact she never calls it a “narrative”), but points to different “lines of interpretation” for the exile, differentiating between a “deuteronomistic-deuteronomistic pattern” seen in Lamentations versus an “Isaian pattern” (*Love and*

other words, Baumann discovers a somewhat happy (implicitly Christian) ending to this troublesome imagery. She does not, however, celebrate this resolution; rather Baumann ends her analysis with a recognition that there are no “counter-images” or “equalizing metaphors” that can “neutralize” the abusive images of God.<sup>35</sup> Implicit, however, in the narrative Baumann constructs is a frustrated and regretful justification of the imagery. She views the use of this imagery as “a way of interpreting Israel’s experience of exile” and therefore admits that the violence seems to be essential.<sup>36</sup>

Christl Maier in *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion: Gender, Space, and the Sacred in Ancient Israel*, expands the texts and imagery under investigation to all those that personify Zion/ Jerusalem. She is particularly interested in the combination of sacred space and gender imagery in Jerusalem’s evolving portrait and argues that Zion eventually emerges as a “religious symbol of salvation.”<sup>37</sup> Like Baumann, Maier treats the biblical texts in chronological order, but within three general categories of “preexilic,” “exilic,” and “postexilic.”<sup>38</sup> Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s spatial theory, feminist theory on the body, as well as evidence of ancient Near Eastern associations between women and cities, Maier traces the development of this metaphor from the early “Zion tradition” (Psalms, Isa 6, and Mic 3) to female personifications of Zion as daughter (Isaiah and Jeremiah) to her role as “whore” (Isa 1:21-26; Jer 2-3, 13; Ezek 16 and 23) and widow (Lamentations) to mother and queen (Second and Third Isaiah). Maier is explicit about tracing the evolution of this imagery across time and texts in order to construct “the turbulent  

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*Violence*, 225).

35. The search for “counter-metaphors” is something Baumann engages in throughout her analysis and while she finds some (e.g., female images of God in Second Isaiah), she admits in her conclusion that they cannot mitigate the violent imagery associated with the “marriage metaphor” (*Love and Violence*, 226).

36. Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 227-228.

37. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 4.

38. These categories were at work for Baumann as well. See n. 32 above.

history of Jerusalem,” which takes the form of a coherent and cohesive narrative. While Maier’s topic is not explicitly “the marriage metaphor” she treats almost all of the same texts as Baumann, for example, because personified Jerusalem is central to most texts that make use of marital or sexual imagery.<sup>39</sup> And while Maier asserts that the personifications of Jerusalem as daughter, wife, whore, mother, and queen are “so complex that any clear distinction between negative and positive portraits seems unattainable,” it is hard to not see a redemptive narrative in Maier’s constructed history that traces the development from vulnerable daughter to guilty whore to mother and queen who is “an ultimate symbol for peace and salvation.”<sup>40</sup>

Sharon Moughtin-Mumby also identifies this reliance on a “recognized story-line” in scholarship on this metaphorical imagery.<sup>41</sup> She, however, describes it as a trend found in

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39. The one text that Maier does not closely analyze is Hosea since this work does not personify *Jerusalem*; however, Maier does deal with it in brief at the beginning of her chapter on the treatment of Jerusalem as “whore” in the prophetic texts (ch 4). She explains that she deals with it first for chronological reasons (*Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 99).

40. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 209. Note too: “From a feminist point of view, however, the connection of the mother with care and love belongs to a dominant, androcentric perspective of reality. Even if Mother Zion lends her role to Israel’s God and refreshes the imagery of the divine, the personified city does not countervail the rule of a mainly male and strong God. Thus, I would caution to praise the motherly image of Zion as a feminist role model. There is no gain in cherishing Zion as mother while negating Zion as whore. Both roles are like the two sides of a coin” (*Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 209).

41. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 26-30. Moughtin-Mumby focuses her analysis on the work of Abma (*Bonds of Love*), and Weems (*Battered Love*), whose reliance on a cohesive story is, perhaps, even more apparent than Baumann’s and Maier’s work. Abma, for example, interprets the marital prophetic metaphors by means of covenant: “Every stage in Israel’s history corresponds to a stage in the marriage between Yahweh and Israel” (*Bonds of Love*, 255). Abma sees these “stages” in the metaphorical marriage play out in the drama of the prophetic texts, which narrate their falling in love, engagement, and marriage “with its concomitant deceptions and nadirs” (*Bonds of Love*, 255). As a result of this underlying perspective of the covenant relationship, Abma ultimately interprets the prophetic marital imagery positively suggesting that “Israel and Yhwh are bound as partners in a covenant relation and the marriage imagery signifies that this is more than a formal affair: it is a passionate affair with a strong and affectionate involvement of the two partners” (*Bonds of Love*, 254). It is noteworthy that Abma does not include Ezek 16 and 23 in her discussion. Weems also reads this imagery with an understanding of an underlying covenant relationship and interprets it as a “part of the messiness of intimacy” (*Battered Love*, 78). While Weems recognizes the potential damage these metaphors can do, especially for vulnerable modern readers, she suggests that the marriage metaphor “calls attention to the contractual character of the divine-human relationship, the stormy character of that relationship, the magnitude of the deity’s love, the interrelatedness of life, and the fickleness of the human heart” (*Battered Love*, 112).

traditional scholarship, where a substitutionary approach to metaphor dominates, that influences even feminist scholars who claim to take a cognitive approach to metaphor.<sup>42</sup> While I believe this diagnosis is correct and that Moughtin-Mumby convincingly demonstrates this influence in her analysis,<sup>43</sup> I would reframe the problem: the impulse of many feminist scholars to attempt to make sense of this troublesome imagery by way of a (sacred and therefore authoritative) narrative mitigates, at least to a small degree, the effect of this imagery. In other words, good stories often feature terrible events. One may even say the more terrible the better the resolution and the more satisfying the happy ending. I would suggest, then, that this trend in feminist readings of the prophetic texts is better understood in light of the original (and ongoing) motivation of this subfield: to save (or reject) biblical texts for the modern womanly reader.

While an examination of Baumann's and Maier's work demonstrates a reliance on a cohesive, historical narrative about this imagery (and therefore the relationship between Yahweh and his people and city), both explicitly resist the pull to explain away this troublesome imagery by merely pointing out that this imagery is used positively as well as negatively. Even so, the very fact of constructing a cohesive narrative for Daughter Zion seems to impose this interpretation.<sup>44</sup> The construction of a history of the city-woman Zion or of the relationship between God and his wife-Israel implies that the violent images are a part of a greater narrative.

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42. Moughtin-Mumby argues that one of the differences between traditional scholars and many feminist scholars' work on female imagery in the prophetic texts is a difference in understanding metaphor. She asserts that traditional scholars often take a substitutionary approach, while many feminists take a cognitive approach (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 3). A substitutionary approach to metaphor is the view that metaphors are just decorative and can easily be substituted with a non-metaphorical term and not lose any meaning. See discussion on metaphor below.

43. See Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 6-30.

44. See Clark on narrative as vehicle of ideology ("The Lady Vanishes," 20-21). Clark helpfully cites Hayden White when she states, "The function of narrative is to produce notions of 'continuity, wholeness, closure, and individuality that every 'civilized' society wishes to see itself as incarnating..." ("The Lady Vanishes," 20, citing White, "Droysen's *Historik*: Historical Writing as Bourgeois Science," 87).

Even with the recognition that so-called “positive” maternal imagery still reflects an androcentric worldview (Maier) and that the abusive imagery can never be neutralized by nurturing “counter images” (Baumann), the very suggestion of a cohesive narrative demonstrates the necessity of the problems along the way.

A third trend in scholarship on the prophetic female imagery is the attempt to explain these difficult images by way of comparative evidence from the ancient Near East. While comparative work may be considered a more traditional method of approaching biblical texts, here again, there seems to be similar feminist motivation: to explain and therefore, for some, mitigate the effect of this difficult imagery and, for others, to ultimately resist this as religious imagery. For example, F. Rachel Magdalene in “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses and the Ultimate Texts of Terror: A Study of the Language of Divine Sexual Abuse in the Prophetic Corpus” examines the imagery of divine sexual abuse in the prophetic texts in light of treaty-curses in the ancient Near East. Drawing on the work of scholars who have examined these treaty-curses (especially Delbert Hillers<sup>45</sup>) and identified a link between the ancient Near Eastern treaty-curse language and descriptions of divine judgment in the prophetic texts, Magdalene calls attention to the common curses leveled at the personified city or nation: threats of exposure and prostitution as well as raping wives.<sup>46</sup> As a result, she asserts that these treaty-curses are “the source of the metaphor”<sup>47</sup> and suggests that “the images contained within these [prophetic] texts were not only acceptable to the men of ancient Israel, they meaningfully conveyed the message to return to the fold of the Israelite covenantal relationship with God.”<sup>48</sup> Magdalene, however,

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45. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*.

46. Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 343-344.

47. Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 342.

48. Magdalene, “Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses,” 347.

concludes that even with this understanding of the texts' historical context she must ultimately "abandon" these problematic patriarchal texts, stating that she "stand[s] against the continued use of this metaphor."<sup>49</sup>

Whether motivated by feminist concerns or not, much scholarship on the female prophetic imagery, at least, reference<sup>50</sup> the work of Aloysius Fitzgerald, who argues that West Semitic capital cities were seen as goddesses who were married to the patron god of that city.<sup>51</sup> He asserts that Israelite poets were influenced by this "mythological" concept and transformed it to conform to their monotheistic perspective by personifying a city as a woman in relationship (as wife or daughter, for example) with the deity.<sup>52</sup> Fitzgerald explains the metaphor of the adulterous wife with this historical background.<sup>53</sup> The popularity of this idea, evinced by the number of studies that cite Fitzgerald (without a close reevaluation of his evidence) demonstrates the desire of scholars, feminist and otherwise, to explain this imagery, at least in part, by historical context.<sup>54</sup> More than two decades after Fitzgerald published these influential articles, Peggy Day reexamined Fitzgerald's work and demonstrated the lack of evidence, circular

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49. Magdalene, "Ancient Near Eastern Treaty-Curses," 349.

50. Biddle, "The Figure of Lady Jerusalem," 179-181; Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 20; Bourguet, *Des métaphores de Jérémie*, 481-484; Callaway, *Sing, O Barren One*, 65; Engelken, *Frauen im Alten Israel*, 42; Schmitt, "The Motherhood of God and Zion as Mother," 568; Steck, "Zion als Gelände und Gestalt," 275. See Day, "The Personification of Cities as Female," 283-285, especially 285n9.

51. Fitzgerald, "The Mythological Background"; Fitzgerald, "BTWLT and BT."

52. Fitzgerald, "Mythological Background," 415.

53. He also suggests that the female imagery is more effective: "Violence done to a strong man or a city wall is violence; but violence done to a delicate young mother is violence indeed" ("Mythological Background," 416). Unlike many feminist readers, however, Fitzgerald does not seem concerned about how this violent imagery may effect vulnerable and/or female readers today.

54. For example, Julie Galambush, in one of the first monographs that focused on female prophetic imagery, in her case in the book of Ezekiel, with a feminist lens, relies on Fitzgerald's work. While her analysis is primarily literary (notably informed by cognitive theories of metaphor), Galambush suggests that "Ezekiel's use of the marriage metaphor depends for its coherence on the culturally accepted notion that the female capital city is married to a male god" (*Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 23). A claim that seems to rob Ezekiel of the literary artistry that Galambush spends her monograph detailing. For her discussion of Fitzgerald's work, see pp. 20-21.

reasoning, and problematic assumptions about the uniqueness of Israelite religion and the depiction of gender.<sup>55</sup>

Even still, historical context remains an important feature in work on the female prophetic imagery. For example, Maier in *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, discussed above, includes an analysis of ancient Near Eastern “origins” of the personification of Jerusalem, which she asserts “surely facilitated” this personification even while cautioning that “the metaphor of Daughter Zion rests also on its plausibility for an Israelite audience.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, despite the impulse to explain, if only partially, these complex metaphorical images with historical evidence, it has proved challenging to do so. Even with some evidence for an association between women and cities in the ancient Near East, it is difficult to make the leap from this limited evidence to explaining why and how this female imagery is utilized in prophetic literature. The extensive scholarship on the association of women and cities in the ancient Near East will be important for this dissertation insofar as this scholarship demonstrates a broadly dominant trend across ancient literature and history, even as the classic articulation of this association by Fitzgerald and others overinterprets the available evidence and fails to appreciate the role of metaphor in this imagery.

One more work deserves mention within this trend for its insight into troubling assumptions implicit in many long-standing historical interpretations. Alice Keefe’s *Woman’s Body and the Social Body in Hosea 1-2* examines Hosea’s depiction of Israel as the adulterous wife of Yahweh in the context of eighth-century Israel. While her approach is primarily

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55. Day, “The Personification of Cities as Female in the Hebrew Bible: The Thesis of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C.” See too Maier’s reconsideration of Fitzgerald’s and Biddle’s evidence (*Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 63-69, esp. 64).

56. Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 61-74, here at 73.

sociohistorical, attempting to understand this metaphor in light of the economic, political, and social realities for Israel, one of the biggest contributions of this work is the exposure of the problematic assumptions that undergird the traditional understanding of this metaphor: a polemic against a syncretistic fertility cult.<sup>57</sup> Keefe argues that this interpretation, as well as many feminist attempts to read for female autonomy and dignity, are driven by Western and modern dualistic ideas about gender and religion (specifically the alignment of male and spirit versus female and material as well as Enlightenment ideas about personal autonomy and empowerment) rather than by the concerns and realities that actually produced the biblical texts.<sup>58</sup> Keefe's work demonstrates that interpretations are always shaped by interpreters. As a result, Keefe pushes back against Western assumptions about individualism and, instead, focuses on the kinship group, reading Hosea's metaphor as one that expresses anxieties about social violence and cohesion with imagery of sexual transgression.<sup>59</sup> Keefe's ideas about how social concerns are aptly reflected in the image of a female body are resonant with my own work.

Finally, the theoretical approach that can be found in nearly all of the recent work on female imagery in the prophetic texts is metaphor theory. Over the last century, metaphor theory has developed and spread across fields and disciplines, providing insight into meaning, language, poetics, linguistics, and human cognition.<sup>60</sup> This development followed the realization that metaphor is not merely an ornamental device, a particularly pleasing turn of phrase that could easily be paraphrased with less verbal decoration, but rather a cognitive device that is capable of creating new meaning. It is easy to understand, then, why this mode of analysis has become a

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57. Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 36-65.

58. Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 66-161

59. Keefe, *Woman's Body*, 162-189. See too Keefe, "Rapes of Women/Wars of Men" where she examines the association between rape and war in biblical narratives.

60. See discussion below.

crucial tool for interpreting such thorny metaphorical imagery. There is a great variety in these metaphor-focused studies in terms of the texts they consider, the interpretations they yield, and the conclusions they put forward.<sup>61</sup> For our purposes, those studies that combine metaphor theory with gender theory are most significant.

S. Tamar Kamionkowski in *Gender Reversal and Cosmic Chaos: A Study on the Book of Ezekiel* examines the problematic gendered imagery of Ezek 16 and 23. Kamionkowski, suggesting that gender was considered an indication of the careful order of God's universe, argues that Ezekiel uses gendered metaphors (especially "a weak man is a woman," found in many ancient Near Eastern military curses, as well as its inverse, "a strong woman is a man") to express the magnitude of social and theological upheaval in the time of the Babylonian Exile. Examining the way Ezekiel copes with the assumed emasculation that resulted from the exile, Kamionkowski, concludes that Ezekiel imagines a world where the military curses have been realized and the chaos of gender reversal has taken affect. The punishment of the female figure, especially in Ezk 16:34-43, provides the desired reordering of the universe, where males again resume control. Kamionkowski not only demonstrates the effectiveness of gendered metaphorical imagery in these texts but also identifies a deep cultural anxiety with gender ambiguity that underlies these metaphors.

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61. Recent studies on female imagery in the prophetic texts that rely on metaphor theory but have not been reviewed here include: Loeland, *Silent or Salient Gender?*; Weems, *Battered Love*; Stienstra, *YHWH is the Husband of His People*; Törnkvist, *The Use and Abuse of Female Sexual Imagery*; Darr, *Isaiah's Vision and the Family of God*; Abma, *Bonds of Love*; Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective*; Wacker, *Figurationen des Weiblichen im Hosea-Buch*; Dille, *Mixing Metaphors*; Shields, *Circumscribing the Prophet*. Moughtin-Mumby has demonstrated that not every study that utilizes metaphor theory does so without inconsistencies. She identifies three tendencies found in feminist studies utilizing cognitive metaphor theory that indicate that this theory is being inconsistently applied: search for etymologies, use of "the marriage metaphor," and assuming a single story about the relationship between Yahweh and his wife lie behind all prophetic imagery (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 22-30).

In a very different kind of work but making use of a similar understanding of gender, Cynthia Chapman argues in *The Gendered Language of Warfare in the Israelite-Assyrian Encounter* that “gender is a tool of ideology communicated metaphorically.”<sup>62</sup> Like Kamionkowski, Chapman also examines the way gendered language is used to express feelings of power and powerlessness in the ancient Near Eastern and biblical context. Chapman finds that in Assyrian texts masculinity was aligned with power and vitality while femininity with weakness and a lack of male qualities. As a result, with insults like “your soldiers are women”<sup>63</sup> or “may your king become a prostitute”<sup>64</sup> the Assyrians were able to figure their enemies as weak, vulnerable, and susceptible to defeat, just as describing the king as “without rival among princes” highlighted his superior strength and vitality.<sup>65</sup> Chapman suggests that biblical texts from this period of contact with the Assyrian empire reveal a similar use of gendered language to express power relations, but applied differently. In the prophetic texts, the language of powerful masculinity is reserved for Yahweh, while it is the people or city that is feminized as the wife or daughter of Yahweh. This allows for Assyria to be cast as merely a pawn in the larger drama that is the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Despite defeat, Yahweh remains fully in control as Woman Jerusalem suffers his punishment in the form of Assyrian conquest. Chapman then traces the development of this imagery, what she refers to as the “Jerusalem Complex,” acknowledging the variety in how the metaphorical imagery is deployed.<sup>66</sup> Although she does trace a chronological development of this imagery, locating a “canonical biography of the

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62. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 10.

63. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 48-50.

64. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 50.

65. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 20.

66. “The Jerusalem Complex is a metaphorical bundle that the prophets used to dramatize the historical encounter with Assyria as they experienced and remembered it...” (Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 61).

woman Jerusalem,” Chapman avoids many of the problems found in other analyses that chart the story of Daughter Zion or the marriage metaphor, discussed above.<sup>67</sup> By approaching this imagery as an evolving complex that can be drawn on and reinterpreted in different historical moments, there is less of a sense of creating a coherent and cohesive narrative for the metaphorical figure.<sup>68</sup> Chapman suggests that tracing these developments and adaptations of imagery throughout biblical literature allows us to expose “the evolving social memory” preserved in these texts. Moreover, Chapman identifies these moments of borrowing, reuse, and reinterpretation as cases of inner-biblical allusion, providing a strong theoretical grounding for understanding this as reuse and not just assuming it.<sup>69</sup> Lastly, Chapman’s work is not explicitly motivated by a need to resolve the troubling gendered images found in the prophetic texts for readers today. Rather, she orients this study towards exposing the ideology behind the Assyrian and biblical accounts.<sup>70</sup>

While both Kamionkowski and Chapman base their studies of gendered metaphorical language in a specific historical context with comparisons to ancient Near Eastern texts, not all metaphorical studies of the female imagery in prophetic studies do this. Moughtin-Mumby, for example, in *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel*, explicitly resists historical reconstructions, especially of terms like marriage, prostitution, and adultery, as a way of explaining or clarifying these prophetic metaphors.<sup>71</sup> Moughtin-Mumby’s analysis is driven primarily by cognitive metaphor theory (especially the work of Max Black), and she

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67. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 66.

68. Chapman compares the “canonical biography” that she identifies across prophetic texts as akin to the multiple accounts of the life of Jesus in the New Testament gospels (*Gendered Language*, 66-67).

69. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 167-172.

70. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 19.

71. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 43.

argues that reconstructing the historical reality of these concepts is unnecessary. Drawing on Black's concept of associated commonplaces, that is the commonly-held beliefs associated with a particular term, Moughtin-Mumby asserts that all possible associated commonplaces within a given culture is not of interest; one only needs to be concerned with those elicited and encouraged by the text. She writes, "Not only is it likely that the associated commonplaces of our metaphorical foci will differ from a reconstructed socio-historic background, the prophetic books have proved themselves more than capable in most instances of assisting the cooperative reader in perceiving the associations of interest to this study."<sup>72</sup> While Moughtin-Mumby still approaches the text with "an awareness of the broad socio-cultural and historical context" of the composition of the prophetic texts and names her approach "literary-historical," the focus of her work remains on the individual texts, prioritizing reading the metaphors within their specific literary contexts.<sup>73</sup>

Despite these differences in approaches to historical reconstructions, what all these studies have in common is an understanding of metaphor as persuasive and able to create new realities. Moughtin-Mumby and Kamionkowski both anchor their studies in the persuasive power of metaphor, while Chapman describes it as an effective tool of ideology.<sup>74</sup> These metaphor-focused studies, then, demonstrate the power of this female imagery and begin to suggest why it became so pervasive in biblical literature.<sup>75</sup>

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72. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 45.

73. Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 41. She also takes a diachronic approach to the texts, distinguishing between Isaiah 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66 as well as between Hos 1-3 and 4-14.

74. Moughtin-Mumby begins both her introduction and conclusion with this statement: "Metaphor is one of the most powerful, if not subversive, tools of persuasion" (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 1 and 269).

75. See discussion below.

This survey of recent work on the female imagery in the prophetic texts has attempted to demonstrate several significant points. First it has outlined the crucial role of metaphor theory as well as three dominant trends in the research: the identification of prophetic imagery with modern day pornography, the attempt to locate a cohesive narrative about Yahweh and his people (often figured as a personified city) across prophetic texts, and the explanation of metaphorical imagery via comparative historical phenomena. While work on this imagery has been largely dominated by a feminist biblical critical agenda, especially around the question of whether or how a womanly reader today can or should make sense of this often violent imagery, there have more recently been studies that have moved away from evaluative readings to analyses that focus on *how* this imagery works within its literary and/or historical context.<sup>76</sup> And yet, as demonstrated here, this work has been limited so far to the prophetic corpus with occasional inclusions of Lamentations.<sup>77</sup> To my knowledge, there is no study that takes a broader view of female figuration, examining its manifestations across texts outside of the prophetic corpus. This becomes all the more remarkable when one considers that what we understand to be the prophetic corpus contains a set of texts that is incredibly varied—in historical context, mode of discourse, and even the way the female imagery is utilized.<sup>78</sup>

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76. The most recent trend in reading prophetic gender imagery has been to shift from examining female imagery to masculine imagery and from a feminist approach to a queer one. See, for example, Haddox, *Masculinity and Metaphor in Hosea* (2011); MacWilliam, *Queer Theory and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (2011); Graybill, *Are We Not Men?: Unstable Masculinity in the Hebrew Prophets* (2016).

77. See, for example, Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 141-160 (a chapter); Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 167-174 (an excursus); and Mandolfo who interprets personified Jerusalem of Lam 1-2 as “talking back” to the prophets. Thus, she includes an in depth analysis of both Lamentations as well as several prophetic texts.

78. See too Moughtin-Mumby, whose central point is demonstrating the “variety and innovation of the prophetic sexual and marital metaphorical language” often obscured when interpreters limit their understanding of this phenomenon to a single “marriage metaphor” (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*,” 48).

Moreover, not only are there no studies that examine female figuration across poetic texts outside of the prophetic corpus, but there are also very few monograph-length studies of this phenomenon within the scholarship on the Song of Songs, Proverbs, or Lamentations. As discussed in the introduction to my chapter in the Song of Songs, there has been a great deal of work done on the woman in the Song, but more often than not it focuses on her as a real person and not as a female figure constructed by metaphors.<sup>79</sup> Fiona Black's *Artifice of Love* is one example of a study focused on metaphor and the female body.<sup>80</sup> Her analysis, however, examines the descriptive poems through the lens of the grotesque in order to get at the issues of gender and desire that are too often neglected, says Black, when these texts are read with the expectation of beauty. While Black's focus on the grotesque takes her work in a different direction, it does enable some perceptive readings of the construction of gendered bodies in the Song. More recently, there have been two excellent monographs published on the Song, but they are only peripherally related to gender imagery: Elaine James' *Landscapes of the Song of Songs* and J. L. Andruska's *Wise and Foolish Love in the Song of Songs*. James focuses her study on the treatment and representation of landscape in the Song, which, as I argue, is intimately related to the construction of the female lover; examination of gender, however, is not the primary target of James' investigation. Andruska demonstrates the pervasive influence of the wisdom genre in the Song. While Andruska does not engage in a discussion of gendered imagery in the Song, her work is interested in the depiction of ideal romantic love, which in my own analysis, is vital to understanding the construction of the female lover. Likewise, despite the many female figures in Prov 1-9, 31, there have been very few monograph-length studies of these figures. The most

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79. See discussion in chapter 2.

80. J. Cheryl Exum's commentary on the Song of Songs is also notable for its attention to gendered imagery throughout.

notable is Claudia Camp's *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, which offers an extensive examination of the female personification of wisdom in both its literary and historical context.<sup>81</sup> More recently, Alice Sinnott in *The Personification of Wisdom* has tackled the same topic as Camp, but is more concerned with reconstructing a historical context for Woman Wisdom than with analyzing her literary figuration. Finally, due in large part to the fact that personified Jerusalem of Lamentations is often examined alongside prophetic texts, as well as the comparatively little material that makes up her portrait, there are no monographs focused on female imagery in Lamentations, to my knowledge.<sup>82</sup> Tod Linafelt's *Surviving Lamentations*, although interested in reading this text as survival literature and tracing its afterlives, analyzes closely personified Jerusalem. He suggests that while the suffering, but hopeful, male figure of Lam 3 often gets the most interpretive attention, the personified city deserves both literary and theological consideration.<sup>83</sup> Lastly, Carleen Mandolfo's *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, deserves mention as it is interested in showcasing the voice of personified Jerusalem and reading Lam 1-2 as a response to the prophetic treatment of this figure. Although neither of these works provide deep analysis of the figuration of Woman Jerusalem, both bring scholarly attention to this figure and her rhetoric.<sup>84</sup>

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81. See chapter 3 for my critique. Yoder's *Wisdom As a Woman of Substance: A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 1-9 and 31:10-31* also deserves mention as a monograph focused on Woman Wisdom, but is also primarily interested in interpreting her in a specific historical context.

82. See n. 77 above.

83. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 1-4.

84. Two other studies to mention are Dobbs-Allsopp's *Weep, O Daughter Zion: A Study of the City-lament Genre in the Hebrew Bible* and Berlin's commentary on Lamentations. Although Dobbs-Allsopp's study does not focus on female imagery, its identification of the weeping goddess motif with the personified city in Lamentations provides insight into her figuration. Berlin's *Lamentations* is notable for her attention to gendered imagery, especially in the portrait of personified Jerusalem. See ch 4 for further discussion of these works.

An analysis, therefore, of how this imagery *works* both within each of these texts as well as across figurative texts outside of the prophetic corpus is needed. This dissertation will demonstrate that an examination of the figurative representations of women within the Hebrew Bible beyond the prophetic texts will discover creative new iterations of the city as woman trope: woman as fortified city, fertile landscape, and intimate homespace, female-bodied (and voiced) representations of good and bad choices found across the cityscape, and a protesting city-woman. Investigating these specific images as iterations of a larger literary trope—the figure of woman—will not only help us to better understand these texts but also demonstrate how ideological discourse about gender, power, and community are worked out and articulated in biblical literature through these female figures.

### ***My Literary-Historical Approach***

I have suggested above that there is a tension between more traditional approaches and feminist critical approaches to biblical texts. This tension is often centered around whether the scholar is concerned primarily with uncovering and explaining the message or significance (whether historical or theological) behind or within the text or the impact of these authoritative texts on readers today. As a result of this tension, female imagery may be dismissed by traditional scholars who see it as “just a metaphor” or explained away with reference to the historical fact of cities as goddesses, for example. Feminist critics, on the other hand, may dive into exploring this imagery but limit their interpretations ultimately to evaluating the text for suitability with feminist concerns and evidence of a patriarchal perspective and/or finding ways to mitigate the

problematic elements of these images.<sup>85</sup> As the survey of recent scholarship on female imagery in the prophetic texts has demonstrated, several scholars have moved beyond this stalemate, taking these metaphors seriously while also drawing broadly on scholarly approaches and advancing beyond evaluative readings.<sup>86</sup> This dissertation, I hope, will join this scholarship; it too is indebted to the work of feminist critical scholars but attempts to ask a broader set of questions about gender imagery in biblical texts.

I approach these texts and their imagery first and foremost as literature. I am calling my approach literary-historical because I recognize that this literature comes from a particular moment in time and is therefore a product of a historically situated community, informed by the socio-cultural forces of their time and place.<sup>87</sup> My work, however, is not attempting to reconstruct this historical moment.

This approach is informed by a critical cautiousness towards dating biblical texts. It is very difficult to date a biblical text with accuracy. At best, some texts can be dated relative to others when direct literary borrowing can be demonstrated. Other texts that speak of historical events, especially those that can be corroborated by extrabiblical evidence, can, at the very least, be dated to after the mentioned event; however, it is often difficult to tell how far after the event the text was written. An ancient author had the same freedom to play with time and perspective

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85. Note Sarah Shectman, who writes, "...nearly every feminist scholar would agree that the Bible is the result of a patriarchal society whose norms are reflected in the text. This idea is not new anymore. The question becomes, where do we go from here? There is more than simply patriarchy at work in the text" (*Women in the Pentateuch*, 53).

86. In addition to the studies discussed above, I would mention a few other excellent treatments of representations of women and/or female imagery in the Hebrew Bible: Sarah Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch*; Esther Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature*; Nicole Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law*.

87. I borrow this designation from Moughtin-Mumby, who describes her approach to female imagery in the prophetic texts as "literary-historical": "my aim is to combine literary interest with an awareness of the broad socio-cultural and historical context in which the prophetic books emerged..." (*Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 41).

as a modern author and could have good reason to position their work closer or further from an impactful historical occurrence. The book of Lamentations, for example, refers to the siege of Jerusalem and the exile of some of its people. Scholars, therefore, assert that the book was written after the fall of Jerusalem but exactly when is difficult to decipher.<sup>88</sup> And for texts like the Song of Songs and Proverbs, where there is no mention of historical events, but rather seem set out of time (Song) or are presented as a collection of wisdom sayings (Proverbs), there are few clues about the historical moment(s) of their origins.<sup>89</sup>

Around all three of the texts under consideration here, there is debate over how best to understand these books: are these collections of independent writings, self-contained compositions, or something in between (for example, originally independent compositions that in the process of being brought together were revised, perhaps rewritten, to create a cohesive piece)? While many scholars think that these texts were likely once independent compositions, it is challenging to distinguish and date compositional layers within these texts or to recreate the unification process.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, as my analyses demonstrate, there is often consistency in the

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88. In a study of the language of Lamentations, Dobbs-Allsopp suggests that its linguistic profile does support a sixth-century date (likely between 586 and 520 BCE). See Dobbs-Allsopp, “Linguistic Evidence.” Even still, there is much we do not know about the historical context of these poems.

89. Both the Song of Songs and Proverbs, however, feature ascriptions that associate these texts with authoritative figures, notably in both cases, Solomon (Song 1:1; Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1). In addition to heading two sections with ascriptions to “the wise” (חֲכָמִים) (Prov 22:17; 24:23), Proverbs also associates sections of Proverbs with two otherwise unknown figures: Agur, the son of Yaqeh (Prov 30:1), and instruction given to King Lemuel by his mother (Prov 31:1; see my discussion in chapter 3). Thus, both texts do provide some historical anchoring; however, this is not about providing historically accurate authorship, but rather drawing authority and prestige as well as providing an “interpretive frame” for the text (Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 185; Mroczek, *Literary Imagination*). For more detailed discussion on this point in Proverbs, see Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 183-206.

90. For instance, of all three texts, Proverbs reads the most like an anthology due, in part, to its use of ascriptions to introduce different sections of the text (see note above). However, even in this case it is difficult to date these sections relative to one another or to be certain that they were originally independent. See discussions in the following chapters for more details on this debate specific to each of these books.

imagery, rhetoric, and perspective on the female figures throughout each of these texts. As a result, I have chosen to treat the sections of each book that feature dominant female imagery (all of the Song, the frame of Proverbs: ch 1-9, 31, and Lam 1 and 2) as units that at least demonstrate a consistency and coherence around this imagery. While any of these sections (or units within them) may have first existed as independent texts, the fact that they have been so well integrated in their present contexts supports reading them as unified portraits.

### ***The Persuasive Power of Metaphor***

As mentioned above, metaphor theory has developed extensively over the last century and has played a significant role in interpreting not only the marital and sexual metaphors in the prophetic texts, but metaphors across the Hebrew Bible.<sup>91</sup> Conceptual metaphor theory has been particularly productive. First articulated by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*, this theory argues that metaphor is only secondarily a matter of language and primarily a matter of thought.<sup>92</sup> Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”<sup>93</sup> Since metaphor structures human thinking, it is fundamental

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91. The work on metaphor theory is notoriously extensive. See, for example, Gibbs, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*; Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought*; Johnson, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor*; Kövecses, *Metaphor: A Practical Introduction*; Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*.

There are several recent studies that demonstrate the value of metaphor theory for biblical studies. See, for example, Lam, *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible*; Jindo, *Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered*; Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*; Weiss, *Figurative Language in Biblical Prose*; Chapman, *The Gendered Language of Warfare*. See also Newsom, “A Maker of Metaphors—Ezekiel’s Oracles Against Tyre.” While not a recent study, it is an exceptionally good example of the significance of metaphor for interpreting biblical texts.

92. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 6. While I draw primarily on Lakoff and Johnson’s presentation of metaphor above for its simplicity and practical application, the work of Ricoeur (*Interpretation Theory*) and Max Black (*Models and Metaphors* and “More about Metaphor”) are also influential on my approach to metaphor.

93. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 5.

to how we understand ourselves and our world and even impacts the actions we take. Metaphor, then, is conceptual, systematic, ubiquitous, and persuasive.<sup>94</sup>

This is a fruitful approach to biblical metaphors for several reasons. First, metaphors are always rooted in physical and cultural experience. They reflect both our embodiment and our particular cultural views and values. This influence works both ways. Our metaphors, influenced by our bodies and society, reinforce our embodied and social understanding of the world, thereby creating and sustaining our reality.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, there is a coherence between what a culture most values and its most fundamental metaphors.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, identifying fundamental metaphors in ancient texts allows us some access to the cultural worldview represented in these texts, even if not to concrete historical realities.<sup>97</sup>

Second, metaphors are most often employed in order to make something abstract more concrete or something partial more complete. Metaphor is able to achieve this by juxtaposing two conceptual domains, mapping the structure of one domain (the source domain) onto the other (the target domain).<sup>98</sup> It is not necessarily preexisting similarities that encourage this pairing of domains, but rather correlations in our experience (which is embodied and in culture)

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94. Jindo summarizes well metaphor as conceptual, systematic, ubiquitous, and fundamental (*Biblical Metaphor Reconsidered*, 31-32). Moughtin-Mumby argues for metaphor as “one of the most powerful, if not subversive, tools of persuasion” (1).

95. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 146. Note, however, Bal, “Metaphors He Lives By” for a critique of Lakoff and Johnson’s universalization of the (white and male) bodily experiences that produce these metaphors. This is a valid critique and in the case of biblical texts, likely authored by an elite male group, this “universalization” is particularly important to uncover. See discussion below as well as in chapter 4 regarding the male gendering of the deity.

96. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 22.

97. Cf. Pohlig, “Cognition and Biblical Documents.”

98. “A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience” (Kövecses, 4). Mappings are systematic correspondences between source and target domains (Kövecses, 7). Well before the language of “domain” was developed, I. A. Richards introduced the terms “tenor” (source domain) and “vehicle” (target domain) (*The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 96-97.)

which facilitate perceived similarities.<sup>99</sup> Metaphors, then, are an educational and ideological tool, providing a powerful way to disseminate ideas.<sup>100</sup>

Third, metaphors are contextually situated. Max Black first brought sustained attention to this quality of metaphors by discussing the importance of the “frame” of a metaphorical utterance.<sup>101</sup> He uses the example of the sentence: “The chairman plowed through the discussion.” This sentence is the frame and the word used non-literally here, “plowed,” Black calls the “focus.”<sup>102</sup> He makes the point that this metaphorical focus (plowed) could be used in another frame where a different metaphor would be produced (e.g. “I like to plow my memories regularly”) or one where it is not metaphorical at all (e.g., the farmer plowed the fields).<sup>103</sup> Moreover, Black argues that metaphors work by bringing together “systems of associated commonplaces” that then interact, filter, and transform each other, producing a particular meaning. Significantly, these associated commonplaces may differ in different cultures, historical moments, and even immediate contexts. Black points out that associated commonplaces are those things generally held to be true and that this may include misinformation.<sup>104</sup> For example, taking a metaphor that is central to this dissertation—a city is a woman—it must be understood in its specific context. This metaphor shared among modern urban studies scholars or perhaps by gynecologists could have very different meanings (because the shared associated commonplaces would likely be different) than when used by tourists enjoying a new city or in a public service

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99. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 147.

100. See discussion of represented bodies as discursive source of ideology below.

101. Black, “Metaphor,” 28. Black is explicitly drawing on and developing I. A. Richards’ interaction theory of metaphor.

102. Black, “Metaphor,” 27-28.

103. Black, “Metaphor,” 28. Moreover, Black acknowledges the importance of the whole context of a metaphorical utterance: tone, setting, background etc. He makes this point effectively with the example of Churchill referring to Mussolini as “that utensil” (29).

104. Black, “Metaphor,” 40.

announcement about urban crime prevention. Examining this and other female-bodied metaphors in ancient texts, then, requires special attention to the specific literary contexts of each metaphor.<sup>105</sup>

Lastly, metaphor allows us access to new perspectives and the ability to create new realities.<sup>106</sup> This is the rhetorical power of metaphor. Well deployed metaphors can actually reorient someone's thinking, thereby creating a new reality. Not only do metaphors have the power to do this work, but they require it of anyone who "gets" the metaphor.<sup>107</sup> This complicity is inherent in metaphors and is part of their power. Metaphors are persuasive. Therefore, the discovery of a productive and prolific metaphorical image used by different authors throughout a corpus of texts should demand close attention—especially to its possible rhetorical effects.

I am using metaphor as a core framework of this dissertation for two primary reasons. First, metaphor has been well theorized and well demonstrated as an insightful analytical category, while other terms for literary images (e.g., trope, figure, imagery) are used broadly, often with little specificity. Moreover, it is the contention of this dissertation that the figuration of woman in these texts is metaphorical work, whether conveyed via personified city in

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105. Literature is a distinct and significant site of metaphor, especially for the work of this dissertation. See Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*, and Harshav, *Explorations in Poetics*, for theory that contends with metaphor specifically in literary contexts.

106. Paul Ricoeur also discusses this power of metaphor, which he sees as resulting from the conflict or tension that is produced when two unrelated things are brought together in a metaphor: "It is, in effect, a calculated error, which brings together things that do not go together and by means of this apparent misunderstanding it causes a new, hitherto unnoticed, relation of meaning to spring up between the terms that previous systems of classification had ignored or not allowed" (*Interpretation Theory*, 51).

107. I use "get," rather than "understand," to signal what Richard Moran describes as "appreciative comprehension": "[T]he full appreciative comprehension of a metaphor can make any subsequent denial of the point it makes seem feeble or disingenuous, in much the same way that appreciative understanding of a joke can overpower any subsequent refusal of the point it makes. If someone is described as having all the charm of a damp kitchen sponge, it's no good simply to *deny* it, after he or she has registered an appreciation of the phrase" ("Seeing and Believing," 91). Ted Cohen first wrote about this in terms of the intimacy cultivated between maker and receiver of a metaphor, although not necessarily to positive effect ("Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy").

Lamentations, a series of similes in Song's descriptive poems, or stereotyped pedagogical figures in Proverbs. Each of these instances plays with the conceptual domain of "woman," allowing it to interact with the concepts of city, landscape, and wisdom and thereby creating new truths and new opportunities for reflection on communal values and vulnerabilities. It is through such mapping and interacting of two conceptual domains that the figuration of these women occurs. Therefore, I do not believe these figures are allegorical. In all three cases the text means what it says.<sup>108</sup> In other words, the Song is about romantic love, Proverbs about wise discernment, and Lamentations about fallen Jerusalem. The use of the female body in each of these texts, then, is not to actually talk about something else, but rather to use the recognizable associations, connotations, and realities of female bodies (e.g. porous, pregnable, leaky, generative, etc.) in order to convey the message of the text in a more imaginatively gripping and persuasive way. The visual element, implied in terms like "figure" and "imagery," is significant for the metaphors under discussion here: all featuring a female body.<sup>109</sup> Thus, I utilize the terms figure and figuration throughout this dissertation in order to refer to the metaphorical work involving female bodies in these texts.

### ***Female Body***

In light of feminist motivations to uncover a Bible that is at least palatable, if not, empowering for modern womanly readers (or to condemn the text entirely to the trash heap of unredeemable

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108. As allegory has a range of uses and refers to a complex phenomenon, I have tried to provide here a simple but essential definition. For more on allegory see Teskey, "Allegory," *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*; Fletcher, *Allegory*; Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 89-92.

109. Shapiro writes that figuration is "the means whereby a system of beliefs and ideas is rendered palpable" and notes that there is often a "strong visual connotation" ("Figuration" in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*). This "palpability" is what is achieved via metaphorical language.

patriarchal literature), feminist biblical critics have often sought to locate real women in the biblical texts.<sup>110</sup> For example, Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes in their book *On Gendering Texts* looked for traces of “women’s texts” in the Hebrew Bible, both in terms of preservations of “women’s culture” as well as the possibility of female authorship.<sup>111</sup> Ilana Pardes, similarly, searches for subversive women’s voices in the Hebrew Bible. She suggests that it is likely that we have lost female traditions that are not preserved in the canon, but that we may find “antithetical female voices by paying attention to underexamined fragments on the margins of biblical historiography.”<sup>112</sup> Pardes attempts to reconstruct from these marginal fragments “counter female voices.”<sup>113</sup> Moreover, even if scholars see women in the Bible as literary figures and not as real women, they may attempt to read them in light of a particular historical reality for real women. For example, Carol Meyers in *Discovering Eve* interprets the Gen 2-3 creation account, especially the depiction of gender and gendered roles, based on her historical reconstruction of woman’s everyday life among the Israelite highlanders in the premonarchic period (roughly Iron I period:1200-1000BCE) (the society Meyers believes produced this creation account).<sup>114</sup> She

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110. Note Esther Fuchs: “Contemporary neoliberal theories seek to introduce a common sense, natural, and straightforward reading of the Bible, where women appear as real individuals, as universal typologies or as sources of anti-patriarchal thinking. This approach is positivist and essentialist in the sense that it ignores the textual or discursive mediation as well as the ideological and political framing of women’s stories. The reading of women as pre-given self-evident subjects collapses the biblical past and the postmodern present and perpetuates religious assumptions about heterosexual arrangements as somehow universal and eternal” (*Feminist Theory and the Bible: Interrogating the Sources*, 66).

111. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, especially 17-31.

112. Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 11.

113. Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 144.

114. Meyers draws on literary and archaeological evidence, as well as social scientific research. One of the main arguments of the book is the “complementarity” of male and female roles during this time in Israel (*Discovering Eve*, especially 168-173). She argues that even though male authority reigned outside the home, within the household women were valued and equal partners, which was necessary for a family’s survival (*Discovering Eve*, especially 142-149). In this family centered society, women had to be skilled workers in a number of different household tasks and therefore were an essential part of the household’s economy. Meyers posits that women were involved in making economic decisions and served as an essential source of knowledge and instruction for other members of the family (most likely children and other dependents) (149-154, 175). Because Meyers ties female power specifically to the household,

suggests, in particular, that the divine oracles directed at the woman and man in Gen 3:16-19 should be read in context of the challenging lifestyle of the Israelite highlanders where both men and women were expected to labor for survival, whether in producing food or children.

While these attempts to discover the real voices, minds, and realities of historical women behind the texts is understandable in light of feminist critics' goals, the access provided to past minds and bodies is necessarily limited. This is, in part, due to the difficulty of accurately dating ancient texts that were likely composed and adapted over a long period of time; but, more importantly, these approaches rely on a problematically stable notion of gender and bodies as well as mistake represented bodies for real bodies. This is not to say that there is no connection between the realities of historical female bodies and the representations of female bodies in literature. In fact, metaphor theory demonstrates the importance of an audience recognizing the source domain of "woman" in order for female metaphors to be effective. This means that authors were certainly drawing on the generally understood realities of female bodies and social roles; but, as Max Black argues, these do not necessarily need to be accurate depictions for an effective metaphor; they just need to be recognizable to an audience.<sup>115</sup>

If these texts, then, cannot provide reliable access to the real lives of ancient women, what can they tell us about gendered/sexed bodies? In this section I will develop my approach to the female body in biblical texts by establishing the constructedness of gendered/sexed bodies, the distinction between real bodies and represented bodies, and the ideological role represented bodies often play. This theoretical grounding will allow us to consider how female figures are

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however, she suggests that once Israel was centralized under a monarchy, conditions for women and their sources of power changed (189-196).

115. See discussion of Black above.

used “to think with” in ancient texts.<sup>116</sup> What advantages do female bodies offer authors that male or ungendered bodies do not?

The sexed/gendered body, a primary category of analysis in this dissertation, has been the topic of much debate and consideration in the last several decades. The theoretical frameworks of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, in particular, have informed my thinking about represented sexed/gendered bodies and their role in these persuasive texts. Foucault, in his influential *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, argues that sexuality is a product of discourse. He claims that the “repressive hypothesis,” the belief that discussion of sex and sexuality was repressed from the late 17th century to early 20th century, is false and, in fact, during this period there was a proliferation of discourse about sex.<sup>117</sup> For Foucault, discourse and power are closely linked; what we talk about, how we talk about it, who does this talking, and in what contexts all determine what we know and how we think.<sup>118</sup> In other words, it is discourse that constructs and controls our reality. Foucault, in examining the ways that sex was investigated, persecuted, medicalized, and confessed, especially around children, women, married couples, and the “sexually perverse,” demonstrates that there is an underlying belief that sexuality reflects an inner truth or essence about individuals, one that must be rooted out in cases of perversion.<sup>119</sup>

Foucault asserts that what we understand as a natural truth is in fact just a form of social control.

Whereas Foucault’s work focuses on sexuality as a discursive object and therefore closely related to discipline and power, Judith Butler expands this thinking to include gender, sex, and even the body as produced by discourse. In her first (and arguably most influential) book on the

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116. See n. 135 below relating to Brown’s interpretation of Lévi-Strauss’ notion of using women “to think with.”

117. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:15-49.

118. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:11-12.

119. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:75-131.

topic of gender and bodies, *Gender Trouble*, Butler seeks to destabilize the notion that there is a natural or biological connection between a human being's reproductive organs and the ways in which that human being behaves in world.<sup>120</sup> Butler, who is concerned with improving the feminist project and what she sees as the problematic category of "woman" on which it so often relies, argues that "sex is always already gender."<sup>121</sup> That is to say that gender (feminine or masculine) and sex (female or male) are both socially constructed and in fact, gender produces sex by the alignment of sex, gender, and (opposing) desire within a heterosexual binary.<sup>122</sup> For example, the repeated and coherent pattern of female reproductive parts, femininity, and desire for a male body is understood to be natural, or, to take a biblical example, woman's creation as a bodily match to man and her dictated role to desire man and bear his children is ideologically framed as right and natural (Gen 2:22-24; 3:16, 20).<sup>123</sup>

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120. Butler, *Gender Trouble*. See too a helpful review of Butler's theory specifically directed to scholars of religion: Armour and St. Ville, "Judith Butler—In Theory."

121. Distinguishing between sex (female/male) and gender (feminine/masculine) was important work for second wave feminists pushing back against the concept of biological determinism (i.e., that a person with female reproductive parts was only suited for "feminine" tasks like childrearing and other domestic work). For the earliest expressions of this idea see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* and Robert Stoller, *Presentations of Gender*. See too Armour and St. Ville on how Butler interacted with this debate ("Judith Butler—In Theory," 2).

122. Before Butler, a few other theorists had begun to think about both sex and gender as constructed. See Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 151n9. See also Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body*, for more recent analyses of the history of these ideas. Butler, furthermore, argues that gender is performative where the identity produced is the *effect* and not cause of this doing. Butler writes: "...[A]cts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal sign and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (*Gender Trouble*, 185, emphasis original). Butler's classic (parodic) example of the performativity of gender is drag where words, acts, and gestures create the illusion of a gender that is "misaligned" with the performer's genitalia. This performative process has, for Butler, material results. The reiteration of gendered practices (acts, gestures, enactments dictated by social norms) are continually creating and reinforcing an identifiable sexed/gendered body. Butler further refines these ideas in *Bodies That Matter*. She also writes specifically about the relationship between language and bodies in "How Can I Deny That These Hands And This Body Are Mine?"

123. See, however, Ken Stone, "The Garden of Eden and the Heterosexual Contract" for Butlerian reading of creation stories.

The work of Foucault and Butler provides a productive perspective on gender and bodies for this examination of female figures in biblical texts.<sup>124</sup> By calling our attention to the discursive nature of all bodies, as well as gender, sex, and sexuality, their work provides parameters for understanding constructed textual bodies and the persuasive agenda of biblical texts in light of the ideological horizons of ancient authors. Under examination here are not real bodies but representations of real bodies, likely reflective of some aspects of some women's lives in a historical moment but not limited by these realities. In a sense, represented bodies can be seen as super-constructed. That is, they are subject to the same discursive forces as real bodies but under the control of (an) author(s) who actively construct(s) the figure for a particular purpose. These texts, of course, did not (and still do not) exist in a vacuum; they were written to serve the needs of a community and therefore are influenced by and participate in the discursive structures at work in this community. The constructed bodies, ensconced in these texts, are a part of this work, participating in the discursive production of gendered/sexed bodies. As Zainab Bahrani writes in the context of art history, "The body in visual representations should be seen as a matter of production of sexed realities and not a reflection of those realities in art."<sup>125</sup> This is no less the case with a textually represented body. Represented bodies (whether visual or textual) are never merely imitations of existing bodies and the norms that govern them, but rather produce those governing norms and expectations of bodies and gender. For example, the fertile production of the woman's landscape-body in the Song of Songs and the ever-flowing fecund

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124. While the work of Foucault and Butler may seem very distant from the ancient world and its surviving literary texts, both scholars, in fact, have investigated gender and sexuality in the ancient world. Foucault followed the first volume of the *The History of Sexuality* with two more volumes, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of Self*, where he examined the perception and role of sex and sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome, respectively. Butler analyzes the figure of Antigone from Sophocles' *Oedipus* in *Antigone's Claim* around the concepts of gender and kinship.

125. Bahrani, *The Women of Babylon*, 41. See too Mizroeff, *Bodyscape*, especially 1-18.

body of the wife of Prov 5:15-20 reinforce the notion that female bodies are primarily reproductive bodies. And more generally, the cohesive and stable presentation of bodies participates in the fiction that real bodies are naturally and essentially gendered/sexed. Moreover, any moments of ambiguity or inconsistency in the depiction of, for example, a female body or the naturalness of the heterosexual pairing is an opportunity to reveal the constructed ideological system at work.<sup>126</sup>

Following the work of Foucault and Butler, then, it is evident that bodies are produced by discourse. It is in the naming, categorizing, and controlling of bodies that constructs the very concept of a body that then becomes an identifiable and interactive thing in the world. This means that bodies cannot be separated from culture. Represented bodies, as discussed above, are a part of this discursive construction of bodies, but they also reflect existing cultural assumptions about bodies and gender. This dynamic between real bodies and represented bodies continues in a feedback loop. The represented female bodies that this dissertation investigates, then, exert discursive force on communities that read and value these texts, as well as reflect aspects of the culture that constructed them. As stated above, this provides little (and often obscure) access to the text's historical context; however, it remains significant for understanding that these represented bodies reflect a particular cultured and biased point of view.

Representations of sexed/gendered bodies, then, are ideal vehicles of ideology. Drawing on Foucault's notion of power as decentralized but pervasive, Joan Scott argues in her influential article, "Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis," that "gender is a primary field

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126. See, for example, Ken Stone, "The Garden of Eden and the Heterosexual Contract," especially 54.

within which or by means of which power is articulated.”<sup>127</sup> Scott adds that while gender may be the means of expressing or manipulating power, it is rarely in situations that are about gender itself. It is gendered language or imagery that helps us make sense of the world. As Scott suggests, “Gender, then, provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction.”<sup>128</sup> Just as socio-cultural forces construct gender, gender in turn constructs social relationships.

This relationship between gender and power existed in the ancient world just as it does today. There have been several studies exploring gender and power in both visual and textual artifacts. For example, Irene Winter argues that the representation of Naram-Sîn’s sexually alluring male body, from his full beard to his rounded buttocks, speaks of his male virility and vigor and therefore his authority and dominance.<sup>129</sup> Carole Fontaine points to the feminization (for example, long hair, lack of visible genitalia, yellow ochre skin color—indicating restriction to domestic space) of enemies or foreigners in ancient Egyptian art, indicating their lack of potency and power.<sup>130</sup> As discussed above, Chapman explores how these same power dynamics are expressed in ancient Assyrian and Israelite texts through gendered language.<sup>131</sup> She asserts that “gender is an ideological tool communicated metaphorically” and traces how masculinity and femininity are treated as binary opposites used to code the powerful and powerless in both Assyrian royal inscriptions and reliefs as well as in the treatment of the Israelite-Assyrian

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127. Scott, “Gender,” 1069. See too Davis: “Female body is symbolically deployed in discourses of power—discourses which justify social inequality and power hierarchies based on gender and other forms of bodily difference” (“Embodiment Theory,” 10).

128. Scott, “Gender,” 1070.

129. Irene Winter, “Sex, Rhetoric, and the Public Monument,” 11-15. Winter draws explicitly on Butler’s work. See p. 21.

130. Fontaine, “‘Be Men, O Philistines!’,” 63-67.

131. Chapman, *Gendered Language*. See discussion above.

encounter in biblical texts.<sup>132</sup> Chapman differentiates how perfected masculinity is the domain of the Assyrian king and his enemies are feminized, while in the biblical texts the deity is described in masculine terms (husband/father) and Jerusalem, the capital city, is depicted as a woman (wife/daughter). She argues that the biblical deployment of this gendered imagery allowed for Yahweh to remain in a position of power and control, even in face of Jerusalem's defeat.<sup>133</sup> These examples, then, demonstrate how gender is routinely linked to expressions of power and ideology. Moreover, these studies indicate that it was not only the female body that was coded in the ancient world. Masculinity is also constructed on represented bodies.

As Chapman's work demonstrates, gendered language and imagery are used in biblical texts for ideological purposes. In the case of the prophetic texts, feminizing Jerusalem and masculinizing Yahweh allows the community to envision threat and defeat not as an indication of the deity's lack of power or even total abandonment, but rather has a (temporary?) punishment always under Yahweh's control. Daughter/Wife Jerusalem, then, offers an opportunity for envisioning and embodying the danger and vulnerability of the community. As a body that reproduces only by penetration—a threat of violence as much as a means of survival—female bodies are uniquely constructed to represent the simultaneous value and vulnerability of the community. Moreover, it is possible that casting the sinful/disloyal actions of seeking help from sources other than Yahweh, whether in the form of other gods or political alliances, as a woman seeking other lovers outside marriage allows the community to present themselves as powerless, humble, and to a certain degree, naïve.<sup>134</sup> In other words, could a female figure, already marginal

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132. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 10.

133. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 65.

134. For example, In Hos 2 (especially vv. 7-10), the woman is depicted as not knowing that the goods she thought she was receiving from other lovers were in fact all coming from Yahweh.

both in terms of social power and in terms of her porous and fluid body, have less to lose? Could a female figure offer a more strategic choice to embody the community's threat and sin?

Several scholars have suggested that female figures are ideal for (male) authors "to think with," especially around dangerous or controversial ideas. For example, Peter Brown, examining the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles of late 2nd to 3rd century CE where women are principal actors, cautions that this does not indicate that women were necessarily active and equal agents in the early Christian communities. Rather, he states, "they reflect the manner in which Christian males of that period partook in the deeply ingrained tendency of all men in the ancient world, to use women 'to think with.'"<sup>135</sup> Brown suggests that ancient men saw women as "less clearly defined and less securely bounded," especially in a woman's ability to move through pagan spaces and relationships in their roles as nurse, servant, or wife and not be "tainted."<sup>136</sup> Moreover, due to their natural vulnerabilities, resilience in women was all the more admirable.<sup>137</sup> As a result, female figures were conveniently used by Christian men to "verbalize their own nagging concern with the stance that the Church should take to the world."<sup>138</sup> According to Brown, then, female figures, in their lower stakes position within the church/world, their ability to move in marginal spaces (especially between Christian and pagan communities) without discredit, and their

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135. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, 153. Brown credits Claude Lévi-Strauss with coining this phrase in *Structural Anthropology* (trans. Jacobson and Schoepf, 1963, pp. 61-62), noting that it "implies considerably more than the creation and manipulation of stereotypes" (*Body and Society*, 153n57). This phrase, however, does not appear in the cited translation. Lévi-Strauss does, however, discuss this idea but in different terms: comparing kinship systems with linguistic systems. The other text Brown cites is Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death: Comparative Studies*, where this term is used with quotation marks but without a citation: "The richness of the mythological data on women from ancient Greece is surely in part due to the tendency of men to use women 'to think with'" (33).

136. Brown, *Body and Society*, 153-154.

137. Brown, *Body and Society*, 154.

138. Brown, *Body and Society*, 153.

impressive resilience, were ideal to shoulder, perhaps, more controversial ideas or, at the very least, express discomfort or anxiety around issues in early Christian communities.

Elizabeth Clark, whose work is also centered on early Christian texts, provides a more thorough treatment of this idea that female figures are used (by male authors) to think with. Clark examines the narratives of 4th and 5th century CE female ascetics, but focuses on two treatises that Gregory of Nyssa writes about his sister, Macrina. She explains that the depiction of this female figure as Gregory's teacher is particularly remarkable, especially considering the denigrating attitude most patristic writers take towards women's intellectual capacities. Although without formal education, besides the study of scripture, Macrina speaks at great length about various philosophical ideas. Clark demonstrates that the ideas placed in Macrina's mouth clearly belong to her brother and can be found in many of his other writings, but she also points out that Macrina serves Gregory as an ideal tool for working out "various troubling intellectual and theological problems that confronted male theologians of his day."<sup>139</sup> By using his sister, a woman untrained in philosophy and without any natural authority, Gregory is safely able to "skirt[] dangerous theological points" and present potentially controversial ideas.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, Clark points out that Macrina also serves as a "shaming device" to Christian men who were less dedicated to the ascetic Christian life that Gregory was preaching: "even weak women reach this summit of wisdom and rationality and look at you!"<sup>141</sup> Like Brown, Clark cautions that depictions of women, especially speaking women, in ancient texts are best viewed not as female voices from the past, but rather have been appropriated by male authors and conformed to their

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139. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 27.

140. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 27. Clark describes these "dangerous" ideas as Gregory's "revised Origenist theology" (27).

141. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes," 29.

own use.<sup>142</sup> Thus, it is on the bodies and in the mouths of female figures that male authors often worked through concerns, anxieties, and potentially controversial ideas.

This use of female figures did not begin in early Christianity. As Both Brown and Clark note this practice can be traced back to ancient Greek authors as well. Helene Foley writes, “Greek writers used the female—in a fashion that bore little relation to the lives of actual women—to understand, express, criticize, and experiment with the problems and contradictions of their culture.”<sup>143</sup> And, more recently, Rhiannon Graybill, writing about the construction of queer prophetic bodies in biblical texts, also argues that women are used to think with throughout biblical literature.<sup>144</sup> She suggests that female bodies serve “as raw material to be formed into masculine discourses, ideologies, and fantasies.”<sup>145</sup> Negotiating the unstable masculinity of male prophets often requires female bodies, especially around issues of openness and fluidity of the prophetic body.<sup>146</sup> Female figures, then, served important ideological and literary roles in the ancient world.<sup>147</sup>

The idea of thinking with women, traced briefly here, is particularly helpful in this dissertation’s work of examining the construction of female figures in that it always implies that there is a thinker behind this work. As discussed above, this is not about locating a historical author, but rather recognizing that these texts were composed to do something for someone.

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142. Clark, “The Lady Vanishes,” 30-31. Clark states, “To be sure, it is a more positive step to have women depicted as wise and beneficial than as ignorant and malevolent, as they all too often are in ancient texts. Nonetheless, historians should take care not to overlook the obvious: that we deal, always, with representation” (30).

143. Foley, “Women in Greece,” 1301-1302. See too David Halperin, “Why was Diotima a Woman?” and Humphreys, *The Family, Women and Death*, 33.

144. Graybill, *Are We Not Men?*, 19, 127-128.

145. Graybill, *Are We Not Men?*, 19.

146. Graybill, *Are We Not Men?*, see, especially, ch 1 on Moses and ch 2 on Hosea 1-3.

147. I doubt that this phenomenon is limited to the ancient world, but tracing it beyond the biblical texts is outside the parameters of this dissertation.

Better, then, is to discuss the implied author and implied audience, projections of the text that are inferred by the real reader (or audience) rather than historical figures, enabling a consideration of these women as effective metaphorical figures for the concerns of a community.<sup>148</sup>

### ***Female Figures & Female Characters***

In defining the topic of this dissertation as females figures and their literary figuration, I have distinguished the metaphorical women of the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Lamentations from female characters found in narrative texts (e.g., Rachel, Ruth, and Esther). These female characters, of course, are represented bodies too; as such, they too are constructed by rhetoric and act as discursive forces, producing cultural norms and expectations about gender, bodies, sexuality, and so on. However, I would suggest that there is an important difference between these types of represented women in the Bible, which is evident in their textual presentations and warrant their own analyses.

Female characters found in biblical prose narrative are depicted as historical women. They are framed within stories that purport to tell the history of the Israelite people, indicating that they are authorially designated as real people rather than poetic figures. The figurative women under discussion in this dissertation are never depicted as historical (human) figures in the history of Israel-Judea. While personified Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2 is anchored to a historical moment, this figure is always a personification of the city. The woman of the Song and

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148. Booth (*Rhetoric of Fiction*) first coined the term “implied author,” which has been picked up and developed by many literary theorists. See, e.g., Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, especially 147-151, and Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 87-90, 118-130 for a discussion of these terms in literary analysis. Chatman describes the implied author as “reconstructed by the reader from the narrative. He is not the narrator, but rather the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative...” (148).

most of the female figures in Proverbs 1-9 and 31 may be, at most, representative of the type of women encountered in a historical community, but they are never marked by the kind of anchoring specificity surrounding female characters in biblical prose narrative (such as, by names, lineage, offspring, or locale).<sup>149</sup> In fact, all three of these texts are considered to be poetic texts. Even as there is debate over how to delineate the category of biblical poetry, these texts are generically different than biblical prose.<sup>150</sup> From their metaphorical constructions to their speech, the female figures of Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Lamentations are unique, and categorically different from female characters in biblical prose narrative.

Recently, Jacqueline Vayntrub has suggested that “the overarching identifying feature for poetic texts in the biblical literary tradition is... its voicing as speech.”<sup>151</sup> This is particularly significant for the three poetic texts under investigation here as all of them feature *speaking* female figures. The woman of the Song of Songs, most of the female figures in Proverbs, and personified Jerusalem of Lamentations seem to be the only figured female bodies who speak at length in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>152</sup> Not only, then, are these women composed of poetry but they also

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149. The one partial exception to this is King Lemuel’s mother (Prov 31:1-9). See discussion in chapter 3.

150. See, for example, Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*; Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*; Berlin, *Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*; Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative and the Death of the Rhapsode*.

151. Vayntrub, *Beyond Orality*, 184. See too Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*, especially part 1.

152. In the prophetic texts the female figures rarely speak beyond short quoted statements (e.g. Hos 2:7, 9). One possible exception is the first-person speech in Jer 4 (primarily vv. 19-26) where a few scholars have argued that this is spoken by personified Jerusalem; however, there is little scholarly agreement over this interpretation and the context of Jer 4 is quite different from that of the female figures of the Song, Proverbs, and Lamentations. While the speaker is not clearly identified in the text, the dominant view is that this is spoken by Jeremiah. Among the scholars who argue that Daughter Zion is the speaker there is no agreement over which verses should be included in her speech. For example, Kaiser argues for vv. 19-26, 31, while Maier suggests only vv. 19-21. Unlike the female figures of the Song, Proverbs, and Lamentations, in Jeremiah 4 this is just a voice. There is not a developed description of the woman’s body and the context of her speech. See Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” especially 166-174 and Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 82-84. See too Baumann, *Love and Violence*, 125 and Moughtin-Mumby, *Sexual and Marital Metaphors*, 114-115.

speak it. In each of the chapters that follow, I examine the constructed bodies as well as their words and role as speaker in the text. I suggest that their speech is central to their figuration.

### *Argument Summary & Chapter Outline*

This dissertation examines embodied and vocal female figures in the Hebrew Bible. Their embodiment is achieved textually by constructing female figures with hands, mouths, vaginas, breasts, and so on, and placing them in social spaces and relationships where these female bodies function. These bodies are sexed/gendered, then, through their female reproductive parts, their female social roles (especially mother, wife, and daughter), and, often, their association with certain spaces and not others (e.g., the house rather than the streets). This alignment of associated space, social roles, and biological parts is presented as natural and normal and any transgression in one of these areas (e.g., a female figure in the streets) is depicted as abnormal or even a severe violation of governing social norms. What is more, these bodies speak. Their speech is contextualized by their environment, both in terms of space and other figures with which they may interact. While their contexts and genres differ greatly, all of these female figures embody critical communal concerns and serve as discursive vehicles of ideology. Ideas around power, hierarchy, and humanity anchor these figures and they serve as tools for authors to “think with.” The femaleness of the literary figures under investigation, I will demonstrate, is closely linked with female bodies’ associations with physical vulnerability, economic value, and the perpetuation of life, suggesting that the female body is a particularly apt source domain for envisioning communal survival.

First, I examine the metaphorical interplay between the female body, landscape (and other spatial) imagery, and the concept of romantic love within the lyric love poetry of the Song of Songs. I demonstrate how the female body is metaphorically constructed as a dynamic landscape, drawing on the textures and sensations of pastoral vistas, urban centers, fragrant gardens, and even the architecture of a house. This construction work is primarily carried out in the male-voiced descriptive poems, a form of totalizing description that articulates and emphasizes wholeness and perfection despite the fact that it is expressed by partial and itemized description. I suggest that integral to the woman's wholeness and perfection, and a central theme throughout the descriptive poems, is her fertility and fortification. These themes are reinforced in the woman's own reflections on their romantic endeavors and expanded on in her impatience with the obstacles to their union. I suggest, then, that this text contemplates romantic love in both its positive and negative aspects and that the female body, valued but vulnerable, is an apt resource for wrestling with the stakes of love.

My next chapter analyzes the female figures of Proverbs 1-9 and 31. I argue that within the didactic instruction of Proverbs, these figures are best understood as pedagogical types utilized to educate the audience on the power of wisdom. Proverbs 1-9 feature a didactic parental voice, which disseminates wisdom to the often explicitly named addressee: a son. Most of the female figures are encountered within these parent-to-son instructional speeches and are central to these lessons. The figure that dominates much of the parent's lectures is the Strange Woman. I submit, contrary to many scholars, that this woman is simply another man's wife and is best interpreted as a stereotyped figure heavily colored by the parent's concerns and perspectives. The parent counters the seductive allure of the Strange Woman by uncovering her deception, aligning

her with death, and by offering a better alternative: a wife who is sexually satisfying as well as legitimate (Prov 5:15-20). The portrait of the powerful woman (Prov 31:10-31) also emphasizes the benefits of a good wife. Moreover, I suggest that this poem, placed at the end of this collection of wise words, demonstrates the effectiveness of wisdom for all (even a woman) and proposes that a wise life is one of wise action and not just speech. Woman Wisdom, the personification of this abstract concept, and her counter-figure, Woman Folly (whom we meet only briefly in Prov 9:13-18), are similarly presented to the implied audience in terms of the risks and rewards they offer. These women, then, are not meant to be role models for the implied male audience or even held up as ideal wives, but rather they are representations of life's many dilemmas that require wise discernment. This is evident from the way each of these figures is carefully localized, both demonstrating that these kind of challenges are ones that a young man will run into on his own street or local square and providing a way to easily code these figures: good women are at home and bad women are not. While Proverbs does complicate this idea somewhat in the figure of Woman Wisdom (who instructs in the busiest parts of town), the stakes of wise discernment are always cast in the most crucial terms: life or death. Female bodies, then, as sources of life, are powerful figures for these lessons.

Finally, I approach the female personification of Jerusalem found in the first two poems of Lamentations. While this figure is often examined in light of the prophetic texts where cities are figured as women, my treatment demonstrates that examining this literature in the larger context of poetic female figures not only allows for different literary resonances to come to light but also discourages claims of the personified city's guilt and sin (implicit to the prophetic motif) from dictating Woman Jerusalem's interpretation. Moreover, alongside the metaphorical women

of the Song of Songs and Proverbs, Lamentations' personified city stands out not only as another significant female speaker, but also as another example of how the valued and vulnerable female body is essential to the text's persuasive postures and message. In this chapter I argue that although these poems are explicit about seeking out the deity's witness and comfort, the rhetoric of the text also reflects a concern with persuading the implied audience of the validity of the personified city's claims of unjust treatment. My analysis examines several of the persuasive strategies, including Jerusalem's articulation of her bodily and emotional suffering, the shifting between describing Jerusalem as a city and Jerusalem as a woman, and the support and eventual persuasion of the other voice in Lam 1 and 2. Central to the poet's description of Jerusalem is her designation as a menstruant in Lam 1:8-9. Drawing on the priestly legislation of bodily impurity and the implications for gendered bodies in this system, I suggest that this designation of impurity is more about expressing Jerusalem's abandonment and isolation rather than an assertion of her innate sinfulness and guilt. This marking of impurity and, therefore, isolation from her god, anticipates the deity's silence in response to Jerusalem's final pleas for his attention at the end of Lam 2. As a result, I submit that the real tragedy of Lam 1 and 2 is not the suffering of Woman Jerusalem nor the silence of her god, but that the case put forward in these poems claiming the excessiveness of the city's punishment is valid and persuasive and yet has no affect on the deity. For the implied audience, however, who is convinced by Jerusalem's pleas, Yahweh's silence will be all the more devastating.

Having examined the ideological constructions of women, composed of both body and voice, in Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Lamentations, the dissertation will have demonstrated that these female figures are persuasive metaphorical expressions of communal values and

anxiety. This work contributes, then, to our understanding of how gendered discourse allows us to make sense of our world. Figurative use of women's bodies and voices remains to this day, as my conclusion indicates, a palpable cultural modality for constructing collective identity and mobilizing communal responses to cultural anxieties.

## Chapter 2

### Woman as Landscape in the Song of Songs

The Song of Songs is, arguably, the text in the Hebrew Bible most concerned with the figure and figuration of a female body. Unlike many other biblical (as well as extra-biblical) texts that use the material and experiences of a female body to understand and discuss, for example, a besieged city, an apostate people, or the concept of wisdom, the Song uses the material and experiences of the world in order to construct and convey the beauty and allure of a beloved female body.<sup>1</sup> As a result, repeated and varied attempts at a poetic construction of female body and voice are at the heart of this book and are central to its lessons on the power and vulnerability of love. This chapter will examine how the Song's female figure, composed of both body and voice, is used to contemplate the realities of romantic love, teaching its audience about both its risks and resources. Before analyzing this figure I will give a brief description of how the woman of the Song has been previously treated by scholarship as well as an account of my understanding of the Song's genre and message.<sup>2</sup>

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1. In other words, the Song of Songs reverses the direction of the typical metaphor: the source domain (female body) becomes the target domain (city/nation/land) and the target becomes the source.

2. I work from the premise that the Song of Songs is not merely a disparate collection of love songs, but rather an intentional composition (which might plausibly be, for example, a singular author's opus, a compilation revised for coherence, or a curated collection) where consistency of character and imagery is applied throughout the work. While presenting a full argument for the compositional unity of the Song of Songs is outside the realm of this project, I believe my conclusions here contribute to such an argument. For a further discussion of the compositional unity/disunity in the Song of Songs see Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 194-195, 202-226; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 33-37; Dobbs-Allsopp, "Song of Songs," *NIDB* 5:348-354. See especially Dobbs-Allsopp, "Lyric *in extenso*: Probing (Some) Possibilities in the Song," in his *On Biblical Poetry* (214-226), for a careful consideration and negotiation between the unity and disunity theories: "What we may have in the Song, then, is perhaps neither a long poem nor a lyric sequence, both high achievements of a distinctly literate art, but a writing still orally and aurally oriented that is on its way to becoming something akin to these other forms—this, too, would be a 'new sort' of something (i.e., the writing down of oral performance)" (15). And for an alternative perspective on the unity of the Song, based on reading a single speaker for the poem, see Chavel, "The Speaker of *The Song*

The woman of the Song is perhaps the most written about woman of the Hebrew Bible, at least among feminist biblical critics who see this “strong, articulate, outspoken, active”<sup>3</sup> woman as a sort of female savior of the Bible, helping to wash away the “sins” of the rest of the patriarchal, androcentric canon.<sup>4</sup> As Marcia Falk writes, “Unlike most of the Bible, the Song of Songs gives us women speaking out of their own experiences and their own imaginations, in words that do not seem filtered through the lens of patriarchal male consciousness.”<sup>5</sup> And even among those critics who have been less convinced by the “gynocentricism”<sup>6</sup> of this text,<sup>7</sup> there is still an emphasis on the woman of the Song as an individual, focusing on her autonomy (or lack thereof), the barriers she encounters, the male gaze she endures. In other words, “the Song of Songs is taken to be an exercise in female subjectivity.”<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this interpretive understanding of the woman of the Song as an individual female *person*, work on the imagery surrounding this character and her body tends to be limited to concerns for the woman’s power and dignity. For example, there is an ongoing interpretive concern for the so-called “bizarre or strange”<sup>9</sup> imagery applied to the woman’s body: how is a woman with a nose like a tower and teeth like freshly washed sheep beautiful? Many have noted

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*of Songs.*”

3. Brenner, “To See Is to Assume,” 273.

4. This perspective (of the Song mitigating the androcentric reality of the rest of the canon) began with the work of Phyllis Trible in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, but many others have followed in her footsteps. For example, Meyers, “Gender Imagery”; Falk, *The Song of Songs*; Brenner, “On Feminist Criticism,” 28-37.

5. Falk, *The Song of Songs*, 117. This view and quote are directly criticized by other feminist critics. See, e.g., Exum, “Ten Things.”

6. Meyers, “Gender Imagery,” 218; Brenner, “To See Is to Assume,” 273.

7. Merkin, “The Women in the Balcony”; Clines, “Why Is There a Song of Songs?”; Polaski, ““What Will Ye Seek in the Shulammitte?””; Black, “Beauty or the Beast?”; Black, *The Artifice of Love*. For an internal, gentle critique (or perhaps better, a “reality check”) for feminist critics reading the Song of Songs, see Exum, “Ten Things.”

8. Polaski, ““What Will Ye Seek in the Shulammitte?”” 65.

9. Meyers, “Gender Imagery,” 211.

the perplexing and ridiculous quality of these images, some suggesting accommodating reading strategies<sup>10</sup> and others asserting parodic<sup>11</sup> and even grotesque<sup>12</sup> interpretations. Motivating these readings is the underlying assumption that “there is something wrong with the body.”<sup>13</sup> For many this wrongness seems to be simply a sense that the images are “inappropriate to what seems to be the task of depicting physical attractiveness.”<sup>14</sup> But for others, it is as Exum notes, “*the body is absent*.”<sup>15</sup> The descriptions of the woman merely conjure the idea of a body by drawing on a collection of non-bodily imagery, most often borrowing from the natural world.<sup>16</sup> She is constructed out of field and brook, rather than flesh and bone. Thus behind the critics’ claim that this imagery is problematic seems to be a set of assumptions about the woman as a whole female person who has a real body, a sense of dignity, and the right to desire and be desired. As a result of these assumptions, much is missed in terms of the metaphorical work performed around the female figure’s constructed body.

The approach of this chapter, in keeping with the dissertation’s overall hermeneutic, is that there is not a “real” woman in this text.<sup>17</sup> As discussed in the introduction chapter, this

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10. E.g., Soulen, “The *wasfs* of the Song of Songs.”

11. Brenner, “Come Back, Come Back The Shulammitte.”

12. Waterman, *The Song of Songs*; Segal, “Song of Songs”; Black, *The Artifice of Love*.

13. Exum, “Ten Things,” 33.

14. Meyers, “Gender Imagery,” 211.

15. Exum, “Ten Things,” 34, emphasis original.

16. While it is not unusual for descriptive poems to use non-bodily imagery when describing a body, some critics have still struggled with the particular images assigned to the woman’s body parts alongside the poem’s assertions of beauty. See discussion below. See too Black, *The Artifice of Love*, for critical reflection on this dilemma in scholarship and a creative treatment through the lens of the grotesque.

17. This point has been made explicitly by only a few other scholars. See, for example, Clines, “Why Is There a Song of Songs?”, especially p. 106: “She is not a real woman, she is a figment of the poet’s imagination.” See also Exum’s third thing every feminist should know about the Song of Songs: “There are no real women in this text” (“Ten Things,” 27). See, too, Linafelt: “Certainly one finds this quite a bit in criticism of the Song of Songs, where interpreters continue to look for a narrative arc or treat the book as if it were a sort of literal reportage of the sex lives of two real ancient Judeans” (“Lyrical Theology,” 298). Black has made a similar criticism of much of the scholarship on the Song, suggesting that it is too often “motivated by an attempt to find behind the images a realistic and attractive

*represented* female body is not a direct link to historically accurate women of the author's moment (if this could be pinpointed), but rather an active discursive force that helps to shape cultural norms about gender, bodies, and love in every community that reads and values this text.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the female body is constructed at various moments throughout the Song out of landscape, house, and city, employing imagery of fertility and fortification in order to speak of the woman's appealing attributes, including her attractive and well functioning body as well as her commitment to the male lover. This visible construction work, occurring across the Song and within both the male and female speech, provides the opportunity for close analysis of how this represented woman and her feminine attributes are depicted.

In order to do this analytical work on the female figure, one must take into account the generic features of this text. First the Song of Songs shares some qualities with wisdom literature. It is not just a celebration of love, as some readers have suggested, but rather promotes a particular perspective on romantic love.<sup>19</sup> J. L. Andruska has recently argued that the Song of Songs was comprehensively influenced by the wisdom genre (especially found in Egyptian and Mesopotamian contexts) and, therefore, suggests that the book has a didactic purpose to instruct its audience about the right kind of love.<sup>20</sup> While I do take issue with the very positive evaluation

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woman" (*Artifice of Love*, 32, see also 62).

18. See, for example, Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, volume I; Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Bahrani, *The Women of Babylon*. See discussion in chapter 1.

19. For examples of readings of the Song that interpret the book as a celebration of love, see Exum, *Song of Songs*, 70; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 244-250, 293-294; Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 14.

20. Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 145-176. She goes even further to suggest that the Song intends to transform its readers into "wise lovers" (176). Andruska examines how the Song instructs by identifying forms borrowed from ancient Near Eastern advice literature genre, such as the "do not awaken" refrains of Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4, as well as the *mashal* of Song 8:6-7 (146-148).

Andruska gives to the love depicted in the Song, as I discuss in more depth below, her argument about the didactic nature of the Song is convincing.<sup>21</sup>

This connection with the wisdom genre, while instructive, is not sufficient to explain how the Song works to persuade its audience of its perspective on love. In addition to drawing on the wisdom genre as well as love poetry, the Song of Songs can also be productively (although not perfectly) compared with lyric poetry.<sup>22</sup> Traditionally distinguished from the other two primary literary modes, drama and epic,<sup>23</sup> lyric poetry is “*chiefly...a nonnarrative, nondramatic, nonrepresentational kind of poetry.*”<sup>24</sup> Unlike the dramatic and epic literary modes, lyric poetry does not rely on features like plot or developed characters. Without these cohesive narrative elements, it is often brief and even fragmentary; however, lyric relies on language for its cohesion.<sup>25</sup> Features like wordplay, euphony, imagery, rhythm, repetition, and structure,

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21. Andruska describes the love in the Song as mutual, peaceful, equal, proactive, devoted, desirous, sexual, exclusive, committed, and timeless (*Wise and Foolish Love*, 62-78). While I agree that all these elements can be found in the Song’s discourse about love, I argue below that the risks involved with love (jealousy, competition, vulnerability, isolation, and so forth) can also be found in the Song. Moreover, I doubt the easy equality between the lovers that Andruska and many other scholars posit (e.g. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 13; Falk, *The Song of Songs*, 117; Meyers, “Gender Imagery,” 220; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric*, 144-165). See my discussion below.

22. The Song’s connection with ancient Near Eastern love poetry, especially Egyptian, is well established. See, especially, Fox, *The Song of Songs* for Egyptian comparisons and Nissinen, “Akkadian Love Poetry” and “Love Lyrics of Nabû and Tašmetu” for Mesopotamian connections.

23. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 181; Linafelt, “Lyrical Theology,” 292. Drama, epic, and lyric are extrinsic literary categories (at least since the Renaissance, if not ancient Greece) applied to biblical literature to help make sense of it in light of broader discussions of literary modes. For more on these literary modes and lyric’s place among them, see Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*; Welles, “Genre Theory, the Lyric, and *Erlebnis*”; Johnson, *The Idea of Lyric*; Genette, *The Architext*. Linafelt offers a helpful gloss on these sources. See Linafelt, “Lyrical Theology,” 440n2.

24. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 184-185, emphasis original. A previously unnoticed and under theorized mode of biblical composition (especially in comparison to the extensive work on biblical narrative), Dobbs-Allsopp’s recent work, *On Biblical Poetry*, provides a lengthy exposition on lyric poetry in the Bible. See chapter 3, “The Idea of Lyric Poetry in the Bible.”

25. Linafelt, “Lyrical Theology,” 302. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 189.

reflecting lyric's origins in musical and oral performance, are the beating heart of this poetry.<sup>26</sup>

The meaning in a lyric poem resides in the poetic devices, not behind or underneath them.<sup>27</sup>

The Song of Songs, while not a perfect manifestation of the category of lyric poetry,<sup>28</sup> shares many of its key features.<sup>29</sup> Lyric provides an ideal lens through which to examine the Song and its figuration of woman not only because the world of the Song is the lyrical world of inner thought and emotion,<sup>30</sup> but also because of the centrality of metaphor and voice to both lyric poetry and this text's figurative and persuasive work.<sup>31</sup>

Metaphors matter. In lyric poetry, such poetic devices are not mere ornaments, but rather they create and carry the meaning of the poem. This aligns well with conceptual metaphor

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26. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 181.

27. James, *Landscapes of the Song*, 6.

28. Linafelt, "Lyrical Theology," 292.

29. Linafelt argues that the Song actually draws on both the dramatic and narrative modes, but always "in the service of lyrical ends" ("Lyrical Theology," 293). Linafelt argues that this borrowing from the other modes creates a "tension, so often exploited by poets, between the expectations of a mode or genre and the thwarting of those expectations..." (293).

30. Lyric poetry is often said to be nonmimetic as it is not concerned with representing reality (as drama or narrative is said to be). As Jonathan Culler writes, "the [lyric] poem becomes an event rather than a representation of an event" ("Genre: Lyric," par. 46). Tod Linafelt, however, argues that the lyric mode is mimetic in its own way, in that it means to represent inner emotional life rather than the activity of the outer world ("Lyrical Theology," esp 292, 298-300). Recalling Erich Auerbach's famous description of biblical narrative as "fraught with background" (*Mimesis*, 15), Linafelt demonstrates that this quality of lyric contrasts strongly with the tendency of biblical narrative to focus on the actions and speech of characters while rarely providing access to their inner thoughts. The realm of inner thought, emotion, and passion is the concern of lyric poetry. Frye also refers to lyric as "an internal mimesis of sound and imagery" (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 250).

31. Dobbs-Allsopp writes about the interpretive power of recognizing certain biblical texts as lyric:

"Indeed the recognition of the lyric as a chief mode of discourse of many biblical poems casts them in a strikingly different light. The lack of story and character, the fondness for repetition and emotion, the prominence of form, and the disjunctive feel of the whole, instead of constituting some of the more enigmatic aspects of such poems, suddenly make good sense and seem all so natural. It is as if we had been looking at many of the Psalms and the Song, for example, all along through the bottom of a Coke bottle, distorting and obscuring our vision. Once we see them through corrected lenses of lyric verse, all comes into focus, and our field of vision seemingly expands and gains in acuity, and our picture of such poems clarifies and crystallizes but also explodes with new colors and previously unperceived dimensions and details of texture" (*On Biblical Poetry*, 214).

For a recent and insightful lyrical approach to the Song, see James, *Landscapes of the Song*.

theory,<sup>32</sup> which argues that metaphor is only secondarily a matter of language and primarily a matter of thought.<sup>33</sup> It is a cognitive device that can reorient how one thinks, creating new realities. Not only do metaphors have the power to do this work, but they require it of anyone who “gets” the metaphor.<sup>34</sup> This complicity is inherent in metaphors and is part of their power. Put another way, Dobbs-Allsopp points out that often metaphor in lyric poetry can have the same effect as argument in other modes. Sentiments expressed with the right imagery can easily convince us of the poem’s perspective. Dobbs-Allsopp writes, “Such doubleness in the usage of metaphor—both as an image event in its own right and as (or in lieu of) argument—is analogous to the superabundance of meaning that can attach itself to a poet’s diction or the doubleness of form..., and each exemplifies the tropological density...that customarily (necessarily) attends lyric discourse.”<sup>35</sup> Similarly with other types of linguistic play and figurative language, their meaning lies in their play and figuration, the ways they make the audience pause to admire its beauty, cleverness, or aural texture. In other words, a poem cannot be translated into simple declarative language and still hope to express the same meaning. As a text with dominant lyric qualities, the Song of Songs is a metaphorical text. It attempts to capture the sensations of love by using images and scenes from nature (such as, gardens, orchards, and the heavens) and from human society (such as, meals, cities, and buildings) to render the *emotional experience* of attraction and pleasure.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, its figuration of the female body is achieved through

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32. See discussion in chapter 1.

33. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*.

34. Moran, “Seeing and Believing,” 91; Cohen “Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy.” See discussion of metaphor in chapter 1.

35. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 194.

36. Soulen, “The *wasfs* of the Song of Songs.”

metaphor, drawing on the imagery of a fortified and fertile landscape in order to demonstrate the woman's beauty and value.

While the figuration of woman is achieved through metaphor, that metaphor must be conveyed through the lyric voices of the Song. Lyric poetry prioritizes voice.<sup>37</sup> While drama has characters that speak directly to each other and narrative has a narrator that controls access to character voices and thoughts,<sup>38</sup> lyric has the voice, the "lyric-I."<sup>39</sup> This voice is not necessarily connected to a fully developed character, but is a constructed "fictive speaker" in whose voice the poem is given, often as an address.<sup>40</sup> The Song of Songs has two primary speakers—the male lover and the female lover—everything that occurs in this text occurs in their speech with very few exceptions.<sup>41</sup> These voices construct each other's bodies, express their desires, imagine opportunities for encountering each other, and even hope for a future together. They also worry about obstacles to their union, vulnerabilities in their relationship, and the stakes in pursuing it.

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37. The primacy of voice reminds us of the oral roots of this mode. Originally, the only medium of this poetry was the human voice. It was performed and heard in a particular moment and place (Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 197). And further: "The medium of poetry is the human body: the column of air inside the chest, shaped into signifying sounds in the larynx and mouth" (Pinsky, *Sounds of Poetry*, 8). This historical reality of the lyric gives new perspective on what it means to re-perform (or even re-read) a lyric poem (see Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *On the Margins of Discourse*, part 1). Dobbs-Allsopp writes that "the lyric is quintessentially that medium of discourse that is intended to be reuttered," and in reuttering the new speaker "entertains the statements made by the poem's speaker, tries them on, and reexperiences them from the inside, as it were" (*On Biblical Poetry*, 195). In other words, lyric is a particularly flexible mode of fictive discourse that allows the reader or listener to imagine the lyric-I in a number of different ways; she may identify the speaker as the poet, as herself, or as a universal voice. And this interpretation may change depending on the context of the performance or reading.

38. Linafelt, "Lyrical Theology," 292.

39. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 197. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that the Song of Songs is a "dialogic" type of lyric poetry where "the lyric-I either recedes fully into the background, giving way to an interchange of voices, or takes part as one of the voices in a larger dialogue" (*On Biblical Poetry*, 197). Also Harold Fisch: "There is dialogue to be sure, but it is dialogue that gives us the maximum of relationality, the minimum of personality or setting" (*Poetry with a Purpose*, 104).

40. Linafelt, "Lyrical Theology," 292. See discussion in chapter 1.

41. Exceptions include brief interjections by a chorus of women, called the Daughters of Jerusalem (e.g., Song 1:8; 5:9; 6:1), and the suitors of Song 8:8-9 (see discussion below). It is, however, challenging to definitively identify the speaker of every verse in Song. For an alternative view that argues for a single speaker in the Song, see Chavel, "The Speaker of *The Song of Songs*."

In other words, this is a text that exists only in the words and in the minds of the lovers. It is their varied perspective on love that is promoted in the Song.

This chapter will proceed in two sections. In the first section I examine the repeated construction of the woman's body as landscape<sup>42</sup> by the male speaker, specifically in the three male-voiced descriptive poems (Song 4:1-7; 6:4-10; 7:2-10) as well as the quasi-descriptive poem of 4:10-5:1. I analyze how the woman's complex and dynamic landscape-body is metaphorically constructed out of the sights, smells, shapes, and experiences of the world. After establishing that these poems are intended to convey the woman's beauty and wholeness, I explore how these landscape poems do this work, both in their poetic form featuring metaphorical language and totalizing description<sup>43</sup> as well as in their detailed imagery of fertility and fortification. I suggest that behind these lush descriptions of the landscape-body's wholeness, health, and fortification is a tension between the value and vulnerability of fertile female bodies, a tension that reflects the precarity romantic love.

Whereas the first section will focus on the male voiced construction of the female body, in the second section of this chapter I turn to how the female voice figures her own body. I argue

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42. My working notion of landscape draws on both the Romantic tradition of landscape painting as well as the practice of mapping. Despite the diversity of these traditions, in both cases we have human attempts to represent and construct a spatial reality. I argue that this is precisely what is happening in the Song of Songs, but here it is the female body that is being constructed by the poet with these various landscape metaphors. I do not, however, consider these poetic representations of the woman's landscape-body to be only two-dimensional. The male-voiced descriptive poems, in particular, depict a living, even interactive, landscape, but this is no less a man-made representation than a map or painting. Although we differ in our argument and application of the term (especially in terms of my attention to how the landscape imagery constructs the female body versus her interest in the landscapes themselves), I am indebted to Elaine James's articulation and use of "landscape" in her recent book, *Landscapes of the Song of Songs*. See especially pp. 12-16, 119-122. See too the recently published *Body as Landscape* by Brian Gault. While Gault's work is also focused on body metaphors in the Song, his attention to locating parallels in the ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography in order to better understand the meaning of the body metaphors differs significantly from this study.

43. Vayntrub coins this term for the work of descriptive poems. See Vayntrub's "Beauty, Wisdom, and Handiwork" and "Tyre's Glory and Demise." See also discussion below.

that the female voice affirms and expands the landscape imagery of fertility and fortification established in the male-voiced descriptive poems. First I analyze the woman's claiming of the fortified city imagery for her own body in her reaction to potential suitors in Song 8:8-10. Here the threat of unwanted attention and the necessity of her defenses are made explicit. Second I examine the woman's description of a (near) sexual encounter with her beloved that overlays the metaphor of female body as house with the imagery of house as boundary in Song 5:2-5. This scene uses the imagery of the house for erotic play around bodily and social boundaries and for the development of productive intimate spaces. Lastly, this chapter analyzes the female-voiced descriptive poem in Song 5:10-16 where the male body is constructed. Unlike the male-voiced descriptive poems, this man is not a dynamic and interactive landscape, rather he is a strong, sturdy, and valuable statue. Therefore, while we see a shared concern for value and worth, as well as power, the different imagery applied to these differently gendered bodies reveals a concern for the vulnerabilities of the female body and not for the male.

This chapter suggests that the female body and voice are ideal for the contemplation of romantic love, all its benefits and instabilities. Not only because women are half the equation in a heterosexual pair, but because the female body as valuable but vulnerable resource aptly captures the reality of love demonstrated by the Song of Songs. While the driving power of love is certainly illustrated in this text, reminders of its precarity seem to always follow close behind. Thus the imagery of fertility and fortification associated with the woman's landscape-body according to both the male and female speakers reflects this awareness of the risks and rewards involved with romantic love.

### ***Woman as Landscape: Male Voiced Poetic Construction of the Female Body***

The male voice of the Song of Songs is singularly focused on the body of his beloved. He is captivated by her form and spends verse after verse trying to capture in words and images her incomparable beauty and his (almost) indescribable experience of being in her presence.<sup>44</sup> The dominant imagery he draws on is that of a thriving landscape—full of life and potential, striking in its beauty, awesome in its fortification. This landscape imagery is complex, not limited to a single scene of pastoral beauty, but rather includes pastures as well as city towers and maps a vast amount of territory onto his beloved's body.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, this lady landscape is productive and even interactive, providing her lover with sustenance, shade, and pleasurable terrain on which to gaze and frolic.<sup>46</sup> She is valuable, a desired resource for her lover, and, therefore, like most valuable things, she is vulnerable.<sup>47</sup>

In this section I will analyze the power and purpose of this female figure, constructed by the voice of the male lover, especially in the interplay between the woman's value and vulnerability, her fertility and fortification. Before I turn to this work, however, I will establish

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44. Richard Soulen, in fact, argues that the best interpretative approach to much of the imagery in the Song is to read it as an emotional trigger meant to help the reader experience the beauty of the woman in an equivalent way to how the young man in the Song of Songs experiences his beloved ("The *wasfs* of the Song of Songs," 189). He writes, "The poet is aware of an emotional congruity between his experience of his beloved's manifold beauty and his experience of the common wonders of life. With this in mind he sets out to convey his discovery in lyrical imagery by creating in his hearers an emotion congruent with his own in the presence of his beloved... Each in its own way triggers the imagination, each is a Pavlovian bell" (189-190).

45. James also sees a kind of mapping of the woman's body in the descriptive poems, suggesting that "the body is constituted as a beloved geography." *Landscapes*, 121.

46. The productive connection between female bodies and space, especially cultivated spaces, such as the city, nation, or home, and their frequent female personification has been well analyzed in many contexts, especially among feminist thinkers. See, e.g., McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place*; Duncan, ed., *Bodyspace*; Grosz and Probyn, eds., *Sexy Bodies*; Best, "Sexualizing Space"; Weigel, *Topographien der Geschlechter*. See, too, Maier, *Daughter Zion*, who considers female personification and space in biblical texts (although not the Song) as well as Meredith, *Journeys in the Songscape*, and Thöne, *Liebe zwischen Stadt und Feld*, who both provide spatial readings of the Song with an eye to gender.

47. See also James who argues that the Song's city imagery evokes the "highly ambivalent... twin themes of protection and vulnerability" (*Landscapes*, 88).

the persuasive rhetoric at work in the man's speeches: totalizing description and metaphor, particularly around the imagery of fertility and fortification.

The construction of the woman's landscape-body can be seen most readily in the male-voiced descriptive poems of the Song of Songs. In these three poems, the male lover speaks to his beloved, beholding her beautiful form, and, it would seem, building her body out of the sights and materials of the surrounding landscape (4:1-7; 6:4-7; 7:2-7).<sup>48</sup> This construction, however, is depicted as deceptively whole, complete, and seamless. The male lover systematically but selectively details and describes parts of the woman's body, moving from the head downwards or from the feet upwards, giving an impression of perfect totality, when in fact this work is partial and obscuring.<sup>49</sup>

Jacqueline Vayntrub has recently argued that totalizing description is a literary form that attempts to convey wholeness. Totalizing description, moving from part to part, implies an exhaustive description when, of course, it is not. It, therefore, attempts to *persuade* the audience

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48. The fourth descriptive poem (5:10-16) is spoken by the woman about the body of the male lover. See my analysis below.

49. These four poems are often said to be unique biblical examples of the Arabic poetic form, "*wasf*," which means "description" and is "characterized by the minute, thorough description of certain objects" (Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry*, 4). Biblical scholars of the nineteenth century applied it to the descriptive poems in the Song due to a presumed similarity in both context and structure. The tradition of the Arabic *wasf* in love poetry was a part of a marriage rite where the bride's beauty would be praised by her bridegroom by describing each of her body parts in turn. This poetic form, however, is found not only among Arabic and biblical poetry, but throughout the ancient Near East (Black, *Artifice of Love*, 21-22). Although the term *wasf* has been used by biblical scholars to categorize these poems in the Song since the nineteenth century, it has recently begun to fall out of use. Vayntrub, for example, points out that this category is not native to the Hebrew Bible and risks obscuring a larger phenomenon of similar poems of "totalizing description" within biblical literature, which often are put to different rhetorical purposes than the Arabic *wasf*--such as persuasion ("Tyre's Glory and Demise," 215. See too Vayntrub, "Beauty," 48n10). James, too, in her work on the Song's descriptive poems states she will not use the term in her analysis (*Landscapes*, 118). See also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 20. Consequently, I will also avoid this terminology here, preferring "descriptive poems," or "totalizing descriptions." See Hermann, "Gedanken zur Geschichte des altorientalischen Beschreibungsliedes" for an examination of the *wasf* in the ancient Near East. See Vayntrub, "Tyre's Glory and Demise," 215-217 for list of other examples of totalizing description in the Hebrew Bible. For a history of the use of the term *wasf* within biblical scholarship see Black, *Artifice of Love*, 21-22.

of some overall quality or attribute of the object described.<sup>50</sup> In the case of the Song of Songs, it is the beauty or perfection of the beloved. Vayntrub draws on the work of Saul Olyan, who reformulates and expands Mary Douglas's classic understanding of physical wholeness as a manifestation of holiness in Leviticus.<sup>51</sup> Olyan points out that while Douglas suggests that wholeness is only valued because of its relationship with holiness, there are several other places in the Hebrew Bible where wholeness seems to be valued without any connection to holiness. One of his examples is Song 4:7,<sup>52</sup> where the woman's wholeness, emphasized in the culminating statement of the description of her body and the declaration that she is without blemish (מוֹם),<sup>53</sup> is emblematic of her physical beauty. He concludes, then, that Douglas's paradigm should be widened in order to account for this connection between physical wholeness and beauty as well as holiness.<sup>54</sup> Vayntrub takes this one step further, asserting that it is in fact wholeness, not holiness, that is the larger valued category that can be expressed as both holiness and beauty.<sup>55</sup> Jeremy Schipper and Jeffrey Stackert have argued that wholeness is valued in priestly texts because it is what is expected and preferred by the deity.<sup>56</sup> While this idea may have impacted the preference for wholeness in the Song, the value of wholeness here is linked with the perceived

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50. See Vayntrub, "Beauty," 48-50; Vayntrub, "Tyre's Glory and Demise," 225.

51. Vayntrub, "Tyre's Glory and Demise," 223; Saul Olyan, "Mary Douglas's Holiness/ Wholeness Paradigm: Its Potential for Insight and its Limitations," *JHS* 8 (2008): 2-9; Mary Douglas, "The Abominations of Leviticus," in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1984), 41-57.

52. His other two examples are 2 Sam 14:25 and Dan 1:4 (Olyan, 7-8).

53. This same term is often used in Priestly texts (in the Holiness Legislation) concerned with cultic sacrifices. See, for example, Lev 21:16-24 (concerning the bodies of priests serving at the altar) and Lev 22:18-25 (concerning the bodies of potential animal sacrifices).

54. Olyan, "Mary Douglas," 8.

55. Vayntrub, "Tyre's Glory and Demise," 223. She states further: "This value of wholeness or totality manifests in different contexts as beauty or holiness. Detailed description follows from this value for wholeness in its attempts to express totality—if always partially—with words"(223).

56. Schipper and Stackert, "Blemishes, Camouflage, and Sanctuary Service," especially 461-470.

rareness, it seems, of beauty, a well-working body, and, most importantly, a body that lacks vulnerabilities.

Totalizing description, then, is a form of argument or a rhetorical tool meant to persuade its audience.<sup>57</sup> The descriptive poems of the Song present a case for the beauty and desirability of the beloved by creating the illusion of totality by moving systematically from body part to body part and then declaring overall beauty and perfection (Song 4:7; 6:9; 7:7).<sup>58</sup> There is, however, a second form of argument in these lyrical poems, that of metaphor. These poems are rich with metaphorical imagery. Each body part is described not as a body part but as an element of a living landscape: her hair is compared to a herd of goats moving down a mountain, her teeth are like a flock of clean white sheep with none missing, and so on. As discussed above, Dobbs-Allsopp suggests that metaphor in lyric poetry can act as a form of argument, convincing its audience of particular perspectives or implications of the thing described with the right metaphorical image.<sup>59</sup>

These metaphors, of course, only further support the speaker's argument for the wholeness and perfection of this woman. In my analysis, I will argue that there are two primary ways that wholeness is conveyed through these metaphorical images: fertility and fortification. I will examine here the metaphorical imagery of fertility and fortification in the male lover's construction of his beloved landscape woman, including the descriptive poems in Song 4:1-7;

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57. Vayntrub, "Tyre's Glory and Demise," 223. Vayntrub compares detailed descriptions to list making (a type of scientific discourse in ancient Mesopotamia): "for both, totality is rhetorical not actual: neither descriptions nor lists can achieve totality, but they are frequently configured to persuade the reader of it...It is, in fact, in the selection, omission, and ordering of components in lists and descriptions where ideology is wrought" ("Tyre's Glory and Demise," 225).

58. See also Song 5:16, the final verse of the descriptive poem of the male body, where the woman concludes by declaring all of him desirable (וְכֹלֵּוּ מִחֶמְדָּיִם). See discussion below.

59. Dobbs-Allsopp, *On Biblical Poetry*, 194. See also Moran, "Seeing and Believing" and Cohen, "Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy."

6:4-10; 7:2-7, as well as the quasi-descriptive poem of 4:10-5:1, which revels in the more implicit comparison of the woman's body to a garden and luscious treats, to demonstrate how this bodily wholeness is constructed by the male lover and to consider what is at stake for the man in this construction. I will suggest that this description reflects deep anxieties around the vulnerability and fertility of the beloved female landscape-body, revealing a truth about the precarity of love.

*First Descriptive Poem: Song 4:1-7*

In the first descriptive poem (Song 4:1-7) the male lover marvels at the woman's physical beauty, describing each body part in turn by drawing on the striking scenery of a landscape to convey the great impact this female body has on him. Despite the fragmentary description, this poem argues for the woman's value in terms of beauty and wholeness. This is achieved not only by a totalizing description, but also by emphasizing the woman's vibrant health and fertility as well as her fortified boundaries. The metaphor of a living landscape is effective at conveying these qualities. He creates an impression of an active landscape that is full of active animals, diverse topography, colors, and movements. Each of these aspects of the land is patiently mapped onto the beloved's body, part by part, from her eyes and hair down to her breasts, depicting a landscape body that is fertile and attractive, but also protected. The man's own stake in this landscape-body is made apparent by the end of the poem where he enters and interacts with her pleasurable resources.

It is immediately apparent that this poem is about the woman's beauty.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Look at you! You are beautiful, my darling (הֲנִדָּךְ יָפֵה רַעֲיָתִי)!

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60. All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Look at you! You are beautiful (הִנְדָּךְ יָפָה)!<sup>61</sup>

Your eyes are doves (עֵינֶיךָ יוֹנִים)

behind your veil (מִבְּעַד לְצַמְחָתְךָ).<sup>62</sup>

Your hair is like a flock of goats (שְׁעָרְךָ כְּעֶדְר הָעִזִּים)

streaming<sup>63</sup> down from the mountain of Gilead (שְׁגָלְשׁוּ מֵהַר גִּלְעָד).

<sup>2</sup>Your teeth are like a flock of shearlings<sup>64</sup> (שֵׁנֶיךָ כְּעֶדְר הַקְּצוּבוֹת)

which have come up from washing (שָׁעָלוּ מִזֶּה־רְחֹצָה)

all of which bear twins (שְׁבָלָם מִתְאַיְמוֹת)

and none are bereft among them (וְשִׁבְלָה אֵין בָּהֶם).

<sup>3</sup>Like a crimson thread are your lips (כַּחוֹט הַשָּׁנִי שֶׁפֶתְתֶיךָ)

and your mouth<sup>65</sup> is lovely (וּמִדְּבָרֶיךָ נְאוּהָ).

Like a slice of pomegranate is your cheek<sup>66</sup> (כְּפָלַח הָרְמוֹן רִקְתְּךָ)

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61. In order to convey in English the proper sense of the presentative particle *hinnēh*, I have rendered the feminine singular pronominal suffix twice in my translation. See GKC 147b.

62. The term *צִמָּה* is found only in the Song (4:1, 3; 6:7) and Isa 47:2 and is best translated as “veil.” Many early interpreters struggled with translating this term, some suggesting, “hair.” See discussion in Pope (*Song of Songs*, 457). See, too, James’ discussion of the veil (*Landscapes*, 127-126).

63. *שְׁגָלְשׁוּ* from the root *גלש* occurs only here and in the nearly identical statement in Song 6:5. It has also challenged translators. Based on Ugaritic *glš*, the motion of waves or flowing water has been suggested, which fits well the context of both wavy locks of hair as well as the continuous winding movement of a herd of goats moving down a mountainside when seen from afar (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 458-459; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 153; James, *Landscapes*, 191n34).

64. *הַקְּצוּבוֹת* is the Qal feminine, plural, passive participle of *קצב*, “to cut off, shear” so this refers to a flock of recently shorn or ready to be shorn animals (Joüon-Muraoka, sec121i). Murphy notes that animals would likely be washed before being shorn (*The Song of Songs*, 155. See, too, Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 138; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 153). I am following James in translating “shearlings” (*Landscapes*, 191n35).

65. Reading with the Qere: *מִדְּבָרֶךָ*. (The presence of the *yod* in the text may be the mistaken 2nd feminine singular suffix for plural nouns, as seen in the previous plural term: *שֶׁפֶתְתֶיךָ*). This is the only time this word, related to *דבר*, “to speak,” appears, referring to the mouth or the organ of speech. The *mēm* here could be understood as a preformative denoting location, as it frequently does in such nominal patterns (see *IBHS* 5.6b). Some translate this term to mean speech (e.g. LXX has *λαλιά* and Vulgate has *eloquium*), but that misunderstands the context of the poem that is wholly focused on describing the woman’s body, part by part (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 153; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 155. Pace James, *Landscapes*, 192n36.) See, too, Fox for a clever reading of a double pun that plays on landscape imagery of a desert and oasis in *נְאוּהָ וּמִדְּבָרֶיךָ נְאוּהָ* (*The Song of Songs*, 130).

66. The exact meaning of *רִקְהָ* is difficult. It appears only here, in Song 6:7 where this statement is repeated, and in Judges 4:21-22 and 5:25 where Jael hammers a tent peg into Sisera’s temple (as it is usually understood in that context). Thus, the term seems to refer to an area of the face, perhaps encompassing a larger area than the English “cheek” or “temple” (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 153). I have translated “cheek” as it makes more sense than “temple” in the context of a comparison with a sliced pomegranate. For an alternative view, see Keel: “But the inviting slit in the pomegranate, revealing dark red and bright red parts, seems most likely to refer to the beloved’s open mouth, to her palate” (*The Song*

behind your veil (מִבַּעַד לְצַמְתָּךְ).

<sup>4</sup>Like a tower of David is your neck (כְּמִגְדַל דָּוִד צְוֹאֲרֶךְ)  
built in layers (בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיזוֹת).<sup>67</sup>

A thousand shields are hung upon it (אֶלֶף הַמָּגֵן תָּלוּי עָלֶיךָ),  
all the accoutrements<sup>68</sup> of warriors (כָּל שְׁלֵטֵי הַגְּבוּרִים).

<sup>5</sup>Your two breasts are like two fawns (שְׁנֵי שְׂדֵיךְ כְּשְׁנֵי עֲפָרִים),  
twin gazelles (תְּאוֹמֵי צִבְיָה)  
who pasture among the lilies (הַרְוְעִים בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים).

<sup>6</sup>When<sup>69</sup> the day breathes (עַד שִׁפְפוֹחַ הַיּוֹם)

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of Songs, 146).

67. The word תַּלְפִּיזוֹת is a *hapax legomenon* and has caused much difficulty for commentators (see Pope, 465-468). Even LXX simply transliterated the term, perhaps confusing it for a proper place name. However, most commentators now agree that this term is best understood as coming from the root, לִפָּא, which means “to arrange in courses” (Honeyman, “Two Contributions,” 51.) Thus the phrase, בְּנוֹי לְתַלְפִּיזוֹת, means, “built in courses,” or, in other words, this tower was built with course or layered masonry. This image of a tower built in courses is best understood as conveying the visibly sound structure of the tower. The layers refer to the rows of well-arranged, rectangular, ashlar blocks that make up this structure (*HALOT*, 1741). This description of the tower’s sound construction reinforces its quality and strength suggested by its association with David, “warrior-king par excellence” (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 164).

Many have focused more on decoding how this image translates to a beautiful young woman, arguing that the layered tower refers to the woman wearing an intricate necklace with multiple rows of beads: Isserlin, “Song of Songs IV:4,” 59-60; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 467-468; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 130-131; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 147; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 159. This, however, seems to miss the point of the poetic exercise: to metaphorically describe the woman’s body in terms of the world around him, drawing in particular on equally beautiful and awe-inspiring elements, and not to accurately capture her physical form.

68. The term שְׁלֵטֵי has also proved difficult for translators. It is immediately apparent that it must refer to some sort of military item as it is in parallel with the term, הַמָּגֵן, “shield,” and in construct with הַגְּבוּרִים, “warriors.” It is used in a military context with David in 2 Sam 8:7 (=1 Chr 18:7) as well as in 2 Chr 23:9. In fact, the reference in Chronicles includes it in a group of weapons along with shields (מִגֵּן) and spears. LXX translates this term with βολίδες, “darts” or “javelins,” although Greek translators render this same word in a variety of ways elsewhere. The Vulgate translates *armatura*, “armor.” All this evidence, then, indicates that this is most likely a collective word for a type of weaponry (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 131).

69. The preposition עַד can be used to indicate a relatively broad swath of temporal possibilities, including the time before something occurs, the time up until it takes place, or, less commonly, the time during which it occurs (*IBHS* 11.2.12b). Translators have seen all three of these possibilities in this passage. At stake here is whether or not the male lover will enter this beloved landscape-body before, until, or during daybreak (*pace* Keel, who argues that the timing is midafternoon, although “late” for “the people of the Bible, who regularly rose early” [*The Song of Songs*, 115]). The secrecy of a nighttime tryst certainly resonates with other passages in the Song (especially 3:1-4; 5:2-7), although these passages are spoken by the woman who seems more aware of the need for secrecy. The rest of the imagery in this passage does not carry any suggestion of the man needing to keep his affections or their interactions in the

and the shadows flee (וְנָסוּ הַצִּלָּלִים),  
 I will make my way<sup>70</sup> to the mountain of myrrh (אֶל־הַר הַמִּזְרָה)  
 and to the hill of frankincense (וְאֶל־גְּבַעַת הַלְּבוֹנָה).  
<sup>7</sup>All of you is beautiful, my darling (כָּל־יְפֵה רַעֲיָתִי)  
 and there is no flaw on you (וּמוֹם אֵין בָּךְ).

The first line begins with a repeated exclamation of beauty (יפה) along with the presentative particle *hinnēh* (twice here with the feminine singular pronominal suffix), indicating his focus and directing our attention.<sup>71</sup> The last line also declares the woman's beauty in a final summary statement ("All of you is beautiful, my darling"), forming an *inclusio* and clearly demarcating the intervening verses as evidence of this beauty. This final statement not only establishes the

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dark. This statement does, however, respond to an earlier invitation made by the woman in Song 2:17: "Before/Until/When (עַד) the day breathes and the shadows flee, romp about (סב), be like, my lover, a gazelle or a fawn upon the cleft mountains." Some interpreters read the Qal imperative סב (from סבב) to mean the woman is asking him to leave or to "turn back" before the day breaks. Of course, it matters whether we are to understand this passage (as well as similar statement in Song 8:14 with the Qal imperative בָּרַח, "to flee or run away") as directed at the man when he is with the woman or not. In other words, is she directing him to leave her body ("mountains") after an erotic encounter, before they are caught by daybreak, or is she encouraging him to hurry to her "mountains"—whether she means before the day breaks or when the day breaks? Due to the Song's constant cycling between the lovers' yearning, (near) encounters, and separation it is impossible to know with certainty. However, even as the woman seems aware of the barriers keeping them apart (and suffers repercussions for her transgressive behavior in Song 5:7), she never wishes for her lover to leave her. Despite being kept apart in particular moments, they are always attempting to move towards reunion. Thus it seems best to read both Song 2:17 and 8:14 as the woman inviting the man to come and enjoy her landscape body (*pace* Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 131). The timing of this request may be best understood in the context of her statement in 2:17. This follows directly on the woman recounting how her beloved had come to her window and urges her to join him outside in the newly awakened spring landscape (2:8-15). The woman's invitation in 2:17, then, seems to mirror the man's request. Just as he encourages her to join him in the land just entering springtime, she invites him to enjoy her awakening landscape-body, just as day breaks. Thus, I have translated 4:6 in accordance with 2:17 and 8:14, interpreting "when the day breathes" to mean when day breaks as her landscape-body awakens. See also Exum on difficulty of understanding these verses (*Song of Songs*, 131-133).

70. Following Fox's translation which nicely captures the ethical dative לִי (GKC sec119s). Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 128. See also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 154.

71. James discusses the use of this particle and argues that it is not only a marker of visual attention, but can also indicate a non-visual awareness of presence: "it is a deictic marker for interiority—specifically, the awareness of the other that 'flashes across a character's consciousness' as internal speech." James, *Landscapes*, 123. Quoting here Kawashima, *Biblical Narrative*, 93. For James it is important to nuance this particle in order to complicate the notion of the gaze in the Song, especially for feminist critics.

*inclusio*, but it also further defines beauty: “there is no flaw (מום) on you.” As discussed above, beauty as a manifestation of wholeness prioritizes perfection, or being free of defects (מומים).<sup>72</sup> This is also stated in Song 6:9 (just after the descriptive poem of 6:4-7) where the male lover calls his beloved, תַּמְתִּי, “my perfect one,” from the root תַּמַּם, “to be whole” or “perfect.”<sup>73</sup> Olyan, drawing on the priestly discussion of defects that prevent someone from making a food offering in Lev 21:18-20, suggests that a defect could be a “lack of symmetry and blurring of physical boundaries..., such as crushed or broken limbs or an indistinct iris.”<sup>74</sup> He also notes that a bodily dysfunction, like blindness or genital damage, may also be seen as a defect. These defects, then, mark a body as somehow problematic in its lack of wholeness or perfection and, therefore, are incompatible with the idea of beauty (and holiness). This reinforces the notion that beauty is primarily physical (assessed by the eye of a viewer) and relates to the body’s ability to function properly.<sup>75</sup> In other words, wholeness can be conveyed through functionality as well as beauty.

Through the metaphor of a healthy landscape, the woman’s physical beauty is described in terms that emphasize her symmetry, the intactness of her physical boundaries,<sup>76</sup> but especially her body’s ability to function as it should, namely, her fertility. In 4:2, her teeth are said to be like a flock of clean sheep “all of which bear twins and none are bereft among them.” Just as this

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72. See also 2 Sam 14:25-27 and Dan 1:4 for pairing of beauty (יפה) and lack of defects. Olyan, *Disability*, 18. See also Olyan, “Mary Douglas,” 7-8.

73. Olyan, *Disability*, 18. Both מום and תַּמַּם are commonly used in priestly discourse to describe bodies (priestly or sacrificial animal) that are or are not suitable for temple. See Lev 21:16-24; 22:18-25.

74. Olyan, *Disability*, 18.

75. This would suggest that there is connection between beautiful/whole bodies and working fertile bodies. For example, a body with crushed testicles (prevented from making an offering in Lev 21:20) would probably not be able to produce offspring. Cf. Jeremy Schipper and Jeffrey Stackert, “Blemishes, Camouflage, and Sanctuary Service,” 458-478.

76. This is partially accomplished by the poem’s very form: the totalizing description of each discrete body part.

flock is healthy with no missing members, so are the woman's teeth.<sup>77</sup> The wholeness of this flock is twice established, once positively and once negatively (all have twins and none are bereft), doubly emphasizing their robust health. By employing the image of a thriving flock of sheep, the poet is able to express the woman's beauty and wholeness (the symmetry of the teeth in her mouth), implying the health and fertility of her body.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, in verse 5, the woman's two breasts are likened to "two fawns, twin gazelles." Twoness is emphasized three times: two (שני) breasts, two (שני) fawns, and twins (תאומי), mentioned for a second time in this passage (see v. 2). Again, the symmetry of the woman's body is highlighted, while also indicating the flourishing fertile health of this landscape-body with the image of twins. Moreover, these twin fawns "pasture among the lilies" and the woman's cheek is likened to a pomegranate in v. 3, indicating the nourishing growth of this land. Not only does this landscape produce beautiful flora and delicious fruit, it sustains its fauna.

It is this very interaction between the elements of the landscape that creates the striking impression of a healthy, working ecosystem. While the images of flora and fauna produce color and movement, the stable topographical features in this landscape provide context and locality. The quotidian moments of these animals' lives are set against a backdrop of clean pools and tall mountains—specifically the mountains of Gilead. This topographical backdrop is not just a stage for the animals' actions, but rather an integral aspect of the landscape-body. The fact that the flock of goats is moving down a mountainside conjures the image of a woman's hair. The collective movement of goats, likely with different shades and textures of white, brown, and

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77. See also Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 129; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 142-143; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 162-163.

78. Note also the description of the woman's eyes in v. 1. Described as doves, the lover emphasizes the symmetry and whiteness (a signifier of health, absent of jaundice) of the woman's eyes.

black, conjures for the viewer the natural movement of a woman's hair and likely the multiple shades illuminated by sunshine and shadow. It is the lively interplay between animate and inanimate that helps produce the effect of a living landscape-body.

Similarly, just as this landscape is not static, it is also not limited to the pastoral, as one might imagine a landscape painting that depicts only the bucolic rolling hills with grazing sheep and leaves out the rest of the related world (e.g., those who buy the wool produced, the society of the painter, and so forth). The woman's landscape-body includes elements of that wider world. For example, the woman's mouth is compared to a crimson thread (חוט), perhaps a product of flocks and plants, but for use beyond fields and farming in textiles.

Even more striking is the appearance of a fortified tower in v. 4: "Like a tower of David is your neck, built in layers. A thousand shields are hung upon it, all the accoutrements of warriors." Likened to the woman's neck, this imagery conjures not only human settlements, but also human conflict and violence. While it may seem to contrast sharply with the bucolic scenes of flora and fauna, both field and fortification are interconnected with one another and depend on each other for survival.<sup>79</sup> The inclusion of a fortified tower, therefore, is fitting in this complex and thriving landscape. Towers were an essential part of the fortified city in the ancient world. Typically they would be built on the highest part of the city,<sup>80</sup> both in order to be seen from a distance and to provide a vantage point for those within. Thus, this tower represents a reality of

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79. James points out that many scholars see a sharp contrast between city and land, "reify[ing]" the nature versus culture distinction (*Landscapes*, 89). In contrast, James argues: "The poetry of the Song relies on an understanding of the city as closely proximate to its surrounding countryside, and intimately connected with it. This reflects a reality of the ancient world: agricultural fields would have abutted the small cities of the ancient world, and its workers would have spent their days out in the agricultural landscape...The ancient city, that is to say, could only thrive in the context of a healthy and thriving agricultural hinterlands" (*Landscapes*, 116).

80. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 231.

human life that is often imprinted on human landscapes: the need for protection. A mighty tower covered in weaponry exudes military might.<sup>81</sup> The fact that the weapons are hanging at rest and not poised to attack may be less of an active threat to the onlooker, but, nevertheless, the message is clear. This tower is fortified and prepared to protect itself and its surroundings.<sup>82</sup>

From what or whom does this landscape-body need protection? A foreboding tower covered in weapons, reaching high above the landscape would be a striking visual that would serve as silent threat to anyone with thoughts of conquest. In the realm of the landscape metaphor, a city or settlement could be attacked, raided, its resources drained and lives ended. The health and vitality of this landscape, so lovingly articulated in this poem, is valued and understood to be under risk from outsiders. But what does this tell us about our constructed woman? Obviously, this beautiful woman may also be “under threat” from other suitors.<sup>83</sup> But we are also reminded of one of Olyan’s criteria for a defected body: “blurring of physical boundaries.”<sup>84</sup> While he gives the examples of a broken limb or a clouded eye, it would seem that intact physical boundaries in the context of a human body is always a fiction. Human bodies are full of holes, flaws, and points of access for the outside world. We, in fact, can only survive through processes of exchange between inside and outside (for example, eating, breathing, reproduction, and so forth). Female bodies, in particular, are often depicted as particularly porous

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81. There is a parallel image in Ezek 27:11: “Men of Arvad and Helech were upon your [Tyre’s] walls (חומות) all around, and the Gammadites were in your towers (מגדלות). They hung their weapons upon your walls all around (שְׁלֹטֵיהֶם תָּלוּ עַל-חֻמּוֹתַיִךְ סָבִיב) , they perfected your beauty (הֵמָּה כָּלְלוּ יְפֵיֶךָ)” (cf. 1 Macc 4:57). Moreover, this parallel is all the more relevant as it is part of another descriptive poem, one describing the city of Tyre as a great merchant ship. See Vayntrub, “Tyre’s Glory and Demise.”

82. Pace Exum who argues that this image “give[s] an impression of peace and security” (*Song of Songs*, 165).

83. As seen elsewhere in Song (see, especially, discussion of Song 8:8-10 below) and implied by her obvious beauty and comparison to other women (e.g. Song 6:8-9). See discussion below.

84. Olyan, *Disability*, 18.

and pregnable, in large part due to their reproductive role as well as the realities and anxieties around access to and control over female bodies. It would seem, therefore, that this mighty military tower reflects an awareness of and concern for the shared value and vulnerability of a female body as well as a communal body. The male speaker's fortification of this landscape-body emphasizes its sound construction, protected boundaries, and, thus, overall wholeness and beauty.

As this first descriptive poem comes to an end, the speaker of the poem, who has been describing the woman's landscape-body, it would seem, from afar, now inserts himself into this landscape.<sup>85</sup> In verse 6 he says, "When the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will make my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense."<sup>86</sup> Understanding land as female body, this is an erotic moment. He has moved beyond describing the landscape to interacting with it. When engaging with a body as one would land, all actions seem to become erotic play (for example, plowing, sewing, treading, grazing, and so forth). The "mountain of myrrh" and "hill of frankincense" are suggestive of the woman's genitals.<sup>87</sup> This area of the body would be a natural next stop for the man's eye and mind after considering her breasts. The association of sweet fragrance with the aroused female body has been established elsewhere in the Song.<sup>88</sup>

Additionally, it seems that myrrh is evocative of the woman's sexual organs in Song 5:5 where

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85. Cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 23.

86. This statement in v. 6 seems to be a direct response to the woman's request 2:16-17. See n. 69 above and discussion below.

87. Most commentators suggest that the mountain and hill of Song 4:6 refer to the woman's breasts (see, e.g., Exum, *Song of Songs*, 167-168; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 132; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 152); however, since the man has already described the breasts it seems likely that he might move to another body part that might share a similar curvature. This could be the genitals specifically or the area of the body that encompasses them, e.g. the hips, lower stomach, etc.

88. See Song 1:3, 13, 14; 2:13; 3:6; 4:10, 11, 13, 14, 16; 5:5, 13; 6:2; 7:9, 14; 8:14. See also discussions below.

myrrh is depicted as “dripping” and “running” from the woman’s hand, representing her vulva or indicating self-stimulation.<sup>89</sup>

Thus, following the trend of much of the Song of Songs, the man’s first attempt at description ends with an erotic engagement between the two lovers (or a wish for one). The fact that the speaker, our describer of the woman’s landscape-body, actually inserts himself into the landscape, reminds us of the role and perspective of this describer. He is not merely a viewer of this landscape, simply attempting to capture the panoramic view from afar, he is engaged in and views himself as a part of this landscape. He fully experiences this landscape and his multi-sensory description reflects this. While most of the poem focuses on the visual with colors and movements, the mention of a slice of pomegranate activates tastebuds, the scents of myrrh and frankincense stir his olfactory senses, and the movement of flocks of goats and sheep conjure the soundscape of shepherding as well as the texture of clean wool and soft fawns. The lover’s interaction with the landscape-body further emphasizes its health and attraction as well as his stake in this reality. In other words, the male lover is intimately connected with this landscape-body, both in his erotic interactions with her, but also in his access to her resources. Just as this fertile living landscape allows its inhabitants sustenance, satisfaction, and security—so does a female body. Women and land both promise a productive and plentiful future.

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89. See my discussion of Song 5:2-5 below. Pardes, *Countertraditions*, 132. Myrrh appears elsewhere in the Song: 1:13; 5:1, 13. Only in 5:13 is it explicitly liquid myrrh (מִזֵּר עֵבֶר), this time applied to the man’s lips.

*Second Descriptive Poem: Song 6:4-10*

The second descriptive poem (Song 6:4-7) shares the same form and much of the same imagery of health and fertility as the first. In fact it repeats, nearly verbatim, the descriptions of the woman's healthy hair, teeth, and cheek even while expanding the fortification of his beloved landscape-body:

- <sup>4</sup>You are beautiful, my darling, like Tirzah (יִפָּה אֶת רַעֲיָתִי כְּתִרְצָה)  
lovely like Jerusalem (נְאוּהָ כִּירוּשָׁלַם),  
awesome like bannered forces (אֵימָה בְּנִדְגָלוֹת).<sup>90</sup>
- <sup>5</sup>Turn your eyes away from me (הִסְבֵּי עֵינֶיךָ מִנִּגְדִי),  
for they make me tremble<sup>91</sup> (שָׁהֵם הִרְהִיבֵנִי)!
- Your hair is like a flock of goats (שְׁעָרֶךָ כְּעֶדֶר הָעִזִּים)  
streaming down from Gilead (שֶׁגְּלָשׁוּ מִזֶּהְגִּלְעָד).<sup>92</sup>
- <sup>6</sup>Your teeth are like a flock of ewes (שִׁנַּיִךְ כְּעֶדֶר הָרְחִלִּים),<sup>93</sup>  
which have come up from washing (שְׁעָלוּ מִזֶּהְרְחֻצָּה)  
all of which bear twins (שְׁכָבְלָם מִתְאִימוֹת)  
and none are bereft among them (וְיִשְׁכְּבָה אֵין בָּהֶם).
- <sup>7</sup>Like a slice of pomegranate is your cheek (כְּפֶלַח הָרְמוֹן רִקְתָּךְ)  
behind your veil (מִבְּעַד לְצִמְתֶּךָ).<sup>94</sup>

This descriptive poem differs from Song 4:1-7 only in its opening verses. It again states the fact of the woman's beauty, but this time immediately compares her to two cities: Tirzah and Jerusalem. Tirzah has caused interpreters a number of problems.<sup>95</sup> The main source of these

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90. See discussion of this translation below.

91. Following Fox's translation of הִרְהִיבֵנִי which captures well the causative sense of the Hiphil (*The Song of Songs*, 152).

92. In 4:1 it is "Mountain of Gilead" (הַר גִּלְעָד).

93. In 4:2 it is feminine plural participle: "shearlings" (הַקְּצוּבוֹת).

94. This verse is the same as 4:3b, but it skips over the woman's mouth (cf. 4:3a). Several early interpreters (e.g., LXX, Sryiac, Symmachus, Aquila, OL, the Syro-Hexapla) add this missing couplet from 4:3a at the beginning of this verse, citing a copyist error (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 212; see, too, Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 152). This, however, is unnecessary. The shared lines are not exact copies and the two poems, otherwise, differ significantly. See, also, James, *Landscapes*, 194n67.

95. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 558-560, for summary of interpretations.

interpretative issues is that the ancient translations did not recognize Tirzah as a city, but rather rendered it as if coming from the root רצה, “pleasing.”<sup>96</sup> Tirzah, however, is mentioned as a Canaanite city (Josh 12:24) and as the capital city of the northern kingdom (ca. 930-880 BCE) until Omri built Samaria as the new capital.<sup>97</sup> As the once capital city of the north, Tirzah is a very fitting parallel to Jerusalem, the capital of the south. Moreover, as the ancient witnesses attest, the name Tirzah can evoke “pleasure” or “loveliness”<sup>98</sup>; therefore, it is the perfect complement to beautiful Jerusalem. Jerusalem’s association with beauty is unquestioned by commentators as it is known as the “perfection of beauty” (Ps 50:2; Lam 2:15; cf. Ps 48:3).

These cities are described as not merely beautiful. They are also terrifying. The adjective אִיָּא “terrible, awesome” is used in only one other place (Hab 1:7) to describe the dreaded military might of the Chaldeans. The noun form is more common and is used in situations of both awe and dread, from theophany (Gen 15:12) to war (Deut 32:25).<sup>99</sup> This complicated emotion composed of both terror and wonder, approximated here with “awesome,” is the description bestowed upon the landscape-body of the beloved, composed of both idyllic fields and fortified towns.<sup>100</sup> This emotion is also reflected in the following verse where her lover is too overcome to describe the woman’s eyes. Instead he demands that she not look at him,

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96. HALOT, 1280-1281. Despite the rich associations between women and cities in ancient Near Eastern and biblical literature (see discussion throughout this dissertation, but especially in chapter 4), Pope surprisingly mentions how many commentators have had great difficulty with the woman being compared to a city: “It is hard enough to explain the comparison of a beautiful female, human or divine, to a city, even Jerusalem...” (*Song of Songs*, 558).

97. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 558. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 213. See 1 Kings 14:17; 15:21, 33; 16:6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 23, 24, 28. See de Vaux for an archaeological analysis of Tell el-Far‘ah, the probable site of Tirzah (“Tirzah,” especially 379-382). See too Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 278, 302-303.

98. See, e.g., Isa 42:1; Psa 147:10-11 Psa 149:4; Prov 15:8; Job 14:6; Est 1:8 .

99. HALOT, 41.

100. Pope points out that goddesses of love are also frequently goddesses of war in the ancient world (*Song of Songs*, 562-563). Fox notes that the intensity of love often involves the combination of contradictory emotions: excitement and fear (*The Song of Songs*, 151).

exclaiming: “Turn your eyes away from me, they make me tremble!” In a descriptive poem, where each body part is described in turn, this departure from the pattern is striking and expresses the lover’s momentary lapse of composure at how awesome he finds the woman’s beauty.

The final image of the first verse is a challenging one, but it ultimately reinforces the lover’s sense of awe. The word, נִדְגָלוֹת, appears only here and in the identical statement in verse 10. However, this root, דגל, appears two other times in the Song. First as a noun in Song 2:4b when the woman tells the Daughters of Jerusalem about her lover: “his banner over me is love (וְדָגְלוֹ עָלַי אֶהְבֶּה).” And then as a passive participle in Song 5:10b when the young woman describes her beloved: “he is distinguished (literally: visible) from ten thousand (דָּגוּל מִרְבָּבָה).” These two uses represent the two different meanings associated with דגל. Its more general definition means, “to look, behold,” as seen in the passive participle in Song 5:10. Its second meaning is denominative from the noun form, דָּגָל, which means “banner, standard,” as seen in Song 2:4. So the denominative verb means, to “carry, or set up standard, banner.”<sup>101</sup> Here in 6:4, 10 we have a Niphal feminine plural participle. Most commentators have rendered this word based on the first definition of דגל as “things seen” or “visible things.” This less specific rendering has given commentators license to creatively interpret what these “visible things” are. Pope, for example, renders “trophies,”<sup>102</sup> Murphy translates, “visions,”<sup>103</sup> and Exum chooses “splendor,”<sup>104</sup> referencing the cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem.<sup>105</sup> Most of these translations,

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101. BDB, 186.

102. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 560.

103. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 175.

104. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 212.

105. See Exum, *Song of Songs*, 218, for a full summary of past translations.

however, do not account for the stated awesomeness of this image.<sup>106</sup> In the context of the young woman's repeated depiction as landscape, and here explicitly a city, understanding נִדְגָלוֹת as referring to "bannered forces" is the best rendering.<sup>107</sup> This translation also fits the other use of נִדְגָלוֹת in verse 10 where the imagery is celestial rather than urban: "Who is this who looks down<sup>108</sup> like dawn, beautiful like the moon, splendid<sup>109</sup> like the sun, awesome like bannered forces?" Here, in v. 10, the bannered forces can be understood as heavenly, rather than human, hosts.

Not only are bannered forces awesome, but they also act as further fortification of the landscape body. Like a sturdy tower covered in weaponry, an army standing in battle array under brightly colored banners is a truly majestic but terrifying sight. The banner imagery emphasizes ordered arrangement, color, and visibility. Whether or not this is an army in battle or troops arranged for inspection, the threat is tangible. If the security of the city is threatened, this army is ready to defend. This imagery, like the fortified tower of Song 4:4, emphasizes the alluring beauty but threatening fortification of the woman's landscape body.

Although the totalizing description of the woman's body abruptly ends here in v. 7, the next three verses act as a long summary statement of the woman's superior beauty (cf. Song 4:7),

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106. Pope's gruesome trophies of war (like Anat's necklace of severed heads) could be considered awesome in the sense of inspiring terror and awe (*The Song of Songs*, 561), but as Fox argues, this does not fit the tone or language of the Song of Songs (*The Song of Songs*, 152).

107. Also NRSV, Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 215, LXX (τεταγμένοι), and Vulgate (*castrorum acies ordinata*). See, too, James who translates "awesome as an army procession" (*Landscapes*, 132).

108. נִשְׁקָפָה is Niphal feminine singular participle from שָׁקַף and is frequently used for looking out and down through a window (see, e.g., Judges 5:28; 2 Sam 6:16; Prov 7:6), adding to the celestial height of the woman in this verse.

109. Following Exum's translation of "splendid" for בָּר. She points out that while this term is often translated "pure," it is associated with luminosity here in 6:10 as well as in Ps 19:9. *Song of Songs*, 213.

stating her “perfection” (תמם): “She is singular, my dove, my perfect one (אַחַת הִיא יוֹנָתִי)” (6:9). The use of תמם to note the woman’s perfection and beauty is significant at the end of a poem of totalizing description as it also carries the connotation of wholeness (as discussed above). The male lover supports his claims of the woman’s surpassing beauty by drawing a comparison to all other women, from maidens to queens (6:8).<sup>110</sup> The man, however, does not let his perspective stand as the only evidence of the woman’s unique beauty, a departure from the singular perspective of this viewer-lover in the descriptive poems. Instead he cites the admiration and agreement of other women, including her mother: “she is singular to her mother (אַחַת הִיא לְאִמָּהּ), she is splendid<sup>111</sup> to the one who bore her (בְּרָהּ הִיא לְיֹלְדֶתָהּ)” (6:9). While we never encounter the woman’s mother in the Song, she is present throughout, often appealed to by both lovers for implicit approval of their relationship.<sup>112</sup> From here, the lover finds further evidence from the opinion of the countless women of the previous verse whose own beauty is surpassed by his beloved. Even these women praise the beloved’s beauty, calling her blessed: “Daughters saw her and they called her fortunate (וַיִּאֲשְׁרוּהָ); queens and concubines, and they praised her (וַיְהַלְלוּהָ).”<sup>113</sup>

110. The Daughters of Jerusalem refer to the woman with the comparative epithet: “O beautiful one among women” (הִיפָּהּ בְּנָשִׁים) (Song 1:8; 5:9; 6:1). In addition to these verses, the man favorably compares the woman to other women in Song 2:2. The woman favorably compares the man to other men in Song 2:3; 5:10. With this shift to comparison, we momentarily leave the realm of metaphor (until v. 10). (He also shifts from 2nd to 3rd person speech.) Here he speaks not of the woman’s landscape-body, but of her as a woman in a world of many women.

111. See n. 109 on this translation choice.

112. See Song 3:4; 8:1-2, 5. There is a similar double parallel reference to mother in 3:4, 8:2, 5.

113. This verse echoes the conclusion of the poem of the powerful woman (אֲשֶׁת־חַיִל) of Prov 31: “Her sons rise up and pronounce her fortunate (קָמוּ בְנֵיהָ וַיִּאֲשְׁרוּהָ) and her husband praises her (בְּעֵלָהּ בְּעֵלָהּ): ‘Many women have performed powerfully (רַבּוֹת בְּנוֹת עָשׂוּ חַיִל), but you surpass them all (וְאַתְּ עָלִית עַל־כָּל־בְּלֵנָה)’” (vv. 28-29). Here it is men, the woman’s sons and husband, who give their approval of this woman and it is not her physical beauty, but rather her capable qualities that they (and the poem as a

The last verse (v. 10) forms an *inclusio* with the first (v. 4) by returning to the same awesome image of bannered forces (נִדְגָלוֹת), but here the terrestrial image of verse 4 is balanced by a celestial image in v. 10: “Who is this who looks down<sup>114</sup> like dawn (מִי־זֹאת הַגִּשְׁקָפָה), beautiful like the moon (יָפָה כְּלַבָּנָה), splendid<sup>115</sup> like the sun (בְּרָה כְחֶמֶה), awesome like bannered forces (אֵימָה בְּנִדְגָלוֹת).” The woman as landscape expands exponentially to include the dawn, moon, and sun. Here it is not her body parts that are likened to these astral bodies, but her overall beauty—the subject of these final verses. The impact of the sight of her whole body is likened to the experience of these celestial bodies and the wholeness of the universe. One can again understand the complicated emotion of awe as well as the speaker’s overwhelmed state in v. 5. While this second descriptive poem focuses less on detailing the woman’s landscape-body, it demonstrates the point of the exercise: to convey the overwhelming beauty of the woman’s whole form, which surpasses all other women and is likened to a divine celestial body. Moreover, the central themes of fertility and fortification continue here with the repetition of the images of a thriving and healthy landscape in 6:5b-7 as well as the expansion of the imagery of protection in 6:4 (and echoed in 6:10).

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whole) praise (See Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 2). But in both cases, there is a concluding move to comparison with other women and outside (beyond the speaker) approval to further strengthen the evidence of a descriptive poem. See my analysis of Prov 31:10-31 in chapter 3.

114. See n. 108 above on this translation choice.

115. See n. 109 above on this translation choice.

*Third Descriptive Poem: Song 7:2-10*

The last descriptive poem (Song 7:2-7)<sup>116</sup> maintains the same form but shifts the pattern and perspective. Instead of detailing the woman's body parts beginning with her head and working down, this poem begins with the woman's feet and moves upwards. The result is a more intimate and erotic poem. Moving up from the feet, the poem quickly ascends to and dwells on the woman's most sexual parts with more intimate imagery. Moreover, the construction of a productive and protected landscape-body continues:

<sup>2</sup>How beautiful are your feet in sandals (מֵה־יָפוּ פְּעָמַיִךְ בְּנִעְלָיִם),

O noble woman (בֵּית־נָדִיב).

The curves<sup>117</sup> of your thighs are like ornaments (חֲמוּקֵי יָרְכֵיךְ כְּמוֹ חֲלָאִים),<sup>118</sup>

the work of the hands of a mastercraftsman (מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵי אָמֵן).

<sup>3</sup>Your navel<sup>119</sup> is a round bowl<sup>120</sup> (שָׁרְרִךְ אֲגֹן הַסֶּהֶר).

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116. How (or whether) Song 7:1 relates to the verses that follow is unclear. It is a particularly problematic verse. See Murphy, "Dance and Death in the Song," 117-119. It is, however, clear with the opening statement of beauty that the descriptive poem begins in Song 7:2.

117. חֲמוּקֵי is a *hapax legomenon* from חמק meaning "to turn" (*HALOT*, 330) This root is also found in Song 5:6 where it is used as Qal perfect in the sense of to turn and leave. *HALOT* suggests translating this term as "curve" (327). See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 213; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 158.

118. חֲלָאִים is a rare term, used only one other time in Prov 25:12 (here as a singular construct). In Proverbs it is paired with the term נְזָם, a piece of jewelry (a ring, nose-ring or earring), and both objects are said to be made of gold.

119. Several commentators see שֶׁר, translated here as "navel," as a euphemism for the woman's vulva (e.g., Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 617; Lys, *Le plus beau chant*), a connection made in part due to the similarity to the Arabic word *sirr*, which means "secret," suggesting secret areas of the body like the vulva (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 182; Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 617). See, too, Keel on the similarity between navels and vulvas on Syrian terra-cotta female figures (*The Song of Songs*, 232). Regardless of whether this term should be understood as euphemistically referring to the woman's vulva, this is clearly an erotic area of her body and sexually suggestive. See my discussion below.

120. אֲגֹן הַסֶּהֶר is also a *hapax legomenon*. Most understand it to describe the quality of the shape or shaper of the bowl, the term being a genitive of specification or a noun referring to the "turner" of the bowl, so a bowl that has been well turned (Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 619; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 159; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 213). Both LXX and Vulgate translated a "turned" bowl, using the same term they use in Song 5:14 to describe the man's hands as "turned gold." Thus, I have translated (with most translations) the term here to refer to the round shape of the bowl.

that never lacks mixed wine<sup>121</sup> (אֶל־יִחְסַר הַמִּזְג).

Your belly is a heap of wheat (בְּטֶנֶד עֲרַמַת חֲטִים),  
encircled with lilies (סוּגָה בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים).

<sup>4</sup>Your two breasts are like two fawns (שְׁנֵי שְׂדֵיךְ כְּשְׁנֵי עֲפָרִים),  
twin gazelles (תְּאֵמִי צְבִיָּה).

<sup>5</sup>Your neck is like a tower of ivory (צִוְאָרֶךְ כְּמִגְדַל הַשֵּׁן).

Your eyes are pools in Heshbon (עֵינֶיךָ בְּרִכּוֹת בְּחֶשְׁבוֹן)  
beside the gate of Bath-Rabbim (עַל־שַׁעַר בֵּת־רַבִּים).<sup>122</sup>

Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon (אַפְּךָ כְּמִגְדַל הַלְּבָנוֹן),  
looking toward Damascus (צוֹפָה פָּנֶי דַמְשֶׁק).

<sup>6</sup>Your head is upon you like Carmel (רֹאשׁךָ עָלֶיךָ כְּכַרְמֶל)  
and the loom<sup>123</sup> of your head is like purple (וְדֹלֶת רֹאשׁךָ כְּאַרְגָּמָן),  
a king is bound in the flowing locks (מֶלֶךְ אָסוּר בְּרֵהָטִים).<sup>124</sup>

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121. מִזְג is another *hapax legomenon*. It is likely that this is an Aramaism for the Hebrew term מִסָּד (Ps 75:9, note too the use of מִסָּד, “to mix,” used for wine in Prov 9:2, 5), referring to mixed wine (Dobbs-Allsopp, “Late Linguistic Features, 57). See, too, James, *Landscapes*, 196n87.

122. See discussion below.

123. The term דֹּלֶת only appears one other time in Isa 38:12 where the term, used with אָרַג, “weaver,” clearly refers to a loom, or more precisely, “threads of warp hanging in a loom” (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 213). Many commentators prefer to translate this term as “hair” (e.g., Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 180; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 212) or “locks” (e.g., Pope, *Song of Songs*, 593; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 230) in order to convey the reference of the loom imagery (the target domain rather than the source domain). I chose here to retain the language of the source domain, as is consistent with the rest of my translation and my interest in the metaphorical construction of the woman’s body. See also Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 154; James, *Landscapes*, 138.

124. The term רֵהָטִים appears in Gen 30:38, 41; Exod 2:16 referring to troughs for watering flocks. The root רהט in Aramaic and Syriac means “to run” (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 161; James, *Landscapes*, 196). This image is also captured by the LXX: ἐν παραδρομαῖς, “in courses” and the Vulgate: *canalibus*, “in canals.” This, of course, calls to mind the image of the woman’s wavy hair from Song 4:1, which says that her hair is like “a flock of goats who stream down the mountain of Gilead.” Here, it seems, the image of running water similarly evokes the waving movement of her hair. As with the previous term discussed in n. 123, we have a challenging translation choice. Most commentators, again, choose to translate with a word related to hair, most commonly “tresses” (e.g., Pope, *Song of Songs*, 593; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 180; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 230; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 212; James, *Landscapes*, 138), highlighting the target domain, the object that this metaphor is attempting to illuminate. Many acknowledge that this translation choice “is arrived at more from context than from etymology” (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 186; see also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 214). I, however, in an ongoing attempt to use the language of the source domain while recognizing the difficulty of finding the right term to convey this particular Hebrew phrase, have chosen to follow Fox who translates “locks.” He suggests that just as “locks” in English can refer to both something used to capture someone and locks of hair; so too רֵהָטִים relates to both runners, that is beams that could be used in a trap as well as waving rivulets of moving water (*The Song of Songs*, 161). Moreover, the term “locks” in English, also carries the connotation of water. See *Merriam-Webster*, s.v. “lock (n.),” accessed August 4, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lock>.

<sup>7</sup>How beautiful and how lovely you are (מֵה־יָפִית וּמֵה־נִעְמָה)!  
Love is among the highest pleasures (אֶהְבֶּה בְּתַעֲנוּגִים).

The imagery here begins not with more impressions of landscape vistas, but products of a fertile landscape and the thriving society it supports. The woman's thighs are likened to masterful ornaments. These ornaments are likely some sort of jewelry, perhaps bracelets or hooped earrings, made of precious material that required the craft of skilled hands. This image not only compares her landscape-body to a beautiful and expensive ornament, but it brings into this landscape a sense of developed culture—artisans who create beautiful objects and wealthy patrons who can buy them. What is more, when this image of an artisan's hands working to round and craft an ornament is compared with the woman's thighs, it carries an erotic tone that suggests the man's desire to explore the beautiful curves of the woman's body with his own hands.

The speaker's attention now travels up to the center of the woman's body: her "navel" and belly. The route from thighs to navel must pass over the woman's genitals and it is possible that the reference to her "navel" is in fact a euphemistic reference to her vulva.<sup>125</sup> Whether navel or vulva, at this most intimate and tender center of the female body, the imagery continues to suggest products of a thriving fertile landscape. Wine would have been an important agricultural product and the fact that this bowl of wine is never lacking emphasizes the ongoing fertility of the landscape. Similarly the heap of wheat encircled by lilies also suggests fecund land that can feed its population. While the man does not explicitly insert himself into the landscape here, he does suggest an engagement with the landscape with the brimming bowl of mixed wine which demands to be drunk and the heaps of wheat which promise baked bread.<sup>126</sup> The lover makes the

metaphorical argument that he himself is nourished by the beauty of this woman and perhaps suggesting that his survival depends on her. This productive landscape-body is a sustaining and hospitable resource.

In verse 4, we return to the woman's breasts and the same image of the twin fawns of a gazelle. This is the only image that the third descriptive poem repeats from a previous descriptive poem (it also appears in the first descriptive poem, Song 4:5). It serves here as a transition point in the poem, a brief pastoral interlude, between the first few verses that highlight valued products of the land and the following verses that emphasize architectural features of this landscape. Here again this image conjures the sense of fertility and health exuded by this landscape-body.

In the remaining verses of the poem, the imagery moves to more monumental aspects of landscape, especially those associated with cities and palaces where concerns of fortification are paramount.<sup>127</sup> In verse 5, the woman's neck is again likened to a tower, but this time it is a tower of ivory. It is unlikely that a tower would be made entirely of ivory, as it was an expensive and rare material. Ivory inlay, however, was a regular feature of fine furniture and royal structures.<sup>128</sup> The richness and rarity associated with ivory fits the elite tone of this descriptive poem and reinforces the value of this landscape-body.<sup>129</sup> Moreover, this grand exhibition of wealth and

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127. Perhaps also activating the reference to the artisan in 7:2.

128. See Ps 45:8 (palaces); Amos 6:4 (bed); 1 Kgs 10:18 (Solomon's throne); Amos 3:15 and 1 Kgs 22:39 (houses). Archeological finds support the claim that ivory inlay was a common decoration. See Winter, "Phoenician and North Syrian Ivory Carving"; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 625; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 235.

129. Keel powerfully illustrates this image: "The off-white color of the precious and artistically fashioned material gave the tower a luxurious luster, producing an almost magical fascination..." (*The Song of Songs*, 235). This description of the woman's neck as an ivory tower may comment on the lovely color, smoothness, and symmetry of the woman's outstretched neck, further illustrating her remarkable beauty. Commentators have also suggested that the ivory inlay may, again, refer to some kind of necklace made of pieces of ivory (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 160; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 234-235).

stature on a fortifying tower further emphasizes the power of her defenses and the attraction of her resources.

In the first descriptive poem the woman's eyes have been compared to doves (Song 4:1)<sup>130</sup> and in the second they so overwhelm the speaker that he asks that she turn them from him (Song 6:5). Here they are pools. The comparison of eyes and bodies of water is a natural one (consider limpidity, depth, reflection, and tears), seen even in our own English poetry,<sup>131</sup> but made richer by a pun in Hebrew. The word for both eye and spring, or more generally, water source, עַיִן, is the same.<sup>132</sup> However, these are not any pools, these are the pools in Heshbon. Heshbon was an Amorite city on the eastern edge of the Transjordan, 80 km east of Jerusalem.<sup>133</sup> Isaiah comments on the fertility of Heshbon's fields and vineyards (Isa 16:8-9). Furthermore, archeologists have found ruins of a large reservoir dating from ninth to eighth century BCE in Heshbon.<sup>134</sup> Referring to pools from Heshbon likely brought further associations of value, fertility, and perhaps grandeur. Moreover, it brings a geographical specificity to the woman's developing landscape-body.

These pools of Heshbon are further qualified by placing them by the gate of Bath-Rabbim. While most commentators transliterate this phrase, interpreting it as a place name, there is no evidence of a place called Bath-Rabbim.<sup>135</sup> Both LXX and Vulgate translate the name

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130. See also Song 1:15; 5:2.

131. For a summary, see Exum, *Song of Songs*, 235.

132. See also Pope, *Song of Songs*, 625; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 235.

133. Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 160. See Num 21:26-34.

134. Geraty, "Heshbon," *ABD* 3: 182.

135. This epithet also echoes the common title for feminized cities: "daughter (בַּת) [Geographic Name]." (See discussion in chapter 4.) Despite the fact that rabbim (רַבִּים) does not seem to be referring to a geographic place, the echo of this common epithet is there nonetheless (See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 12). Moreover, Fox points out that rabbim (רַבִּים) can have both a quantitative and qualitative sense—meaning it could refer to both "many people" or "great people." If we were to understand בַּת־רַבִּים as "daughter of

literally: “the gate of the daughter of many.”<sup>136</sup> Accordingly, some commentators have interpreted this as referring to the many people passing in and out of the city gate.<sup>137</sup> Of course, this is the function of all city gates, they serve as the portal through which people, livestock, and goods pass. Moreover, city gates were often depicted as the center of city activity in both a legal and commercial sense.<sup>138</sup> Therefore, referring to a city gate as “the daughter of many” is an apt description, giving a sense of the hustle and bustle of city life and the interconnectedness of the city to its surrounding landscape. On the other hand, while a busy city gate in one sense reflects the health and economic success of a city, it is also the source of its vulnerability. It is the access point for unwanted visitors, foreign influence, disease, and so on.<sup>139</sup> This reality perhaps makes the presence of the towers on either side of this image that much more necessary.

The tower imagery returns in the final line of this verse; this time, however, it is the woman’s nose that is likened to a tower.<sup>140</sup> Lebanon<sup>141</sup> is associated with high mountain ranges and, thus, increases the height and inaccessibility of this tower.<sup>142</sup> This is further reinforced by the

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great people” this would be nearly synonymous to the title applied to the woman just three verses earlier: בַּת־נָדִיב or “daughter of a nobleman” (Song 7:2). Fox, therefore, suggests that בַּת־רַבִּים in 7:5 could also be read as a vocative (as a pun): “Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the city gate, O Daughter of Great Men” (*The Song of Songs*, 160). Dobbs-Allsopp also notes this connection with the Daughter Zion epithet, but only with בַּת־נָדִיב in Song 7:2 (“Daughter Zion,” 134).

136. LXX: ἐν πύλαις θυγατρὸς πολλῶν; Vulgate: *quae in porta filiae multitudinis*.

137. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 626. Keel interprets this similarly. Noting the account featuring Heshbon in Numbers (Num 21:16-18, 23, 25), he suggests that the many coming through this gate were those people from the steppes visiting the pools to refresh themselves (*The Song of Songs*, 236).

138. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 234.

139. See Vayntrub, “Tyre’s Glory and Demise.”

140. This simile has created quite a stir among commentators, causing many to unnecessarily consider differing notions of beauty in the ancient Near East. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 626, and Exum, *Song of Songs*, 235-236, for the range of interpretations of this image.

141. Fox points out that Lebanon, לְבָנוֹן, is associated with fragrance in the Song (Song 4:11; cf. Hos 14:7, 8), at least partly because it is a play on the word for frankincense (לְבָנָה) (*The Song of Songs*, 160). Thus, the woman’s nose compared to a fragrant tower resonates with the male lover’s cheeks being compared to “towers of perfumes (מְרִקְחִים)” (Song 5:13).

142. See 2 Kgs 19:23; Isa 2:13; 37:24; Jer 18:14; 22:6; Ps 72:16.

fact that Damascus is on a high plateau; a tower overlooking Damascus must be that much taller.<sup>143</sup> Just like the tower covered in weaponry of Song 4:4, this image reinforces the visibility of this citified woman's might and protection. The woman is inaccessible both in her separation (whether in terms of distance—the height of the tower or value—the expense of the ivory) and in her visible fortification. Despite her very tangible inaccessibility, she remains visible and alluring and despite her immense fortification, there is always a hint of her vulnerability.

Lastly, the man describes the woman's head and her flowing hair. In the first two descriptive poems, the same image of a flock of goats streaming down a mountainside is used for the woman's hair. Here there are two images at work. The first, applied more generally to her head on her body, perhaps her proud posture, is another mountain: Carmel. Here again the woman's landscape-body is populated by grand mountains.<sup>144</sup> This landmark is made all the grander by the fact that it overlooks the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>145</sup> Moreover, the word **בְּרִמָּל** refers to fertile land, such as an orchard or fruit garden,<sup>146</sup> further emphasizing the woman's fragrant and fertile landscape-body.<sup>147</sup> The second image returns us to the world of the craftsman from the beginning of the poem, but here it is the weaver and loom. Her head with her flowing tresses is compared to a loom, which when in use has streams of thread hanging down from it. Many have, therefore, interpreted this image to be a reference to the woman's loose, flowing hairstyle.<sup>148</sup> This

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143. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 236.

144. Isa 35:2 speaks of the **הַדָּר הַבְּרִמָּל** “majesty of Carmel.”

145. Jer 46:18 refers to **בְּרִמָּל בַּיָּם** “Carmel by the sea.” Cf. Amos 1:2.

146. BDB, 502: “garden-land.” See, e.g., Isa 10:18; 16:10; 29:17; 32:15-16; Jer 2:7; 4:26; 48:33; 2 Chron 26:10.

147. See discussion below.

148. See, e.g., Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 161; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 183; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 238; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 237. Fox (*The Song of Songs*, 161), Keel (*The Song of Songs*, 237-238), and Exum (*Song of Songs*, 237) all reference images of Egyptian women featuring a similar hairstyle. This is also implied in the final image of the verse (see nn. 123-124 above).

seems to be the same target image behind the comparison of the woman's hair to a flock of goats moving down a mountainside in Song 4:1 and 6:5. The reference to purple, perhaps purple cloth of the loom, brings connotations of wealth and royalty while providing more details about the woman's captivating tresses. Purple dye came from the murex shellfish and was rare because it required many snails to get a sufficient amount of dye.<sup>149</sup> As a result, purple textiles were used primarily for royal (Est 1:6; 8:15) and cultic (Exod 25:4-39:29; Jer 10:9) purposes.<sup>150</sup>

Despite the seemingly disparate images of this verse, from the stately Mount Carmel to the loom of purple cloth to a king caught in locks, the images actually all relate to each other, especially when viewed from the landscape perspective. Fox refers to Mount Carmel as a “Janus pun” in that it simultaneously looks both backwards to the previous geographical references (v. 5) and forwards to the color purple.<sup>151</sup> Carmel (כַּרְמֶל) sounds like *karmil* (כַּרְמִיל), which means “crimson” and is used in parallel with “purple” (אַרְגָּמָן) in 2 Chron 2:6, 13; 3:14.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, the fact that Mount Carmel overlooks the Mediterranean Sea means that it sits beside the source of this expensive purple dye.<sup>153</sup> The final image picks up on the royal connotation of the purple cloth by referring to a king bound by the woman's flowing locks. This king must be the lover, who again inserts himself into the woman's landscape, this time too caught up in the beauty of the woman's hair to interact further, perhaps contentedly bound up in her locks.<sup>154</sup>

The poem concludes in verse 7, much like the other two descriptive poems, with a summation of the woman's beauty and statement of the pleasure of love. Even though this is a

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149. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 629; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 238.

150. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 238.

151. Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 160.

152. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 630; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 160; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 236-237.

153. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 238.

154. This is similar to the man's statement in 6:5 when he is overcome by the woman's eyes.

fitting end to the poem, the next few verses seem to stand as a coda to what comes before while further illuminating the woman as landscape metaphor and returning to the erotic tone from the beginning of the poem:

<sup>8</sup>This, your height, resembles a palm tree (זאת קומתך דמתה לתמר) and your breasts its clusters (ושדיך לאשכולות).  
<sup>9</sup>I say, I will climb the palm tree (אמרתי אעלה בתמר) I will take hold of its branching clusters (אחזה בסנסניו) And may your breasts be (ויהיונא שדיך) like the clusters of the vine (כאשכולות הגפן) And the scent of your breath<sup>155</sup> like apples (וריח אפך כתפוחים),  
<sup>10</sup>And your mouth<sup>156</sup> like the best wine (וחכך כין הטוב) going down, for lovers,<sup>157</sup> smoothly<sup>158</sup> (הולך לדודי למישרים) gliding past (דובב)<sup>159</sup> my lips and teeth.<sup>160</sup>

Here the male lover likens the woman's body to a palm tree, specifically aligning her breasts with its clusters of fruit. As demonstrated in the first descriptive poem, the male lover inserts himself into this landscape to interact with it and enjoy its delights. This imagery suggests an erotic encounter between the man and the woman-landscape where he imagines mounting her body/tree and fondling her breasts/fruits and enjoying her sweet fruit smell. The last verse emphasizes the delicious and sustaining produce of a fertile landscape. As mentioned above,

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155. Literally, “your nose.” Thus a metonymic reference to the breath. While the nose is also referenced in Hebrew for expressing anger (probably snorting), here that reference to heavy breathing is about erotic passion (Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 246).

156. Literally, “your palate.”

157. Following Gordis (*The Song of Songs*, 97) in understanding לדודי as an apocopated plural for לדודים. See, too, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 214.

158. For למישרים as referring to wine going down “smoothly” see Prov 23:31 where we have במישרים describing how wine goes down (also with הלך). See, too, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 214.

159. See BDB, 179 and *HALOT*, 208.

160. Emending MT's “lips of sleepers” (שפתי ישנים) and reading with LXX, Aquila, Symmachus, Syriac (cf. Vulgate has “his lips and teeth”) and several modern translations (NRSV, NAB, NIV). See Pope, *The Song of Songs*, 641; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 214.

wine would be an important product of a thriving landscape and one often associated with love and erotic play in the Song.<sup>161</sup> Here the woman's mouth is compared to the best wine and the imagery follows the path of wine into the lover's mouth, where he enjoys its pleasurable descent. The comparison of the woman's mouth to wine does not seem to be about its shape or appearance (although the color of red wine could be appropriate), but rather the sensation of kissing her mouth, a natural next step in this erotic encounter.

This last descriptive poem, then, continues to interweave the themes of fertility and fortification in the construction of the woman's beautiful landscape-body. Here the images take a more intimate and erotic tone, emphasizing the many resources such a thriving landscape would provide thereby increasing its value and attraction. As its value increases, so does the need for protection. Two more towers and a city gate are constructed to defend its valuable resources. All these defenses, of course, speak of strength and power and yet betray a concern for weakness and vulnerability. The fact that it is the male lover who constructs these fortifications on the body of his beloved reveals, perhaps, a reality of early, lustful love: jealousy and insecurity. In arguing for this woman's perfection, beauty, and worthiness of his attention and affection, he also wishes to guard her from the attention of others. She is to be inaccessible to all but him. Only he should have access to her many products and pleasures.

*Erotic Encounters: Desiring and Consuming the Constructed Female Body (Song 4:10-5:1)*

The male-voiced descriptive poems are not the only passages in the Song of Songs where the male lover constructs his beloved's body out of the images and resources of a thriving landscape. In 4:10-5:1 the man likens the woman's body to a fragrant and delicious landscape, drawing on

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161. See Song 1:2, 4; 2:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:3, 10; 8:2.

the imagery of a garden and its sweet and aromatic products.<sup>162</sup> If the descriptive poems were visual maps emphasizing the magnificent vistas of color and movement, this passage asks the audience to focus on the sensual enjoyment of scent, taste, and even touch. Of course, the health and fertility of the landscape-body are central to the depiction here as well. These scents and tastes are pleasures produced by a flourishing gardenscape. And, as was glimpsed in the descriptive poems but fully developed here, this passage is focused on the man's enjoyment of this landscape-body. Not only does he walk in the woman's garden and smell her exotic scents, but he tastes her milk and honey and consumes her sweet fruit. In other words, this passage savors the landscape-body imagery and takes it to its most erotic heights.

This passage is not a descriptive poem like those found in Song 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:4-7; 7:2-7. It does not, for example, compare each of the woman's body parts in turn to aspects of a landscape, nor does it have an envelope structure that asserts the woman's beauty. It does, however, share elements of the descriptive poem's structure and imagery, making use of itemization, description, summary statements of the woman's beauty, and even an envelope structure that focuses on the pleasurable consumption of the woman's landscape-body.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, the metaphorical comparison between the woman's body and a productive landscape, as well as the motivating anxieties behind this imagery, are still at work, even if the connection between landscape and body is often only implicit, allowing the sensual imagery to take center stage. This passage revels in enjoying the aromas and flavors of this foodscape and lets the audience make the connection to the pleasures of enjoying the woman's body. Song 4:10-5:1,

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162. Black also describes this passage as an "extended metaphor" that functions similarly to the descriptive poems, although she frames the passage slightly differently referring to Song 4:9-16. *Artifice of Love*, 2, 22.

163. Compare Song 4:10-11 with 5:1. See discussion below.

then, certainly warrants comparison with the male-voiced descriptive poems that construct the woman's landscape-body and could even be read as a quasi-descriptive poem.

In Song 4:10-11, the male lover proclaims the beauty and allure of his beloved by using imagery of decadent taste and sweet scent.<sup>164</sup> He tells her:

<sup>10</sup>How beautiful is your love, my sister, bride (מה־יָפּוֹ דְדִידְךָ אַחֲתֵי כְלָהּ)!  
How much better is your love than wine (מה־טָבוֹ דְדִידְךָ מִיַּיִן),  
and the fragrance of your oils than any spice (וְרִיחַ שְׁמֵנֶיךָ מִכָּל־בְּשָׂמִים)!  
<sup>11</sup>Your lips drip liquid honey,<sup>165</sup> bride (נֹפֶת תִּטְפְּנָה שְׁפִתֹתֶיךָ כְלָהּ).  
Honey and milk are under your tongue (דְּבַשׁ וְחֶלֶב תַּחַת לְשׁוֹנֶיךָ).  
The fragrance of your garments (וְרִיחַ שְׁלֹמֹתֶיךָ)  
is like the fragrance of Lebanon (כְּרִיחַ לְבָנוֹן).

This passage draws on products of landscape that are associated with sweet taste and fragrance, a smooth sensation, and a sense of luxury and pleasure: wine, oil, spices, honey, and milk. The appeal and uniqueness of her fragrance is repeatedly emphasized, culminating in a comparison with the fragrance of Lebanon (לְבָנוֹן), a wordplay on fragrant frankincense, לְבָנָה.<sup>166</sup> Within the context of these sweet smells emanating from the woman's body, the lover focuses on her lips

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164. This passage, spoken by the male lover, draws on and develops many of the same images from Song 1:2-4, where it is the female lover who speaks. Exum notes "These verses develop the thought of 1:2-4 and complete it by establishing a correspondence between what his caresses represent for her and hers for him. They are antiphonal across the space of the poem, building on the harmony of the lovers' voices to reinforce the mutuality of their desire" (*Song of Songs*, 172).

165. The term נֹפֶת, a synonym of דְּבַשׁ, appears only five times in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 19:11; Prov 5:3; 24:13; 27:7; Song 4:11) and is paired with דְּבַשׁ in three of those occurrences (Ps 19:11; Prov 24:13; Song 4:11). Caquot suggests this may be a more specific term for bee honey (especially if we understand דְּבַשׁ to refer more generally to sweet substances, as he suggests), pointing to cross semitic evidence: Ugaritic *nbt* is "honey" and Akkadian *nub/p-tu* and Ethiopic *nêhêb* for "bee" ("דְּבַשׁ," *TDOT* 4:128). In its five attestations it is associated with sweetness (מתוק) (Ps 19:11; Prov 24:13; 27:7) and dripping (נטף) (Prov 5:3; Song 4:11). Most commentators understand this term to refer to the liquid honey that comes from a honeycomb. See, for example, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 172; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 486; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 156; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 165.

166. Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 160.

and tongue, anticipating (or recalling) their taste and texture.<sup>167</sup> The woman’s mouth is described metaphorically in terms of a dessert or decadent treat: sweet and creamy.<sup>168</sup> Even the sound of the words reinforce the image of dripping honey with the quick repetition of t-sounds: *nōpēt* *tittōpnāh siptōtayik*,<sup>169</sup> and the creamy smoothness of milk and honey with the repetition of soft labials, the shushing of the *šin*, and the gurgle of the guttural *het*: *dabāš wəḥālāb taḥaṭ lašōnēk*, saturating the listener’s experience of the poetry with onomatopoeia and allowing the reader or performer to activate some part of these sensations through the very act of reading.

This comparison of consumable products with the woman’s body parts creates a foodscape for her lover to enjoy. This foodscape metaphor paired with the explicitly erotic tone of the Song of Songs allows the reader to easily decipher the reproductive reality of the female body the poet is describing. Here the woman’s mouth may be read as a reference to her vulva.<sup>170</sup> Biblical literature does not have specific anatomical terms for the male and female genitalia.

Euphemistic substitutions with more public body parts are commonly used instead. For example,

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167. Commentators debate whether this image of lips dripping honey is describing kissing (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 172; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 165-166) or “friendly and sweet conversation” (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 486) or both (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 137; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 156, 160). The interpretation of sweet speech seems to come, in part, from Prov 5:3 (see also Prov 16:24) where this phrase (found in Song 4:11a) appears almost verbatim, but in a different context. In Prov 5, the parental speaker warns a son against the dangers of the seductive but deceptive speech of the Strange Woman: “For the lips of a strange woman drip honey” (כִּי נִפְתָּה הַטַּפְּנָה שִׁפְתֵּי זָרָה) (Prov 5:3). See discussion in chapter 3. My analysis demonstrates that the image in Song 4:11 indicates erotic play that surpasses kissing. It is not her speech that is under consideration here.

168. Exum agrees that “honey and milk provide the crowning touch to the sumptuous erotic meal” (*Song of Songs*, 173).

169. Fishbane, *Song of Songs*, 121. Fox also notes the “striking assonance” in this phrase (*The Song of Songs*, 137), as well as Exum (*Song of Songs*, 173) and Murphy (*The Song of Songs*, 156). Keel refers to this phrase as “nicely onomatopoeic” (*The Song of Songs*, 165). See also Song 5:5, a particularly erotic scene, where myrrh drips from the woman’s hand. See discussion below.

170. Case, “Cunning Linguists,” 7, 11-13. See too Eilberg-Schwartz, “The Nakedness of a Woman’s Voice.” Song 7:3 is perhaps another metonymic reference to the vulva by way of a different body part, her “navel” (see discussion above). Here, too, the male lover speaks of his beloved’s body as a source of delicious liquid, this time intoxicating wine, which he is eager to consume. See, too, discussion below of another erotic bivalent scene in Song 5:2-5.

the word for hand, יד, or foot, רגל, is used often for the male member.<sup>171</sup> This is not, however, a random assignment; these body parts are also appendages that correspond, at least in form, with the penis. The correspondence between mouth and vagina would have been as apparent in ancient times as it is today.<sup>172</sup> After all, our modern anatomical term for the folds of the vulva is “labia,” Latin for “lips.” Both mouth and vulva are erogenous zones in the female body and they share several similarities in shape and functions; most significantly, they both produce liquid, which is often triggered in moments of desire. The mouth will salivate in anticipation of enjoying delicious food, and the vagina will emit lubricant in anticipation of sexual intercourse. In both cases, this fluid is a sign of arousal, which may be stimulated by any of our senses—sight, smell, sound, even our own internal thought or recalled memory, and it is meant to enable and ease the act that it anticipates. Saliva eases the process of eating and ensures digestion. Vaginal lubricant enables and increases the pleasure of sexual intercourse. Thus, the image here in Song 4:11 is particularly erotic. The male lover describes the female body as ripe for the sexual act. Her “mouth” is salivating in anticipation. What is more, the male lover describes these physical signs as appealing, even appetizing. By describing her physical arousal in terms of fragrant and decadent treats, he mirrors her arousal—he too is salivating at the sight, smell, and taste of her milk and honey. The woman’s body is a foodscape that her lover is eager to enjoy.<sup>173</sup>

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171. See also Malul who discusses the use of foot (רגל), thigh (ירך), and knee (ברך) as euphemisms for the male organ (“Woman-Earth Homology,” 359). For the euphemism of a hand for a penis, see Isa 57:8, 10. This euphemism also appears in several Qumran texts (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 65:3; 1QS 7:13; 4QD<sup>a</sup> 10.2.11; 1QM 7:6-7; 11QTemple<sup>a</sup> 46:13-16) and Ugaritic texts. See Case, “Cunning Linguists,” 10-11.

172. See Malul, “Woman-Earth Homology,” 354.

173. For other biblical instances of erotic eating and drinking imagery outside of the Song of Songs, see Prov 5:15, 19; 30:20. Brenner also argues that the female lover is the “embodiment of food and food production,” while the male lover is the consumer of this food. Due to this imbalanced gender dynamic where man is subject and agent and woman is object acted upon, Brenner suggests that this possibly undermines the common feminist reading of Song of Songs that there is a dominant female voice

This erotic exploration of scent and taste continues, now drawing on garden imagery.

While the woman's lips, tongue, and garments were evoked in the previous verses, here the garden alone comes into full focus and the metaphorical connection to the woman's body is more subtly executed:<sup>174</sup>

<sup>12</sup>A locked garden is my sister bride<sup>175</sup> (גַּן נְעוּל אֶחָתִי כְלָה),  
a locked garden,<sup>176</sup> a sealed spring (גַּל נְעוּל מַעַן חָתוּם).

<sup>13</sup>Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates (שְׁלַחֲדָךְ פְּרָדִים רְמוֹנִים)  
with delicious fruit (עִם פְּרֵי מְגֵדִים)  
henna with nard (כְּפָרִים עִם-נַרְדִּים).

<sup>14</sup>Nard and saffron (נַרְדֵּךְ וְכַרְכֹּם)  
calamus and cinnamon (קַנְהָ וְקִנְמוֹן)  
with all trees of frankincense (עִם כָּל-עֵצֵי לְבוֹנָה)  
myrrh and aloes (מֵר וְאַהֲלוֹת)

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and perspective ("Food of Love," 108-111). Exum, on the other hand, sees mutuality in the desire and balance in the give and take between male and female lover, even if conforming to conventional gender roles: "The woman is a garden whose fruits are ripe for the plucking and a vineyard to be tended. She invites her lover to come to his garden, an image in which she assumes the role of recipient, waiting for his visit. He comes to his garden and takes what is offered... But he takes what he desires only by invitation... [L]ove is pictured as something she gives and he takes" (*Song of Songs*, 27). While there does seem to be a mutuality between the two lovers, they do not seem to be equal in terms of their freedom of movement, social expectations, and risks involved in pursuing their romance.

174. James: "[T]he garden itself, standing at the head of the line, emerges as the foremost subject, which is reinforced and elaborated by the rich description of plant life that follows... If the garden is a metaphor for the young woman, it is much more obliquely so than many interpreters imply. The subtle cues of the poem draw our attention back again and again to the garden, the garden, the garden" (*Landscapes*, 59).

175. Although James points out that supplying a copulative verb is not the only way to read this verbless phrase, within the larger context of the *Song of Songs* with its repeated tendency to discuss the woman's body in the terms of landscapes, the potential ambiguity is less prominent than she suggests (*Landscapes*, 58-59). James argues that one could read this as a vocative: "A locked garden, my sister bride" or the participle could be taken as a predicative adjective: "A garden is locked, my sister bride." Most commentators translate this line with a copulative verb (e.g., Exum, *Song of Songs*, 152; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 132; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 453).

176. Reading גַּל for MT גַּן along with a number of Hebrew mss, LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate. This sort of repetition is not unusual in the *Song* (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 154). In particular, Fox points out the ab//ac couplet structure that is common throughout the *Song* (see 1:15; 4:1, 8, 9, 10; 5:9; 6:1, 9; 7:1) (*The Song of Songs*, 137). Some (e.g., Gordis, *The Song of Songs*, 87-88; Lys, *Le plus beau chant*, 188; JPS) retain MT and render it "fountain" or "spring." Pope supports the reading of "pool," following Ugaritic *gl*, "cup" (*Song of Songs*, 488), first argued by E. M. Good, "Ezekiel's Ship," 94n44. Fox, however, asserts that the translation, "fountain," for גַּל is not well established (*The Song of Songs*, 137).

with all the chief spices (עם כל־ראשי בשמים).

<sup>15</sup>A garden spring,<sup>177</sup> a well of running water<sup>178</sup> (מעין גנים באר מים חיים)  
and flowing-streams<sup>179</sup> from Lebanon (ונולים מן־לבנון).

Verse 12 begins by establishing this metaphorical connection between the garden and the woman's body: "A locked garden is my sister bride."<sup>180</sup> Even without this statement, however, especially after a close analysis of the descriptive poems, the intimate association between this

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177. Literally, "a spring of gardens" (מעין גנים). Some argue that the final *mem* on גנים is enclitic (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 157; Paul, "A Lover's Garden of Verse," 106; cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 495), reading instead "a spring of my garden." Keel suggests the plural has "an intensifying effect" (*The Song of Songs*, 180). Here I follow Fox who takes גנים as the *nomen rectum* representing the species, i.e. the type of fountain found in gardens (*The Song of Songs*, 138; GKC 128m; see also Exum, *Song of Songs*, 155; NRSV; JPS).

178. Literally, "living water" (מים חיים). This phrase describes fresh running water (Gen 26:19; Lev 14:5-6, 50-52; 15:13; Num 19:17; cf. Jer 2:13; 17:13), in contrast to something like a cistern that collects only rain water. Most commentators see this imagery as indicating an inexhaustible water source. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 155, 180; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 496; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 180-181.

179. I understand the participle נולים as a substantive for flowing water (see Exod 15:8; Isa 44:3; Ps 78:16, 44; Prov 5:15; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 155). Alternatively, it could be read as modifying מים (Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 157). The fact that these streams are said to originate in Lebanon indicates the high quality of the water, i.e. particularly clear and cool (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 138; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 157; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 181; cf. Jer 18:14). Moreover, Lebanon echoes the image of "trees of frankincense" mentioned in the previous verse as Lebanon is associated with both trees (Song 3:9; 5:15) and fragrance, specifically frankincense (Song 4:11). See discussion above.

180. Most commentators understand the fact that the garden is "locked" and the fountain "sealed" as a reference to either the woman's virginity (e.g., Case, "Cunning Linguists," 3; Paul, "A Lover's Garden of Verse," 105; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 488; Würthwein, "Das Hohelied," 55; Gordis, 88) or the male lover's exclusive access to her (e.g., Exum, *Song of Songs*, 175-176; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 137; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 156, 161). Considering the association of liquid imagery with the female genitals, it is easy to see why an interpretation of virginity would be suggested; however, within the context of the Song of Songs there is not sufficient evidence of the woman's chastity. In fact, the constant references to erotic play would seem to make this interpretation less likely. Understanding the locked garden as an indication of exclusivity is more convincing, but in the sense of conveying the intimate connection between the two lovers and their desire for privacy (as Exum writes, "a locked garden is a secluded garden, an enclosed garden hedged or walled in to protect from intruders" [*Song of Songs*, 176]). It makes little sense to argue that the male lover has constant open access to the woman, as the Song repeatedly puts barriers between the two lovers (e.g. the city guards in 3:3; 5:7, nocturnal searches in 3:1-2; 5:6-8, the metaphorical construction of city walls and towers on the female body in 4:4; 7:4; 8:8-10). As Keel points out, the images of a locked garden and sealed fountain fit with a series of images of inaccessibility applied to the woman throughout the Song (e.g. Song 2:14; 4:4, 8; 6:4). "This image [of the locked garden and sealed fountain] is simply about the inaccessible loved one, whose charms are all the more wonderful, mysterious, and exotic the tighter the doors that lead to them are locked" (Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 174). Moreover, Keel notes that a locked garden is self-sufficient as it does not need another water source to sustain it. This is further emphasized in v. 15 where the woman is depicted as a source of fresh and abundant water.

fragrant and flowing garden imagery and the woman's body is readily apparent. While these verses conjure the sensations of the garden—its aromas, its flowing waters, and especially the sensual enjoyment of its many delicious fruits—it is clear that it is the pleasures of the woman's body that are really under consideration.

Scent dominates this passage. In verses 13-14, the part of the poem that most reads like a list, the various plant species of the garden are itemized. It is a catalogue of fragrant vegetation, much of which is noted elsewhere in the Song for its association with the lovers' bodies.<sup>181</sup> Thus, as elsewhere in the poem, the lover meditates on the woman's enticing scent, describing her as an orchard of excellent fruit full of sweet and spicy aromas. James notes the intermixture of both native and exotic species that flourish together in this garden.<sup>182</sup> The mix of the familiar and exotic only adds to her appeal and vitality.<sup>183</sup>

These fragrance-focused verses are framed by verses 12 and 15, both of which are interested in the garden's water sources. In verse 12, the woman is associated with a "sealed fountain." As a fountain, the woman is a source of nourishing liquid that sustains her garden.<sup>184</sup> In verse 15, the water imagery returns, emphasizing the water's freshness and constant flow.

Woman as water source is another common metaphorical image.<sup>185</sup> Not only does life (in the

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181. Pomegranates (רְמוֹנִים): Song 4:3; 6:7, 11; 7:13; 8:2; henna (כַּפְרִים): Song 1:14; nard (נִגְרִים): Song 1:12; 4:13, 14; frankincense (לְבוֹנָה): Song 4:6, 11; myrrh (מֵר): Song 1:13; 4:6; 5:1, 13; spices/balsam (בְּשָׂמִים): Song 4:10; 5:1; 6:2; 8:14.

182. James, *Landscapes*, 68.

183. Many have noted the frequency of erotic garden imagery among ancient Near Eastern love poetry, most often associated with female sexuality. See, e.g., Paul, "A Lover's Garden of Verse"; Westenholz, "Love Lyrics from the Ancient Near East," 2477-2479, 2482; Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, 73-75; Lambert, "Devotion: The Languages of Religion and Love," 25-39; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 174-175; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 169-174; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 283-288.

184. See Prov 5:16; cf. Lev 12:7; 20:18; cf. Whitekettle, "Levitical Thought and the Female Reproductive Cycle."

185. See, e.g., Prov 5:15-20, a short discussion of the benefits of an exclusive sexual relationship with a wife where water imagery is employed to a similar effect, depicting the abundance and satisfaction

form of children) flow from women, but female bodies also produce and flow with various fluids necessary for reproduction: menstrual blood, milk to feed their young, and lubricating vaginal fluids that enable conception. As the Song of Songs is concerned primarily with the sexual appeal of the female body,<sup>186</sup> the image of this flowing body primarily conveys the woman's healthy aroused state and anticipates the pleasures of sexual intercourse.<sup>187</sup>

After the male lover has described his beloved in terms of a fragrant and flowing garden, the woman responds,<sup>188</sup> inviting him to enter and enjoy: “Awake, O North (Wind) and come, O

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of the sexuality of the legitimate female sex partner. Especially relevant to our discussion of female bodies is vv. 18-19: “May your fountain be blessed (יְהִי־מְקוֹרְךָ בְּרוּךְ) and rejoice in the wife of your youth (וְשִׂמַח מֵאִשְׁתְּךָ וְעוֹרְךָ), a doe of love, a female mountain goat of grace (אֵילַת אֲהָבִים וַיְעַל־חֶזֶן). May her breasts saturate you at all times (בְּכָל־עֵת) (דְּדִיָּה יִרְגֵךְ בְּכָל־עֵת). May you be intoxicated by her love continually (בְּאַהֲבָתָהּ תִּשְׁגָּה תָּמִיד).” For a full discussion of this passage, see chapter 3.

186. See also discussion of myrrh in Song 5:5 below.

187. Exum also observes this connection between the woman as a source of water and a source of sexual pleasure: “The woman is metaphorically an inexhaustible source of water to make the garden an inexhaustible source of pleasure. In the lavish liquid imagery...there seems to be a veiled allusion to bodily secretions and the exchange of body fluids, in kissing, fondling, and sexual intercourse” (*Song of Songs*, 180). While Exum allows for a “range of associations,” she asserts that the male lover (who is conjuring this garden imagery) is “thinking only of erotic enjoyment, not reproductive capacity” (*Song of Songs*, 176). And while this is impossible to determine, I, however, question whether one can separate sexual attraction from reproductive capacity, the physical signifiers of which are bound up with sexual desirability (for example, in some cultures curvy hips and ample breasts are coded as “sexy”). Either way, the imagery here clearly depicts a fecund garden. See also, Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 137.

188. I take this whole verse to be spoken by the female lover (see, too, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 180-181; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 138), although some suggest that the first half of the verse is spoken by the man due to the fact that “my garden” (גַּנִּי) is mentioned in the first half (in contrast to “his garden” (גַּנּוֹ) mentioned in the second half) (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 498; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 157, 161; cf. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 181). There is, however, no reason to assume that the woman could not speak both of “my garden” and “his garden,” especially when the preceding verses have established the garden as a metaphor for the woman's body. In this moment of encouraging the man to “enter the garden,” the woman emphasizes his free access by now referring to her body as “his garden.” Cf. Song 1:6 and 8:12, where the woman and man, respectively, make reference to “my vineyard” (כַּרְמִי), a similar metaphor for the woman's body. Moreover, as Exum points out, if the man speaks the first half of the verse, why would he want the winds to waft about the fragrances of his garden? It would seem that he would want to keep the pleasures of his beloved to himself (as the fortification imagery seems to indicate) (*Song of Songs*, 181). Therefore, it is more likely this is spoken by the woman, enthusiastically participating in the man's description of her body and encouraging him to enter her garden-body. See discussion below for more examples of this dynamic between the male and female lovers.

South (Wind) (עֹרֵי צָפוֹן וּבוֹאֵי תִימָן)! Blow through my garden so that its spices may flow<sup>189</sup> (הִפְיָחִי יָבֵא דוֹדֵי לְגַנּוֹ וַיֵּאכֹל) (גְּנֵי יָלֹד בְּשָׂמִי (פְּרֵי מְגֵדִי” (Song 4:16). Here the woman as landscape speaks.<sup>190</sup> She calls on her winds to waft the alluring scents of her garden to attract her beloved. The appeal of her spicy perfumes and watery channels is already evident from the male lover’s previous speech, but here the woman explicitly encourages his attention. In her request that he enter the garden she transfers its ownership to him. In verse 16a, when speaking to the winds, she calls it “my garden,” but in verse 16b she calls it “his garden.”<sup>191</sup> The woman’s invitation that the man “come to his garden and eat its excellent fruit” is evocative.<sup>192</sup>

This imagery and the garden scene culminate in the following verse: “I come<sup>193</sup> to my garden, my sister, bride (בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֲחֹתִי כַלָּה). I pluck<sup>194</sup> my myrrh with my spices (אָרִיתִי מוֹרִי

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189. This root (נזל) appears in the previous verse in the participle נֹזְלִים, “the flowing-streams from Lebanon.” This term almost always describes flowing water (Exod 15:8; Num 24:7; Isa 44:3; 45:8; 48:21; Jer 9:17; 18:14; Ps 78:16, 44; 147:18; Job 36:28; Prov 5:15; Song 4:15; cf. Deut 32:2). Thus the use here to indicate wafting aromas is unique, but carries the same sense of a flowing movement and continues the water imagery.

190. See below for discussion of the woman’s speech throughout the Song.

191. Two LXX manuscripts (codex Alexandrinus and codices minusculis scripti) have “my garden” instead of “his garden,” possibly undermining this transferral of ownership. However, this is not sufficient evidence to suggest the switch to “his garden” is not original. It seems more likely that this discrepancy is due to scribal error.

192. This verb, בּוֹא, with אֵל often denotes sexual intercourse (e.g., Gen 16:2; 38:16). See also Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 181; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 498.

193. The four perfect verbs in this verse, come, pluck, eat, and drink, have been interpreted as past, present, and future by various translators depending on whether or not they understand this as a moment of consummation. I agree with Exum who asserts that “since in the Song the distinction between the anticipation and enjoyment of sexual union is constantly blurred, there is no point in arguing over whether the couple has enjoyed, is enjoying, or will enjoy a sexual banquet. Through both the blurring of temporal distinctions and the indirection of language, sexual union is simultaneously anticipated, deferred, and enjoyed” (*Song of Songs*, 182). A present tense translation brings tension to this moment while also maintaining ambiguity about the precise moment of the actions. See also Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, 157.

194. The verb אָרָה is attested only here and in Ps 80:13. While Pope (*Song of Songs*, 504-505) and Fox (*The Song of Songs*, 139) both note the possibility of this word carrying the sense of “to eat” (or

עִם־בְּשָׂמִי). I eat my honeycomb with my honey (אֶכְלֹתִי יַעֲרִי עִם־דְּבַשִּׁי). I drink my wine with my milk (שָׁתוּ רַעִים יַיִנִי עִם־חֶלְבִי). Eat, friends, drink and be drunk of love!<sup>195</sup> (אֶכְלוּ רַעִים שְׁתוּ וְשָׁכְרוּ) (Song 5:1). While the structure of the Song of Songs is cyclical, progressing in repeated arcs of longing, anticipation, and separation that seem to always evade climax, this moment in 5:1 may be the clearest moment of consummation in the book.<sup>196</sup> In 5:1 the male lover responds to the woman’s invitation with exuberant assent. He echoes the second half of the woman’s statement (“Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its excellent fruit”) by affirming his entry into and enjoyment of—by eating—the woman’s garden. He acknowledges the garden’s transference of ownership to him as he now refers to it as *my* garden and expands this ownership to all of the delights within: *my* myrrh, *my* spices, *my* honeycomb, *my* honey, *my* wine, *my* milk. It is significant that many of the fragrant and flowing substances (honey, milk, wine, myrrh) that have been used elsewhere to describe the aroused and alluring state of the female body appear here. Moreover, the man interacts with the woman’s body as a landscape that offers him nourishing resources. He enters the garden and picks myrrh and spices and then eats and drinks honey, milk, and wine—all products of a fertile landscape and all fragrant, flowing, and

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“taste” for Fox), drawing on its occurrence in Ps 80:13-14 as well as the possible connection with the Arabic cognate *'ary* for “honey,” Paul (“A Lover’s Garden of Verse,” 107) notes that this “erotic verbal metaphor” of plucking (see also Song 6:2 and the image of “picking [לִקַּט] lilies”) has a parallel in Akkadian love poetry. Moreover, as Exum (*Song of Songs*, 155) points out, “pluck” makes more sense in this verbal sequence.

195. LXX, Vulgate, Syriac, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Rashi, as well as some modern translations (RSV, NIV, NJB), render דוֹדִים as “lovers,” in parallel with “friends” (רַעִים). However, דוֹדִים is used repeatedly in the Song of Songs and elsewhere to refer to acts of love. See Song 1:2, 4; 4:10; 7:13; cf. Ezek 16:8; 23:17; Prov 7:18. Moreover, it is especially fitting that here the lovers are encouraged to become intoxicated by lovemaking (דוֹדִים) as love-acts (דוֹדִים) are twice compared to and said to surpass wine in Song 1:2 and 4:10. Cf. Prov 7:18. See also Pope, *Song of Songs*, 508; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 139; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 155.

196. The cycle begins again in 5:2, where the lovers are again separated.

decadent. This episode ends with a final imperative exclamation, most likely spoken by the Daughters of Jerusalem: “Eat, friends, drink and be drunk of love!” welcoming the audience to join in the feast of love.<sup>197</sup> Here lovemaking is intoxicating, which draws on the concept of saturation both in terms of the bodily fluids produced in the act but also in terms of being mentally and emotionally overwhelmed by and lost in bodily sensations. These bodily sensations are impressed upon the audience by evoking these sweet liquid treats, suggesting the great pleasure of enjoying them.

This quasi-descriptive poem, then, puts forward an even more specific argument than the other descriptive poems that assert the woman’s beauty and wholeness. Here he makes a case for the beauty and deliciousness of the woman’s love(making) (דוֹדִים). There is an envelope structure here too that emphasizes this point: Song 4:10 begins, “How beautiful is your love (דוֹדִי), my sister, bride!” and compares her love(making) with the experience of consuming wine, honey, and milk and smelling spicy fragrances. The passage ends in Song 5:1 with a declaration of delicious lovemaking and an invitation for others to revel in these same pleasures: “Eat, friends, drink and be drunk of love (דוֹדִים).” Many of the same delectable images appear again: spice, honey, milk. The intervening verses play with this imagery of taste, scent, and liquid, appealing more to the audience’s imagination to make the connection with the woman’s body parts, rather

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197. Due to the often unmarked shift in speakers in the Song it is sometimes difficult to determine with certainty who is speaking a particular passage. There has been much debate over who speaks the final exclamation of 5:1b (most agree that 5:1a is spoken by the male lover): “Eat, friends, drink and be drunk of love!” See Pope (*Song of Songs*, 508) and Exum (*Song of Songs*, 182-183) for summaries of the debate. I follow Exum here who argues that there are only three “distinguishable speaking voices” in the Song and thus this line must be assigned to one of them: the woman, the man, or the Daughters of Jerusalem. If the lovers are being addressed here, the Daughters of Jerusalem must be the ones to address them. Exum further remarks that the presence of these women is “ubiquitous, and they are often referred to when the poem seems to reach a climax in the uniting of the lovers (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Having them as witness to the lovers’ intimacy is the poet’s way of welcoming readers into this private pleasure garden” (*Song of Songs*, 182-183). See also Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 139.

than making those discrete connections explicit. This passage, then, is a celebration of the functionality of the woman's body, her well working sexual organs and the tangible appeal of engaging intimately with her body. Therefore, as with the other male-voiced descriptive poems, the imagery of a fertile and productive landscape is central here. Fortification imagery, however, recedes into the background, leaving only the hint of protective barriers with the mention of a "locked garden" and "sealed fountain" of 4:12. It is not surprising that in the man's enthusiastic engagement with this landscape-body feelings of jealousy and concerns of unauthorized accessibility would seem less critical. Even still, the emphasis on the fecund and productive (that is, well-functioning) female body reflects the desire to depict the woman's wholeness, value, and lack of vulnerabilities.

*Mapping the Landscape-Body: A Fictional Construction of Wholeness*

The form of the descriptive poems is meant to construct an overall image of wholeness and, therefore, beauty of the beloved. This wholeness is constructed despite the fact that the poem precedes by a sequential itemization and elaboration of discrete body parts. As discussed above, this is partially the trick of the form; systematic itemization creates a sense of completeness, especially when paired with summary statements of totality. Another way that this construction of wholeness is accomplished is through the metaphorical image of landscape, which can be conjured with reference to several select land images without describing the entirety in detail. James argues that these descriptive poems are a visual "mapping" of the woman's body, "one in which the ineffable totality of the young woman is evoked by the presentation and iteration of

select parts.”<sup>198</sup> I think the image of a map is a productive one.<sup>199</sup> A map, like a descriptive poem or list, constructs and projects a sense of wholeness, when in fact it is necessarily partial. It is a biased representation of reality that emphasizes some aspects and ignores others. If it did not, it would not be a useful tool. For different maps have different purposes. A hiker looking for the safest trail through a mountain pass needs a different map than a truck driver looking for the quickest route on the interstate. Considering these metaphors of landscape as mapping is particularly helpful for understanding the fragmentary construction of wholeness in these poems.

The woman’s wholeness, perfection, and beauty do not lie any more in her real body than they do in the actual land, beyond the frames of a landscape painting. It is, rather, in that landscape painting or a drawn map or these descriptive poems where the concepts of wholeness and beauty are constructed and maintained. For somatic wholeness is just as much a fiction as the exhaustive list or the totalizing description. In emphasizing, then, the woman’s beautiful wholeness—her lack of blemish, the intactness and fortification of her boundaries, and her well-working, fertile body, all of which are cultural priorities rather than biological necessities—these descriptive poems reflect some anxiety about the porous and vulnerable reality of real female bodies.

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198. James, *Landscapes*, 119.

199. James emphasizes the “reiterative process” involved in this mapping of the woman’s body (*Landscapes*, 119). The male lover comes back to this exercise three times, each time overlapping with the last but also expanding its views from new perspectives and elaborating details from his multi-sensory experiences. As a result, James agrees that the wholeness of woman, like land, can never truly be captured: “the young woman’s wholeness is elusive; it can’t be taken in at a single glance, ‘mastered’ by the eye of the viewer, or accounted for in every detail. The perceiver’s capacity to apprehend the complexity of the whole always falls short” (*Landscapes*, 145). It would seem, then, that James believes that wholeness exists, it just cannot ever be fully expressed by the viewer/describer. I disagree with James on this point and articulate differently the way the descriptive poems, in fact, construct wholeness and beauty.

It would seem, therefore, that the male voice makes a lyric argument for the perfection of his beloved and her worthiness of adoration by asserting the woman's value, despite her vulnerabilities. This value is expressed in the imagery of a fertile landscape and its nourishing products as well as by the fortification of any potential weaknesses. In fact the landscape's elements of protection not only demonstrate the strength of her boundaries but also further emphasize her value. Anything that is evaluated as having high worth to one person is likely to be seen as beneficial to someone else, perhaps worth risking other valued things to attain it. In other words, the reality of limited resources and the problems that it can cause are apparent in cases of love and land alike; the Song thinks about a female body in terms of landscape in order to demonstrate the benefits and risks of romantic love.

If the Song's message is ultimately about the realities of love, then it would seem that the tension between value and vulnerability illustrated by the female landscape-body is central to this message. Like a pregnable female body that can ensure a community's future generation or be penetrated by enemies and a plot of land that can sustain a family or be raided by outsiders, romantic love too brings many benefits but is always at risk. While these risks are mostly implied in the male-voiced poems, an examination of the woman's speech will demonstrate more explicit awareness of the potential external and internal barriers to love as well as bring new perspective and landscapes to the Song's contemplation of love.

### ***Woman as City and House: The Female Voice Speaks of Love***

The female figure of the Song of Songs, even while constructed in the words of the male lover with a concern only for her physical beauty and a preoccupation with her fertility and

fortification, is not simply a possessed, papier-mâché woman. In fact, we experience the Song of Songs more from the woman's perspective than the man's. Although they speak more or less an equivalent amount of text,<sup>200</sup> the male lover's speech tends to be solely focused on the woman—speaking to and/or about her, while the woman's speech is more diverse. She certainly talks about her beloved and even speaks her own descriptive poem about his body, although with different predominant imagery than the male-voiced descriptive poems. Her speech, however, provides access into the world that surrounds this romance. There are hints of limitations on the lovers, from family conflicts and contexts (e.g., Song 1:6; 3:4; 8:1-2) to other suitors (e.g., Song 8:8-10)<sup>201</sup> to city guards inhibiting nightly meetings (e.g., Song 3:4; 5:7). The woman even confides in “friends,” the daughters of Jerusalem, about this love affair (e.g. 2:5; 5:10-16; 6:2) and gives them advice about love (e.g. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). It is primarily through the woman's voice, then, that we experience the highs and lows of this couple's romance.<sup>202</sup>

How does the woman's perspective compare to the man's? Does she speak of herself as mapped landscape or view her beloved's body as such? While her attentions are primarily elsewhere (his body, her desire, the barriers that keep them apart, hopes for the future, and so forth), in general, the woman affirms much of the male lover's descriptions. In our examination of the descriptive poems above we have already encountered some examples of the woman's participation in the man's construction of her body, especially in moments when an erotic interaction is at stake. For example, at the end of the first descriptive poem, the man inserts

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200. This is challenging to precisely quantify as there are several verses that could be spoken by the woman or the man or another party (e.g. Daughters of Jerusalem), but looking at the verses where the speaker is identifiable they speak roughly an equivalent amount with the woman speaking a few more verses than the man. See, too, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 25.

201. See discussion below.

202. Cf. Chavel who argues that the entire Song is spoken only by the woman who is in an “erotic reverie” (“The Speaker,” 3).

himself into his constructed landscape in 4:6 when he says: “When the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will make my way to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of frankincense.” This could be read as a response to the woman’s request at the end of chapter two: “My lover is mine and I am his who pastures among the lilies. When (עַד) the day breathes and the shadows flee (שִׁיפּוֹחַ הַיּוֹם וְנָסוּ הַצִּלְלִים), romp about (סַב),<sup>203</sup> my lover, and be like a gazelle or a fawn (עֵפָר) upon the cleft mountains (הַרֵי בְתָר)” (Song 2:16-17). We see that the man has repeated the woman’s description of when he should “visit” these hills/mountains (at dawn, when the day awakens),<sup>204</sup> and the reference to “cleft mountains,” conjures the shape of a woman’s genitals.<sup>205</sup> She tells him to “pasture among the lilies,” which is associated with the fawns in the previous verse (Song 4:5) and may euphemistically refer to oral sex.<sup>206</sup> So we see here in 2:16-17 the woman participates in the application of landscape imagery to her body, embodying the pastoral scene by offering an invitation to her beloved to come and enjoy her mountains. Similarly, as discussed above, in the quasi-descriptive poem of Song 4:10-5:1, the description of all the

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203. While this verb (סַב) can mean “to turn oneself around” or “to turn away” (*HALOT*, 739), this does not make sense in this context. (See n. 69 above). Better is to render it as “to go around” (*HALOT*, 739), as in the frolicking movement of young animals. This, for example, is the same term to describe the monitoring circuits of the city guards in Song 3:2; 5:7. See also Ps 118:12 where it describes the movement of bees.

204. See n. 69 above.

205. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 410. Exum suggests reading a double entendre here (and at 4:6): “the woman presents herself as the mountain on which her lover should now cavort” (*Song of Songs*, 132), although she does not explicitly refer to the women’s genitals.

206. Case argues that this image refers to the act of oral sex, reinforcing the nature of the woman’s request in 2:16-17 and the area of her body under discussion (“Cunning Linguists,” 9). What is more, the woman’s request of 2:16-17 follows upon a speech by the man in Song 2:10-15. The woman is inside her house and her lover whispers through her window about the beauty of the surrounding landscape, attempting to entice her to join him for a tryst. The man emphasizes the springtime quality of the earth; winter weather has passed and everything is blossoming and ripening. While the man never makes an explicit connection between the woman’s body and this nubile landscape—this connection is there implicitly and is only strengthened by the woman’s statement in 2:16-17: her response to his invitation for a springtime tryst is her own request that her lover pasture among the lilies and frolic on the hills. In light of the landscape metaphor that is developed in the descriptive poems, reading this metaphor back onto the lovers’ exchange in Song 2 is suggestive.

aromas and delicacies of her garden-body culminate in the woman inviting the man to enter and enjoy, to consume her fruits and savor her scents. It would seem, then, that the possession implied by the male lover's mapping, construction, and even consuming of the female body is something in which the female voice participates, or at least invites.<sup>207</sup>

In this section I will examine the ways in which the woman's speech affirms, expands, and complicates the man's construction of the female body as landscape, especially around the themes of fortification and fertility. I will focus my analysis exclusively on those passages where the woman engages in a similar poetic construction of her body as the man performs. First, I will examine Song 8:8-10 where the woman affirms the city imagery that has been applied to her body, further emphasizing her protected boundaries. Second, I will explore the imagery of fertility in the woman's speech, which takes a different form than in the male-voiced descriptive poems. Here we find the woman also focuses on body-construction but this time it is intimate home-space instead of the lush garden or dynamic ecosystem. Examining the way the woman compares her body to a house in Song 5:2-5 will demonstrate the way the woman conceives of their intimacy. Lastly, I will take a close look at the female-voiced descriptive poem in 5:10-16 in order to establish how differently the male body is constructed in comparison to the female body. While value certainly constitutes the male body, neither the themes of fertility and fortification nor their associated vulnerabilities are found in this descriptive poem. Each of these analyses will contribute to my overall argument about how the Song of Songs uses the female body to contemplate the value and vulnerability of love.

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207. In fact, at several points in the Song the woman states their mutual desire for and, in a sense, ownership of each other's bodies: "My beloved is mine and I am his" (דִּוְדִי לִי וְאֲנִי לּוֹ) (Song 2:16; 6:3; cf. 7:11).

### *The Citified Female Body: Fortification*

As discussed above, in the male-voiced descriptive poems the female body is constructed out of a rich and varied landscape that includes mountains, pomegranates, and gazelles, as well as towers, gates, and bannered troops. This fortified city imagery (especially, Song 4:4; 6:4, 10; 7:5) is essential to the male lover's construction of the female body. Not only does it convey the woman's strong defenses to any onlookers but it also further emphasizes her beauty—both in terms of her wholeness or perfection with intact boundaries but also her magnetizing allure. The tall towers, the colorful banners, the gleaming display of shields and weapons all attract the eye. Furthermore, this city is full of attractive resources: refreshing pools and a busy commercial center. From the man's perspective, the city imagery speaks to the woman's great value: her many resources and captivating beauty. While the woman's fortifications and overall landscape construction emphasizing health and wholeness certainly reflect anxieties around the porous female body and, I am suggesting, the potential precarity of love, the man's descriptions are less explicitly concerned with competition from other potential suitors. The woman's defenses are more awe-inspiring than threatening in the eyes of the man. Moreover, the fortifications are sound, according to the man; while potential weak points exist, they are adequately defended. And yet, fortified city-imagery from the woman's perspective reflects a different reality: she is not only aware of her vulnerabilities but must take an active role in defending herself from unwanted attention.

In the woman's voice, the fortification imagery is explicitly affirmed. She declares: "I am a wall and my breasts are like towers!" (8:10). This declaration that so enthusiastically

participates in the citification of her body is not, however, in response to her beloved. Rather, it responds to another male party concerned with the woman's accessibility. It is this deployment of defensive imagery in Song 8:8-10 that demonstrates what is really at stake in this construction of the fortified female body: penetration from unwanted bodies.

In Song 8:8-9, we find the fortification of the woman's body, but not from the mouth of the woman's beloved:

<sup>8</sup>We have a little sister (אֶחָזוֹת לָנוּ קִטְנָה),  
and she has no breasts (וְשָׁדַיִם אֵין לָהּ).  
What shall we do for our sister (מִהַ־נַּעֲשֶׂה לְאַחֲתָנוּ)  
on the day she is spoken for<sup>208</sup> (בַּיּוֹם שֶׁיִּדְבַּר־בָּהּ)?  
<sup>9</sup>If she is a wall (אִם־חֹמֶה הִיא),  
we will build upon her (נִבְנֶה עָלֶיהָ)  
a battlement of silver (טִירַת כֶּסֶף).  
And if she is a door (וְאִם־דֶּלֶת הִיא),  
we will barricade her (נִצְוֹר עָלֶיהָ)  
with a plank of cedar (לִיֹּחַ אֶרְזוֹ).

There has been considerable debate over who speaks these two verses, although most commentators think they should be attributed to the woman's concerned brothers who wish to protect the woman's chastity until she is married.<sup>209</sup> According to this interpretation, the citified woman is treated as a city under siege, whose defenses must be shored up in preparation for the onslaught of suitors, who would be enemies of the city who wish to lay siege to it in the hopes of one day entering it and gaining access to all its valuable assets.<sup>210</sup> So they speak of installing

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208. See 1 Sam 25:39.

209. See, e.g., Pope, *Song of Songs*, 678-681. Some, however, propose that the woman is still speaking these verses, but quoting what her brothers said to her in the past. See, e.g., Gerleman, *Das Hohelied*; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*; Longman, *Song of Songs*; Munro, *Spikenard and Saffron*, 33-34, 77. For a summary of the different scholarly perspectives on this debate, as well as her own alternative proposal, see Exum, *Song of Songs*, 256-257.

210. While the degree to which commentators interpret this passage in terms of its city imagery varies, many read this passage as spoken by the brothers (vv. 8-9) who are concerned with protecting their

silver battlements on her walls and barricading her doors with planks of cedar.<sup>211</sup> Both silver and cedar are strong and durable materials, but they are also expensive and attractive.<sup>212</sup> The brothers, therefore, will both fortify and beautify this city in hopes of attracting the right suitor while also being prepared for the potential attack of the wrong/unwanted suitors (or, perhaps, the “right” suitor before the proper time). In the context of a marriage arrangement, it makes sense for her family to be concerned with protecting the young girl’s chastity, while still making sure she appears attractive and valuable to a potential betrothed until the marriage is finalized.<sup>213</sup>

James, however, has recently put forward a different reading that better accounts for this city imagery. She understands the speakers of verses 8-9 to be a group of suitors interested in the woman, rather than her brothers. She rightly points out that the word “sister” is used throughout as a term of endearment for the woman by her beloved (Song 4:9, 10, 12; 5:1, 2). Similarly, the

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sister’s chastity. See, for example, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 255-259; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 678-681. Keel varies slightly by suggesting that the brothers are bolstering their sister in order to discourage a marriage arranged by their parents before she is ready (*The Song of Songs*, 278-279).

211. There has been much debate among commentators over whether or not the wall and door should be read as synonymous or antonymous terms (See Pope, *Songs of Songs*, 679-680). While, in translation, a wall, symbolizing inaccessibility, and a door, symbolizing accessibility, could be seen as presenting opposite realities, this is less apparent in the Hebrew. The word used for door here is דלת, which almost always refers to the panel that closes an opening, in contrast to פתח, literally, “opening,” which is generally used for entryways—whether open or closed. Therefore, it seems best to understand wall and door as synonymous, both representing inaccessibility (Also Fox, *The Songs of Songs*, 172; Keel, *The Songs of Songs*, 279; Exum, *Songs of Songs*, 258). Keel points out that any city said to have walls, gates, doors, and bars is presented as strong and secure (*The Songs of Songs*, 279). See also Deut 3:5; Ezek 38:11; 2 Chr 8:5. Note other images of inaccessibility throughout the Song: e.g., in Song 5:2-6 the woman is associated with a locked door (see discussion below) and in Song 4:12 her lover calls her a locked garden and sealed spring. However, while these images do indicate protection, they also imply at the same time the reason for this protection: vulnerability. See James, *Landscapes*, 109.

212. Cedar appears in the Song of Songs two other times: once as part of the construction of the lover’s bower (1:17) and once associated with the strong and attractive form of the male lover (5:15). Cedar is also associated with Lebanon (Judg 9:15; 1 Kgs 5:13, 20; 7:2; 2 Kgs 14:9; 19:23; Isa 2:13; 14:8; 37:24; Jer 22:23; Ezek 17:3; 27:5; 31:3; Zech 11:1; Psa 29:5; 92:12; 104:15; Song 5:15; Ezra 3:7; 2 Chr 2:7; 25:18) and luxury (Jer 22:14-15).

213. See, for example, Exum, *Song of Songs*, 256-255; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 278; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 678. Fox, who also sees here the brothers’ involvement in their sisters’ marriage arrangements, suggests that this passage has more to do with teasing and ornamenting the bride rather than fortifying her (*The Song of Songs*, 172-172).

term “brother” is only used once and it is when the woman wishes her lover could be “like a brother” to her in her hopes for greater intimacy with him (8:1). Thus, we see these familial titles, especially “sister,” more consistently used as terms of endearment between the lovers.<sup>214</sup> The only reference to the woman’s actual brothers uses the phrase “sons of my mother” (1:6). By understanding the speakers here as the woman’s suitors who eagerly await her coming of age, this city imagery can be read in a different light. The suitors are still the potential enemies of this woman-city who wish to enter her when the time is right, but their role as city enemies is more pronounced. Thus, verse 9 represents siege tactics. Taking the word טִירָה to refer to an encampment or temporary dwelling, James translates: “If she is a wall, we will build beside her a camp of silver. If she is a door, we will blockade her with cedar planks.”<sup>215</sup> This reading of טִירָה follows the more common use of the word (Gen 25:16; Num 31:10; Ezk 25:4; Ps 69:26; 1 Chron 6:39), rather than the much more infrequent translation of a battlement or a row of stones to fortify a wall (Ezk 46:23). This, James argues, is more appropriate for the besieged city imagery as a key part of any siege was the blockade: the enemy would set up camp around the city and prevent any goods or people from coming or going. She refers to several Assyrian inscriptions that describe successful blockades of cities made “like a bird in a cage” and mention the use of camps or “fortified posts” as blockade methods.<sup>216</sup> Thus the second image in verse 9 also refers to this blockade strategy: closing up the city in order to wait for their surrender. James emphasizes that the primary strategy here was waiting, which fits the behavior of the suitors. They plan to

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214. James, *Landscapes*, 109.

215. James, *Landscapes*, 110.

216. James, *Landscapes*, 110. Sennacharib on the siege of Jerusalem and Tiglath-pileser III on siege of Damascus. Eph‘al, *The City Besieged*, 37, 52.

wait in their fancy encampments, in view of this city-woman, until she is ready for marriage.<sup>217</sup>

They wait for her to open her doors to them.<sup>218</sup> James argues that the imagery stops short of further siege violence by these enemy-suitors, suggesting that the fact that their encampments are made of silver and their blockade planks of cedar indicate the “luxurious quality of this encounter.”<sup>219</sup> While there is a playful quality to this description of a potential or imagined encounter with suitors, the siege imagery brings a sense of the dangers and vulnerabilities of this woman’s city-body.

The woman responds to the suitors’ plans in verse 10:

I am a wall (אֲנִי חוֹמָה)  
and my breasts are like towers (וְשָׁדַי כַּמְגִדְלוֹת).  
Then I have become in his eyes (אֲזֵה הָיִיתִי בְּעֵינָיו)  
like one who brings<sup>220</sup> peace (כְּמוֹצֵאת שְׁלוֹם).

The woman dismisses the claims and siege plans of the suitors in two ways. First, she emphasizes her great fortification, thereby also indicating that she has indeed reached womanhood and is eligible for marriage. She tells them that not only does she have breasts, but they are towers upon her city walls. The woman taunts the suitors: they can wait all they want

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217. Robert Gordis (*The Song of Songs*, 75) also understands the woman’s suitors as the speakers of vv. 8-9 and similarly draws on siege imagery, but, James argues, that “he too flatly reads hostility into the encounter by ascribing to the suitors all the tactics of siege warfare... The metaphor, while it has a violent undertone, does not fully exploit the possibly violent valences of the metaphor. The intention is not to breach the city, as Gordis implies. The intention is to wait” (*Landscapes*, 112).

218. This is further evidence for reading “wall” and “door” as synonymous (see n. 211 above). Both images convey that the woman remains closed off and inaccessible to these suitors. James points out the man’s repeated request that the woman “open to me” (Song 5:2, 5, 6) (*Landscapes*, 112).

219. James, *Landscapes*, 113.

220. The word מוֹצֵאת, can be interpreted two different ways. It is either a Qal feminine singular active participle of מָצָא, meaning, “one who finds,” or it could be a Hiphil feminine singular active participle of יָצָא, meaning, “one who brings.” Either verb would fit this reading. One who brings peace would refer to one who surrenders and one who finds peace would refer to one whose surrender is accepted by the enemy. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 684-686, for brief overview of the many interpretations suggested by commentators. Either way, the same idea of surrender is expressed. Cf. See Deut 20:10-11; Josh 9:15; 11:19; 2 Kgs 18:31-32 // Isa 36:16-17.

but they will not penetrate her city walls. The fact that she reinforces the image of herself as a wall emphasizes the suitors' ongoing lack of access to her, despite her declaration that she is ready for marriage. In the second half of her comment, her tone changes and she speaks of only one suitor, her beloved, referring to him in third person masculine singular. She explains to the suitors that none of their siege tactics matter as she has already surrendered to her chosen suitor.<sup>221</sup> And this is a suitor who knows her fortification well; after all, he has constructed it himself throughout the descriptive poems (4:4; 6:4, 10; 7:5). Here, in 8:10 the woman affirms this fortification and, it would seem, her alliance with her beloved, in her own voice.

Therefore, in Song 8:8-10 the imagery of a city under siege by a foreign enemy is used as a metaphor for courtship. Even with the positive portrayal of the woman-city confidently resisting her enemy-suitor's siege plans, there still lurks here a strong sense of anxiety surrounding the porous and pregnable female body. Despite the luxurious siege materials and the lack of violent action taken here, the comparison of siege warfare to courtship is striking in the suggestion of violence—whether through a deprivation of resources or eventual forced penetration.<sup>222</sup> Here we see that behind the woman's beauty and fortification is her vulnerability—the vulnerability of a female body.<sup>223</sup>

The association between female bodies and cities is not, of course, unique to the Song of Songs. As discussed in the first chapter, it is a common motif found throughout ancient Near

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221. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 279; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 259.

222. Pace James who reads this as a playful “battle of the sexes” (*Landscapes*, 112-113).

223. Cities, shaped by and for human bodies and functioning as an integrated unit, are easily compared, then, to bodies (James, *Landscapes*, 91-93). Both have boundaries, many of which are porous. Through these porous boundaries cities and bodies receive sustenance from the world around them, but they can also obtain disease, infection, and other unwanted intruders (See Vayntrub, “Tyre's Glory and Demise”). Siege warfare tactics are, after all, designed to exploit a city's vulnerabilities—the fact that it needs outside resources to survive means that it has weak points, it can never be fully protected without destroying the life within it.

Eastern materials as well as in much of biblical literature: the personified female city.<sup>224</sup> The Song of Songs draws on this well-known biblical trope, found predominantly in the prophetic texts, where a city, often one that has fallen under siege (or threat of siege), is personified as a woman, and it reuses and reverses it.<sup>225</sup> This poetic reversal is carefully crafted. Rather than a defeated city in the form of a woman lamenting her demise, the Song presents a young, nubile woman as a powerful, fortified city. The poet has taken this single trope, reworked and expanded it so that it permeates much of the poem, encompassing its central message about the paradoxes and realities of love rather than grief. Even with this much more positive portrayal of the woman-city, however, behind it lies the same realities of vulnerable female bodies and the collective anxiety around them.

*Woman as House: The Intimacies of the Body-Home*

In the Song of Songs it is only the female speaker who makes use of the house imagery for the female body. The man is preoccupied with the vast scale of landscape, its fortifications and health, its valuable and pleasurable resources. As discussed above, the woman affirms much of his imagery and seems to also share his concern for fortification and fertility, but in her mouth this imagery often takes on a different form, revealing other anxieties and possibilities for love. We will see here that the woman also shares the man's enthusiasm for fertility and productivity of the landscape-body. For the woman, however, this concern is best captured by the productive

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224. See discussion of this motif in chapters 1 and 4.

225. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion," 134. See also James, *Landscapes*, 104-107. Keel acknowledges that the woman is depicted as a city but does not argue that it is a reverse of the Daughter Zion trope. Rather, he connects this imagery to the fact that cities in the Hellenistic era were often personified as the city goddesses (*The Song of Songs*, 212-213).

and intimate imagery of the house.<sup>226</sup> In applying this house imagery to her body, the woman makes use of both the literal and metaphorical connections between women and houses, particularly in its associations with a fertile female body, sexual union, and familial relationships.<sup>227</sup> The architectural features of a house, especially the door, merge with the female body, in order to convey an intimate encounter in Song 5:2-5.

The house imagery appears in one of the most sexually evocative scenes in the Song of Songs:

<sup>2</sup>I was sleeping but my heart was awake (אָנִי יְשָׁנָה וְלִבִּי עָר).  
 Listen (קוֹל)!<sup>228</sup> My lover is knocking (דוֹפֵק)!<sup>229</sup>  
 “Open to me, my sister, my darling (פִּתְחִי־לִי אָחוּתִי רַעִיָתִי),  
 my dove, my perfect one (יוֹתֵתִי תַמָּתִי).  
 For my head is wet with dew (שָׁרָאֲשִׁי נִמְלֵא־טָל)  
 My locks with droplets of the night” (קִנְצוֹתַי רְסִיסֵי לַיְלָה).  
<sup>3</sup>I have stripped off my garment (פָּשַׁטְתִּי אֶת־בְּתֻנְתִּי),  
 how can I put it back on (אֵיכָכָה אֶלְבָּשֶׁנָּה)?

226. Of course, she also participates in the healthy landscape imagery as well, especially when she invites her beloved to come and enjoy her landscape-body (see discussion above).

227. While this passage in Song 5 is the only time in the Song of Songs that the woman’s body is described as a house, there are a few other passages that draw out the association between female bodies and houses. Most notably the two times the woman refers to “my mother’s house,” בַּיִת אִמִּי, in Song 3:4 and 8:2. This is particularly notable as these two occurrences represent half of all the occurrences of this phrase in the Hebrew Bible, in contrast to the more than 145 occurrences of the ubiquitous בַּיִת־אָב, “father’s house.” בַּיִת אִמִּי appears elsewhere only in Gen 24:28 and Ruth 1:8. For a new account of the significance of “the house of the mother” in the Hebrew Bible see Chapman, *The House of the Mother*.

228. קוֹל is literally “sound” or “voice.” For this use, see Joüon-Muraoka, sec.162e. See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 185; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 139; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 185; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 512; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*.

229. LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac all understand דוֹפֵק here as “knock.” The root דפק occurs only two other times in the Bible. One time it refers to driving a flock of sheep (Gen 33:13), but the other time refers to men pounding on a door demanding that the visitor staying the night be brought out so they may “know him” (Judges 19:22). Despite the violent nature of this passage, the same sequence of actions is described: men knocking on the door of a house in order that they may have access to someone inside for a sexual encounter. In the Judges 19 passage, however, it specifies that they knock upon a door (עַל־הַדְּלָת), while the Song passage does not supply the word for door. This keeps the Song passage open to a bivalent reading. See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 185; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 185; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 512; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*. Pace Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 143-144.

I have washed my feet (רַחֲצָתִי אֶת־רַגְלִי),  
 how can I soil them (אֵיכָכָה אֶטְנַפֵּם)?  
<sup>4</sup>My lover thrust his hand through<sup>230</sup> the hole (דוּדִי שָׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר) and my insides thrilled<sup>231</sup> because of him<sup>232</sup> (וַיִּמְעִי הָמוֹ עָלָיו).  
<sup>5</sup>I arose to open to my lover (קָמָתִי אֲנִי לִפְתּוֹחַ לְדוּדִי) and my hands dripped with myrrh (וַיִּדְדִי נִטְפוּ־מֹר) and my fingers with liquid myrrh (וַאֲצָבְעֹתַי מֹר עֵבֶר) upon the handles of the bolt (עַל כַּפּוֹת הַמְנַעוּל). (Song 5:2-5)

This scene voiced by the woman is immediately suggestive. She narrates this encounter erotically with intimate images of home. The woman is in bed at night and her lover comes to her door, knocks and asks her to “open to [him]” (Song 5:2). There is a sense of urgency conveyed both by the sound of urgent knocking made tangible by the repeated knocking sound of the *dalet* and the final *qoph* of the Hebrew phrase דוּדִי דוּפֵק, as well as by the lover’s excessive use of endearments: “my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect one.”<sup>233</sup> His request that she open to him carries an erotic bivalence, referring simultaneously to the door separating the couple as well

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230. The preposition מן can mean “in through,” as in from the perspective of someone who is inside: “in from outside.” See also Song 2:9. See Delitzsch, *Hoheslied*, 85-86; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 185; cf. Pope, *Song of Songs*, 518.

231. The phrase וַיִּמְעִי הָמוֹ עָלָיו is clearly indicating a strong emotional and physical response to the man. The verb from the root המה indicates tumultuousness and turbulence and when applied to the body it indicates internal emotional and physical upheaval. It occurs with מֵעָה, “insides,” “belly,” or even “bowels” (Song 5:2; Isa 16:11; Jer 31:20), as well as לֵב, “heart” (Jer 4:19; 48:36), and נַפֶּשׁ, traditionally, “soul,” or better, “throat,” “breath,” or even “life source” (Pss 42:6, 12; 43:5). In all these cases, an emotion so strong that it has a physical effect is expressed. Often it is distress (Jer 4:19; Pss 42:6, 12; 43:5) or mourning (Isa 16:11; Jer 48:36), usually in the face of destruction, but once it occurs in the case of a strong feeling of compassion (Jer 31:20). Here, the woman is expressing a strong emotional and physical response to her lover. A turbulent feeling inside that is likely a mix of emotions. I have followed Exum in her translation of “thrilled” because it aptly captures the emotional and physical aspects as well as giving it a positive tone, which certainly seems to be the case in this context. It is significant for the bivalent reading here that מֵעָה can also be used to refer to reproductive organs—both female (Gen 25:23; Num 5:22; Isa 49:1; Ps 71:6; Ruth 1:11) and male (Gen 15:4; 2 Sam 7:12; 16:11; Isa 48:19; 2 Chr 32:21).

232. Some mss and editions have עָלָי, “within me” instead of עָלָיו, “because of him.” While the first common singular suffix does occur with some other uses of המה (Pss 42:6, 12; 43:5), it does not indicate the cause of the woman’s turbulent insides—the man—expressed by MT’s עָלָיו. As a result, I retain MT.

233. Even the word, דוּפֵק, “knocking” carries this sense of urgency. See n. 229 above.

as her body.<sup>234</sup> The woman hesitates, offering what could be understood as a coy refusal. She says that she is not sure if she can open up as she has already undressed and bathed, seductively implying that she is clean and naked. This no-but-yes response is enticing and continues to drive the sexual narrative forward.<sup>235</sup>

The man responds by attempting to enter and the woman narrates the strong physiological effect this has on her: “My lover thrust his hand through the hole and my insides thrilled because of him (דוּדֵי שְׁלַח יָדוֹ מִן־הַחֹר וּמַעֵי הָמוֹ עָלָיו)” (Song 5:4). This verse clinches the double valence that has been building up to this point in the passage, referring simultaneously to both the male lover putting his hand through the hole in the door (possibly a part of the lock or through a latticed window referred to earlier in Song 2:9) and to the sex act.<sup>236</sup> The man’s hand, possibly a euphemism for his penis,<sup>237</sup> penetrates the woman’s “hole,” which is suggestive of her vagina. The woman reports her reaction—whether tangible excitement and anticipation in

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234. Exum also identifies this contradictory imagery and narrative: “While the woman’s narrative ostensibly moves in one direction (a missed encounter), the poetic composition moves in another (coition)—through its choice of vocabulary and imagery and, particularly, in its artistic design” (*The Song of Songs*, 192). See her whole discussion of how this passage works on two levels (190-192).

235. Commentators debate whether this is meant to be coy or earnest, but either way most agree that this hesitating reply, which delays their (potential) union, intensifies the scene and the lovers’ desire. See Exum (*Song of Songs*, 194) for summary of views. As Exum writes, “This is verbal foreplay, corresponding to sexual foreplay on the erotic level, and abetted by the suggestiveness of the request to ‘open,’ the readiness of the bed, the woman’s state of undress, and, especially, the double entendre in the next verse” (*Song of Songs*, 194).

236. Pope understands the phrase in 5:4, “My love thrust his hand through the hole” to be suggestive of “coital intromission,” noting the attested use of “hand” as representative of a phallus (*Song of Songs*, 519). He also explains that keyholes in Near Eastern villages would have been large enough for a man’s hand to fit through (518). Keel, however, disagrees stating that keyholes were not common and were not large enough for a hand. Rather, he suggests that above the door bolt there would have been a “barely fist-sized hole” that allowed occupants to see who was at the door before opening it (*The Song of Songs*, 190). In either case, the bivalent reading of the door/woman’s body works well.

237. See Isa 57:8, 10. This euphemism also appears in several Qumran texts (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 65:3; 1QS 7:13; 4QD<sup>a</sup> 10.2.11; 1QM 7:6-7; 11QTemple<sup>a</sup> 46:13-16) and Ugaritic texts. See Pope, *Song of Songs*, 517-518; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 192; Case, “Cunning Linguists,” 10-11; Malul, “Woman-Earth Homology,” 359.

response to his attempt to enter the house and/or her physical reaction to being penetrated—pleasure and possibly the suggestion of an orgasm.<sup>238</sup>

When she finally gets up to open the door, she says, “my hands dripped with myrrh and my fingers with liquid myrrh upon the handles of the bolt (וַיִּדִי נְטֹפוֹ-מֹר וְאֶצְבָּעֵתִי מֹר עָבַר עַל כַּפּוֹת) (הַמְנַעוּל)” (Song 5:5). Here the doubled imagery seems to give way to the erotic reading. Unless we imagine the woman hastily dousing herself with myrrh in anticipation of her lover entering the room,<sup>239</sup> which seems to be an unnecessary stretch of the poetry, it makes sense to view this image as an indication of the woman’s fecundity and arousal.<sup>240</sup> Elsewhere in the Song, other liquids are associated with the woman’s aroused and fecund body, such as honey and wine.<sup>241</sup> Myrrh, like honey and wine, is associated with sweet fragrance and decadence.<sup>242</sup> The image of myrrh dripping from the woman’s hand and fingers could be a metonymic reference to her vagina. The male member is sometimes referred to euphemistically by the word for hand (יָד)—as is likely the case in the preceding verse: “My lover thrust his *hand* (יָדוֹ) through the hole (מִן-הַחֹר)” (Song 5:4).<sup>243</sup> Alternatively, Ilana Pardes has suggested that this passage implies that in anticipation of her lover and his imminent presence, the woman was stimulating herself, resulting in her hand dripping with the “myrrh” produced by her genitals.<sup>244</sup> With either reading,

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238. Pope, it seems, also suggests reading an orgasm here, although he never says so explicitly: “Given the attested use of ‘hand’ as a surrogate for phallus, there can be no question that, whatever the context, the statement ‘my lover thrust his ‘hand’ into the hole’ would be suggestive of coital intromission, even without the succeeding line descriptive of *the emotional reaction of the female*” (*Song of Songs*, 519, emphasis mine.) See Exum for this interpretation of Pope (*Song of Songs*, 191) and her own suggestion that this could be interpreted as an orgasm (195).

239. See Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 194.

240. Case, “Cunning Linguists,” 10-11.

241. See, e.g., Song 4:10-5:1; 7:3, 10; 8:2. See also discussion above.

242. Myrrh is expensive. Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 194.

243. See n. 237 above.

244. Pardes calls it “close to masturbatory fantasy” (*Countertraditions*, 132).

the dripping myrrh is a strong indication of the woman's physiological arousal. The bolt of the door continues the bivalent imagery. On the one hand, it is the mechanism on the door that prevents the man from entering the room. The woman's hand is poised to open it. On the other hand, it would follow from the previous imagery that it is part of the woman's vagina.<sup>245</sup>

Both readings, the story of a clandestine almost-meeting of the lovers and the description of a sexual encounter, exist entwined with one another in these verses. The reader is not meant to choose one but to see both. This is accomplished in large part due to the easy application of house imagery to the woman's body. Although the word "door" is never mentioned, this passage makes liberal use of the image of a doorway both as the opening to a house and the opening to the woman's body. This is further enhanced by the dream-like quality of the passage. The opening words of the poem imply that the woman could be dreaming: "I am asleep, but my heart is awake." Moreover the bivalent imagery promotes reading a dream-like state, where it is unclear what is real and what is imagined.<sup>246</sup> Lastly, in verse 6, the woman does open to her beloved, but he has suddenly disappeared, frustrating her dream desires, and perhaps even taking on a shade of nightmare.<sup>247</sup> This dream state makes this imagery all the more flexible, allowing for this creative overlap of house and female body.

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245. Perhaps the bolt is another part of the woman's genitalia, such as her clitoris? Also Case, "Cunning Linguists," 41n11. Fox, on the other hand, cautions against reading this passage as "an elaborate gynecological conceit, in which each part of the door lock represents a specific part of the female genitals," arguing that such a reading detracts from the "tension of the narrative...[and] its erotic intensity" (*The Song of Songs*, 145). It seems to me, however, that this bivalent imagery encourages precisely this kind of thinking in its audience.

246. See also Exum on reading this passage as a dream. She suggests that in light of the double entendre at work in the passage, negotiating between dream and reality becomes less significant (*Song of Songs*, 190).

247. She expresses her deep disappointment and goes out into the city streets to search for him. Alternatively, see Exum who continues the bivalent reading in v. 6, suggesting that נִפְשִׁי יָצְאָה, which she translates, "I swooned," carries connotations of death and is associated with sexual ecstasy (French *la petite mort* for orgasm) as well as bewilderment (*Song of Songs*, 196).

Thus, while the male lover figures sexual encounters with the woman as interactions with her landscape-body, including transversing her hills and mountains (Song 4:6), mounting her trees (Song 7:9), and consuming her fragrant and decadent produce (Song 5:1), the woman imagines their encounters as much closer to home. Although relying on the poetic layering of body and house rather than the imagery of luxuriant meal or pastoral landscape, she too emphasizes that her body is fertile and responsive to the presence of the man. By employing house imagery for her body, it enables her to play with the ideas of fortification and inaccessibility already at work in the Song but focus on the intimate realities of flirting with boundaries.

*The Female-Voiced Descriptive Poem (Song 5:10-16)*

I have argued throughout this chapter that the depiction of the woman in the Song, most notably in the male-voiced descriptive poems, has revolved around imagery of fortification and fertility, themes that reflect an underlying anxiety about the value and vulnerability of female bodies. In order to demonstrate that this imagery is indicative of ideas about a female body and not just entwined with ideas about desire or love more generally or themes common to the Song's descriptive poems, I will analyze the female-voiced descriptive poem in Song 5:10-16. Here, the woman takes up the man's favorite form of praise and composes her own descriptive poem about her beloved's body. While some of the same landscape imagery that is applied to the female body appears here, the themes of fertility and fortification are not dominant in this poem. In fact, compared to the male-voiced descriptive poems, this description is less unified in its imagery,

but, if anything, gives the impression of a perfected statue-body: valuable and strong but not dynamic or responsive.

This descriptive poem is well integrated into the verses that surround it. In Song 5:2-7 the woman narrates her erotic dream-like (almost) encounter with her beloved, which ends with him disappearing (he is not at the door when she finally opens to him) (v. 6) followed by her frantic search for him through the city streets where she is met and beaten by the guards (v. 7). We discover in verse 8 that the woman has been recounting this experience to the Daughters of the Jerusalem, the chorus-like figures that appear throughout the Song with whom only the woman explicitly interacts. In Song 5:8 the woman addresses these women: “I implore you, O Daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my lover tell him that I am weak with love (חֹלֵת אֶהְבֶּה אָנִי)”<sup>248</sup> The woman has made a similar statement to this group in 2:5 where she also reports an (imagined?) erotic encounter with her beloved and instructs them to bring her refreshments “because I am weak with love” (כִּי־חֹלֵת אֶהְבֶּה אָנִי). Here in Song 5:8 this statement takes on a darker tone considering that she has just told them about how her beloved seemed to abandon her in the middle of a (imagined?) tryst and then was beaten by guards when she was found searching for him in the city streets. It would seem the woman has been physically hurt and weakened by her recent experience of love.

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248. Fox understands this verse differently than most commentators. Taking the *מה* here as negative (e.g. 1 Kings 12:16; Job 16:6), he suggests that the girl is embarrassed by her crazy behavior (frantically running through the streets at night) and asks the Daughters of Jerusalem to *not* tell her lover how she has acted. He supports this reading with a similar sentiment in an Egyptian love poem (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 146-147.) While I agree with Fox that the woman is aware of her transgressive behavior, there is no indication in the text that she is embarrassed by it and would want to keep it from her lover. See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 201.

The woman implores the Daughters of Jerusalem to deliver this message of pain to her beloved, if they find him.<sup>249</sup> The Daughters of Jerusalem respond: “What makes your lover different from any other lover, O most beautiful among women? What makes your lover different from any other lover that thus you implore us?” In other words, the women ask: “What makes this man so special?”<sup>250</sup> There even seems to be a question of whether this man is worth all this angst and trouble, especially when they address her as “most beautiful among women.” Is this man an appropriate match for the most beautiful woman? It would seem that no other form but the descriptive poem, which emphasizes perfection and beauty, would be right to answer this question. Thus, the woman responds with a full description of her beloved drawing on imagery that has been used to describe her body as well as new images that highlight the value and strength of this man.<sup>251</sup> Moreover, as a response to the Daughters of Jerusalem, the woman speaks about the man in third-person and not directly to him, unlike the male-voiced descriptive poems that directly address the woman they describe.

<sup>10</sup>My lover is radiant<sup>252</sup> and rosy (דוֹדִי צַח וְאָדוּם),  
distinguished<sup>253</sup> among ten thousand (דְּגוּל מִרְבָּבָה).

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249. This is not the only time the woman implores the Daughters of Jerusalem. Three times the woman instructs the Daughters of Jerusalem to not “arouse or awaken love until it desires” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). For a recent perspective on these “Do Not Awaken” refrains see Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 43-61.

250. See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 202.

251. Exum points out that this description conjures up the man, making the search for him no longer necessary. *Song of Songs*, 201-202.

252. צַח, “radiant,” is used elsewhere to refer to clarity in speech (Isa 32:4) and shimmering heat (Isa 18:4; Jer 4:11) (*HALOT*, 1018). Here it is paired with אָדוּם “rosy” to describe his healthy, radiant complexion. See too Ps 104:15; 1 Sam 16:12; 17:42 for other examples of rosy or shining complexions as healthy and beautiful. These terms are also paired in Lam 4:7 to describe healthy bodies. See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 203; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 147.

253. דְּגוּל is related to דָּגַל in Song 2:4 and נִדְגְלוֹת in Song 6:4, 10. See discussion above. Here it is a Qal passive participle meaning, “visible” or “seen.” In other words, the man stands out among other men. This visibility carries both a meaning of distinctiveness and preeminence. Exum, therefore, suggests a modern rephrasing might be to say this man is “one in a million” (*Song of Songs*, 203.) I have chosen to render this term as “distinguished” to express both his visibility and specialness.

<sup>11</sup>His head is the finest gold<sup>254</sup> (רֵאשׁוֹ בְּתָם פָּז),  
his locks<sup>255</sup> are palm fronds<sup>256</sup> (קוֹצוֹתָיו תְּלִתְלִים)  
black like a raven (שְׁחֹרֹת כְּעוֹרֵב).

<sup>12</sup>His eyes are like doves (עֵינָיו כְּיוֹנִים)  
by channels of water (עַל-אֲפִיקֵי מַיִם),  
bathing in milk (רִחְצוֹת בְּחֶלֶב),  
sitting by a brimming pool<sup>257</sup> (יֹשְׁבוֹת עַל-מְלֵאת).

<sup>13</sup>His cheeks are like beds<sup>258</sup> of spice (לְחָיו כְּעֲרוֹגַת הַבֶּשֶׂם),  
towers<sup>259</sup> of perfumes (מִגְדָּלוֹת מְרֻקָּחִים).

His lips are lilies (שִׁפְתוֹתָיו שׁוֹשַׁנִּים),  
dripping liquid myrrh (נֹטְפוֹת מֹר עֶבֶר).

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254. Two words for gold occur here in apposition or, possibly a bound phrase (the construct and absolute form of בְּתָם would be identical): פָּז בְּתָם. I follow Fox here who sees these terms as “joined in a bound structure for poetic hyperbole” (*The Song of Songs*, 147; see too Pope, *Song of Songs*, 502; JPS, NRSV). These terms appear in parallel in Isa 13:12.

255. קוֹצוֹת, “locks,” appears only here and Song 5:2, both times describing the man’s hair.

256. תְּלִתְלִים is a *hapax legomenon*. Here I follow LXX, Vulgate, and most commentators who render this term as related to a palm tree. See, e.g., Exum, *Song of Songs*, 204; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 147; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 199; especially Pope, *Song of Songs*, 536. Pope points out that this term follows the same pattern as three other *hapax legomena* that also seem to describe plant shoots or branches: סִנְסִנִּים (Song 7:9), זִלְזִלִּים (Isa 18:5), and סִלְסָלוֹת (Jer 6:9) (*Song of Songs*, 536.) Commentators debate whether this is a reference to the black color of the man’s hair—black like the palm spathe (Gerleman, *Das Hohelied*)—or to its quality—wavy (NRSV), luxuriant (Pope, *Song of Songs*, 536), or unruly (Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 199). Exum notes a Sumerian poem that praises a man’s hair by comparing it to a date palm: “...O my one fair of locks—like a date palm! O my one fair of shaggy neck—like the date fibers!” (*Song of Songs*, 204, citing Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once*, 91).

257. I am following LXX, Vulgate, as well as several modern commentators (e.g., Pope, *Song of Songs*, 502; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 141; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 205) in rendering מְלֵאת as referring to a full pool. Some (KJV; NRSV) have translated this term as “fitly set” as מְלֵא can be used to refer to the setting of precious stones (Exod 25:7; 28:17; 35:9, 27; 39:13; 1 Chr 29:2). This, however, would shift the referent back to the man’s eyes (fitly set in his face) and away from the doves (Exum, *Song of Songs*, 205). As Fox points out, everything that follows the comparison of the man’s eyes to doves in this verse is describing the birds and not his eyes. Moreover this description of active doves brings some animation to the man’s eyes as “the doves...take on a life of their own” (Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 148).

258. Reading MT’s singular form (עֲרוֹגַת) as a plural (עֲרוֹגוֹת) along with some Hebrew mss, LXX, Vulgate, and Syriac. The plural also better agrees with “cheeks” (dual form). See also Song 6:2. See too Exum, *Song of Songs*, 185; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 148; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 540.

259. Some choose to vocalize מִגְדָּלוֹת as a piel participle of גָּדַל as LXX has φύσσαι, “pouring forth” (See Exum, *Song of Songs*, 185; cf. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*; Gordis, *The Song of Songs*, 63; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 540; NRSV; NIV). However, keeping MT’s מִגְדָּלוֹת, “towers” is preferable considering the role towers have played in the rest of the Song. See Song 4:4; 7:5; 8:10. See too Bloch and Bloch, *The Song of Songs*, 186; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 148; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 196.

<sup>14</sup>His hands are golden cylinders<sup>260</sup> (יָדָיו גְּלִילֵי זָהָב)  
 filled with precious stones<sup>261</sup> (מְמִלָּאִים בַּתְּרָשִׁישׁ).  
 His torso<sup>262</sup> is a bar<sup>263</sup> of ivory<sup>264</sup> (מַעֲיו עֵשֶׂת שֵׁן)  
 adorned with lapis lazuli<sup>265</sup> (מְעֻלְפֶּת סַפִּירִים).  
<sup>15</sup>His legs are pillars of marble (שׁוֹקָיו עֲמוּדֵי יָשׁ)  
 set upon pedestals of gold (מִיִּסְדִּים עַל־אֲדָנִי־פָז).  
 His appearance is like Lebanon (מְרֵאֵהוּ כַּלְבָּנוֹן),  
 choice like the cedars (בְּחֹר כַּאֲרָזִים).  
<sup>16</sup>His mouth<sup>266</sup> is sweetness (חֶכְמוֹ מִמְתָּקִים)  
 and all of him is desirable (וְכֹלֹ מִחֲמָדִים).  
 This is my lover and this is my darling (זֶה דּוֹדִי וְזֶה רַעִי),  
 O Daughters of Jerusalem (בָּנוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם). (Song 5:10-16)

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260. The root of גְּלִיל is גָּלַל, “to roll.” Thus this term seems to refer to something round. *HALOT* suggests “cylinders.” Both LXX (τορευται) and Vulgate (*tornatiles*) use the same term they used to render סֶהַר from 7:3, the “rounded bowl” that described the woman’s navel (see discussion above), which refers to something “turned” by a craftsman. See too uses at 1 Kings 6:34, which seems to refer to a *revolving* or *pivoting* door and Est 1:6, which describes fabric hangings or curtains tied to silver *rings* or *rods*. See too discussion of term in Exum, *Song of Songs*, 185-186.

261. תְּרָשִׁישׁ refers to both a place, notable for its ships and wealth (e.g., 1 Kings 10:22; 22:49; Isa 2:16; 60:9; Ezek 27:25), as well as a precious stone (Exod 28:20, 39:13; Ezek 1:16, 10:9, 28:13; Dan 10:6). Most commentators agree that תְּרָשִׁישׁ refers to some sort of precious gemstone, but the identity of the stone is debated. As Pope (who translates the term as “gems”) comments, “The variety of renderings by both ancient and modern versions reveal the utter uncertainty as to the identity of the jewel” (*Song of Songs*, 543). For example, LXX just transliterates the term (cf. Exum, *Song of Songs*, 184); Fox translates “jasper” (*The Song of Songs*, 141); Keel renders “garnets” (*The Song of Songs*, 196).

262. מַעֲיו is the same word used for the woman’s insides in 5:4 and is usually used to refer to internal organs, including reproductive organs. See n. 231 above. This term can, however, also refer to the external abdominal region (Dan 2:32).

263. While this term appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, עֵשֶׂת occurs in a similar phrase in the Copper Scroll from Qumran (3QTr 1:5; 2:4): עֵשֶׂת זָהָב, “bar of gold.” Moreover, this word means “bar” in Mishnaic Hebrew. See Exum, *Song of Songs*, 208; Fox, *The Song of Songs*, 148-149.

264. שֵׁן is used for both tooth (4:2; 6:6) and for ivory (7:5) in the male-voiced descriptive poems. Here it is clearly ivory.

265. See Pope (*Song of Songs*, 544) and Exum (*Song of Songs*, 208) on סַפִּירִים as lapis lazuli and not sapphires.

266. The term here, חֶכְמוֹ, is literally “palate,” but is often used to refer to the mouth generally, or what the mouth does: taste, kiss, or even speech. See Song 2:3 and 7:10 where this term appears and carries this sense. I have chosen to translate the term here “mouth” as this is a descriptive poem that is focused on the lover’s body parts; however, the fact that it comes out of place—after the woman has already described the man from his head down to his legs and is preceded and followed by statements of the man’s overall appearance and desirability—suggests that this line could refer to the woman’s overall experience of him: his kisses or even his speech.

Although the terms for beauty (יפה) or perfection (תמים) found in the male-voiced descriptive poems do not appear here, this passage does take on the same form that asserts wholeness and completeness. The first and last verse state this man's distinctiveness and overall desirability and the intervening verses support these statements by describing the main body parts from his head to his legs in valuable terms.<sup>267</sup>

In the male-voiced descriptive poems, as discussed above, the themes of fertility and fortification are central to describing the woman's body as a landscape, complete with healthy pastures, a fortified city, and enticing products. While this passage draws on some of that landscape imagery, it does not give an overall impression of a cohesive productive landscape. For example, in v. 12 she declares that the man's eyes are like doves. The man applies this same comparison to the woman's eyes in 1:15 and 4:1 (in the first descriptive poem) and three times the man refers to the woman as "my dove" (Song 2:14; 5:2; 6:9). This is the only time that the woman employs this imagery to describe the man. She develops the image, detailing their watery setting and emphasizing their white color ("bathed in milk"), which recalls the man likening the woman's eyes to pools in 7:5 and her white teeth to freshly washed sheep in 4:2 and 6:6. However, in the male-voiced descriptive poems these images, while giving impressions of color and health, also convey the productivity of these animals (all of the sheep bore twins and none were bereft) and highlight their movement (goats streaming down a mountain) and symmetry (emphasis on twos). There are some elements of a healthy and functional landscape here, but they are limited to discrete and often recycled images.

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267. See also Exum, who comments that "his statuesque body of precious materials is less an engrossing visual image than a comment on his value to her" (*Song of Songs*, 202.) While I agree with Exum that the man's descriptive poems emphasize the visual, trying to capture the impact of the woman's beauty on him, I believe that both the woman's and the man's poems are about expressing the value of their beloved, even if they do so in different imagery.

Moreover, in v. 13 the man's cheeks are compared to garden beds of spices and said to be "towers of perfume." While towers are central to the fortification imagery on the woman's landscape body (Song 4:4; 7:5; 8:10), here they lose that connotation almost entirely and seem to refer only to the emanation of a strong spicy scent from the man's cheeks. The woman's towers are covered in weapons (4:4), made of ivory (7:5), and placed high above the landscape (7:5) giving an impression of defense. A tower of perfume, on the other hand, reads more like a fantasy with no fear of real vulnerabilities. Of course, the association of enticing odors with the lovers' bodies appears throughout the Song, although more often with the female than male body, and while central to the landscape-body, it is not exclusive to it.<sup>268</sup>

After these first few verses that describe the man's head (hair, eyes, cheeks, and lips) with some limited landscape imagery, the poem turns to a different realm of beauty and value. The woman describes the rest of the man's body (hands, torso, and legs) in terms of an expensive statue.<sup>269</sup> His hands are golden, jewel encrusted cylinders. His torso is an ivory bar covered in lapis lazuli. His legs are marble pillars on golden pedestals. The man is wrought out of the most expensive materials, that which may be used to make a crown or some other item fit only for royalty.<sup>270</sup> However, with the mention of cylinders, bars, and pillars this body does not come across in any way delicate. Rather the impression is that of power and value. This is reinforced

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268. For example, the term **מִצְבָּ**, used here in 5:13, occurs frequently in the Song for the spicy scent of the woman's body (both in descriptive poems and elsewhere): 4:10, 14, 16; 5:1; 6:2; 8:14. However, note too Song 1:3, 13, 14 where the woman comments on the man's fragrance.

269. Several commentators also make this comparison to a statue (e.g., Gerleman, *Das Hohelied*; Keel, *The Song of Songs*, 202; Murphy, *The Song of Songs*; Müller, *Vergleich und Metapher*, 37). Keel, in particular, who notes that the poem "give[s] the impression of unexpected, colorful, precious, but somewhat barbaric splendor" (198), draws a comparison to the statues of gods in the ancient Near East, especially Egypt (202-204).

270. For example, many of the precious items used to describe the man's body can be found in a description of a setting of a royal banquet held at the king's palace in Est 1:6.

with the comparison of his appearance to Lebanon and its choice cedars, emphasizing height and sturdiness (as well as sweet fragrance).<sup>271</sup> While the fortifications on the woman's landscape-body betray an anxiety about her porous and pregnable body, here there is only certainty about his strength and worth.

Due to the lack of developed landscape imagery here, there is no opportunity or invitation for the woman to enjoy the man's resources as the man does (or imagines doing) with the woman (e.g., Song 4:6; 7:8-10; 4:16-5:1). In fact, especially following closely on the description of the near sexual encounter of Song 5:2-5, there are surprisingly few erotic elements in this passage.<sup>272</sup> One possible exception to this is v. 13b: "His lips are lilies dripping liquid myrrh." Lilies are mentioned elsewhere in the Song, but always associated with the woman and her body (e.g., 2:1, 2). In the descriptive poem of Song 7:2-6, the man declares that the woman's stomach is "a heap of wheat encircled with lilies" (v. 3) and several times throughout the Song the woman describes the man as "grazing among the lilies (הָרֵעָה בְּשׂוֹשַׁנִּים)" (Song 2:16; 6:3; cf. 4:5; 6:2). Here, the only time in the Song when lilies are compared to the man's body, the woman says the man's lips are lilies dripping liquid myrrh. The image of dripping myrrh occurs just a few verses previous in Song 5:5 where, as I argue above, this seems to evoke the woman's aroused state. In Song 5:5 it is the woman's hands and fingers, perhaps a euphemism for her vulva, that are dripping myrrh. Here in Song 5:13 where the man is said to have lilies dripping myrrh for lips there seems to be

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271. Keel points out that the highest peak of Lebanon reaches over 10,000 feet above sea level and states that it was believed to be a dwelling place of the gods (*The Song of Songs*, 155, 206; cf. Ezek 31; Ps 104:16). See too Song 3:9; 4:8, 11, 15; 7:5.

272. Exum notes that all the imagery of hard materials (golden cylinders, ivory bars, marble pillars, and so on) could be sexually suggestive, not only in calling to mind an erect penis (not specifically mentioned in the poem, but could be euphemistically referred to with the hand or even torso) but also by emphasizing the man's well-formed muscular figure (*Song of Songs*, 207). While this is certainly true, the lack of erotic interaction the woman has with the figure she describes is still notable, especially compared to the man's repeated enjoyment of the woman's landscape-body that he constructs.

an erotic connection. M. Case, following a similar analysis of these verses, suggests that the image of the man grazing among the lilies refers to the act of oral sex.<sup>273</sup> Therefore, this image of his lips would be an erotic recognition of how the man uses his mouth. If this analysis is correct, it would be a unique moment in this descriptive poem that reveals a sign of connection and encounter with the female body. The same dynamic between male and female body that is established in the male-voiced descriptive poems is maintained here: the man “grazing” in her intimate spaces and not the other way around. In other words, the woman does not insert herself into this descriptive poem, but rather finds a way to mark the male body as an explorer of her own landscape-body.

The female-voiced descriptive poem, then, underscores the different presentations of the differently gendered bodies. As has been discussed throughout this section, much of the female speech reinforces the imagery used by the man, especially in the descriptions of the female body. Here we see that not only does the woman get her turn to describe the male body but that she even uses the same poetic form as the man. Even still, a close analysis of this female-voiced descriptive poem reveals that while an argument around the worth and value of the beloved is still central, the predominant imagery is from the world of expensive and sturdy materials that emphasizes power and prestige rather than productivity and vulnerability. The imagery of landscape and the themes of fertility and fortification, thus, are integrally related to the female body and not to the form of the descriptive poem nor to the lovers in general.

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273. Case, “Cunning Linguists,” 10-11.

### ***Conclusion: Gender in the Song of Songs***

This chapter has thoroughly analyzed the female body, from both the male and the female perspectives, in the Song of Songs. I have demonstrated the rich and varied ways that the female body is described, conjured, possessed, and enjoyed through the imagery of landscape. From bucolic vistas to lush gardens to fortified cities to intimate homes, the poet has played with imagined spaces, scents, boundaries, and sensations in order to convey a particular vision of romantic love. I have argued that this vision plays out almost entirely on the woman's body, through both the man's desirous construction of and interaction with her fortified and fertile body and the woman's own contribution to this construction, which adds reflections on social legitimacy and sexual intimacy. I have suggested that it is the value and vulnerability of love that are so well articulated by the porous and pregnable female body, amplified by the fortification and fertility imagery of landscape.

While this analysis has focused on the rhetorical work of this poetry—its imagery, its speakers, and its metaphorical logic, I would also like to suggest that this work can provide some insight into the potential impact that this influential text could have on any community that values it. In my introductory chapter I established how represented bodies are discursive forces that help to produce, as well as reinforce, cultural norms about bodies, sex, and gender.<sup>274</sup> As a represented body, then, the woman of the Song is an ideal example of how represented bodies can produce gender ideology. For example, the repeated emphasis on the woman's fertility, whether expressed in terms of a productive landscape or house imagery, define women in terms of their reproductive role. Moreover, the assumed vulnerability that requires fortification and

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<sup>274</sup> See my discussion of the female body, especially the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, in chapter 1.

defense produces the idea that women are weak and in need of protection. These ideas are not necessarily new (from the perspective of today or the ancient world), but it is significant to identify that the text produces them and how it does so, in order to be better equipped to recognize the ways that metaphorical construction of women's bodies in particular shape cultural expectations around gender and sexuality to this day.

## Chapter 3

### Women, Wisdom, and the Landscape of Life in Proverbs 1-9 and 31

In comparison to the figured landscape-body and voice of the erotic woman of the Song, Proverbs offers a proliferation of female figures in the landscape of life who act as pedagogical types in the instruction of wisdom rather than the contemplation of romantic love. And yet, many of the same associations with the female body around risks and rewards, vulnerability and value, appear here as well, although in the more extreme formulation of death and life. While in the previous chapter the woman was carefully constructed and her body was under constant consideration, here in Proverbs it is the ruinous or edifying persuasive influence of (un)wise female voices that receive the closest attention. From the “slick tongue” of the Strange Woman to the forceful truths of Woman Wisdom, the women of Proverbs are marked by what they say, where, and to whom they say it. Their bodies are also important in so far as these women take up space in coded locations and are the vehicles of their speech. This chapter will examine the female figures of Proverbs 1-9 and 31, analyzing how these texts utilize female body and voice in order to educate its audience on the power of wisdom.<sup>1</sup> Before beginning this analytical work,

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1. The book of Proverbs is an anthology, a collection of several works with different kinds of discourse on wisdom. Based on the headings found throughout the book, there seem to be nine works collected here: 1:1-9:18; 10:1-22:16; 22:17-24:22; 24:23-34; 25:1-29:27; 30:1-14; 30:15-33; 31:1-9; 31:10-31 (Clifford, *Proverbs*, 1-2; Chavel, “Knowledge of the Lord,” 55, 81n13). (Most disagreement between scholars on this point are more focused on how to categorize divisions as major or minor. For example, see Fox who suggests six major units by collapsing the final four sections in Prov 30-31 into one major unit with four subsections [*Proverbs 10-31*, xviii-xix].) Although Prov 1-9, 31:1-9, and 31:10-31 are marked off as separate works, these framing chapters have a distinctive style and content compared to the rest of the book. Proverbs 1-9 features a series of longer poetic units, often framed as a parent’s advice to a son (e.g. Prov 1:8; 4:1; 6:20; 31:1-2). Prov 30:1-9 is also framed as parental, here explicitly maternal, advice given to her son, a king. Moreover, what holds all three units together is the

I will offer a brief discussion of how other scholars have accounted for the prevalence of female figures in the framing sections of Proverbs as well as my understanding of Proverbs as a didactic text.

While many other scholars have puzzled over why there is a predominance of female figures in the framing sections of Proverbs, most have looked for answers outside of the book. Several scholars have put forward an argument about a particular dating for the book as an answer to this question. For example, if Proverbs is dated to the Persian period, roughly contemporaneous with the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, many have proposed that the concern with choosing the right wife and avoiding foreign women, indicated especially by the discourse around the Strange Woman, reflects the same presumed historical concerns recorded in these other texts: the danger of exogamous marriages to the community.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, others argue that the “feminization of wisdom” that occurs in Proverbs reflects the development of monotheism that occurred during and following the Babylonian exile. As the male-envisioned deity, Yahweh, became the only god of Israel, room had to be made to include feminine divine elements that

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consistent use of female figures to discuss, convey, and/or depict wisdom and (un)wise choices, unlike the rest of Proverbs (See too Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 182). As is the case with the Song of Songs, while it is unclear if these units were composed by the same hand or selected and paired due to their similarities, I (and my analysis) would suggest that there is intentionality in placing these units as the frame to the book of Proverbs. As a result, I interpret the female figures found in Prov 1-9 and 31 as a part of a larger strategy of the book of Proverbs in its final form in conveying wisdom to its reader.

Moreover, we do not know what the life of these units were before they were brought together in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1-9, in particular (because of its length and variety), could itself be a collection of once disparate texts. However, the consistency of female figures and the style of instruction (parent to son speeches) seem to suggest some form of unity (whether, for example, from the hand of a single author or an editorially involved compiler). As a result, my analysis will treat Prov 1-9 as a unit (even while made up of several lectures) that utilizes the same type-figures (e.g., the Strange Woman, Woman Wisdom, the parental speaker) and addressee (sons), and returns frequently to the same dominant concerns (e.g. adultery).

2. See, for example, Harold C. Washington, “The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9”; Herbert R. Marbury, “The Strange Woman in Persian Yehud”; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman.’” Cf. Tova Forti who argues against this position (“The *Isha Zara*”).

would otherwise be lost.<sup>3</sup> Still others argue that the often erotic female figures in Proverbs were intentionally utilized to attract the young male audience that the book supposedly targets. It is suggested that these young men would be much more interested in and committed to their studies of wisdom if the concept were figured as an accessible woman.<sup>4</sup> This last argument, while depending less on a particular historical moment, is often connected to a post-exilic understanding of developing Jewish culture that involves collective and exclusive male study of religious texts, which is problematic.<sup>5</sup>

Each of these readings is motivated more by particular assumptions about the history and societal development of Israel-Judea, than by the imagery and rhetoric of the text. Moreover,

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3. See, for example, Perdue, *Proverbs*, 50-51. Perdue suggests this phenomenon also explains the female personification of Israel and Jerusalem in other biblical texts. Cf. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 179-183.

4. See, for example, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 179-183.

5. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 179-183. This problematic assumption (that links the development of Judaism with the exile) can be traced to Wellhausen's understanding of Israelite history and religion in his seminal work *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*. His degenerative scheme (Israelite religion shifted from being free and lively to rigid and legalistic after the exile) is often reproduced in scholarship examining the roles and imagery of women in Israel and Judea's history. The argument first made by Carol Meyers (*Discovering Eve*), and since is frequently cited, is that in the early days of Israel, women enjoyed relative equality in their homes, but as Israel centralized (both under a monarchy and under a single religious center) and power shifted from households and clans to a central government and religious center, women were marginalized. During and after the exile, this marginalization was further solidified as a result of "colonial" power, and, eventually Hellenistic influence (see, especially, 189-196). Claudia Camp in her influential work on the feminine personification of wisdom in Proverbs (*Wisdom and the Feminine*), shifts this scheme slightly, arguing that in the "post-exilic" Persian period when there was no longer a monarchy, households and, therefore, women, again gained access to power. Drawing on Meyers's work, she asserts that the texts on which Meyers bases her theory of gender equality in early Israel (primarily Gen 2-3) were canonized in this period and therefore must have reflected a reality that also spoke to the present day (see, especially, 256-265). Meyers and Camp, however, both make these claims primarily based on their own interpretations of the biblical texts—in terms of depictions of women (good versus bad; powerful versus powerless) and the dating of said texts. They, therefore, rely on the problematic assumption that a literary text will always reflect dominant cultural trends (e.g., a patriarchal, sexist society will only produce texts with negative and/or powerless depictions of women and/or a text with positive depictions of women could only be produced by a culture marked by equality between the sexes.) Meyers and Camp have both contributed greatly to our understanding of biblical texts and biblical depictions of women; nevertheless, these assumptions which shape much of their work remain problematic and require critical engagement. See discussion in chapter 1 about the challenge of dating biblical texts.

most rely on a particular dating of the book of Proverbs (or at least its latest strata) when we do not have sufficient evidence for this. Often, then, these arguments are circular: supporting an interpretation of the text based on a proposed historical setting that is itself primarily supported by that very interpretation. While there is little doubt that socio-historical realities of women's roles and lives impacted the presentations of women in Proverbs, the fact that we have limited access to the precise realities of the historical moments and social milieux in which the book of Proverbs was developed, composed, and disseminated, leaves us with little reliable data on which to base an historical analysis.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, even having access to this historical data would not necessarily explain the depiction of female voices and bodies in this text.<sup>7</sup>

The book of Proverbs is a didactic text. It is a collection<sup>8</sup> of different forms of instruction varying from longer poems framed as life lessons given from parent to son to very short proverbial sayings, whether admonition, aphorism, or precept.<sup>9</sup> Whether the female figures are depicted as speakers of wisdom or used to exemplify wise or unwise choices, they are all pedagogical tools utilized for instruction. None of the figures of Proverbs, male or female, are imitations of real people in the form of fleshed out characters, rather we have *types* of people: a

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6. See discussion in chapter 1 about dating texts. See also Fox who notes the particular challenge of dating Proverbs: "The book by its own testimony is a collection of sayings from an indefinite number of sages (see 24:23) over a number of generations..." (*Proverbs 1-9*, 6).

7. See discussion in chapter 1.

8. While there is a vast amount of scholarship on the dating, writing, and redaction theories of the book of Proverbs, as is so often the case with biblical texts there is insufficient evidence to date the book of Proverbs or any of its parts with any certainty or even to reconstruct its process of redaction or a motivating social setting. With that being said, it is likely that this book came together over a long period of time and as a result it represents a long and venerable tradition of wisdom, perhaps representing several different social settings and periods. See discussion above in n. 1.

9. See too Jacqueline Vayntrub's recent work on the *mashal*, poetry, and Proverbs in *Beyond Orality*, especially 70-102, 183-216.

parent, a son, an adulteress, a wife, a mother, a king.<sup>10</sup> By using stereotyped figures Proverbs ensures maximum adaptability of its content.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these stereotyped figures become central vehicles for Proverbs' pedagogy.<sup>12</sup> Understanding these figures as stereotypes and pedagogical tools is key to appreciating how female figuration works in this text.

As mentioned above, some scholars have suggested that the predominance of women in the framing chapters of Proverbs is due to the stated addressee of the text, a son, assuming young men's interest in women and, therefore, their need to be instructed on how to discern the good ones from the bad ones.<sup>13</sup> While it is true that many of the lessons are framed as instruction from a parent to a son, the larger generic understanding of Proverbs as a repository of wisdom statements suggests a more complex reading of the book's intended audience.<sup>14</sup> Fox proposes that we distinguish between the audience of the prologue (Prov 1:1-7) and the addressee throughout Prov 1-9. While the addressee may be a son, the audience of the prologue is an "adult teacher,"

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10. As discussed in my introductory chapter, this means that female speech of Proverbs cannot serve as a reliable access point to the thoughts and concerns of historical women. Cf. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, especially 113-130.

11. The one historical figure that is associated with the book of Proverbs is Solomon (Prov 1:1; 10:1; 25:1). Solomon is said to be very wise and the composer of many proverbs (1 Kings 5:9-14) and it is said that his wisdom has been recorded (1 Kings 11:41). Most scholars agree that the association with Solomon is more likely traditional rather than historical, although some still assert the possibility of a Solomonic hand in the earliest layers of the book of Proverbs. For the strongest position on the historicity of Solomonic Proverbs, see Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, 31.

12. See also Fox (*Proverbs 1-9*) who refers to the Strange Woman as "a type-figure" (134) and as a figure who "represents the class of women who behave like her" (261). Cf. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 79-123.

13. See, for example, Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 179-183.

14. Pace Perdue who draws on the work of Victor Turner as well as the comparative evidence of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature, argues that the social setting for Proverbs is a moment of "liminality" for young men who are about to transition to a more adult role in society (often taking the place of their fathers). The lessons of Proverbs, then, according to Perdue, not only pass on necessary knowledge about the world, but it also generates an "ontological change" in the son ("Liminality as a Social Setting," 125). Many scholars have been interested in identifying the social setting of Proverbs. The most commonly suggested settings are the school, the household, or the royal court. In addition to Perdue, see Fox, "The Social Location"; Clark, "Wisdom School Sitz im Leben"; R. N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty*.

who reads this compilation of wisdom texts for his own edification and perhaps also to aid his own instruction of wisdom.<sup>15</sup> While I disagree with limiting the intended audience of the final book of Proverbs to teachers, whether parent or schoolmaster,<sup>16</sup> Fox's differentiation between addressee and implied audience is important.<sup>17</sup> As Fox argues, the wisdom lessons of Proverbs are not really about teaching important truths about the world, but rather about illustrating wisdom as a powerful skill for navigating the world successfully.<sup>18</sup> This means that the frame of parent to son education is just a frame that the text employs, while the compiled collection of wisdom is aimed more broadly at anyone who wishes to understand its power.<sup>19</sup> It is unnecessary, then, to limit the age of the audience to young men and assume that the imagery caters to young men's unbridled sexual desires.

Proverbs' use of female figures should not be dismissed as merely an attempt to keep young men engaged in their study of wisdom. The frame of parent to son instruction that dominates Prov 1-9 and 31 certainly plays a role in the use of female figures. Within the context of a family, issues of adultery and tempting women could potentially threaten family stability.<sup>20</sup> Considering, however, the wider context of the book, as a resource for anyone who wishes to learn and teach wisdom, then there is more value in these female figures than just the familial educational setting.

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15. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 73.

16. Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, p. 73, n. 74.

17. See discussion of implied audience in chapter 1.

18. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 347-348.

19. "Anyone," of course, should be qualified as anyone literate and male—no doubt an elite group.

20. See discussion below.

I suggest interpreting these stereotyped female figures as repositories of collective social anxieties.<sup>21</sup> Female bodies, especially wives and mothers, represent the source of the community's future, both in terms of actual children as well as their rearing and education. This is not to say that anxiety about the community's future is *the* driving concern behind the book of Proverbs; but it does suggest why these female figures are such an effective pedagogical tool: figuring life and death in the form of female bodies would touch on a core concern of the community. Women must be a source of life for communal survival and success.

In this chapter I will examine each of the female figures of Prov 1-9 and 31 for the female roles it depicts, the wisdom teachings that it embodies, and the words it speaks. In the first section, I explore the wife figures, including the Strange Woman, the sexually satisfying wife of Prov 5:15-20, and the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31. All of these figures contribute to the parent's instruction to the son to avoid married women and focus instead on the benefits that the right wife can provide. In the second section, I analyze the complex figure of Woman Wisdom as authoritative speaker, cherished companion, and *zonah* figure. Although Woman Wisdom is the personification of the abstract concept of wisdom and is associated with the divine, I argue that she is still treated as a human woman and used as pedagogical tool in the parental speech, just like the wife figures. I conclude the Woman Wisdom section with a close reading of Prov 9:1-6, 13-18 where Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly are juxtaposed as a final lesson of Prov 1-9.

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21. See also Camp who suggests that the Strange Woman's "strangeness" is due in part to the otherness of her gender: "The language of deviant sexual behavior *is* being used symbolically...[for] the forces deemed destructive of patriarchal control of family, property, and society. Because control of women's sexuality is a sine qua non of the patriarchal family, it is no accident that the forces of 'chaos' are embodied in a woman who takes control of her own sexuality" ("What's So Strange?" 27, emphasis original). Cf. Keefe (*Woman's Body and the Social Body in Hosea*, especially 140-221), who argues that the female body represents the social body and reads Hosea in light of this metaphor. Keefe also highlights female bodies as "the generative source of the life of the community" (*Woman's Body*, 175). See too discussion in chapter 1.

Lastly, I discuss the image of mother as wisdom-giver, considering the effect of wisdom-speaking in the frame of Proverbs as a predominantly female phenomenon. This final section culminates in an argument for reading the narrator of Prov 7:6-27 as a concerned mother, watching from her window.

As the previous chapter on the Song of Songs argues, the consistent figuration of the woman's body as landscape reflects an anxiety around the porous and vulnerable female body. While female figuration in the book of Proverbs works quite differently, there are many of the same animating anxieties at work. In the Song of Songs, the beloved woman is figured as landscape in order to express her beauty, wholeness, and fertility. In Proverbs, female figures populate the landscape of life, representing the need for wise discernment. One must be able to differentiate the women of death from the women of life in order to have success. The very concept of wisdom is figured as a woman who shares qualities of both the life-giving wife and the deathtrap adulteress. Thus behind all these female figures of Proverbs as well as the Song and Lamentations, as will be discussed in the next chapter, there are the same animating concerns about female bodies and their life-giving functions. This gives power to the imagery in these texts, demanding the attention of their readers.

### *Wisdom, Women, and the Topography of Life*

Before turning to the analysis of the female figures of Proverbs, it is necessary to first establish how this didactic text depicts its central topic, wisdom, and the role female bodies and voices play in this depiction. Proverbs does not conceive of wisdom as a memorization of lessons and precepts. Michael Fox remarks that the lessons of Proverbs are not particularly difficult or

esoteric; the precepts seem to offer obvious moral guidance: do not steal, kill, or commit adultery; be honest and trust God.<sup>22</sup> Fox, then, suggests that wisdom must be something more than just knowing, or even following, these rules. He argues that “the knowledge of wisdom, once achieved, resides in the learner as a potential and must be activated by God in order to become the power of wisdom, an inner light that guides its possessor through life.”<sup>23</sup> This idea of wisdom as an inner guide to life can be seen throughout Proverbs. In Prov 1-9, in particular, most of the parental rhetoric is about choice, presenting wisdom as the *ability* to make good choices.<sup>24</sup> This is very often figured through the spatial metaphor of the way or path (דֶּרֶךְ):<sup>25</sup> there are the ways of the wise and there are the ways of the foolish.<sup>26</sup> The parent urges the son to keep or walk the ways of the good and guard against the ways of the wicked. For example, in Prov 2:20 the parental voice encourages the son to keep to the right path: “So you should walk in the way of the good and the paths of the righteous you should keep (לְמַעַן תֵּלֶךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ טוֹבִים וְאַרְחוֹת צְדִיקִים) (תִּשְׁמַר) and in Prov 4:14 the parent warns against the wrong path: “The path of the wicked do not enter and do not stride onto the way of the evil (בְּאַרְחַת רְשָׁעִים אַל־תָּבֹא וְאַל־תֵּאָשֶׁר בְּדֶרֶךְ רָעִים).” The reason the parent must instruct the son about the right and wrong paths is because he must choose his paths in life and they will not always be clearly marked. The parent is concerned with

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22. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 347. Many of these principles are included in the ten commandments of Exod 20 and Deut 5.

23. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 347. See too Vayntrub, who argues for wisdom as acquired skill (“Beauty,” esp. 58-62).

24. See also Vayntrub, “Proverbs,” 346. Vayntrub introduces the concept of choice only in her discussion of the acrostic poem of Prov 31:10-31: “Thus the entire concluding acrostic may in fact be seen as an instruction in the importance of choice: choice of woman, choice in behavior, choice in wisdom, and even choice in language.” See too Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 60-61.

25. Prov 1:15, 31; 2:8, 12, 20; 3:6, 17, 23, 31; 4:11, 14, 19, 26; 5:8, 21; 6:6, 23; 7:8, 19, 25, 27; 8:2, 13, 22, 32; 9:6, 15. A few other synonymous terms also appear, often parallel to דֶּרֶךְ, e.g. אֲרָח: Prov 1:19; 2:8, 13, 15, 19, 20; 3:6; 4:14, 18; 5:6; 8:20; 9:15; מַעְגָּל: Prov 2:9, 15, 18; 4:11, 26; 5:6, 21; נִתְיָבָה: Prov 1:15; 3:17; 7:25; 8:2, 20.

26. See too Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 128-131; Habel, “The Symbolism of Wisdom,” 135-139.

teaching the son how to discern right from wrong so that he is always able to make successful choices.

I would like to propose that this spatial metaphor for life is, in fact, inherently connected with the depiction of female figures. As discussed in the previous chapter, the association of women and houses is common and often indicative of a woman's role and/or evaluation of her behavior. The stereotyped female figures of Proverbs are spatially marked and, for the most part, they are read as good or bad depending on their location. This is most readily apparent with the Strange Woman. She is described as a woman whose "feet do not stay in her house" (Prov 7:11) and can be found in the streets and squares, "near every corner she lies in wait" (Prov 7:12). And what is more, her house, a place that should be associated with life and sustenance, is explicitly linked with death (Prov 2:18; 7:27; cf. 5:5). In contrast, the wife of Prov 5:15-20 is compared to a domestic well and fountain whose waters sustain only her husband's household. Similarly the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31 is praised specifically for her thorough and successful care of her household ("her house" *ביתה* is mentioned four times throughout the poem in vv. 15, 21 [twice], and 27). Woman Wisdom is also associated with a thriving household: she has built a house with seven pillars (Prov 9:1) where she provides a life sustaining banquet (Prov 9:2-6). Adding to the complexity of this figure, however, the place she is most often found is in the streets and squares—the busiest and most populated areas of town (Prov 1:20-21; 8:1-3; 9:3). In the brief description of Woman Folly she is depicted as a poor imitation of Woman Wisdom. She too invites passersby to her house for a meal, but all she can offer them is death (Prov 9:13-18).

Thinking, then, about the topography of life depicted by Proverbs, it is striking to see how prominently these women figure in it. They are in the streets and squares and looking out

from their houses. Often their actions and figures look remarkably similar.<sup>27</sup> Representing either a deathtrap (the Strange Woman and Woman Folly) or a resource for life and success (good wives, Woman Wisdom), the discerning young man will only be able to navigate the landscape of life successfully if he can determine which women are good and which are bad, despite deceptive words and ambiguous locales.

Making things all the more difficult for the young male addressee is the fact that many of these women speak. The Strange Woman's power of verbal seduction is the parent's primary concern in Prov 1-9. The parent depicts her as deceptive and flattering. She draws on the erotic language of love poetry (Prov 7:15-18) and can anticipate and counter a young man's hesitation (Prov 7:19-20). What is more, she could be easily confused with Woman Wisdom. Both women are found in the same public parts of town, addressing the same naïve men. While Woman Wisdom's speech, which is also quoted at length twice in Prov 1-9, is different in message and tone than the Strange Woman's, both women invite naïve men back to their homes with promises of sustenance (explicitly sexual in the case of the Strange Woman). These localized female figures illustrate the power of wisdom. It is not enough to know to do good and not bad. One must be able to discern the good from bad especially when something appears to be deceptively good or bad or just particularly tempting.

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27. See too Aletti ("Seduction et Parole") who first identified the similarities between the opposing figures of the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom.

### *The Wife Figures: Seductive Female Speech vs. Productive Female Body*

Proverbs 1-9 features a series of longer poetic units, repeatedly framed as a parent's advice to a son<sup>28</sup> (e.g. Prov 1:8; 4:1; 6:20; 31:1-2). These are instructive speeches that teach the son about the power and importance of wisdom, often by considering various scenarios where wise discernment is vital. While the parental speaker considers several potential scenarios that require wise discernment and action, such as joining a gang (1:10-19) and mistreating a neighbor (3:27-35; 6:1-5), adultery (2:16-19; 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27) is by far the most discussed case. This potential danger is fleshed out, literally, in the stereotyped figure of an adulteress, the "Strange Woman." We experience this woman solely through the eyes of the parent. Although the parent describes her in detail, even quoting her speech, it is all in hopes of persuading the son of the dangers of the Strange Woman and convincing him to avoid her at all costs.

The parent also includes a brief discussion of the Strange Woman's counterpoint: a sexually satisfying and productive wife (Prov 5:15-20). Like the Strange Woman, this figure is also a stereotype. In fact, she is spoken of primarily metaphorically through water and animal imagery (vv. 15-20) and only partially conjured by mention of one female body part: her breasts (v. 19). Even still, this female figure serves as an important part of the parent's argument against the Strange Woman: with a sexually satisfying wife at home the adulteress is unnecessary and not worth the trouble.

While the acrostic poem about the powerful woman (31:10-31) is not explicitly framed as parental speech, it features another female figure being utilized for the pedagogical purpose of demonstrating the power and effectiveness of wisdom. Depicted as an industrious and valuable

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28. The address "my son" or "sons" appears repeatedly throughout Prov 1-9: 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:1, 10, 20; 5:1, 7, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1, 24; 8:32.

wife, this woman also serves as an important counterpoint to the Strange Woman. Like the wife of Prov 5:15-20, she is evaluated by her behavior, specifically that which serves the interests of her husband. While she is a flurry of activity, the only body parts depicted are those that enable this activity: her hands (vv. 13, 19, 20, 31), mouth (v. 26), and strong body (v. 17).<sup>29</sup> Thus, the book of Proverbs concludes with this poem highlighting the wise activity of a woman.

The parent's obsession with persuading the son to avoid adultery and focus his attentions on the many benefits of his own wife is understandable from the very practical perspective of a family and community. Adultery and jealousy could threaten peace, stability, productivity, and inheritance. Moreover, no doubt these temptations did lurk around every corner, or, at least, wherever men and women intermixed. Thus the use of seductive and beneficial female figures would likely be effective for a male audience. Female bodies, however, as sources of life and continuity for a family and community, would likely resonate on a metaphorical level as well. By hyperbolically declaring the Strange Woman as a source of death, a perversion of the female body, and emphasizing the positive wife figures as aligned with life, the parent's rhetoric made an effective point about what is at stake in giving into a pleasurable temptation.

### *The Strange Woman*

The Strange Woman is depicted solely from the perspective of the parental speaker, who emphasizes her bad behavior, her disregard for social boundaries, and especially her deceptively persuasive speech. The parental voice constructs the transgressive body and seductive speech of this Strange Woman as the primary threat to the implied audience of naïve, young men. This threat is presented in catastrophic terms: interacting with this woman is not just a bad decision,

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29. See also Vayntrub, "Beauty," 54-55.

but leads to death. In what follows, I will analyze this woman's "strangeness," persuasive speech, transgressive location, and her repeated association with death in order to demonstrate that this figure is most productively read as a pedagogical tool within the parent's discourse. With the Strange Woman figure, the parent is able to vividly depict what is at stake in acquiring wisdom: life or death.

Despite the hyperbolic tone that often accompanies her descriptions and the title "Strange Woman," this type-figure is the off-limits married woman.<sup>30</sup> As mentioned above, some suggest relying on a Persian period dating and, therefore, read Proverbs in light of the supposedly contemporaneous texts Ezra and Nehemiah and argue that the reference to a "strange" (זָרָה) and "foreign" (נְכַרִּיָּה) woman should be understood as an actual foreigner.<sup>31</sup> Intermarriage between Judeans and "foreign women" is a concern in both Ezra and Nehemiah and is strongly condemned.<sup>32</sup> This, however, is a tenuous interpretation of the Strange Woman not only because there is insufficient historical evidence to support a contemporaneous dating of Proverbs with Ezra and Nehemiah,<sup>33</sup> but, more importantly, because the text of Proverbs itself does not support this reading. It is made explicit in several passages that the Strange Woman is "strange" because

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30. See also Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 19; Humbert, "La 'Femme Étrangère'"; Humbert, "Les Adjectifs 'zâr' et 'nokri'"; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 139-141 et passim; Forti, "The *Isha Zara*." For a summary of scholarly interpretations of the Strange Woman see Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 134-141, 252-262.

31. Harold C. Washington, "The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9 and Post-Exilic Judaeae Society"; Herbert R. Marbury, "The Strange Woman in Persian Yehud"; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman' in Proverbs 1-9." Cf. Tova Forti who argues against this position ("The *Isha Zara* in Proverbs 1-9"). Others date Proverbs to the Persian period for reasons other than exogamous marriage. See, e.g., Perdue, *Proverbs*; Christl Maier, *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1-9*; Camp, "What's So Strange?"

32. Ezra 9:2-5; Neh 6:18-19; 13:23-31.

33. Even if we did have the evidence to date all three of these texts to the same period, not every author shares the same concerns or sets out with the same purpose when composing a piece of literature.

she is married.<sup>34</sup> In the Prov 7:6-27 pericope, the Strange Woman herself mentions her husband being out of town (Prov 7:19). Additionally, the parental lecture of Prov 6:20-35 is concerned explicitly with the topic of adultery (Prov 6:32) and makes use of this figure, although not explicitly with the Strange Woman title (אִשָּׁה זָרָה). It is clear that this problematic female figure is another man's wife. The phrase, "woman of a neighbor" (אִשָּׁת רֵעֵ), appears twice (v. 24, 29), once in parallel with an "alien woman" (נְכַרְיָה),<sup>35</sup> the term usually paired with the Strange Woman title (אִשָּׁה זָרָה) throughout Proverbs 1-9.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it is evident that this figure is a member of the community, as the parental voice speaks with knowledge of her usual behavior (e.g., Prov 7:10-12). There is no indication in Prov 1-9 that this woman is foreign to their community. As a stock figure, I see no reason to differentiate between the different portrayals of this illicit woman throughout Prov 1-9. She is, after all, described with the same terminology (as a strange or illicit woman, the wife of a neighbor) and the same associations (danger and death) throughout.<sup>37</sup>

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34. Pace Marbury, "The Strange Woman in Persian Yehud." See also use of זָרָה and נְכַרְיָה to refer to men of different households in Prov 5:10 and the potential "other men" your wife could commit adultery with in 5:17, discussed below.

35. While נְכַרְיָה usually refers to a foreign woman (e.g., 1 Kgs 11:1; Ezra 10:2; Neh 13:26; Ruth 2:10), in Proverbs (as with זָרָה) it is used to mark other men's wives as off-limits to the young male addressee and it often appears in parallel with זָרָה (Prov 2:16; 5:20; 7:5; see too 6:24; 23:27). As a result, I have chosen to translate it as "an alien woman" which, like "strange woman," captures both the sense of illicitness as well as the parent's hyperbolic tone.

36. Proverbs 6:24 requires a slight emendation. MT reads מֵאִשָּׁת רֵעֵ "from the woman of evil," which is not impossible, but does not fit the message of this verse, which is specifically concerned with adultery. A few verses later אִשָּׁת רֵעֵהוּ "a wife of his neighbor" appears, suggesting that repointing v. 24 to also read רֵעֵ "neighbor" would make more sense in this context. Others have suggested a bolder emendation of v. 24 to זָרָה מֵאִשָּׁה זָרָה, as this is the usual pair to נְכַרְיָה, but this seems unnecessary given the simple solution of repointing. See too Clifford, *Proverbs*, 78; cf. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 230.

37. I disagree with those who see an adulteress in some texts and foreign/unmarried woman or prostitute in others (see for example Marbury, "The Strange Woman in Persian Yehud"; Washington, "The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9"). The only distinction to be made among the negative female figures in

Furthermore, even though the terms זָר and especially נֹכְרִי are used elsewhere to identify foreigners or those outside of the Israelite community, both terms carry a wider semantic range.<sup>38</sup> The term זָר can be used to denote anything different or other, something that does not belong in a particular context or situation. For example, the term is used to refer to illegitimate cultic offerings (Ex 30:9; Lev 10:1; Num 3:4; 26:61).<sup>39</sup> The term נֹכְרִי, while more specifically marked for foreignness, can also be used in a similar way to emphasize alienness or strangeness,<sup>40</sup> especially when paired with זָר (Isa 28:21; Ps 69:9; Job 19:15; Prov 27:2).<sup>41</sup>

The association of these terms with the Strange Woman figure in Prov 1-9, therefore, does not mark her as a foreigner. It does, however, bring the connotation of alienness and illicitness to the imagery, reinforcing the hyperbolic tone of these parental lectures. This is a significant aspect of the parent's rhetoric. By emphasizing the foreignness of all married women

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Prov 1-9 is the Strange Woman figure and the Woman Folly figure of Prov 9:13-18 (See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 262).

38. For a thorough review of the term זָר throughout the Hebrew Bible, see Snijders, "The Meaning of זָר in the Old Testament." Snijders, however, comes to a different conclusion about the Strange Woman. While he agrees that she is not a foreigner (*pace* Boström), he also does not think she is merely someone else's wife (*pace* Humbert). He reads her strangeness as marking her more strongly as an outsider of the community but due specifically to her deviant behavior: "An *'išša zara* is a woman who leaves the community and the rules in force there (ii 17). She is 'strange' in respect to the right marriage viz. with the woman whom one is given in youth (v 18). She acts independantly [*sic.*] towards the young man and makes him her victim (vii 22 ff.). She is called *nokriyya* and a *zōna* (xxiii 27) or an *'ēšet ra'* (vi 24), a bad woman, because she is a heterogeneous woman with whom one does not associate, an unknown woman" (96). As my analysis demonstrates, while there is no doubt that the parental voice brings a hyperbolic tone to the description of this "Strange Woman," the parent's concern is married women. By understanding the woman's "strangeness" as inherent rather than relative (i.e. the result of the parent's hyperbolic language), we risk misreading the pedagogical purpose of this figure in the parent's instruction and the real threat of this very familiar figure.

39. HALOT: "strange, different heterogeneous, illicit" (279).

40. Hoftijzer, "Ex xxi 8," 390.

41. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 139; Snijders, "The Meaning of זָר in the Old Testament," 60-78; Humbert, "Les Adjectifs 'zâr' et 'nokrî,'" 263-266.

it instructs the son (hyperbolically) on how he should be thinking about his female neighbors—as alien beings belonging to a different world than his own.

As a married woman, the Strange Woman has a home and a husband to which she is restricted. She is depicted, however, as disrespectful of these boundaries. She can be found out in the streets, seducing other men. The fact that she has a legitimate place in society and still chooses to engage in illicit activities makes her transgression all the more serious and paints her as very “strange,” indeed.

According to the parent, what makes this woman so dangerous is not necessarily her disregard of social boundaries, but rather it is her seductive speech. The parent emphasizes her “slick tongue,” *הַלִּקְתָּ לְשׁוֹן*, her most identifiable feature, throughout Prov 1-9 (Prov 2:16; 5:3; 6:24; 7:5, 21), consistently depicting her as one who will flatter and lie in order to get what she wants. Her words are described as so smooth and sweet that they easily persuade and entice. It is this persuasive power that the parent is most concerned with exposing and undermining. For example, in Prov 5:3 the parent tells the son: “For the lips of a Strange Woman drip honey (*כִּי נִפְתָּ תִטְפְּנָה שִׁפְתֵי זָרָה*), and her mouth is slicker than oil.” This phrase echoes a similar sentiment expressed in Song of Songs by the man to his beloved: “Your lips drip liquid honey (*נִפְתָּ תִטְפְּנָה* שִׁפְתֹתַי), bride. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon” (Song 4:11).<sup>42</sup> Thus, the parent here draws on erotic imagery from the Song to illuminate the deceptively enticing nature of the Strange Woman.<sup>43</sup> The parent, however, quickly exposes the illusion with the following verse: “But in the end, she is bitter like

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42. See discussion of this phrase in chapter 2. Fox (*Proverbs 1-9*, 192) and Murphy (*Proverbs*, 31) both note this connection to the Song in Prov 5:3 as well. See n. 72 below for a discussion of Proverbs’ literary borrowing from the Song of Songs.

43. This occurs elsewhere as well. See discussion below of Prov 7.

wormwood, and sharp like a two-edged sword<sup>44</sup>” (Prov 5:4).<sup>45</sup> Despite the Strange Woman’s deceptively sweet words, she will lead only to trouble.

The Strange Woman’s speech is her main tool of seduction.<sup>46</sup> Only once does the parent make reference to the Strange Woman’s physical beauty: “Do not desire her beauty (הַיְפִיּוֹת) in your heart. Do not let her captivate you with the batting of her eyelashes<sup>47</sup>” (Prov 6:25).<sup>48</sup> Even here, it seems the woman is using her eyelashes just as she would use her slippery words: to attract and flatter men. By remarking so little on the Strange Woman’s appearance, the text leaves the figure open to accommodate women of all sorts of physical descriptions and, more powerfully, the imagination of young men.

There is, however, another reason why speech is presented as the primary danger of the Strange Woman: she competes with the voice of the parent and the voice of Woman Wisdom who also rely on persuasive speech as their primary tool of instruction.<sup>49</sup> It seems that this is why the parental voice gives so much attention to the words of the Strange Woman, even quoting her seductive speech directly.<sup>50</sup> The parent wants the son to be able to see through her deceptive language and to avoid this temptation.

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44. Literally, “a sword of mouths.”

45. Cf. Ps 55:21.

46. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 119; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 134.

47. Literally, “with her eyelashes.”

48. In Prov 7:10 the narrator reports that the Strange Woman is dressed in “the garment of a prostitute” (שֵׁיט זֹנֶה); however, it is unclear what this means since the text makes it clear that she is not a prostitute, but a married woman. This is a fact she does not hide (see Prov 7:19). It is possible this indicates that she wore a veil (see Gen 38:14), which marked her as available or, possibly, was worn to hide her identity. However it is to be understood, it is the only other remark on the appearance of the Strange Woman.

49. See too Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom,” 146-149 and Fox: “Speech is both the danger and the antidote” (*Proverbs 1-9*, 191).

50. See discussion below of Prov 7:14-20. Similarly, the parent quotes the speech of potential gang members in Prov 1:11-14.

The parent believes that the best antidote to the Strange Woman's seductive words is the wisdom of Proverbs, that is, the parental instruction to the son. This is stated explicitly three times (Prov 2:1-19; 6:23-24; 7:1-5). For example,

<sup>23</sup>For commandment is a lamp (כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה) and instruction is a light (וְתוֹרָה אֹר),  
and the disciplining reproofs are the way of life (וְדַרְדָּר חַיִּים תּוֹכַחֹת מוֹסֵר)

<sup>24</sup>to keep you from another man's wife<sup>51</sup> (לְשִׁמְרָךְ מֵאִשֶּׁת רֵעַ)  
from the slick tongue of the foreign woman (מִחִלְקַת לְשׁוֹן נְכָרִיָּה). (Prov  
6:23-24)

Three terms for wisdom are presented here as authoritative instruction: commandment (מִצְוָה), instruction (תּוֹרָה), and disciplining reproofs (תּוֹכַחֹת מוֹסֵר). The first two are associated with light and the last with the way of life, activating the spatial metaphor of the topography of life. The lamp and light are tools that would enable the son to see and avoid pitfalls and dangers on his path. And the way of life, associated with wisdom (Prov 3:16-18; cf. 3:21-22; 4:11-13, 20-22; 8:32, 35; 9:11), conjures the path that takes the son where he wants to go: a long and rewarding life. Moreover, the way of life calls to mind its opposite, a path to death, which is exactly how the parent depicts the Strange Woman.<sup>52</sup>

This spatial metaphor partially obscures what is really being compared here: two kinds of persuasive words—those that are wise instruction and those that are deceptive and dangerous.<sup>53</sup> Obedience to one will save the son from the other. This same logic is applied to the female

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51. My translation reflects emending MT's מֵאִשֶּׁת רֵעַ to מֵאִשֶּׁת רֵעַ, similar to the statement in Prov 6:29 (see n. 36 above). LXX renders γυναικας ὑπάνδρους, "married woman." See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 230.

52. See discussion below.

53. Several commentators have suggested that the verse order between verses 22 and 23 is unclear and possibly corrupt and should be reversed in order to restore the original order (see Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 229). This reversal, however, would obscure this comparison of wise parental speech (v. 23) and devious speech of the Strange Woman (v. 24).

figures in Proverbs as well. Fidelity to the right kind of wife and treasuring the words of Woman Wisdom will save the son from the deceptions of the Strange Woman and Woman Folly.

Proverbs 1-9, then, presents a battle of words, asserting that the best antidote to the Strange Woman's toxic discourse, is the parent's salvific instruction.

This spatial metaphor is also at work in the depiction of the Strange Woman. The parent not only refers metaphorically to this woman and her deceptive words as pitfalls and traps that one may not see without the lamp of wisdom, but the woman's place in the coded landscape of life is also key to her depiction: she is out in the streets and not at home, her house leads to death and not to life. Thus, the parent thickly layers a series of dichotomies on and around the Strange Woman that make clear how bad this woman is: good women are associated with life and home while bad women are associated with death and the public streets.

The developing portrait of the Strange Woman culminates in a unique moment of narrative instruction of Prov 7:6-27 that relates a cautionary tale about interacting with this Strange Woman, emphasizing her transgressive behavior, highlighted by her location, and her seductive speech.<sup>54</sup> This story is told from the point of view of a parent<sup>55</sup> who has observed this

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54. Murphy refers to the scenario outlined in Prov 7:6-23 as a "typical 'example story'" used to reinforce the instruction. He compares it to the much shorter episode of Prov 24:30-34 (*Proverbs*, 42).

55. I argue below that the parental speaker is best understood as a mother. See discussion in final section of this chapter.

scene from a window above the street.<sup>56</sup> This parental speaker is especially concerned with presenting the woman in the streets as undeniably disreputable:

<sup>6</sup>For at the window of my house (כִּי בַחֲלוֹן בֵּיתִי),  
through my opening<sup>57</sup> I looked out<sup>58</sup> (בְּעֵד אֲשַׁנְּבִי נִשְׁקַפְתִּי)  
<sup>7</sup>and I saw among the naïve ones (וְאִרְאָה בַּפְתָּאִים)  
and I discerned among the youths (אֲבִינָה בְּבָנִים),  
a young man lacking a plan<sup>59</sup> (נָעַר חֶסֶר-לֵב).  
<sup>8</sup>passing the street near her corner (עֹבֵר בְּשׁוּק אֶצֶל פְּנֵה),  
and the way to her house he walked along (וְדֶרֶךְ בֵּיתָהּ יֵצֵד),  
<sup>9</sup>in the twilight, at the evening of the day (בְּנֶשֶׁף-בְּעֶרְבַּיּוֹם)

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56. LXX renders vv. 6 and 7 with a feminine subject: ἀπὸ γὰρ θυρίδος ἐκ τοῦ οἴκου αὐτῆς εἰς τὰς πλατείας παρακύπτουσα, “For *she* looks out from a window of *her* house into the squares” (7:6 LXX).

This is usually read as following from the previous verse which warns against the Strange Woman and her seductive speech (v. 5) and, therefore, takes the Strange Woman as the feminine subject in vv. 6-7. While most scholars dismiss LXX as secondary, a few follow LXX reading. For example, Boström (*Proverbiastudien*) is particularly influenced by the ancient Near Eastern woman at the window motif and its connection to goddess cults, which supports his understanding of the Strange Woman as a foreign devotee to a goddess cult. (See my discussion below on the connection between this motif and goddess cults as well as how I see the woman in the window motif working in this scene.) Others, influenced it would seem by this same motif, argue that even in the MT reading the speaker could be Woman Wisdom. See, for example, McKane, *Proverbs*, 334; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 135. All these readings are unduly influenced by the expectation that this text contains elements of goddess worship when there is little to no evidence of this in the text. There is no indication that there is a change in speaker from vv. 1-5 to vv. 6ff in MT.

57. אֲשַׁנְּבִי is a difficult word to translate. Many translate it as “lattice,” implying that there is some sort of barred paneling over the window (e.g. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 82; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 242). While it is possible that some windows had a covering of some type, it is unlikely that all windows did. Additionally, it is hard to know what this “lattice” looked like and what its purpose was. This word appears only twice: here and Judg 5:28. In both texts אֲשַׁנְּבִי is in parallel with חֲלוֹן, the word typically used for a window throughout the Bible. It is likely, therefore, that אֲשַׁנְּבִי is simply a synonym for a window or vent, and does not necessarily indicate a barred covering. I have chosen to translate this word more broadly as “opening,” in order to allow for both possibilities. See discussion of archaeological evidence for windows below.

58. Fox notes that all the occurrences of this verb (שָׁקַף), used for looking down from above, are cases of looking for an extended period of time (e.g. Num 21:20; Judg 5:28), which makes sense in this context (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 242). It seems that the speaker watches the Strange Woman often and for an extended period of time in order to narrate such a tale.

59. In Hebrew the heart is the center of intellect, not emotion. See Staubli and Schroer, *Body Symbolism*, 41-55. Here, it seems this young man is wandering without purpose.

in the dark<sup>60</sup> of night and gloom (בְּאִישׁוֹן לַיְלָה וְאֶפְלָה).

<sup>10</sup>And now—a woman approaches him (וְהִנֵּה אִשָּׁה לִקְרֹאתוֹ),  
in a garment of a prostitute<sup>61</sup> and with a concealed plan<sup>62</sup> (שֵׂית זֹנָה וְנִצְרֶת לֵב).

<sup>11</sup>She is raucous and rebellious (הַמְזִיהָ הִיא וְסָרְרֶת),  
her feet do not stay in her house (בְּבֵיתָהּ לֹא־יִשְׁכְּנוּ רַגְלֶיהָ),

<sup>12</sup>one moment in the street (פְּעַם בַּחוּץ), the next in the squares (פְּעַם בְּרַחֲבוֹת),  
and near every corner she lies in wait (וְאֶצֶל כָּל־פְּנֵי תְּאֵרָב). (Prov 7:6-12)

The parental voice asserts itself as a reliable witness. Not only does the parent have an unobstructed arial view<sup>63</sup> of this event, it is also implied that the parent is a regular observer of the Strange Woman. This is the only time in Prov 1-9 where the parental speaker is embodied (i.e. a figure looking out the window) and becomes a part of the scene.<sup>64</sup> The parent remarks on her typical bad behavior in vv. 10-12 where the Strange Woman is depicted as everything a

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60. While elsewhere *אִישׁוֹן* refers to the pupil of the eye, here and in Prov 20:20 it refers to deep darkness, likely based on the black color of the eye's pupil (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 243).

61. The only other time this word (*שֵׂית*) appears is in Ps 73:6 and it does not refer there to a *zonah*. The only time we have a possible description of a garment that may be worn by a *zonah*, a veil (*צַעֲרִי*), is in Gen 38:14. It is not clear, however, whether this veil was the mark of a *zonah* or a way to conceal identity. See discussion below. See also Job 24:15 which refers to a (male) adulterer who goes out at night and covers his face (*סָתַר פְּנֵי יָשִׁים*) so he will not be seen.

62. *נִצְרֶת לֵב* is literally a “guarded heart.” Fox points out that a guarded heart can sometimes be a virtue (see Prov 4:23), but here it implies the woman's devious deceitfulness (*Proverbs 1-9*, 244). The fact that she can act like she is romantically interested in the young man while concealing her murderous intentions (Delitzsch, *Proverbs of Solomon*, 1:161). See Driver on the semantic development of “guarded” to “crafty” in semitic languages (“Hebrew Notes,” 250). Clifford suggests a wordplay, translating “with shrouded breast” in order to extend the depiction of the *zonah*'s garment by drawing on the story of Tamar from Gen 38, who covered herself with a veil when she posed as a *zonah*. He comments, “in this scene, the woman may cover her breast (‘heart’) with a shawl, while at the same time covering her heart (= mind, intent)” (*Proverbs*, 83). While this wordplay is possible, considering it is unclear whether Tamar's covering was the marking of a *zonah* or a way to conceal her identity from her father-in-law, this interpretation is less certain. See discussion of Gen 38 below. I have chosen to translated “concealed plan” to convey the sense of hidden intentions and echo the implicit comparison of the innocent and unsuspecting young man in v. 7 who is going about without a plan (*נֶעַר חָסֵר־לֵב*) in contrast to the devious Strange Woman who is acting with a hidden purpose.

63. See discussion of archaeological evidence for windows below.

64. See discussion in final section of this chapter.

respectable woman is not, from her clothing to her intentions to her activities.<sup>65</sup> It is apparent, even before we know what transpires, that this woman is trouble.

The location of this woman is central to her depiction. The Strange Woman is described in relation to her house and its binary opposite, the streets. She is never at home, but rather is seen in the streets and squares, as if she were a woman unattached from a household (a *zonah*). This comparison is made explicit in the parent's description of her clothing: "a garment of a prostitute (שֵׁית זֹנָה)." <sup>66</sup> The text makes it clear that this woman is not a prostitute, as she has a

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65. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 245.

66. See discussion below.

husband and household to which she belongs.<sup>67</sup> By aligning her appearance and her location with that of a *zonah*, the speaker emphasizes the extent of her deviance.<sup>68</sup>

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67. See discussion of *zonah* as unattached woman below. Gustav Boström (*Proverbiastudien*, 103-155.) famously argued that the Strange Woman of Proverbs was a foreign devotee of a goddess cult. Although married to a merchant established locally, she searches out a different sexual partner in the Prov 7 episode in order to engage in a fertility rite, an act of cultic prostitution. Boström's evidence comes primarily from the Prov 7 narrative, especially v. 14 where she mentions her fulfilled vows, and vv. 9 and 20, which suggest references to lunar phases. While most scholars have dismissed this reading, the study continues to be influential, especially on the question of whether or not the woman of Prov 7 is indeed engaging in an act of prostitution. See, for example, Scott, *Proverbs*, 64; McKane, *Proverbs*, 337-339; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 218; van der Toorn, "Female Prostitution," 193-205.

At most, these scholars cautiously accept Boström's reading as a possibility, often even while identifying problems with his argument. See, for example, van der Toorn who disagrees with Boström that Prov 7 represents a foreign woman engaging in a foreign cult, but does argue that this is an act of prostitution in service of a temple. He argues that this is an Israelite woman who is driven to a, possibly, one time act of prostitution in order to pay her vows to the temple (of Yahweh). He notes that vows were a common way for women to practice their devotion, but without access to funds or the cooperation of their husbands could be forced into difficult situations in order to pay for these vows. It seems important to van der Toorn that this woman's dignity be preserved: "Of course, she is no common whore! Under normal circumstances she would not dream of doing such things. But necessity knows no law" (199). One problem with this argument is that it neglects the perspective of this text: the parent's. This parent does not have a favorable view of this woman and, in fact, is trying to depict her as negatively as possible.

Another issue that all these studies share is the assumption that in ancient Israel a woman could be married and a *zonah*, or, in other words, that the definition of a *zonah* was a woman who engaged in sexual intercourse as economic exchange. The issue, rather, seems to be around ownership. No (outside) man could have access to a woman in a man's household (whether of a father or husband). If an outside man did have sexual access to a woman in the household, this would be an act of adultery (whether she received payment or not). See, for example, the story of Tamar in Gen 38. A *zonah* is an unattached woman who because she is not attached to a man's household can be accessible to many different men. There is little to no evidence of any sacred prostitution rites in ancient Israel (See Bird, "'To Play the Harlot'"; Washington, "The Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9," 164-166), as van der Toorn agrees. So the situation van der Toorn describes would be considered a case of adultery and, therefore, harshly condemned.

The only piece of evidence that points towards this particular idea of prostitution is the very brief mention of a vow paid in v. 14. Too much has been made of this single comment (see also note below on vow). The best way to read v. 14 as well as everything the Strange Woman says, is through the eyes of the parent who is constructing this depiction in order to instruct the son. See Garrett, "Votive Prostitution Again," 681-682) who argues that v. 14 (and the rest of the woman's speech that follows) should be understood in light of the parent's framing comment in v. 13b: *לֹא תַעֲזֹב פְּנֵיהָ וְתֹאמַר לָהּ* which Garrett translates "She makes her face strong" (681) and interprets in light of Prov 21:28-29, arguing that this expression indicates that the woman is lying ("a bold-faced lie" [682]). Whether or not Garrett's reading of this expression is correct, it reminds us to read the woman's speech in light of its framing, which, I argue, is key to the parent's depiction of this woman. See n. 73 below.

68. See too Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 243.

Just as the disreputable nature of the Strange Woman is established, so is the innocence of her victim.<sup>69</sup> The parent describes him as “naïve” (פְּתִי) and “lacking a plan” (חֲסֵר-לֵב), two terms that appear often in Proverbs, most notably as the specific addressee of Woman Wisdom (Prov 1:22, 32; 8:5; 9:4, 6).<sup>70</sup> In other words, these terms are used throughout Proverbs to designate those most in need of wisdom. In the larger context of Proverbs, therefore, it anticipates the bad decision this young man is about to make, that is, following the Strange Woman.

The setting of this encounter between the Strange Woman and the unsuspecting youth again activates the parent’s reoccurring spatial metaphor for wisdom: the ability to choose the good way over the bad way. The young man is described as passing by her corner and walking along “the way to her house” (וְדֶרֶךְ בֵּיתָהּ). The Strange Woman’s house and way are repeatedly associated not only with unwise choices, but hyperbolically with death (Prov 2:18-19; 5:5-6, 8; 7:27). This is also emphasized when the parent says that “near every corner she lies in wait” (וְאֶצֶל כָּל-פְּנֵה תְּאֹרֵב) (Prov 7:12). Lying in wait to ambush some unsuspecting passerby is another trope of Proverbs.<sup>71</sup> This imagery also shares in the spatial metaphor of wisdom. The path of life is full of pitfalls and traps that one must avoid. The parent illustrates life with dangerous topography, depicting wisdom as the way to navigate difficult terrain and even improve rough roads. Thus, the parent’s description of the Strange Woman in the streets at night lying in wait for passing prey, both paints the woman as devious and disreputable, while also

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69. Clifford notes the stark contrast between the woman’s activity and speech and the young man’s passivity and silence (*Proverbs*, 84-85).

70. “Naïve” (פְּתִי): Prov 1:4, 22, 32; 8:5; 9:4, 6, 16; 14:15, 18; 19:25; 21:11; 22:3; 27:12.  
“Lacking a plan” (חֲסֵר-לֵב): Prov 6:32; 9:4, 16; 10:13, 21; 11:12; 12:11; 15:21; 17:18; 24:30.

71. It appears twice in Prov 1:8-19, the passage about avoiding gangs (vv. 11, 18). See also Prov 12:6; 23:28; 24:15.

presenting a metaphor for life: dangers lurk at every corner in darkness. One must listen to the parent's instructions and learn to follow only the straight and well-lit paths of wisdom.

The parent continues to narrate this encounter between the young man and the Strange Woman by presenting the woman's seductive speech as a direct quotation. Here, for the discerning son (or reader), the Strange Woman's enticing words and persuasive methods—including, borrowed love lyrics,<sup>72</sup> tempting false promises, deceptive double-speak, and assurances of her husband's absence—are laid bare for analysis:

<sup>13</sup>She seized him and kissed him (וְהִחְזִיקָה בּוֹ וְנִשְׁקָה-לּוֹ).

With a bold expression<sup>73</sup> she said to him: (הֶעֱזָה פְּנֵיהָ וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ)

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72. Andruska has recently convincingly argued that Proverbs, in particular Prov 7, draws on the motifs and imagery of the Song of Songs but perverts them in order to demonstrate the effectiveness, but ultimate insincerity, of the Strange Woman's performance (*Wise and Foolish Love*, 35-42, 88-93). While she avoids the discussion of dating these two sets of texts, Andruska demonstrates the likelihood of Proverbs' literary dependence on the Song (at least for the Prov 7 passage) by pointing out the frequency of terms and phrases in the Song that appear in Prov 7 (as well as the distinctiveness of these phrases and the way they are utilized in the Song and not ancient Near Eastern Love literature in general) (37-39). Moreover, she contends that the fact that these terms and motifs occur throughout the Song but often only once in Proverbs clearly indicates the direction of borrowing (40-41). Andruska suggests that the author of Prov 7 wanted the reader to perceive these allusions, which aid in structuring the message of this passage (36). My analysis here also relies on understanding this passage (and below I suggest elsewhere in Prov 1-9 as well) as borrowing words and images of love from the Song of Songs and, I think, further supports Andruska's conclusions. While Andruska is the first to mount a full argument for the literary dependence of Prov 7 on the Song, others have suggested that Proverbs draws on the Song. See, e.g., Dell, "Does the Song of Songs Have Any Connections to Wisdom?," 24; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 98; Pope, *Song of Songs*, 675; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 166-168.

73. Literally, "she makes her face strong." See Garrett who suggests that this phrase (הֶעֱזָה פְּנֵיהָ) indicates that the woman is about to lie ("Votive Prostitution Again," 681-682). While Garrett's primary evidence is based on the only other use of this phrase in Prov 21:29 (and requires an emendation to make best sense of the proverb in Prov 21:28-29), this reading works quite well in the context of Prov 7 which is narrated by the concerned parent instructing a son about the dangers of this woman. The parent has already undermined the seductive speech of the Strange Woman with a description of her deviant behavior in the preceding verses and will continue to do so in the verses that follow her speech by revealing her actual murderous intentions. The parent repeatedly depicts the Strange Woman and especially her speech as deceptive (e.g. Prov 5:3-4) and the parent is explicit here that the woman is lying: even though she promises a night of lovemaking what she really intends is to murder you! Therefore, Garrett's reading of v. 13b is convincing. However, even if one does not agree with his rendering of this phrase as explicitly indicating a lie, his reading does remind us that the woman's speech is explicitly framed by the parent's negative depiction of this Strange Woman. Fox notes that having a strong or hard

- <sup>14</sup>“I had an obligation to make offerings of well-being<sup>74</sup> (זָבַחַי שְׁלָמִים עָלַי)  
today I have completed my vows (הַיּוֹם שָׁלַמְתִּי נְדָרַי)  
<sup>15</sup>so I have come out to meet you (עַל-כֵּן יָצָאתִי לִקְרֹאתְךָ),  
to search for your face and I have found you (לְשַׁחַר פְּנֵיךָ וְאָמַצְתֶּךָ).  
<sup>16</sup>I have spread my couch (with) covers (מִרְבָּדִים רְבִדְתִּי עֲרֹשִׁי),  
fine colored linens of Egypt (חֲטֹבוֹת אֵטוֹן מִצְרַיִם).  
<sup>17</sup>I have drizzled<sup>75</sup> my bed (with) myrrh (נִפְתִּי מִשְׁכָּבִי מִרְ),  
aloes and cinnamon (אֶהְלִים וְקִנְמֹן).  
<sup>18</sup>Come, let us drink our fill of lovemaking until morning (לֵכָה נִרְוֶה דָדִים עַד-הַבֹּקֶר).  
Let us delight ourselves with love (נִתְעַלְסָה בְּאַהֲבָיִם).  
<sup>19</sup>For my husband is not at home (כִּי אִין הָאִישׁ בְּבֵיתוֹ).  
He went on a long journey (הִלְךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ מִרְחוֹק).  
<sup>20</sup>A purse of silver he took in his hand (צִרְוֹר־הַכֶּסֶף לָקַח בְּיָדוֹ).  
He will come home on the day of the full moon” (לַיּוֹם הַכֶּסֶף יָבֵא בֵיתוֹ).

(Prov 7:13-20)

The Strange Woman presents herself as desperately and specifically seeking this young man. We see in vv. 13 and 15 a strong echo of the street scene in Song 3:1-4 where the woman searches for her beloved and seizes him when she finally finds him.<sup>76</sup> The Strange Woman’s tone carries the same romantic urgency as the woman of the Song’s city scenes (Song 3:1-4; 5:7). This romantic urgency, now explicitly erotic, continues in vv. 16-18, which could have been lifted right out of the Song of Songs. The reference to דָדִים and אַהֲבָיִם draw on central and repeated concepts in the Song. The luxury items of myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon are also erotically associated with the woman in the Song, where they are used to describe the appealing scents of her landscape-body.<sup>77</sup> By drawing on the lyrics of love poetry, which celebrate lovemaking as

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face “means to be devoid of proper human sensibilities, such as the capacity for mercy (Deut 28:50), humility (Qoh 8:1, cf. 2a), and shame (Prov 7:13)” (*Proverbs 1-9*, 245), which is an apt description of a liar.

74. Literally: “Offerings of well-being (were) upon me.” See Num 30:7, 9, 15; Ps 56:13 for similar construction. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 245.

75. See Prov 5:3 and Song 4:11.

76. In Prov 7:13 the verb is חָזַק and in Song 3:4 it is אָחַז. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 243-247; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 86-87; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 43.

77. See, e.g., Song 4:14.

luxurious and enticing, the parent demonstrates the persuasiveness of the Strange Woman's speech. The Strange Woman can convincingly mimic a woman in love, despite her murderous intentions.<sup>78</sup>

The use of love lyric imagery is not only seductive but it also brings a telling ambivalence to the Strange Woman's speech. Robert O'Connell discusses how the luxurious details of the seductress' bedroom in vv. 16-17 are actually reminiscent of the clothes and oils used to prepare a body for burial.<sup>79</sup> In other words, while the young man hears only promises of lovemaking in a sensual environment, seeded in these promises is the truth: these sexy boudoir accoutrements will be "enjoyed" only by his dead body.<sup>80</sup>

This deceptive double-speak is established from the beginning of the woman's speech with the mention of fulfilling her vows. This verse has received a lot of scholarly attention due to this overtly religious activity and the fact that it seems linked to the sexual proposition that follows. As discussed above, many scholars have argued for an illusion to a fertility rite in a goddess cult<sup>81</sup> or even a desperate act of prostitution in order to fulfill a vow to the Yahwistic cult.<sup>82</sup> There is, however, no reason to understand the woman's invitation for sex to be directly

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78. See Grossberg, who writes, "The Proverbs warning is compelling precisely because the teacher exploits the love lyrics (of the Song of Songs) in his didactic narrative poem and then subverts their charm by having the action of the narrative lead to disastrous results for the young man" ("Two Kinds of Sexual Relationships," 24). See also Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, 88-93.

79. O'Connell, "Proverbs VII 16-17," 238. He writes, "The fool of Prov. vii is lured by the woman's choice wording in vv. 16-17, all the time oblivious to her intention to prepare him for burial" (238).

80. See also Clifford, *Proverbs*, 89.

81. See Boström, *Proverbiastudien*, 103-155; McKane, *Proverbs*, 337-339; Scott, *Proverbs*, 64; von Rad, *Weisheit in Israel*, 218. Most of these readings require translating this verse as McKane does "I must provide a sacrificial meal, today I am to fulfil [*sic.*] my vows" (*Proverbs*, 221) in order that the woman's sexual proposition be directly related to fulfilling these vows. This requires understanding the perfect verb *שְׁלַמְתִּי* as carrying a modal meaning (near future tense) rather than past tense. See Joüon-Muraoka sec. 112g.

82. van der Toorn, "Female Prostitution"; Camp, "What's so Strange?" For more details on these readings, see n. 67 above on reading the Strange Woman as a "sacred prostitute."

related to paying her vows. Rather, it seems to serve as an additional enticement to the young man: a meal. If we are to understand this reference to vows and well-being offerings in light of priestly legislation, a well-being offering (שְׂלָמִים) would likely be an animal and most of the meat would be returned to the devotee for immediate consumption (Lev 17:15). The meat had to be consumed by the end of the day following the sacrifice (Lev 7:16).<sup>83</sup> This, then, explains the relevance and some of the urgency of the woman's statement. She invites the young man for a meat dinner and then sweetens the invitation with the promise of lovemaking.<sup>84</sup> This invitation, however, carries with it that same double-speak as her description of her bed chamber. The boy hears a promise of a delicious meal, but does not realize that he is the one who will be consumed.<sup>85</sup>

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83. Building on the argument of van der Toorn, Claudia Camp ("What's so Strange?", 20-23) also suggests understanding Prov 7:14 as referring to a vow made to Yahweh and reads it in light of levitical and deuteronomic legislation (Lev 7:11-21; Deut 23:19) on ritual cleanness. In violation of Leviticus, the woman plans to have sexual intercourse either just before or just after the sacrifice (depending on how one translates the tense of these verbs), either way, defiling herself and, therefore, deserving the penalty of Lev 7:20, that she be cut off from the community. In violation of Deuteronomy, she proposes to pay for a vow "with the wages of the prostitute" (Deut 23:19). As a result, Camp argues that the Strange Woman is portrayed as one who disrespects and defiles the Israelite community and rituals. Camp looks to this as evidence that the author of Prov 7, at least, is one who knows and is deeply engaged with the Torah, suggesting a relatively late date for the book (post-Ezra, closer to Ben Sira). Christl Maier ("Conflicting Attractions") also points to Prov 7:14 as indicating a violation of Levitical law and has a similar view as Camp on the dating of Proverbs (see also her monograph, *Die "fremde Frau" in Proverbien 1-9*), but she specifically reads this as a result of the speaker's (i.e. parent's) perspective on the woman: "In the speaker's view the woman unmasks herself as unbearable, because she mixes a cult offering with sexual acts—a real abomination in Israel" (97). Whether or not the author intended to reference these pentateuchal laws, I think the evidence of this single verse is too insubstantial to draw conclusions about dating or the author's concerns about ritual purity. The fact that the Strange Woman is only, possibly, associated with violating cultic legislation here suggests that it is an overreading of this passage. These accusations of violating ritual purity seem to miss the point of the story: a murderous outcome! I do, however, appreciate Maier's point that it could be a subtle way for the parent to further vilify the Strange Woman.

84. See too Fox: "The woman baits her trap with food, not religion" (*Proverbs 1-9*, 246).

85. See also Clifford (*Proverbs*, 88-89) who suggests that the fact that the perfect verb יִתְמַלֵּא could be translated as past or near future carries an important ambiguity for the passage. While the woman means that she is about to fulfill her vow, the boy hears that she has fulfilled her vow, understanding the statement as an invitation for dinner. In reality, the woman intends the boy to be her sacrifice. In addition to the ambivalent language of this passage, Clifford also points to the similarity in

The Strange Woman's final persuasive ploy is to anticipate the young man's objection: getting caught. She reassures him that her husband is out of the house on a long journey. Anticipating again any hesitance due to the risk of her husband's early return, she emphasizes the length of the journey, the fact that he took plenty of money with him, and his expected return date on the day of the full moon. This reassurance of her husband's absence, while serving as further enticement to the naïve young man, is meant to signal to the parent's son and, especially, to the reader what is really going on here. This is another man's wife—a woman who should remain alien to all other men. Moreover, this invitation to come to her house (that is, her husband's house) for a night of “lovemaking” is an audacious affront to her husband and his authority in his home. In a perverted twist, the Strange Woman engages in adulterous behavior in the very place to which her sexual activity should be restricted, but with a man who is not her husband. By placing this fornication in the home, Proverbs emphasizes the damage adultery does to the household. This illicit act in the home poisons the very source of the family: the woman's womb.

After reporting the Strange Woman's speech in Prov 7:14-20, the parental speaker states just how effective it is:

<sup>21</sup>She entices him with much persuasive speech (הַטָּתוּ בָּרַב לְקַחָהּ),  
with the smoothness of her lips she seduces him (בְּחֶלֶק שְׁפָתֶיהָ תְּדִיחֶנּוּ).

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language and structure with Jephthah's vow in Judg 11:30-31 where he promises to sacrifice whatever comes out (יֵצֵא) to meet him (לְקָרְאתִי). This echoes the woman's statement that as a result of her fulfilling her vows (or being about to) “I have come out to meet you” (עַל-כֵּן יֵצְאָתִי לְקָרְאתֶךָ) (Prov 7:15). I am not convinced that this loosely parallel language between Judg 11 and Prov 7 quite justifies this reading, but Clifford's work further emphasizes the sense of slippery ambivalence that exists in the Strange Woman's speech.

<sup>22</sup>He goes after her impetuously,<sup>86</sup>  
like an ox to slaughter he comes ( הוֹלֵךְ אַחֲרֶיהָ פְּתָאֵם כְּשׁוֹר אֶל-טֹבַח יָבֹא )  
like a deer bounding to bonds<sup>87</sup> ( וּכְעֶבֶס אֶל-מוֹסֵר אוֹיֵל )

<sup>23</sup>until an arrow pierces his entrails ( עַד יַפְלֹחַ חֵץ בְּבִדּוֹ ).  
Like a bird hastening to a trap ( כְּמִהָר צִפּוֹר אֶל-פֶּה ),  
he does not know that it is with his life that he will pay<sup>88</sup> ( וְלֹא-יָדַע כִּי-בִנְפֹשׁוֹ )  
הוא. (Prov 7:21-23)

In v. 21, the parent is explicit about the power of the Strange Woman's speech, which is referred to as לְקַח—the same term used elsewhere in Proverbs for the parent's instruction that is presented as vital to the son's success and wellbeing (Prov 4:2).<sup>89</sup> The use of this word here, when this persuasive speech is employed for opposite ends as the parent, only further reinforces the parent's perspective on the Strange Woman as competition for wise instruction.<sup>90</sup> The power and danger of the woman's persuasive speech is effectively demonstrated by the following verses. The parent reveals the Strange Woman's true intentions: She is out to deceive, capture, and murder young men. Her victim is depicted as a hapless creature, completely unaware of the

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86. פְּתָאֵם, literally, “suddenly.” Most translators understand this to indicate the young man's rash decision and render the term accordingly (e.g. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 249). Vulgate and Targum follow MT. LXX, however, translates *καεπιφωθείς*, likely reading פְּתָאֵם (as in Prov 7:7) and understanding this term to refer again to the young man's stupidity in taking these actions. See too Clifford, *Proverbs*, 83. Either translation depicts the young man as acting unwisely. I follow MT.

87. MT is corrupt. The text is vocalized to read something like: “and like an anklet to foolish discipline.” I, along with most commentators, emend the verse by revocalizing MT's אֶל-מוֹסֵר אוֹיֵל to וּכְעֶבֶס אֶל-מוֹסֵר אֵיל. For verb עֶבַס as “bounding” or playful movement see Isa 3:16 as well as translation in Symmachus and Vulgate. See too Driver, “Hebrew Notes,” 241; McKane, *Proverbs*, 240-341. This reading is supported by LXX which translates: *καὶ ὡσπερ κύων ἐπὶ δεσμοῦς*, “and like a dog to bonds.”

88. כִּי-בִנְפֹשׁוֹ הוא this phrase makes use of the *bet* of price (*bet pretii*), implying “pay.” See, e.g., Gen 23:9; Deut 19:21; 1 Kgs 10:29; 2 Sam 23:17; 1 Chron 12:20. For more on *bet* of price see Pardee, “The Preposition in Ugaritic,” 299-300.

89. This term appears six times in the book of Proverbs (Prov 1:5; 4:2; 7:21; 9:9; 16:21, 23) and only here is it not associated with wise instruction.

90. See also Murphy who writes: “With some irony the writer employs a term that is used often and favorably for wisdom teaching...” (*Proverbs*, 44) and Fox who asserts this term is used in its usual sense of “instruction,” “but said in a facetious tone” (*Proverbs 1-9*, 249).

harm to which he is about to come. Proverbs 7, therefore, paints a dark and dramatic end to anyone who dares to get involved with the Strange Woman.<sup>91</sup>

The Strange Woman, here and throughout Prov 1-9, is routinely and expressly associated with death.<sup>92</sup> The hyperbolic tone that imbues the Strange Woman with mythic powers of seduction is matched by the stated dramatic result of interacting with her: certain death. Her identification with death is accomplished using the same spatial metaphor that we have seen throughout Prov 1-9—the path imagery and, notably for a female figure, her house.

Proverbs 2 features this death imagery associated with both the Strange Woman’s house and ways:

<sup>18</sup>For her house bows down to death<sup>93</sup> (כִּי שָׁחָה אֶל-מָוֶת בֵּיתָהּ),  
and her paths to the dead (וְאֶל-רְפָאִים מַעְגְּלֹתֶיהָ).

<sup>19</sup>All those who enter her will not return (כָּל-בָּאֶיֶהָ לֹא יָשׁוּבוּן),  
they will not attain the ways of life (וְלֹא-יִשְׁיִגּוּ אַרְחֹת חַיִּים). (Prov 2:18-19)

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91. The Prov 7 episode is the culminating piece of the parent’s campaign against adultery. The parent, however, has also taken another line of defense by offering an extensive discussion of the many negative consequences for the man who gets involved with the Strange Woman. Most of these consequences are structured around the importance of the household unit in society and its necessary boundaries around female sexuality (Lipka, *Sexual Transgression*, 166-167). The parent suggests that engaging with the Strange Woman could result in children born to another man’s household, wasting his youthful “vigor” on an illegitimate relationship which corrupts the continuance and integrity of family lines and risks financial loss (Prov 5:8-10). Additionally, the parent highlights the risk of public ruin (Prov 5:11-14) and jealous revenge (Prov 6:32-35).

92. See Esther J. Hamori, *Women’s Divination in Biblical Literature*, 203-216, especially 203-108. Hamori considers how the death imagery that appears throughout Prov 1-9 and is primarily associated with the Strange Woman draws on the language and imagery of necromancy (“she manipulates the pathways to Sheol” [206]). She suggests that this trope that combines sorcery and sexual deviance, always applied to women in the Hebrew Bible as well as in many other texts of the ancient Near East, delegitimizes women, especially as religious practitioners.

93. Fox suggests emending בֵּיתָהּ “her house” to נתיבתה “her path(s)” in order for the gender of the subject (בֵּיתָהּ is masculine) to match the 3fs verb (שָׁחָה) (*Proverbs 1-9*, 121-122). This emendation, however, is unnecessary as sometimes the gender of a subject and its verb do not match and, as discussed above, the association between women and houses is seen throughout Proverbs, especially in the case of the Strange Woman. See, especially, Prov 5:8; 7:27.

The Strange Woman, her house, and her paths are all equated here. The parent identifies them all with death.<sup>94</sup> This equation of the woman and her house, both here and elsewhere, along with the fact that the Strange Woman represents the act of adultery, suggests a sexual valence to this reading, especially with the use of the verb בּוֹא in v. 19.<sup>95</sup> While this verb is most commonly employed to mark movement, it is also the verb used to express sexual intercourse.<sup>96</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the metaphorical association between women and houses carries an erotic as well as practical dimension. The act of entering a house (especially when the figure of house and female body are linked) is suggestive of coitus. By making a consistent connection between the Strange Woman and her house, the parent's message carries a double meaning. For example, the parent warns the son to “keep your way far from her and do not draw near the door (literally: פתח “opening,” ) of her house” (Prov 5:8).<sup>97</sup> This warning works on two registers: do not go near her house and, quite specifically, do not go near her vagina.<sup>98</sup> The parent intensifies this message in passages like Prov 2:18-19 that establish the woman's body/house as

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94. See also Prov 5:5-6 for similar imagery.

95. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 122; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 48.

96. Most commonly: בּוֹא + אֵל . E.g., Gen 16:2-4; 30:3-4; 38:8; Deut 22:13; 2 Sam 16:21-22.

Sometimes this phrase for sexual intercourse is immediately followed by a report of the woman conceiving a child, strengthening this reading (e.g., Gen 16:2-4; 30:3-4).

97. Woman Folly is depicted as sitting at the door (literally: “opening,” פתח) to her house (Prov 9:14) and Woman Wisdom is twice said to be proclaiming her words of wisdom at the doors (again, literally, “openings,” פתחים) of the city gates (Prov 1:21; 8:3). While this word for opening, פתח is often used for doors in the Hebrew Bible (rather than the Hebrew word for door, דלת), this literature seems to be making use of the available euphemism.

98. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 194; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 182.

death: an orifice leading to Sheol. This path goes only one way. Once the choice is made, there is no return.<sup>99</sup>

This same association with death appears in the dramatic conclusion to the Prov 7 narrative. The parent ends the tale with a powerful warning to the son:

<sup>24</sup>Now, sons, listen to me (וְעַתָּה בְּנִים שְׁמְעוּ-לִי)

and attend to the speech of my mouth (וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְאִמְרֵי-פִי).

<sup>25</sup>Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways (אַל-יִשְׁטּוּ אֶל-דַּרְכֶיהָ לְבָבְךָ),

do not stray onto her paths (אַל-תִּתַּע בְּנַתִּיבוֹתֶיהָ).

<sup>26</sup>For many victims she has caused to fall (כִּי-רַבִּים חָלְלִים הִפִּילָה)

and numerous are all the she has slain (וְעַצְמִים כָּל־הֶרְגָהּ).

<sup>27</sup>The ways of Sheol are her house (דַּרְכֵי שְׁאוֹל בֵּיתָהּ)

leading down to the chambers of death (יִרְדּוּת אֶל-חַדְרֵי-מָוֶת). (Prov

7:24-27)

After this long cautionary tale about the Strange Woman, including a direct quotation of her seductive speech, the parent concludes by reinforcing whose voice the son should listen to: the parent's. These two competing voices are then linked to the right and wrong ways of life, explicitly in the case of the Strange Woman and implicitly in the case of the parent. Again, the Strange Woman is given agency by the parental voice: her intentions are evil and murderous and she is good at what she does. The parent speaks of her many victims. The passage ends with a final association of the woman's house with death. This verse echoes and inverts the woman's statement in Song 3:4 when she wants to bring her beloved "to the house of my mother, the chamber of the one who conceived me" (אֶל-בַּיִת אִמִּי וְאֶל-חֲדָר הַוּרְתִּי). Both verses make use of the

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99. McKane attempts to simply decode this metaphor, arguing that the meaning here is merely that any man who gets involved with the Strange Woman will be estranged from society and, therefore, is only metaphorically "dead" (288). This reading dismisses too quickly the consistent association of the Strange Woman and death. See, for example, Hamori, *Women's Divination in Biblical Literature*, 203-208.

house/chamber parallel, but the woman in the Song speaks of a house that is associated with life. It is the house of her mother, the one who gave her life. It refers to the productive outcome of sexual intercourse, an act that is constantly on the mind of the speakers of the Song. In Prov 7, this house is associated with the opposite phenomenon: death.<sup>100</sup> Reading Prov 7:27 in light of Song 3:4, this deadly outcome is all the more striking.<sup>101</sup> Death is the opposite outcome one expects from “entering” a woman’s body. Moreover, a woman’s actual house as a site of food production and shelter is also expected to be a place of nourishment and life. The fact that the Strange Woman’s house and body are so definitively associated with death marks her as a failure in every way a woman was expected to contribute to society.

Despite the hyperbolic portrait of this figure that depicts her as a portal to death and demise, the rich narrative details in this passage have led many to read this Strange Woman as a real person with legitimate motivations, such as money problems.<sup>102</sup> Even Fox, who argues that the Strange Woman is a “type-figure”<sup>103</sup> and critiques those who “overread”<sup>104</sup> this figure, especially feminist critics who attempt to locate female voices in Prov 7<sup>105</sup> or argue for the Strange Woman as “the Other,” a symbol of chaos and evil,<sup>106</sup> interprets the Strange Woman of Prov 7 as a woman who is “pathetic”<sup>107</sup> and “sad and shabby.”<sup>108</sup> He writes: “The author depicts a

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100. See also Prov 5:5-6 where the Strange Woman is associated with the same parallel of death/Sheol: “Her feet go down to death; Sheol her steps reach so that the way of life she does not observe. Her paths wander, but she does not know.”

101. See n. 72 above on Proverbs’ literary dependence on the Song of Songs.

102. See, for example, Meike Heijerman, “Who Would Blame Her?,” especially 107; van der Toorn, “Female Prostitution.”

103. Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 134.

104. Fox: “overreading is misreading” (*Proverbs, 1-9*, 262).

105. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*. See Fox’s discussion in *Proverbs 1-9*, 256-257.

106. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom”; Camp, “What’s So Strange?” See Fox’s discussion in *Proverbs 1-9*, 257-258.

107. Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 253.

108. Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 254.

particular type of person, and even in his abhorrence for her he reveals a certain sensitivity to the forces that drive such a one to sin. . . . The woman's actions bespeak a deep disquiet, not a simple physical lust."<sup>109</sup> It is unclear to me how this interpretation of the woman as "pathetic" and compelled by a "deep disquiet" is not also an overreading of this text. All we have in Prov 7 is the parent's portrait. This portrait is detailed and brings particularity to this female figure: her clothing, her attitude, her location, her regular behavior, and most importantly her persuasive words. But none of these details gives any indication of her motivations, whether lust, dissatisfaction, or maleficence. The fact that the parent places the words of love poetry into her mouth and suggests piety with the mention of vows, only provides insight into what the parent sees as an effective depiction of a tempting woman. Moreover, Fox wants to separate the description of the Strange Woman in Prov 7:6-20 from her presentation in vv. 21-27, arguing that the woman in the concluding verses is "the Strange Woman in the abstract, the paradigm of all adulterous tempters," while the woman of the narrative is meant to represent a real woman with which the reader may already be familiar.<sup>110</sup> This distinction is unnecessary and unsupported by the text. As a stereotyped figure, the Strange Woman is always "the paradigm of all adulterous tempters" even if she is described in terms of a real particular human being. The concluding hyperbole of the Prov 7 episode is central to the parent's rhetoric and is consistent with the Strange Woman's depiction throughout Prov 1-9. The parent's bottom line is that the Strange Woman, whether representing all bad choices or specifically the act of adultery, leads to death. The fact that this figure can be represented in both human and mythic terms speaks to the flexibility of this stereotyped figure and the power of the parent's rhetoric.

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109. Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 253.

110. Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 253-254.

*The Pleasing Wife of Proverbs 5:15-20*

As discussed above, the parental voice of Proverbs 1-9 spends a great deal of energy instructing the son to avoid other men's wives at all costs, even depicting the lethal consequences of getting involved with the Strange Woman, a figure who represents married women but is presented hyperbolically as powerfully seductive and deadly.<sup>111</sup> While this is the primary focus of Proverbs' teaching about women, there is also a short discussion in Proverbs 5:15-20 on the benefits of having a fulfilling sexual relationship with the right woman—the legitimate wife. Although this passage reflects a different tactic, it is central to the parent's larger discussion about the dangers of the Strange Woman. These verses follow immediately on the parent's urgings to avoid the Strange Woman, her ways, her house and her seductive words (Prov 5:1-8) as well as a warning about negative outcomes of not doing so (Prov 5:9-14). Here, the parent shifts from warnings and admonitions to providing the son with a positive and compelling reason for avoiding the Strange Woman: she cannot give the son anything that he cannot already get at home.

Reading the passage in this context helps illuminate the best reading for v. 16, which has vexed commentators. I will argue that the springs and streams of water of v. 16 refer to the faithful and sexy wife described in the second half of the passage. This reading not only draws on the productive association between women and water but it also plays with the overlapping ideas of value and vulnerability that often surround the female body, as seen in the Song of Songs.<sup>112</sup>

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111. The parent also discusses the many negative consequences that could befall the man who does not heed this advice in more practical terms, including wasting one's resources (Prov 5:8-10), regret (Prov 5:11-13), public disgrace (Prov 5:14), and a jealous and vengeful husband (Prov 6:32-35).

112. See discussion in chapter 2.

The legitimate wife of Prov 5:15-20 is presented in sharp contrast to the Strange Woman: she is at home, exclusively available to her husband, and is a source of life. Moreover, she is silent. Unlike most of the female figures of Proverbs, this wife is never given the opportunity to speak nor is she even described as one who speaks. The only body part conjured are her breasts and she is otherwise described in metaphorical terms meant to highlight the pleasurable qualities of her body: flowing water and soft but agile animals. In other words, this woman's body is constructed for sexual pleasure and reproduction. In fact, her sexual appeal is the only quality that the wife and the Strange Woman share. What is more, this sexual appeal is described in similar terms drawn from the Song of Songs.<sup>113</sup> While the Strange Woman seduces with words reminiscent of love poetry, the ideal wife is constructed out of this imagery. By aligning this woman with life and the Strange Woman with death, the parent asserts that the sexual pleasure promised by the Strange Woman is attainable, just not with her. Rather the son need look no further than his own marital bedroom.

This passage begins awash in water imagery, but without an immediately clear referent to what this water refers: “Drink water from your cistern, the flowing water from your well. Your springs overflow into the streets, in the squares streams of water” (Prov 5:15-16). This confusion is compounded by the fact that the syntax of v. 16 (יִפּוּצוּ מֵעִיִּנְתֶיךָ חוּצָה בְּרַחֲבוֹת פְּלִיגֵי־מַיִם) could be interpreted in several different ways and the simplest reading seems to challenge understanding the wife as the referent for the springs and streams of water (which is evident in v. 18). To take the wife as the referent for the water imagery and to translate v. 16 as a declarative sentence, as I do above, or even as a volitive: “May your springs overflow into the streets, in the squares

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113. See n. 72 above on Proverbs' literary dependence on the Song of Songs.

streams of water” seems to contradict the message of the passage—exclusive fidelity to one’s wife.<sup>114</sup> As has been demonstrated thus far, a proper wife does not belong in the streets and squares—the domain of the Strange Woman.<sup>115</sup> This public space should be understood in contrast to the private space of a domestic well or cistern. This contrast is further strengthened by v. 17, which demands that these springs be only for the young man and not for “strange men” (זָרִים): “May they be for you alone and not for strange men (זָרִים) along with you!” The fact that the same term is used to refer to these other men as the Strange Woman plays on the same spatial contrast: strangers, those not in one’s household, are in the public space.<sup>116</sup> Based on this understanding of these verses within the larger context of Prov 1-9, the straightforward declarative or volitive reading of v. 16 seems out of place.

Several suggestions have been made for understanding a different referent of the springs and streams of v. 16, but none satisfy the context of the passage as well as the wife. For example, some scholars argue that the springs and streams should be understood as referring to the man’s offspring,<sup>117</sup> while others suggest it refers to his semen.<sup>118</sup> With the first reading, v. 16 is a reward for fidelity. The faithful man will have many children and he will clearly be the progenitor.

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114. Robert Chisholm does take v. 16 as a declarative sentence, but understands the imperfect verb as a modal indicating capability (*IBHS* 31.4c: “non-perfective of capability”): “The wife is capable of attracting and satisfying many men, just like a prostitute or adulteress. But despite her tremendous capabilities her streams of sexual satisfaction belong solely to the son” (“Drink Water from Your Own Cistern,” 400). While this reading certainly fits with the parent’s message, I think it does not take seriously the contrast between home and public space. Chisholm’s suggestion that the statement is “ironic” is an insufficient explanation (400).

115. For similar attention to the importance of public and private space in this passage, although a different conclusion, cf. Kruger, “Promiscuity or Marriage Fidelity?” 66-67.

116. As with the term זָרָה for the Strange Woman, reading זָרִים as a reference to men who are foreign to the community does not fit the context of this passage. See discussion of זָר and its use in Proverbs 1-9 above.

117. Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 29; Snijders, “The Meaning of זָר in the Old Testament,” 93

118. Perdue, *Proverbs*, 121; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 68, 71; Boström, *Proverbiastudien*; McKane, *Proverbs*, 319.

Although this reading plays on the anxiety around paternity,<sup>119</sup> the fact that streets and squares have been figured negatively makes it seem questionable.<sup>120</sup> With the second reading, v. 16 is an admonishment. The young man has wasted his reproductive resources in the streets and not kept them for the continuation of his own family line.<sup>121</sup> This reading, however, requires an abrupt change for the water referent in the middle of the passage. Verse 15 commands men to drink water from one's own cistern. The "drink water" metaphor is clearly indicating sexual intercourse, which is bolstered by the reference to erotic intoxication in vv. 19-20. Verse 18 is a blessing of the man's fountain, which stands in parallel to "the wife of your youth." It is, therefore, apparent that the water imagery preceding and following vv. 16-17 refer to the man's wife and not his offspring or semen.

The association of women and water, discussed in the previous chapter on the Song of Songs, is drawn on here in Prov 5 as well.<sup>122</sup> This association reflects a practical as well as a

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119. See just a few verses earlier in Prov 5:8-10 where the parent warns the son against wasting his youthful "vigor" on an illegitimate relationship. Any children produced from an adulterous affair would belong to the woman's legitimate husband and household as paternity would be impossible to determine. This has serious consequences in the ancient world of Israel-Judea, which operated on a patrilineal and patrimonial system. If a man's son was born into a different household then the son would not carry on the right name or receive the right inheritance (Perdue, *Proverbs*, 128.) Moreover, the greater concern lies with determining ancestry. Many have discussed the Israelite belief in afterlife, where one's ancestors would dwell and remain connected to the fortune and wellbeing of the family. Ancestors depended on their descendants to remember them and perform memorial rites in order to have favorable conditions in the afterlife (Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife," 48). Thus, a large part of the concern surrounding adultery stemmed from the fact that it had the potential to corrupt the very backbone of society: the continuance and integrity of family lines. See Blenkinsopp, "The Family in First Temple Israel"; Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife"; Cook, "Death, Kinship, and Community."

120. This reading also does not fit with the sense of verb פוצוץ as scating or disorganization (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 201).

121. This reading requires taking v. 16 as an unmarked question or as a negative command.

122. See especially discussion of Song 4:15 in chapter 2. Most commentators have noticed the parallels between this passage and the erotic imagery of the Song. See, for example, Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 199, 202-203; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 71-72; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 32; Perdue, *Proverbs*, 212. Cf. Schellenberg, "May Her Breasts Satisfy You at All Times," especially 260-261. See n. 72 above where I discuss Proverbs' literary dependence on the Song. While Andruska's discussion focuses primarily on demonstrating literary borrowing in Prov 7, she recognizes that this borrowing occurred elsewhere in Prov 1-9 as well and mentions Prov 5 specifically (*Wise and Foolish Love*, 38-39).

figurative reality. While drawing water from a well was likely a necessary part of women’s daily domestic work,<sup>123</sup> the well is also symbolic of both a woman’s sexuality and fertility.<sup>124</sup> The shape and nature of a well conjures an image of the female genitals.<sup>125</sup> The fact that female arousal results in vaginal liquidity and that the female body produces milk makes the description of a woman as a water source particularly apt.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, both wells and women are sources of life. Just as a well provides water to sustain one’s family, livestock, garden, and so forth, a wife provides and sustains children, one’s own descendants. From her flows the family line. This is emphasized in Prov 5:18a where the wife is explicitly figured as a water source: “May your fountain be blessed! (יְהִי־מְקוֹרְךָ בְרוּךְ).” The wish that “your fountain”<sup>127</sup> be blessed indicates a blessing for fertility, as the command for blessing so often does.<sup>128</sup> In fact, verses 17-19 with its repeated jussive forms read like a parental benediction of this union:<sup>129</sup>

- <sup>17</sup>May they be for you alone (יְהִיוּ־לְךָ לְבַדְּךָ)  
and not for strange men along with you! (וְאִין לְזָרִים אֶתְךָ)  
<sup>18</sup>May your fountain be blessed! (יְהִי־מְקוֹרְךָ בְרוּךְ)  
Rejoice in the wife of your youth (וּשְׂמַח מֵאִשָּׁת נְעוּרֶיךָ),  
<sup>19</sup>a loving doe, a graceful mountain goat (אֵילָת אֶהָבִים וַיְעֵלֶת־חֹן).

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123. The well has an important role in the biblical betrothal type-scene as a place where men may encounter women (e.g., Gen 24:13-20; 29:1-20; Exod 2:15-22). On the betrothal type-scene, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 47-62.

124. Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 52. The terms well and cistern are both used here in parallel. While they are technically different—a cistern collects water, while a well taps into an underwater stream—they seem to be used synonymously here. See Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 199. Pace Chisholm, “Drink Water from Your Own Cistern,” 399, 401.

125. Also Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, 182.

126. See discussion in chapter 2.

127. In Lev 12:7 and 20:18 the term מְקוֹר (translated here as “fountain”) is used to refer to a woman’s “flow” of blood (in the case of menstruation in Lev 20 and postpartum lochia in Lev 12). This strengthens the association of female bodies (especially their reproductive organs) with flowing liquid.

128. The paradigmatic example of this would be in the Priestly creation account in Gen 1:1-2:4a where God’s blessing is directly followed by the command to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:22, 28).

129. E.g., see the priestly benediction of Num 6:22-27.

May her breasts saturate you at all times (דְּדֵיָהּ יִרְנַד בְּכָל־עֵת).

May you be intoxicated by her love continually (בְּאַהֲבָתָהּ תִּשְׁגָּה תָּמִיד).

(Prov 5:17-19)

The parent blesses the marriage union, wishing the couple fertility and pleasure.<sup>130</sup> After all, in a pre-contraception age it is likely that a young wife would be in a near constant state of pregnancy and nursing and therefore her breasts would be able to saturate her husband at all times.

If, then, the streams and springs of v. 16 also refer to the man's wife, how should we understand this verse? Some scholars read it as a threat referring to a wife's potential infidelity, often taking v. 16 as the direct result of the man not following the command to stay faithful to his wife in v. 15.<sup>131</sup> This, however, suggests that wives are just as likely to stray as their husbands. While this was likely as true in the ancient world as it is today, I question whether this point would serve the parent's rhetoric. A well or cistern is stationary and private, even with the potential of overflowing water this imagery suggests understanding the wife as one who is at home. The parent, then, presents the wife as an antithesis to the Strange Woman in the fact that she is at home, exclusively available to her husband, and a source of life.<sup>132</sup> This contrast would be undermined by suggesting that the son's wife could be capable of the same sort of deviant activity as the Strange Woman. However, the parent does want to liken the wife to the Strange

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130. In the parent to son instruction trope presented in Prov 1-9 this may be intended as a blessing of the son's marriage, whether envisioned as a potential future or current union. What seems to matter here is that the parent supports this union, in sharp contrast with any relationship the son may have with a "strange woman."

131. See, e.g., Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 29; Scott, *Proverbs*; Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 28; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 200-201; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 30. Many who argue for this reading supply a negative particle at the beginning of v. 16, such as לֹא, "lest," or אַל, which would create a negative command with the imperfect verb (Scott, *Proverbs*; Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 28; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 200). This is supported by LXX which inserts the negative particle μή at the beginning of v. 16. I, however, have chosen to translate the verse as an unmarked rhetorical question as this does not require emending MT and it works better rhetorically. See discussion below.

132. See discussion in previous section about the Strange Woman consistently portrayed as a portal to death/Sheol.

Woman in one way: the wife is just as capable in the bedroom as the Strange Woman. This passage, then, attempts to convince the son that his own wife can provide everything he needs—legitimate children and sexual satisfaction. There is no need for the Strange Woman and her erotic possibilities.

Therefore, the best reading is to understand the water imagery as a reference to the wife and her potential vulnerability if the husband’s attentions are elsewhere. I translate v. 16, then, as an unmarked rhetorical question<sup>133</sup> as this does not require emending MT and it works well rhetorically; not only does the rhetorical question match the interrogative of v. 20 (marked with the word לְמָה), but it also puts strong persuasive force behind the parent’s statement:

- <sup>15</sup>Drink water from your cistern (שְׁתֵּה-מַיִם מִבּוֹרְךָ)  
the flowing water from your well (וְגִזְלִים מִתּוֹךְ בְּאֵרְךָ)  
<sup>16</sup>Should your springs overflow into the streets? (יִפּוּצוּ מִעֵינֹתֶיךָ חוּצָה)  
In the squares, streams of water? (בְּרַחֲבוֹת פְּלִגְי־מַיִם)  
<sup>17</sup>May they be for you alone (יִהְיֶי-לְךָ לְבַדְּךָ)  
and not for strange men along with you! (וְאִין לְזָרִים אִתְּךָ) (Prov 5:15-17)

There is still the suggestion of the well’s water overflowing as a result of neglect, but I think this is best understood as an attempt to activate a sense of jealousy, an issue dealt with explicitly in Prov 6:34-35. After such concentrated discussion of the Strange Woman in Prov 5:1-14, the parent reminds the son what else is at stake in his attention to her. He is less aware of what is happening in his home—his well is neglected and, as a result, other men may take notice of her overflowing sexuality and take advantage of this situation. It is the risk of other men, rather than an unfaithful wife, that is emphasized in v. 17. As mentioned above, these “strange men” belong to the public space of v. 16. The fact that the wife is understood as a stationary, domestic well

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133. GKC 150a. See too Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 28; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 30; Toy, *Proverbs*, 111; Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*; NRSV.

means she is not in the streets either, but that does not mean that news of her neglected state, whether in the sense that she is sexually unsatisfied or just simply unprotected (her husband is out of the house, perhaps day and night), could not “leak” into the public space.<sup>134</sup> In other words, the parental voice figures the wife not as independent agent but as an ever-flowing hydraulic force. If a husband does not regularly attend his wife, she will overflow into the streets and he would be responsible for any resulting adultery. This passage, therefore, appeals to a man’s sense of ownership and jealousy, asking: How would you like it if other men gained access to “your waters”? No man wants his wife available for anyone to “quench his thirst.”

In the second half of the passage the parent details the value and benefit of the wife by drawing on erotic imagery and word play from the Song of Songs.<sup>135</sup> As mentioned above, vv. 18-19 continue the benediction begun in v. 17 and emphasize the man’s wife as fertile and sexually satisfying. In v. 18a this benediction is explicit and indicates a constant flow of both offspring and sexual pleasure. The latter is emphasized in Prov 5:18b-19a, which specifically direct young men to “rejoice in the wife of your youth, a loving doe, a graceful mountain goat.” This reference to charming and affectionate animals evokes the love lyrics of the Song. Both lovers in the Song liken each other to animals, either in reference to a specific feature or in entirety, emphasizing their beloved’s beauty, agility, or grace. This parallel with the Song strengthens the sexual appeal of the wife in Prov 5.

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134. This reading would also work with the insertion of a negative particle rather than an unmarked interrogative. See, also, Fox who inserts “lest” at the beginning of v. 16 but reads this verse as a threat. He leaves this threat open as to whether or not it is neglected wives seeking the affection of strange men or being sought after: “[T]he sexual defilement of one’s own wife is an appropriate, tit-for-tat punishment for violating another’s wife. The wronged wife’s motive, whether it is spite or sexual frustration, is not stated, nor are we told whether she will be acting voluntarily. The only relevant agents are male” (*Proverbs 1-9*, 201).

135. See also Ringgren, *Sprüche*, 29.

What follows explicitly describes how one should rejoice in a wife: “May her breasts saturate you at all times. May you be intoxicated by her love continually” (Prov 5:19).<sup>136</sup> The imagery of saturating breasts and intoxication continues the water and drinking imagery established in the earlier verses. As discussed in the previous chapter, drinking imagery is also used throughout the Song of Songs to express sexual pleasure.<sup>137</sup> The closest parallel to this passage is the redolent imagery of Song 4 where the woman’s watery garden-body culminates in this imperative: “Eat, friends! Drink and be drunk of love!” (Song 5:1c).<sup>138</sup> Here the term for “drunk” is שכר, while in Prov 5:19-20 the word שגה is used, which I translate “be intoxicated.” The Qal of שגה is more commonly understood as “to go astray, err,” which is sometimes extended to “swerve, meander in drunkenness,” and, therefore, can imply a state of intoxication.<sup>139</sup> Of the 21 times that this root occurs, only four times indicate an intoxicated state<sup>140</sup> and two other times refer to being lead astray as a result of the influence of alcohol.<sup>141</sup> In Prov 5:19-20 this term (שגה) is used twice, but in contrasting ways. The first use in v. 19 appears in relation to the wife and is intended to be positive “May you be intoxicated (תשגה) by her love continually.” Drawing, it would seem, on the erotic language of love lyrics, the parent encourages the young man to “get intoxicated” or “lose yourself,” with his wife. Lovemaking with his wife is presented as a licit intoxicant. The next verse follows from but contrasts sharply with the previous: “Why should you be intoxicated (תשגה), my son, by a Strange Woman?” Here

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136. Song 1:9-11, 15; 2:9, 17, 14; 2:7; 3:5; 4:1, 2, 5; 5:15; 6:5, 6; 7:4; 8:14.

137. See discussion in chapter 2. Wine is the most common liquid used in this motif, appearing eight times in the Song. See Song 1:2, 4; 2:4; 4:10; 5:1; 7:3, 10; 8:2. Fox points out that this motif also appears in Egyptian love poetry (*Proverbs 1-9*, 203).

138. See chapter 2 for a full discussion of this verse.

139. BDB, 993.

140. Isa 28:7 (twice); Prov 5:19, 20.

141. Isa 28:7; Prov 20:1.

the concept of intoxication is undoubtedly negative. The contrast is clear: getting intoxicated by one's wife is encouraged and should be enjoyed, getting intoxicated by the Strange Woman is dangerous and unnecessary.<sup>142</sup> The parent provides context for the moral instruction regarding the Strange Woman: sexual pleasure is a wonderful thing, but only with the right woman, your wife, where there are no negative consequences. "Go astray" with her and enjoy your moments lost in each other, rather than truly "erring" with another.<sup>143</sup>

Another wordplay is at work with the word used for "breasts" (דָּד) in v. 19. This term occurs four times in total and the other three uses appear in a single passage in Ezekiel (Ezk 23:3, 8, 21). The more common word is שָׁד, which appears 24 times in the Hebrew Bible. This is the only term used for breasts in the Song of Songs.<sup>144</sup> The term used in Prov 5 (דָּד) is similar to the word for lover or, more generally, for love or the act of lovemaking: דָּוָד. This term appears in the Song of Songs alone 40 times, but it also appears in Proverbs. In Prov 7:18 the Strange Woman's seductive words and tempting promises are reported: "Come, let us drink our fill of lovemaking (גְּרוּהַ דָּדִים) until morning. Let us delight ourselves with love (אֶהְבִּים)." Here דָּוָד is used in the plural, דָּדִים, clearly referring to erotic play and the Strange Woman proposes "drinking their fill" of this sexual pleasure.<sup>145</sup> The word גְּרוּהַ, from the root רוה, meaning to drink

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142. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 203-204.

143. The term (שָׂגָה) appears a third time in the concluding statement of the chapter in reference to the wicked man who pays the price of his sins, "He dies without discipline and with his great foolishness he is lost (יִשָּׁגָה)" (Prov 5:23).

144. Song 1:13; 4:5; 7:3, 8; 8:1, 10.

145. Fox wants to reposit "her breasts" in 5:19 to "lovemaking" (as in Prov 7:18). This is unnecessary and obscures the wordplay. Also Gale Yee points out the chiasmic wordplay that appears in vv. 19-20, comparing the breasts of one's wife and the bosom of the Strange Woman ("I Have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh," 119).

abundantly, to get drunk, or be saturated,<sup>146</sup> is the same word that appears in Prov 5:19 when the parent hopes the wife’s breasts saturate her husband at all times (דְּדִיָּהּ יִרְגָּן).<sup>147</sup> There seems to be an undeniable echo of the Strange Woman’s words here in the parent’s discussion of the sexual pleasures of a wife.

This reading is further strengthened by another similarity between Prov 7:18 and Prov 5:19. Prov 7:18 uses דְּדִים in parallel with אֶהְבִּים, which is most commonly used to refer to the abstract concept of love, especially in the plural, but here seems to reflect a synonymous understanding to what דְּדִים implies here, sexual intercourse. Similarly, in Prov 5:19, דְּדִיָּהּ, “her breasts,” is in parallel with אֶהְבֶּתָּהּ, “her love.” Perhaps, the parent in Prov 5 uses this less common term for breasts in parallel with אֶהְבֶּתָּהּ in order to reflect and counter this statement of the Strange Woman in Prov 7:18, which appears just two chapters later. The parental speaker again subtly reassures the son that they can still experience the enjoyment promised by the Strange Woman, but without the negative consequences that come with adultery. The Strange Woman may promise lovemaking until morning, but so does your wife! This speech emphasizes whose love the son should be enjoying with the repeated use of the third feminine singular pronominal suffix: “May *her* breasts satisfy you at all times. May you be intoxicated by *her* love continually” (Prov 5:19b-c).

If there was any doubt that the parent is drawing a stark comparison between the ideal wife and the Strange Woman, one only needs to look to the last line of this passage: “Why should you be intoxicated, my son, by a Strange Woman (זָרָה)? And embrace the bosom of a woman

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146. HALOT, 1194-1195.

147. Same word but inflected differently. In Prov 7:18 it is a Qal first common plural cohortative form and in Prov 5:19 it is Piel third masculine plural jussive form.

alien to you (נִבְרָיָה)?” (Prov 5:20). The parent has clearly stated this case: the son can get everything from his own wife that he could get from the Strange Woman, but without the negative repercussions. The parent speaks of the marital relationship as both sexually satisfying and productive, and asks with rhetorical force, “What more could you want?” By employing the same tool as the Strange Woman, namely sexual imagery borrowed from the Song of Songs, and at times drawing directly from the Strange Woman’s own speech in Prov 7, Proverbs 5:15-20 presents the legitimate wife as the antithesis of and ideal antidote to the Strange Woman.<sup>148</sup> There should be no need to “drink from another man’s cistern” when one’s own well flows abundantly.

### *The Woman of Power*

Proverbs provides one more depiction of an ideal wife, this time emphasizing the domestic success and economic gain that such a woman would bring to a marriage. As with the wife figure of Prov 5:15-20, this woman is described in terms of how she benefits her husband and their household, this time focusing primarily on economic rather than sexual benefits. Of course, the depiction of this woman comes at a significant place in the canonical book of Proverbs: it is the concluding verses (Prov 31:10-31) that paint this portrait of an ideal wife, who is referred to as a woman of power (אִשְׁת־חַיִל) in the first line of the poem.<sup>149</sup> The ultimate position of this poem along with the repeated depiction of this woman’s powerful and active body, suggest that this

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148. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 262.

149. As discussed above in n. 1, although we cannot know what the process of the compilation of the book of Proverbs was like (e.g. if there was intention in the order, editing for consistency, and so on), it seems likely that there has been at least some intentionality in the arrangement of the units. The fact that the first unit’s (Prov 1-9) prevalence of female figures is mirrored in the closing units (Prov 31:1-9 and 10-31) and not elsewhere indicates this likelihood. Moreover, if Prov 31:10-31 was randomly placed at the end of the book, this placement has nonetheless impacted how communities have read and understood this collection of texts and therefore its ultimate position deserves consideration.

poem could be read as more than just another attempt to convince men to avoid the Strange Woman and marry a loyal and capable wife. I will argue here that not only is this woman depicted as an ideal wife who would bring much value to her husband and household, but also that this figure demonstrates the power and effectiveness of wisdom. By using martial imagery to emphasize her masculine strength and effectiveness and the descriptive poem form to praise her actions rather than her beauty, this passage suggests that wisdom can make even a woman successful and adds a significant final message at the end of a book composed of words about wisdom: wisdom is ultimately about what one does and not what one says.

Most scholars have been concerned with who this woman is. Is she a “real” woman—whether ordinary housewife or exceptional lady of an estate,<sup>150</sup> personified Woman Wisdom,<sup>151</sup> or a complete fiction (as no woman could meet this criteria).<sup>152</sup> This powerful woman, however, just as the other female figures in the frame of Proverbs, is best understood as a pedagogical type-figure,<sup>153</sup> constructed to teach the reader about the power and importance of wisdom.<sup>154</sup>

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150. Crook, “The Marriageable Maiden,” 137-140; Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 90.

151. McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife.” Some scholars suggest that the woman is both an ideal wife and the personification of wisdom. See, for example, Clifford: “We propose that it is a portrait of an ideal wife (of a great house) and, on a metaphorical level, a portrait of Woman Wisdom and what she accomplishes for those who come to her house as disciples and friends” (*Proverbs*, 274). Similarly, Murphy: “But is there more here than a literary inclusion, so that the woman of valor is to be identified with Woman Wisdom? One is left with an eerie feeling of identity: both Woman Wisdom and the woman of valor are into house-building (cf. Prov 9:1; 14:1); both influence the public, and both are associated with fear of the Lord” (*Proverbs*, 248).

152. Hausmann, “Beobachtungen zu Spr 31, 10-31,” 262. Hausmann’s reading is strongly influenced by the opening question of the poem and assumes a strong negative answer: “A powerful woman who can find?”

153. See also Fox, 911-912. Yoder refers to the woman as a “composite figure of real—albeit exceptional—women in the Persian period” (*Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 90).

154. While the parental voice and implied audience of a son is not explicit in this passage, the fact that it features an instructive female figure and deals with one of the parent’s favorite topics—right versus wrong women—makes this context likely. Moreover, the passage that immediately precedes this one (Prov 31:1-9) records advice from a mother to her royal son on how to rule justly, including a plea to avoid bad women (Prov 31:3). While there is nothing beyond proximity to suggest that the poem describing the powerful woman would also be voiced by this maternal voice, it is apparent that this instructional context returns again in the final chapter of Proverbs.

Here this work is done primarily by playing with audience expectations. While many scholars have identified the genre of this poem as one associated with praise, either a hymn or an encomium,<sup>155</sup> in a recent article Vayntrub suggests that there is a more specific praise-genre that is being activated in Prov 31:10-31: the descriptive poem or “totalizing description.”<sup>156</sup> Vayntrub argues that Prov 31:10-31 is a descriptive poem that prioritizes the acquired skill of wisdom over the innate gift of beauty.<sup>157</sup> Unlike the descriptive poems of the Song of Songs, this poem is concerned with a woman’s activities and their benefits for her family and community rather than her pleasing physical appearance:<sup>158</sup>

<sup>10</sup>A woman of power who can find? (אֲשֶׁת-חַיִּיל מִי יִמְצָא)

Her value<sup>159</sup> is greater than jewels<sup>160</sup> (וְרֵחַק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָה)

<sup>11</sup>The heart<sup>161</sup> of her husband trusts in her (בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בַּעֲלָהּ)

and he does not lack gain<sup>162</sup> (וְשָׁלַל לֹא יִחָסֵר).

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155. Al Wolters (“Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn”) first argued that the form of this poem was of the hymnic genre (Gunkel’s technical designation: “*Hymnus*” [449]), specifically “a heroicizing hymn adapted to a wisdom context” (457). Most commentators have followed this designation (e.g., Clifford, 272-273; Murphy, 245). Fox, however, argues that Wolters unnecessarily “stretch[es] the concept of hymn beyond its usual use” in that hymns are “properly” songs in praise of God and his unique deeds (*Proverbs 10-31*, 902). He suggests instead that this poem is better classified as an encomium, which declares praise for a person (*Proverbs 10-31*, 903).

156. Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 47. See too discussion of descriptive poems in chapter 2.

157. Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 51, 54, 58-60.

158. Cf. Murphy, 249; Zakovitch, “A Woman of Valor.” Zakovitch argues that Prov 31:10-31 is composed as a response to the presentation of the woman in the Song: “the poet...sought to replace the paragon of femininity in the Song of Songs with a different female ideal: instead of the clever, active, and bold woman who is not confined by conventions, the physically beautiful woman who is not afraid to wander outside her home and to arouse her lover’s desire, the author of ‘A Woman of Valor’ put forward a smart, active woman of a different sort: a woman who remains inside her home and supervises the household” (412-413). While Zakovitch puts forward a thought-provoking argument, I find his reading of the woman of the Song to be too positive (see previous chapter) and his assessment of literary borrowing to be lacking in sufficient evidence. His thesis does, however, suggest a comparable presentation of female figures in these texts that this dissertation also identifies and investigates.

159. Term is מְכָרָה from root מכר, “to sell.” The noun refers to sale value—a price (Num 20:19) or merchandise (Neh 13:16).

160. פְּנִינִים is literally, “pearls of coral” (*HALOT*, 946).

161. See n. 59 above on heart as the center of intellect in Hebrew.

162. Sometimes perfect and imperfect verb forms are set in parallel not to indicate a temporal

- <sup>12</sup>She does him good and not harm (גַּמְלָתָהּ טוֹב וְלֹא־רָע)  
all the days of her life (כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיהָ).
- <sup>13</sup>She seeks out wool and flax (דָּרְשָׁה צֹמֶר וּפְשֵׁתִים)  
and she works with her eager hands (וַתַּעַשׂ בְּחֶפְזָן כַּפָּיָהּ).
- <sup>14</sup>She is like the ships of merchants (הִי־תָהּ כַּאֲנִיּוֹת סוֹחָר),  
from a distance she brings her food (מִמְרָחֵק תָּבִיא לַחֲמָהּ).
- <sup>15</sup>And she rises while it is still night (וַתִּקָּם בְּעוֹד לַיְלָה)  
and she provides food for her house (וַתִּתֵּן טָרֶף לְבֵיתָהּ)  
and a portion<sup>163</sup> for her servant girls (וַחֶק לְנַעֲרֹתֶיהָ).
- <sup>16</sup>She considers a field and buys it (זָמְמָה שָׂדֶה וַתַּקְחָהּוּ)  
From the fruit of her hands she plants<sup>164</sup> a vineyard (מִפְרֵי כַּפָּיָהּ נָטְעָ כָּרֶם).
- <sup>17</sup>She girds her loins with might (חָגְרָה בְּעוֹז מִתְנַיָּהּ)  
and she strengthens her arms (וַתְּאַמֵּץ זְרַעוֹתֶיהָ).
- <sup>18</sup>She notices that her merchandise is good (טָעַמָּה כִּי־טוֹב סַחְרָהּ),  
(but) she does not extinguish her lamp at night<sup>165</sup> (לֹא־יִכְבֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה נֵרָהּ)
- <sup>19</sup>Her hands she sends to the whorl (יָדֶיהָ שְׁלָחָהּ בְּכִישׁוֹר)  
and her palms hold the spindle (וּכְפָיָהּ תִּמְכּוּ פְלֶדֶד).
- <sup>20</sup>Her palm she opens to the poor (כַּפָּהּ פָּרְשָׁה לְעֹנִי)  
and her hands she sends to the needy (וַיָּדִיָּהּ שְׁלָחָהּ לְאַבְיוֹן).
- <sup>21</sup>She does not fear for her household in the snow (לֹא־תִירָא לְבֵיתָהּ מִשֶּׁלֶג)  
because all her household is dressed in crimson<sup>166</sup> (כִּי כָל־בֵּיתָהּ לְבָשׁ שָׁנִים)
- <sup>22</sup>Coverings<sup>167</sup> she makes for herself (מִרְבָּדִים עָשְׂתָהּ־לָהּ)  
Linen and purple is her clothing (שֵׁשׁ וְאַרְגָּמָן לְבוּשָׁהּ).

sequence but for stylistic reasons. Berlin calls it “a kind of grammatical parallelism” (*Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 36). This poem is describing the ongoing state and activities of the powerful woman so there is no need to slavishly translate perfect verbs as past/completed action and so forth. For more on this kind of grammatical parallelism, see Berlin, *Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, 35-36.

163. While חֶק is usually translated “statute” or “law,” it has been suggested that it refers here to a task the woman gives to her servants. However, as Fox notes, this term is never used for individuals giving orders (*Proverbs 10-31*, 894). Clifford, too, suggests this is referring to the servants’ portion of food due to the parallelism with the previous colon (*Proverbs*, 275). See Prov 30:8.

164. Following the *Qere*: נָטְעָהּ

165. Following the *Qere*: בַּלַּיְלָהּ

166. LXX and Vulgate have δισσᾶς “double” so some suggest reading שָׁנִים, referring to the warmth of the clothing (Clifford, *Proverbs*, 276; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 244). MT, however, makes sense as it is (שָׁנִים). This red dye would have been expensive and therefore refers to how high quality the clothing is, even in winter (Toy, *Proverbs*, 545; Gemser, *Sprüche Salomos*, 84; McKane, *Proverbs*, 668-669; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 896).

167. This term (מִרְבָּדִים) also appears in Prov 7:16 in the speech of the Strange Woman where it refers to the luxurious bed coverings.

- <sup>23</sup>Her husband is known in the gates (נודע בשערים בעלה),  
 where he sits with the elders of the land (בשבתי עם זקני ארץ).
- <sup>24</sup>Linen garments she makes and sells (סדין עשתה ותמכר)  
 and a waistcloth she gives to a tradesman<sup>168</sup> (והגור נתנה לכנעני).
- <sup>25</sup>Might and honor are her clothing (עז והדר לבושה)  
 and she laughs at the last day (ותשחק ליום אחרון).
- <sup>26</sup>Her mouth opens with wisdom (פיה פתחה בחכמה)  
 and an instruction of devotion is upon her tongue (ותורת־חסד על־לשונה).
- <sup>27</sup>She keeps watch over the doings of her household (צופיה הליכות ביתה)  
 and the bread of laziness she never eats (ולחם עצלות לא תאכל).
- <sup>28</sup>Her sons rise up and pronounce her happy (קמו בניה ויאשרוה)  
 and her husband praises her: (בעלה ויהללה).
- <sup>29</sup>“Many women have performed powerfully (רבות בנות עשו חיל)  
 but you surpass them all” (ואת עליית על־כלן).
- <sup>30</sup>Charm is deceptive and beauty is worthless (שקר החן והבל היפי)  
 (but) a woman who fears<sup>169</sup> Yahweh is to be praised (אשה יראת־יהוה היא תתהלל).
- <sup>31</sup>Acclaim<sup>170</sup> her for the fruit of her hands (תנו־לה מפרי ידיה)  
 and let her accomplishments praise her in the gates<sup>171</sup> (ויהללה בשערים). (Prov 31:10-31)

Similar to the descriptive poems of the Song, this poem begins and ends with statements of the woman’s overall value, referred to here as “power” (חיל) in vv. 10 and 29, specifically for her husband (vv. 10-12, 28-29). The concluding statement of value is given in the husband’s own

168. Yoder suggests that this term came to mean “trader” in the Persian period (Zech 14:21; Job 40:30) (*Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 79). Fox, however, asserts that there is insufficient evidence to prove that this could not have been the case earlier (*Proverbs 10-31*, 897).

169. The form יראת in the phrase יראת־יהוה is a construct noun: “fear of Yahweh,” but that does not make sense here. Some commentators suggest that this term is a contracted form of the feminine construct participle (normally: יראת), so “fearer of” (Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 899; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 244).

170. Here I follow several commentators (Wolters, “Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn,” 454; Murphy, *Proverbs*, 245; Clifford, *Proverbs*, 277) in revocalizing MT’s תנו, “give,” from נתן, to תנו, “extol,” from תנה, (see Judges 5:11; 11:40). This reading provides a better parallel to the second half of the verse: “let her accomplishments praise her...” In support of MT, see Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 899; Yoder, *Woman of Substance*, 83n53.

171. LXX makes her husband the object of praise in the gates: και αινεισθω εν πυλαις ο ανηρ αυτης.

words, remarking that the power of her actions surpasses those of all other women (vv. 28-29).<sup>172</sup>

The intervening verses serve as evidence for this *inclusio* of praise, systematically describing all the powerful activities of this woman and the ensuing advantages for her household.

The systematic description in this poem, however, operates differently than the poems of the Song of Songs. There is not, for example, a patient head-to-toe description of the woman's body parts. This poem is an acrostic, where each line begins with the letter of the alphabet in corresponding order, bringing a systematic sense of completeness, even without the order of a head-to-toe description.<sup>173</sup> The woman's body parts, however, still play a fundamental role in the meaning and structure of the poem. As this passage is concerned with the woman's actions and their benefits and not her physical beauty, only the body parts that are responsible for the woman's work are highlighted—especially her hands (vv. 13, 19, 20).<sup>174</sup> Several scholars have noticed a chiasmic structure at the center of the poem<sup>175</sup> that relies on the imagery of the woman's hands:<sup>176</sup>

“<sup>19</sup>**Her hands** (יָדַיָּהּ) she sends to the whorl  
and *her palms* (כַּפָּיָהּ) hold the spindle.

<sup>20</sup>*Her palm* (כַּפָּהּ) she opens to the poor  
and **her hands** (יָדַיָּהּ) she sends to the needy.

The importance of the woman's hands is further strengthened by the fact that in this acrostic poem verses 19 and 20 are each headed by the word for hand and palm, respectively, which

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172. See discussion in chapter 2.

173. See also Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 890.

174. See also Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 52-57.

175. Some argue that vv. 30-31 should be understood as a closing coda. This would put vv. 19-20 directly at the center with 9 verses preceding and following before the concluding two verses. See, for example, Lichtenstein, “Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31,” 208.

176. Most commentators comment on this chiasmus. It was first identified by Dahood (*Ras Shamra Parallels I*, 237n305), but Lichtenstein (“Chiasm and Symmetry in Proverbs 31,” especially 206-207) developed the idea and connected it to understanding the structure of the poem. Most recently, see Vayntrub, who refers to the “mirror structure” in these verses (“Beauty,” 52-57).

happen to be identical to each line's respective letter: *yod* and *kaph*.<sup>177</sup> Thus the woman's hands anchor the center of the poem and are her primary instruments of her praise-worthy deeds.<sup>178</sup>

The penultimate verse clarifies the message of this action-focused descriptive poem: "Charm is deceptive and beauty is worthless (but) a woman who fears<sup>179</sup> Yahweh is to be praised." This woman is praised not for her beauty but for her actions which reflect the wisdom she has attained. The poem's focus on her active hands serve this contrast, especially when compared to the descriptive poems in the Song. In all the detailed descriptions of the woman's various body parts, her hands are never mentioned.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, her body parts are always described as landscapes in which her lover (and describer) may roam.<sup>181</sup> While these landscape visions are vivid and full of life, the woman, although beautiful and vital, is often lost behind the lush details. The passiveness of this woman's beauty stands in stark contrast to the activity and agency of the powerful woman in Prov 31:10-31.

The fear of Yahweh is a concept found throughout the book of Proverbs and is consistently presented as the method of gaining and living according to wisdom.<sup>182</sup> For example, note the synonymous and chiasmic bookend attestations of this phrase at the beginning and end of

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177. Vayntrub, "Beauty," 55. Vayntrub argues that this chiasmus marks a transitional moment in the poem. Whereas verses 13-19 describe the woman's activities that contribute to the wellbeing of her family, verses 20-29 report on the woman's actions that result in establishing and furthering her household's good reputation ("Beauty," 50-51, 56-57).

178. See too Vayntrub who writes: "The mirrored arrangement of these verses fuses the precise focus of the poem's praise—the generative nature of the woman's skill—with the alphabetic acrostic" ("Beauty," 55).

179. See n. 169 above.

180. In the descriptive poem spoken by the woman about the man's body, his hands are mentioned, although the description seems equally passive: "His hands are golden cylinders filled with precious stones" (Song 5:14). Some, however, have suggested that this description of a hard cylinder refers euphemistically to his erect penis (as  $\tau$  sometimes does). See discussion in chapter 2.

181. See discussion of descriptive poems in chapter 2.

182. Prov 1:7, 29; 2:5; 8:13; 9:10; 10:27; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33; 16:6; 19:23; 23:17; cf. 3:7; 14:2; 24:21.

Prov 1-9: “Fear of Yahweh is the start of knowledge” (יִרְאַת יְהוָה רֵאשִׁית דָּעַת) (1:7) and “The beginning of wisdom is fear of Yahweh” (תְּחִלַּת חֲכָמָה יִרְאַת יְהוָה) (9:10). Proverbs teaches that gaining wisdom gives one the power of discernment, which allows the wise person to make good choices in life that result in success and happiness. Fearing Yahweh is the way to gain this wisdom. For Vayntrub this description of the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31 is so effective, in part, because its message is delivered in its form as well as its content. By drawing on the descriptive poem genre where typically a woman’s physical beauty is systematically described, this poet defies the audience’s expectation and prioritizes the acquired skill of wisdom over the innate gift of beauty.<sup>183</sup>

Al Wolters, the first to classify Prov 31:10-31 as a hymn, also contends that the form of the poem (for him, a “heroicizing hymn”) is put to unexpected, or at least atypical, use. He argues that hymns in praise of women in the ancient Near East valorized their physical beauty and erotic charms, while this poem “glorifies the active good works of a woman in the ordinary affairs of family, community and business life—good works which for all their earthliness are rooted in the fear of the Lord.”<sup>184</sup> While this conclusion supports the idea that the form of this poem highlights the exemplary nature of the woman described, it stops short of the conclusion suggested by his own evidence for the *heroic* qualities of this poem in the repeated use of mighty martial imagery.<sup>185</sup>

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183. Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 51, 54, 58-60.

184. Wolters, “Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn,” 456-457. He identifies seven features that he argues demonstrate its heroic hymn classification. See 453-455.

185. He identifies the Song of Deborah (Judges 5), as well as David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:19-27) as other examples of this genre in the Bible. In both cases these songs have a martial context.

A hermeneutic key to understanding this poem lies with the opening words of the poem and title for its remarkable subject: אִשְׁת־חַיִל, which Wolters translates “Valiant Woman” and identifies as a female counterpart to the ubiquitous male title, גִּבּוֹר חַיִל, often applied to a warrior. This term has both martial and wealth connotations and is used to describe strength, power, and competency.<sup>186</sup> The significance of this term is suggested not only in the fact that it is repeated again at the end of the poem (לִשְׂוֹתָיִךְ in v. 29), forming an *inclusio*,<sup>187</sup> but also by the recurring military imagery throughout the poem. For example, the use of vocabulary typically used in situations of physical aggression that are conspicuous in the domestic setting, such as שָׁלַח,

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186. The term חַיִל is used frequently to refer to an army (e.g., Exod 14:4; Num 31:4; Deut 11:4; 1 Sam 17:20; 2 Sam 8:9; 1 Kgs 20:1; Isa 36:2; Jer 34:1; Ezek 17:17; Joel 2:11) and wealth (e.g., Gen 34:29; Num 3:19; Isa 30:6; Jer 15:13; Ezek 26:12; Mic 4:13; Zech 14:14; Ps 49:7), but it is also used to indicate capability (e.g., Gen 47:6; Exod 18:21; 1 Kgs 11:28) or strength/power (e.g., 2 Sam 22:33, 40; Ps 18:33; 59:12). While it is used almost exclusively in male contexts (often bound to male terms, such as אִשְׁת־חַיִל or אִשְׁת־חַיִל or גִּבּוֹר חַיִל usually indicating a warrior or courageous fighter), it appears several times in a domestic context in the Book of Ruth. Boaz, who is called an אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר חַיִל (Ruth 2:1), here best understood as a wealthy and prominent man in the community, identifies Ruth as an אִשְׁת־חַיִל (Ruth 3:11) like the powerful woman in Prov 31:10-31. In the context of the Book of Ruth this also seems to refer to the woman’s industriousness as most of Boaz’s encounters with Ruth have been in his barley and wheat fields where she is working the harvest (Ruth 2:2-17), as well as to Ruth’s loyal commitment to her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:11-12). The expectation would have been for Ruth to return to her own family once her husband died, but she refused and committed herself to her widowed mother-in-law (Ruth 1:8-18). Thus, Ruth’s designation as an אִשְׁת־חַיִל indicates not only her capability and work ethic but also her worthiness, especially as a foreigner in the Israelite community. This is borne out at the end of the story when Boaz claims Ruth as his wife. Their union is blessed by those who witnessed the arrangement in the city gate with wishes for Ruth and Boaz to establish a strong house of Israel, through which their line would continue (Ruth 4:11-12). Ruth is compared to previous matriarchs (Rachel, Leah, and Tamar) who established such houses and Boaz is requested to עָשֶׂה־חַיִל, “do worthily” in establishing this house. Considering the apparent concern with women, houses, and producing quality offspring (understandable as David traces his line through Ruth and Boaz), the term here likely refers to Boaz’s role in this venture, perhaps suggesting he must match the “worthiness” proven by Ruth. This brief examination of חַיִל in the Book of Ruth demonstrates that this term, while certainly carrying connotations of physical strength, capability, and military might, is applied elsewhere in domestic contexts where a woman’s value to her husband and community are at issue.

187. As this does not come at the end of the poem, it is not a perfect *inclusio*. Fox admits it creates “somewhat of a bracketing effect” (*Proverbs 10-31*, 890).

literally, “spoil” or “plunder” (v. 11) and טָרֵף, literally, “prey” (vs. 15).<sup>188</sup> Even more striking is the repeated mention of the woman’s bodily strength. In v. 17 the woman is said to be active in strengthening her body: “She girds her loins with might and she strengthens her arms” (חֲגָרָהּ בְּעֹז (מְתַנֵּיָהּ וְתִאֲמָץ זְרַעוֹתֶיהָ). This verse is full of terms typically used to describe men (or Yahweh) and their physical power. The words עֹז (repeated in v. 25) and תִּאֲמָץ are rarely used for women and are most often reserved for martial contexts.<sup>189</sup> This is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where a woman is said to have “loins” (מְתַנֵּיָהּ), let alone have them girded with might, indicating the powerful state of her body.<sup>190</sup> Even the woman’s hands/palms, which are repeatedly mentioned throughout the poem (vv. 13, 16, 19, 20, 31), demonstrate her physical capability and power.<sup>191</sup> What we have in this poem, then, is a portrait of a powerful woman. Is it sufficient, then, to note only “the active good works of a woman in the *ordinary* affairs of family, community and business life”?<sup>192</sup> How “ordinary” is this woman?<sup>193</sup>

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188. Wolters also points out a few other phrases in the poem that are more common to a martial or aggressive context: In v. 29 עָשׂוּ הָיִל and עָלִיתָ עַל both carry a military connotation. In v. 19 יָדֶיהָ שְׁלָחָה בַּאֲרָמִים a phrase that is commonly used to relate hostile action and yet here it describes the mundane, domestic activity of putting her hand to her spindle (“Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn,” 453-454).

189. See Szlos, “A Portrait of Power,” 99-100. See, e.g., for עֹז: Isa 51:9; 1 Sam 2:10; Pss 89:11; 140:8; for תִּאֲמָץ: Deut 3:28; Isa 41:10; Nah 2:2; Ps 18:18.

190. See Szlos, “A Portrait of Power,” 101-102. The phrase, “to gird one’s loins” is used to indicate preparation for a certain activity or state. See, e.g., 2 Sam 20:8; Gen 37:34. Note too v. 25 where the woman is said to be clothed in might. Vayntrub suggests v. 17 playfully refers to the woman’s procreative ability (“Beauty,” 54-55).

191. See Szlos, “A Portrait of Power,” 101.

192. Wolters, “Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn,” 456-457, emphasis mine.

193. The title אִשְׁת־הַיִּל only appears two other times in the Hebrew Bible: Ruth 3:11 and Prov 12:4.

While many commentators at least note some of this military strength imagery, most seem to give little thought to its significance.<sup>194</sup> Michael Fox, for example, explains “*Hayil* means strength, whether in wealth, physical power, military might, practical competencies, or character... The last two strengths are praised here, but others also come into the portrait... Her primary strength is in character, because even her practical competencies are not simple technical skills but manifestations of her focus, selflessness, and determination.”<sup>195</sup> I question if this poem is primarily about the woman’s “character.” It is explicitly about her actions and the success of those actions. It seems to vastly underestimate the capacity of this woman’s body and mind by saying her greatest strength is that of her character and not her actions and achievements—which is what is precisely praised at the end of the poem, and not her “focus, selflessness, and determination”<sup>196</sup> (v. 31).

Even still, despite the woman’s strength and unusual power, she is depicted as an ideal wife who greatly benefits her husband and household.<sup>197</sup> This figure is never presented as transgressive. Contrary to the Strange Woman, for example, this powerful woman is closely and repeatedly associated with her house and household. She is actively involved in both ensuring the survival of her family (Prov 31:12, 15, 21, 27) and contributing to the household’s economic gain (Prov 31:16, 18, 24). Whether she engages in business or household activities, her tasks

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194. Commentators often seem more concerned with exploring the woman’s economic power, which is another important aspect of this portrait but does not stand in place of her physical power. See, for example, Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman of Substance*.

195. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 891.

196. Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 891.

197. See also Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 905. A few scholars have pointed to the fact that in comparison to the powerful woman, there is very little for the husband to do (McCreesh, “Wisdom as Wife,” 27). Murphy goes even further suggesting the poem views the husband negatively: “But one may wonder if there is a sly subversion or irony here because the role of the male is so inconsequential. He is reduced to hanging out with the crowd at the gate, while she is the effective power in the household” (*Proverbs*, 247). This, however, misses the fact that the whole depiction of the woman is oriented towards her husband and his wellbeing (vv. 11, 12) and reputation (vv. 23, 28, 29, 31).

focus primarily on food (Prov 31:14, 15, 16) or cloth production (Prov 31:13, 19, 21, 22, 24), appropriate for the domestic female domain.<sup>198</sup> The poem emphasizes her effort, effectiveness, and efficiency in everything she does, remarking that her work does not stop with the setting of the sun (Prov 31:18) nor start with its rising (Prov 31:15). She works tirelessly to ensure the success and survival of her household. Most of her work keeps her at home (especially food and clothing production) and even when it takes her out into the world she and her activities are always closely associated with her house. Moreover, while she is said to engage in business transactions (v. 16, 24), she is never explicitly placed outside her home. She is never depicted in the streets and squares, for example, as both the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom are. In contrast, it is only her husband who is said to be in a public space—the city gates (v. 23), where her works should be praised but she will not be found (v. 31).

This woman, then, despite her unusually strong limbs and girded loins, is depicted as an ideal woman. This passage makes the benefits of taking such a wife crystal clear. This woman's value is discussed primarily in economic terms.<sup>199</sup> The opening verse of the poem states that “her value is greater than jewels” (וְרַחֵק מִפְּנִינִים מְכָרָהּ).<sup>200</sup> The word for value here is מְכָר, from the root מכר, “to sell,” and the noun refers to sale value—a price<sup>201</sup> or merchandise.<sup>202</sup> Throughout Prov 31:10-31, the woman's economic value to her husband is made evident, whether by keeping her household well-fed and well-clothed or by participating in merchant activities (vv. 18, 24).

Moreover, her husband benefits not only from his wife's economic successes and capable

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198. Lang, “Women's Work, Household and Property”; Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman of Substance*, 81.

199. See too Yoder, *Wisdom as Woman of Substance*.

200. Note also Prov 3:14-15 where similar language is used for Woman Wisdom. See discussion below.

201. Num 20:19.

202. Neh 13:16.

administration of their household, but also by improving his reputation. Verse 31 concludes the poem by addressing the (masculine plural) audience, instructing them to praise this woman's domestic successes in a public forum (the city gates), which has been described as a male space (v. 23). In other words, the woman's achievements are praised in the domain of her husband, whose reputation will benefit from having such an effective wife.

This poem, therefore, should be understood, in part, as further evidence to the male audience that choosing the right wife is vital to their success and happiness. Along with the parent's instruction in Prov 5:15-20, these two texts articulate many benefits that can come with acquiring the right woman, from offspring and sexual satisfaction to a well run household and economic gain. Moreover, figured as a wise choice that leads to a good life, this woman represents wisdom and demonstrates its value.<sup>203</sup>

And yet, this is not an "ordinary" woman. She is an אִשָּׁת־הַיָּמִן. The poem speaks of the rarity of this figure in both its opening question and comparison to jewels, as well as by the consistent hints of masculine, martial features attributed to her throughout the poem. The audience is meant to understand this figure as quite exceptional and atypical precisely because she is a powerful *woman*. Women are not typically described as physically strong nor do they "gird their loins with might." These martial features are balanced by the woman's domestic location and tasks, but there is a suggestion of her anti-femininity, specifically in her physical power. It would seem, then, that this powerful woman who is a paragon of wise living, not only a

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203. Vayntrub suggests that "one might conclude that Prov 31:10-31 is a praise of the 'happy man' who makes correct choices" ("Beauty," 60-61). She too, however, sees a larger lesson on wisdom at work in this final poem in the book of Proverbs. Vayntrub calls it a "summary statement of Proverbs's epistemology," encouraging the reader to acquire wisdom by diligent study of the book of Proverbs itself (62). I suggest a different way to view this portrait of a powerful woman in light of the collection of instructions that precedes it. See my discussion below.

wise choice for a wife but a demonstration of the success of wisdom well-lived, suggests an important message about the ability of wisdom to transform lives. If even a woman, who is more often than not in a disempowered position, is strengthened beyond expectation by wisdom, then how much more could it do for a man who already has more access to power in the world?<sup>204</sup> The woman's physical prowess, then, represents the transformative power of wisdom.<sup>205</sup>

It is significant, however, that in a portrait that demonstrates the power of wisdom at the end of a book that records spoken instruction about wisdom, this wise woman does not speak.<sup>206</sup>

Although the woman is described as a one who regularly speaks wisdom: “Her mouth opens with wisdom and an instruction of devotion is upon her tongue” (פִּיהָ פְּתָחָהּ בְּחָכְמָה וְתוֹרַת־חֶסֶד)

(עַל־לְשׁוֹנָה) (Prov 31:26),<sup>207</sup> the only recorded speech is that of her husband and sons (Prov

31:28-29). In fact, this woman is depicted as a doer and not a speaker. Her portrait is full of

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204. See too Clark, “The Lady Vanishes,” 29; and discussion in chapter 1.

205. This figure is not Woman Wisdom. While she certainly shares some characteristics and there are some lexical and thematic links between the depictions of these two figures, they cannot be the same woman. Pace McCreesh who argues that Prov 31 “symbolize[s] Wisdom finally settled down with her own” (“Wisdom as Wife,” 30). The woman of power is married and her industrious activity serves only her household. She is never said to be out in the streets calling out to naïve passersby and inviting them to her home. Even while she engages with the outer world, her focus is on the wellbeing of her house and not on those outside of it. (The exception to this may be v. 20 which says she gives to the poor and needy. This is not the same population, however, that Woman Wisdom is concerned with. In the larger context of the poem, this generosity seems to be more a sign of her success as she has plenty to spare rather than a sign of her interest in the outer world.) Therefore, she is not the personification of wisdom, but rather a demonstration of its effects in mundane daily life, which is the domain that the book of Proverbs is most concerned. Several scholars have pointed to the ways the depictions of these two figures overlap. See, for example, Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 908-909; Yoder, *Wisdom as a Woman of Substance*, 91-93.

206. She is unique among all the female figures of Proverbs who are primarily speakers. The one exception is the wife in Prov 5:15-20 who is also silent. Szlos points out the striking contrast between the depiction of the active powerful woman and the speech-oriented Strange Woman: “I think that the very oral depiction of the strange and adulterous woman in chapters 1-9—that is, her being described as having a tongue, lips, mouth, palate, but no arm, hand, or palm—is a striking counterpoint to the woman pictured in Proverbs 31” (“A Portrait of Power,” 103). See too Szlos, “Body Parts as Metaphors.” This comparison could also be drawn between the powerful woman and Woman Wisdom in Prov 1-9. See discussion below.

207. This is another verse emphasized by the acrostic as it begins with פֶּה which is both the word for “mouth” and for the letter *peh*, corresponding to the seventeenth line of the poem. See, too, Vayntrub, “Beauty,” 54.

active verbs.<sup>208</sup> This is particularly striking in light of the descriptive poems of the Song which conveys the woman's beauty primarily through verbless clauses. The only activity taking place is in the imaginary landscape conjured by her static form. The woman of power, in contrast, is an active subject. As discussed above, the poem focuses only on her active body parts that enable her activity: her hands, arms, and mouth. Obviously, much of this work would require speech and, as v. 26 states, she instructs her household in wisdom, an activity that Proverbs sees as a primary parental duty. What is significant here is that this woman is not yet another female figure who verbally disseminates wisdom to the reader, but rather *shows* the reader how to live wisdom. The fact that the book of Proverbs ends with this depiction suggests a subtle, perhaps ironic, twist.<sup>209</sup> At the end of this collection of speeches and much contemplation and anxiety about verbal pedagogical instruction, we find a woman who is not a speaker but a doer. She demonstrates the power of wisdom by her achievements and not by her words.<sup>210</sup>

### ***The Complex Figure of Woman Wisdom***

Woman Wisdom is a unique female figure in Proverbs. While the other women in the frame of Proverbs demonstrate the power of wise choices by indicating specific real life cases, specifically staying faithful to one's own wife, knowing the value of a good wife, and avoiding other men's wives, Woman Wisdom personifies the very concept of wisdom. Not only does she embody it,

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208. Wolters, "Proverbs XXXI 10-31 as Heroic Hymn," 454; Szlos, "A Portrait of Power," 99.

209. Cf. Camp who suggests that the frame of Proverbs (1-9, 31), which is dominated by female figures, "bracket[]" the collection of proverbs providing an "interpretive framework" for the entire work. She argues that this frame helps to "reorient" the book to its new status as religious literature (*Wisdom and the Feminine*, 182). While I do think, as I suggest above, that the portrait of the powerful woman could be read as a reflection on and a possible counterpoint to the book, I would not tie this to a particular understanding of the books' redactional process or a reconstruction of the historical moment in which some aspect of this process occurred. There is insufficient historical evidence with which to make such claims. See discussion in chapter 1.

210. See n. 149 above.

but she is also depicted as an authoritative speaker of wisdom, giving two long speeches (1:22-33; 8:4-36) that bookend the parental instructions of Prov 1-9. Moreover, as wisdom is explicitly connected to Yahweh (Prov 1:7; 9:10), she is associated with the deity, even though she herself does not appear to be divine. As a result, the figure of Woman Wisdom draws on several different female types and experiences in order to adequately convey the concept of wisdom. In fact, she could be seen as a conglomerate of all the female figures of Prov 1-9, 31, embodying in a single figure all the lessons of wise discernment personified by the various women of Proverbs.

It is this figure's potential divinity that has captured the attention of most commentators. Many have argued that Woman Wisdom is, or is based on, an ancient Near Eastern goddess, such as Asherah, Ma'at, Isis, Astarte, or Inanna.<sup>211</sup> While there may be a few correspondences between the portrayal of Woman Wisdom and depictions of some ancient Near Eastern goddesses, there is insufficient evidence of direct borrowing or even strong influence.<sup>212</sup> In comparison to extant sources, Woman Wisdom appears to be a unique figure. This uniqueness has caused many scholars to search for a reason for this personification, often a historical "crisis" that necessitated Woman Wisdom's creation, such as the Babylonian Exile or the Persian period that followed.<sup>213</sup> As is the case with the Strange Woman, these readings are often connected to a particular dating of the book of Proverbs without sufficient evidence for this dating. Moreover, these studies posit that a literary figure such as Woman Wisdom requires an extreme and destabilizing moment in

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211. See, for example, Albright, "The Goddess of Life and Wisdom"; Albright, "Some Canaanite-Phoenician Sources of Hebrew Wisdom"; Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs*; Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*; Kloppenborg, "Isis and Sophia in the Book of Wisdom"; Coogan, "The Goddess Wisdom," 203-209; Clifford, "Woman Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs."

212. See, for example, Fox (*Proverbs 1-9*, 331-344, esp. 334-338) and Sinnott (*The Personification of Wisdom*, 10-52) who both offer summaries of scholarly work on the origins of Woman Wisdom as well as critiques of several approaches and conclusions.

213. See, for example, Mack, *Wisdom and the Hebrew Epic*, 143-150; Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt in Proverbien 1-9*; Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, 53-87; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 274-281.

history and do not consider the fact that she could be a novel literary creation born of the demands of the message and mode of the text.

In what follows, I analyze the figure of Woman Wisdom not as a goddess, but rather as a pedagogical tool employed within parental instruction. My analysis will demonstrate that she is depicted just as all the other female figures of the frame of Proverbs: as a human woman who inhabits the same landscape of streets, public squares, and homes as the Strange Woman, the pleasing wife of Prov 5:15-20, the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31, and even the parental speaker of Prov 1-9. Even while Woman Wisdom shares instructive similarities with all these figures, as well as the parental voice, she remains unique in some ways. For example, I propose that Wisdom's personification relies, in part, on the figure of the *zonah*; a woman who could be found in the busiest places of town, available to passersby, and unattached from a male-led household.

### *Wisdom and the Divine*

While Woman Wisdom is not depicted as a goddess, she is associated with the deity throughout Prov 1-9. Wisdom is said to be intimately connected to (e.g. Prov 1:7; 2:6; 8:22; 9:10) and used by Yahweh (e.g., Prov 3:19-20), although wisdom does not appear as a personified female figure in all of these cases. For example, Prov 3:19-20 states that Yahweh created the world with wisdom: "Yahweh with wisdom founded the earth and he established the skies with understanding. With his knowledge the depths were split and the clouds continually drip dew."<sup>214</sup>

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214. This is not a unique statement. Jeremiah refers to Yahweh twice as the one who established the world with his wisdom and understanding; however, in both cases the verbs are masculine singular participles, placing the emphasis on Yahweh as the enactor of creation (Jer 10:12; 51:15). These statements seem to be answering the question: Who is Yahweh? Yet in Prov 3, the emphasis is on wisdom and understanding and their significant role in creation.

In this passage the wisdom Yahweh uses in his creation work is not personified.<sup>215</sup> The deity uses wisdom and understanding in order to create the world, emphasizing not only wisdom's association with divine creation but also making these concepts, promoted by Proverbs, as part of the bedrock of human existence. Yahweh is also described as a source of wisdom, much like the parent and the figure of wisdom herself: "For Yahweh gives wisdom, from his mouth knowledge and understanding" (Prov 2:6).<sup>216</sup> The concept of wisdom, then, is much more than the figure of Woman Wisdom in Prov 1-9 and its depiction as a divine tool and gift emphasizes its significance and power. The fact that there are passages where wisdom is not personified strengthens our understanding of the female figures of Proverbs 1-9 and 31—including Woman Wisdom—as pedagogical tools that are used to instruct others about this vital but abstract concept.

The only time that Yahweh interacts with personified wisdom is in Prov 8:22-31. This passage, which falls within the second of two long speeches given by Woman Wisdom (8:4-36), describes the beginnings of wisdom and offers insight into the relationship between wisdom, God, and creation. Expressed in first-person from the perspective of Woman Wisdom, this poem recounts how God created<sup>217</sup> wisdom first, before he created the world. In verses 23-29, Woman

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215. The **ב** preposition is attached to both words with an instrumental force (BDB, 89). God founded the earth *by means of* wisdom and established the heavens *by means of* understanding.

216. See too Prov 1:7; 9:10.

217. It is much debated whether Proverbs 8:22 states that God *created* wisdom, or simply *acquired* or *possessed* wisdom. The verb **קנה** means "to acquire" (BDB, 888), however, as Fox points out, that something can be acquired by creating it, thus either "acquire" or "create" are suitable translations for **קנה** in this context (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 279). Moreover, Ugaritic, Phoenician, and Hebrew evidence demonstrate that "to create" is an accurate rendering of **קנה** (Clifford, *Proverbs*, 96). See Gen 14:19, 22; Deut 32:6 and Ps 139:13. Additionally, LXX, Syriac, and Targum traditions all render "to create." Clifford points out that all four verbs that appear here in recounting wisdom's origins use the language of birth—in addition to **קנה**, in Clifford's translations: "formed" (**נסך**) and "brought forth" (**חיל**) (twice) (*Proverbs*, 96). For an argument against **קנה** as "to create," see B. Vawter, "Prov. 8:22: Wisdom and

Wisdom systematically lists the creation events, repeatedly stating that she was created before each of these occurrences and witnessed each one in turn. Woman Wisdom, then, is a primary witness to creation, establishing again her significance to all created life, but especially to humanity. She concludes her description of the creation events by commenting not only on her intimacy with Yahweh but also her delight in humanity: “I was beside him growing up (אָמֵן),<sup>218</sup> I was his intense delight day to day, playing before him always, playing in his inhabited world (תְּבִיל אֶרְצוֹ) and my intense delight was in humankind” (Prov 8:30-31). Wisdom’s primacy and preeminence in creation, which she claims here, provide her with authority for her persuasive speeches in Prov 1 and 8 and further establish wisdom’s association with life over death.

Moreover, Prov 8:30-31 suggest that wisdom is a critical point of contact between God and

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Creation.”

218. A key interpretive issue is how to understand the word אָמֵן. It has often been understood as a noun: “master-workman” or “architect” (BDB, 54). This seems to be supported by the other ancient versions. LXX says, “I was with him, arranging (ἀρμόζουσα).” One can see how this could be expanded to “craftsman” or “architect.” The Vulgate seems to be based on LXX: “I was with him arranging everything (*cum eo eram cuncta componens*)” (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 414). אָמֵן is frequently taken as an Akkadian loanword, *ummanu*, which means “artisan,” although it can be used more broadly (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 286). However, the attested Hebrew cognate of *ummanu* is *’omman*, and therefore would require an emendation.

Furthermore, this understanding of אָמֵן as craftsman carries heavy theological implications, which do not seem to be supported elsewhere in this passage. If wisdom were the architect of creation, she would have necessarily been a very active participant. This does not, however, seem to be the case in the rest of the poem. It only emphasizes wisdom’s presence at creation, and in particular, her primary nature: she was in existence before even the earliest forms of the world (i.e. the depths, תְּהוֹמוֹת) existed. One would expect more description of wisdom’s crafting actions involved in creation if this had been her role. Rather, the focus is on wisdom’s presence and preeminence. Moreover, the last verses emphasize God’s delight in wisdom and wisdom’s delight in creation. This seems to suggest a different reading of אָמֵן.

One could also understand אָמֵן according to the root, אָמַן, which can mean ‘to nurture’ (cf. Num 11:12; 2 Kgs 10:1-5; Isa 49:23; Ruth 4:16). Fox argues that if אָמֵן is parsed as a Qal infinitive absolute serving as an adverbial complement (cf. Gen 30:32; Exod 30:36; Jer 22:19), one can read verse 30a as: “I was with him growing up” (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 287). This reading requires no emendation and fits nicely within the context of Prov 8; it continues to emphasize wisdom’s role as a witness to creation, while explaining her playful nature emphasized in verses 30-31.

humanity. This idea seems to be subtly present in much of Proverbs, which presents a bi-lateral relationship where one can achieve wisdom through “fear of Yahweh”<sup>219</sup> and secure Yahweh’s favor by finding wisdom.<sup>220</sup>

Woman Wisdom’s connections with the divine, however, are not further elaborated in Prov 1-9. While some scholars have sought to depict wisdom as a mediator between God and humanity,<sup>221</sup> Proverbs never explicitly depicts any mediation done by this figure.<sup>222</sup> Woman Wisdom never claims that her instruction was given to her by Yahweh or that she was given a divine command to preach wisdom. It would seem, then, that mediation is not the interpretive key to understanding Proverbs’ use of personified wisdom. Rather, as I suggest above, Woman Wisdom must be read in the same way as all the other female figures of Prov 1-9 and 31, as a pedagogical tool. Focusing on Woman Wisdom’s divine connection, then, risks missing the fact that she is depicted as a human woman who inhabits the same places as the other female figures of Proverbs and exhibits no special divine powers.

### *Woman Wisdom as Authoritative Speaker*

First and foremost, Woman Wisdom is depicted as a speaker. In fact, she speaks more than any other female figure in the Book of Proverbs. She gives two lengthy speeches, nearly bookending Prov 1-9 (1:22-33; 8:4-36), and she is consistently described as a speaker. At the beginning of both speeches, the parent describes her stationing herself in the most public and populated places

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219. See Prov 1:7; 9:10.

220. Prov 8:35: “For he who finds me, finds life, and secures favor from Yahweh.”

221. Some have argued that Woman Wisdom and her speech in Prov 1:22-33, in particular, draw on prophetic imagery (e.g. Blenkinsopp, “The Social Context of the ‘Outsider Woman’ in Proverbs 1-9,” 461-462; Sinnott, *The Personification of Wisdom*, 68-87, esp 68-71; Baumann, *Die Weisheitsgestalt*, 289-291). See too Camp who argues that wisdom is a mediator between human and divine, but sees Woman Wisdom symbolically functioning as a king (*Wisdom and the Feminine*, 291).

222. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 334.

where she “calls,” “cries out,” “gives forth her voice” to the passersby. What follows is her quoted speech, where Wisdom directly addresses the crowds. In Prov 8:6-9, Woman Wisdom insists that her body was constructed to speak authoritative and authentic wisdom:

- <sup>6</sup>Listen for candid things<sup>223</sup> **I will speak** (שָׁמְעוּ כִּי־נִגְיָדִים אֲדַבֵּר)  
 and from the opening of **my lips** right things (וּמִפֶּתַח שִׁפְתַי מִיִּשְׂרָיִם).  
<sup>7</sup>For truth **my mouth** will **utter** (כִּי־אֵמֶת יִהְיֶה חִבִּי)  
 and an abomination of **my lips** is wickedness (וְתוֹעֵבַת שִׁפְתַי רָשָׁע).  
<sup>8</sup>In righteousness are all **the words of my mouth** (בְּצַדִּיק כָּל־אִמְרֵי־פִי)  
 none among them is twisted or crooked (אֵין בָּהֶם נִפְתָּל וְעִקָּשׁ).<sup>224</sup>  
<sup>9</sup>All of them are straightforward for he who discerns (כָּל־ם נִכְחִים לְמִבִּין)  
 and right for those who find knowledge (וְיִשְׂרָיִם לְמִצְאֵי דַעַת). (Prov 8:6-9)

There is a persistent repetition of the activity of Woman Wisdom’s mouth as a source of authentic wise speech. Personified wisdom in her human form speaks by way of her mouth and lips. She is presented as an authoritative and embodied female speaker—one whose mouth is designed for the dissemination of wisdom.

Woman Wisdom’s authority comes not only from her connections with the divine and her self-proclaimed designation as truth-teller and straight-talker, but also from her unstated connection to the other primary voice of wisdom in Prov 1-9: the parent. There are frequent

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223. Following Fox who understands נִגְיָדִים as “honest or forthright things, things that are directly before (*neged*) a person.” He suggests that the original vocalization was נִגְיָדִים, the plural of נִגְיָד (*Proverbs 1-9*, 269. See too Grollenberg, “A Propos de Prov., VII 6,” 41). This rendering fits the context of the passage much better than taking this term to be the plural of נִגְיָד, “prince” and rendering “princely things” as most commentators as well as LXX: *σεμνά*, “august things.” Syriac, however, has *šryrt* “truth,” supporting Fox’s reading (*Proverbs 1-9*, 269).

224. The roots of פתל and עקש are paired in 2 Sam 22:27 (= Ps 18:27). This imagery echoes what has already been seen repeatedly with the path metaphors for wisdom. While having the guidance of wisdom is likened to straight, well-lit paths, without it one must contend with dark, twisted paths, full of hidden dangers. (See too Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 269-270). Here the same imagery is applied to Woman Wisdom’s words (likely implicitly countering the dark and perverted words of the Strange Woman).

echoes between the parent's wisdom instruction and Wisdom's own speeches. For example, in

Prov 3:14-17 the parent explains the great value of wisdom:

<sup>14</sup>For her profit is better than silver (כֶּסֶף)  
and her yield than gold (וּמַחְרוֹץ תְּבוּאָתָהּ).

<sup>15</sup>She is more precious than jewels (פְּנִינִים)<sup>225</sup>  
and all your desirable things cannot compare with her (וְכָל־חֲפָצֶיךָ לֹא  
(יִשְׁוּוּ־בָּהּ).

<sup>16</sup>Long life is in her right hand  
and in her left hand are wealth and honor (עֲשֶׂר וְכְבוֹד).<sup>226</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Her ways are favorable ways (דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי־נַעַם),  
and all her paths are peace (וְכָל־נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם). (Prov 3:14-17)

In Wisdom's own speech she expresses a similar sentiment, relying on much of the same vocabulary:

<sup>10</sup>Take my instruction and not silver (כֶּסֶף)  
and knowledge rather than choice gold (חָרוֹץ נְבָחָר).

<sup>11</sup>For wisdom is better than jewels (פְּנִינִים)  
and all desirable things cannot compare with it (וְכָל־חֲפָצִים לֹא יִשְׁוּוּ־בָּהּ).

(Prov 8:10-11)

And a few verses later:

<sup>18</sup>Wealth and honor (עֲשֶׂר־וְכְבוֹד) are with me  
splendid riches and righteousness.

<sup>19</sup>My fruit is better than gold (חָרוֹץ), even find gold  
and my yield than choice silver (וּתְבוּאָתִי מִכֶּסֶף נְבָחָר).

<sup>20</sup>On the way of righteousness I walk (בְּאֶרְח־צְדָקָה אֶהְלֵךְ),<sup>227</sup>  
in the middle of paths of justice (נְתִיבוֹת מִשְׁפָּט). (Prov 8:18-20)

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225. Following the Qere: מְפִינִים. This term also appears in Prov 31:10. See discussion above.

226. These two terms (עֲשֶׂר וְכְבוֹד) are paired together elsewhere: 1 Kgs 3:13; Qoh 6:2; 2 Chr 1:11-12; Esth 1:4.

227. As mentioned above, there are several terms used to express ways and paths in Prov 1-9. The term here (אֶרְח) appears in parallel with דְּרָךְ in several places: Prov 2:8, 13, 20; 3:6; 4:14; 9:15.

Wisdom speaks just as the parent does about the benefits and attributes of wisdom. This is not surprising as Woman Wisdom is the personification of this attribute with which the book of Proverbs (and its parental voice) is so concerned. There are not, therefore, competing concepts of wisdom preserved in the instructions of the parent and Woman Wisdom. In fact, there could be an overlap between these figures, Woman Wisdom drawing on the image of a mother who instructs her son.<sup>228</sup> In Prov 8:32 Wisdom even addresses her audience as “sons” just as the parent so often does throughout Prov 1-9.<sup>229</sup> This overlap between personified Wisdom and the parental voice only further bolsters the sense of authority and accuracy in the parent’s own instruction.

### *Woman Wisdom as Cherished Companion*

The parent’s depiction of Woman Wisdom in Prov 1-9 not only overlaps with Woman Wisdom’s own self-description, but also shares imagery with the parent’s portrait of the pleasing wife in Prov 5:15-20, although less in terms of her erotic presentation than in her portrayal as both a cherished asset and a source of life.<sup>230</sup> The ideal wife is presented as a benefit of leading a wise life. The parent emphasizes that Wisdom itself should be valued just as much, if not more so,

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228. The parental speaker of Prov 1-9 refers to the instruction of both mother and father. See discussion below.

229. This is also suggestive of King Lemuel’s mother who provides wise advice to her royal son in Prov 31:1-9. See discussion below.

230. A few scholars have discussed the “erotic language” that is used to depict Woman Wisdom (e.g. Murphy, “Wisdom and Eros in Proverbs 1-9,” 601-602; Clifford, “Woman Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs,” 61). The evidence for this mostly consists of resonances with the Song of Songs. For example, there is language of seeking (שׁוּחַ) and finding (מִצָּא) Wisdom (Prov 3:13; 8:17, 35) as well as a good wife (Prov 18:22; 31:10), just as the woman attempts to seek (בִּקֵּשׁ) and find (מִצָּא) her beloved in the Song of Songs (3:1; 5:6). Similarly, the son is encouraged to love (אָהַב) and embrace (חָבַק) Wisdom (Prov 4:6-8; 8:17) and call her “my sister” (Prov 7:4), all language also found in the Song. While these correspondences perhaps suggest some resonance with the love lyrics of the Song, they are subtle and are far from approaching the erotic imagery in Prov 5:15-20 and 7:10-20, which clearly do draw on love lyrics (see my discussion above). In a text that seems to have little reluctance in using sexual images and language, these linguistic parallels are insufficient for making an argument about the erotic depiction of Woman Wisdom.

than the benefits it inspires in one’s life. The way the parent describes honoring this valuable female asset is very similar to how one is told to cherish a wife. As a result, there is often a bleeding of imagery—between the industrious wife one chooses under the influence of wisdom and the female form of Wisdom herself—both of which should be highly valued. This is best seen in Prov 4:6-9 where the parent describes the relationship between man and Wisdom not as erotic but respectful and beneficial:

<sup>6</sup>Do not forsake her so that she will keep you (אַל־תַּעֲזֹבָהּ וְתִשְׁמְרֶךָ).

Love her so that she will guard you (אַהֲבֶהּ וְתִצְרְדֶךָ).

<sup>7</sup>The beginning of wisdom<sup>231</sup> is: acquire<sup>232</sup> wisdom! (רֵאשִׁית חֵכְמָה קִנְיָה חֵכְמָה)

And with all your acquisitions, acquire discernment (וּבְכָל־קִנְיֵיךָ קִנְיָה

בִּינָה).<sup>233</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Cherish her so that she will exalt you (סִלְסֵלָהּ וְתָרוּמְמָךָ).

She will honor you when you embrace her (תִּכְבְּדֶךָ כִּי תִחַבְּקֶנָּה).

<sup>9</sup>She will place on your head a wreath of favor (תִּתֵּן לְרֵאשִׁיךָ לְוִיַּת־חַן);

a crown of glory she will bestow upon you (עֲטֹרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת תִּמְגֵּן). (Prov

4:6-9)

This passage describes the acquiring and maintaining of wisdom as a mutual relationship of love and respect. The son is instructed to value and embrace her in order that she will honor and exalt him. A “wreath of favor” appears in Prov 1:9 as well where it is paired with a pendant worn on the neck. In Prov 1:9 these images serve as a metaphor for valuable parental instruction. It also

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231. This phrase is reminiscent of the sentiment that bookends the Prov 1-9 prologue: “fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge.” In fact, the phrase here רֵאשִׁית חֵכְמָה, “beginning of wisdom,” is a mix of the two phrases. In 1:7 it is the רֵאשִׁית דַּעַת, “beginning of knowledge” and in 9:10 it is תְּחִלַּת חֵכְמָה, “the start of wisdom.”

232. This verb is marked as masculine singular imperative indicating again our addressee: the son. While this imperative is a bit awkward as the predicate of this sentence, it is likely that the parent is quoting a, perhaps, well-known saying about how to begin one’s quest to wisdom. See too Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 175.

233. Verse 7 is missing from LXX. While some commentators choose to delete it (e.g., Clifford, *Proverbs*, 60), especially as it can be seen as interrupting this list of imperatives, this seems unnecessary as it fits well with the topic at hand. See too Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 175.

indicates that wisdom will have visible effects—the son’s success will be visually marked. In Prov 4:9, this imagery is used similarly, but wisdom is not merely the crown on one’s head, she is also the one who bestows it.

Despite the fact that Woman Wisdom is depicted here as a valuable wife, a woman that one must love, cherish, and embrace, Wisdom takes the more active role in the relationship.<sup>234</sup> It is Woman Wisdom who will watch over and protect her companion and it is she who will bestow a beautiful crown on her acolyte’s head. Even though there is a mutuality described in the relationship between man and Wisdom, the focus is on the benefits for the man. All the actions expected of the man—not forsaking, loving, cherishing, and embracing—can all be equated with him accepting and valuing Wisdom. In exchange Woman Wisdom keeps, guards, honors, exalts, and bestows markers of success, resulting in protection and tangible benefits for the man. He takes no responsibility for her and promises no equivalent actions on her behalf in return.<sup>235</sup>

In Prov 5:15-20 the parent depicts the marital relationship as both sexually satisfying and productive: a wife as a source of life. While Woman Wisdom is never explicitly portrayed with the same erotic language, she is consistently associated with life, from her presence at creation to much of the imagery expressing value and success. For example, in Prov 3:16-18 Woman Wisdom is depicted as a source of life as well as honor and wealth:

<sup>16</sup>Long life is in her right hand (אֶרֶךְ יָמִים בְּיְמִינָהּ)  
and in her left hand are wealth and honor (בְּשֵׁמֶאוֹלָהּ עֶשֶׂר וְכִבּוֹד).

<sup>17</sup>Her ways are favorable ways (דְּרָכֶיהָ דְרָכֵי-נֵעַם),  
and all her paths are peace (וְכָל-נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלוֹם).

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234. See too Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 174.

235. This is similar to the portrait of the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31, where the industrious activity of the woman and the many benefits for her (seemingly passive) husband were emphasized. See discussion above.

<sup>18</sup>She is a tree of life to those who grasp her (עֵץ־חַיִּים הִיא לַמְחַזְקִים בָּהּ)  
and those who take hold of her are called blessed (וְתִמְכְּיָהּ מְאֻשָּׁר).

Not only is Woman Wisdom said to hold long life in her hand, but she is also depicted as a tree of life.<sup>236</sup> This image resonates with the metaphors of the Song of Songs, where the woman is frequently depicted as a landscape, always emphasizing her body as a valuable life-source. In fact, in Song 7:8-9 the woman's lover likens her body to a palm tree and expresses his desire to climb it and grasp its branches (אֶעֱלֶה בְּתֶמֶר אֲחֶזָּה בְּסִנְסֶנֶיּוֹ).<sup>237</sup> Here in Prov 3:18 there is not the same erotic tone but there does seem to be a possible allusion to the image in the Song, especially in the idea that men should “grasp” (חזק) this tree of life. Those who do take hold of this tree are “called blessed” (מְאֻשָּׁר), a concept associated with both portraits of ideal wives in Proverbs. This is the same term used by the sons of the powerful woman to praise her (וַיֹּאשְׁרוּהָ) (Prov 31:28). And Prov 5:17-19 have the form of a parental benediction of a marriage union, explicitly wishing that the son's “fountain” be blessed (יְהִי־מְקוֹרֶךָ בְּרוּךְ) (5:18). Thus, the parent depicts Woman Wisdom in similar terms as the ideal wife figures in Prov 5 and 31, emphasizing her value for all those who cherish her. She brings blessing and, again, is identified as a source of life, in direct contrast to the Strange Woman as well as Woman Folly (Prov 9:13-18).

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236. For a brief summary of the mythological concept of tree of life in the ancient Near East, see Fox, who concludes that “in Proverbs, the tree of life is devoid of mythological significance and serves only as a figure for vitality and healing” (158-159, here at 159). For a more thorough look at this topic, see Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 16-59.

237. See chapter 2 for full discussion of this passage in the Song of Songs. See too n. 72 above for discussion of Proverbs' literary dependence on the Song of Songs. Andruska also discusses parallels between Woman Wisdom and the woman in the Song. See *Wise and Foolish Love*, 131-136.

## *Woman Wisdom versus The Strange Woman*

While these similarities with the ideal wife figures emphasize Woman Wisdom's value and assets, she is not depicted as a wife. In Prov 9:1-6 Wisdom builds her own house and runs it herself. Despite being portrayed as valuable to men, she has no husband; and while she has her own home, she is rarely in it.<sup>238</sup> Three times (1:20-21; 8:1-3; 9:3) Woman Wisdom is described as going to the busiest places in town and calling out to passersby. Twice she gives lengthy speeches (Prov 1:22-33 and 8:4-36), encouraging all to listen to her and severely admonishing those who will not heed her words. Her forthright behavior in the public arena would likely be unthinkable for a proper married woman, whose role is in the home and not in the public streets, the place where it is repeatedly emphasized that Woman Wisdom does her work:

<sup>20</sup>Wisdom<sup>239</sup> cries aloud in the streets (חֲכָמוֹת בַּחוּץ תִּרְנֶנָּה),  
in the squares she gives forth her voice (בְּרַחֲבוֹת תִּתֵּן קוֹלָהּ).

<sup>21</sup>At the intersection<sup>240</sup> of busy roads<sup>241</sup> she calls (בְּרֹאשׁ הַמַּיּוֹת תִּקְרָא),  
at the entrance of the gates in the city (בְּפִתְחֵי שַׁעֲרִים בְּעִיר),  
she speaks her speech (אֲמַרְיָהּ תֹאמֶר). (Prov 1:20-21)

<sup>1</sup>Does wisdom not call (הֲלֹא־חֲכָמָה תִּקְרָא)  
and discernment not give forth her voice (וּתְבוּנָה תִּתֵּן קוֹלָהּ)?

<sup>2</sup>At the head of the heights, beside the road (בְּרֹאשׁ־שִׁמְרוֹמִים עַל־יַד־דָּרֶךְ),<sup>242</sup>

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238. See discussion below.

239. The plural form, חֲכָמוֹת, appears here but with a singular verb (as in 9:1), thus clearly indicating the individual figure of personified wisdom. Even still, the form has puzzled commentators. See Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 96-97, for a summary of positions.

240. Literally, "at the head." Fox clarifies, "the point at the city gate from which the roads fan out into the city" (Proverbs 1-9, 97).

241. הַמַּיּוֹת is a noun form from הָמָה, "to be bustling or noisy." It refers elliptically to the busy streets. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 97. Note that this term is also used to describe the Strange Woman in Prov 7:11.

242. See too Prov 9:3 (and discussion below).

between paths,<sup>243</sup> she stations herself (בֵּית נְתִיבוֹת נִצְבָּה).

<sup>3</sup>At the hand of the gates, at the mouth of town (לְיַד־שַׁעְרִים לְפִי־קִרְתָּ),  
(at) the entrance of doorways, she cries out (מְבוֹא פְתָחִים תִּרְנֶה). (Prov  
8:1-3)

Woman Wisdom is regularly found in the most bustling of places: in the city streets and squares, at the entrance to the city gates, at the intersections of roads, in the high places of town, from where she can be seen and heard. In this behavior, then, Woman Wisdom can be compared to the Strange Woman who is also said to never be at home (Prov 7:11-12).<sup>244</sup>

This comparison, it seems, is intentional as there is a subtle message about wisdom here.<sup>245</sup> First it activates the spatial metaphor so often associated in Proverbs with life choices. In the terrain of life, there are good paths and bad paths. Gaining wisdom not only helps one discern good from bad, but it also improves the terrain (perhaps, in that, good and bad choices become so obvious to the son that discernment is no longer a challenge). The fact that both Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman can be found in the same public spaces, both potentially trying to attract a young man's attention, is an illustration of this challenge. How can one discern which woman holds life and which woman holds death? As this chapter discusses at length, the parental voice of Proverbs has a lot to say about this, but Woman Wisdom, more than the other figures, seems to most embody the subtleties of this challenge.

While both Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman can be found in the streets, there is a difference in their depictions. In the case of Woman Wisdom it is the roads that are described as boisterous (הַמְיֹזֹת) (1:21), rather than the woman in them (הַמְיָהָהּ) (7:11). Woman Wisdom is depicted as crying out in the midst of the hustle and bustle of city streets, whereas the Strange

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243. בֵּית (literally, “house”) is equivalent to Aramaic for “between” (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 266). For other examples of this usage in Hebrew, see Job 8:17; Ezek 41:9; 2 Kgs 11:15.

244. See Aletti, “Seduction et Parole.”

245. See discussion above in n. 1 above on understanding Prov 1-9 as a unit.

Woman merely converses with a young man on the road in the quiet of night (7:6-27). This illuminates the nature of each woman's message in life. The wise words of Woman Wisdom will have to be heard over the roar of day to day activities, while the seduction of the Strange Woman will ring out loud and clear, as if one were alone on a deserted street in the dead of night.

On the other hand, this portrayal of Woman Wisdom calling out in the streets emphasizes that her message is not hidden<sup>246</sup>—it is right out in the open, accessible to anyone who will simply stop and listen. Wisdom's message is not available to just one person at a time, but to everyone. In 8:4, she calls, "To you, O men, I call and my voice to humankind."<sup>247</sup> Otherwise, she specifically addresses those who are naïve (פְּתָאִים) and lacking in wisdom (1:22; 8:5; 9:4), which are the same people addressed by Woman Folly (9:16) and the Strange Woman (7:7). It seems that these are the men who are most at risk to falling prey to bad choices (as vividly illustrated in 7:6-27) and therefore those most in need in of Wisdom's instruction.

Another illuminating difference between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman is in their speech. The fact that the young man can encounter the words of Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman in the same venue (the public streets) makes this a natural comparison and carries another important lesson about wisdom. The parent warns the son that the Strange Woman's "lips drip honey" when in fact she will bring him only bitterness (5:3-4). Wisdom is depicted as the antidote to the Strange Woman's slippery and deceptively sweet words (6:23-24). In fact, the sweetness of the Strange Woman's words are only made sweeter and more appealing in comparison to the angry threats found in much of Woman Wisdom's speech. Woman Wisdom's words do not drip with honey. In fact, she is more likely to admonish than seduce. Her

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246. In contrast to the wisdom poem in Job 28, which emphasizes the hidden quality of wisdom.

247. Literally, "sons of man" (בְּנֵי אָדָם).

first speech in Prov 1:22-33 is all admonishment and threats. She is angry because she is not getting any attention from her intended audience. She rants:

<sup>24</sup>Because I have called but you refused (יַעַן קָרָאתִי וְתִמְאַנּוּ)  
I have stretched out my hand,<sup>248</sup> but no one listened (וְנִטִּיתִי יָדַי וְאִין מְקָשִׁיב);  
<sup>25</sup>and you have been unconcerned with<sup>249</sup> all of my counsel (וְתִפְרְעוּ כָּל-עֲצָתִי)  
and my reproach you have not wanted (וְתוֹכְחָתִי לֹא אָבִיתֶם),  
<sup>26</sup>I will laugh at your disaster (גַּם-אֲנִי בְּאִדְכֶם אֶשְׁחַק)  
I will mock when your dread comes.” (אֶלְעַג בָּבֵא פְחַדְכֶם) (Prov 1:24-26)

This is not the language of a seductive, enticing woman. She is depicted, instead, as an angry, even wrathful figure, someone that young men should fear and respect and not one they should want to take to bed.<sup>250</sup> In direct contrast to the Strange Woman who says deceptively appealing and sexy things, Woman Wisdom speaks truth with authority. While both these women have the same primary tool (speech) to persuade the same audience (ignorant men), Woman Wisdom is presented as powerful and authentic, especially in comparison to the Strange Woman’s imitation and falsehoods.

### *Woman Wisdom as Zonah*

As mentioned above, the comparison between Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman brings one unexpected similarity to light that does not seem to match Proverbs’ dichotomous perspective on women and wisdom—the fact that both Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman

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248. This is a threatening gesture (e.g. Josh 8:19). Fox likens it to shaking a fist at someone (*Proverbs 1-9*, 100).

249. *HALOT*, 970.

250. As discussed above (see n. 221), some have suggested that Woman Wisdom could be read as a prophetic figure, especially in the context of her angry speech in Prov 1:22-33. Fox, however, points out that Woman Wisdom’s promise to ignore those who have ignored her when tragedy strikes them is more reminiscent of Yahweh than his prophets (e.g., Mic 3:4; Isa 1:15; Jer 11:11; Hos 5:6) (*Proverbs 1-9*, 333).

can be found out in the public streets. The ideal wife figures are both closely associated with their homes, while what makes the Strange Woman so detestable, at least in part, is the fact that she has a home and a husband but disrespects those boundaries. Woman Wisdom, on the other hand, is also associated with a well-established and nourishing home but one in which she is the head (Prov 9:1-6). She is depicted as independent of male control, but still a valuable asset to all men. She can be found in public spaces, making herself accessible to all. As a result, Proverbs' own teaching about the importance of female sexual fidelity prohibits its portrayal of Woman Wisdom from being limited only to the role of valuable wife. The only wives that are associated with public spaces are deemed immoral and presented in Proverbs as adulterers. It would seem, therefore, that the figure of Woman Wisdom is, at least in part, drawing on the image of a *zonah*, an unattached woman, often translated "prostitute."

Proverbs 1-9 brings up *zonah* only twice, both instances in the context of the Strange Woman and neither with a clear message about this type of woman.<sup>251</sup> Proverbs 6:26 says, "For the price of a *zonah* comes to a loaf of bread, but the wife of (another) man will hunt your life." This verse does not condemn the *zonah*, but rather presents her as the better alternative to another man's wife if one is looking outside of marriage for sexual satisfaction (which Proverbs does not recommend). Later, in Prov 7:10, the parent describes the Strange Woman confronting the young man on the street in a "garment of a *zonah* (שֵׁיט זֹנָה)." The parental speaker depicts the Strange Woman in Prov 7:6-27 as a married woman who is disrespectful of social boundaries. She is described by the speaker as "raucous and rebellious" and one whose "feet never stay at home" (Prov 7:11). It seems, therefore, that mentioning a garment of a *zonah* is

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251. Also mentioned in Prov 23:27; 29:3. While many scholars compare the Strange Woman to a *zonah* (e.g. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 112-119), I submit that this is a much more helpful comparison for Woman Wisdom.

meant to reflect a negative judgment of the woman and not imply that she is a *zonah*. It is unclear whether the rest of her description is inspired by the image of a *zonah*.<sup>252</sup> This negative evaluation is based precisely on the fact that this woman is not a prostitute but a married woman. Despite the fact that both of these passages compare the adulterous woman and the *zonah*, they are not equated.

We have very little information about the *zonah* in ancient Israel. While *zonah* is often translated as “prostitute” or “harlot,” this term seems to be used more broadly than just to describe sex workers.<sup>253</sup> The *zonah* seems to be an accepted, although marginalized member of society,<sup>254</sup> while the adulterous woman holds an accepted position as a married woman, but actually poses a dangerous threat to societal order and family lines.

These two women are likely associated because they are both deviating from the behavior of proper women. Ancient Israelite society dictated that a woman should pass from the house of her father to the house of her husband and the transition should be quick and without

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252. Bird, “Prostitution in the Social World,” 45.

253. While the noun זֹנָה always refers to a female figure and often seems to be best understood as a title or professional designation for a prostitute, a woman who has sex in exchange for money. Even when this term is employed metaphorically it still refers to a female entity. In the prophets this is often a personified female figure, such as a city (Isa 1:21) or nation (Ezk 16; 23). Moreover, these figurative uses still play on the image of a “professional” prostitute, often emphasizing payment for services. See Ezk 16:31, 33, 41; Mic 1:7. It is now apparent that the noun and verb form must carry different connotations. The verb, זָנָה, has a much broader meaning than its noun. It seems to include the work of the prostitute but is by no means exclusive to it (Bird, “To Play the Harlot,” 221-225). The verb זָנָה can refer to “any sexual relationship of a woman outside the marriage bond or without a formal covenant relationship” (Erlandsson, “זָנָה,” TDOT 4: 100). This includes a married woman having sex with any man who is not her husband, an unmarried woman still in her father’s house (and therefore under his control) having sex with any man, and, as is the case in Gen 38, a levirate-obligated widow having sex with any man to whom she is not betrothed (Bird, “To Play the Harlot,” 222).

254. There are a number of more neutral presentations of prostitutes: Rahab (Josh 2:1; 6:17-22), Samson and the prostitute in Gaza (Judges 16:1), and the two quarreling prostitutes of 1 Kings 3:16-28. See also discussion of Gen 38 below.

interference.<sup>255</sup> A woman should always be under the protection of a man and his house, and sexually available only to her husband. If a woman engages in premarital sex or has a relationship with a man other than her husband, then she dishonors her father/male kin and violates her husband's sexual rights, as well as his rights of ownership.<sup>256</sup> Therefore, the adulterous wife directly offends the normative gender system; the *zonah* merely stands outside of it. The *zonah* has no husband nor, perhaps, male kin. As a result, she has no sexual obligations to any one man and does not dishonor or violate any man by her sexual activity.<sup>257</sup> As Phyllis Bird writes, "Strictly speaking, her activity is not illicit—and neither is her role. Despite frequent assumptions to the contrary there is no evidence that prostitution was ever outlawed in ancient Israel or that the prostitute was ever punished simply for her activity as a prostitute."<sup>258</sup>

The story of Tamar and Judah in Gen 38 sheds some light on this distinction between the sexual activity of an unattached *zonah* and a woman attached to a household. Tamar had married and outlived Judah's two eldest sons and still had no offspring (Gen 38:6-10). She remained in Judah's household, waiting for his youngest son to come of age and marry her, as prescribed by levirate custom (Gen 38:11). When Judah neglects this duty, Tamar takes off her widow's clothes and wraps herself in a veil<sup>259</sup> and stations herself by the entrance of Enaim (בְּפֶתַח עֵינַיִם)<sup>260</sup> by which Judah would pass on his way to Timnah (Gen 38:14). When Judah passes by he understands her to be a *zonah*, not recognizing her when covered by a veil (Gen 38:15). He has

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255. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 113.

256. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World," 42.

257. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World," 42.

258. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World," 42. Bird identifies the prostitute in ancient Israel as a "legal outlaw."

259. It is unclear whether a veil marked one as a prostitute or if it was just a way to hide her identity.

260. *HALOT* explains this term as either a location related to עֵינַיִם (Josh 15:34) or "a viewpoint from which two routes can be seen" (820). See Emerton, "Some Problems," 341-343.

sex with her and she conceives (Gen 38:18). Later, when he discovers that his unmarried daughter-in-law is pregnant by illicit sexual activity (לְזִנְיִים),<sup>261</sup> Judah demands that she be publicly burned until he realizes his own role in the pregnancy (Gen 38:24). When Judah encounters a woman that he thinks is a *zonah* he engages with her without shame and their recorded discourse is fair and economical. They work out the method of payment and Judah accepts her request to hold his signet, cord, and staff as collateral until he makes his promised payment of a kid goat from his flock (Gen 38:16-18). When Judah discovers, however, that his own daughter-in-law engaged in illicit sexual activity, he demands her death (Gen 38:24). These contrasting evaluations of the same woman who engages in the same behavior seem to be due only to the woman's status as belonging to a household or not. It would seem, then, that the *zonah* is not held to the same standards as other "legitimate" women.

The use of the *zonah* image in Prov 1-9 is somewhat limited. Woman Wisdom is not offering her body to the passersby, nor is the promise of sexual activity suggested in her message. Her depiction, however, as a woman regularly seen outside her home in the busiest parts of town and accessible to any and all men, is suggestive of this likely common urban figure.<sup>262</sup> It is possible that this suggestive imagery for Woman Wisdom and her accessibility is intentional, raising a knowing eyebrow or two, perhaps keeping the implied audience of young men intrigued by aligning Woman Wisdom with the sexually available *zonah*. However, in a book that does not shy away from erotic depictions of women (e.g., 5:15-20; 7:26-27), it would seem that if the figure of Woman Wisdom was supposed to have a titillating effect on her

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261. See n. 253 above.

262. Bird, "Prostitution in the Social World," 47.

audience, she would have been portrayed in a more sexual light.<sup>263</sup> More likely, the *zonah* figure was the only available female figure who was a woman associated with public spaces and that could be accessible to all men.

Thus, the figure of Woman Wisdom draws on several female roles, all of which exist in relation to (and, sometimes, in service to) men: mother, wife, *zonah*. What is consistent throughout her depictions is her association with life, value, and success for those who accept her and her guidance. This point is made subtly in comparing her depictions to those of the Strange Woman: even if one has to seek out her voice above the roar of the busy streets and her words are not as seductive as the Strange Woman's, one's efforts will be rewarded. The parent makes this comparison between choosing wisdom over folly, life over death, starkly in the final verses of Prov 1-9. Here the same metaphors of female bodies, houses, and streets are all drawn on in order to instruct the son one last time on this vital lesson.

### *House of Life vs. House of Death: Portraits of Wisdom and Folly*

In the final chapter of Prov 1-9, where the voice of parental instruction dominates, the parent juxtaposes contrasting portraits of Woman Wisdom and her opposite, Woman Folly in Prov 9:1-6 and 9:13-18.<sup>264</sup> Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly are personifications of the abstract concepts of wisdom and folly. While Woman Wisdom appears throughout Prov 1-9, Woman Folly appears

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263. Pace Tikva Frymer-Kensky: "Desire for learning is a lust: it is a compelling attraction that can absorb a person deeply, that can consume a person's life and desires, and can (in our language) supplant or suppress the libido. The male scholars of antiquity expressed the magnetism of this drive by representing wisdom as a female" (*In the Wake*, 181).

264. Most exegetes argue that the intervening verses are later additions inserted between these two contrasting portraits. The exception is v. 11, which commentators suggest was the original end to the passage describing Woman Wisdom (following v. 6), which was displaced when vv. 7-10, 12 were added. See note below on v. 11. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 102-103; Fox, *Proverbs*, 1-9, 299.

only here in Prov 9:13-18 where she is depicted as the obvious antithesis of Woman Wisdom.<sup>265</sup>

As this passage closes the opening section of Proverbs where female figures play such a prominent role, these concluding portraits emphasize the parental message about wisdom and folly while drawing on much of the female imagery used throughout Prov 1-9. Most notably, the same spatial metaphor appears, associating the “good” female figure with private space and the path of life and the “bad” female figure with public spaces and death.

Much like the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31, Woman Wisdom is portrayed as a hardworking and efficient guardian of her household:

<sup>1</sup>Wisdom<sup>266</sup> has built her house (חִכְמוֹת בְּנִתָּה בֵּיתָה)<sup>267</sup>

she has set up<sup>268</sup> her seven pillars (הִצְבָּה עִמּוּדֶיהָ שִׁבְעָה).

<sup>2</sup>She has slaughtered her animals (טָבְחָה טְבַחָה),<sup>269</sup> she has mixed her wine (מִסְכָּה

וַיִּנָּה

she has arranged her table (אֶף עֲרֻכָּה שְׁלֹחַנָּה).

<sup>3</sup>She has sent out her servant girls (שְׁלָחָה נְעֻרֹתֶיהָ). She calls (תִּקְרָא)

at the tops of<sup>270</sup> the heights of town (עַל־גִּפְי מְרֹמֵי קִרְת):

<sup>4</sup>“Whoever is naïve, let him turn aside here!” (מִי־פֶתִי יִסַּר הֵנָּה)

To him who lacks a plan,<sup>271</sup> she says: (חִסְר־לֵב אֲמַרְהָ לוֹ)

<sup>5</sup>“Come, taste my bread<sup>272</sup> (לָכוּ לֶחֱמוּ בֶלְחָמִי)

and drink wine I have mixed (וּשְׁתוּ בַיַּיִן מִסְכָּתִי).

<sup>6</sup>Forsake immaturity and live (עֲזְבוּ פְתָאִים וְחִיו)

and stride in the way of discernment (וְאָשְׁרוּ בְדַרְדָּר בִּינָה).

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265. While the Strange Woman, the stereotyped adulteress figure, shares many qualities with personified Woman Folly, these are not the same figures. See Fox, *Proverbs, 1-9*, 262.

266. The plural form, חִכְמוֹת, appears here but with a singular verb (as in 1:20). See n. 239 above.

267. Cf. Prov 14:1; 24:3.

268. Here emending MT’s הִצְבָּה, “she has hewn” to הִצְבָּה, “she has set up” (cf. Josh 6:26; 1 Kng 16:34). This emendation follows LXX, Syriac, Targum. This also serves as a better parallel to בְּנִתָּה “she has built.” See too Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 297 and Clifford, *Proverbs*, 102.

269. Literally: “She has slaughtered her slaughtering.” This is a cognate accusative.

270. *HALOT*, 200.

271. See n. 59 on heart as the center of intellect in Hebrew.

272. לֶחֱמוּ בֶלְחָמִי is another cognate accusative (like v. 2).

<sup>11</sup>For by me your days will increase (בִּי־בִי יִרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ)  
and years of your life will be added<sup>273</sup> to you (וְיִוָּסְפוּ לְךָ שָׁנוֹת חַיִּים).<sup>274</sup>  
(Prov 9:1-6, 11)

While Woman Wisdom shares the same vigor in her housework as the powerful woman, she is quite distinct in having established her home. Proverbs 9:1 states that Woman Wisdom has built her house. The fact that it stands on seven pillars marks it as especially stable.<sup>275</sup> Verses 2-3 recount the work that Woman Wisdom has done to ready her home for guests by preparing a meal of meat, bread, and wine. Not only does this passage emphasize Wisdom's agency and activity, but it also repeatedly designates her ownership of her home. In the first three verses the household is marked as *hers* no less than six times: her house, her pillars, her slaughter, her wine, her table, and her servant girls. What is conspicuously missing from this portrait is a husband, a male head of house who has ultimate ownership and whose reputation is built up or torn down by his wife.

Despite Woman Wisdom's close association with her home in this passage, she is consistently depicted elsewhere as being out in the most public places, in the streets and squares, at intersections and city gates, and even here at the highest point of town (Prov 1:20-21; 8:1-3; 9:3). In these busy places she publicly addresses all who pass by, inviting them to her home and her carefully prepared banquet. She specifically seeks out those who need her most—those who

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273. Repointing MT's וְיִוָּסְפוּ a Hiphil to וְיִוָּסְפוּ a Niphal, supported by LXX which also renders this verb as a passive. Fox suggests that the difficult syntax of this verse comes from the fact that it was “transferred rather mechanically” from Prov 3:2b where this verb had a subject in the previous verse (*Proverbs 1-9*, 300).

274. It seems that v. 11 is the original ending to the passage describing Woman Wisdom (following v. 6), which was displaced when vv. 7-10, 12 were added. Between vv. 10 and 12, it makes little sense as there is no antecedent to the pronominal suffix on the opening words of the verse (בִּי־בִי, “for by me”). Moreover, the sentiment of the verse makes sense as a part of Woman Wisdom's words and, in fact, seems to have been drawn directly from previous verses regarding wisdom (Prov 3:2; 4:10) (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 299-300). See too Clifford, *Proverbs*, 102-103.

275. Clifford, *Proverbs*, 106. See too Fox, who suggests that the number of pillars “indicate spaciousness and elegance” (Proverbs 1-9, 297).

are naïve and lack sense, the same target of the Strange Woman in Prov 7:7. As a result, there is a sharp deviation from the woman and house imagery that has been examined elsewhere. While Woman Wisdom keeps a good home, it is a home without a male head. This home serves as a place to nourish naïve men in need of learning the ways of wisdom. Much like the Strange Woman, Woman Wisdom is in the streets targeting the same kind of men and urging them to come to her home for a good meal. The parent, however, makes it clear that the house of Woman Wisdom is actually a place of nourishment and life.<sup>276</sup> For accepting her invitation is the first step in forsaking foolishness and taking the path of wisdom (Prov 9:6).<sup>277</sup>

The portrait of Woman Folly just a few verses later presents Folly attempting a poor imitation of Woman Wisdom:

- <sup>13</sup>Woman Folly is raucous<sup>278</sup> (אֲשֶׁת בְּסִילוֹת הַמַּיָּה)  
 (she is) ignorance<sup>279</sup>—she knows nothing at all! (פְּתִיּוֹת וּבִלְיִדְעָה מָה)  
<sup>14</sup>She sits by the door of her house (וַיֵּשְׁבָה לְפֶתַח בֵּיתָהּ)  
 upon a seat at the heights of town (עַל-בֶּסֶס מְרֹמֵי קָרַת)  
<sup>15</sup>to call out to passersby (לְקַרְא לְעַבְרֵי-דָרֶךְ)  
 who are making straight their paths (הַמְיֹשְׁרִים אֶרְחוֹתָם)  
<sup>16</sup>“Whoever is naïve, let him turn aside here!” (מִי־פִתִּי יִסַּר הִנֵּה)  
 And to him who lacks a plan, she says: (וְחֹסֵר-לֵב וְאִמְרָה לוֹ)<sup>280</sup>  
<sup>17</sup>“Water stolen is sweet (מִמֵּי־גְנוּבִים יִמְתְּקוּ)  
 and bread gained in secrecy is a delight.” (וְלֶחֶם סֶתְרִים יִנְעֵם)  
<sup>18</sup>But he does not know that the dead are there (וְלֹא־יָדַע בִּי־רַפְּאִים שָׁם)

276. Woman Wisdom is associated with life elsewhere. See Prov 3:16-18; 8:35.

277. See discussion above on comparing Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman.

278. Woman Folly is presented as raucous, הַמַּיָּה, just like the Strange Woman (Prov 7:11).

279. As I take פְּתִיּוֹת, “ignorance” to be a nominal predicate of Woman Folly (from the beginning of the verse), I supply “she is” for clarity. Just as Woman Wisdom embodies wisdom and discernment, Woman Folly embodies folly and ignorance.

280. Virtually identical to Woman Wisdom’s words in 9:4. The only difference is a *waw* at the beginning of v. 16b (“and to him...”) and before the following verb (אִמְרָה), which I’ve left untranslated for a better English rendering.

in the depths of Sheol are her guests.<sup>281</sup> (בְּעַמְקֵי שְׂאוֹל קְרָאֶיהָ) (Prov 9:13-18)

Woman Folly is portrayed as engaging in much of the same behavior as Woman Wisdom. She calls out to passersby from high places and addresses the same people. Woman Folly, Woman Wisdom, and the Strange Woman (as presented in Prov 7) are all interested in the same population: the ignorant.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, since Woman Folly is the personification of foolishness, she is characterized as ignorance itself (פְּתִיזוּת),<sup>283</sup> and thus she is described in the same terms as those she calls: the naïve (פְּתִי).

Not only does Woman Folly address the same people as Woman Wisdom in the same public space (the heights of town), she also says almost identical things to them. In fact, Prov 9:16 is an exact duplicate of Prov 9:4: “Whoever is naïve, let him turn aside here!”<sup>284</sup> As if overhearing Woman Wisdom’s calls, Woman Folly decides to imitate her; however, she does so with much less energy and care. Woman Folly is not in the streets seeking out the ignorant, but rather she sits by the door of her house, which seems to be conveniently located at the heights of town, and calls out to whomever may pass by. As discussed above, the opening of a house, especially when associated with a woman, carries a sexual valence. In Prov 5:8, the parent warns the son to stay away from the opening of the Strange Woman’s house (פֶּתַח בַּיְתָהּ), a warning that

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281. This is a Qal passive masculine plural participle, “those called by her” or “her invitees.”

282. In Prov 1:22; 8:5; 9:4 Woman Wisdom addresses the naïve ones and in Prov 7:7 the Strange Woman confronts a young man lacking a plan, חֶסֶר-לֵב, who is among the simple ones, בְּפִתְאִים.

283. Fox translates, “callowness itself” (Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 301).

284. See discussion in n. 1 above on understanding Prov 1-9 as a unit. Here in Prov 9, considering the parallels between the two poems it is quite likely that they were composed as a pair (or possibly one in response to the other). Either way, the portrait of Woman Folly follows the poem about Woman Wisdom in the final text and therefore would be experienced by a reader as duplicating and perverting elements from the first poem.

implies both where the woman lives as well as her body.<sup>285</sup> Woman Folly’s association with the opening of her house suggests a sexual valence to her invitation.<sup>286</sup>

The contrasting second halves of their speeches relate to Woman Folly’s laziness and immorality over and against Woman Wisdom’s vigor and virtue. Woman Folly says, “Water stolen is sweet and bread gained in secrecy is a delight” (Prov 9:17); while Woman Wisdom says, “Come, taste my bread and drink wine I have mixed” (Prov 9:5). These statements serve as mirror images of each other. Woman Folly speaks of stolen bread and water, while Woman Wisdom publicizes bread that she has made and wine that she has mixed, which she wants to share with anyone who will join her at her banquet. The obvious quality of the products is emphasized by Woman Wisdom’s personal role in their production, while Woman Folly encourages one to steal these items. Woman Wisdom offers high quality mixed wine,<sup>287</sup> while Woman Folly mentions only water.<sup>288</sup> Even the syntax of the two statements is inverted, forming a chiasmic structure:

	Woman Wisdom (Prov 9:5)	Woman Folly (Prov 9:17)
Colon A	[verb] bread	water [stative verb]
Colon B	[verb] wine	bread [stative verb]

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285. See discussion above.

286. See too discussion below of woman in the window motif and its possible sexual valences.

287. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 299.

288. Woman Folly’s comment that “water stolen is sweet” seems to reference Proverbs 5:15-20, which uses water imagery to speak of female sexual fidelity. Prov 5:15 tells young men to “drink water from their own cistern.” Thus, Woman Folly’s comment attempts to counter the parent’s logic of Prov 5, which argues that there is nothing to be gained from the Strange Woman that one does not already have with one’s own wife, besides trouble. Woman Folly here tempts young men by telling them in the same language of the wise parent that “stolen water is sweet.” See discussion on Prov 5:15-20 above.

Juxtaposed with Woman Wisdom and her banquet, Woman Folly and her promises seem empty and cheap. It is readily apparent that Woman Folly is not meant to characterize the ideal woman at home, but rather mocks this institution.

This is most apparent in the depiction of Woman Folly's house as a place of death. The conclusion of this passage undeniably links her home with death: "But he does not know that the dead are there (in her house), in the depths of Sheol are her guests" (Prov 9:18). This is the very opposite of what a home should be—a place of life, protection, and nourishment. Woman Folly does not provide her guests with food or drink; instead she encourages them to steal these life sustaining provisions from others. Her home provides only death. Similar to the depiction of the Strange Woman in Prov 7:6-27, her guests have no idea that in accepting her invitation they ensure their own demise. This portrait of Woman Folly and her home makes a mockery of this productive image.<sup>289</sup>

These contrasting portraits underscore and deepen the parental instruction of Prov 1-9: be wise and not foolish. The parent has lectured the son on the importance of being able to discern the good from the bad in the streets of life, figured most often by female figures. There is an acknowledgment that it is not always easy to see through deception, but here the parent provides a few more diagnostic tools. The laziness of Folly is contrasted with the industriousness of Wisdom. Even though these two women offer the same invitation to the same population, there are key differences in their affect, words, and activities. Moreover, the parent again reminds the son of the dire life or death consequences of making the wrong choice. Considering these figures

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289. *Pace* scholars who argue for an association of Woman Wisdom and/or Woman Folly with a cult or ancient Near Eastern goddesses. See, e.g. Böström, *Proverbiastudien*, 156-161; McKane, *Proverbs*, 360-365; Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 98-100. I take this imagery to be essentially domestic, just as the rest of the female imagery in Prov 1-9, 31.

are personifications of these abstract concepts of wisdom and folly, it is their behavior and not their gender or bodies that indicate these opposing concepts: Wisdom is conveyed in the stability of her home, the quality of her hospitality, her diligent hard work, and association with life and success, while Folly is expressed by her noise, ignorance, indolence, her lack of resources and encouragement to steal necessary nourishment (bread and water) from others, and her association with deception and death.

### *The Maternal Speaking Voice*

This chapter has focused primarily on the presentation of the female figures used by the parental speaker to educate the son on the benefits of wisdom (and the dangers of lacking in wisdom). Little attention, therefore, has been given to one of the most dominant voices in Prov 1-9: the parental speaker. This section will analyze the parental speakers of Prov 1-9 and 31 both in terms of their identity and their message about wisdom. Even as more or less generic speaking figures, it is in these voices that the female figures are constructed and put to pedagogical use. It is, therefore, vital to understand female figuration within this context.

The fact that the speaker is a parent is repeatedly established throughout Prov 1-9, not only by the frequent address to “my son” (or “sons”),<sup>290</sup> but also by the recurrent reference to parental education. Proverbs 1:8 states: “Listen, my son, to the instruction of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother” and similarly in Prov 6:20: “Keep, my son, the commandments of your father and do not forsake the teaching of your mother.” Despite the fact that most commentators assume that the parental voice of Prov 1-9 must belong to a father who

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290. “My son” (בְּנִי) as addressee: Prov 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1, 20; 6:1, 3, 20; 7:1. “Sons” (בְּנֵי) as addressee: Prov 4:1; 5:7; 7:24; 8:32.

instructs his son, the text almost never makes this explicit, but in fact emphasizes both the mother and father as advice givers.<sup>291</sup> Only once in Prov 1-9 is the speaker explicitly identified as the father: “Listen, sons, to the instruction of a father and attend in order to learn understanding” (Prov 4:1). Even here, however, mothers are not left out of the discourse. Just a verse later the paternal speaker reflects on his own time of education involving both of his parents: “When I was a son to my father, tender and the only one before my mother...” (Prov 4:3).

Based on this evidence, it is apparent that at the very least it is not a given that the parental voice of Prov 1-9 is always a father and, more likely, it reflects the teaching of both mother and father.<sup>292</sup> There is, however, more evidence for female wisdom-givers in the frame of Prov 1-9 and 31. As discussed above, Woman Wisdom is a figure whose primary role is to disseminate wisdom instruction. She appears throughout Prov 1-9, but most notably, gives two long speeches that nearly bookend the parental instruction of the opening nine chapters (1:22-33; 8:4-36) in which she explains the power and necessity of wisdom for safety and success. Not only is it made clear that the source of her authority is divine, but much of her message matches the parental instruction found elsewhere in Prov 1-9. Woman Wisdom is very clearly depicted as a powerful disseminator of wisdom.

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291. I disagree here with Menahem Haran’s article “The Graded Numerical Sequence.” Haran argues that Proverbs’ repeated mention of “mother” is only for the sake of parallelism, solely serving as the complement to “father,” the one with whom the poet is actually concerned. As I seek to demonstrate in this chapter, however, the frame of Proverbs depicts women, often specifically mothers, as authoritative speakers of wisdom in more cases than the uses of this word-pair. See too Goitein, “Women as Creators of Biblical Genres,” 11-12; Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 81-82; Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts*, 113-126; Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 83.

292. My point here is not that the reader has to hear both the voice of a mother and a father in every parental speech. Rather, I wish to indicate that hearing a maternal voice in the parental speeches is possible based on the examples of female wisdom giving in the frame of Proverbs. As a generic parental voice, however, the lectures of Prov 1-9 do not indicate whether this should be heard as a father or mother (unless it is important to the message of the text as in Prov 7, as I discuss below).

The female figures of the two units in Prov 31 are also depicted as speakers of wisdom. The powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31, while never quoted in the text, is described as one who speaks wisdom: “her mouth opens with wisdom and an instruction of devotion is upon her tongue” (Prov 31:26).<sup>293</sup> Moreover, in the passage immediately preceding the poem of the powerful woman, another wise woman’s words are preserved (Prov 31:1-9). A mother advises her son, a king. Her advice pertains to him doing his royal job well. The passage begins with an ascription which makes the source of the advice explicit: “Words of King Lemuel. Advice<sup>294</sup> with which his mother instructed him” (Prov 31:1). The king’s mother instructs him on three primary issues, all of which relate to the concerns of Proverbs. First she warns him about the wrong kind of women: “Do not give to women your power (לְחַיִל),<sup>295</sup> your ways to those who destroy<sup>296</sup> kings.”<sup>297</sup> This statement reflects one of the primary concerns of Prov 1-9—the importance of

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293. This verse is accented in the acrostic structure as the first word is פִּיָּהּ, “her mouth,” is also the name of the letter heading this verse in the acrostic poem: *peh*. See discussion above.

294. My translation follows MT, which places a major disjunctive on “king,” indicating that the following term (מֶשֶׁךְ) should be read with what follows. Some commentators, however, read against MT and translate מֶשֶׁךְ מַלְכֵי מַסָּא as “king of Massa,” referring to a North Arabian tribe (Gen 25:14; 1 Chron 1:30) because usually when a king is introduced the country over which he rules is also named (see, e.g., Clifford, *Proverbs*, 269; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 884). This, however, seems unnecessary as the book of Proverbs focuses on generic type-figures and not historical figures. (Lemuel is unknown.) The association with Solomon is the possible exception; however, Solomon appears only in the headings and is never used explicitly as an example of wise living or to provide a narrative structure to the content (e.g., “Solomon once gave the following advice...”).

295. See discussion of לְחַיִל and its range of meanings above in section on the powerful woman (אִשְׁת־חַיִל). Here it carries the same connotations of power, strength, and capability, but seems to convey a more specific meaning—the king’s energies that he is deploying sexually (rather than towards just ruling). See *HALOT*, 311.

296. This translation reflects a revocalization of MT’s לְמַחֲזוֹת, a Hiphil infinitive construct, to לְמַחֲזוֹת, Qal feminine plural participle, following several other commentators (Delitzsch, *Proverbs of Solomon*, 2:318-319; Toy, *Proverbs*, 540; Fox, *Proverbs 10-31*, 886; *BHS*). This form not only makes more sense but also serves as an appropriate parallel to לְנַשְׂאִים in the first half of the verse.

297. מְלֻכִּין is one of several Aramaisms in this passage. See, for example, v. 2 where there is the Aramaic בַּר instead of the expected Hebrew בֶּן.

avoiding the wrong kind of women. Just as the parent instructs throughout Prov 1-9, the wrong woman can utterly destroy one's life and future. The mother's second concern is intoxication (vv. 4-7). She explains that drinking not only does not befit a king, but it actually can prevent him from doing his job well: "lest he drink and forget what has been decreed and he perverts the rights of all the afflicted" (v. 5). This leads to her third concern, the king's role as purveyor of justice. She encourages her son to speak out (twice she instructs him to "open your mouth") on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves or those that are most in need of defense (vv. 8-9). Proverbs 31:1-9, therefore, is presented explicitly as a woman's advice to her powerful son. While her instruction does include a concern for avoiding the wrong kind of women, it mostly pertains to a subject that is usually considered far from the female domain: how to be a just ruler.<sup>298</sup> This mother is presented as having the authority to offer wisdom to her son about kingship and justice.

It is evident, then, that Prov 1-9 and 31 hosts a well-developed literary image of women as authoritative speakers of wisdom. While it is often impossible and, perhaps, unnecessary to identify the gender of the parental speaker from passage to passage in Prov 1-9, there is one case in which identifying the speaker as a mother produces a better reading of the text. In Prov 7:6-27, the account of the Strange Woman's nighttime seduction is narrated by, I submit, a mother watching from the window of her house: "For at the window (חַלּוֹן) of my house, through my opening I looked out (בַּעַד אֲשַׁנְבִּי נִשְׁקַפְתִּי) and I saw among the naïve ones and I observed among the youths, a young man lacking a plan" (Prov 7:6-7). We know little else about the speaker of Prov 7:6-27, besides the fact that she views this scene from her window and addresses her speech

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298. For a similar view of kingship as presented in Prov 31:1-9, see Ps 72:1-4. See too Weinfeld on justice as a central task of kings throughout the ancient Near East (*Social Justice*, 45-56).

to her sons (Prov 7:24). The narrator is otherwise left unidentified, thus linguistically and thematically allowing for a female speaker: a mother offering moral instruction to her son motivated by what she has seen out her window.<sup>299</sup>

Archaeological evidence has shown that as early as the Chalcolithic period, houses contained windows.<sup>300</sup> These windows were likely just narrow slits in the wall of the house which provided airflow and natural light to the inside rooms.<sup>301</sup> Windows were kept small in order to help secure the house as well as regulate the temperature inside;<sup>302</sup> however, it is likely that they were large enough for a person to climb through.<sup>303</sup> Archeologists have inferred from ancient ossuaries modeled after real houses that windows were usually placed on the upper portion of the wall, often on the wall opposite the door.<sup>304</sup>

This architectural evidence provides two important pieces of information about the window in the ancient Near East. First, its height and unobstructed view created an ideal place from which to observe the outside world.<sup>305</sup> The height allowed one to have a better view of the

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299. Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes have argued in their collaborative study, *On Gendering Texts*, for a female voice in Prov 7 (57-62, 113-132). And yet, as soon as they establish the likelihood of a female speaker, they criticize her for using her female voice to support patriarchal values: “It appears that we read here not just complicity with androcentric values, not simply voiced conformity, but also overzealousness in protecting those values” (125). Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes argue further, “F[emale] self interest is silenced through identification with M[ale] interest...” (125-126). Their analysis is motivated, in part, by a desire to access authentic women’s voices in the Hebrew Bible. Their disappointment here, therefore, is understandable. While I do not share their motivations (see chapter 1) or assumptions (especially that an authentic female voice would not support androcentric values, whether in the past or present) their conclusion that the Prov 7:6-26 episode is narrated by a female voice, but one that ultimately supports androcentric values reminds us that all the speakers of Prov 1-9 and 31 are constructed for the book’s own pedagogical purposes.

300. Paul and Dever, *Biblical Archaeology*, 37.

301. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 30.

302. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 30.

303. There are a number of biblical stories that recount people passing through windows. See, e.g., Josh 2:15; 1 Sam 19:12; 2 Kgs 9:30-33.

304. Paul and Dever, *Biblical Archaeology*, 37.

305. Qohelet 12:3 refers to the act of gazing through latticed windows. This text references death and mourning with apocalyptic imagery, stating: “those who look through latticed windows are darkened

land below, while the lack of a barrier (glass or otherwise) meant that one's perception was not limited to sight. One could hear the people in the streets, smell the animals, and feel the air temperature all while remaining inside one's home. Secondly, the architecture reflects an awareness of vulnerability that windows created. Archeological evidence shows that doors had locks on them,<sup>306</sup> while windows typically had no protective covering. Without chimneys, windows served the vital task of providing a ventilation system for the house.<sup>307</sup> While supplying views and ventilation, these open portals to the outside also ran the risk of letting the outside world in.<sup>308</sup>

The narrative use of the window to ensconce the narrator calls to mind other biblical stories featuring watchers in windows,<sup>309</sup> a motif within the biblical corpus that almost exclusively features female watchers.<sup>310</sup> In each of these stories, the watcher is given a privileged view of a situation that provides insight into a coming danger for themselves and their

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(וְחָשְׁבוּ הָרְאוֹת בְּאֲרָבוֹת).” The feminine plural participle of ראה could be referring to “those females who look”; however, it is also possible that it refers to eyes, which is also a feminine noun (עיני). See Lam 5:17 and Ps 69:24 where eyes are referred to as “being darkened” with the same verb used here (חשך). Either way, this text reinforces the image of people regularly looking through their windows. This passage uses scenes of everyday life to make the point that everything, even the most regular of activities, are all grinding to a halt. This implies that Qohelet identified looking out one's window as a quotidian activity.

306. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 30-31.

307. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 30.

308. In Joel 2:9 the vulnerability of windows is made evident: “They rush into the city, they run up the walls, they go up into the houses, through the windows they enter like thieves.”

309. See Gen 26:6-11; Judges 5:28-30; 2 Sam 6:16-23; 2 Kings 9:30-37. For another analysis of the watcher-at-the-window motif in biblical texts see Don Seaman, “The Watcher at the Window” (and see my analysis of his work below in n. 316). Furthermore, there are ancient ivory carvings of a woman's face with Egyptian styled hair framed by a recessed window with a balustrade balcony in front. These plaques have been found throughout the Near East, attesting to the familiarity of this image. It seems they were used to decorate furniture and homes. For example, the ivory relief, the “Garden Party,” depicts Ashurbanipal reclining on a couch decorated with these images. D. N. Pienaar, “Symbolism in the Samaria Ivories,” 56.

310. The one exception is Gen 26:6-11 where Abimelech witnesses Isaac and Rebekah engaging in amorous activity that indicates to him that they are not siblings. As a result, Abimelech realizes the danger that could come to himself and his household if someone mistook Rebekah as an unmarried woman.

households. When the watcher is a woman, the perspective of the window reinforces a sense of vulnerability in their positions as women and indicates an end to their family. In Judges 5:28-30, the mother of Sisera, the Canaanite commander, watches from her window waiting for the triumphant return of her son from battle, not yet knowing of his defeat and murder. The fact that she sees no sign of her son from the vantage point of the window is an answer in itself, but it is not one that she wants to receive so she turns back inside and constructs her own false, but reassuring, vision of her son's victory.<sup>311</sup> In 2 Kings 9:30-33, Jezebel, unlike Sisera's mother, does see the truth of the end of her family from her window, and while she tries to resist this reality by mocking her sent assassin (and new king of Israel), Jehu, she ultimately is pushed to her death from that same window.<sup>312</sup> Lastly, in 2 Sam 6:16-23, Michal, daughter of Saul and wife of David, observes from her window David's victorious and zealous display in only a loincloth as he leads the ark into Jerusalem after success in battle and "she despise[s] him in her heart" (2 Sam 6:16). The story is not explicit about why Michal finds David's exhibition so offensive, but after her unsuccessful attempt to admonish David for his inappropriate behavior, we are told that she never has any children and Michal fades from David's story.<sup>313</sup> The report of Michal's

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311. She reasons to her "wise ladies" that it will take time for him to ransack the Israelites, abducting their treasures and women. Ironically, this vision may be the very reality that is about to confront her and her wise ladies, since her son and male protector is now dead, and she is on the defeated side of battle.

312. Jezebel is a foreign woman who influenced her husband, King Ahab, to engage in many transgressions against Yahweh, most notably the worship of Baal. At this point in the narrative, Ahab has died and his son, Joram, has taken his place on the throne. Elisha, however, sends prophets to anoint Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, as king and order him to destroy the remaining household of Ahab. Jehu kills Joram, and then continues on to find Jezebel. She hears he is coming and prepares herself: "She put kohl on her eyes and dressed her hair. She looked out through the window (וַתִּשְׁקֹף בָּעֵד הַחַלּוֹן)" (2 Kgs 9:30). Jehu ignores her mocking and orders the eunuchs (who are also looking through the window) to push her. They do and she falls to her death.

313. Michal's reaction may have something to do with the power change that led to David's rise and Saul's fall. At this point in the story Saul has died and his family is fading from power, while David is gaining it. David's victorious exhibition reflects both his devotion to Yahweh as well as his success on the battlefield and subsequent rise to power over Israel, replacing Saul's family. The fact that this friction

childlessness indicates the end of Saul's family line. It seems Michal's observations of this unsavory scene indicated to her the end of her family's power and the possibility of motherhood.

These watcher-in-the window passages establish a pattern of how to read this motif. First from the perspective of a window, a viewer gains access to an authoritative source of information. From its high and unobstructed position, the window provides insight into the world outside and the house's place in that reality. As the frequent attestation of female watchers demonstrates, a window may have been a woman's best source of information about the outside world. As discussed throughout this chapter, for Proverbs in particular, good women do not stray far from their homes. Women gained credibility and authority within a household. It makes sense, therefore, that their best view of the world would be from a window. Moreover, their perspective on matters outside the home would also come from their observations at the window. Lastly, a mother, as two of three female watchers are,<sup>314</sup> is sensitive to her vulnerability in the world, a vulnerability also embodied by the window. A married woman's fortune is intrinsically linked to the fortunes of her male relatives, most especially her husband and sons. While men's successes and failures outside of the home are largely beyond a woman's control, the window is one place where a woman could get just a sense of the potential dangers that could affect her household's wellbeing.<sup>315</sup>

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between husband and wife is centered around Saul is indicated both by David's dismissive response to Michal's admonishment, reminding her that Yahweh chose him over Saul and his house to be ruler (2 Sam 6:21) and the text's identification of Michal as "daughter of Saul" (and not "wife of David") twice (2 Sam 6:16, 23), forming an *inclusio* around the passage. See also Seeman, "The Watcher at the Window," 22.

314. While Michal is not a mother, her perspective on her marriage from the window is connected with her childlessness as the story sets her up as someone who *should* have been a mother.

315. See also Seeman: "the biblical window can be deployed poetically to signify a threshold across which anxiety concerning the boundaries and integrity of kin groups plays out" ("The Watcher at the Window," 2).

It would seem that all these factors are at play in the narrator of Prov 7:6-27.<sup>316</sup> The speaker is depicted as viewing this scene from within her house. It is from the vantage point of her window, the best weapon of a concerned mother, that she is able to secretly observe the entire scene of seduction, allowing her not only to see what has happened, but also to hear the “slick words,” אַמְרֵיהָ הַחֲלִיקָהּ, with which the Strange Woman seduces the naïve young man (7:5). This unique perspective on the scene allows her the ability to see what is happening in the streets without having to enter them herself. She is, therefore, protected from receiving an evaluation similar to that which she pronounces about the Strange Woman. From within the walls of her home she is empowered with the authority to speak and advise. Whether or not this is the same parental voice of some or all of the parental instruction in Prov 1-9, the frame of Proverbs regularly puts wisdom in the mouths of female figures.

Some have argued that the woman at the window image carries implicit sexual connotations.<sup>317</sup> As discussed above, spatial openings, such as doors and windows, can be easily

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316. Several scholars argue against reading the narrator of Prov 7 as a woman. Don Seeman (“The Watcher at the Window”), for example, asserts that there is an independent sub-genre of the male watcher-at-the-window, which dictates a different reading than female watchers. His argument, however, lacks sufficient evidence as his only examples of the male watcher are Abimelech in Gen 26, the speaker of Prov 7, and a Talmudic retelling of Gen 39 where Joseph has a vision of his father in a window. I concur with Seeman’s point that Gen 26 and Prov 7 engage similar uses of the window; however, I disagree with the point that these similarities are more compelling than the parallels Prov 7 shares with the other biblical window stories. In light of the abundant evidence of the woman-at-the-window motif both in and outside of the Bible, it is hard to see merit in an additional male watcher-at-the-window sub-genre. Considering, especially, that without Prov 7, Seeman only has Abimelech as an example of a biblical male watcher-at-the-window.

Michael Fox has also expressed doubt at the possibility of a female speaker in Prov 7. He states, “In the entirety of extant Wisdom literature, with the exception of Prov 31:1-9, whenever we can determine the sex of the speaker, it is male” (*Proverbs 1-9*, 258). This statement, however, should be qualified by the number of wisdom texts that have an ambiguous speaker. As has been discussed, there is only one time in Prov 1-9 that the text explicitly identifies the speaker as male (Prov 4:1-3). If there is one exception with Prov 31:1-9, why could there not be another exception in Prov 7? This seems to be especially likely within the context of Prov 1-9, which regularly emphasizes the role of both the mother and the father in the teaching of wisdom.

317. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 14.

associated with fertility and female sexuality.<sup>318</sup> This was seen across ancient cultures. In Mesopotamia, a form of Ishtar was referred to in texts as a “goddess of the window” and in Greece, the image of Aphrodite standing in a window indicated that she was offering herself for sexual encounters.<sup>319</sup> Nehama Aschkenasy writes, “The image is linked to female deities who possessed omnipotent power and often used that power to taunt or punish men, adding a sense of awe to the image of the woman-at-the-window (or doorstep) in both artifacts and the literary texts.”<sup>320</sup>

If the author of Prov 7 was aware of this link between the woman at the window and female sexuality, it is possible that this image was intentionally used, but in reverse. Rather than the woman in the window seducing the viewer from the street, it is the Strange Woman in the street who is flaunting her sexuality, while being watched by the mother in the window. As seen from the window, this woman is using her sexual power in order to ultimately conquer and kill a man. The extreme consequences that the mother presents demonstrate how powerful and threatening she considers this Strange Woman to be. Looking out of the window, instead of in, the window now serves as a moral frame for the world. The vantage point of the window furnishes the female watcher with power, affording her the perspective and position from which to warn her sons.

Of course, the maternal speaker of the Prov 7 episode is just as much a stereotyped figure as the Strange Woman. The parental speakers in Prov 1-9 are generic and the majority of the parents’ speeches reveal nothing specific about the parent speaking. The one possible exception is the window narrative of Prov 7:6-27. Here the speaker is embodied for the first time and

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318. See also Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 14.

319. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 14.

320. Aschkenasy, *Woman at the Window*, 14.

contextualized by the window of her house. While the speaker still remains for the most part generic, the shift in the style of this passage—to a narrative rather than didactic instruction—demands a shift in the presentation of the speaker as well. As a result, this narrative section, which draws on real life experiences of community living, architecture of streets and houses, and typical (or at least relatable) behavior of people (looking out a window, meeting someone on the street, and so forth), conjures a scene that the audience should recognize. This recognizability is key to the effectiveness of the scene. If the audience were to respond to this story of a young man being seduced by a woman on the street with dubiousness, then the parent's punchline that this young man dies as a result of his unwise decision does not have the desired impact.

Hearing the Prov 7:6-27 episode from the mouth of a mother brings into sharper focus what is at stake in the son's attention and acceptance of his mother's lesson. The life or death consequences now ripple out beyond the son, effecting the stability of his own household and the community in which it exists. The vulnerable female body, drawn on in these texts to depict family purity and communal survival, is usually a young and fertile female body. Here, ensconced by her window, this vulnerability is found in her age and utter dependence on the survival and success of her male relatives. This maternal speaker, then, reminds the audience of the larger communal context in which individual's (un)wise choices exist and implies that the benefits of wisdom extend beyond the young man who acquires it.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has closely examined each of the female figures found in Proverbs 1-9, 31. I have argued that these figures, composed of body and voice and coded by location and relationship,

are best understood as pedagogical tools wielded for the promotion of wisdom. Central to this figurative work has been the recognition that much of it occurs within parental speech and that it plays out on a morally coded landscape. The frame of parental speech, which strongly colors and controls these educational portraits (especially that of the Strange Women), makes evident that these figures are not meant to be full characters, reflective of real women, but rather are recognizable stereotypes that are used by the authors purely to convey a message about the importance of wisdom. This message is articulated not only by the bodies and voices of these figures, but also by their locations. These women populate the landscape of life. With wisdom, suggests Proverbs, one should be able to navigate life's dark streets as well as its well-lit paths. Proverbs makes it clear, however, that this discernment is not always easy. Sometimes it is Woman Wisdom on the busy street corner and sometimes Woman Folly can be found at home. This is why these figures are so well fleshed-out and carefully depicted in Proverbs. With attention to the behavior, and especially the words, of these women, the parent attempts to equip young men, the implied audience, for the challenges of life's landscape.

While the only true personifications in Proverbs 1-9 and 31 are Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly, my analysis has suggested that all these figures are doing metaphorical work. The wife figures demonstrate the effectiveness of wisdom in just one arena of life: avoiding adultery and appreciating the value of a good wife. There are many more pitfalls, however, on the road of life. The figuration of the Strange Woman, the pleasing wife of Prov 5:10-15, and even the powerful woman of Prov 31:10-31 all exemplify the effectiveness of wisdom. These lessons are offered to the implied audience with the expectation that they be widely applied. In the terms of metaphor theorists, while the portraits of these female figures are the source domain, the target

domain is all of life's challenges. We find, then, in the frame of Proverbs, an optimal example of an author using women's bodies and voices to contemplate and articulate the community's morals, concerns, and anxieties around the practical wisdom of life in community, in all its value and vulnerability.

## Chapter 4

### The Tragedy of Woman Jerusalem in Lamentations 1 and 2

In Lamentations 1 and 2 we again encounter a metaphorical woman. She is the personification of the city<sup>1</sup> and inhabitants of Jerusalem in the aftermath of destruction.<sup>2</sup> Like the pedagogical

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1. Lamentations takes advantage of the existing link between women and cities available in the ancient world. While there is nothing inherently feminine about a city, the imaginative figuring of cities as women is attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East over a wide swath of time (Dobbs-Allsopp, "Daughter Zion," 132). There have been several studies that examine the connection between cities and goddesses in the ancient world. Notably, two widely cited articles by Aloysius Fitzgerald ("Mythological Background" and "*BTWLT* and *BT*") who argues that in the West Semitic area capital cities were seen as goddesses who were married to the patron god of that city. He asserts that it is this "mythological" idea that Israelite poets draw on when they choose to personify a city as a woman even while transforming this thinking to fit their "revolutionary" monotheistic understanding of the world ("Mythological Background," 415). Fitzgerald's work has served as the starting point for years in the discussion of personified female cities in the Bible without a close reevaluation of this evidence. More than twenty years later Peggy Day ("The Personification of Cities") performed this reevaluation, demonstrating Fitzgerald's lack of evidence, circular reasoning, and problematic assumptions about the uniqueness of Israelite religion and the depiction of gender. See too Maier's reconsideration of Fitzgerald's and Biddle's evidence (*Daughter Zion*, 63-69, esp. 64).

While Fitzgerald, it seems, overreaches when he claims West Semitic cities were understood to be goddesses married to the patron god, there is, however, evidence that there was a productive association between cities and female personae that existed in the ancient world. One piece of evidence pointed to by Fitzgerald ("Mythological," 406-407) and others is the Phoenician coins of the Hellenistic period that depict a woman wearing a mural or turreted crown, reminiscent of city walls with towers (e.g., Biddle, "The Figure of Lady Jerusalem," 179-181). Christl Maier traces the iconographic tradition of the mural crown in the ancient Near East, discovering attestations of this crown in iconography from the 13th century BCE to 3rd century CE ("Daughter Zion as Queen," 148-152). Maier's work demonstrates that there is some evidence of a tradition associating city and women that stretches back into the ancient world ("Daughter Zion as Queen," 148, 153-154). See also Maier, *Daughter Zion*, 61-74. Here she frames the discussion around question of Israelite innovation.

While this association between women and cities existed in the ancient Near Eastern world, no where else (at least in extant literature) do we have such an extensive development of the imagery of the city-woman as we do in biblical texts, especially in Lamentations and prophetic literature (Anthonioz, "Cities of Glory," 22). It is clear that the biblical authors were drawing on these ancient associations, but extensively reimagining and expanding these images, going far beyond a pious demythologization of a once polytheistic idea.

2. Time is difficult to grasp in the book of Lamentations. Not only are there shifting perspectives recounting the destruction, but the poetry often plays with verbal tense and aspect, alternating between perfect and imperfect verbs to balance a poetic line with no concern for creating a clear historical timeline. In her commentary on Lamentations, Adele Berlin suggests that Lamentations is a "memorialization of...suffering and grief. It eternalizes the catastrophic moment and its aftermath,

female figures of Proverbs it is the female body and her roles and experiences that serve as the source domain for the metaphorical work being done. Moreover, like the other metaphorical women discussed in this dissertation, this female figure speaks. In fact, she weeps, wails, challenges, and protests. This woman does not suffer in silence; she gives voice to her pain and demands to be seen. Despite her depiction as the lowest of the low, an abandoned widow, a bereft mother, betrayed by her friends, abused and discarded by her protector, this is the figure that represents the community and speaks on their behalf to their god.<sup>3</sup> The analogous relationship between the personified city's ruined and polluted body and the dismantled and scorched fortifications and raped and pillaged temple is established throughout Lam 1 and 2. This debased female figure is considered an appropriate representation of Jerusalem's fallen condition. This analysis aims to examine the effect of having this female body represent Jerusalem, speak on their behalf, and, ultimately, bluntly protest the severity of their punishment.<sup>4</sup> I will argue that personified Jerusalem of Lam 1 and 2 is designed to be particularly compelling to an audience that understands the suffering of bodily pain and sees the validity of her argument. Ultimately, however, Jerusalem is a tragic figure expressing a tragic reality: despite the fact that her argument is valid and persuasive—she has, indeed, suffered too much and deserves comfort—

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freezing in time, probing it from various perspectives, and preserving it forever" (*Lamentations*, 1). Furthermore, Berlin sees the alternating verb tenses, not only as a feature of Hebrew poetry, but also yet another way for the poet to express one of his primary themes: the timelessness of suffering (3). The book is focused on the present devastating moment and little else (18). See, too, Francis Landy, "Lamentations," 329; Hens-Piazza, *Lamentations*, xl.

3. Mintz, "The Rhetoric of Lamentations," 2; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 124-125; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 31; Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 39-44.

4. Here I am in agreement with Tod Linafelt who articulates this point so well: "...[Lamentations] is more about the *expression* of suffering than the meaning behind it, more about the vicissitudes of *survival* than the abstractions of sin and guilt, and more about *protest* as a religious posture than capitulation or confession" (*Surviving Lamentations*, 4, emphasis original).

she receives no response from the deity.<sup>5</sup> I suggest that Jerusalem's impure body, established in Lam 1:8-9, 17, is central to the poet's depiction of this tragic reality.<sup>6</sup> The woman's impurity codes her body as incompatible with the deity, thereby reinforcing her abandonment and anticipating the ultimate futility of her protest. Before turning to the analysis of personified Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2, I will briefly discuss Lamentations' generic distinctiveness and innovative treatment of traditional literary motifs.

Most scholars agree that the genre of Lamentations cannot be easily classified.<sup>7</sup> While it may share features with the Mesopotamian city lament<sup>8</sup> as well as the biblical *qinah* or funeral dirge, and the individual and communal laments found in the Psalms,<sup>9</sup> it also differs significantly enough from each of these literary types that it seems to stand on its own. Its connection to but innovation beyond traditional genres is central to its rhetorical work.

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5. I am drawing on and expanding from Dobbs-Allsopp's work on Lamentations as tragic literature in "Tragedy, Tradition, and Theology in the Book of Lamentations." See discussion below.

6. As has been the case with the Song of Songs and Proverbs, the compositional history of the book of Lamentations is unknown. The fact that it consists of five poems, four of which are acrostics, could suggest that these poems were composed as singular units which were later compiled into the book of Lamentations; the plausibility of this option, however, should in no way be considered conclusive evidence that the poems were written by different authors or conceived of separately. As scholars have noted, there is consistency across these five poems in terms of form, rhythm, linguistic details, imagery, and the five poems in sequence can be read as "an intelligible whole" (Dobbs-Allsopp, *Lamentations*, 5). It seems reasonable, then, to refer to "the poet" of Lamentations, as I do throughout this chapter, whether we imagine this poet to be an original author of all five poems, or an involved editor. Moreover, this poet is the implied author of the text as we have no historical evidence with which to reconstruct the historical poet and therefore must rely only on the evidence within the text (see discussion in chapter 1; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 32).

While consistencies can be traced across the whole book of Lamentations, only the first two poems feature personified Jerusalem. Moreover, as I suggest above, the same two voices (one of whom is Jerusalem) constitute Lam 1 and 2. As a result, I limit my analysis of Lamentations to its first two poems. Several other scholars have made this choice as well. See, e.g., Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, especially 55-102; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, especially 35-61; Maier, *Daughter Zion, Mother Zion*, 141-160; Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator,'" 174-182.

7. For discussions of genres in Lamentations, see Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 8-11; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 24-n85; Salters, *Lamentations*, 11-15.

8. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep*; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 32-39.

9. See, for example, Berlin, *Lamentations*, 22-30; Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 55-67; O'Connor, *Tears*, 9-11.

F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that Lamentations draws on the Mesopotamian city lament, exhibiting the weeping goddess motif where the goddess mourns the destruction of her city and/or temple and the death, scattering, and/or suffering of her people.<sup>10</sup> He demonstrates how the motif of the personified city in the Hebrew Bible shares five distinct features with the motif of the weeping goddess in Mesopotamian city laments: The goddess of the city mourns for the destruction of her city just as the personified Jerusalem mourns for the destruction of her city in Lamentations. In both lament traditions there is an interchange of different speakers, including the poet addressing the goddess or personified city and the goddess or personified city speaking herself. Both the city goddess and personified Jerusalem are depicted as having possession of different elements of the city, such as the temple and its treasures. The metaphor of motherhood is applied to both the city goddess and personified Jerusalem. Lastly, language of exile is present in both city lament traditions.<sup>11</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp demonstrates that the city lament was well established in biblical literary tradition, especially in prophetic texts.<sup>12</sup> The poet of Lamentations, however, while drawing on the city-lament genre, has also adapted it for new purposes. For example, the biblical prophets often utilize elements of the city-lament genre in oracles against nations, where the sins of the nation are detailed and the resulting punishment is declared.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis in these texts, then, are appropriately focused on the many sins of the nation and not (as in Lamentations) on the resulting suffering of the nation nor on the divine judge who enacted

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10. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep*, 75, 85. Dobbs-Allsopp, like Fitzgerald, also suggests that biblical authors have reimagined this weeping goddess motif for their Yahwistic use. No longer are these city-goddesses but rather female personifications of a city. Not all scholars agree that Lamentations draws on Mesopotamian city-lament literature. See Salters (*Lamentations*, 13-15) for a brief summary of scholarly division. See too Berlin for disagreement with specifically Dobbs-Allsopp's argument (*Lamentations*, 25n47).

11. Dobbs-Allsopp, "The Syntagma of *bat*," 455-463. See too Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep*, 31-94, where he examines nine shared generic features between Mesopotamian laments and Lamentations.

12. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep*, 97-154.

13. See, for example, Amos 5. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 51.

it. Moreover, in both the Mesopotamian and often the biblical uses of the city-lament genre the divine judge who executes the destruction speaks.<sup>14</sup> In fact, in Mesopotamian city-laments the deity usually returns and the temple is rebuilt.<sup>15</sup> Realizing, then, that Yahweh's conspicuous silence in Lamentations as well as the focus in Lam 1 and 2 on punishment over sin are generic innovations makes these features particularly worthy of analysis.

Other scholars, especially those interested in form critical analyses, have identified the forms of the dirge,<sup>16</sup> as well as individual and communal laments in Lamentations.<sup>17</sup> Most concede that none of the poems in Lamentations perfectly conforms to one of these traditional genres.<sup>18</sup> Rather, they exhibit features from each of these categories.<sup>19</sup> Tod Linafelt, recognizing this combination of genres in Lamentations, suggests that they have been meaningfully activated and arranged in Lam 1 and 2 to suit the poet's purposes.<sup>20</sup> He analyzes the way the generic features from the dirge and lament interact with each other in Lam 1 and 2, tracing a progression from the dirge (associated with death and funerals) toward the lament (associated with life in

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14. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 51.

15. Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep*.

16. The classic work identifying Lam 1, 2, and 4 as dirges is Gunkel and Begrich's *Einleitung in die Psalmen* (136). See too Jahnow, *Das hebräische Leichenlied*, 170-171. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 36.

17. Westermann, *Lamentations*, 118, 148.

18. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, 501-502. Gottwald, *Studies*, 37. Gunkel and Begrich would refer to this blend of genres as "mixed types" (*Mischungen*) (*Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 397-403; See Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 36).

19. Deciding, however, on the balance of the generic influences is debated. For example, Linafelt points out that Westermann and Jahnow came to opposite conclusions on the form of Lam 1. While Jahnow argues that it was a dirge that included motifs from the lament psalms (*Das hebräische Leichenlied*, 170), Westermann asserts it is a communal lament with elements from the dirge incorporated (*Lamentations*, 118). Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 37.

20. Linafelt's argument here is closely tied to his analysis of Lamentations as survival literature (*Surviving Lamentations*, 19-34) and his understanding that a "fundamental dynamic of survival literature...[is] the paradox of life in death and death in life" (37).

terms of the removal of suffering).<sup>21</sup> Linafelt's work, then, demonstrates further innovation on the part of the poet.

Adele Berlin in her commentary on Lamentations, while admitting the influence of both the dirge and lament in Lamentations, argues that this literature "transcends" both of these genres to embody a new genre that meets the demands of the historical moment post-586BCE: the Jerusalem lament.<sup>22</sup> Whether a new genre or a new generic combination is suggested, most scholars agree that Lamentations is doing something new.<sup>23</sup> Even while drawing on previous literary traditions and forms, the poet of Lamentations is subverting expectations and adapting old ways to mourn in order to express the catastrophic enormity of Jerusalem's destruction.<sup>24</sup>

For the purpose of this examination, there are two innovated rhetorical features that will be closely attended to: the use of multiple voices and the role of persuasion. Lamentations 1 and 2, more so than the other poems, feature an exchange of voices, a dialogue, between at least two personae. One of these voices is the personified city, a female-bodied figure who is able to speak on behalf of the city, express its experiences of siege and suffering, and even protest the extremity of its punishment. The other voice speaks, it seems, at some distance from the city's

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21. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 35-43, especially 42-43. His understanding of the lament's association with life is strongly influenced by Westermann (see *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 266; Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 38).

22. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 22-26. Berlin also includes Pss 74, 79, and 137 (and possibly Pss 44, 69, and 102) as Jerusalem laments, but calls Lamentations the "Jerusalem lament par excellence" (26).

23. Hillers suggests that in reusing older literary traditions (for him, specifically the Mesopotamian city-lament) Lamentations becomes more universal by both relating it to a larger historical phenomenon of fallen cities and divine abandonment and by using generic language of lament allows "more remote generations, with their own griefs and guilts, to find here warning or comfort in a language that is, paradoxically, common and enduringly contemporary" (*Lamentations*, 5). Hillers, in fact, does not seem to think the poet is doing much innovating with the literary form. He suggests, rather, that the poet was so influenced by existing literary forms that "the traditional literary forms shaped his perceptions and memories of the events" (*Lamentations*, 84).

24. Dobbs-Allsopp: "The community's shared paradigms of meaning had been shattered. If survival was to be a possibility then these paradigms would have to be reconstructed, redrawn, or replaced...Such rethinking and probing constitutes the rhetorical focus of the poetry of Lamentations" ("Tragedy," 34).

destruction, primarily describing Jerusalem from a third-person perspective. This voice is sometimes referred to by commentators as the “narrator,” a problematic identity as it prioritizes and authorizes this point of view over the other speaker.<sup>25</sup> In fact, this analysis will argue that it is the voice of the personified city that is ultimately bolstered by the other speaker. This is partially achieved through a generic innovation by the poet. Carleen Mandolfo, asserting the influence of the psalmic lament genre on Lamentations, argues that while in many double-voiced laments of the Psalms the voice of the supplicant is balanced and, perhaps, even undermined by the third-person “didactic voice” that confirms the normative theological position, in Lam 1 and 2 this does not occur.<sup>26</sup> While Lam 1 and 2 still has a “didactic voice” that speaks from a seemingly more “objective” perspective, its role is not to remind the suffering woman of Yahweh’s righteousness. Rather, this voice only adds further evidence to the woman-city’s mounting argument that her punishment is too much. What is more, close attention to the interplay of voices in Lam 1 and 2 allows the missing voice of this text to stand out in stark clarity. Yahweh, although addressed throughout Lam 1 and 2 by the personified city, remains silent in the text.<sup>27</sup>

The other rhetorical feature that this analysis will closely consider is the persuasive postures within Lam 1 and 2. While commentators typically see this text as an expression of grief and a memorialization of suffering,<sup>28</sup> I would like to suggest that it is worth paying attention to *how* grief and suffering are articulated and what intentions the text reveals. The intent to persuade is explicit throughout Lam 1 and 2. In Lam 1 the refrain of “she has no one to comfort

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25. See too Miller, “Reading Voices,” 393-394. See discussion below.

26. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 55-77. See discussion below.

27. O’Connor emphasizes God’s missing voice in her analysis of Lamentations (*Tears*, 15, 84-86).

28. See, for example, Berlin, *Lamentations*, 1; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 4; Hens-Piazza, *Lamentations*, xxxix-xl.

her” rings (Lam 1:2, 9, 17, 21; cf. 1:7, 16), suggesting that comfort is the sought response to these words. It seems, however, that fellow human compassion and aid is insufficient at this point. In Lam 2:13, the voice, now speaking directly to the personified city, attempts to offer this much sought-after comfort, but finds it impossible to do and instead expresses the vastness of her need (“For great like the sea is your destruction”). It is divine comfort for which Lam 1 and 2 lobbies. Four times Woman Jerusalem demands Yahweh witness her suffering. She addresses him directly throughout Lam 1 and 2, insisting on his attention: “See, O Yahweh, my affliction (רָאָה יְהוָה אֶת-עֲנִי)” (Lam 1:9) and “See, O Yahweh, that I am distressed (רָאָה יְהוָה כִּי-צָרָלִי)” (Lam 1:20). Twice this call for divine visual witness is doubly emphasized: “See, O Yahweh, and look (רָאָה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָהּ)” (Lam 1:11; 2:20).<sup>29</sup> Divine attention and comfort, then, is the explicit aim of the poems in Lam 1 and 2.<sup>30</sup>

While Lam 1 and 2 are explicitly oriented towards persuading Yahweh to witness and, ultimately, end Jerusalem’s suffering, I will suggest here that the rhetoric of these poems reflects a concern with persuading its implied audience.<sup>31</sup> Lamentations 1 and 2 put forward a persuasive case for understanding the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment that has gone too far. The argument, which is mostly implicit until the final speech of Woman Jerusalem at the end of Lam 2, is that no one deserves such extreme suffering. The personification of Jerusalem is central to this work. By embodying the city, depicting her downfall in feminine terms (especially with the

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29. See, too, O’Connor on a “theology of witness” in the book of Lamentations (*Tears*, 96-109).

30. See Berlin: “Lamentations is a plea for comfort in the form of access to God” (*Lamentations*, 16). Note too Dobbs-Allsopp, who writes, “In fact, a chief aim of the poem is to get Yahweh to take note of his handiwork, to move Yahweh to action after the battle, to make Yahweh speak once again...” (“Tragedy,” 45).

31. Linafelt analyzes Lamentations, with special attention to Lam 1 and 2, as survival literature and argues that any literature of survival is meant to be persuasive, “to make the concerns of the survivor the concerns of the reader” (*Surviving*, 49). Linafelt argues that “the desire to persuade is one of the most striking correspondences between Lam 1 and 2 and modern survival literature” (49).

imagery of impurity), allowing her to voice her distress directly, and even shifting between describing Jerusalem as a city and as a female body, Lam 1 and 2 appeal to embodied audience members. By the time Jerusalem cries out to Yahweh for a final time at the end of Lam 2, the implied audience, like the other voice in Lam 1 and 2, should be convinced of the validity of the woman's claim, making Yahweh's silence in the text all the more tragic. Thus, ultimately, the personified, gendered figure of suffering and speaking, Jerusalem, is central to the rhetorical strategy of Lam 1 and 2.

While many have analyzed Lamentations in light of ancient Near Eastern lament literature, noting especially the connection between cities and goddesses,<sup>32</sup> as well as in the context of biblical prophetic literature and the "marriage metaphor,"<sup>33</sup> this book is rarely examined alongside the Song of Songs and Proverbs as an example of a constructed female literary figure that speaks. Although, arguably, the Daughter Zion figure of Lamentations is closer in imagery and tone to similar female figures found in the prophetic texts, it is only here in Lamentations that she is given a powerful voice (just as the figures in the Song and Proverbs). This examination will not deny the connection Lamentations has to both prophetic texts as well as ancient Near Eastern lament literature, but rather will focus attention on the female figure of Lamentations as one that stands in a larger literary tradition that uses female bodies and voices to grapple with the community's identity, values, and theology.<sup>34</sup>

This chapter, then, will take seriously Daughter Zion as a persuasive speaking figure, constructed to represent the collective identity of destroyed Jerusalem, to give words to its

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32. See n. 1 above.

33. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, especially 1-28, 79-102; Guest, "Hiding Behind the Naked Women"; O'Connor, *Tears*, 7, 20; Maier, *Daughter Zion*, 141-160.

34. See discussion in chapter 1.

suffering, accept responsibility for its transgressions, while also asserting that the punishment has gone too far. The argument will be deployed in three parts. First, I will mount a discussion of metaphorical gendered language found within the prophetic marital and sexual imagery as well as the priestly texts, especially around the cult and impurity. This preliminary discussion will demonstrate the pervasive impact of gendered language in the Bible and suggest that the female body represents the most human, or anti-divine body. The second section will focus on a close reading of the female-bodied figure of Lam 1 and 2, examining how and to what effect this city is personified and gendered with special attention to imagery of impurity in Lam 1. I will argue that Jerusalem's personification is central to the text's persuasive rhetoric, allowing the poet to animate, intensify, and personalize the destruction of the city. Moreover, I intervene in the scholarly debate around sin and menstrual impurity in Lam 1:8-9, asserting that this passage does ascribe an impure, menstruating body to Jerusalem, but that this designation is more about articulating the community's abandonment and isolation rather than illuminating the woman's sins. The final section focuses on the effective interplay of voices in Lam 1 and 2. Drawing on the work of Mandolfo, Linafelt, and Dobbs-Allsopp, I demonstrate not only how the descriptive voice bolsters and encourages the protest of Daughter Zion, but also how this voice actually models the effectiveness of Jerusalem's argument by gradually becoming more drawn to her cause. Ultimately, I argue that the true tragedy of Lam 1 and 2 is not just that Jerusalem is suffering and that Yahweh ignores her pleas for comfort, but that the text's argument regarding the undue severity of Jerusalem's punishment is valid and persuasive and yet it receives only silence. Central to this articulation is Jerusalem's depiction as an impure woman. The unstated metaphorical summary of Jerusalem's predicament as depicted in Lam 1 and 2 is that the city is

like a defiled woman, alienated from the deity, lamenting to a pile of rubble, for her god is gone and will not respond to her cries.

### ***Gender, Purity, and Metaphor***

Before examining the (de)construction of the female body and persuasive deployment of the female voice in Lam 1 and 2, it is vital to first consider the association between gender and power and the way one expresses and enables the other in biblical texts. I will briefly examine here the sexual and marital imagery in the context of Assyrian warfare as well as the masculinization of the divine and the feminization of pollution in priestly literature in order to suggest that the female gender is identified with the vulnerability and messiness of the human body, as far from the divine “body” as possible. The hierarchy reflected by the imagined genders of Jerusalem and Yahweh in Lam 1 and 2 is integral to understanding the tragic nature of this female figure.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the sexual and marital imagery found in the prophetic texts has drawn the attention of scholars, especially those interested in gender and feminism. Lamentations, similar to much of the prophetic imagery, also features a female-bodied Jerusalem who has suffered abuse from her once-protector, Yahweh.<sup>35</sup> Several scholars have addressed the question of why a female figure is used to represent, for example, Jerusalem. Most point to the patriarchal context of the text and consciously or unconsciously draw on essentialist ideas around masculinity and femininity, asserting that the vulnerable and pitiable state of the

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35. I suggest below that while it is likely that the poet knows and is drawing on prophetic texts that use marital or sexual imagery to describe the relationship between Jerusalem (or Israel) and Yahweh, Lam 1 and 2 do not simply reproduce this imagery. It is never explicitly established here that Jerusalem is or was Yahweh’s wife.

city is best expressed by a female body and will arouse the most sympathy.<sup>36</sup> For example, Fitzgerald writes: “Violence done to a strong man or a city wall is violence; but violence done to a delicate young mother is violence indeed.”<sup>37</sup> Emphasis is usually placed on why this is effective imagery for the implied audience, stating either the shock and pity that would be aroused by seeing a woman treated this way<sup>38</sup> or the shock and humiliation experienced by the male audience by being compared to a woman treated so violently.<sup>39</sup> Adele Berlin in her commentary on *Lamentations* expresses well this first position when she writes “He [the poet] chooses particular female images precisely because they are shocking and do not represent normative behavior. The imagery is meant to evoke a strong feeling of horror and outrage, immorality and shame, suffering and pity, because this mixture of reactions is a crucial part of the poet’s message.”<sup>40</sup> Harold Washington, representative of the second position, also identifies the shocking quality of this imagery as the source of its effectiveness, but specifically argues that this is not because of the violence done to a female body but rather the feminine positioning of

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36. For example, Heim: “personifications are always female, presumably to evoke the impression of vulnerability and dependency typically associated with femininity in the patriarchal context in which the book was composed” (“The Personification of Jerusalem,” 130n1).

37. Fitzgerald, “Mythological,” 416. And similarly in his other article on this topic: “Violence done to a delicate, young mother is more apt to arouse sympathy than violence described in impersonal terms” (Fitzgerald, “BTWLT,” 182). Stinespring expresses a similar sentiment: “nothing is more touching than a ravished maiden” (“No Daughter of Zion,” 136).

38. For example, Berlin, *Lamentations*, 9; Fitzgerald, “Mythological,” 416; Fitzgerald, “BTWLT,” 182; Stinespring, “No Daughter of Zion,” 136.

39. For example, Washington, “Violence and the Construction of Gender,” 355-356; Graetz, “Jerusalem the Widow,” 21. Cf. Mandolfo, who suggests that the effectiveness of this metaphorical imagery was due to the fact that it “tapped into Israelite men’s deepest anxieties.” She notes both the ambiguity an adulterous wife could bring to paternity and ancestral lineage as well as “social dishonor” (*Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 31).

40. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 9.

men: “by describing divine judgment as sexual assault, the prophets use rape figuratively to threaten their elite male addressees with the most shocking degradation.”<sup>41</sup>

What these explanations demonstrate is what Joan W. Scott argues in her influential article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”: gender is always tied up with and reflective of power relationships.<sup>42</sup> Cynthia Chapman, drawing on Scott, examines the gendered language used in the marriage metaphor in prophetic texts in comparison with Assyrian royal propaganda. Chapman asserts that gender is an ideological tool that is articulated metaphorically.<sup>43</sup> Masculinity is power, reflecting a position to dominate, conquer, and rule. In the Assyrian texts this male language was used to express the vitality and prowess of the king and feminine language was used to describe the defeated and conquered peoples that came up against the Assyrians.<sup>44</sup> Using metaphorical language like “your soldiers are women”<sup>45</sup> or “may your king become a prostitute”<sup>46</sup> the Assyrians were able to figure their enemies as weak, vulnerable, and susceptible to defeat, just as describing the king as “without rival among princes” highlighted his superior strength and vitality.<sup>47</sup> Chapman argues that the Israelites were influenced by this Assyrian propaganda and made use of gender in articulating their relationship with their deity and making sense of defeat. By using masculine imagery for Yahweh, just as the Assyrians used for their king, and figuring his relationship with Israel as marriage, it provided a

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41. Washington, “Violence and the Construction of Gender,” 355-356. Moreover, in contrast to Berlin, Washington argues that this imagery only works because this was in fact how women were treated: “Indeed it is the cultural *appropriateness* of raping women that generates the scandal of the prophetic threat addressed to men” (“Violence and the Construction of Gender,” 356, emphasis original).

42. Scott, “Gender,” 1069. See discussion in chapter 1.

43. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 4.

44. See too Carole Fontaine, ““Be Men, O Philistines”” Fontaine, drawing on evidence from iconography in military art of the ancient Near East, argues that from a male perspective to be female is to be disabled. By visually feminizing enemies in art marks them as weak and suitable for conquest (66-67).

45. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 48-50.

46. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 50.

47. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 20.

way to narrate Israel's defeat while preserving the power and dignity of Yahweh. The invading army becomes merely a pawn within the larger drama of a tumultuous marriage. The blame rests with Israel-the-wife whose adulterous behavior is the direct cause of her lamentable predicament, while Yahweh remains in control and justified in his anger.<sup>48</sup>

Chapman's work on gendered language in the context of warfare in both biblical as well as ancient Near Eastern texts demonstrates that there is something at stake in these gendered depictions. Not only is there an articulation and (re)production of power relationships, but, in the biblical texts, gender is mapped onto the ultimate power relationship: human and divine.

The male gendering of Yahweh occurs not only in moments of warfare or within the prophetic marital imagery, but, in fact, throughout the Bible.<sup>49</sup> Priestly texts, in particular, are concerned with the deity's (male) superhuman<sup>50</sup> body and his interaction with other human bodies. The connection between the divine body and human body is established in the Priestly account of creation, when Yahweh says: "Let us make humankind<sup>51</sup> in our image (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ), according to our likeness (בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ)" (Gen 1:26a). While there is much debate over what is meant by the deity creating human beings "in his image (בְּצַלְמוֹ),"<sup>52</sup> this same terminology appears again

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48. Chapman, *Gendered Language*, 65.

49. For an in-depth examination of divine anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch, see Knafl, "Forms of God."

50. Schipper and Stackert refer to the priestly depiction of Yahweh as a "superhuman king" ("Blemishes," 459).

51. Literally, "mankind" (אָדָם).

52. Moore summarizes the two primary ways that commentators have understood this phrase: either the likeness refers to the human being's role, analogous to the deity's, in dominating the created world (established also Gen 1:26) or it refers to a physical resemblance. While the first interpretation finds support in parallels with ancient Near Eastern texts and artifacts where a king is depicted as being in a god's image (see, e.g., von Rad, *Genesis*, 59-60; Sarna, *Genesis*, 12-13; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 30-32), the most common meaning of the word צֶלֶם is a physical image. See Num 33:52; 1 Sam 6:5, 11; 2 Kgs 11:18 [=2 Chr 23:17]; Ezek 7:20; 16:17; 23:14; Amos 5:26. Cf. Ezek 1:26-28. Moore, *God's Gym*, 83-84. See, too, von Rad, *Genesis*, 58-59; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 153-154.

in P's description of the first human offspring: "He (Adam) fathered a son in his likeness (בְּדַמּוֹתוֹ), according to his image (כְּצֶלְמוֹ)" (Gen 5:3).<sup>53</sup> Thus, at the very least, it is clear that the formal resemblance between a father and son is thought to be analogous to the formal resemblance between the deity and human beings. As with a human father and son, this inherited likeness is apparent in the physical form, the body.<sup>54</sup>

Further evidence for P's view of Yahweh's body exists in the priestly texts that describe the complex system of cultic sacrifices and purification. The priestly cultic system operates as an elaborate arrangement to maintain Yahweh's presence among the Israelite community. This presence is understood to be bodily. Yahweh is understood to not only take up space, but to dwell within the sanctuary, which is depicted as the deity's house complete with fine furnishings (e.g., Exod 25:9-27:19).<sup>55</sup> The offerings and sacrifices are understood to be the deity's food.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, all of the rituals performed in the sanctuary, such as burning incense (e.g., Exod 30:7-8), lighting lamps (e.g., Exod 27:20), or ringing bells (e.g., Exod 28:33-35), are all designed to activate the deity's bodily senses.<sup>57</sup>

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53. Gen 5:1-2 refers again to God's creation of the first human beings and refers to them being created "in the likeness of God (בְּדַמּוֹת אֱלֹהִים)."

54. See Chavel, *Oracular Law*, 73-74; Moore, *God's Gym*, 82-86.

55. Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 216-226; Wright, "The Study of Ritual," 130-134; Knafl, "Forms of God," 107. See too Chavel who refers to the priestly tabernacle as God's "majestic mobile home" ("Oracular Novellae," 12).

56. Like in temples of other ancient Near Eastern deities, Yahweh is fed a meal twice a day (Exod 29:38-41). For discussions of temples in ancient Near East and how these spaces and related practices reflected particular understandings of deities and their relationships with human beings, see Dever, "Palaces and Temples"; Smith, "Like Deities, Like Temples (Like People)"; Sommer, *The Bodies of God*, especially 80-108; cf. Knafl, "Forms of God," especially 197-274.

57. Haran, "Complex of Ritual Acts," 289; Haran, *Temples and Temple Service*, 216-226; Knafl, "Forms of God," 107. Cf. Schipper and Stackert on Yahweh's superhuman perceptive abilities ("Blemishes," 477) and the way cult rituals are aimed at only "minimally engag[ing] the deity's senses (sight, smell, hearing) in order to simultaneously announce the priest's presence and diminish the disruption caused by it" ("Blemishes," 473).

Yahweh's continued dwelling among the Israelites was essential in the priestly writers' view. The deity's presence would protect and bless the people and their land. It was, therefore, of vital importance that the community maintain this delicate arrangement by creating an environment that was conducive to the deity's comfort. In order to achieve this environment an interlocking system of appeasing sacrifices and defilement management was created.<sup>58</sup> Besides the desire to maintain the deity's presence, the other undergirding principle of this system was a concern for imitating the deity and a belief that this imitation would be the best way to keep Yahweh comfortable and content in their presence.<sup>59</sup> Jonathan Klawans, working inductively from the priestly purity laws as well as drawing on the work of Jacob Milgrom, David Wright, and Tikva Frymer-Kensky,<sup>60</sup> argues that within the cult the best way to imitate the deity was by avoiding that which was most unlike the deity.<sup>61</sup> Yahweh does not have sex and he cannot die. As a result, death and sex are the two human realms that are the most incompatible with the divine and therefore must be carefully managed in order to avoid offending the deity.<sup>62</sup>

The priestly writers translated this desire to imitate and maintain the deity into a detailed set of purity laws around managing the body, especially in the areas of death and sex. Bodily impurities, including skin diseases, corpse contamination, both normal and abnormal discharge

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58. Klawans, "Pure Violence," 138.

59. Klawans, "Pure Violence," 141.

60. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 766-768, 1000-1004); Frymer-Kensky, "Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," especially 401; Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 189; Wright, "Unclean and Clean (OT)," *ABD* 6:729-741, especially 739. (See too Wright, "Holiness, Sex and Death," 305-329.) See also Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism*, 178-186. Milgrom focuses only on death-avoidance as the primary motivation behind the priestly purity system, while Frymer-Kensky and Wright both argue that sex-avoidance must also be an important factor.

61. Klawans, "Pure Violence," 142-151. In light of Milgrom's popular death-avoidance theory, Klawans is motivated by the question: "Why, if the ritual purity system is concerned with keeping death out of the sanctuary, does the sacrificial system involve precisely the opposite: the killing of animals, *in the sanctuary*?" ("Pure Violence," 143, emphasis original).

62. Klawans, "Pure Violence," 144.

from sexual organs, birth, and impurities related to cultic duties, are discussed at length in the priestly literature. And while these bodily impurities were considered tolerated impurities—those that occur naturally in everyday human experience, they are nonetheless still an offense to the deity, especially if improperly handled.<sup>63</sup> Proper handling of an impurity always required some sort of separation of the impure person from the activities of the cult and/or the larger community. The severity of the impurity dictates the amount of time and degree of separation. The more severe impurities additionally require the impure person, once in a state of purity, to offer the deity a *תאטת*, or a purification offering, in order to cleanse the tabernacle from the effects of his or her impurity. The overarching concern is contamination of the sanctuary. As Jacob Milgrom explains, impurity in P is a physical reality, “an aerial miasma,” that is attracted to the sanctuary.<sup>64</sup> The blood of the purification offering is necessary to purge the sanctuary of the impurities’ contaminating effects.<sup>65</sup> If this contamination is not policed and regularly removed, the sanctuary could become uninhabitable for the deity, causing him to abandon the Israelite community.<sup>66</sup>

If, then, we are to understand P’s purity system as (a) envisioning Yahweh to have a perfect body (that is, immune to death and free of the complications of sexuality)<sup>67</sup> and as (b) reflecting a desire to imitate the deity and, more importantly, to protect the deity and his

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63. There are also prohibited impurities, which include transgressive acts, whether done intentionally or unintentionally, and broadly include neglecting the proper purification procedures and moral infractions, such as homicide and adultery. See Wright, “The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” 152.

64. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 392.

65. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 391. Wright, “Unclean and Clean (OT),” *ABD* 6:736.

66. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 396-399. Wright, “Unclean and Clean (OT),” *ABD* 6:737. Cf. Stackert, “Political Allegory,” where he argues (against Milgrom and others) that the threat of divine abandonment is not, in fact, imagined in P, but rather appears in the later Holiness stratum of the Priestly source (e.g., Lev 26:30-33). Stackert suggests that this distinction likely reflects a pre-exilic date for P and an exilic or post-exilic date for H. See, “Political Allegory,” especially 216-223.

67. Klawans, “Pure Violence,” 143-144. See also Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 401; Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake*, 189; Wright, “Unclean and Clean (OT),” *ABD* 6:739.

sanctuary from those aspects of the human body and behavior that are most unlike this perfect divine body, then female, sexual, and death-bound bodies become especially vital to consider and police. While there is only so much control human beings can exert over death, sex and gender relations, on the other hand, can be managed, restricted, and coded.<sup>68</sup>

Leviticus 12 and 15 articulate the impurities and purification rites associated with gendered bodies. Leviticus 15 discusses the tolerated impurities involved with the male and female sexual organs: abnormal discharge from male sex organ (vv. 2-15), normal discharge from male sex organ, ejaculate (vv. 16-18), normal discharge from female sex organ, menstruation (vv. 19-24), abnormal discharge, specifically blood, from female sex organ (vv. 25-30).<sup>69</sup> Thus while both male and female bodies are capable of discharge, normal male bodies *should* only have emissions of semen during a sex act, a relatively controllable and quick emission in contrast to female bodies that regularly menstruate and give birth.<sup>70</sup> Leviticus 12 dictates the impurities related to birth, the most severe impurity for sexed bodies.<sup>71</sup> Notably the birth of a female-sexed body doubles the length of impurity compared with the birth of a male-sexed body. Examining the corresponding length of impurity, the degree of communicability, and the required (if any) sacrificial offering for each type of impurity reflects a clear hierarchy of

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68. See Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, volume 1, especially 53-73, 103-114.

69. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 217; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 904; Ellens, "Menstrual Impurity," 34.

70. Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism*, 186-194. He argues that the more a process or substance can be controlled, the less defiling it will be. See too Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood*, 151-154.

71. Many have put forward different theories to relate birth with death, such as the risk of death for mother and child (Levine, *Leviticus*, 249) or the great loss of blood (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 767). See too Frymer-Kensky who suggests that in birth women experience the nexus of life and death and therefore require "a long period of transition" before engaging with the cult ("Pollution, Purification, and Purgation," 401).

bodies: bodies that discharge for longer and more uncontrollably<sup>72</sup> are more often in a state of impurity and require more involved purificatory acts.<sup>73</sup> While the priestly texts do not consider these tolerated bodily impurities to be sinful, the practical application and theoretical undergirding result in some bodies (male) having more access to the deity, and therefore conceived as more like the deity, than other bodies (female).<sup>74</sup>

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72. See Eilberg-Schwartz on controllability's role in bodily impurity laws (*The Savage in Judaism*, 186-194). See Klawans on the strength and weaknesses of Eilberg-Schwartz's argument ("Pure Violence," 146-147).

73. This hierarchy is readily apparent from a comparison of the length of time the impure state lasts, the imagined transferability of the impurity, and the sacrifice required (if any) described in Lev 12 and 15. From most severe to least severe: New mother after the birth of a daughter (Lev 12:5-7): fourteen days impure plus an additional 66 days of "blood purity" (דְּמֵי טְהָרָה), which requires separation from "any holy things" as well as the sanctuary; transferable to inanimate objects and via direct contact; requires the sacrificial offering of a year-old lamb (as an עֹלָה) and a pigeon or turtledove (as an תֹּמֵת). New mother after birth of a son (Lev 12:2-4, 6-7): seven days of impurity with only 33 additional days of "blood purity" (but with the same restrictions from holy things and space); transferable to inanimate objects and via direct contact; requires the sacrificial offering of a year-old lamb (as an עֹלָה) and a pigeon or turtledove (as an תֹּמֵת). Man with abnormal discharge (Lev 15:2-15) or woman with an abnormal discharge (Lev 15:25-30): The time of discharge and seven days of impurity after the discharge ceases; transferable to inanimate objects and via direct contact; requires the sacrificial offering of two pigeons or turtledoves (one as an עֹלָה and one as an תֹּמֵת). Menstruant (Lev 15:19-23) or a man who has sexual intercourse with a menstruant (Lev 15:24): impure for seven days; transferable to inanimate objects and via direct contact; no sacrificial offering required. Man after ejaculation (Lev 15:16-17) or a woman who has sexual intercourse that results in ejaculation (Lev 15:18): impure until evening; transferable only to inanimate objects which come in contact with semen; no sacrificial offering required. Anyone who contracts an impurity secondhand (Lev 15:5-11, 19, 21-23, 26-27): impure until evening; no transferability; no sacrificial offering required.

74. While others have noted the "graded power" of impurities (see, especially, Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," esp. 78-79), few have engaged with the implications for gendered bodies. To date, there is only one study that substantially analyzes the role gender plays in the biblical laws pertaining to impurity and sacrifice: In *Sacrifice and Gender in Biblical Law*, Nicole Ruane examines the gender of both the (human) bodies performing the ritual and the (animal) bodies that are offered, as well as how the ritual purity system negotiates gender difference. See, especially, chapter 5, "Impurity and the Creation of Difference," where Ruane argues that the ritual purity laws (especially those related to male and female genitals) function to control sexuality and reproduction and define social roles for men and women in ancient Israel (esp. pp. 175-184). While Ruane also recognizes the gendered hierarchy created by P's purity system, she focuses her analysis on social order and lineage and does not consider at length the implications of this gender hierarchy on the human/divine relationship. For other scholarship that engages with the idea that purity laws produce hierarchical relations between men and women, see Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, esp. 141-159; Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism*, esp. 183, 190-191; Olyan, *Rites and Ranks*, esp. 59-60; Archer, "'In They Blood Live,'" esp. 40; Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?"; Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, esp. 41-60; Erbele-Küster, *Body, Gender, and*

Anthropologist Mary Douglas articulates holiness as wholeness and perfection, qualities intrinsic to the deity.<sup>75</sup> She writes, “the idea of holiness was given an external, physical expression in the wholeness of the body seen as a perfect container.”<sup>76</sup> In P’s system, the deity’s immortality and asexuality set the standard for perfect bodies. Bodies with oozing, active sexual organs are far from this standard. Of course, this is an impossible standard for any human body to meet so a graded system develops.<sup>77</sup> The less a body is like the deity, the more defiling it becomes. Or to put this in gendered terms, the less a body is like the deity, the more feminine it becomes. A female body, with its regular bleeding and impure (i.e. non-god-like) production, is understood as anti-divine. The very activity of the female body that marks it as female is what requires its separation from the deity.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, while it seems that it is the regular fluidness of female bodies that is the cause of female bodies being marked as more impure, it is important to recognize that ultimately the impurity is less about the fluid itself than about which body (and body part) is doing the discharging. For example, blood from a vagina defiles, but not blood from a penis (or any other body part, for that matter).<sup>79</sup> The deity, therefore, is perfected masculinity, perhaps hypermasculinity.<sup>80</sup> For this god has no consort, he creates by command and not by messy fluids and pained bodies.<sup>81</sup>

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*Purity*; Feinstein, *Sexual Pollution*, esp. 11-99; Goldstein, *Impurity and Gender*, esp. 31-62.

75. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 68. For a detailed discussion of the pertinence of Mary Douglas to these issues, particularly vis-à-vis gender and the priestly purity laws, see Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender*, 156-162.

76. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 65.

77. See too Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender*, 170. Milgrom discusses gradation in P’s understanding of the severity of impurities and their impact on the sanctuary, but does not consider issues of gender (“Israel’s Sanctuary,” esp. 78-79).

78. Note Ruane: “For both sexes impurity appears when their body behaves in an especially gendered way.” (*Sacrifice and Gender*, 162).

79. Ruane, *Sacrifice and Gender*, 180-181.

80. Stephen Moore, *God’s Gym*, esp. 99.

81. It is possible that it is precisely this fundamental difference in Yahweh’s mode of creation versus woman’s mode of creation that makes birth the most defiling of bodily impurities. It could be

Virginia Burrus asserts that gender in the ancient world was not understood as a fixed binary but rather a “dynamic spectrum or gradient of relative masculinities” ranging from the most masculine to not at all masculine, that is, feminine.<sup>82</sup> Men were expected to strive to attain the highest degree of masculinity (or at least not slide into femininity) while women were expected to adhere to their “natural” end of the spectrum. It was masculinity that was valorized and while both genders may desire to be more masculine, some bodies (female) were incapable of such a transformation. What I would like to suggest, then, is that in biblical literature this spectrum of female to male is mapped onto the spectrum of human to divine, where female bodies are always found at the bottom end, farthest from the masculinized deity. In other words, in a sense, the female body—fluid, porous, and messy—is the most human body. It is not the case, of course, that male bodies cannot or do not bleed, ooze, or break, but just that when they do they are feminized and slide further away from the deity.

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argued that the process of birth is an imitation of P’s deity, a creator god (See, again, Klawans [“Pure Violence,” 142-151] on importance of imitating the deity in P’s cult). The Priestly source unambiguously presents Yahweh as the creator of the world and the human beings in it (Gen 1:1-2:4a). Thus, arguably, birth, the moment when a new creation enters the world, is a very god-like act according to P’s characterization of its deity. This moment of creation, however, occurs in the most human, anti-divine manner: a female body, whose impure characterization has already been well established, produces a child amidst blood and other bodily substances through the vagina, the very source of female impurity. In contrast, P’s god creates by speech, order, and classification. It seems possible that it is the very paradoxical nature of human birth that is the cause of its severe impurity. A new life, created in God’s image (Gen 1:27), is produced by the most human, anti-divine means.

Frymer-Kensky suggests that the lengthy period of impurity for the new mother is related to the nexus of life and death experienced during birth: “It may be that, like the person who has touched death, the person who has experienced birth has been at the boundaries of life/non-life and therefore cannot directly reenter the community. She must undergo a long period of transition before she can reapproach the sacred” (“Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 401). What I am suggesting is a similar notion; however, rather than experiencing the nexus of life and death, the new mother experiences the nexus of divine power and human (female) production resulting in the need for isolation from the deity. The new mother has imitated the deity to the point of encroaching on his power and done so in an offensive human manner. She, therefore, risks drawing his negative attention. Cf. Ruane (*Sacrifice and Gender*, 184-190) who sees the severe impurity around childbirth to be due to P’s undergirding patrilineal system that requires dealing with the less than ideal (for P) fact that mothers, who are outside of this male lineage, produce the children the system requires.

82. Burrus, “Mapping as Metamorphosis,” 5.

As I have explained it here, these overlapping spectrums can best be seen in priestly texts where the concerns of sexed bodies and access to the deity coexist. The book of Lamentations, however, while not priestly literature, seems to know and draw on many priestly concepts. This is a text that copes with the loss of the temple, the cultic system, and, it seems, the end of the relationship with the deity. It is no surprise, therefore, that priestly ideology would be influential.<sup>83</sup> Lamentations 1 and 2 depict the city of Jerusalem as a female body. Central to the articulation of this body is its description as polluted (Lam 1:8-9, 17). As a polluted female body, the community of Jerusalem is not only powerless and vulnerable, but their deity is inaccessible.

### ***City-Woman: Personification and Impurity***

Turning our attention now to the poems of Lam 1 and 2, it is immediately clear what is at stake in the gendered figuration of Jerusalem: a communal expression of human suffering, a powerlessness in improving their predicament, and an indefinite alienation from their deity. By personifying the city as a woman the poet is able to unite the experiences and perspectives of the city's inhabitants into a single figure who is built to be emotionally provocative. Moreover, using gendered metaphorical language, especially drawing on ideas of gender and impurity, the reality of the city's abandonment and isolation is vividly expressed.

This section, then, will demonstrate how the city is personified and gendered, drawing on and supporting the idea introduced in the previous section that the female body is the most human body, on the other end of the spectrum from the perfected, male, divine body. The body is described here as leaky, suffering, and impure. She has been abused and abandoned. Her

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<sup>83</sup>. See too Berlin who also argues that Lamentations draws on the "paradigm of purity" found primarily in priestly literature (*Lamentations*, 19-21). See my discussion below.

impurity, established in Lam 1, is especially important to this description as it depicts the community's insurmountable distance from the deity. Adding another layer of complexity to this poetic work, the imagery shifts back and forth between body and city, slipping between target and source domain. This technique produces a doubled quality to the images, encouraging the implied audience to see both city and female body in each report of violence and devastation, amplifying the effect of this imagery by allowing the implied audience to experience it in stereo.

### *Personified City-Body*

Personification, where a nonsentient object or abstraction is described in terms of human characteristics, is perhaps one of the most common types of metaphorical mapping as it draws on the source domain that we know and understand most intimately: ourselves.<sup>84</sup> By applying language, imagery, and experiences from our most immediate context, for example, our physical bodies and human emotion, it allows us to quickly make sense of our world and convey this understanding to others who also share the experiences of human bodies and emotions. This means that personification can be a powerful tool of persuasion. By speaking of pain and suffering in bodily terms, it provokes an empathetic response in an embodied audience.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, it puts something that may feel distant or so large that it is incomprehensible, like the destruction of a city, into human, comprehensible terms.

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84. Kovecses, *Metaphor*, 39. Kovecses points out that personification is used widely in conventional speech as well as in literature (39, 55-56). On personification in literature, see Lakoff and Turner, *More Than Cool Reason*.

85. Cottrill, "The Articulate Body," 111-112; Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," 310-312, 314, 325. Cf. Camp: "it personalizes the impersonal" (*Wisdom and the Feminine*, 213). See discussion below.

Not only does personification draw on what we know about ourselves in order to better understand something more foreign to us, but it can also unify multiple perspectives and experiences into a single subject.<sup>86</sup> This is well exemplified in the case of personified Jerusalem: the trauma, misery, and grief of all the inhabitants of the city are represented by, but reduced to, a portrait of a single suffering woman.<sup>87</sup> This poetic choice is strategic. Not only does the female body offer opportunities to depict in vivid terms Jerusalem's vulnerability and ruin, but by depicting this female body as impure it implies the community's alienation from its god.

The personification of the city in Lam 1 and 2 is achieved by assigning a female body, emotions, experiences, and actions to the city. This personifying work is done both by the speaker who describes Woman Jerusalem, primarily speaking about her, as well as by the personified city herself, who speaks about her bodily pain and emotional turmoil. Despite their different perspectives, both voices contribute to the personification and embodiment of Jerusalem and employ this rhetoric to put forward a persuasive argument about the city-woman's vulnerability, suffering, and worthiness of empathy.

The most obvious way Jerusalem is personified in Lam 1 and 2 is by providing her with a body and voice (1:9b, 11b-22; 2:20-22). Jerusalem's body is a pained and leaky female body with cheeks (Lam 1:2), hands (Lam 1:17; 2:19), feet (Lam 1:13), bones (Lam 1:13), neck (Lam 1:14), eyes (Lam 1:16; 2:18), heart (Lam 1:20, 22; 2:19), and stomach (Lam 1:20). Her body weeps, suffers, and even menstruates.<sup>88</sup> In short, this is a body in pain. Personified Jerusalem describes this bodily pain herself in the first half of her speech in Lam 1, which begins:

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86. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 214-216.

87. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, 215. See too Heim: "In the book of Lamentations this expression of both individual *and* corporate pain has been achieved through the personification of Jerusalem" ("The Personification of Jerusalem," 130).

88. See discussion below on Lam 1:8-9.

<sup>11b</sup>See, O Yahweh, and look (רֵאֵה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָה)  
for I have become worthless (כִּי הֵיִיתִי זֹלָלָה)!

<sup>12</sup>Come,<sup>89</sup> all you passersby (לֹא אֲלִיכֶם כָּל־עֹבְרֵי דָרֶךְ),  
look and see (הִבִּיטוּ וּרְאוּ):  
If there is pain like my pain (אִם־יֵשׁ מְכָאוֹב כְּמְכָאֲבִי)  
that has been inflicted upon me (אֲשֶׁר עוֹלָל לִי),  
which Yahweh made (me) suffer (הַיְהוָה הוֹגָה יְהוָה)  
on the day of his furious anger (בְּיוֹם חֲרוֹן אַפּוֹ)?

<sup>13</sup>From on high he sent fire (מִמְרוֹם שָׁלַח־אֵשׁ)  
into my bones and he brought it down (בְּעֵצְמֹתַי וַיִּרְדְּנָה).<sup>90</sup>  
He spread a net for my feet (פָּרַשׁ רֶשֶׁת לְרַגְלִי),  
he made me turn back (הֵשִׁיבֵנִי אָחֹזֵר).  
He made me a ravaged woman (נִתְנַנְנִי שִׁמְמָה),<sup>91</sup>

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89. לֹא אֲלִיכֶם, literally, “no/not to you,” which makes little sense here. There seems to be little consensus among commentators on how to solve this crux. For example, Berlin follows Jewish tradition and renders it “may it not come upon you” (*Lamentations*, 43; see Caro, *Beiträge zur ältesten Exegese des Buches Threni*, 26). Hillers follows the emendation first proposed by Praetorius (“Threni I, 12,” 143) as “approximately correct” to read לָבוּ, “come” (*Lamentations*, 71). Linafelt, on the other hand, simply leaves out the difficult phrase, stating that it is “obviously an interjection” but admitting this is “not a completely satisfactory solution” (*Surviving Lamentations*, 157n27). I have chosen to follow Praetorius and Hillers and emend MT. See too Salters, *Lamentations*, 34. This is a relatively simple emendation and works in the context of the passage. For another example of a construction of לָבוּ followed by a question introduced by אִם, see Isa 1:18.

90. Emending MT’s וַיִּרְדְּנָה from רָדָה: “he ruled over it/her” to יָרַד: “he caused it to come down.” See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 46; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 72. In MT the antecedent for the third-person feminine singular suffix is unclear. See 2 Kgs 1:10, 12, 14 and 2 Chr 7:1 for other examples of the verb יָרַד used for God’s fire.

91. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt have pointed out that this term (שִׁמְמָה) can carry connotations of rape. See 2 Sam 13:20 where it is used to describe Tamar (שִׁמְמָה) after she is raped by Amnon (“Rape of Zion,” 81). This feminine adjective is also used elsewhere to describe destroyed cities (Isa 1:7; 62:4; Jer 33:10; Ezek 36:4, 35). See too Maier, *Daughter Zion*, 146. This term appears two other times in Lam 1: to describe the gates of the city (שַׁעְרֵיהָ שׁוֹמְמִין) (v. 4) and to describe the personified city’s sons (בְּנֵי שׁוֹמְמִים) (v. 16). It is possible that these uses carry a similar connotation, considering the poetic overlap between the woman’s body and the city’s fortifications and the realities of warfare (both in terms of penetrating gates as well as the rape of conquered peoples). However, in 1:4 and 1:16 these connotations are not drawn out.

all day sick (בְּלֵי־הַיּוֹם דָּוָה).<sup>92</sup> (Lam 1:11b-13)

The personified city expresses in her own words the pain inflicted on her by Yahweh. She appeals not only to Yahweh but also to passersby, asking them to witness her suffering. By referring specifically to her body parts and the pain she experiences by fire and entrapment, she attempts to connect with others listening who also have a body and know what it means to experience bodily pain.<sup>93</sup> The position this city-woman takes is one of absolute vulnerability. She has been abused by her once protector and suffered greatly at his hands.

This can also be seen in the descriptions of the city-woman's great emotional turmoil. She is depicted as weeping repeatedly (Lam 1:2, 16; cf. 2:18-19) and in Lam 1:20 the city-woman speaks of her emotional distress in terms of how these feelings are affecting her body: "See, O Yahweh, how distressed I am (רְאֵה יְהוָה כִּי־צָרָה־לִּי)! My stomach churns (מַעֵי חֲמָרְמָרוּ). My mind reels inside me (נִהְפָּד לִבִּי בְּקִרְבִּי), how bitter am I!"<sup>94</sup> (Lam 1:20a). Thus the personified city uses the language of bodily suffering, even emotional suffering with physical effects, in order to express her experience of divine punishment.

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92. דָּוָה is an adjectival form of the root דוה, which generally refers to being sad or sick but often specifically refers to menstruation (see, especially, Lev 12:2; 15:33; 20:18; Isa 30:22.) This does not seem to be an explicit reference to menstruation (nor in Lam 1:22), but considering the context of an impure female body established in the 1:8-9 and 17, this connotation is present. See too Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator,'" 176.

93. Cottrill, "The Articulate Body," 111-112; Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," 310-312, 314, 325. See discussion below.

94. Following Seow's suggestion that there has been confusion between the roots מרה (to rebel) and מרר (to be bitter), I am emending MT's מְרוֹר מְרוֹתֵי, "I have seriously rebelled," to מְרוֹר מְרוֹתֵי "I am very bitter." ("A Textual Note on Lamentations 1:20"). This is supported by both the Syriac and Vulgate, moreover it better reflects the context of the verse. As Seow points out emotional distress is not usually caused by rebellion, but by destruction ("A Textual Note," 416). See Ruth 1:20-21 for another example of bitterness applied to a woman's emotional distress (this time over the death of her husband and sons). See too Berlin, *Lamentations*, 47. Pace Salter, *Lamentations*, 97-98. Following Seow, I also take כִּי here and at the beginning of the verse as asseverative ("A Textual Note," 418. Gordis, "The Asseverative *kaph* in Ugaritic and Hebrew").

Personified Jerusalem's embodiment, then, is central to her persuasive discourse. Amy Cottrill has considered the effect of the language of bodily suffering in the lament psalms and argues that despite the fact that articulating bodily pain expresses a position of vulnerability and powerlessness it also provides the speaker with authority and agency.<sup>95</sup> This is partially achieved by its ability to persuade listeners, who also have bodies and know what it means to suffer. By describing her distress in terms of bodily suffering,<sup>96</sup> the city-woman draws the implied audience to experience the pain along with her, controlling their response.<sup>97</sup> It would be challenging for anyone who has experienced bodily pain to hear an account of suffering and not respond empathetically, recalling one's own experience of pain and bodily complications. As Cottrill writes, "Indeed, to remain distant or unmoved in the presence of this embodied suffering and anguish seems obscene."<sup>98</sup> Therefore, personified Jerusalem's embodiment and speech depicts a unified and moving portrait of the city that aims to provoke an empathetic response in its implied audience.

The descriptive voice also shares in personifying Jerusalem, emphasizing her femininity and vulnerability. While this voice also portrays Jerusalem with body parts (such as, cheeks in Lam 1:2; eyes in Lam 2:18; hands and a heart in 2:19) and in a state of emotional distress (Lam 1:2, 16; 2:18-19), this speaker explicitly feminizes Jerusalem by assigning her female roles and titles. For example, the first chapter of Lamentations opens with the declaration: "Alas! She sits

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95. Cottrill, "The Articulate Body," esp. 106-107, 109-112. Cf. Scarry, who argues for the inarticulateness of bodily pain and sees this "unshareability" as central to pain's power (*The Body in Pain*, 4).

96. For example: speaking of her pain (Lam 1:12, 18), fire in her bones (Lam 1:13), being trapped (Lam 1:13, 14), her constant weeping (Lam 1:16; 2:11) and groaning (Lam 1:21, 22), her tumultuous insides (Lam 1:20; 2:11), and feeling sick (Lam 1:13, 22).

97. Gillmayr-Bucher, "Body Images in the Psalms," esp. 310-312, 314, 325.

98. Cottrill, "The Articulate Body," 112.

alone, the city (once) great with people.<sup>99</sup> She has become like a widow, the one great among nations. She, a queen among provinces, has become a slave.” In Lam 1:1, the speaker personifies and genders Jerusalem by comparing her to a widow and recalling her previous status as a “queen among provinces.” This woman’s reversal in fortune, from queen to slave, is narrated three times in just this first verse, emphasizing her great downfall, but in feminine terms.<sup>100</sup> Although the first line speaks of the city as a city, contrasting loneliness and being “great with people,” one could see a reference to motherhood, even if only on rereading as this is a role assigned to the city-woman throughout Lam 1 and 2 (and especially in Lam 2:19-22).<sup>101</sup> The bitter and isolated condition of the city-woman established in the first verse is further developed throughout Lam 1 and 2, returning again and again to describe her specifically female suffering and loneliness.<sup>102</sup>

This feminine portrayal of Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2 is made explicit by the repeated use of the appellation, “Daughter [Geographic Name].”<sup>103</sup> The most common is “Daughter Zion

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99. Taking *רַבְּתֵי עַם* as a construct chain: “full of people.” Cf. 1 Sam 2:5 *רַבַּת בְּנִים*. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 45; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 64.

100. Hillers points out that poems that begin with *אֵיכָה* often note a dramatic change in disposition (e.g. Isa 1:21) or fortune (e.g. Jer 48:17; Isa 14:4; Ezk 26:17), which explains its appearance in many laments (*Lamentations*, 80).

101. See too O’Connor, *Tears*, 20; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 50. See also discussion below.

102. Chayim Cohen has pointed out that the term “widow” in Hebrew (*אַלְמָנָה*), as well as the related terms in Akkadian (*almattu*) and Egyptian (*h3rt*), refer not simply to a woman who had once been married, but specifically to one who now has no financial support and therefore requires special legal protection (“The ‘Widowed’ City” 78). In other words, the lonely and bitter conditions described here are implied and emphasized in the term “widow” (*אַלְמָנָה*) that appears in the very first verse of the text. This is also apparent in examining other attestations of this term in the Hebrew Bible. It is often paired with orphan (*יְתוֹם*) and used to reference the most needy members of society: e.g., Exod 22:21; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19-21; 26:12, 13; 27:19; Isa 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer 7:6; 22:3; 49:11; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10; Mal 3:5; Pss 68:6; 94:6; 146:9; Job 22:9; 24:3. See too Hillers, *Lamentations*, 81.

103. Many commentators assert that this phrase is best understood as an appositional genitive or a genitive of association (e.g., Gen 33:18; Josh 19:29); therefore, the translation “Daughter Zion” is preferred to “Daughter of Zion.” For a full discussion of the grammar of “bat X” see Berlin, *Lamentations*, 10-12. See too Stinespring, “No Daughter Zion”; Dearman, “Daughter Zion and Her Place

(בַּת־צִיּוֹן),” occurring 25 times in the Bible,<sup>104</sup> but eight times in Lamentations alone.<sup>105</sup> In Lamentations the epithets Daughter Judah (בַּת־יְהוּדָה),<sup>106</sup> Daughter Jerusalem (בַּת יְרוּשָׁלַם),<sup>107</sup> and Daughter Edom (בַּת־אֲדוֹם)<sup>108</sup> are all attested.<sup>109</sup> In fact these titles appear in a higher concentration in the book of Lamentations than any other book in the Hebrew Bible, occurring 20 times in its 154 verses. Based on his argument that the book of Lamentations (as well as other prophetic and psalmic texts that often feature the Daughter Zion title) is drawing on the Mesopotamian city-lament genre and its weeping goddess motif,<sup>110</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp suggests that the Daughter Zion titles are based on the very similar Akkadian divine epithet “*mārat GN*.”<sup>111</sup> I find Dobbs-Allsopp’s argument about these titles convincing. As he notes, this is a literary phenomenon: “the divine title of the type *bat GN* has been appropriated as a whole and used in a stereotypical

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in God’s Household”; Kartveit, *Rejoice, Dear Zion!*. Dobbs-Allsopp, on the other hand, argues that it is better to understand this phrase as the (very common) genitive of location. This argument is based in large part on his reading of Lamentations as drawing on the Mesopotamian city-lament genre where the very similar Akkadian divine epithet “*mārat GN*” is found (“The Syntagma of *bat*,” 452-455). See discussion above. See too Floyd, “Welcome Back Daughter of Zion.” Overall, as both Berlin (*Lamentations*, 12) and Dobbs-Allsopp (“Daughter Zion,” 127n7) admit, appreciating the personification of Jerusalem (in this case) that is supported by this title does not require resolving this philological debate.

104. 2 Kings 19:21; Isa 1:8; 16:1; 37:22; 52:2; 62:11; Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23; Mic 1:13; 4:8, 10, 13; Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:14; 9:9; Ps 9:15; Lam 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:22.

105. Lam 1:6; 2:1, 4, 8, 10, 13, 18; 4:22.

106. Lam 1:15; 2:2, 5. Elsewhere: Psa 48:12; 97:8.

107. Lam 2:13, 15. Elsewhere: 2 Kings 19:21; Isa 37:22; Mic 4:8; Zeph 3:14; Zech 9:9.

108. Lam 4:21, 22. Thus this epithet can also be used for other, often enemy, nations: e.g. Daughter Babylon: Isa 47:1; Jer 50:42; 51:33; Zech 2:7; Psa 137:8.

109. Also the title “Daughter of my people” (בַּת־עַמִּי) (Lam 2:11; 3:48; 4:3, 6, 10) is also usually treated with these Daughter titles (see, e.g., BDB, 123; *HALOT*, 166; *TDOT* 2:334-35). The grammatical relationship is the same, although בַּת is in construct with phrase “my people” rather than a geographic designation (like a city or country). This phrase is used for individuals (not personified entities) elsewhere in the Bible, for example, Ezek 13:17; 32:16, 18. As Dobbs-Allsopp points out, in cases where this title identifies a personified entity it depicts the figure as a “female compatriot” and helps to “lend personhood” to the personification (“Daughter Zion,” 131n21).

110. See discussion above.

111. Akkadian *mārat* (like Hebrew בַּת) is the word daughter in a construct state (Dobbs-Allsopp, “The Syntagma of *bat*,” 453). For Dobbs-Allsopp’s argument see, “The Syntagma of *bat*,” 452-455.

way...to create the literary metaphor of the personified city.”<sup>112</sup> As my analysis demonstrates, the borrowing of this title did not limit the imagination of the poet; Jerusalem’s personification is achieved in a multitude of ways. But, as discussed above, the poet of Lam 1 and 2 draws on literary traditions and creatively reuses them to serve the text’s message. Thus it is worth thinking about how else these Daughter titles assisted the work of the poet.

Referring to a city as a daughter emphasized its vulnerability and therefore its need for protection.<sup>113</sup> A daughter was under the protection and control of her father until she became a wife. The daughter titles underscore the fact that the city is in need of divine protection and guidance.<sup>114</sup> She must obey him in exchange for his protection. This relationship is reflected in much of the biblical literature featuring Daughter Zion; however, in Lamentations the use of these titles seems to be ironic, or, at the very least, tragic. This city is no longer a vulnerable woman in need of protection; she is now ruined. The time for protection has passed. And what is more, the entity tasked with providing this protection, Yahweh, not only did not provide it, but is figured as the one responsible for this destruction.

This tragic reality of Jerusalem’s once-protector-turned-destroyer is seen most clearly in the opening verses of Lam 2 where Yahweh’s violent demolition of Jerusalem is recounted (Lam 2:1-9). The speaker does not explain or rationalize Yahweh’s rage but rather meditates on it in terrified awe, detailing the devastation it brought to the city and all its protective elements: fortifications, strongholds, and fortresses. The fact that Yahweh so easily dismantled Jerusalem’s architecture of protection and security echoes the fact that Yahweh, once protector, has become

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112. Dobbs-Allsopp, “The Syntagma of *bat*,” 467.

113. See too Dobbs-Allsopp, “Daughter Zion,” 131-132.

114. Christl Maier, “Daughter Zion as Queen,” 147.

their enemy.<sup>115</sup> Significantly, there is not the extensive figuring of the city as body in this passage as there is in Lam 1 (or even at the end of Lam 2), although the city is repeatedly referred to by the Daughter Zion or Daughter Judah epithets (vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 8). The repetition of these epithets that emphasize the city's vulnerability make this account of destruction all the more shocking and devastating, encouraging the implied audience to draw the connection between the ruined walls and ramparts and a woman's ravaged body. Moreover, it would seem that it is the very absence of the personified and embodied female form of Jerusalem, which figures so prominently in Lam 1 and the second half of Lam 2, that requires the implied audience to make this interpretive leap, intensifying the implied audience's experience of this account.<sup>116</sup>

In fact, the personification of Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2 is so effective precisely because it never overwhelms the implied audience to the point where they could forget the actual subject of these poems: a devastated city. This is achieved through a constant and intentional slippage between Jerusalem the city and Jerusalem the female body. Throughout Lam 1 and 2 the imagery moves and back and forth between the two domains, sometimes focusing on the metaphorical city-woman and other times describing the condition of a city and its inhabitants. This poetic technique can be well demonstrated by examining further the opening verses of Lam 1.

As discussed above, the first verse introduces the fallen female figure as well as the complexity of this poetic figuration. As Hebrew has no neuter, the feminine singular subject of

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115. Several commentators have called attention to the divine warrior imagery (Exod 15; Judg 5; 2 Sam 22 = Ps 18; 68; Hab 3) here in Lam 2:1-9; once a defender of Israel, Yahweh has become their enemy. See Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 50; Dobbs-Allsopp, "R(az/ais)ing in Lamentations 2," 36; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 104; Linafelt, *Surviving*, 48-49.

116. Dobbs-Allsopp also calls attention to the way that personified figure is evoked in this passage without being present. He suggests that although this female persona is conjured, in part, by the Daughter Zion and Daughter Judah epithets, she is "effectively push[ed]...out of view, offstage, as it were, at least for the time being" until she is "raised" up to speak by the end of the poem ("R(az/ais)ing Zion," 50-52, here 51). Dobbs-Allsopp does not, however, analyze this as a persuasive poetic strategy in the text.

these phrases could be understood as simply the city (הָעִיר), a feminine singular noun. The attributed action of lonely sitting, however, as well as the images of widow and queen indicate that this city is being figured as a feminine entity. Yet this figuration feels partial. The speaker creates distance between the target and source domain with the use of a simile: “She has become *like* a widow.” This simile draws attention to the fact that the city is not actually a widow because this is a city and not a woman. This space prevents the implied audience from becoming too immersed in the metaphor. It is important, it seems, for the poet that both fallen city and suffering woman remain actively present in the implied audience’s mind. Throughout Lam 1 and 2, there is a fluidness in the imagery, constantly moving between the female figure and the city itself, resulting in a blending of imagery that requires the implied audience to see both a woman and a city in every image.<sup>117</sup>

The next several verses continue this pattern:

<sup>2</sup>She weeps intensely at night (בְּכֹו תִבְכֶּה בַּלַּיְלָה)  
 and her tears are upon her cheek (וְדַמְעָתָהָ עַל לְחִיָּהָ).  
 She has no one to comfort her (אֵיזֶלֶה מְנַחֵם)  
 from among all her lovers (מִכָּל־אֲהָבָיָהָ).  
 All her friends have betrayed her (כָּל־רֵעֵיהָ בָּגְדוּ בָּהּ),  
 they have become her enemies (הָיָו לָהּ לְאֹיְבִים).

<sup>3</sup>Judah has gone into exile after<sup>118</sup> misery (גָּלְתָהּ יְהוּדָה מֵעֲנִי)  
 and intense servitude (וּמֵרַב עֲבָדָה).  
 She has dwelled among the nations (הִיא יָשְׁבָה בְּגוֹיִם),  
 she has found no rest (לֹא מָצְאָה מְנוּחַ).  
 All who pursue her have overtaken her (כָּל־רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשְׁיִגוּהָ)

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117. Berlin: “The poem moves back and forth from the woman to the city in such a way that the figurative and the literal blend together” (48).

118. Following Hillers (*Lamentations*, 66) and Berlin (*Lamentations*, 45) in taking this *mēm* in the temporal sense: after miserable servitude as a vassal to Babylonia, they are now exiled from their land. They have gone from bad to worse.

in the midst of distress (בֵּין הַמְצָרִים).

<sup>4</sup>The roads to Zion are mourning (דַּרְכֵי צִיּוֹן אֲבֵלוֹת)  
without any festival-goers (מִבְּלִי בָּאֵי מוֹעֵד).  
All her gates are ravaged (כָּל־שַׁעְרֶיהָ שׁוֹמְמִין).<sup>119</sup>  
Her priests groan (כֹּהֲנֶיהָ נֹאנְחִים);  
her young women are grieving (בָּתוּלוֹתֶיהָ נוֹגְוֹת).<sup>120</sup>  
And as for her, it is bitter for her (וְהִיא מֵרָלָה).

<sup>5</sup>Her adversaries have become supreme (הָיוּ צָרִיחָהּ לְרֵאשׁ),  
her enemies are at ease (אֵיבֵיהָ שְׁלוֹ),  
for Yahweh causes her grief (כִּי־יְהוָה הוֹנֶה)  
on account of her abundant transgressions (עַל רַב־פְּשָׁעֶיהָ).  
Her children have gone as captives<sup>121</sup> (עוֹלְלֶיהָ הִלְכוּ שְׁבִי)  
before the adversary (לְפָנֵי־צָר). (Lam 1:2-5)

As the speaker describes (Woman) Jerusalem in these opening verses the complexity of this figuration is apparent. The city and its people are at times clearly personified as a mourning woman. For example, in verse 2 the city-woman is said to “weep intensely by night” and refers to the “tears upon her cheek.” And while both women and cities can have friends and enemies, the reference to lovers and the lack of a comforter seems to draw specifically from the domain of human relationships.<sup>122</sup> By verse 3, however, we are told who this woman is: Judah (still represented by feminine singular verbs and pronouns). The first two verses focus our attention on the image of a mourning widow while verse 3 pulls the implied audience back, perhaps forcing

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119. See n. 91 above.

120. נוֹגְוֹת is a feminine plural Niphal participle of נִגַּח. Although rare (only in Zeph 3:18) and not reflected in LXX (has ἀγόμεναι, “led away”), it does make sense in this context. See too Berlin, *Lamentations*, 45; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 67; Salters, *Lamentations*, 47.

121. The expected construction of “to go in captivity” is הִלְכוּ בְשִׁבִי, which occurs in Lam 1:18. See, e.g., Amos 9:4; Isa 46:2; Jer 20:6. Here this occurs without the ב preposition and so we can understand שְׁבִי as an adverbial accusative. GKC 118q; *IBHS* 10.2.2. See too Berlin, *Lamentations*, 46.

122. Berlin, drawing on the work of Anderson (*Time to Mourn*), suggests that the search for a comforter is a part of the mourning process. One who comforts is one who mourns along side the mourner, an expected role for family members and close friends (*Lamentations*, 17).

her to reread or remember the previous lines in a new light: this widow is a city with suffering inhabitants. The imagery constantly brings the implied audience back to the subject at hand (the target domain): mourning, captive Jerusalem. Verse 4 reinforces the city imagery by reporting on individual elements of the city and even personifying its roads, reminding us that the city is our focus, even while animating its very parts. Verse 5 marks another turn in the poem—it is the first time the speaker explains the true source of this suffering: Yahweh has caused it as a direct result of her many transgressions. We also see another element of the woman-city developed here: she is figured as a mother whose children have gone into captivity. The introduction of this image may also cause the implied audience to think back to the previous verse, understanding “her young women” (perhaps even “her priests”) all as children of Mother Jerusalem, only further reinforcing this image.<sup>123</sup>

The female figure, then, whether bereft mother or lamenting widow, is Jerusalem, both its people and its structures, as an abstract idea and the blood and brick of the space and those that inhabit it. By personifying the city, the poet unites the diversity of its people into a single vulnerable figure, who is able to speak on their behalf and express, even protest, their suffering. She represents the collective identity of Jerusalem.<sup>124</sup> The fluidness in imagery, constantly shifting from describing the fallen city in terms of its besieged structures and starving inhabitants to imagining it as a vulnerable female figure—sometimes even within a single verse—keeps the condition and fate of the community always at the forefront of the implied audience’s mind. Thus this poetic complexity, the layering of the source and target domains and fluid interchange

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123. This could also bring a nuance of motherhood to that statement in Lam 1:1 that the city was once “great with people.”

124. Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations,” 2; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 124-125; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 31; Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy,” 39-44.

between them, not only establishes the representative role of the city-woman persona, but it also encourages the implied audience to experience these poems twice, seeing both city and woman in every line and doubling the meaning and impact of this composition.

### *Jerusalem as Impure Female Body*

In the previous section I demonstrated that Jerusalem is personified as a female figure, although not exclusively, in Lam 1 and 2. This personification is achieved by attributing to her human actions (most notably speech), female roles and titles, as well as a suffering body. As a unified representation of the suffering inhabitants and ruined fortifications of Jerusalem, this female body is marked as one that is distant from her god. While this distance is expressed by the repeated statements of her downfall (especially in Lam 1:1-11), as well as by the vivid description of Yahweh's wrathful demolition of the city (Lam 2:1-9), it is also viscerally coded on the woman's body with the statement of her impurity (Lam 1:8-9, 17). If, as discussed above, an impure female body is coded as being as far from the perfected divine body as possible, then this depiction of the polluted body of Woman Jerusalem is a striking articulation of the community's alienation from their deity. There is, however, much debate over the meaning of these verses that describe the Jerusalem's impure body (Lam 1:8-9, 17), many resisting or attempting to mitigate the effect of reading a reference to menstrual impurity.<sup>125</sup> In this section, then, I will not only argue that Lam 1:8-9, 17 ascribe to personified Jerusalem an impure, menstruating female body and that this imagery appears at a structurally significant point in the poem, but also that this depiction of Jerusalem's polluted female body is vital to the poem's

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125. See discussion below.

message—in terms of both the injustice of divine abuse and abandonment and the resulting tragic reality of the futility of Jerusalem’s valid and persuasive protest.

The impurity imagery is first encountered towards the end of the descriptive voice’s speech in Lam 1:

<sup>8</sup>Jerusalem has sinned (חַטָּא חַטָּאָה יְרוּשָׁלַם),<sup>126</sup>  
therefore she has become a menstruant<sup>127</sup> (עַל־כֵּן לְנִידָה הִיְתָה).  
All who honored her despise her (כָּל־מְכַבְּדֶיהָ הִזְלוּהָ),  
for they have seen her nakedness (כִּי־רָאוּ עֶרְוֹתָהּ).<sup>128</sup>  
Even she groans (גַּם־הִיא נֹאֲנָהָה)  
and turns away (וַתִּשָּׁב אַחֲזֹר).

<sup>9</sup>Her uncleanness is in her skirts (טִמְאַתָּה בְּשׂוּלְיָהּ),<sup>129</sup>  
she did not consider the outcome of her actions (לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרֵיתָהּ).  
She has come down in an astonishing way (וַתִּרְדַּד פְּלֵאִים),  
she has no one who will comfort her (אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ).  
“See, O Yahweh, my affliction (רֵאָה יְהוָה אֶת־עַנְיִי),  
for the enemy boasts (כִּי הִגְדִּיל אוֹיֵב).”<sup>130</sup> (Lam 1:8-9)

The primary crux in these verses is how to understand the term נִידָה in verse 8. A *hapax legomenon*, the word has been interpreted in three ways.<sup>131</sup> Some have understood the root to be נוד, meaning, “to shake head,” a mocking gesture (Jer 18:16; Ps 44:15). *HALOT* suggests reading

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126. חַטָּא חַטָּאָה is an example of an internal accusative (GKC 117p) and not an example of an infinitive absolute emphasizing or intensifying this idea (i.e. “Jerusalem sinned greatly”) as some commentators and translations suggest (e.g., Berlin: “Grievously has Jerusalem sinned” [*Lamentations*, 42]; Hillers: “Because Jerusalem sinned so great a sin” [*Lamentations*, 62]; NRSV: “Jerusalem sinned grievously”). Salters, *Lamentations*, 60.

127. See discussion below.

128. See discussion below.

129. See discussion below.

130. הִגְדִּיל is the Hiphil of גדל and here refers to the enemy’s self-magnifying behavior, or boasting. *HALOT*, 179; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 46.

131. See too Hillers, *Lamentations*, 70; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 53-54.

an “object of derision.”<sup>132</sup> Others take this root to refer to a “wanderer,” which some commentators, Adele Berlin, for instance, have connected to the idea of banishment and exile, the expected consequence of sin (cf. Gen 4:12-14).<sup>133</sup> Lastly, this term is interpreted as a misspelling of נִדָּה, which refers to menstrual impurity or the menstruant herself.<sup>134</sup> This word appears 29 times in the Hebrew Bible and always refers to impurity, but most often indicates a woman’s impurity during her menstruation (Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19, 20, 24-26 [6 times], 33; 18:19; Ezek 18:6; 22:10; 36:17). Although this interpretation requires a slight emendation of MT, it receives additional support from its context, which continues to refer to the woman’s body and impurity.<sup>135</sup> Later in v. 8 the woman’s nakedness (עֲרוּתָהּ) is mentioned and v. 9 describes טְמֵאָה “uncleanness” in the woman’s skirts (בְּשׂוּלֶיהָ) or, possibly euphemistically, “pubic area” (Jer 13:22, 26; Nah 3:5). The precise image being evoked here is unclear (and will be discussed more below), but the references to the female genitals and to pollution (טְמֵאָה) seem to support understanding נִדָּה in v. 8 as referring to menstrual impurity.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, in Lam 1:17, the third-

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132. HALOT, 696; Ibn Ezra; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 70; Meek, “The Book of Lamentations,” 10; Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 130.

133. Berlin, 54. See, too, 4QLam<sup>a</sup>, LXX, and Rashi.

134. Aquila; Symmachus; Syriac; Kraus, *Klagelieder*, 21; Gottwald, *Studies*, 8; Provan, *Lamentations*, 44; Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” 175-176; Renkema, *Lamentations*, 133-134; House, *Lamentations*, 354. Cf. Berlin, who renders this term as “banished” in her translation but suggests that “all three of the associations [with נִדָּה] adhere to the word, and the dominant one shifts as we proceed from line to line—from the consequence of sin, to the scorn of others, to the idea of nakedness and impurity in her skirts” (*Lamentations*, 54).

135. Even commentators who argue for a different reading of נִדָּה, often suggest that menstrual impurity is still being referenced here, if only by pun or homonym (Berlin, 54; Hillers, 85-86; Hens-Piazza, 8).

136. It is also significant that every attestation of נִדָּה that refers to menstrual impurity is accompanied by the concept of pollution (טְמֵאָה). See Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19, 20, 24-26, 33; 18:19; Ezek 18:6; 22:10; 36:17.

person speaker again states that Jerusalem has become a menstruant, this time using the expected spelling of the word (הִיְתָה יְרוּשָׁלַם לְנִדָּה).

The other interpretive problem that commentators, especially those who see a reference to menstrual impurity, encounter is how to make sense of the implied connection between sin and menstrual impurity. If one understands the first line of v. 8 to read, “Jerusalem has sinned, therefore she is a menstruant,” then the text could be read as implying that the personified city is experiencing menstruation, a natural and necessary function of the female body, as a result of her sins. Commentators are quick to point out that menstruation is not a sin.<sup>137</sup> As a result, many argue that if this is a reference to impurity it must be that which results from immoral behavior. For example, Berlin writes in her commentary on v. 9:

I must stress that this verse is not evidence that menstruation was considered morally offensive or disgusting. If the intended image is a menstruant, ritual impurity must be interpreted as a metaphor for the moral impurity of which Jerusalem was guilty by virtue of her unfaithfulness to God. If the phrase [in v. 9a] is interpreted as a menstruant metaphor, it may suggest that Jerusalem’s moral impurity was obvious for all to see, as visible as a bloodstain on the skirt of a menstruating woman. But this interpretation seems forced. In fact, the verse is better understood as not referring to menstruation but to the impurity of sexual immortality... She is not a menstruant; she is a whore.<sup>138</sup>

Berlin, although particularly concerned that the modern reader not walk away with a biblically ordained understanding of menstruation as sinful, provides what seems to be a common

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137. Salters, *Lamentations*, 63n80; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 20-21, 54.

138. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 54-55.

interpretation for recent commentators on this passage.<sup>139</sup> There are, however, several problems with this reading.

First, while it is true that the priestly texts distinguish between impurities that result from naturally occurring bodily functions (such as ejaculation, menstruation, or corpse contamination) and those that result from transgressive actions (such as adultery, homicide, or mishandling the proper purification procedures for bodily functions), religious categories of “sin” and “morality” may confuse these distinctions.<sup>140</sup> As discussed above, these impurities are all a part of a single cultic system with a primary objective: maintaining the deity’s presence.<sup>141</sup> The graded spectrum of impurity prescribed in the priestly texts does identify certain impurities as more impactful on the sanctuary and, therefore, more threatening to the deity’s presence, than others.<sup>142</sup> Although prohibited impurities, especially those performed intentionally, were among the most damaging and, therefore, required additional penalties beyond the purgation rituals (such as being cut off from the community, e.g., Num 19:13, 20<sup>143</sup>), they still fell into the same system with the rules and regulations as any tolerated impurity. In other words, while it is true that the impurity

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139. Salters, *Lamentations*, 60-63; O’Connor, *Tears*, 22; Maier, *Daughter Zion*, 147; Wright, *The Message of Lamentations*, 64; Tremper, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 346-347; Mintz, *Hurban*, 55; Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations,” 3-4; Bergant, *Lamentations*, 41. See also Hens-Piazza, who also observes the dominance of this interpretation and the lack of clear evidence in the text: “Though the text never narrates Zion as an adulterer, there is a great deal of confluence among readers leading to this conclusion. Even though the case for such sexual impropriety is based on ambiguous references in the text, the dominant interpretations forward certainty” (*Lamentations*, 9-10). Hens-Piazza suggests that vv. 8-9 likely refer to the woman’s punishment of rape and assault (*Lamentations*, 10).

140. See Wright who refers to “tolerated” versus “prohibited” impurities (“The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” 151-165). Note too Wright’s comment that referring to these categories of impurities as “ritual” versus “moral” is problematic as “the Hebrew Bible does not clearly make this distinction” (151n3). See too Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism*, for a thorough discussion of the distinctions between ritual impurity and moral impurity (especially pp. 21-42).

141. Klawans, “Pure Violence,” 143-144. See also Frymer-Kensky, “Pollution, Purification, and Purgation,” 401; Wright, “Unclean and Clean (OT),” *ABD* 6:739. See discussion above.

142. Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary,” 393-395; Wright, “The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” 152-169. See discussion above.

143. Wright, “The Spectrum of Priestly Impurity,” 161.

accrued by a woman menstruating would have been considered tolerable and, if properly managed, would be harmless, the potential damage (especially if improperly handled) is ultimately the same as an intentional act of adultery: the deity's abandonment of the community. Therefore, a quick dismissal of menstrual impurity as not "sinful" betrays a potential misunderstanding of the priestly impurity system.

Moreover, there are other instances of the priestly concept of menstrual impurity being used outside of priestly legislation, specifically to describe offensive, defiling behaviors. For example, in Ezek 36:17: "Mortal (בְּן־אָדָם),<sup>144</sup> when the house of Israel was living upon their land (אֶרֶץ) they made it unclean (אִטְמָה) with their ways and their deeds; like the uncleanness (אִטְמָה) of menstrual impurity (נִדָּה) were their ways to me." Here the defiling actions of Israel are compared with a woman's menstrual impurity. The next verse in Ezekiel reports "I poured out my wrath upon them because of the blood that they shed upon the land and with their idols they made it [the land] unclean (אִטְמָה)." The comparison with a woman's menstrual impurity is used here to express just how repulsive Yahweh found their defiling behavior to be.<sup>145</sup> It is easy to understand how this technical terminology for being unclean and impure came to be used to describe acts and states that are detestable to Yahweh and risk the termination of their relationship.<sup>146</sup>

While Berlin does admit that the image of a menstruant in Lam 1:8-9 could be the poet using "ritual impurity... as a metaphor for the moral impurity of which Jerusalem was guilty..."

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144. Literally: "son of man."

145. See too Ezek 7:19-20; Ezra 9:11.

146. See too Galambush's work on female imagery in the book of Ezekiel. She argues that as Ezekiel understood the female body to be always potentially defiling and therefore incompatible with "Ezekiel's goal to establish an inviolably pure realm in which Yahweh can safely dwell" (*Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 3). As a result, she suggests that the female persona of the city is suppressed in Ezekiel's description of the renewed temple in Ezek 40-48.

it is unclear what exactly this moral impurity is.<sup>147</sup> Berlin claims that this is an image of a “whore.”<sup>148</sup> She supports this reading only by explaining that שִׁלְיָהּ, “her skirts,” could imply her modesty by pointing to its attestation in Nah 3:5 and Jer 13:22, 26 where lifting up “skirts” results in exposing nakedness.<sup>149</sup> Berlin concludes that “from the meaning and context of ‘skirts’” this image must be a reference to “sexual immodesty or impropriety” and not to menstruation.<sup>150</sup> This interpretation, however, is not convincing, especially when one considers the evidence of Nah 3:5 and Jer 13:22, 26. In both passages, exposure is threatened and explicitly linked to shame (קָלוֹן) (Nah 3:5; Jer 13:22, 26), as a result of bad behavior. Although both passages include sexual promiscuity (often meant metaphorically) in the description of their bad behavior that results in the punishment by exposure (Nah 3:4; Jer 13:27), this is still not sufficient evidence that “skirts” always refers to sexual immodesty or impropriety. Rather, it is clear from these passages that “skirts” cover the part of the body that it would be shameful to expose: the genitals.

Where, then, does the interpretation for a “whore” come from? I propose that many interpreters are unduly influenced by the statement that heads v. 8: “Jerusalem has sinned.” In fact, at several points in Lam 1, a reference to Jerusalem’s transgressions is made (Lam 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 22); however, what these transgressions are is never established. While the detailed ways that Jerusalem suffers is made fully apparent, in both personified and material terms, the poet

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147. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 54. Berlin also gives the example of Lam 4:15 where “the ritually impure leper (Lev 13:45) is the symbol of the morally impure leaders” (20). She also points to Ezek 36:17 and Ezra 9:11 as other examples of immorality being symbolized by menstrual impurity, but she still ultimately contends that Lam 1:9 is not a reference to menstruation.

148. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 55. See too Salters, *Lamentations*, 62.

149. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 54-55.

150. Berlin, *Lamentations*, 55. Robert Salters comes to a similar conclusion in his commentary about the imagery in v. 9: “The fixation with menstrual blood, rather than the stains of sexual activity, leads scholars astray here... The stains reveal what has happened (v. 8) The woman has engaged loosely in sexual activity” (*Lamentations*, 63n80). Salters does not explain how loose sexual behavior would result in a woman’s clothing being stained.

does not seem concerned with detailing the mistakes that led to this suffering.<sup>151</sup> And yet, many interpreters see a predominantly sinful and guilty depiction of Jerusalem.<sup>152</sup>

Tod Linafelt identifies and criticizes this trend in modern critical scholarship on the book of Lamentations, arguing that one must distinguish between the presentation of pain and the interpretation of pain in Lam 1 and 2. He asserts that “biblical scholars have tended to focus on the *interpretation* of pain, and not surprisingly they have done so primarily by explaining pain and suffering as resulting from the guilt of the sufferer.”<sup>153</sup> Linafelt suggests that scholars’ focus on Jerusalem’s sin, seen especially in the interpretation of personified Jerusalem as a figure of guilt, is driven, at least in part, by a desire to both mitigate the image of God as ultimately responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and identify the possibility of reconciliation.<sup>154</sup> If Jerusalem did sin grievously then they deserved their punishment and Yahweh’s righteousness is preserved; but, with admission of this guilt and repentance, there is hope for restoration.<sup>155</sup> Coming to Lam 1 and 2 with this perspective, however, may cause the interpreter to miss much about personified Jerusalem as well as the poems’ critique of Yahweh.<sup>156</sup>

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151. See too Maier, who comments that despite the poet’s attention to Jerusalem’s suffering, “his reference to her transgressions seems rather vague and unimaginative” (*Daughter Zion*, 147). Also Salters (*Lamentations*), who acknowledges that the poet “does not spell out a single example of this evil doing” (60) and yet still interprets the predominant image in Lam 1:8-9 as “the guilty harlot” (62).

152. See, e.g., Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*; Gottwald, *Studies*; Westermann, *Lamentations*; Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*. See too Lambert’s *How Repentance Became Biblical* for a discussion of the problematic “penitential lens” that many interpreters bring to biblical texts (3).

153. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 43, emphasis original.

154. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 9-10. Linafelt’s critique of scholarship also includes what he sees as an undue focus on the suffering man of Lam 3. For his critical engagement with scholarship, see *Surviving Lamentations*, 5-17.

155. See, e.g., Gordis, *The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, 126; Brandscheidt, *Gotteszorn und Menschenleid*, 212; Ferris, *The Genre of Communal Lament*, 145-146; Gottwald, *Studies*, 62; Westermann, *Lamentations*, 116-117, 127-128, 132-134.

156. See my discussion below. See also Chopra-McGowan’s recently completed dissertation, “Representing the Destruction of Jerusalem,” where she argues that Lamentations is an indictment of Yahweh as unfit ruler. See pp. 130-203.

It is likely that interpreters are also influenced by the literary resonances between Lamentations and prophetic texts where marital or sexual metaphors are used to describe a city or nation and its relationship with the deity.<sup>157</sup> Often this relationship is portrayed as a marriage between Yahweh and adulterous Jerusalem (e.g. Ezek 16; 23). This metaphor, however, is never explicitly established in Lam 1 and 2. Beyond two elusive references to Jerusalem's "lovers" (אהב), who abandon and betray her in her hour of need (1:2, 19), and the fact that Jerusalem is personified as a woman, and specifically as a violated woman (esp 1:8-10), marital imagery is not employed to construct personified Jerusalem and her relationship with the deity in Lam 1 and 2. These resonances, however, are tempting to interpreters, especially because they help to explain Jerusalem's punishment. If personified Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2 is like, for example, the personified Jerusalem in Ezek 16 or 23, then it is clear that she has indeed sinned by being sexually promiscuous. This, however, is never explicitly established in Lam 1 and 2.<sup>158</sup>

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157. Many scholars analyze Lamentations based on its connection with prophetic texts. See Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, especially 1-28, 79-102; Guest, "Hiding Behind the Naked Women"; O'Connor, *Tears*, 7, 20; Maier, *Daughter Zion*, 141-160.; Most commentators also recognize this connection: e.g., Berlin, *Lamentations*, 8; Hillers, *Lamentations*, 81-82; Hens-Piazza, *Lamentations*, xli-xlii.

158. Dobbs-Allsopp suggests that there is a prophetic motif that is drawn on in Lam 1:8-9: that of a besieged city depicted as a violated woman (*Lamentations*, 63-65). While this motif appears in many texts where the city or nation is depicted as Yahweh's wife, it is not exclusive to these texts. This prophetic motif usually features an accusation of sinful behavior (Isa 47:6-7, 10; Jer 13:22, 27; Ezek 16:15-34; 23:1-22; Nah 3:1-4) and punishment by exposure (Isa 47:3; Jer 13:22, 26; Ezek 16:37; 23:29; Nah 3:5) that is witnessed by others, often resulting in shame (Isa 47:3; Jer 13:26; Ezek 16:37; 23:29), which occurs in Lam 1:8-9 (63). Dobbs-Allsopp, however, argues that there are "subtle but significant differences in how the motif is realized in this poem as compared with the prophetic literature that ultimately cast the imagery in a different light, creating tensions that shift the focus away from the issues of sin and guilt and toward the experience of pain and suffering" (64). In particular, Dobbs-Allsopp points to the fact that while the woman's exposure is described, "all the details surrounding the exposure of the city's 'nakedness' has been suppressed, and as a result, the image swells with potential connotations..." (64). Dobbs-Allsopp's analysis demonstrates that even if the poet of Lam 1 is making use of a prophetic motif (and I do find his argument convincing on this point) this does not result in a collapsing of personified Jerusalem of Lam 1 and 2 into the guilty figure of the prophetic texts.

Returning to the image of personified Jerusalem in Lam 1:8-9, I agree with Berlin that understanding what is meant by impurity is crucial to interpreting this passage. Above, I suggested that considering the regular and frequent impurity contracted by women, especially in the very messy realm of human reproduction, the female body is incompatible with the deity's perfected and masculinized body. In many ways, a menstruating female body, although not the most impure on the graded spectrum of bodily impurities, acutely represents the problem of the female body in, at least, the priestly system. Due to the regularity and duration of menstruation women could potentially be in a state of contractable impurity for much of their adult lives and proper management of this impurity required cultic separation and necessitated social separation.<sup>159</sup> Leviticus 12 and 15, at least, reflect an inherent incompatibility between the reproductive female body and the deity. Personifying fallen Jerusalem, then, not only as a female body, but a menstruating female body is striking. Jerusalem is marked as alienated from Yahweh. Moreover, this alienation carries a tone of disgust.

The opening statement of Lam 1:8 should be interpreted, then, as expressing Jerusalem's alienation from Yahweh: Jerusalem has sinned therefore she has become a menstruant, one who is separated from the deity and in a state of isolation. The idea of isolation runs throughout Lam 1, beginning with the very first image of Jerusalem sitting alone as a widow. Her isolation is reinforced here in the reference to a menstruant. Moreover, the image in Lam 1:9: "her impurity is in her skirts" further contributes to the idea of an isolated menstruating woman. As discussed above, transferability of a woman's menstrual impurity is a concern of the priestly writers. In particular, anyone she touches and anything on which she lies or sits would contract the impurity,

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<sup>159</sup>. Because the woman's impurity could be transferred to anyone she touches (Lev 15:19) or anything on which she lies or sits (Lev 15:20), it seems that women would have their domestic and social lives disrupted regularly. See discussion below.

which could then be contracted by anyone who touches these items (Lev 15:19-23).<sup>160</sup> If a man has intercourse with a menstruant he would contract the full force of her menstrual impurity and would be unclean for seven days and could also transfer the impurity onto any bed on which he lay (Lev 15:24). In other words, the source of her impurity *is* in her skirts, that is, her genitals.<sup>161</sup> Therefore, it is neither a stained garment nor a “guilty harlot”<sup>162</sup> that is being evoked here. It is, rather, a further reference to fallen Jerusalem’s state of isolating impurity. Not only has her deity abandoned her, but her ongoing impurity keeps others away too. As the third-person speaker relates just after this statement of her impurity: “She has no one to comfort her.”

The language of impurity here, then, is meant to emphasize the woman’s isolation, reflecting the reality of divine abandonment.<sup>163</sup> While this does occur because Jerusalem sinned (v. 8) and “did not consider the outcome of her actions” (v. 9), the rest of the images in these two verses are describing this resulting reality, her punishment, and not further describing those sins. She has been disgraced, even in the eyes of those who once respected her, by exposure (v. 8).<sup>164</sup> This punishment by exposure, which is often linked in prophetic texts to punishment for female

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160. These regulations are similar for all of the impurities related to genital discharges in Lev 15. Emission of semen is the notable exception in that the duration of impurity lasts only until evening and while it is transferrable, it is only to materials (cloth or skin) or people (the woman engaged in intercourse with him) that the semen touches and not that his body touches (Lev 15:16-18).

161. As discussed above, the attestations of שׂוֹל in Jer 13:22, 26; Nah 3:5 demonstrate that the genitals is precisely the area that this part of the garment covers. The other attestations of שׂוֹל seem to refer to an even more specific area of a garment, the hem, where the priest was expected to affix pomegranates and bells (Exod 28:33-34; 39:24-26). Cf. Isa 6:1 where it is the lower part of God’s garment that fills the temple. See *HALOT*, 1442.

162. Salters, *Lamentations*, 62.

163. Cf. Maier who sees as one of the connotations of *niddā/nidā* an interpretation of Jerusalem as no longer sacred space: “Since sexuality and all sorts of fluids connected to it, among them menstrual blood, are barred from the sacred (Lev 15:16-33), the menstruating woman conveys the ultimate counterimage to Jerusalem’s former status as a sacred space” (*Daughter Zion*, 147). This argument, however, is not presented in detail.

164. See Hillers (*Lamentations*, 86) and Berlin (*Lamentations*, 53) for discussions of the association of nakedness with shame in the ancient world.

sexual promiscuity (especially in texts that figure the nation or city as the unfaithful wife of Yahweh, see, e.g., Ezek 16:37, 39; 23:29), seems to contribute to the argument of scholars who interpret these verses as portraying Jerusalem as a “guilty harlot.” However, as Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt point out in their consideration of rape imagery in Lam 1, the discourse around exposure (at least in prophetic texts) seems to be more about “the particularly vicious language and atrocious tenor of the imagery itself” than the accuracy of the accusation of promiscuity.<sup>165</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt clarify that exposure imagery is often applied to foreign nations, and therefore, not the metaphorical wives of Yahweh (e.g., Babylon in Isa 47 and Nineveh in Nah 3). As such, Yahweh would have no legal standing to perform such a punishment.<sup>166</sup> What is more, in the case of Babylon, she is never even accused of promiscuity even though she has been sentenced with exposure (Isa 47:2-3). Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt also point to the curse section of the Sefire treaty where punishing wives “just as a harlot” is punished is a threat leveled at one who breaks with the stipulations of the treaty.<sup>167</sup> This threat is not about making accusations of sexual promiscuity, but rather about ensuring compliance by drawing on “this particularly grizzly curse.”<sup>168</sup> In other words, depicting Jerusalem’s punishment as one of exposure further emphasizes her vulnerability, victimhood, and assaulted female body.<sup>169</sup> It is not, however, sufficient evidence to argue that Jerusalem’s sin is sexual promiscuity.

The imagery of an impure female body appears at a significant moment in Lam 1. As mentioned above there are two speakers in Lam 1: the descriptive voice who speaks in third-

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165. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “Rape of Zion,” 80.

166. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “Rape of Zion,” 79-80.

167. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “Rape of Zion,” 80.

168. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “Rape of Zion,” 80.

169. See discussion below. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt suggest that 1:8 has “connotations of rape” (“Rape of Zion,” 80).

person about Jerusalem and the personified city who speaks in first-person about her predicament.<sup>170</sup> Each of these speeches takes up half of the poem: verses 1:1-11a are spoken by the descriptive voice and in 1:11b-22 are spoken by personified Jerusalem. However, each speaker interjects once within the other's speech. Woman Jerusalem interjects in verse 9 anticipating the beginning of her own speech just two verses later and the descriptive voice interjects in verse 17, halfway through Woman Jerusalem's speech. These moments of interjection are significant as they rupture one perspective with another, intensifying the discourse. Notably it is in these heightened moments of interjection and exchange that the language of female impurity is found.

Verses 8-9, where Jerusalem is first described as a menstruant, culminate in an interjection from Woman Jerusalem herself.<sup>171</sup> This is the first time that her voice is heard in this poem. She speaks directly to Yahweh, begging him to witness her suffering: “See, O Yahweh, my affliction (רְאֵה יְהוָה אֶת־עֲנִי), for the enemy boasts (כִּי הַגִּדְדִּיל אֹיִב)” (Lam 1:9b).<sup>172</sup> Just two verses later, she begins her own speech with a similar cry: “See, O Yahweh, and observe (רְאֵה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָה) for I have become worthless (כִּי הִיִּתִי זוּלָּלָה)” (Lam 1:11b). Thus her cry to be seen by Yahweh in verse 9 anticipates and builds towards her full speech that begins in Lam 1:11 and describes her physical suffering (esp 1:12-14) and her lowly status (esp 1:19, 21). In other words, her speech provides the evidence for her claims of affliction, a boastful enemy, and her worthless position that she implores Yahweh to witness. Therefore, the description of Woman Jerusalem's impure body in verses 8-9 builds towards and, perhaps, provokes Jerusalem's expression of her

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170. The following section will perform a deeper analysis of the interplay between and perspectives of the speaking voices in Lam 1 and 2.

171. See too Kaiser, “The Poet as ‘Female Impersonator.’” especially 174-176.

172. Woman Jerusalem makes a similar statement again in 1:20 and begins her speech in Lam 2:20 with this same call to Yahweh to witness her suffering.

suffering in her own words and her appeal to the deity, the one who has inflicted this pain (1:12), to witness it.

Between Jerusalem's two cries for Yahweh to witness her suffering (vv. 9b and 11b), the descriptive voice returns to continue to recount Jerusalem's devastation. As discussed above, vv. 8-9a describe Jerusalem in personified terms: as a result of her sin she has suffered a great reversal in fortune; she has been publicly disgraced; her body is in a state of impurity; she is utterly alone. Verse 10 reinforces this image of isolated Jerusalem by stating the deity's abandonment in undeniable terms: "The adversary stretches out his hand (יָדוֹ פָּרַשׁ) over all her precious things (כָּל-מִחְמַדֶּיהָ). For she sees the nations (גוֹיִם) enter (בָּאוּ) her sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ), those whom you had commanded 'they shall not enter your assembly'" (Lam 1:10).<sup>173</sup> This verse not only describes the defiling of Jerusalem's sanctuary, the city's most holy space, but the sharp reversal of Yahweh's protection of this sanctuary. Immediately following the statement of Jerusalem's bodily impurity, then, this report of the sanctuary's defilement and Yahweh's lack of protection, only further underscores Jerusalem's impurity, that is, incompatibility with the deity's presence.<sup>174</sup>

Although the speaker returns to describing the city as a city in v. 10, as discussed above, one cannot help but also hear the violation of personified Jerusalem's body. If we take seriously the figuration of the city as a woman, this statement implies a violent and non-consensual sexual encounter. Many interpreters have identified this double reading of v. 10. For example, often

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173. Most commentators suggest that this is a reference to Deut 23:4, specifically: "Neither Ammonite nor Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of Yahweh" (לֹא-יָבֹא עַמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי בְּקִהְלֵי יְהוָה). As Hillers states, "Here in Lamentations, the reference to the commandment is made with ironic intention: no heathen was to enter, even piously and peaceably, into the sacred assembly, but now they break in violently and rob the holy place" (*Lamentations*, 87). See also Berlin, *Lamentations*, 55; Salters, *Lamentations*, 65.

174. The description of the destruction of the cult continues in Lam 2 (esp vv. 6-7).

quoted is Alan Mintz who explains, “The force of this image of violation is founded on the correspondence body // Temple and genitals // Inner Sanctuary. So far have things gone that even in the secret place of intimacy to which only the single sacred partner may be admitted, the enemy has thrust himself...”<sup>175</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, expanding on Mintz’s interpretation,<sup>176</sup> argue that it is the fact that it is the personified portrait of Jerusalem in Lam 1 that “freights the leading terms in this verse (*mḥmd, bw’, mqdš, prš*) with double meaning.”<sup>177</sup> Thus, “her precious things” (מְחַמְדֵּיהָ), while on a literal level suggest the treasures of the temple (2 Chr 36:10), it can also carry a sexual, or at least bodily, connotation (Song 5:16).<sup>178</sup> Moreover, as discussed in the Song chapter, a “hand,” (יָד) can be a euphemism for a man’s penis.<sup>179</sup> This image, then, of the adversary “stretching out his hand over all her precious things” is, as Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt suggest, a “perver[sion of] the otherwise positive and healthy notion of sexual desirability denoted by *mah<sup>a</sup>mād* and thus gives the image a far more sinister and heinous coloring, that of a man physically assaulting and violating a woman.”<sup>180</sup> This rape imagery

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175. Mintz, *Hurban*, 55. Mintz explicitly links this violation with Jerusalem’s promiscuity that he asserts is established in v. 8-9. For other discussions of Lam 1:10 and rape imagery, see Mintz, “The Rhetoric of Lamentations,” 3-4; Berlin, *Lamentations*, 55; Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” 175; and, especially, Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “The Rape of Zion in Thr 1,10,” who also point to similar imagery in a Mesopotamian *balag* (78-79) and identify other passages in Lam 1 (vv. 8b-c, 10b-c, 12b, 13c, 22b) with possible rape imagery (80-81).

176. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt (“The Rape of Zion,” 77) also draw and expand on the work of Kaiser, who suggests too that there is rape imagery in Lam 1:10 (“Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” 175).

177. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 77. They go on to say: “The effect is not unlike that in a Chagall painting where both literal and more metaphorical imagery reside together, each moving in and out of focus depending on the play of light and the eye of the observer” (77).

178. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 77.

179. For the euphemism of a hand for a penis, see Isa 57:8, 10. This euphemism also appears in several Qumran texts (1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 65:3; 1QS 7:13; 4QD<sup>a</sup> 10.2.11; 1QM 7:6-7; 11QTemple<sup>a</sup> 46:13-16) and Ugaritic texts. See too Case, “Cunning Linguists,” 10-11. See too discussion in chapter 2.

180. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, “The Rape of Zion,” 77. See too Prov 31:20 where at a central moment in the poem about the powerful woman it describes her generosity and morality by commenting that “Her palm (כַּפָּה) she spreads out (פָּרְשָׁה) to the poor and her hands (יָדֶיהָ) she sends to the needy.” Salters mentions that this is the only occurrence of “to stretch out (פָּרַשׁ) the hand” in the Hebrew Bible with a negative or violent meaning (*Lamentations*, 65).

continues with the statement that nations, that is, outside peoples (גוֹיִם)<sup>181</sup> enter (בא) the sanctuary, the verb often used to mark sexual penetration.<sup>182</sup> As discussed above, according to the priestly vision the most sacred space in the temple, the Holy of Holies, is where Yahweh dwelled, and would only be entered by the High Priest one day a year for an annual purification ritual (Lev 16). Entering the deity's space was thought to be dangerous and required several precautions.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, this report of outsiders entering the temple is a highly aggressive and violent act, which would utterly defile the cult center. Reading the city as a metaphorical body, this defiling act of foreign bodies entering the innermost space would be rape, violating this body and rendering it unclean.

Lamentations 1:10, then, forces the implied audience to think back to the impurity claim in vv. 8-9.<sup>184</sup> First, v. 10 demonstrates in very literal terms divine abandonment. The sanctuary has been violated; their protector is gone. The image of the impure female body of Jerusalem that demonstrates her ongoing alienation from the deity and isolation from any comforter, is thus vividly reinforced. Moreover, the rape of Jerusalem's metaphorical body in v. 10 adds a new valence to her impurity. Not only is Jerusalem's body menstruating, physically marking her

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181. *HALOT*, 183. This term is used seven times in Lam 1 and 2 (1:1, 3, 10; 2:9; 4:15, 17, 20). In every other occurrence it is used to describe the world outside Judea. For example, in Lam 1:1, it is used as a point of comparison: "she was once great among the nations (גוֹיִם)" and in Lam 1:3 it describes her exile: "she dwells among the nations (גוֹיִם)." This is the only time where the term is used for invaders, those who have entered her space.

182. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, "The Rape of Zion," 78. See, for example, Gen 6:4; 16:2; 19:31; 38:9. Note 2 Sam 16:21 and Prov 6:29 for examples of illicit sex. Note too Julie Galambush's analysis of Ezk 23:39-44 for a similar image that compares entering a temple and penetrating a female body (*Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 118-120).

183. Lev 16:2; Haran, *Temples*, 165-188. Schipper and Stackert, "Blemishes," 460.

184. Dobbs-Allsopp and Linafelt, suggest that the rape imagery in v. 10 can help one recognize rape imagery elsewhere in the poem, specifically in 1:8, 12, 13, 22 ("The Rape of Zion," 79-81).

isolated and isolating state, but this violation by foreign bodies further adds to her polluted and devastated body.

In Lam 1:8-10 Jerusalem is portrayed as one whose sins have separated her from Yahweh's presence and protection; as a result she is figured as a woman in isolation. This is reinforced in Lam 1:17, when the descriptive voice interjects at the midpoint of Woman Jerusalem's speech to apply again the imagery of an impure female body: "Jerusalem has become a menstruant (הַדָּמָה) among them." Jerusalem again is identified as an impure menstruating body among her neighbors, all of whom have been turned against her by Yahweh. The familiar refrain of Lam 1 begins this verse: "she has no one who will comfort her (אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ),"<sup>185</sup> reinforcing personified Jerusalem's vulnerability and loneliness.

As in v. 8, the description of Jerusalem's impurity is paired with a statement of her sin here as well. The interjection of v. 17 follows Woman Jerusalem's first-person description of her bodily pain inflicted by Yahweh "on the day of his furious anger" (1:12) and immediately precedes Jerusalem's admission of her transgression: "Yahweh is in the right for I have rebelled against his command" (Lam 1:18).<sup>186</sup> As with the earlier references to Jerusalem's sin (esp. vv. 5, 8), however, there are no details of her sinful behavior given. In other words, this appears as an admission of wrongdoing, but not a confession. Even still, this admission seems to be prompted

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185. Lam 1:2, 9, 16, 17, 21. This statement appears in both third-person speech and first-person speech.

186. Hens-Piazza productively (though somewhat anachronistically) interprets this admission as one that results from the woman's "confused and violated state." There seems to be no other explanation for her suffering other than what must be her own past mistakes: "Like an abused, abandoned woman who has become so violated and devalued, Woman Zion now concludes it must be her own fault. Whether correct or not, that is her perception..." Hens-Piazza notes that these sins are not detailed and the emphasis remains on her suffering (*Lamentations*, 16). See too O'Connor, *Tears*, 27.

by the interjection of the descriptive voice who reminds her of her impurity, which isolates her from the deity and any comforter, and therefore her assumed sinfulness.

The speech of personified Jerusalem in Lam 1:11b-16, 18-22, while focused on her immense suffering and loneliness, does not end with a plea for an end to her pain or reversal of her fortune. Instead she asks Yahweh not to let the evil of her enemies go unpunished, requesting that they be dealt with just as she has been dealt with (1:21-22).<sup>187</sup> It is as if the interjection by the descriptive voice (1:17), recalling her impurity and prompting her admission of sin, causes Jerusalem to stop short of what appears to be a building critique of Yahweh.<sup>188</sup> While Woman Jerusalem still wants Yahweh to witness her distress (1:20), it is not until her speech at the end of Lam 2 that she explicitly questions the justice of Yahweh's actions.

Thus the personified city of Lam 1 and 2 is depicted as a woman who is despised, isolated, and violated. She has not only lost her protector, but that protector has become the perpetrator of her abuse (Lam 1:5, 12-15; 2:1-9, 21-22). While this experience has left the woman powerless in many ways, she still has her voice and is able to speak about her suffering in vivid terms. In Lam 1 she admits that she has transgressed and affirms Yahweh's righteousness (v. 18); however, the woman's guilt is not the intended purpose of this figure.<sup>189</sup> The admissions of the woman's sins, whether from the descriptive voice (Lam 1:5, 8) or the woman herself (Lam

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187. See Maier who explains that this call for revenge is "highly traditional," appearing in both communal and individual laments in Psalms (e.g. Ps 1:6; 104:35) (*Daughter Zion*, 151). See too Lam 3:59-66; 4:21-22.

188. See discussion below. While the constructed woman never refers to herself as suffering menstruation impurity in her speech, she does twice use a term that echoes this reality: *דָּוָה* in Lam 1:13 and *דָּוָה* in Lam 1:22, both adjectival forms of the root *דָּוָה*, which generally refers to being sad or sick but often specifically refers to menstruation (see, especially, Lev 12:2; 15:33; 20:18; Isa 30:22). Neither of the references in Lam 1 explicitly refer to menstruation, but considering the context of an impure female body established in the 1:8-9 and 17, this connotation is present.

189. See discussion above.

1:14, 18, 22) are relatively few and are repeatedly overshadowed by the detailed discussion of immense suffering.<sup>190</sup> In other words, this female figure has not been constructed by the poet to justify her punishment, but rather to emphasize her vulnerability and suffering. By Lam 2, there is no longer any discussion of Jerusalem's sins and instead there is an explicit discussion of the severity of the suffering from multiple perspectives. Ultimately, the voices of Lam 1 and 2 work together to present a persuasive case for the injustice of the severity of Jerusalem's punishment.

### ***The City-Woman Speaks: Voice, Persuasion, and Futility***

I have argued above that Jerusalem is personified in Lam 1 and 2 as a vulnerable, isolated woman. She has experienced assault at the hands of her protector (Lam 1:5, 12-15; 2:1-9, 21-22) and her body is in a state of impurity, physically marking her isolation from friend and, especially, deity. This personification work, which is achieved in the words of both the descriptive voice as well as her own voice, is central to the persuasive postures of the text. By depicting Jerusalem, a representation of the distraught community, as a suffering and vulnerable woman, the poet unifies the experience of the city into a single compelling figure. Her cries of bodily suffering are hard to ignore. Anyone who has suffered pain, loss, or isolation, may find it hard to shut out this woman's pleas for witness and comfort. The comfort that she seeks, however, is divine. Most interpreters agree that Lam 1 and 2, even the whole book of Lamentations, is aimed at getting the attention of the deity and urging his intervention.<sup>191</sup> And yet, the woman's body has been marked as incompatible with the deity's presence. What is the effect, then, of crafting this woman not only to represent Jerusalem's collective suffering, but to

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190. See, e.g., Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 1-18. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 36-37; Provan, *Lamentations*, 23.

191. See, e.g., Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 45.

speaking the culminating critique of Lam 1 and 2 directly to Yahweh? I will argue here that Woman Jerusalem is meant to be a tragic figure, one who, while compelling to any human audience, will not receive a response from her addressee: Yahweh.<sup>192</sup>

This section, then, will examine the interaction between the two voices of Lam 1 and 2, the descriptive voice and the personified city's voice, in order to demonstrate how these voices work together to present a persuasive argument that Jerusalem's punishment has far exceeded her sin. This work is accomplished not only in the structure, exchange, and echoing between the voices, but also the poet's creative reuse of literary genres.

The use of multiple voices, blending of genres, and allusions to other texts and traditions in Lamentations have made the work of Mikhail Bakhtin particularly relevant to its analysis.<sup>193</sup> As discussed above, Lam 1 and 2 feature two voices who speak from different perspectives on the fallen state of Jerusalem. Charles Miller points out that many scholars have assumed that the voice that is not personified Jerusalem is the "narrator" or represents an "objective" viewpoint, thereby allowing this voice's perspective to dominate in their analysis.<sup>194</sup> Miller, drawing on Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic text, points out that both voices are created by the poet and neither can be said to represent the more "objective" position. Therefore, one must "take seriously the existence of two 'independent and unmerged voices and

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192. Dobbs-Allsopp has argued convincingly that the book of Lamentations can be read as a tragedy and doing so brings many insights into its "distinctive theology" ("Tragedy," 29). See discussion below.

193. Mandolfo suggests that "In Bakhtinian terms, Lamentations as a whole comes closer to genuine polyphony than most biblical texts" (*Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 68).

194. Miller, "Reading Voices," 393-394. Miller only examines Lam 1 in this article, but these ideas can easily be applied to Lam 2, as well. Mandolfo, for example, in *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, performs a Bakhtinian analysis of Lamentations, but with special attention to Lam 1 and 2 and the personification of Jerusalem.

consciousnesses.”<sup>195</sup> Doing so, suggests Miller, allows us to examine Lam 1 and 2 as a double-voiced discourse where both voices interact with and shape the other.<sup>196</sup> As Bakhtin writes: “Two discourses equally and directly oriented toward a referential object within the limits of a single context cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically, regardless of whether they confirm, mutually supplement, or (conversely) contradict one another, or find themselves in some other dialogic relationship (that of question and answer, for example).”<sup>197</sup> As already discussed briefly above (and will be more below), the two voices in Lam 1 and 2 interact, echo, and prompt one another and, although they speak from different perspectives, they ultimately confirm one another’s positions.<sup>198</sup>

Carleen Mandolfo also draws on the work of Bakhtin in her analysis of Lamentations, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*. Mandolfo applies Bakhtin’s ideas about polyphony on a wider scale than Miller, examining the way Lamentations is in dialogue with other biblical texts and traditions.<sup>199</sup> For example, she points out Bakhtin’s work on speech genres and his understanding of them as fluid and always changing depending on context and applies this to her analysis of Lamentations.<sup>200</sup> Mandolfo argues that Lamentations, while likely drawing on several related genres (city lament, dirge, and so on) is specifically reworking the interplay of voices

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195. Miller, “Reading Voices,” 394, here quoting Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 6.

196. See Miller for discussion of Bakhtin’s types of double-voiced discourse and their application to Lam 1 (“Reading Voices,” 395-406).

197. Bakhtin, *Problems in Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 188-189. Also quoted in Miller, “Reading Voices,” 395.

198. Cf. Miller who argues that the two voices (at least in Lam 1) are often representing antagonistic positions (“Reading Voices,” 397-406).

199. Mandolfo is primarily interested in engaging in “dialogic reading practices” that enable her to identify in Daughter Zion of Lamentations a “counterstory that resists the myopic identity in which God and his prophets have confined her” (*Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 26-27).

200. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 55. See Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 87.

found in many lament psalms, which she asserts are often double-voiced.<sup>201</sup> The voices are not explicitly marked within the laments, rather it features a shift in perspective (first-person and/or second-person to third-person) and, most importantly, a change in the theological tone, that indicates the existence of two voices. Mandolfo explains that the lamenter typically speaks about her/himself and her/his misfortune (from a first-person perspective), while addressing God directly (in second-person), and may, for example, exhibit doubt in Yahweh's justice or attention. While the other voice, which she refers to as a "didactic voice" (DV), speaks from a third-person perspective, usually about the deity, and always reaffirms the "normative" theological position, such as: Yahweh *is* just. What Mandolfo finds significant here is how these two perspectives interact with each other and stand in tension with one another: "Both are altered by the interaction and forced to 'tilt' their position, so to speak. The DV's worldview is decentered, its centripetal tendencies resisted, while the supplicant's complaint is clearly constrained by the generic demand, imposed by the cult, no doubt, to avoid blasphemous speech."<sup>202</sup> Mandolfo sees this dialogic tension inherent in the lament psalms subverted in the reworking of this genre in Lam 1 and 2. In Lam 1 and 2 we have at least two voices that interact with each other; however, unlike the lament psalms, none of the voices seem to be reaffirming the normative theological position. Rather, Mandolfo argues, it seems the DV is persuaded by Daughter Zion's plight and, as a result, it is the traditionally authoritative voice that bolsters the voice of complaint.<sup>203</sup> The

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201. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 55-77. Mandolfo cites extensively here her earlier work on lament psalms: *God in the Dock*.

202. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 64.

203. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 74. Mandolfo asks: "What does it mean, theologically, when the voice traditionally representing the divine position, the voice of authority, speaks against its own interests and from the perspective of suffering humans?" (74).

fact that this is a subversion of a generic expectation makes it an even more powerful feature of this poetry.

Turning now to the speakers of Lam 1 and 2, what the work of Mandolfo brings to our attention is the dominance of the city-woman's voice in these poems, both in terms of her perspective and often culminating position of her voice in the dialogue.<sup>204</sup> After all, in both poems she has the final word. Unlike in the lament psalms, the personified city, who represents the collective identity of the people and stands in the role of supplicant, is not subdued or restrained by any authoritative voice. There is no explicit defender of Yahweh's position nor reassurance of a stable system of cosmic justice. Yahweh does not even speak on his own behalf. Even while there is no authoritative voice countering the voice of complaint, there is still significant interaction and exchange between the two speakers. As Mandolfo points out, this interaction often comes in the form of support, providing evidence and an external perspective to her very personal point of view and even escalating the discourse by prompting the woman to speak. The interplay between voices, then, functions in an opposite way as they do in the lament psalms. Instead of restraining the voice of the supplicant, it amplifies it.

The descriptive voice of Lam 1 speaks from a more distant perspective. This speaker does not express personal suffering or turmoil, but describes that of Jerusalem and her people. In Lam 1:1-11a, 17, the voice focuses on describing the current fallen condition of Jerusalem. This report sometimes presents the city as a city and sometimes, through personification, as a woman. There

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204. While Bakhtin (*Problems in Dostoevsky's Poetics*) argues that in a polyphonic text, neither voice should dominate, rather they "coexist[] and interact[]" (28) and persist "as an eternal harmony of unmerged voices" (30), Mandolfo recognizes that in Lam 1 and 2 Daughter Zion's voice does dominate (*Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 68). Mandolfo demonstrates, however, in her discussion of Lamentations' reworking of the lament-psalm, that this dominance is part of the generic innovation and, therefore, all the more significant. Miller, on the other hand, who is only examining Lam 1, argues that by the end of the poem neither voice is in a dominant position ("Reading Voices," 407).

is no doubt as to why Jerusalem has met this downfall: she has sinned (Lam 1:8, see too Lam 1:5). Even still, as discussed above, this voice is not interested in detailing her sins, but rather focuses on her sad state. Drawing on imagery of impurity and assault (Lam 1:8-10, 17), the city's personified body is vividly depicted in terms of her misery and isolation. Thus, while this speaker certainly does not view Jerusalem as completely innocent of her punishment, there is sympathy in this report. This can be seen especially in the repeated refrain, "she has no one who will comfort her" (Lam 1:2, 9, 17 cf. 1:7), making a case for this comfort.

The descriptive voice of Lam 1, then, provides the context for the first-person speech. Not only does it set the stage, as it were, by explaining the reality of the city's total devastation, affecting both the cultic and royal spheres, as well as all inhabitants—the young and old, men and women, but it also begins the work of personifying the city. As discussed above, this personification is in large part what makes the pleas for comfort so compelling. By giving the city a vulnerable female body and voice, she can now speak effectively about her experience of bodily and emotional suffering. The city-woman's message of extreme suffering, then, requires the support of the descriptive voice to be effective.

What is more, one can observe the way that these two voices work together in Lam 1 not only through the contextualization and personification achieved by the descriptive voice, bolstering personified Jerusalem, but also in the way that one voice echoes the other. For example, as noted above, the descriptive voice repeats the refrain "she has no one to comfort her" three times in Lam 1:2, 9, 17 (cf. Lam 1:7 "she has no one who will help her (אֵין עֹזֵר לָהּ)"). The city-woman picks up this refrain and repeats it about herself in Lam 1:16, 21. The location of each of these statements reflects and perhaps strengthens the structure of the whole poem. The

refrain appears at the beginning (v. 2) and at the end (v. 21) of the chapter, voiced first by the descriptive speaker and last by the personified city. The occurrences in verses 9, 16, 17, all appear at moments of interjection: in verse 9 it is the last words spoken by the descriptive voice before the city-woman interjects, crying out to Yahweh to witness her pain. In verse 16, it is among the last things the city-woman says<sup>205</sup> before the other speaker interjects to recall again this female body's impure and helpless state and echoes again "she has no one who will comfort her" (1:17). The repetition of this statement by both voices underscores their agreement and joint purpose. Even though Lam 1 ends with the city-woman urging Yahweh to bring this same punishment upon her enemies, it would seem that the argument of the text is the comfort deserved by Woman Jerusalem, even if she has sinned.

Lamentations 2, while still featuring voices in dialogue, has a different structure than Lam 1. Here it is the descriptive voice that speaks for the majority of the poem, although the perspective of the speaker changes throughout the course of the poem. As discussed above, this voice describes, from a third-person perspective, Yahweh's furious demolition of Jerusalem in nearly the first half of Lam 2. Yahweh is depicted as a divine warrior who instead of defending his people has turned against them. While the speaker reports these actions of Yahweh from the same external perspective found in Lam 1, it is not without judgment. The speaker states that "the Lord has destroyed without compassion" (Lam 2:2)<sup>206</sup> and reports an onslaught of destructive action by Yahweh, enumerating with verb after verb the deity's tearing down, hurling, burning, spurning, and so on.<sup>207</sup> The dual emphasis on the abundance of Yahweh's actions and his

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205. A slightly different form is found here: "For a comforter is far from me."

206. לֹא נִחַם אֱלֹהִים on its own means "he did not spare" but in this context (and in Lam 2:17, 21) it functions adverbially. See too Salters, *Lamentations*, 116.

207. See too Kaiser, "Poet as 'Female Impersonator,'" 177.

anger suggests this punishment is too much. After eight verses recounting Yahweh’s overzealous destruction, the speaker turns to fallen Jerusalem and her suffering inhabitants, reporting in verses 9-10 on the ruined structures and the complete destruction of their leadership—both royal and cultic, as well as the state of mourning that all surviving inhabitants, young and old, are in.

At this point the speaker shifts dramatically from third-person reporting on Jerusalem to a personal first-person outcry that is strongly reminiscent of Jerusalem’s words from Lam 1:

<sup>11</sup>My eyes are used up with tears (כָּלוּ בְדִמְעוֹת עֵינַי),  
 my stomach churns (חִמְרְמוּ מַעֵי),<sup>208</sup>  
 my guts are poured out on the ground (נִשְׁפָּדוּ לְאָרֶץ כְּבִדִי)  
 on account of the collapse of Daughter-My-People<sup>209</sup> (עַל־שִׁבְרַת־עַמִּי),<sup>210</sup>  
 when child and infant languished<sup>211</sup> (בְּעֵטָף עוֹלָל וְיֹזֶנֶק)  
 in the squares of town (בְּרַחֲבוֹת קִרְיָה).

<sup>12</sup>To their mothers they say: (לְאִמֹתָם יֹאמְרוּ)  
 “Where is the grain and wine (אַיִה דָגָן וְיַיִן)?”<sup>212</sup>  
 as they fainted like the wounded (בְּהִתְעַטְּפָם כְּחַלָּל)  
 in the squares of the city (בְּרַחֲבוֹת עִיר),  
 as their life force poured out (בְּהִשְׁתַּפֵּד נַפְשָׁם)  
 on their mothers’ bosoms (אֶל־חִיק אִמָּתָם).” (Lam 2:11-12)

This sudden shift to a first-person perspective is indicative of the speaker’s emotional state. No

longer does this voice report distantly on the devastation of Jerusalem, rather it joins the

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208. This same expression is used in personified Jerusalem’s speech in 1:20, except the word order is switched: מַעֵי חִמְרְמוּ.

209. See n. 109 above.

210. This same phrase appears in Jer 6:14.

211. MT’s בְּעֵטָף is the ב preposition with a Niphal infinitive construct of עָטַף with an elided ה. As this is the only case of עָטַף in the Niphal in the Hebrew Bible, some have suggested repointing as a Qal infinitive construct: בְּעֵטָף. See GKC 511; Joüon, 51b; BDB 742; *BHS*. The meaning of the Qal certainly makes sense here (“be faint”) and is nearly equivalent to the Niphal. Salters suggests that the Niphal was chosen in order “to convey the idea that the fainting/languishing was not the infants’ choosing” (*Lamentations*, 148n78). Thus, I retain MT.

212. See Berlin (*Lamentations*, 72) for a good interpretation of the grain and wine in this verse representing the last of the food stores.

personified city in her lament by drawing on her language of suffering and meditating on the distress of the city's most vulnerable—children. The description of constant tears and churning insides (מַעֵי הַמְרָמְרִי) appears in the personified city's speech of the previous chapter (Lam 1:16, 20). While in Lam 1 personified Jerusalem's most vivid expressions of pain were articulated in terms of her own bodily suffering and emotional misery, she speaks often of the suffering of her inhabitants, especially the youth. She refers to her young men and women twice, once referring to them being crushed (1:15) and once stating that they had gone into captivity (1:18); once more she speaks of "my sons (בְּנֵי)" as ravaged (1:16).<sup>213</sup> The speaker in 2:11-12, then, echoes this imagery and focuses attention on the youngest and most vulnerable of the city. The imagery of dying children returns as a focal point of Jerusalem's critique in verses 19-22.

Tod Linafelt has argued convincingly that the descriptive voice is slowly become more and more convinced by the unwarranted severity of Jerusalem's suffering and the need for a compassionate response.<sup>214</sup> He demonstrates this progression by showing how this speaker's words begin to sound more and more like personified Jerusalem's words. Linafelt sees this happening subtly at the end of Lam 1 in the speaker's interjection (v. 17), but sees it culminating here in 2:11-12.<sup>215</sup> After reporting on the violent destruction of Jerusalem (2:1-10), which reinforces the images of pain and suffering expressed by Woman Jerusalem in Lam 1, the speaker speaks in solidarity with Jerusalem, drawing on her words and imagery.<sup>216</sup> Linafelt, recognizing that the plea for comfort is ultimately about divine attention, states that "the poet is

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213. See n. 91 above.

214. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 49-58.

215. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 51-52.

216. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 52-53.

modeling the response to Zion's lament that should come from God."<sup>217</sup> This, then, is a powerful moment in the text. The speaker who was distant from, although not unsympathetic to, Jerusalem now becomes her explicit supporter. This visible shift in perspective on the part of the speaker serves as another persuasive strategy of the text. Witnessing the influential effect that Jerusalem's plight has had on this speaker, one who recognizes her wrongdoing and yet comes to see the severity of her punishment is undeserved, makes the text's argument all the more persuasive.

The descriptive voice, now convinced of Jerusalem's undue suffering and desperate to bring her some comfort, turns and addresses her directly: "How can I witness for you (2fs)? To what can I liken you, O Daughter Jerusalem? With what can I compare you (2fs) *so that I may comfort you*, Young Daughter Zion? For great like the sea is your destruction. Who can heal you (2fs)?" (Lam 2:13). Despite the speaker's desire to help, there is a realization here that the comfort she requires cannot come from a human source. Echoing the refrain of Lam 1, the speaker reiterates and laments Jerusalem's lack of comfort. The speech continues with a description of deceiving and deceived prophets (Lam 2:14), mocking passers-by (Lam 2:15), and triumphant enemies (Lam 2:16-17). The speaker grapples with the question "why?" but finds no satisfying answers besides the certainty that Yahweh is responsible for her destruction: "Yahweh did what he had planned; he has brought to fulfillment his threat which he commanded long ago. He destroyed without compassion (הָרַס וְלֹא הֶמְלֵל).<sup>218</sup> He made the enemy rejoice over you and raised up the horn of your adversaries" (Lam 2:17). This statement reinforces the speaker's report of Yahweh's merciless destruction in 2:1-9, as well as the several references to triumphant

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217. Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 53.

218. See n. 206 above.

enemies and Yahweh as the cause of suffering made by both speakers in Lam 1 (vv. 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 21).

With the idea of Yahweh's role as merciless destroyer reinforced in 2:17 and the realization of the futility of human comfort (2:13), the speaker can offer only one avenue to the comfort Jerusalem deserves: crying out to the deity and begging for his intervention in hopes that such a show of despair would convince him to end their suffering. Drawing on the imagery from 2:11-12, the speaker appeals to the personified city as a mother:

<sup>18</sup>“Cry out for yourself<sup>219</sup> to the Lord (אֶל-אֲדֹנָי)  
O Wall of Daughter Zion! (חֹמַת בַּת-צִיּוֹן)<sup>220</sup>  
Bring down like a torrent tears (הוֹרִידִי כַנְחַל דְּמָעָה)  
day and night (יּוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה).  
Do not give yourself rest<sup>221</sup> (אַל-תִּתְּנִי פֹגַת לִדְ),

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219. MT is difficult. It reads צָעַק לְבָם, “their heart cried out,” but it is unclear to what the 3mp suffix refers. While commentators have made many suggestions for this referent (see Salters, *Lamentations*, 167-168 for a summary), the problem remains that the sudden switch to third-person perspective makes little sense. The voice has been addressing Jerusalem directly since v. 13 and this address clearly continues in later v. 18 (“bring down (2fs) tears”) and into v. 19. Thus, most exegetes attempt to restore the 2fs address. Ewald first suggested emending to צַעֲקִי, so the feminine singular imperative form. He emended לְבָם to לְבָךְ, so reading a 2fs suffix rather than 3mp (Ewald, *Die Psalmen und die Klaglieder*, 335-336). This is an improvement on MT but the relationship between צַעֲקִי and לְבָךְ is difficult. Bickell's suggestion that we emend לְבָם to לְךָ produces a clear reading that works well in this context. Bickell, “Kritische Bearbeitung der Klagelieder,” 111; Budde, *Die Klagelieder*, 90. See too Salters for a summary of emendations (*Lamentations*, 168-169).

220. MT here too has prompted many suggestions for emendation. See Salters for a summary (*Lamentations*, 169-170). MT marks this phrase as a vocative by placing an *athnah* at אֲדֹנָי (Salters, *Lamentations*, 167). While urging the wall of Daughter Zion to cry out may seem odd, within the personification of the city in Lam 1 and 2 it has poetic grounding. In 2:8 wall and rampart are said to be put into mourning. Dobbs-Allsopp writes the wall in 2:18 is “a synecdoche for Zion as a whole” (*Lamentations*, 98). See too Berlin, *Lamentations*, 74-75. I have chosen to retain MT.

221. פֹּגַת is a *hapax legomenon*. Salters suggests that it may be a form that preserves the old feminine ending (*Lamentations*, 171; GKC 80f). It likely comes from the root פּוּג, “to grow weary” (*HALOT*, 916). BDB suggests “benumbing” or “cessation” and renders this phrase in Lam 2:18 as “grant thyself no benumbing” (806).

do not let your tears<sup>222</sup> be still (אַל־תָּדָם בַּת־עֵינֶיךָ).

<sup>19</sup>Rise up, give a ringing cry in the night<sup>223</sup> (קוּמִי רְנִי בַלַּיְלָה)  
at the beginning of the watches (לְרֵאשֵׁי אֲשֶׁמְרוֹת).  
Pour out your heart like water (שֶׁפְּכִי כַמַּיִם לַבַּיִת)  
before the face of the Lord (נֹכַח פְּנֵי אֲדֹנָי).  
Lift up to him your hands (שִׂאֵי אֲלֵיו כַּפֶּיךָ)  
for the sake of the lives of your little children (עַל־נַפְשֵׁי עוֹלְלָיִךָ),  
who are weakened with hunger (הַעֲטוּפִים בְּרָעָב)  
at the head of every street” (בְּרֵאשֵׁי כָּל־חֻצוֹת).<sup>224</sup> (Lam 2:18-19)

Echoing the personified city’s references to her bodily pain and emotions in Lam 1, the speaker calls her body into action. The voice encourages her to weep, cry out, and lift up her hands in supplication, all in the hopes that Yahweh will finally listen and respond. Moreover, the speaker provides a clear motivation for this work: the dying children. Her most vulnerable residents and the future of the community are at stake. It is as if the speaker, who has been convinced by Jerusalem’s cries for comfort, now encourages her to utilize (and highlights for the implied audience) the most persuasive aspects of her case: her corporate body and the reality of dying children.

The final three verses of Lam 2 recount Jerusalem’s response to the voice’s encouragement to cry out to Yahweh. This speech is the culmination of the whole dialogue between the speakers in Lam 1 and 2 and, while the personified city has addressed Yahweh

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222. Many have rendered בַּת־עֵינֶיךָ as “apple of your eye.” Better is to consider this as the emission of the eye: the tear (Blayney, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 316; Robertson, “The Apple of the Eye,” 59; Salters, *Lamentations*, 171).

223. Following the Qere: בַּלַּיְלָה

224. Some suggest eliminating this final line as the pattern has been three lines per verse and therefore suspect this is an addition: “a mosaic of bits from vv. 11c, 12b, and 4:1b” (Hillers, *Lamentations*, 101). This, however, seems unwarranted. If anything, this is a fitting moment for a change in the poetic structure, that is, just as one speech is ending and another, the final words of the personified city, is about to begin.

before, it is only here that she demands that Yahweh reconsider his treatment of her.<sup>225</sup> This final speech is strengthened not only by the encouragement of the other voice but also by the reuse of dominant imagery from Lam 1 and 2:

<sup>20</sup>“Look, O Yahweh, and observe (רֵאֵה יְהוָה וְהִבִּיטָה)<sup>226</sup>  
 whom have you treated this way? (לְמִי עוֹלָלְתָּ בָּהּ)  
 Should women eat their fruit (אִם-תֹּאכְלֵנָה נָשִׁים פְּרִיָם)  
 healthy<sup>227</sup> children? (עֲלֵלֵי טַפְחִים)  
 Should<sup>228</sup> be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord (אִם-יִהְרַג בְּמִקְדָּשׁ אֲדֹנָי)  
 priest and prophet? (כֹּהֵן וְנָבִיא)

<sup>21</sup>They lie on the ground in the streets (שָׁכְבוּ לְאֶרֶץ חוּצוֹת),  
 the young and old (נְעַר וְזָקֵן).  
 My young women and my young men (בְּתוּלָתִי וּבַחֹרִי)  
 have fallen by the sword (נָפְלוּ בְּחֶרֶב).  
 You (2ms) have killed on the day of your anger (הֲרַגְתָּ בְּיוֹם אַפְּךָ)  
 you have slaughtered without compassion<sup>229</sup> (טַבַּחְתָּ לֹא חַמְלָתָּ).

<sup>22</sup>You invite like a festival day (תִּקְרָא כְּיוֹם מוֹעֵד)  
 my attackers<sup>230</sup> from all around (מִגְּוֹרֵי מְסָבִיב).  
 And there was not on the day of Yahweh’s anger (וְלֹא הָיָה בְּיוֹם אַף-יְהוָה)

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225. As discussed above in n. 6, while I understand Lam 1 and 2 as separate poems (as marked by their acrostic form), I think they were placed sequentially with intention (whether by the poet or by an editor). As argued above, both poems personify Jerusalem and feature two voices and there is development in the imagery and voices across the two poems.

226. These are the same imperatives that begin Woman Jerusalem’s words to Yahweh in 1:9, 11.

227. טַפְחִים is a *hapax legomenon*. Here I follow Driver’s suggestion that this term (as well as טַפְחֹתַי in v. 22) is related to the Arabic *tafaḥa* “to bring forth fully formed children” (“Hebrew Notes on ‘Song of Songs’ and ‘Lamentations.’” 138-139). *HALOT* has followed Driver and suggests children in a particular condition (378). See too Salters (*Lamentations*, 177-178).

228. יִהְרַג is a 3ms Niphal. I am taking this verb as an incomplete passive in an impersonal construction (*IBHS* 23.2.2e)—until, that is, it is completed with the subjects of the passive verb at the end of the line. See discussion below.

229. I have rendered this phrase adverbially, as in 2:2 and 2:17 (see n. 206 above), but Salters points out that at this moment of accusation it may be better to render the last line with three accusations: “You killed, you butchered, you did not spare” (*Lamentations*, 181).

230. מְגוֹרֵי is difficult to translate. The root גוּר is associated with several different meanings: “to live, sojourn,” “to attack,” or “to fear.” Here I follow Berlin (*Lamentations*, 66) and Hillers (*Lamentations*, 102) and translate “attackers.”

a fugitive or survivor (פְּלִיט וְשָׂרִיד).  
Those whom I have borne<sup>231</sup> and reared<sup>232</sup> (אֲשֶׁר־טַפַּחְתִּי וְרַבִּיתִּי)  
my enemy has finished off (אִיבִי כָלָם). (Lam 2:20-22).

In response to this plea, the city-woman delivers her scathing censure to Yahweh. She begins with her now typical way of addressing Yahweh, demanding his visual attention. Unlike, however, the three previous times when she urges Yahweh to observe her affliction (Lam 1:9, 11, 20), here in Lam 2:20 the city-woman demands Yahweh consider whom he has treated so terribly: “Look, O Yahweh, and observe whom have you treated this way?” This is followed by two more rhetorical questions that demand Yahweh reconsider the severity of his punishment. These lines are made all the more powerful by defying expectations: the completion of the idea is the opposite of what the first half of the line leads one to expect. The city-woman asks in the first half of Lam 2:20b: “Should women eat their fruit?” The answer would seem to be “yes,” why should anyone not eat fruit they have produced? But the second half of the line takes a shocking turn by defining this fruit as the women’s own healthy offspring! This same technique is used again when the city-woman asks the deity, “Should be slain (יִהָרַג) in the sanctuary of the Lord?” She delays the subject until the end of the line, allowing the implied audience to expect a reasonable subject, such as sacrificial animals (the expected victim in the sanctuary),<sup>233</sup> only to again provide the shocking subject of the passive verb: priest and prophet.<sup>234</sup> In both cases, the

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231. טַפַּחְתִּי is a *hapax legomenon*, but seemingly related to טַפַּחִים in v. 20. As above, I follow Driver’s suggestion that these terms are related to Arabic *ṭafaḥa*, so bringing forth healthy children (see n. 227 above).

232. For another similar use of רבה in the Piel, see Ezek 19:2 where a lioness rears her cubs.

233. There is, however, a hint that this is not referring to sacrificial animals as the verb used here is used typically for violence (הרג) and not the verb used for slaughtering animals (זבח or שחט).

234. Most translations obscure this effect. See, e.g., NRSV: “Should women eat their offspring, the children they have borne? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?” Kaiser, motivated in part by the lack of agreement (the 3ms verb and the plural subject of priest and prophet), suggests emending in order to make the Lord the subject of the verb: “Should Adonai slay in the

city-woman lays out the horrifying reality of Yahweh's destruction: the natural order has been perverted and now mothers eat their own children out of extreme starvation<sup>235</sup> and priest and prophet are murdered in the very space where they work to serve the deity, where they are closest to him and his protection.<sup>236</sup> Implicit is a sharp-edged critique of the deity and his punishment: Is this truly what Jerusalem deserved?

The city-woman continues the critique describing the death of her inhabitants, referring to "*my* young women and *my* young men" who have fallen by the sword. She lays blame for all this death squarely on the deity: "You have killed on the day of your anger, you have slaughtered without compassion" (Lam 2:21b). By the final line of the final verse, the city-woman fully embodies the role of mother when she says: "Those whom I brought forth and reared, my enemy has finished off" (Lam 2:22b). In these final three verses, the last words the city-woman utters and the culminating speech of the poems of Lam 1 and 2, the personified city levels a bitter accusation at Yahweh. While there is no explicit request here, besides for Yahweh to pay attention to the outcome of his actions, these final statements state a clear case for the unnecessary severity of Jerusalem's punishment. Yahweh has acted "without compassion."

As Dobbs-Allsopp explains, this kind of complaint leveled at the deity is part of Israelite literary tradition.<sup>237</sup> The lament, found primarily in the Psalms, provides space for anger to be expressed and accusations to be made against the deity while still within a conventional structure of grievance that often concludes with a reassertion of devotion.<sup>238</sup> As the work of Mandolfo

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sanctuary..." ("The Poet as 'Female Impersonator,'" 179-180, here at 180). This, however, is unnecessary and misses the rhetorical strategy at work in this verse.

235. This image of mothers eating their own children reoccurs later in Lam 4:10. Cannibalism is found in other biblical and ancient Near Eastern descriptions of famine. See Berlin, *Lamentations*, 75.

236. Berlin: "this utter meltdown of life as it should be" (*Lamentations*, 10).

237. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 52-54.

238. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 53. Examples of accusations against Yahweh in the Psalms: Ps

demonstrates, the structure of complaint within lament Psalms often includes the voice of the cult that tempers the critical words of the complaint and reinforces Yahweh's righteousness.<sup>239</sup> Dobbs-Allsopp, moreover, points out that it is these mitigating elements, "such as affirmations of trust and statements of praise and thanksgiving, which give these psalms a decidedly comic orientation."<sup>240</sup> In other words, what is remarkable about the complaint in Lamentations is this lack of structure or statement that reassures the implied audience (and the deity) that the relationship between the individual or community and Yahweh is not in jeopardy. As demonstrated above, the other voice in Lam 1 and 2, which one would expect to balance the supplicant's angry words with reassurance or correction of Yahweh's righteousness, in fact bolsters and encourages her complaint.

This unexpected silence from the voice of tradition is matched by the silence of the deity.<sup>241</sup> As discussed in the introduction, Dobbs-Allsopp argues that another influential literary genre on Lamentations is the city-lament, found both in Mesopotamian texts as well as other biblical texts, especially in prophetic literature.<sup>242</sup> As with the lament-psalm genre, the poet has also taken up and reworked the city-lament genre for meaningful effect. Thus, as Dobbs-Allsopp

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35:22; 44:9; 88:15-18; cf. Lam 2:21; 3:42. Examples of pointed questions: Ps 13:1; 44:24; 77:10; cf. Lam 1:12; 2:20; 5:20. See too Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 70-77. On faithful expression of anger and accusation in the Psalms, see Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 53-54; Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 98.

239. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back*, 55-77. See discussion above.

240. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 53. Notes rare exception of Ps 88.

241. My claim about the deity's silence is literary and not historical. This analysis has identified that despite Jerusalem's persuasive argument for witness and comfort, she receives none in the text. And while the speakers and rhetorical strategies change across the poems of Lam 3, 4, and 5, the desire for divine witness remains and yet there is still no response from the deity and little reassurance that Jerusalem has or will again secure his attention (Lam 5:19 may be a momentary exception) (See too Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 58-61). It seems, therefore, that it is precisely the hopelessness of Jerusalem's situation that the poetry of Lamentations most keenly expresses.

242. See discussion above. See also Dobbs-Allsopp, *Weep*, 97-154; Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 50-51.

writes, “the typical use of the Israelite city lament, at least as it is attested in the Hebrew Bible, has been turned on its head. This is indicated not only by the depiction of Yahweh and his fight against Jerusalem and the accusations aimed at Yahweh, but also by the rhetorical framework.”<sup>243</sup> In particular, despite the fact that there are multiple voices in Lamentations, none of them belong to the deity. Elsewhere in city laments, the deity responsible for the city’s destruction does often speak.<sup>244</sup> “It is precisely Yahweh’s silence amidst so much suffering that is indicted in Lamentations.”<sup>245</sup>

Understanding these generic influences and reinventions only further strengthens the reading of Lam 1 and 2 presented here. Lamentations 1 and 2 put forward a persuasive argument for Jerusalem’s need for divine witness and compassion. While the city may have sinned, the punishment she has received has far exceeded what she deserves. The other voice of Lam 1 and 2 is convinced by Jerusalem’s plight and encourages her to cry out to the deity in hopes that he too may be convinced. What remains to be considered, then, is what is the effect of having a female body voice this accusation?

Barbara Bakke Kaiser argues that in Lam 1 and 2 the male poet takes on a female persona at the most intense moments of this poetry in order to express the fullest sense of the community’s agony and grief.<sup>246</sup> She claims that there is no disparagement of the female body or experience in these moments; rather she suggests that the female persona plays a “vital role in religious expressions of sorrow.”<sup>247</sup> Kaiser does not offer a reason why a suffering female

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243. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy,” 51.

244. For example, see Amos 5.

245. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy,” 51.

246. “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator.’” In addition to the female voice in Lam 1 and 2, Kaiser also examines Jer 4. Her discussion of Lam 1 and 2 is found on pp. 174-182.

247. Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” 182.

persona would be necessary “to bear the weight of the emotion” that comes at the zenith of lament, but her analysis would seem to suggest that female bodies are bodies that “naturally” suffer.<sup>248</sup> Although my own analysis of gender and impurity in the priestly texts suggests that female bodies are more aligned with bodily functions (birth) and substances (blood) that are considered the most incompatible with the deity, this is never conceived of in terms of suffering.<sup>249</sup>

Rather, I think the work of Dobbs-Allsopp on Lamentations as tragic literature provides a better avenue to understanding this imagery. Dobbs-Allsopp argues that Lamentations is a tragic work by demonstrating that the book shares key features with other tragedies, such as contemplating the problem of evil and featuring a tragic hero,<sup>250</sup> and that the poet draws on and reworks elements from Israelite literary tradition to support its tragic vision. I have already described above the way the lament-psalm and city-lament genres are reworked in the poems of Lam 1 and 2. For Dobbs-Allsopp, however, reworking genres is only a part of conveying the poet’s tragic vision. Additionally, he suggests that “whatever is tragic in Lamentations results from the poet’s craft, how he manipulates and molds the literary material of his tradition.”<sup>251</sup> This material includes images and ideas. I would, therefore, suggest, that the priestly literature and, in

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248. Kaiser, “Poet as ‘Female Impersonator,’” 182. She suggests that the female voice is important for the expression of joy as well, briefly citing the female voice in the Song of Songs. There seems to be an unstated suggestion that women are emotional and therefore are necessary for emotional moments, which reflects a modern essentialist understanding of gender that I do not think the text supports.

249. Linafelt argues that the repeated image of dying children is central to the persuasive strategy of Lam 1 and 2, contributing to personified Jerusalem being appealed to as and speaking as a mother (*Surviving Lamentations*, 49-58).

250. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy,” 31-45. He also discusses historical context, trajectory of the organizing pattern, and setting as other features shared by tragic literature.

251. Dobbs-Allsopp, “Tragedy,” 54.

particular, the ideas around gender, impurity, and the deity, discussed above, are also central to the poet's crafting of tragedy in this text.

Thus, personified Jerusalem, described as an impure female body (Lam 1:8-9, 17)—polluted and human at the other end of the spectrum from the masculinized deity, is the tragic hero<sup>252</sup> of Lam 1 and 2 who speaks out on behalf of the city inhabitants to protest the severity of their punishment. As argued above, this impurity physically marks the body as isolated from Yahweh. The deity's presence is incompatible with this bodily impurity. Not only does this metaphorical marker viscerally reinforce the imagination of divine abandonment, it also tragically colors Woman Jerusalem's words of protest, which, however persuasive to her human audience, do not reach and move an absent deity. The final punch of this poetry, then, is this very realization. The implied audience and even the other voice in the text, the very one who we would expect to be asserting Yahweh's justice, are all persuaded by the pleas of personified Jerusalem. But, in her polluted female form the city and her people no longer have access to their god. Tragically, from the point of view of these poems, Yahweh is gone and will not respond to her cries.

### ***Conclusion***

This chapter has made two significant interventions in the scholarly work on personified Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2. First, I have argued that Lam 1:8-9 does ascribe menstrual impurity to personified Jerusalem's body and that this impurity is central to the poet's message regarding the poems' construction of divine abandonment and abuse as well as the unjustness of Jerusalem's overly severe punishment. I have suggested that one of the reasons scholars have preferred to see

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252. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy," 39-44.

an accusation of sexual promiscuity in these verses is related to a desire to fill the gap that the poet has intentionally left open: Jerusalem has sinned but her sins are not enumerated. These poems are concerned with Jerusalem's suffering and punishment and not her sins.

Second, building on Dobbs-Allsopp's analysis of Lamentations as a tragic text, I have attempted to articulate the tragic logic behind the poems' unanswered protest expressed by a suffering, impure female body.<sup>253</sup> I have suggested that the personification of the city and the interplay of the voices all work together to present an attempted but fruitless appeal to the deity. The text, with its many persuasive strategies, including the voice of a witness convinced by Jerusalem's undue suffering and deserved compassion, invites the implied audience to bear witness and be persuaded. For any witness convinced by Jerusalem's claims for comfort, then, the silence of the deity will be all the more powerfully tragic. Moreover, the personified city's impurity reminds Lamentations' implied audience of the futility of her protest: she has been abandoned by her god.

Throughout this chapter I have analyzed the various ways that the poet has drawn on and reimagined tradition, especially in terms of generic innovations and reworked images and ideas. While much of this work has been done by other scholars, my analysis suggests that the priestly legislation is a set of texts and ideas that deserves more careful attention as a possible resource that the poet of Lam 1 and 2 drew on and innovated from in order to articulate the tragedy of Jerusalem's fall.<sup>254</sup>

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253. Dobbs-Allsopp, "Tragedy."

254. Berlin does argue that "the paradigm of purity" served as one resource for the poet in articulating the relationship between land and God, but, as I have argued above, I disagree with several aspects of her analysis that rely on this paradigm (specifically, her interpretation of Lam 1:8-9) (*Lamentations*, 19-21). See my discussion above.

## Conclusion

It is worth recognizing and deciphering how influential texts, whether the Bible or the *Joy of Cooking*, produce ideology, circulate in culture, and shape our world. When it comes to the Bible's influence, at least in American contemporary culture, often it is the texts that make explicit claims about gender or sexuality—those, for example, that are interpreted by many as forbidding homosexuality—that receive the most attention. I would submit, however, that in some ways the more effective texts at producing ideology around sex and gender are those that construct and figure it as natural and stable. As discussed in the introductory chapter, it is represented bodies, found in both texts and visual art, that produce cultural norms and expectations around bodies, gender, and sexuality.

Therefore, it is vital that the Bible, as an influential (and, for many, authoritative) text in our culture, both be excavated for a maximally clear picture of the kinds of perspectives, values, and rhetoric that shape what it says and how it says it, and that the ideological power of not only the explicit claims about gender and sexuality but also its implicit constructions of gender and sexuality be recognized. It is dangerous to underestimate how much influence the Bible's construction of gender has and has had on our society. The work of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, demonstrates the extent and potency of the Bible's ideas about gender during the suffrage movement. When Stanton realized that women would never gain voting rights without undermining one of the primary sources producing the beliefs about their inequality, she gathered a group of women to read and interpret the Bible for

themselves.<sup>1</sup> Many of these interpretations, while lacking in historical critical depth, are insightful and do precisely this work of uncovering the problematic assumptions about gender that undergird many of the stories, images, and laws found in these texts.

Ultimately, then, the value in examining these female figures and their figurations is in demonstrating how ideological discourse about gender, community, and bodies are worked out and articulated in this literature. The way that these female bodies are figured—the body parts that are highlighted, the activities that they perform, their associations with, for example, fertility, morality, impurity, suffering and so on—shapes the way society understands female bodies, roles, and value. These figurations are powerful forces of ideology, for they do not make claims about gendered bodies but rather in figuring their bodies as, for example, fertile, impure, and vulnerable, present these qualities as natural, stable, and right. The female figures examined in this dissertation, then, are ideal cases for discovering and observing this ideology in that as metaphorical figures their construction is apparent. Unlike characters mired in the particularities of a narrative, in all three sets of texts these figures are created in order to think about something else. Female bodies are the source domain for discussions targeting love, wisdom, and divine abandonment. The constructions of these represented bodies concretize, by way of their femaleness, the animating ideas, assumptions, and anxieties that anchor the texts in which they appear.

This dissertation has focused primarily on the *how* of this enduring figurative phenomenon in some of its most ancient and influential iterations. It has been interested in analyzing and articulating how texts in the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Lamentations use female bodies and voices to contemplate, express, and instruct topics of communal importance—

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1. See discussion of Stanton's *The Woman's Bible* in chapter 1.

romantic love, wise discernment, and the fractured relationship with their deity. Despite the very different topics and genres, and even modes of figuration, in all three of these sets of texts female bodies and voices have embodied critical authorial concerns and served as vehicles of ideology. What remains consistent across these figurations is the use of the female body, different from the male body in its liquidity and porousness, even as these qualities are depicted and coded differently depending on the text's concerns. In the Song the flowing female body is, for the most part, celebrated and valued. She is sensuous, productive, and, with sufficient protection from others, open to her lover to enjoy. In Proverbs these qualities are also seen as seductive and a benefit when acquired wisely, otherwise the flowing waters and open doors of other women can entice a young man to ruin. Finally, in the poems of Lam 1 and 2 personified Jerusalem's leaky and broken body is a mark of her pollution and the source of her isolation.

In all three cases, then, I have demonstrated that the female figures serve as repositories for and voices of collective social anxieties, concerns, and values. The female bodies and voices of these texts are utilized to articulate what is at stake for the community. The fact that it is community concerns that motivate this literature and their figurations is evident in all three texts. The Song, even with its acknowledgement of the risks involved, ultimately promotes romantic love and suggests that it is exemplifying the ideal.<sup>2</sup> Practically, valuing romantic love is likely a positive for any community interested in growth and stability. Metaphorically, the celebration of fertility, again supporting the ongoing life of a community, as well as the necessity of protection, all contribute to a view of romantic love within—and that can enhance or hinder—a communal environment. Even the setting of an “urban” center, that is the frequent reference to streets and squares and passersby, central in all three of these texts, suggests an interest in community. In

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2. See discussion of Andruska, *Wise and Foolish Love*, in chapter 2.

Proverbs, this communal environment is implied in many of its wisdom lessons. For example, the warnings about avoiding a neighbor's wife is explicitly motivated by the importance of maintaining a stable relationship with one's neighbors. Moreover, the imagery of a populated town, where one may run into the Strange Woman or Woman Wisdom is key to Proverbs' rhetoric. Lastly, Woman Jerusalem in Lam 1 and 2 personifies the city and its inhabitants. These poems are explicit about their concern for the suffering of this community, especially the most vulnerable.

As I have suggested throughout this dissertation, the female body is an apt metaphor for communal concerns around vulnerability, resources, and survival. Women's reproductive roles make them valued and precious resources and ideal symbols for community thriving. Any corruption of a female body could corrupt the community and the death of a female body could reduce a community's chances for a future. Moreover, as a body that produces and nourishes new life, an association with death would be an effective representation of perversion of the natural order and even chaos; fitting imagery, then, for both the depiction of Jerusalem's devastation in Lam 1 and 2 and the extreme danger of unwise ethical discernment expressed in the portraits of the Strange Woman and Woman Folly in Prov 1-9. Thus, female bodies are productive and powerful metaphors for grappling with the conditions of communal survival.

Methodologically, this work has progressed primarily by way of literary analysis, with close attention to the metaphors and rhetoric that produce the female bodies and voices in these texts. In defining this project as focused on how female figuration works in this literature, I have differentiated it both from attempts to discover real women's voices in the text or even the historical women behind or around the text and from work that seeks to locate biblical texts and/

or women that could be empowering for readers today or provide theological answers to the many negative depictions of women in the Bible. However, I hope that the analyses found here could serve either of these types of projects, insofar as they provide access to many of the values and concerns of community/ies that produced these texts as well as insight into the complicated and varied portrayals of women in biblical literature, which can serve as a resource for theological, ethical, or political reflection.

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Not long after President Trump's election in 2016, there was a proliferation of political cartoons depicting Lady Liberty being assaulted, often sexually, by her newly elected commander-in-chief. The images are varied and creative, each one giving a different perspective on President Trump's relationship with particular embodied ideals of the nation. For example, in several cartoons President Trump reaches for Lady Liberty's genitals. The depiction of Lady Liberty varies from empowered to victimized. In one she returns with "Don't even think about."<sup>3</sup> In another Lady Liberty stands dejected besides a woman at a press conference who refers to her as "Another Trump assault victim...."<sup>4</sup> In yet another, she has been stripped and wears only a bikini and a Miss USA sash; a passing boat comments that "President Trump insisted...."<sup>5</sup> Finally, and most recently, Michael De Adder of the Toronto Star published an image entitled "Video Evidence," which depicts an image of President Trump kneeling on Lady Liberty's neck captured by a cell phone held in someone's hand.<sup>6</sup> These images *work* in large part because of the female body—its perceived vulnerabilities, its ability to represent a community's future, and the social

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3. Darrin Bell, WPWG, 2016.

4. Mike Luckovich, *ajc.com*, 1.27.17.

5. Mike Luckovich, *ajc.com*, 5.12.16.

6. Michael De Adder, "Video Evidence," *The Toronto Star*, June 1, 2020.

coding around male violations of female bodily autonomy. Not only are these images indicative of the rhetorical power of this female-bodied national symbol as the country reckons with its identity and values, but they also illuminate the enduring importance of the cultural and literary phenomenon of using female figures to develop, maintain, and adapt collective identities.

As I complete this dissertation in the summer of 2020, the figurative and rhetorical dynamics that I have shown to be operative in biblical literature feel only increasingly relevant. The ways women's bodies in these texts serve as the canvas on which a community works out the complications of love, the stakes of wisdom, and the tragedy of divine abandonment. These bodies are victims of violence (notably from those who are meant to protect in both the guard beating scene in Song 5:7 and Yahweh's destruction of Jerusalem in Lam 2:1-9) and are even depicted as evil in the case of the Strange Woman of Proverbs and Woman Jerusalem of Lam 1 and 2 is sinful and impure, even if her punishment is unjust. Today it is sick bodies and abused black bodies that fill us with anxiety for our community's future, that persuade us to rethink what we thought was wise discernment, and that urge us to protest the injustices that we are only now beginning to see. As we as a nation and a world grapple with the many challenges of this moment, I hope that we can recognize that our future is bound up with the extent to which we can attend to the bodies and voices of our most vulnerable.

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