

Jezebel's Voice
A Feminist Reconstruction of the Message to Thyatira
in the Book of Revelation

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DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

Although she reportedly describes herself as a prophetess, the voice of the woman whom the Book of Revelation's misogynistic Son of Man pejoratively describes as "the Woman Jezebel" (Rev 2:20) has been silenced by its author. The Introduction to this study notes that the only clue to "Jezebel's" prophetic words is provided by the description of her teaching as being "the deep things of Satan" (Rev 2:24). In order both to discover the nature of her teaching and to allow her lost prophetic voice to speak again, this study aims to reconstruct the message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) and the conflict contained within it (Rev 2:22-23) between the Son of Man (Rev 1:13), in his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:18), from the point of view of the Prophetess of Thyatira.

In order to carry out these aims, a review is made in Chapter 1 of feminist critiques of the presentation of the Woman Jezebel, of the Son of Man as a gendered character and of the conflict between the two characters. This review concludes that there is a lack of feminist interpretation in all three areas, in particular in the reconstruction of the conflict. In Chapter 2 the methodology by which such an interpretation may be made is reached by taking into account the necessary strategic criteria and the difficulties of interpretation posed, firstly, by the vocal hierarchy of the first three chapters of Revelation and, secondly, by the Woman Jezebel being both a historical woman and a character in the Book of Revelation. This methodology is one of feminist comparative analysis using a hermeneutics of suspicion and transformation, which considers the presentation of the characters and the conflict in both their socio-historical and literary contexts. The consideration of the socio-historical background to the conflict in the first-century C.E. trading city of Thyatira undertaken in Chapter 3 takes into account a variety of possible causes of the conflict, including the author of Revelation's belief in magic and the Prophetess's female gender. Interpretations are then made in the following two chapters of the presentations of the two adversaries in the conflict. These interpretations analyse in turn the Son of Man in his persona of the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel, the Prophetess of Thyatira, in their socio-historical and literary situations.

In Chapter 4, after a consideration of Revelation's hierarchy of gender, status and power, the Son of Man is analysed as an ambiguously-gendered character who has usurped from the Mother Goddess not only her cosmic powers and divine wisdom, but also her lactating breasts, with which to nourish his followers. He also has an ambiguous relation of power, gender and status with John, the narrator of the Letter to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:4-3:22; 22:21). The Son of Man presents himself to the Seven Churches

that are in Asia in a variety of guises, both male and female, both nurturing and violent. In particular, analysis is made of his presentation as the Son of God, the persona in which he presents himself in the message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18). Unlike the ambiguously-gendered Son of Man, the Son of God is a hyper-masculine character whose actions verge upon the bestial.

In Chapter 5, the Woman Jezebel, who calls herself a Prophetess, is analysed firstly as a first-century C.E. Graeco-Roman Christian woman, who held a position of power in the local church, in relation to John and in relation to the other three “women” of Revelation. Jezebel is analysed secondly as a character created by means of the Author of Revelation’s use of literary allusion, a technique which sometimes escapes his control and allows different interpretations of his creation to be made to those which he probably intended. Thirdly, Jezebel is analysed as a prophetess whose teaching was that handed down by Paul’s later disciples, and which laid stress upon the love of God. This three-pronged analysis enables a picture to emerge of a “mother” in the church, an officially-recognised prophetess who was known for her leadership through service of others and her inclusiveness of sinners and outsiders at the meetings of the assembly in her house.

In Chapter 6, four interpretations are made of the conflict inscribed in the message to Thyatira: firstly, as a sexual assault by the Son of God upon the Woman Jezebel; secondly, as the Son of God’s use of malevolent magic upon the Woman Jezebel; thirdly, as the Son of God’s enactment of a curse pronounced upon the Prophetess by the Author of the Book of Revelation; and fourthly, as a conflict of gender, in which the Son of God attempts to throw the Woman Jezebel down Revelation’s hierarchy to her “rightful” position as a slave. Finally, the lack of a corollary to this conflict allows the feminist interpreter to suggest how the Prophetess might have arisen to thwart the Son of God’s attack.

This feminist comparative analysis of the conflict between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel enables a reconstruction to be made, in the Conclusion, of the message to Thyatira from the point of view of the Prophetess of Thyatira and the liberation of her prophetic voice, calling sinners and outsiders to share in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at the assembly in her house, to learn “the deep things of God” and to know the immeasurable love of God in Christ Jesus.

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S.E.S.

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INTRODUCTION

THE SILENCING OF THE PROPHETESS OF THYATIRA'S VOICE

“She keeps on saying that she is a prophetess” (ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν) complains the Book of Revelation’s Son of Man, in his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:18), about the woman whom he calls “Jezebel” (Rev 2:20).¹ The Son of God does not, however, provide any indication of the words which the Prophetess of Thyatira speaks; the only clue the reader is given is that she teaches “the deep things of Satan” (διδάσκει [...] τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ, Rev 2:20, 24). In this she is not alone; despite Peter’s Pentecostal declaration that the time has come for the prophetic Spirit to be poured out upon women as well as upon men (Acts 2:16-18; cf. Joel 2:28-29), in the record of the earliest days of the church the female prophetic voice is notable only for its absence.²

The author of a biblical text, or its approved male narrator, who finds himself vying with a woman, whether or not she has authorial approval, for the attention of his audience, feels obliged, as it were, to shout, “Listen to me!” This is despite the woman’s words often not even being transmitted directly, but merely being heard through distorted report. The only reason for this can be that, when he finds himself in competition with a woman, the male in question immediately loses his authority over the reader, which he has to work hard to re-exert. An excellent example is provided by the Father who narrates Proverbs 1-9 and who, faced with the distracting competition from the Strange Woman (Prov 7:1-27), is obliged to keep exhorting his son(s) to pay attention to his instruction (ἄκουε, Prov 1:8; Ἀκούσατε, Prov 4:1) and to lend an ear to his words (ἐμοῖς δὲ λόγοις παράβαλλε σὸν οὖς, Prov 5:1).³

A similar situation pertains in the case of Simeon and Anna in the Gospel of Luke. In terms of prophetic authority, Anna is explicitly described as a prophetess (προφήτις, Lk 2:36), while Simeon is described, with great emphasis, as being inspired by the Holy

¹ Unless otherwise stated, translations of the Greek New Testament are my own, whilst those of the Jewish Scriptures are taken from the NRSV.

² F. Scott Spencer draws attention to the “broad, inclusive framework” of Joel 2:28-29, which “makes it particularly clear that the Spirit will not discriminate on the basis of *gender*.” However, in his speech Peter addresses only the men (ἄνδρες) of Judea and Jerusalem (Acts 2:14, 22, 29); “women are still constructed by male discourse.” F. Scott Spencer, *Acts* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 37 (the author’s emphasis). On the silencing of the female prophetic voice in Acts see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “What Ever Happened to Those Prophesying Daughters?” in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Marianne Blickenstaff; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 49.

³ The similarity of the battle for the ear of the narrator’s hearer in Proverbs 1-9 and the messages to the Seven Churches was noted in the reading of Carol A. Newsom, “Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989): 142-160.

Spirit and as being a recipient of revelation (Lk 2:25-27). Moreover, like Jezebel, the Prophetess Anna is described as speaking (ἐλάλει, Lk 2:38; cf. λέγουσα, Rev 2:20), but her prophetic words are not recorded and only briefly reported (Lk 2:38); in contrast, Simeon has two speeches (Lk 2:29-32; 34-35). Simeon certainly has a captive audience in Mary and Joseph, perhaps because he is holding their new-born infant in his arms (Lk 2:28). It is Anna, however, who both addresses and effortlessly holds the attention of the crowds (Lk 2:38). It may be argued that the Strange Woman has the advantage over the Father of Proverbs of being a sexually-available and seductive woman (Prov 7:10-12, 21); the author of Luke goes out of his way to emphasise that the Prophetess Anna is nothing of the sort (Lk 2:36-37).

Likewise, in the Book of Revelation, the Son of Man is obliged to recruit “the Spirit” as a chorus in order to be heard above the Prophetess of Thyatira’s unrecorded prophetic words, and not only in the church of which she is a member. For at or near the end of every single one of the Son of Man’s seven messages are the words “Let he who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις, Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).⁴

“She teaches [...] ‘the deep things of Satan’” warns the Son of God (Rev 2:20, 24). However, the popularity of Jezebel’s teaching with most, if not all, of the members of the Church in Thyatira (see Rev 2:24) demonstrates that few would have agreed with him. As noted by John W. Marshall, the Son of God’s anger over her teaching leads him to attack the Prophetess with physical, perhaps sexual, violence (Rev 2:22), an anomaly even amongst the threats of reprisals littered amongst the seven messages (Rev 2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 9, 16).⁵ Since the Prophetess belongs to, symbolises or even leads the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15), the faction which opposes that to which the author of Revelation belongs and whose influence pervades the churches in Ephesus and in Pergamum (Rev 2:1-7, 12-17), the author is vying with her voice for the audience’s attention in every church where there is not wholehearted agreement with his point of

⁴ David E. Aune considers that “this expression functions as [...] an injunction to the audience to pay attention.” David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (WBC 52A; Nashville; Thomas Nelson, 1997), 150. The use of this formula may be either a deliberate allusion to liturgy which contained sayings of Jesus or simply a reflection of “the distinctive modes of speech that entered into Christian discourse from both the Gospel texts themselves and the oral traditions within which such texts were transmitted.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 265. For a discussion of “the Spirit” in Revelation, see Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 36.

⁵ John W. Marshall, “Collateral Damage: Jesus and Jezebel in the Jewish War,” in *Violence in the New Testament* (ed. Shelly Matthews and E. Leigh Gibson; New York: T&T Clark International, 2005), 41, 44-46.

view (the Church in Sardis, Rev 3:1-6; the Church in Laodicea, Rev 3:14-19).⁶ That he is obliged to call his audience to attention even in those churches which have his approval (the Church in Smyrna, Rev 2:8-11; the Church in Philadelphia, Rev 3:7-13) suggests that they too are not completely deaf to the Prophetess's teaching.⁷

The discovery of this teaching, that is "the deep things of Satan," and the cause of the author of Revelation's portrayal of the Prophetess of Thyatira as a "sexually-immoral" woman being violently attacked by the Son of God, is the main aim of this study. Therefore, in order to begin the search for the voice which once pronounced these "deep things," let S/he Who Has an Ear listen to what feminist interpreters have said about the Woman Jezebel.

⁶ Since the teachings promulgated by Balaam, the Nicolaitans and by Jezebel (Rev 2:14-15, 20; see, also, 2:6) are the same it may be concluded that they belong to the same faction, which is opposed to that to which the author of Revelation belongs. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 148-49. The possibility of Jezebel being the leader of the Nicolaitans is considered in §3.3 and 5.

⁷ Aune notes that He Who Hears only has one ear to hear the voice of the Spirit, which suggests that his other ear is listening to another voice. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 151.

CHAPTER 1

“SHE IS LEADING ASTRAY MY SLAVES” (REV 2:20)

Review of Feminist Research on the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel and of Research on the Presentation of the Son of Man as a Gendered Character in the Book of Revelation

The Prophetess of Thyatira is the subject of a number of feminist analyses which provide a wealth of information about the use of hostile literary allusion in her portrayal and about her socio-historical situation. Paul B. Duff's *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* stands out as a monograph devoted to the analysis of the author of Revelation's hostile presentation of the Prophetess within the trading culture of the historical city of Thyatira and the baleful all-pervading influence of Rome, as represented by Babylon.¹ The only two focussed attempts to reconstruct the conflict between the Prophetess and the author of Revelation and to recover her lost voice, however, are the brief “virtual letter,” “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos (Revelation 2.18-29),” written by Ian Boxall, and the article, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John: Negotiating Empire in Revelation Then and Now,” written by Warren Carter.² In the search either for Jezebel's view of the socio-historical situation pertaining in first-century C.E. Thyatira or for her prophetic words, general feminist critiques of Revelation are useful, less for their usually brief analyses of the presentation of the Woman Jezebel than for their methodologies. Those made by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and by Tina Pippin are arguably the most thorough and influential. In comparison, there is only a small field of critiques of the presentation of male characters in Revelation, and only two which include more than a brief mention of the Son of Man. The first such critique is made by Colleen M. Conway in her study of the portrayal of Jesus in the New Testament in terms of Graeco-Roman gender construction, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*.³ The second critique of the presentation of the Son of Man as a gendered character is that made by Stephen D. Moore in *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex and Gender, Empire*

¹ Paul B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

² Ian Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos (Revelation 2.18-29),” in *Yours Faithfully: Virtual Letters from the Bible* (ed. Philip R. Davies; London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2004): 147-151; Warren Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John: Negotiating Empire in Revelation Then and Now,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 63.1 (2009): 32-47.

³ Colleen M. Conway, *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 160-63.

and Ecology.⁴ In this chapter, therefore, a review is undertaken of the feminist analyses of Revelation made by Schüssler Fiorenza (§1.2) and by Pippin (§1.3) and a survey is made of contemporary feminist interpretations focussed upon, or including, the Woman Jezebel (§1.4), including that of Duff (§1.4.4). This is followed by Steven J. Friesen's critique of feminist critiques of Revelation, and Schüssler Fiorenza's defence of the use of a hermeneutics of suspicion (§1.5). Attention then focusses upon Conway's and Moore's analyses of the Son of Man as a gendered character (§1.6). Finally, analyses are made of Boxall's and Carter's interpretations of the Prophetess of Thyatira's view of the conflict between her and the author of the Book of Revelation (§1.7).

First of all, however, it is important to note the contributions made to the feminist critique of biblical texts by *The Woman's Bible* and to the feminist critique of Revelation by Adela Yarbro Collins in *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*.⁵

1.1. Two Ground-Breaking Feminist Critiques: *The Woman's Bible* and *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*

Feminist interpretation of biblical texts is not a new phenomenon, nor is its critique.⁶ Upon its publication at the end of the nineteenth century, *The Woman's Bible* was the cause of much controversy; its radically political stance drew the fire not only of the patriarchal establishment, but also of women who felt that the Bible should be reinterpreted from women's perspectives, and in order to recover its message for women.⁷ More recently, Schüssler Fiorenza has pointed out that the demythologising approach of the book's critique is also problematic. Since this focusses upon those parts of the biblical text which specifically feature women, it inadvertently serves to reinforce the Bible's authoritative definition of women by their relationship to men and the norm

⁴ Stephen D. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation: Sex and Gender, Empire and Ecology* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 125-54, esp. 149-52.

⁵ *The Woman's Bible: the Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*, with an Introduction by Dale Spender (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1985); Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

⁶ Marla J. Selvidge, *Notorious Voices: Feminist Biblical Interpretation 1500-1920* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 20. Throughout this study, the word "Revelation" is usually used in preference to "the Apocalypse," except in quotations, for two reasons. Firstly, "Revelation" better translates the word Ἀποκάλυψις, which means "to unveil, to disclose, to reveal." Catherine Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), xii. Secondly, "Revelation" is better suited to a feminist critique which seeks to "unveil" the voice of its silenced Prophetess.

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Transforming the Legacy of *The Woman's Bible*," in *Searching the Scriptures, Volume One: A Feminist Introduction* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, with the assistance of Shelly Matthews; London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994), 4.

of the male. It also fails to challenge the Bible's exclusive attitude to any person or culture perceived as alien to its ethos of privileged heterosexual male superiority.⁸ Nevertheless, *The Woman's Bible* provides important and ground-breaking critiques of biblical texts and it has bequeathed to feminist biblical interpretation its use of a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion, and the highlighting both of the androcentric language of the texts and of the misogynistic mindset of its authors. Matilda Joslyn Gage makes the claims that Revelation is a mystic book which owes a debt to Egyptian mystery religions and that "[t]he woman attacked by the great red dragon" (Rev 12:4) is the constellation Cassiopeia, while her crown of twelve stars (Rev 12:1) signifies the Zodiac.⁹ Moreover, although in her interpretation of Revelation, Elizabeth Cady Stanton interprets "Jezebel" not as a real woman, but as the representation of a group of people with the characteristics of Queen Jezebel of 1 and 2 Kings, she makes the insightful point that in Revelation motherhood "is used to illustrate the most revolting crimes."¹⁰

In an equally ground-breaking study of Revelation, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Yarbrow Collins has identified the extent to which the author of Revelation has adapted and alludes to pagan mythology. She argues persuasively that the combat myth, found in many ancient mythologies, is the basis of the structure of Revelation 12 and discusses at length the possible literary allusions to various pagan myths used in the depiction of the Woman Clothed with the Sun.¹¹ Yarbrow Collins brings to the fore the

⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Introduction: Transforming the Legacy," 4-5, 9.

⁹ Matilda Joslyn Gage, "Revelation," in *The Woman's Bible: the Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*, with an Introduction by Dale Spender (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1985), 176, 181-82.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Revelation," in *The Woman's Bible: the Original Feminist Attack on the Bible*, with an Introduction by Dale Spender (Edinburgh: Polygon Books, 1985), 179-80, 84. In her imaginative retelling of the story of Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, Eleanor Ferris Beach writes: "Jezebel [...] is the common English spelling, from the Hebrew *'izebel*, of the name of Ahab's wife. The Hebrew appears to be an intentional distortion of the Phoenician ritual phrase *'i z'bul* ("where is the Prince [Baal]?") into the Hebrew *'i-z'bul* ("no nobility") and then into the current form where *zebel* means 'dung.'" Ferris Beach gives her the name "Jizebul" which, she argues, was her real name, from the Phoenician *'i z'bul*, "Where is the Prince?" Eleanor Ferris Beach, *The Jezebel Letters: Religion and Politics in Ninth-Century Israel* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 2005), 206. Except in quotations, this study will refer hereafter to Jezebel of 1 and 2 Kings as "Jizebul," firstly in order to avoid confusion with "Jezebel" of Thyatira, and secondly out of respect for a much-maligned and misrepresented woman.

¹¹ The combat myth is found in the traditions of the ancient Near East, in Jewish texts, and in Graeco-Roman and Egyptian mythologies. Despite cultural differences, the basic pattern is always the same. It involves a cosmic struggle for universal kingship. The two main protagonists are divine or supernatural beings, one of which is a monster, often a dragon. The hero represents order and fertility, the monster chaos and sterility. Initially the monster seems to have conquered by killing the hero, and a reign of disorder follows during which he often attacks the hero's goddess ally, who is either his wife/sister or mother. However, the goddess overpowers him and brings the hero back to life. The battle is renewed, the monster is finally killed and order is restored. This pattern is found, in a slightly different order, in Revelation 12. Adela Yarbrow Collins points out that the text of Revelation does not rely upon one particular version of the myth, but weaves various traditions into its complex imagery. Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 57-61.

multivalency of the literary allusions in Revelation, the literary parallels with non-canonical texts and the complexity of the Woman of Chapter 12. In particular, Yarbrow Collins points out that in Revelation 12 traces may be found of the Ugaritic myth of Baal, Anat and Mot, of the Egyptian myth of Isis, Seth-Typhon and Horus, and of the Greek myth of Leto, Apollo and Python.¹²

The use of a hermeneutics of suspicion, the awareness, both of the wide range of literature and imagery to which the author of Revelation alludes and of the hidden depths of his characters, and the knowledge of his ambivalent attitude towards motherhood are three of the most important tools for a feminist critic of this book. Another tool at the feminist interpreter's disposal is language. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that all feminist biblical critiques understand that language is a powerful tool, but are then divided into two critical positions. In the first type of critique the assumption is made that the language of the Bible is a tool of misogynistic oppression, which determines how the text should be understood. In this understanding, the female is presented as deviant from the male norm. She is either completely good or completely evil, and defined in the sexual language of misogynistic male authors. This understanding leads to a narrow, overly-critical reading which only serves to alienate female readers even further from texts such as Revelation.¹³ The second type of critique declares that language is a tool to be used by the feminist critic. The interpreter deliberately uses her or his own world view, which includes assumption of gender equality, to read the text. She or he strives to use an interpretive methodology which will "undermine the androcentric-reality construction of the text."¹⁴ This is the approach favoured by Schüssler Fiorenza, and her feminist liberation critique of the Book of Revelation is discussed in §1.2.

¹² Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 62-64. In a later essay, Yarbrow Collins demonstrates that the Woman of Chapter 12 symbolises a high goddess with cosmic powers, whose description best tallies with the "iconography" of the Egyptian goddess Isis. Adela Yarbrow Collins, "Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 121-22. In the same essay, Yarbrow Collins explores the presentation of the Woman of Chapter 12, Babylon and the Bride "in the context of a psychological interpretation of symbols in the tradition of Carl Jung." Yarbrow Collins, "Feminine Symbolism," 126 (cf. §4.9.5).

¹³ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress Press, 1991), 12-13.

¹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 14.

1.2. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Feminist Liberation Critique of the Book of Revelation

Schüssler Fiorenza locates feminist critical readings of Revelation within interpretive communities on the margins of mainline Christianity. She considers that the “social location” of these interpretive communities has resulted in the identification of contemporary events and people with those depicted in Revelation, which then become an inspiration for movements with a liberation theology ethos.¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza herself makes “a critical feminist-political interpretation and theo-ethical assessment” of Revelation.¹⁶

1.2.1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Methodology of Rhetorical Analysis and Its Social, Theological and Political Location

By combining the interpretive methodologies of biblical studies and liberation and feminist theologies, Schüssler Fiorenza aims for an interpretation that is rooted in both theology and politics.¹⁷ Her interpretation aims to make relevant Revelation's “language of divine kingship and royal reward, as well as its ethical dualism” for those engaged in political theology, who fight for justice for those marginalised by political systems and power structures.¹⁸

Schüssler Fiorenza's methodology is one of rhetorical analysis, which, she explains, is superior to historical-critical and literary-critical interpretations.¹⁹ These offer no opportunity for viewing the interpretation in the light of contemporary political, social and religious situations.²⁰ She considers that historical-critical interpretation assigns the symbols and world view of the text to particular historical figures and situations. As far as literary-critical interpretation is concerned, study of intertextuality enhances the appreciation of the text, but then removes it from contemporary political and social relevance.²¹ Literary-critical analysis insists upon the multivalency of the symbolism of Revelation. When this is combined with the critique made by the reader it leads to a huge variety of interpretations, possibly unforeseen by the author. There are as

¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 7 and 10.

¹⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 5.

¹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 5-6.

¹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 139.

¹⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 2.

²⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 15.

²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 17-18.

many interpretations as there are readers of the text.²² Both these methodologies depoliticise, universalise and spiritualise the symbolism of Revelation.²³ A rhetorical analysis, however, openly uses the interpreter's own world view and religious and ethical positions as a conversation partner with the world view, social norms and symbols of the book.²⁴

Schüssler Fiorenza's own commentary on Revelation is "a reasoned rhetorical production of meaning from a particular sociopolitical and theo-ethical stance and perspective."²⁵ She considers that rhetorical analysis is better than either the historical- or literary-critical methods because it focusses upon the power and symbolism of the composition's language, not just in its individual elements, but as parts of a whole. It also takes into account the context of the social and political situations both of the original and of the contemporary interpreters of the book. This concentration upon the rhetorical nature and structure of the text as a whole enables the meaning of the symbolic imagery to be made clear. This is because Revelation is a letter, and the author employs rhetoric to bring his hearers round to his point of view and to persuade them to stand up to the ideologically-imposed structures of the society in which they live.²⁶

1.2.2. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Reading of Jezebel "Against the Grain" in Her Feminist Analysis of the Book of Revelation

Schüssler Fiorenza writes that, although in its original context, Revelation's female imagery must have given its hearers comfort, assurance and encouragement, for contemporary readers, the androcentrism and misogyny of the language and images provoke an attitude of distrust towards women, who are understood as either good or bad. Thus its symbolism should be "'translated' into a contemporary 'rhetorical situation' to which it can be a 'fitting' rhetorical response."²⁷ By reading the "gendered language" within the context of Roman imperialist domination and racial and class structures, the interpreter avoids replicating "the dualistic sex/gender system."²⁸

²² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 19.

²³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 18.

²⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 3.

²⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 5.

²⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 20-21, 31 and 36.

²⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (2d ed.; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1998), 199.

²⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza stresses the importance of taking into account that "the Western gender discourse does not produce and negotiate just *androcentric* but *kyriocentric*, i.e., master/lord/father/husband – *elite-*

In her analysis of Revelation's women, Schüssler Fiorenza's most vehement critique is reserved for John's portrayal of the Prophetess of Thyatira. She can defend his brutal portrayal of the Whore of Babylon as a symbol of Roman oppression, which uses the traditional generic language and imagery of the Hebrew Bible. However, she finds his attitude to a female who was almost without doubt a real, although unnamed, woman indefensible. His abuse of the tradition of sexual promiscuity equating to idolatry has led to the vilification both of this Christian woman leader and of her referent, whose story is told in 1 and 2 Kings, for being sexually promiscuous, a charge that is without foundation. It is a personal attack upon an influential rival, whose prophetic gift and power in the local community John does not dispute.²⁹

It is, moreover, only in the depiction of the woman whom John abusively calls "Jezebel" that it is possible to read against the grain of Revelation's political and ethical rhetoric. This is because Jezebel is the only "real" woman in Revelation. Such a method of reading reveals that, behind the accusations of fornication and eating food sacrificed to idols (Rev 2:20), was an authoritative and respected leader of a church, who was entitled to the "official title 'prophet.'"³⁰ Further, John also uses similar language to describe Balaam and his followers and the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14-15). Thus for John, the "other" is not always characterised as a woman or female character; sometimes the "other" is male. She considers that John is not accusing Jezebel of "fornication" simply because she is a woman, but "because he disagrees with her theological stance." Similarly he does not dispute her right to be a church leader and prophet because she is a woman, but because he disagreed with what she was teaching her followers. The disagreements between Jezebel and John are to do not with sex but with doctrine, politics and culture.³¹

1.2.3. A Response to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's Interpretation of Revelation: Greg Carey's Consideration of the Text's Ethos

Greg Carey identifies various groups of contemporary readers of Revelation and, under the umbrella of a literary-historical approach, he includes a critique of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's work. He considers that an interpretation such as hers, which is made in order to make Revelation meaningful for contemporary readers, can only be

male-centered [sic] relations of domination, not only between wo/men and men but also between wo/men and wo/men." Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 218 (the author's emphases).

²⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 133-35.

³⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 222.

³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 222-23.

done by hedging the exegesis with caveats. These range from its extreme misogyny, through the imperfection of its vision, to abhorrence of the text's vengeful attitude to its dissenters. Carey says of Schüssler Fiorenza that she "foregrounds its vision of justice over its violent and misogynist dimensions."³²

In his discussion Carey identifies three strands of ethos running through Revelation. The first comprises the moral norms of a society, in this case that of the readers of Revelation, whom John hopes to influence. The second ethos is that of the character of the narrator himself, which is defended by the use of rhetoric. These "ethoi" are held in constant tension, which is heightened when the third ethos, that of the narrative itself, is added to the mix. In addition, these three "ethoi" are internally at war with each other. The audience is divided by conflicting interpretations of the text.³³ John's voice is at once that of a man vested with the divine authority of a prophet and with the humility of a slave of Jesus Christ who sees himself as no better than other potential Christian martyrs. In addition, the defence of his ethos involves attacks upon the "ethoi" of his opponents.³⁴ The ethos of the text itself is inclusive in its invitation to readers to reject the values of and social involvement in the structures of the Roman Empire, to repent, and to take their places as citizens of the New Jerusalem. Yet it is exclusive in its condemnation and prophesied punishment of those who succumb to the attractions of the lifestyle of citizens of the Roman Empire.³⁵

Comment

Schüssler Fiorenza considers that "Revelation's world of vision is best understood as a rhetorical response to a particular sociohistorical communicative situation."³⁶ She points out the importance of an interpretation taking into account the historical and situational context of the text, but at the same time wishes to make an interpretation that enables John's proclamation to be made relevant for contemporary situations. Thus she stresses its political message of resistance to institutionalised evil and political oppression. However, she observes that: "Only where a rhetorical situation similar to that addressed

³² Greg Carey, "The Apocalypse and Its Ambiguous Ethos," in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 167.

³³ Carey, "The Apocalypse and Its Ambiguous Ethos," 163-64.

³⁴ Carey, "The Apocalypse and Its Ambiguous Ethos," 176-77.

³⁵ Carey, "The Apocalypse and Its Ambiguous Ethos," 170-72.

³⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 118.

by Revelation exists can Revelation's world of vision be understood as a 'fitting' theological response."³⁷

John's "sexually coded language" should not be misread. It should be understood within the political rhetoric of Revelation as a whole. Rev 2:20 is important, because it points to the standing of real women in the historical early Church, which has been repressed by "grammatically masculine language and vituperative polemics."³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza considers that Revelation's audience was not made up only of men but, on the contrary, included women. The clue to this is the abundance of female characters who are central to its political message. Grammatical gender should not be given too much weight, because such a strategy causes the female, and in this case a real woman, to be understood as equated with sexual licence. This would imply that the audience was only male, and that women were of no account in the early Church. This is not to deny, however, that the grammatical gendering of Revelation does not contribute to the marginalisation and elimination of historical women from accounts of the early Church.³⁹

Schüssler Fiorenza's interpretation, based upon her belief that "Revelation's text is best understood as a rhetorical practice concerned with issues of power, values, and commitment"⁴⁰ is impressive. It emphasises Revelation's political rhetoric and John's hortatory message of standing out against oppression and seeking justice. It also draws attention to the way in which the female imagery fits into Revelation as a structural whole.⁴¹ At the same time the interpretation highlights how the negative, apocalyptic and dualistic female imagery is a hindrance to his message, at least in the eyes of contemporary readers. However, Pippin notes that, because of Schüssler Fiorenza's desire to reconstruct rather than merely to deconstruct the text, she finds herself defending John's use of misogynistic categorisation and symbolism of female characters.⁴² Despite declaring that Babylon is not a woman, but a city depicted in terms of a woman, Schüssler Fiorenza considers Rev 15:5-19:10 to be a courtroom drama, in which Babylon is standing her trial for "exploitation and murder,"⁴³ with the saints as the legal representatives of her victims, and God as judge. God finds Babylon guilty and

³⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 138-39.

³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 223.

³⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 223.

⁴⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 117.

⁴¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 32.

⁴² Tina Pippin, "The Revelation to John," in *Searching the Scriptures, Volume Two: A Feminist Commentary* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, with the assistance of Ann Brock and Shelly Matthews London: SCM Press, 1995), 116.

⁴³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 7.

condemns her to execution by the Beast. She also states that Babylon is a personification and an “incarnation” of “international exploitation, oppression, and murder.”⁴⁴ It is difficult to understand how such an interpretation can be made of a city; despite Schüssler Fiorenza’s argument, this study interprets the Whore of Babylon as a woman (§5.5; 5.9.3; 5:11).

In contrast with Schüssler Fiorenza’s important interpretation, is the no less influential deconstructive feminist critique of Revelation made by Pippin. Her interpretation belongs to the group of feminist critics, identified by Schüssler Fiorenza, who understand language as a tool of misogynistic oppression.

1.3. Tina Pippin’s Deconstructive Feminist Critique of the Book of Revelation

Tina Pippin argues that the best way to approach Revelation is with a poststructuralist critique, since it is impossible to know anything for certain about the context in which it was written. All that exists is the text, “the trail of an absent author.”⁴⁵ Approaches involving form criticism and attempts to reconstruct the historical context of the author or of the original readership are inadequate. Neither the historical context of the text nor that of its original readership can be known for certain.⁴⁶

1.3.1. Tina Pippin’s Postmodern Methodology and “Feminist Biblical” Hermeneutic

Pippin recognises that readers are not passive recipients of information, but engage with and interpret the text.⁴⁷ Pippin respects interpretive readers and declares that she makes no assumptions about what the characters or symbols in Revelation might be supposed to represent for its original readers or hearers. Nor does she intend, she says, to interpret the text in such a way as to make it palatable for today’s readers. She admits that her own reading has a particular political and ethical outlook. Her methodology is a postmodern one of experiential participation in the story. This involves identifying the emotional

⁴⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 7.

⁴⁵ Tina Pippin, *Death and Desire: the Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 26. Pippin quotes Patrocínio P. Schweickart, “Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading,” in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1986), 47.

⁴⁶ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 27.

⁴⁷ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 16 and Footnote 1, 111.

responses invoked by the rhetoric of the author of Revelation to its crisis, which are released by catharsis, “the central mode of reader response in the Apocalypse.”⁴⁸

The concept of catharsis, which is achieved by linking death and desire, is central to Pippin’s interpretation of Revelation.⁴⁹ She uses ideology critique, concentrating upon the political and ethical assumptions which underpin the text and give it an authority which is intended to influence readers and to transform their lives.⁵⁰ This enables her to highlight two themes. The first is that catharsis becomes a problem in Revelation when one is interpreting it with gender in mind. The second is that a liberation reading requires identification with the oppressed, and not all categories of the oppressed are liberated.⁵¹

In particular, Pippin uses a “materialist-feminist reading,” a type of Marxist dialectical materialist interpretation, which brings to the fore the class struggle inherent in literature and exposes its “political unconscious.” This in turn reveals the reader’s own repressed unconscious.⁵² Pippin is of the opinion that all literature is political in that it is unconsciously formed either by the dominant ideology or by a repressed reaction of alienation to it. It is only when the “political ideology” of a text is brought to the fore that the text is freed from the false consciousness of its formative overarching ideology and is able to transform the reader. The powerless desire power, but this desire is repressed and not directly expressed. The desire is unconscious and is thus more likely to be found in what is assumed rather than what is explicitly said, and it pervades the text in its gaps.

⁴⁸ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 16. Pippin explains this concept of catharsis in Revelation. She considers that John has realised that his readers have a repressed desire, with the sexual dimension proper to all desire, for that which he and they know to be forbidden. He recognises that his readership will identify themselves with those desiring the Whore, and he uses the sophisticated technique of catharsis to manipulate them into rejecting that which they most desire. He deliberately exploits his unwitting readers, by mythologising the political, religious and social circumstances of the first century C.E. with a fantasy which merges the “real” with a fictive happy ending. He first demonises that which he knows they find desirable, and then describes in chilling detail the consequences of this desire. Readers are led to recognise what they are feeling and to realise that they are siding with evil. John, having terrified his audience with the prospect of hideous and never-ending torture, releases them from the tension of repressed desire by destroying its object. With the relief and peace of mind that come from having their fears vanquished, readers eagerly identify themselves with the elect. The powerless have gained power. Just as in ancient Greek drama, Revelation is a “ritual re-enactment.” It even incorporates the concept of a scapegoat, in this case the sacrificial and warrior Lamb. Thus readers are able, when they have repented of their desire, to brace themselves to endure, conquer, and witness to Jesus, and thus also be assured of a place in the New Jerusalem. In doing this they experience catharsis. Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 16-21.

⁴⁹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 21.

⁵⁰ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 27.

⁵¹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 21. An ideology critique, which looks at the way the text is formed by both social circumstances and the use of language, concentrates not upon its supposed context but upon the emotions and attitudes unconsciously inscribed within it. This type of critique highlights the difficulties of interpreting a narrative from which the reader may be alienated. It depends upon whether or not the reader feels that she or he is included or excluded from the utopian vision or can accept it as such rather than viewing it as a dystopia. Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 30.

⁵² Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 30-32, 58.

The oppressed repress their alienation out of necessity. This leads to a Nietzschean “*ressentiment*” and a delight in oppression.⁵³ The only means of releasing the unconscious desire for the overcoming of the powerful oppressors is literature. Stories express desire, and stories with an underlying class struggle contain a hidden desire for freedom.⁵⁴ Apocalyptic texts, however, put this desire in plain words. Also present in a work concerned with a vision of utopia is a Marxist dialectic between the utopian and the dominant political ideology. The text demands that its readers decide which side they are on.⁵⁵

Pippin also interprets Revelation by a consideration of the interaction of “biblical studies and feminist and political criticism,” which she calls “a feminist biblical hermeneutic.”⁵⁶ Her aim is to subvert Revelation in a way that enables as many different interpretations to be made as there are female readers. This is because the misogynistic imagery and language are past reclaiming. This text states that for women Ἀποκάλυψις, re-veiling, means being silenced, sidelined, raped or killed. Women are defined only by their sexuality, which is always evil, unless controlled by men. Revelation is unrelentingly vindictive towards women.⁵⁷ It strips any vestige of power from the women it portrays, even over their own bodies, and especially over their own sexuality. Pippin says: “The social construction of gender in the Apocalypse leaves the female body as the object of male desire.”⁵⁸

1.3.2. *Death, Desire and the Woman Jezebel in Tina Pippin’s Feminist Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*

Pippin’s understanding of the concept of desire is not the simplistic one of just sexual desire, although this impacts upon any other definition. Desire in the Apocalypse is not only desire for life but also for death, and life and death are always connected in this text. This is not as unusual as it might seem. Literary definitions of desire connect it with “truth, reason or ideology,” the yearning for wholeness or the fulfilment of wishes. The erotic is also connected to death. Pippin looks at the tension caused by these undercurrents in Revelation. She considers that this heady mix of the desire for life in an

⁵³ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 30-32.

⁵⁴ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 37.

⁵⁵ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 35-36.

⁵⁶ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 23.

⁵⁷ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 46-47.

⁵⁸ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 70.

eternal utopia and the desire for a martyr's death may be understood as a means of effecting an upheaval in the structure of society.⁵⁹

By a comparison of the death of the Whore with that of the two witnesses (Rev 11:7-13), the other ideology in the text is exposed, that of death.⁶⁰ Pippin points out “[t]he centrality of the body” both in the deaths and in the “funeral scenes of the Whore and the two witnesses.”⁶¹ No less than that of the Whore, the bodies of the two witnesses are humiliated. However, just as their deaths may be understood as noble, their bodies are brought back to life by God. In contrast the “horrible deaths” of the Whore and Jezebel “destroy the sexuality and seductiveness of the women.”⁶² Death permeates Revelation, but desire also runs through its images and rhetoric. Desire, like death, is inevitable, and desire leads to death. Desire for the Whore leads to death while desire for the Lamb leads to probable martyrdom. It is only desire for the Bride/New Jerusalem that leads to resurrection and to life.⁶³ It depends on what the reader desires or how that desire, which always has a sexual element, is focussed. It is focussed upon a female body whether it is that of the Whore or that of the Bride. Both may be understood as symbolising power and wealth, but what is important is the choice of focus made by the reader.⁶⁴

The female characters in Revelation bear no resemblance to real women. They are representations of the stereotypical female roles of “virgin, whore, and mother,” which are created by male desire, a desire which includes the destruction of female sexual power. Even in the depiction of the Woman who gives birth, motherhood is controlled by males who take away her child and get on with the male task of waging war. This is because the women of Revelation are defined simply by their sexuality in the service of male desire and by their ability to bear men's children.⁶⁵

Pippin writes that Revelation may be understood to be subversive of the prevailing political, social and religious order, but only for men. Women are still required to be submissive and dominated by men, and women are excluded from God's kingdom in order to keep it pure (Rev 14:4). They are either passive, fulfilling their roles in a man's world as virgin bride or mother (the New Jerusalem and the Woman of Chapter 12), or they are destroyed, because they threaten to destabilise that order (Jezebel and the

⁵⁹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 21-22.

⁶⁰ Tina Pippin, “Eros and the End: Reading for Gender in the Apocalypse of John,” *Semeia* 59 (1992), 196.

⁶¹ Pippin, “Eros and the End,” 199.

⁶² Pippin, “Eros and the End,” 199.

⁶³ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 59.

⁶⁴ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 22.

⁶⁵ Pippin, “Eros and the End,” 200-201.

Whore).⁶⁶ Evil is equated with the female in the persons of Jezebel and the Whore, especially in their bodies since, as in science fiction fantasies, women in Revelation are defined solely as “sexual beings” and “rewards” for men. Any independent action or power that a woman has is viewed as problematic. Jezebel and the Whore have power, one as a prophetess and rival of John, the other with a strong sexual allure. They are “used as “scapegoats” for the evil in society,” sacrificed for the benefit of men.⁶⁷

In Revelation oppressive structures are destroyed and the marginalised are liberated, but this applies only to men. Women remain oppressed and in the traditional roles determined for them by men. The only way to escape is, like the Woman, to flee to the wilderness. There is no place for her in utopia.⁶⁸ For female readers, Revelation can only be oppressive. It is impossible for any woman to identify with the oppressed. This is not only because of the violent misogyny, but also because “[d]ifference is not affirmed in the Apocalypse; everyone is called to be the same, regardless of their nation, tribe, or language.”⁶⁹ Revelation claims a message of decolonisation, in its identification of the prevailing ideology of oppression and annihilation of any opposition. At the same time, however, it reveals a desire for those very things which it condemns. The text cries out to be deconstructed, since it contains so many internal conflicts. Any feminist interpretation of Revelation is by definition deconstructive.⁷⁰

1.3.3. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s Critique of Tina Pippin’s Feminist Interpretation

Unlike Pippin, Schüssler Fiorenza, whilst acknowledging the androcentrism of the text, argues that this is not caused by an intention to exclude women from the New Jerusalem, but is generic language used in a rhetorical way. Certainly Revelation is exclusive of certain people, but this includes males as well as females. Understanding Babylon as a woman prevents the interpreter from trying to put herself in the place of one of John’s original hearers, and considering how she might have reacted to his polemic.⁷¹ Thus Schüssler Fiorenza’s criticism of Pippin is that she understands the female symbols and images as “real” women.⁷² Whilst this deconstructive reading exposes the misogyny of

⁶⁶ Tina Pippin, “The Heroine and the Whore: Fantasy and the Female in the Apocalypse of John,” *Semeia* 60 (1992), 69.

⁶⁷ Pippin, “The Heroine and the Whore,” 70.

⁶⁸ Pippin, “The Heroine and the Whore,” 78.

⁶⁹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 56.

⁷⁰ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 56.

⁷¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 208-209.

⁷² Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 216-17.

the text, Schüssler Fiorenza considers that it “does not destabilize but rather literalizes the gender inscriptions of Revelation.”⁷³ She states that the language, whether understood as gendered or generic, should be understood within the context of the various ambiguities in the text. These include not only “feminine and urban characterization” but also “masculine and beastly symbolization,” “images of war and justice, violence and salvation, defeat and hope, ethical struggle and divine predestination.”⁷⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza rightly notes that Pippin’s approach underlines the dualities of the text, and makes each image symbolic of only one thing, instead of being multivalent. This causes the text to be even more negative for women readers than it already is, and rules out any other type of interpretation, including “a *different feminist* reading of Revelation’s symbolic world.”⁷⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza critiques Pippin for reading “as a woman” and reading for gender. This strategy “reinscribes” and makes universal the understanding of women and men as both different in terms of essentialism and as either complementary or hostile to each other in terms of humanity.⁷⁶

Schüssler Fiorenza insists that the Whore says nothing about John’s attitude to women in general or specific historical women. She states that John is concerned to portray in symbolic terms the evil political system of the Roman Empire. Pippin interprets Revelation from her point of view as a woman of a particular class and ethnic background and, since she is adamant it can be understood in no other way, makes it invalid for other women readers with different cultural backgrounds.⁷⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza also considers that Pippin’s interpretation of John’s portrayal of the female as either good or bad fails to understand that this portrayal is more sophisticated than that, since there are visions of three women, including that of Chapter 12.⁷⁸ Moreover, they are portrayed as possessing power. She says: “They symbolize in a dialectical fashion the Powerful Queen of Heaven, the Powerful Queen of Earth, and the Powerful Queen of the New Heaven and the New Earth.”⁷⁹

⁷³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 217.

⁷⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 217.

⁷⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 217-18 (the author’s emphasis.)

⁷⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 218.

⁷⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 219.

⁷⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 223-24.

⁷⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 224. The depiction of the women of Revelation as queens is analysed by David L. Barr, “Women in Myth and History: Deconstructing John’s Characterizations,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009): 55-68. Cf. §1.4.1.

1.3.4. Tina Pippin's Defence of her Deconstructive Feminist Critique of Revelation

In response to Schüssler Fiorenza's critique that she understands the symbol of the Whore "too literally," Pippin counters that, if the character were a male prostitute, the overall symbolism of the "evil empire" would collapse. She points out that both Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon are treated with sexual violence, and the Whore is stripped naked. The "male gaze" is invited to linger upon them in their suffering. The hearers are supposed to rejoice, with the god of Revelation, in the violence which is reiterated with every reading.⁸⁰ Revelation may be considered pornographic because the Whore is subjected to mass rape and degradation and at the same time is presented as an object of male desire.⁸¹ Pippin also notes that in "the classical world" pornography, which may literally be understood as the "depiction of whores," often portrays women as naked and as food, and objectified. Babylon, the New Jerusalem and the Abyss are under male domination and perverted by "the male gaze," which served to reinforce the maleness of the subject.⁸² Pippin notes that there is also a link between pornography and horror. Revelation is riddled throughout with bodily suffering. The elect have to suffer the physical pain of martyrdom in order to be able to share in the Lamb's wedding banquet and to live in the heavenly utopia. Thus pain is connected to sexual desire, and this connection is a theme which runs through Revelation.⁸³

Comment

Pippin points out that the women in Revelation are either "marginalized (the woman left in exile in Revelation 12) and/or used as sexual objects and abused ("Jezebel," the Whore and the Bride)."⁸⁴ Pippin's passionately-expressed deconstructive approach highlights the undisguised and violent misogyny of Revelation, and the ideological association of sexual desire and death. Her reading may be summed up as follows: "Having studied the evils of Roman imperial policy in the colonies, I find the violent destruction of Babylon very cathartic. But when I looked into the face of Babylon, I saw a woman."⁸⁵ However, in her justified attack upon the portrayal of the female characters in Revelation, she loses sight of the text's inherent violence of which its misogyny is but a part. Pippin states: "I

⁸⁰ Tina Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies: the Biblical End of the World in Text and Image* (London: Routledge, 1999), 92-94.

⁸¹ Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 94.

⁸² Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 95-96.

⁸³ Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 96-97.

⁸⁴ Pippin. "The Revelation to John," 116.

⁸⁵ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 80.

want to show that all the females in the Apocalypse are victims.”⁸⁶ Although she is right to highlight this, and the violent heterosexist ideology underlying this victimisation, her interpretation serves to heighten the stereotyping of the female characters.⁸⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza considers that an interpretation such as Pippin’s only serves to reinforce the dualism of the text and to make it abhorrent for contemporary readers. Pippin causes the text to be defined not by its content but by the interpretation of people who are far removed from the world view and social situation of its original hearers. It is therefore important to use a rhetorical analysis when interpreting the text in order to explain the generic language or traditional imagery whose androcentric language seems, to the contemporary mindset, to exult in violent misogyny. This enables the interpreter to explain that the gendered language of oppression is ideological, rather than a reflection of the natural state of affairs. To this end, feminist critiques of Revelation should approach the female images as part of a broader critique of its general violence and structural oppression.⁸⁸

Schüssler Fiorenza considers that a feminist interpretation should be centred in a critique of power and ideology which objectifies and oppresses everyone, and that the females of the text should be seen as victims certainly, but not the only victims, and victims not of John’s or his culture’s or faith’s misogyny, but of the political and economic system of the time. She points out that the difference between her method and that favoured by Pippin is “not exegetical-textual but rather rhetorical-hermeneutical.”⁸⁹ It is necessary to point out to privileged Western readers that the oppression of the female characters is only one part of the structural oppression inscribed in the text. Readers from different backgrounds will interpret the imagery differently, perhaps in terms of racial or class oppression. Revelation speaks to the marginalised: this does not just mean women.⁹⁰

Pippin acknowledges that she reads Revelation as “an elite female embedded in a system of white privilege.”⁹¹ She does not, however, assume that other women will necessarily agree with her interpretation, and acknowledges that Revelation speaks to people suffering oppression.⁹² She considers that Revelation is no respecter of ethnic or

⁸⁶ Pippin, “The Heroine and the Whore,” 69.

⁸⁷ In a related point made by Jane Schaberg, it is not just women who are victimised. For example, the Earth is completely annihilated by the text’s ideology of violence. Jane Schaberg, “Response to Tina Pippin, “Eros and the End,”” *Semeia* 59 (1992), 223.

⁸⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 226-27.

⁸⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 228.

⁹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 228-29.

⁹¹ Pippin, “The Revelation to John,” 120.

⁹² Pippin, “The Revelation to John,” 120-21.

cultural diversity. It is an exclusivist text which “has an oppressive function in women’s lives,” and “a feminist reading of Revelation is necessarily deconstructive.”⁹³ In her ideological critique Pippin states that it is difficult to interpret this text as one of liberation, invested as it is with misogyny.⁹⁴ It is also difficult to disagree with this analysis.

Like Schüssler Fiorenza, Pippin writes of the excluded and marginalised. For her, however, they are not the readers of the text, but the text’s female characters. Babylon is presented as evil in that she represents class oppression, but because this evil city is symbolised by a woman, ideological evil is also associated with a woman, and moreover with one who is sexually impure. When the symbol of oppressive power is destroyed, the object of male sexual desire is also destroyed. This desire has to be displaced onto the pure Bride, the New Jerusalem, God’s utopia, a city symbolised by another woman and yet a city into which no women are permitted to enter. There is no room for the “other” in this utopia, whether the female or males who have satisfied their sexual desires.⁹⁵

Pippin says: “I want to play with the polyvalence of the symbols, unanchoring them from any specific historical context.”⁹⁶ This is a laudable aim, but one that she does not carry out. Pippin understands the Whore of Babylon as representing Rome and Roman power in the first century C.E. or as an evil, oppressive and colonising foreign power in general terms. This is not doing justice to John’s literary allusions in his detailed description both of the Whore and of Babylon.

Lynn R. Huber points out that, despite their different approaches and conclusions, Schüssler Fiorenza and Pippin both highlight the importance of Revelation’s structural rhetoric.⁹⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza wishes to stress that Revelation contains a utopian vision of justice for the marginalised and oppressed, whether women or men.⁹⁸ For Pippin, Revelation yearns for a male utopia where there is no justice for marginalised and oppressed women, because they are excluded from it.⁹⁹ Whilst Pippin’s analysis of Revelation as violently misogynistic is more persuasive, it is Schüssler Fiorenza’s

⁹³ Pippin, “The Revelation to John,” 123.

⁹⁴ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 91-92.

⁹⁵ Pippin, “Eros and the End,” 195.

⁹⁶ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 16.

⁹⁷ Lynn R. Huber, “Unveiling the Bride: Revelation 19:1-8 and Roman Social Discourse,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 161.

⁹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 229.

⁹⁹ Pippin, “Eros and the End,” 195.

methodology, which insists upon contextualising the female imagery in Revelation, which is superior.

The foregoing analyses have highlighted the vastly different interpretations which a different methodological and hermeneutical approach can make to a feminist critique of Revelation. These pave the way for a consideration of contemporary feminist critiques which are either centred upon or include the presentation of the Woman Jezebel.

1.4. Contemporary Feminist Critiques of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel in the Book of Revelation

The first contemporary feminist critique of Jezebel to be considered is centred upon an analysis of the four women as queens.

1.4.1. The Presentation of the Woman Jezebel as One of Revelation's Five Queens

David L. Barr interprets the Earth and the four women of Revelation as queens. The Earth, or Gaia, is “the original Queen Mother.”¹⁰⁰ The women whose bodies John used as “symbolic constructs” for, among other things, “the faithful community,” are: the Queen Consort and the Queen of Heaven, “good” women with submissive attitudes to their male protectors, and the Queen Ruler and Queen Jezebel, portrayed as “bad” women. All four are presented through sexual stereotyping.¹⁰¹ Of his five queens, Barr is most interested in Queen Jezebel, whom he terms “originally a historical figure.”¹⁰² Jezebel is the “alter ego” of oppressive Rome, and John’s success in his connected representation of these two figures means “that scholars have invented a Domitianic persecution and condemned Jezebel’s apostasy, with no real evidence for either outside John’s rhetoric.”¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Barr, “Women in Myth and History,” 57.

¹⁰¹ Barr, “Women in Myth and History,” 57-64.

¹⁰² Barr, “Women in Myth and History,” 60. Barr considers that the real prophetess behind this name was so powerful that John was afraid to use her real name. He thus smeared her reputation by associating her with the supposed crimes and idolatry of Jezebel of 1 and 2 Kings and used his rhetoric to turn his original readers, who would have been aware of her true identity, against her, with the accusation of adultery, equated with idolatry. He doubts that there was anything to substantiate John’s accusations of either of these charges, but he smeared her reputation with a name which had, over time, become associated with the most evil things that a woman could be and do. Barr, “Women in Myth and History,” 61-62.

¹⁰³ Barr, “Women in Myth and History,” 62-63.

1.4.2. The Presentation of the Woman Jezebel as John's Powerful Rival

Pamela Thimmes identifies and discusses two themes in the Letter to Thyatira. The first theme is John's "rhetoric of conflict," which he uses to vilify the character of the woman he calls "Jezebel," whom he sees as his rival for prophetic authority in the Christian community in Thyatira.¹⁰⁴ The second theme is that of "women, sex and food."¹⁰⁵ Thimmes is also interested in how women read the female characters of Revelation. She considers that the women of Revelation are constructed as "sexual signifiers" by John, who tries to control them.¹⁰⁶ Thimmes also draws attention to the "triad of women, sex and food in the text,"¹⁰⁷ and rightly notes the triangular relationship between Jezebel, the Prophetess and the Whore/Babylon, forged through each female's association both with sexual intercourse and with eating.¹⁰⁸

1.4.3. The Presentation of the Woman Jezebel within the Depiction of Female Impurity and Sexualised Violence in the Book of Revelation

Marshall considers that, although the Prophetess was probably a real woman and Babylon is a personification of Rome, they are linked by their gender, by the "sexualised violence" perpetrated against them and by the location of the text in a "subaltern group in a colonial context."¹⁰⁹ He takes into account the political, historical and religious contexts of John's composition of Revelation, and uses postcolonial theory to explain that the "sexualised violence" is part of John's polemic of resistance against colonisation.¹¹⁰ Almost all the instances of violence in Revelation are manifestations of the inter-religious conflict

¹⁰⁴ Pamela Thimmes, "'Teaching and Beguiling my Servants': the Letter to Thyatira (Rev. 2.18-29)," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 70-75. Thimmes considers that the conflict portrayed in the letter is between Christians, over how Christians should conduct their lives. This conflict is different to the conflict with Roman power which is portrayed in and pervades the rest of the text. However, in an earlier article Thimmes declared that the conflict between insiders and outsiders is characteristic of the text as a whole. Pamela Thimmes, "Women Reading Women in the Apocalypse: Reading Scenario 1, the Letter to Thyatira (Rev. 2.18-29)," *CBR* 2.1 (2003), 132.

¹⁰⁵ Thimmes, "'Teaching and Beguiling my Servants,'" 82.

¹⁰⁶ Pamela Thimmes, "Women Reading Women," 129. Like Pippin, Thimmes also considers that women are excluded from the female New Jerusalem.

¹⁰⁷ Thimmes, "'Teaching and Beguiling my Servants,'" 72.

¹⁰⁸ Thimmes, "'Teaching and Beguiling my Servants,'" 83.

¹⁰⁹ John W. Marshall, "Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John's Anti-Imperial Apocalypse," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 17.

¹¹⁰ Marshall assigns the date and circumstances of the writing of Revelation specifically to "the Jewish Diaspora in western Asia Minor during the latter stages of the Jewish War, in the long year, 69 CE, or immediately following." Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 19.

between the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Great City of Rome.¹¹¹ The only exceptions are found in the Letters to the Seven Churches, in which intra-religious conflict is portrayed in the polemics against the Nicolaitans, Balaam and Jezebel. It is the Prophetess, however, who bears the brunt of the threats of violence, depicted in sexual language. The religious, political and historical circumstances which gave rise to John's polemic against the Whore of Babylon, who symbolises the religious outsider, were also the cause of his polemic against Jezebel, who symbolises the religious insider seen by John as a threat to the insider group.¹¹²

Marshall rightly highlights John's emphasis on purity and impurity and notes the prevailing cultural association of impure women with possession by demons. Although in the text purity and impurity have various sources, the only criterion for them being assigned to characters is how the text judges them. Marshall notes that "impurity from God and his followers attaches to Babylon, and impurity from Babylon attaches to Babylon."¹¹³ He points out that none of the women in Revelation is specifically portrayed as being pure except the Bride. Even the Woman of Chapter 12 is impure since she has recently given birth.¹¹⁴

1.4.4. The Presentation of the Woman Jezebel within Revelation's Hostile Portrayal of Trade

Like Marshall, Duff contends that the conflict in Revelation is not caused by real or perceived persecution of the Christian communities, but by internal disagreements between John and other Christians.¹¹⁵ The messages of the seven letters demonstrate that the churches, especially those in Pergamum and Thyatira, were rife with internal

¹¹¹ Marshall understands Revelation as a Jewish text, because of the author's dedication to the temple and to the commandments, and especially by his obsession with issues of purity. Marshall points out that the Roman Empire was a colonising empire. Colonisation gives rise to hybridity, in which all those affected find themselves having to struggle against or adapt to new cultural norms and new understandings of individual and group identity. This gives rise to violence amongst the colonised groups, who are envious of the power of their colonisers, and desire power of their own. For Diaspora Jews, the question arises of to what extent they should allow themselves to be assimilated into the dominant culture of a colonising power whose armies are at that very moment besieging Jerusalem. Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 20-25.

¹¹² Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 17-19.

¹¹³ Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 29.

¹¹⁴ Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 28.

¹¹⁵ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 14. The roots of this conflict lay not only in theological differences but also in attitudes to society and commerce. Some Christians were probably merchants and craftsmen who had been, or were the recent descendants of, slaves. Thus while they could not expect to be accepted by the higher ranks of society, they enjoyed a certain amount of status, and a reasonably comfortable standard of living. On the other hand, there were probably also a number of Christians who scraped a living doing menial work or were even destitute, both as a result of refusing to be assimilated into a society whose mores and religious rites and beliefs were repugnant to them. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 24-30.

factionalism. One of these factions seems to have been loyal to John, while the other is characterised by εἰδωλόθυτα and πορνεία. Duff states that “it is likely that the factionalism in the churches is related to the wealth/poverty issue.”¹¹⁶ John’s insistence that Christians should not take part in commercial activities or eat εἰδωλόθυτα, that they should set clear boundaries between themselves and their fellow citizens and that they should remain virgins is in direct contrast with the teaching of a rival leader, a powerful prophetess. Duff argues that eating εἰδωλόθυτα was widespread among the Christians, and that the Prophetess, like Paul before her, tolerated rather than promoted this practice. It would have been necessary for those engaged in trade to partake of this food, either in the context of a festival or a meal with potential clients. For them to refuse to do so would have been extremely detrimental to their businesses.¹¹⁷ Duff considers that the willingness of “Jezebel” to engage with society in general was likely to be caused by a desire to be in a (better) position to reform it. John, on the other hand, “recommended withdrawal into the ghetto.”¹¹⁸

Duff writes that the only category to appear in both the lists of the reasons for Babylon’s fall (Rev 18:2-3, 21-24) is “the success of the merchants.” Notably, John condemns not the merchants themselves, but their trading, for which he gives no reason, but it is included in a list that includes “πορνεία, sorcery, and bloodshed,” (Rev 18:3, 23).¹¹⁹ Those engaged in commercial activity bear the mark of the Beast from the Earth, that is, the overarching culture, whose authority derives from the Beast from the Sea, Rome, whose power in turn originates with Satan. It follows that, if one is engaged in trade, one is doing the work of Satan.¹²⁰ Duff says: “It is notable that Revelation 13:16-17 singles out commerce as the sole activity that requires the mark of the beast.”¹²¹ John does not condemn commerce directly. The reason for this is that he has as his rival “Jezebel,” whose message and outlook find favour with his readership; John sets about procuring the endorsement of those Christians who had not committed themselves either to him or to “Jezebel.” By use of a “rhetoric of innuendo” and “homology,” and through deft handling of literary allusions and irony, John connected the Prophetess to the Whore

¹¹⁶ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 47.

¹¹⁷ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 48-60.

¹¹⁸ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 61.

¹¹⁹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 67.

¹²⁰ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 67-68.

¹²¹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 68-69.

of Babylon, to the two Beasts and to the False Prophet.¹²² Like Thimmes, Duff points to the triangular relationship between Jizebul, the Prophetess and Babylon.¹²³ He also notes Jezebel's connection with the Beast from the Earth (Rev 13:11-18), which, in his opinion, represents Greco-Roman religious culture. By doing this John also connects her with the Beast from the Sea, representing Rome, and the Dragon, representing Satan. Moreover, the Beast from the Earth is also the False Prophet. By associating "Jezebel" with him, he undermines her authority as a prophetess.¹²⁴

1.4.5. *The Projection of John's Hatred for Jezebel onto the Cosmos*

In her interpretation of Revelation, which is "informed by historical-critical biblical scholarship and feminist theology" [*sic*], Mary Ann Beavis suggests that the Prophetess's teaching regarding the eating of "food sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:20) is similar to that of Paul's teaching that "since the pagan gods have no objective existence, feasting in 'an idol's temple' (cf. 1 Cor. 8.10) is no offense [*sic*] against Christian monotheism."¹²⁵ The world in which the Prophetess and John lived was steeped in the mythologies and imagery of many gods and goddesses from the cultures of the various ancient peoples who lived around the Mediterranean and in the ancient Near East. Astrology was also popular.¹²⁶ Like Duff, Beavis considers that John's hatred for the Prophetess influenced Revelation as a whole; she argues that John's "obsession" with the teaching of the Prophetess of Thyatira, who is able to continue her prophetic leadership while he is exiled to Patmos, "takes on cosmic proportions;" he gives vent to his feelings of "resentment and jealousy" "by projecting her divine archetypes onto the cosmos" as goddesses.¹²⁷ He

¹²² Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 69. Cf. Susan Garrett's similar analysis: Susan R. Garrett, "Revelation," in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 378.

¹²³ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 89-90.

¹²⁴ John links "Jezebel" with the Beast from the Earth, which both represents Graeco-Roman religious culture and is the False Prophet, through the use of *πλανᾷ*. This verb is used of "Jezebel" (Rev 2:20), of the Dragon/Satan/the Devil (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10), of Babylon (Rev 18:23), of the Beast from the Earth (Rev 13:14) and of the False Prophet (19:20). It should be noted that the word *πλανᾷω* has connotations of sorcery. In addition, the use of *διδάσκει* links her to the false prophet Balaam (2:14). Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 115-16, and 165, Footnote 6.

¹²⁵ Mary Ann Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks: Naming the Goddesses in the Book of Revelation," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 132.

¹²⁶ Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks," 133.

¹²⁷ Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks," 143. Like Yarbro Collins (see §1.1), Beavis notes the pagan mythology and imagery in Revelation 12 and that the Woman resembles a number of goddesses, including Leto and Isis, while the Dragon has affinities with Tiamat. Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks," 132-38. She considers that the Whore of Babylon is presented as Roma and as Israel, the whoring wife of YHWH. Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks," 138-139. The "Bride Jerusalem" may be divine Wisdom, "portrayed in Proverbs as a woman of

continues by “casting them down and transforming them into tame feminine stereotypes of Mother (Revelation 12), Whore (Revelation 17) and chaste Bride (Revelation 21-22).”¹²⁸ Beavis also considers not only that the attack upon Jezebel is rape, but also that the author makes her the object of “maledictions” and that her “children,” that is her “disciples,” are “accursed.”¹²⁹

1.4.6. The Triangular Literary Relationship between the Woman Jezebel, the Whore of Babylon and Queen Jizebul

Like Thimmes and Duff, both Boxall and Caroline Vander Stichele rightly highlight the triangular relationship between the Whore of Babylon, the Woman Jezebel and Queen Jizebul. Boxall notes that this triangular relationship is created through John’s use of literary allusion.¹³⁰ Like Duff, Vander Stichele considers that John deliberately uses both literary allusion and rhetoric to link his powerful rival prophetess, whom he names “Jezebel” with the Whore, which enables him to identify Jezebel who, like Babylon is accused of πορνεία, also as a whore.¹³¹ She says: “The terms “whore” and “woman” used for Babylon in Revelation 17 are then used not just as metaphors, but are also meant to establish a link with a real person mentioned earlier in the book.”¹³² They both transgress boundaries, and eat that which is forbidden.¹³³

1.4.7. Literary Allusions and Pornographic Violence in the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon

Marla J. Selvidge points out that Revelation contains violent and pornographic threats directed at women.¹³⁴ Both the woman whom John names “Jezebel” and the city or

the city (Prov. 8.1-9.6).” Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 140. The Earth is “the ancient Mother Goddess (Γῆ, *Gaia*).” Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 142.

¹²⁸ Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 143.

¹²⁹ Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 132, 143.

¹³⁰ Ian Boxall, “The Many Faces of Babylon the Great: *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the Interpretation of Revelation 17,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 66.

¹³¹ Caroline Vander Stichele, “Re-membering the Whore: The Fate of Babylon According to Revelation 17.16,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins. London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 112-13.

¹³² Vander Stichele, “Re-membering the Whore,” 113.

¹³³ Vander Stichele, “Re-membering the Whore,” 118-19.

¹³⁴ Selvidge notes the similarity of the imagery and metaphors to parts of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea. Revelation and the prophetic books offer visions of encouragement to minority groups who perceive their existence to be threatened, or as “healthy outlets for feelings of violent revenge.” However, they also justify terrorism, revolution and the utter destruction of the powerful and those in favour of the current social order. Social change can only be brought about by annihilation of the “other.” Marla J. Selvidge, “Reflections on Violence and Pornography: Misogyny in the Apocalypse and Ancient Hebrew Prophecy,”

structure he calls “Babylon” represent power which is beyond his ability to control. Since he cannot control them, he puts into words his desire for them to be brought to “a violent end.”¹³⁵ By labelling the woman who opposes him “Jezebel,” John, like the writers of the deuteronomistic history who maliciously libelled Jizebul as promiscuous, power-hungry and responsible for leading the community into idolatry, claims divine authority for his personal vindictiveness towards her. Selvidge points out that women who contravened the strict rules regarding women’s sexual behaviour were said to be “defiled,” a charge rarely brought against men, since their behaviour was subject to fewer restrictions. She agrees with Duff that the Prophetess was probably more popular and influential than the author of Revelation, and so he tries to bring the community round to his way of thinking through the use of intimidating threats against both her and her followers. He wants the Prophetess to be punished. Similarly to Isaiah and Hosea, he tries to force her to change her teaching by threatening her children (Rev 2:23; cf. Isa 13:16, Hos 2:4).¹³⁶

Comment

The feminist critiques discussed above have highlighted a number of points: (1) in Revelation female authority and/or power is perceived as a threat; (2) the author of Revelation entertained a fierce hatred for the Prophetess, which may have influenced his portrayal of the other fantastical female characters; (3) there is a triangular literary relationship between Jizebul, the Whore of Babylon and the Prophetess; (4) Revelation’s violence is often portrayed in sexualised language, including the attack upon the “real” woman Jezebel; (5) women in Revelation are associated with impurity, the demonic and/or the Satanic; (6) the Whore of Babylon may be interpreted as the Prophetess of Thyatira writ large; (7) according to Duff’s argument, the major aim of Revelation is to undermine the status and authority of the Prophetess and thus to persuade those Christians wavering between her teaching or John’s to adopt his attitude of withdrawal

in *A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 274-75.

¹³⁵ Selvidge, “Reflections on Violence and Pornography,” 276-77.

¹³⁶ Selvidge, “Reflections on Violence and Pornography,” 277-80.

from the world;¹³⁷ and (8) that the author may be using magical language in his condemnation of Jezebel and her “children.”¹³⁸

However, the feminist critique of Revelation has itself been critiqued.

1.5. Steven J. Friesen’s Critique of Feminist Critiques of the Book of Revelation

The feminist hermeneutics of suspicion has always understood and strived to explain that language can be a tool of oppression and abuse. The androcentric language of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament has legitimised, and continues to legitimise, the abuse and denigration of women and the view that women are of less worth and ability than men.¹³⁹ However, feminist critiques, like any other interpretation, reflect the political and social stance of the interpreter.¹⁴⁰

Friesen takes issue with “readings of Revelation as a misogynist text,” in particular that of Pippin. He considers that such a critique fails to acknowledge the depths of the book’s symbolism.¹⁴¹ Friesen makes four points. Firstly, the female and male images of Revelation should be compared. Although he does not accept that Revelation is misogynist, he points out that an interpretation which declares that it is should examine the misandry and misanthropy of the text. Secondly, he points to the lack of differentiation “between the sign and that which is signified.” The Prophetess’s referent is a “historical” woman; the Woman and the Bride symbolise “transcendent entities;” the “personification” of the Earth and the city of Babylon is undertaken using Graeco-Roman mythology; and the Whore partially symbolises “an imperialist power.” These images should not be considered as an “undifferentiated group.”¹⁴² Thirdly, the Whore is not the only character who symbolises “Roman hegemony.” This is represented firstly by the Beast from the Sea, then by the Whore astride a beast closely resembling the first beast,

¹³⁷ The accusation of *πορνεία* against Jezebel is given emphasis through her link to Babylon, and thus loses some of its ambiguity of meaning, and implies that she was herself promiscuous. By his portrayal of Babylon as a drunken and sexually promiscuous woman John intimates that Jezebel is also such a woman, unsuitable for leadership. Women should not behave like men, but should be like the Woman and the Bride, passively under the control of men and “shut away from the world.” Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 111-12.

¹³⁸ Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 132, 143.

¹³⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM Press, 1983), xv-xvi.

¹⁴⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xvi.

¹⁴¹ Steven J. Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John: Reading Revelation in the Ruins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 185-86. Friesen also criticises Keller’s feminist interpretation of Revelation. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 186.

¹⁴² Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 186-87.

and finally the beast associated with the False Prophet. The Whore is part of a systemic symbolisation which “cannot be simplified into a single gender code.” Fourthly, Friesen considers that mistakes in interpretation are made because “some images are simply misread.” The Woman is not abandoned in the wilderness. There is “some continuity between the Woman and the Bride.” John is not manipulating his audience to choose between the stereotypes of the Whore and the Bride; Jezebel, whose prophetic gift John does not deny, provides another female image. Friesen concludes that the female images should be considered in the context of John’s world view and “his suspicion about claims to authority.”¹⁴³

Friesen acknowledges that “John’s use of gender imagery” is “problematic” and does not deny the violence inherent in Revelation. He states, moreover, that it is “related to the question of gender.” However, Revelation’s violence and “patterns of male domination” are only two aspects of the author’s “religious criticism.”¹⁴⁴ The saints are called to conquer, but through martyrdom, not violent resistance. He gives three reasons for this. Firstly, violence is the prerogative of John’s warrior god, who passes judgement on his creation. Only God has the right and “competence” to be violent, vengeful and just. Secondly, the Lamb has conquered through suffering. Since the Lamb is Jesus’ “primary symbol,” the messianic warrior is subservient to its “sacrificial imagery”. The saints are called to follow the Lamb’s example, not that of the warrior. Thirdly, although those faithful to the Lamb are said to conquer, they conquer through death. Their faith and morality ensure their resurrection, and they are saved from the second death. Their conquering is through submission, not violence.¹⁴⁵

1.5.1. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s Defence of the Use of a Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion in the Analysis of Biblical Texts

Schüssler Fiorenza vigorously defends the feminist hermeneutics of suspicion. She notes that feminist scholars have found it difficult to promote their interpretations of biblical texts, for these interpretations have been condemned as subjective and unacademic. On the other hand, the historical-critical method has been held up as the epitome of objective scholarship. Schüssler Fiorenza, however, points out that the only difference between a feminist interpreter, and one who claims to make a value-neutral historical-critical

¹⁴³ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 187.

¹⁴⁴ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 189.

¹⁴⁵ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 190.

interpretation, is that the feminist is being honest about her or his political standpoint. There is no such thing as an entirely objective interpretation, and no historian is able to discard her or his world view and enter into the minds of the writers of an historical text, or fully understand the world in which it was written. The feminist critique is therefore situated, not in the stream of male academic methodologies, but in the struggle of feminist scholars to find answers to their questions about biblical texts and to liberate women from the patriarchal and androcentric arguments, based upon biblical texts, which had for centuries been used to justify male privilege, and to write women out of their roles in the formation of early Christianity.¹⁴⁶

Comment

Friesen makes the important point that John is extremely suspicious of any form of authority in the church.¹⁴⁷ He also notes John's failure to denounce Jezebel's position as a prophetess, despite his obvious antipathy towards her.¹⁴⁸ Although he seems to misread John's intention, Friesen notes that: "In the manner of his denunciation, he confirmed the role of women as prophets in the congregations of Asia."¹⁴⁹ Despite making these interesting points, however, Friesen fails to delegitimise Pippin's critique of Revelation as a misogynist text.

As noted in the Introduction to this chapter, while there are a number of interpretations of Jezebel as a gendered character and of the socio-historical situation in which she lived, there are very few analyses of male characters in terms of their gender. The only two such analyses which focus upon the Son of Man who, in the persona of the Son of God, is Jezebel's adversary in the message to Thyatira, are discussed in §1.6.

¹⁴⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past in Creating the Future: Historical-Critical Scholarship and Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (ed. Adela Yarbro Collins Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1985), 44-48, including Footnote 9.

¹⁴⁷ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 184, 187.

¹⁴⁸ Friesen rightly points out that the phrase "but she is not" is absent after "Jezebel's" declaration of her prophetic status in Rev 2:20, in contrast to Rev 2:2, 9; 3:9. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 187.

¹⁴⁹ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 187.

1.6. Analyses of the Presentation of the Son of Man as a Gendered Character in the Book of Revelation

Conway analyses the presentation of the Son of Man as one of the three personae of Revelation's Christ.

1.6.1. "The Angelic Son of Man"

Conway considers Revelation's Christ under three headings: "The Angelic Son of Man," "The Warrior Rider" and "The Lamb."¹⁵⁰ She rightly draws attention to the emphasis laid upon the physical description of the "the Angelic Son of Man" (Rev 1:13-16) and draws attention to the literary allusions contained in that description (Ezek 43:2; Dan 7:9-10; 10:4-6; *I Enoch* 46:1). She points out that "he is a terrifying angel" with a double-edged sword for a tongue, and before whom John understandably falls down in a dead faint (Rev 1:16-17). At the same time, it becomes apparent that the Son of Man is being portrayed "as one with imperial authority issuing instructions to various locals" (Rev 2:1-3:22).¹⁵¹ However, Conway rightly notes that, in portraying the Son of Man in imitation of the Roman Emperor, the author of Revelation also imitates "imperial violence." The Son of Man's violence comes to the fore in his attack upon the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:22), which "evokes images of sexual humiliation, if not assault."¹⁵² This violence continues, and becomes excessively bloodthirsty, in the Son of Man's later portrayal as an emperor, seated and crowned, dispensing justice (Rev 14:14-20).

Similarly, "the Warrior Rider," "Faithful and True" (Rev 19:11-13), wages war justly, and thus may be understood as a figure of ideal Roman manliness. However, throughout the passage there is a tension in the depiction of the masculinity of God and Christ which is displayed in the extremities of violence and vengeance and what may be understood as just retribution. This tension reflects the dichotomy of the ideal of Roman manhood and the empire; the virtues of justice and moderation rested upon the bloody violence of war and conquest.¹⁵³ The depiction of the Lamb standing as though slain (Rev 5:5-6) is Jesus after his death and resurrection. His death was a noble and honourable one which entitles him to receive acclamation and to share in God's status and authority (Rev

¹⁵⁰ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 160, 163, 165.

¹⁵¹ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 161.

¹⁵² Conway, *Behold the Man*, 162.

¹⁵³ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 163-65. Cf. Stephen D. Moore, who states: "In Revelation, Jesus is not so much God become *man* as God become *masculine*." Initially an inhuman angel and then an unmanly lamb, he becomes a "hypermasculine" warrior. Stephen D. Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor: and Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 190.

5:12; 7:9-17; 22:3). In the heavenly throne room he is, moreover, worshipped, just as at the imperial court, the Roman Emperor received the tribute of the senators.¹⁵⁴

It may be argued that the violence attributed to God and Christ, and God's anger, are manifestations of their masculinity. However, their desire for vengeance upon their enemies demonstrates a corresponding lack of the self-control which was associated with manliness in Graeco-Roman culture, and which was demanded in particular of a Roman Emperor.¹⁵⁵

In contrast to Conway, Moore analyses the presentation of Revelation's Jesus, including his portrayal as the Son of Man, in comparison with that of Babylon, both of which characters, he argues, are ambiguously-gendered.

1.6.2. *The "Intersexed Body" of Revelation's Christ*¹⁵⁶

Moore considers that Babylon is portrayed as "the goddess Roma," who is "hegemonic Roman manhood encased in female flesh that is clad in hypermasculine garb."¹⁵⁷ For, although depicted as a woman, since her "quintessential capability is *imperium*" ("dominion") and her "very name is 'Strength,'" she embodies "the central imperative of Roman masculinity." She is also "the very personification of *virtus*," "the ideal of masculine behavior" [*sic*].¹⁵⁸ Roma is usually depicted as armed and, since she has affinities both with Athena and with the Amazons, "in military dress (sometimes with bared breast)."¹⁵⁹ She is portrayed on coins as sitting "warrior-style" on shields and was addressed as "warlike mistress with a girdle of gold."¹⁶⁰ She is, in effect, "a manly woman."¹⁶¹ Since, however, Babylon has been divested of Roma's armour and is also portrayed and described as a whore, who indulges in vices associated with women, such

¹⁵⁴ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 165-68.

¹⁵⁵ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 161-63. Roman emperors such as Augustus preserved defeated nations and granted pardon to those enemies who requested it. In contrast, Revelation presents Christ, with his desire for bloodthirsty vengeance, as distinctly unmanly. Conway, *Behold the Man*, 161.

¹⁵⁶ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 126, 151.

¹⁵⁷ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 144. In Roman culture, masculinity was associated with "control of, exercising dominion over, others and also oneself," and femininity with "ceding control of oneself to others." Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 142.

¹⁵⁸ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 136.

¹⁵⁹ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 131.

¹⁶⁰ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 132-33. Moore's quotation is from a hymn by Melinno of Lesbos.

¹⁶¹ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 137.

as “sexual immorality” and the wearing of luxurious clothing and jewels (Rev 17:1-4), this character is “a man dressed as a woman dressed as a man dressed as a woman.”¹⁶²

The gender of Revelation’s “leading man” “troubles the gender binary” even more than that of Babylon. For, in his presentation as “one like a son of man,” Revelation’s Christ is, like Roma, described as having female breasts which are encased in a “bra-like” golden girdle (καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσαῖν, Rev 1:13).¹⁶³ Moore notes that this character is described only as “akin to a human being” and that his “manlike yet woman-breasted” body “fissures naturalizing or normalizing notions of the human, whether ancient or contemporary.”¹⁶⁴ Christ is first presented in Revelation, therefore, “as celestial androgyn;” he is later presented “as celestial superwarrior” (Rev 19:11-21).¹⁶⁵ He is also presented in animal form, as a lamb (Rev 5:6).¹⁶⁶ At the same time, in the person of Babylon, who is destroyed by the Scarlet Beast (Rev 17:16), his enemy Rome is “phallic masculinity” presented firstly in the form of a female and “virtuous” warrior and then as a “brothel slave,”¹⁶⁷ who is “simultaneously dehumanized, because bestialized [...] and feminized.”¹⁶⁸ No less than Babylon, therefore, Revelation’s Christ “blurs the boundaries not only between male and female, masculine and feminine, but also between human and animal.”¹⁶⁹

Comment

Conway notes that in Revelation Jesus is nowhere portrayed as a human being, but as an angelic figure, a lamb and a warrior riding on a white horse. These three images are, however, gendered. They are also interwoven throughout Revelation, and “their gender identity is tension-filled and complex.”¹⁷⁰ Conway considers that this is because masculinity in Revelation imitates the “ideal” Roman man while its violence mirrors that of the Roman Empire. There is thus a tension between the image of man who is worthy

¹⁶² Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 144. Moore notes that Seneca’s list of “women’s vices” included “*impudicitia* (‘unchastity,’ ‘sexual profligacy,’ ‘shamelessness,’) ‘weakness for jewels and riches,’ and ‘excessive pride in appearance.’” Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 137, with reference to Seneca, *Dialogues* 12.16.2.

¹⁶³ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 149-50. The breasts of the Son of Man are discussed further in §4.2.

¹⁶⁴ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 150-51.

¹⁶⁵ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 151.

¹⁶⁶ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 152.

¹⁶⁷ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 146-47.

¹⁶⁸ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 152.

¹⁶⁹ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 152.

¹⁷⁰ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 160.

of ruling and being worshipped, as was the Roman Emperor, and between the image of a man whose lack of self-control in his desire for violent revenge makes him, on the contrary, the antithesis of the ideal ruler. War is central to Revelation, and its saving characters are males who are triumphant warriors. Success in warfare was another prized virtue in a Roman ruler. Conway explains that “when the Book of Revelation employs images of warfare, it engages a very basic element of imperial masculinity.”¹⁷¹

In his analysis of the presentation of Revelation’s Jesus in comparison with that of Babylon, Moore also points to the influence of Roman gender construction upon Revelation. Moore draws attention to the androgynous body of the Son of Man; he does not, however, analyse the Son of Man as a character in his/her own right. Moore rather concludes that, since the book’s Christ has female breasts (Rev 1:13) whilst also being “an invincible warrior” (Rev 19:11-21), its author is “busy modeling [*sic*] Jesus on Roma.”¹⁷² At the same time, in the person of the Whore of Babylon, Revelation is “shaming” the goddess.¹⁷³ However, Moore rightly notes that the portrayals both of Roma and of Revelation’s female-breasted Jesus, celebrate “a masculinity that constructs itself through the incessant suppression of femininity.”¹⁷⁴

Finally, analysis is made of two interpretations of the conflict between the author of Revelation and the Prophetess of Thyatira which aim to provide her point of view.

1.7. Two Analyses of the Prophetess of Thyatira’s View of the Conflict between Herself and the Author of the Book of Revelation

First to be considered is a “virtual” letter from Jezebel to John, by Boxall.¹⁷⁵

1.7.1. A “Virtual” Letter from Jezebel to John

Boxall’s “Jezebel” makes the perceptive point that John seems to have “confused” his “own animosity with the spirit of prophecy,” and that the words spoken by the Son of Man appear to have come from his own mouth.¹⁷⁶ Boxall’s “Jezebel” also notes that the Son of Man (or John) is not only more aggressive in his attack upon her than upon Balaam

¹⁷¹ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 161.

¹⁷² Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 154.

¹⁷³ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 154.

¹⁷⁴ Moore considers that in the portrayal of Revelation’s Jesus “animality” is also suppressed. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 154.

¹⁷⁵ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 147-151.

¹⁷⁶ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 147.

(Rev 2:14), but also lays more stress upon the sexual nature of her “crimes.” She wonders if her gender is at the root of his portrayal of her as a “seductress.”¹⁷⁷ Unlike John, Boxall’s “Jezebel” is at home in the society in which she lived, and was probably involved in Thyatira’s purple-dying trade. She seeks to spread the gospel and to make it “a force for urban good,” and both to dispel the “suspicions” of Christians held by her pagan neighbours and to win converts to Christianity by her involvement in “the Thyatiran Guild of Purple-Dyers.”¹⁷⁸ She protests that if she left the trade guild, not only she, but her dependants in the church, would face “financial ruin.”¹⁷⁹ “Jezebel’s” perception of the society in which she lives is quite different to that of John, and she is surprised at his portrayal of Rome, in the character of “Babylon,” as “a tyrant.”¹⁸⁰ In Thyatira, the Christians have not been persecuted, and there have been no “wars and upheavals,” but “peace, security and prosperity.”¹⁸¹ Boxall draws attention to the personal nature of the attack which indicates that Jezebel and John were known to each other;¹⁸² he suggests that John may at some point have spoken to the members of the assembly gathered in her house and “shared the Lord’s Supper” with them.¹⁸³ Boxall also points out that, in order to understand the significance of the name with which John dubs her, “Jezebel” must have had knowledge of the Jewish scriptures.¹⁸⁴

Warren Carter states of Jezebel that, “while the text silences her, it is possible to hear something of her voice.”¹⁸⁵ In order to find this, he analyses the conflict between Jezebel and John by means of contrasting their attitudes to living as “followers of Jesus” in the Roman Empire.¹⁸⁶

1.7.2. Two Contrasting Ways of Living as “Followers of Jesus” in the Roman Empire
Carter first considers Jezebel’s “agenda of active cultural participation” which is suggested by her description in Rev 2:20.¹⁸⁷ He considers that this description indicates

¹⁷⁷ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 148.

¹⁷⁸ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 148-49.

¹⁷⁹ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 149.

¹⁸⁰ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 150.

¹⁸¹ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 150.

¹⁸² Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 150.

¹⁸³ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 149.

¹⁸⁴ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 147, 149-50.

¹⁸⁵ Carter, “Accommodating ‘Jezebel’ and Withdrawing John,” 37.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, “Accommodating ‘Jezebel’ and Withdrawing John,” 32.

¹⁸⁷ Carter, “Accommodating ‘Jezebel’ and Withdrawing John,” 34.

that Jezebel, like some other followers of Jesus (e.g., 1 Cor 8-10), taught her followers that they could participate in “observances of deities and imperial power.”¹⁸⁸ Carter also argues that participation in trade guilds and in their cultic rituals was an economic necessity.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, he suggests that failure to participate in the religious life of imperial society would be viewed with hostility by other members of that society “who feared inevitable civic or group reprisals from offended deities or political powers (cf. Acts 19:27).”¹⁹⁰ Since Jezebel knew that there was only one God and that idols did not exist (cf. 1 Cor 8:4), she considered them to be harmless for followers of Jesus.¹⁹¹ Carter also wonders whether Jezebel might have argued that Rome had been “chosen by God” as an empire for his own purposes, and that “[c]ultural participation” would bring “the experience of God’s blessing.”¹⁹²

John, of course, is vehemently opposed to such “active cultural participation.”¹⁹³ In Revelation he portrays Rome’s terrifying power being destroyed by that of God, and along with it those who, like Jezebel, have collaborated with that power.¹⁹⁴ John’s vision of Heaven (Rev 4-5) demonstrates that only God and the Lamb should be worshipped.¹⁹⁵ For John, the Roman Empire and its exploitative practices are subject to the judgement of God.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, since the real power wielded by the Roman Empire belongs to Satan, “[a]ctive participation in imperial structures means worship of the devil.”¹⁹⁷ In contrast to Jezebel, John demands that followers of Jesus should withdraw from society, even if this means facing the possibilities of persecution, starvation and death.¹⁹⁸ Carter concludes that “[t]he conflict between “Jezebel” and John emerges as a bitter dispute over ways of negotiating Roman power in the province of Asia.¹⁹⁹

Comment

Boxall’s “letter” from Jezebel makes some interesting points. In particular, he draws attention to the similarity of Jezebel’s teaching about eating food sacrificed to idols with

¹⁸⁸ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 37.

¹⁸⁹ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 37.

¹⁹⁰ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 38.

¹⁹¹ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 38.

¹⁹² Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 39.

¹⁹³ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 39.

¹⁹⁴ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 39-40.

¹⁹⁵ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 40-41.

¹⁹⁶ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 42-43.

¹⁹⁷ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 44.

¹⁹⁸ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 44-45.

¹⁹⁹ Carter, “Accommodating “Jezebel” and Withdrawing John,” 45.

that of Paul.²⁰⁰ However, he not only takes at face value the Son of Man's accusation that Jezebel is encouraging her followers to eat food sacrificed to idols, but also indicates that she herself eats this food;²⁰¹ this is an accusation which, tellingly, is not actually made against her by the Son of Man (see Rev 2:20). Similarly, Boxall's equation of "Jezebel" with Lydia, the "godfearer" from Thyatira baptised by Paul in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15), seems unjustified:²⁰² she cannot have been the only female Thyatiran merchant who became a "godfearer" and was then converted to Christianity. Nevertheless, Boxall makes the valid points that Jezebel's view that eating food sacrificed to idols is harmless indicates that she was probably converted to Christianity by Pauline teaching, and that she would have been ignorant of "the so-called 'Apostolic Letter' of Acts 15" (cf. Rev 2:20-21, 24).²⁰³

Carter rightly points out that the power wielded by Revelation's God mirrors that of the very empire it seeks to destroy, and that, although it is Jezebel who engages with society and is thus complicit in Roman power, "John is not entirely free of involvement in the empire;"²⁰⁴ this is evident in Revelation's images of Heaven.²⁰⁵ However, Jezebel's view that participation in a society rife with pagan religious practices poses no harm to a follower of Jesus, "is, ironically, based on a rejection of a fundamental dimension of imperial society."²⁰⁶ In his hatred of Rome, and of Jezebel's participation in its economy, it is John's faith which is corrupted by empirical society rather than Jezebel's: "He is more imperially embedded than he allows."²⁰⁷

Conclusions

This review of feminist critiques of the Book of Revelation, with particular emphasis upon interpretations of the presentation of the Woman Jezebel, has provided some thought-provoking conclusions. The first is that any feminist critic of Revelation needs to employ a hermeneutics of suspicion coupled with an awareness of the multivalency of the text's literary allusions, the literary parallels with non-canonical texts and the complexity of its characters.

²⁰⁰ Boxall, "Jezebel' of Thyatira to John of Patmos," 148-49.

²⁰¹ Boxall, "Jezebel' of Thyatira to John of Patmos," 149.

²⁰² Boxall, "Jezebel' of Thyatira to John of Patmos," 148, 150. The presentation of Jezebel is compared with that of Lydia in §5.2.4.

²⁰³ Boxall, "Jezebel' of Thyatira to John of Patmos," 148-49, including Footnote 9.

²⁰⁴ Carter, "Accommodating 'Jezebel' and Withdrawing John," 46.

²⁰⁵ Carter, "Accommodating 'Jezebel' and Withdrawing John," 46-47.

²⁰⁶ Carter, "Accommodating 'Jezebel' and Withdrawing John," 47.

²⁰⁷ Carter, "Accommodating 'Jezebel' and Withdrawing John," 47.

The comparison of the different methodologies made by Schüssler Fiorenza and Pippin demonstrate how they come to their different conclusions about Revelation's portrayal of women. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that "Revelation's world of vision is best understood as a rhetorical response to a particular sociohistorical communicative situation."²⁰⁸ She thus uses a methodology of rhetorical analysis with which to analyse the author of Revelation's own employment of rhetoric. Schüssler Fiorenza is thus able to conclude that behind the author's portrayal of the Prophetess as a sexually-promiscuous and idolatrous woman was an authoritative and respected leader of a church, who was entitled to the "official title 'prophet.'"²⁰⁹ She considers that the author accuses the Prophetess of "sexual immorality" and impugns her prophetic authority, not because she is a woman, but because of her teaching and attitude to the culture in which she lived.²¹⁰ In contrast, since she contends that it is impossible to know anything for certain about either the historical context in which Revelation was written or its original audience, Pippin uses a poststructuralist critique and a postmodern methodology of experiential participation in the story. She concludes that Revelation is unrelentingly vindictive towards women.²¹¹ In particular, an association is made between "evil" and the Whore and Jezebel, especially in their female bodies,²¹² and the attacks upon them "destroy the sexuality and seductiveness of the women."²¹³ Pippin is taken aback by the "blatant voice" of Revelation's misogyny.²¹⁴ Whilst she appreciates the reconstructive efforts of feminist interpretation rooted in liberation theology to make it a text of hope for marginalised communities, she finds it impossible to rid her mind of Revelation's graphically-imagined association of evil with a woman.²¹⁵ It is difficult to agree with Schüssler Fiorenza that Jezebel's womanity has nothing to do with the attack upon her in a book which is, as pointed out by Pippin's ideology critique, riddled with misogyny.²¹⁶ However, Schüssler Fiorenza's methodology, which insists upon contextualising the

²⁰⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 118.

²⁰⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 222.

²¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 222-23.

²¹¹ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 46-47.

²¹² Pippin, "The Heroine and the Whore," 70.

²¹³ Pippin, "Eros and the End," 199.

²¹⁴ Pippin, "The Revelation to John," 119.

²¹⁵ Pippin, "The Revelation to John," 119.

²¹⁶ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 91-92. Pippin also points out that, since the image of the "jezebel" woman pervades history, film and literature, both popular and academic, contemporary readers, as much as the original hearers of the condemnation of Jezebel and her teaching (Rev 2:20-24), come to Revelation with cultural preconceptions. Tina Pippin, "Jezebel Re-Vamped," in *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1994), 196-98. Pippin says: "An outside Jezebel has invaded the text." Pippin, "Jezebel Re-Vamped," 204.

female imagery in Revelation, demonstrates the importance of contextualising Jezebel's presentation in the socio-historical situation in which she found herself.

Several of the contemporary feminist interpreters of Revelation have pointed to the connection between Jezebel and the Whore of Babylon, and further to the triangular literary relationship between Jezebel, Babylon and Queen Jizebul. Marshall rightly highlights the author's emphasis on purity and impurity and notes the prevailing cultural association of impure women with possession by demons. In particular, he draws attention to the violence perpetrated against Jezebel, which is depicted in sexual language. He agrees with Pippin that Revelation "is not a tale for women," and points out that it is impossible to agree with Schüssler Fiorenza that God's rule means an end to slavery and oppression.²¹⁷ He says: "Sexualized violence against women is one of John's primary modes of depicting God's judgment."²¹⁸ Selvidge makes the astute point that the author mimics the authors of the deuteronomistic history and of a number of prophetic books, not only in impugning "Jezebel," but also in his self-portrayal as a prophet with divine authority for his attack upon her.²¹⁹ Like Pippin, Selvidge also draws attention to Revelation's pornographic imagery.²²⁰

Duff argues that the conflict in Revelation is caused not by real or perceived persecution of the Christian communities, but by internal disagreements between John and other Christians.²²¹ The roots of this conflict lay not only in theological differences, but also in attitudes to society and commerce. While the author wished to withdraw from any social engagement, the Prophetess wished to reform society through playing an active role in society.²²² Duff draws attention not only to the author's use of literary allusion in his vilification of Jezebel and those associated with her, but also to his use of a "rhetoric of innuendo," the use of "homology" and "irony."²²³ In particular, he connects the Prophetess to the Whore of Babylon and to the Beast from the Earth, or the False Prophet.²²⁴ Duff highlights the importance of the Prophetess of Thyatira and the aim of the author of Revelation to undermine her status and authority.²²⁵ However, Friesen points out that, in so doing, the author "confirmed the role of women as prophets in the

²¹⁷ Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 32; Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 105.

²¹⁸ Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 19.

²¹⁹ Selvidge, "Reflections on Violence and Pornography," 277-79, 285.

²²⁰ Selvidge, "Reflections on Violence and Pornography," 285. Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 94.

²²¹ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 14.

²²² Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 61.

²²³ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 71-82.

²²⁴ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 83-125. Cf. Garrett, "Revelation," 378.

²²⁵ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 111-12.

congregations of Asia.”²²⁶ Beavis also draws attention to the intensity of John’s hatred for the Prophetess and, perhaps unintentionally, to the possibility of his using curses against her and her followers.²²⁷

In her analysis of the presentation of the Son of Man, Conway points out the influence of Graeco-Roman gender construction upon Revelation, to the similarity of the Son of Man with the Roman Emperor and to the violence and lack of “manly” self-control in the portrayal of the Son of Man. Moore draws attention to the ambiguous gender of the Son of Man who, although male, has female breasts; Moore rightly notes that this ambiguity has received surprisingly little scholarly analysis.²²⁸

Finally, Boxall and Carter demonstrate that it is possible to read against the grain of the author of Revelation’s hostile rhetoric and use of literary allusion and, by both taking into account the socio-historical situation in which the Prophetess found herself, and looking at the portrayal of other early Christians in Acts and 1 Corinthians, to put forward a point of view which she might well have held, and to attempt to rediscover Jezebel’s lost voice.

It is generally agreed that “Jezebel” was a real woman with authority within the church. It is necessary to read against the grain of John’s hostile rhetoric to find out as much as possible about the social and historical reality behind this Christian woman leader. However, there is a surprising lack of feminist or gender analysis of the presentation of the Son of Man, and almost none at all of the Son of God. A related point is made by Friesen: although he offers a polemical critique of feminist interpretations of Revelation, especially that of Pippin, Friesen rightly observes that analysis of any of the gendered characters in Revelation should not be made in isolation, and that there is lack of scholarly comparison of “the male and female imagery of Revelation.”²²⁹ Whilst in no way concurring that a female character’s identity is dependent upon that of a male character, this study, therefore, seeks both to build upon the feminist critiques surveyed in this chapter and to rectify this interpretive omission. This will be undertaken by means both of a focussed and sustained study of the Woman Jezebel, the Prophetess of Thyatira, in her socio-historical and literary settings and of a feminist interpretation of the

²²⁶ Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 187.

²²⁷ Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 132, 143.

²²⁸ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 150.

²²⁹ Friesen, *Imperial Cults and the Apocalypse of John*, 185-86. At one point Friesen carefully accentuates his prose thus: “If we are going to analyse the imagery in this manner [...]” Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 185. This seems to suggest that it is not a mode of analysis which he would recommend. Friesen’s critique of the feminist critique of Revelation is analysed fully above (§1.5).

portrayals of the Prophetess, of the Son of Man in his persona of the Son of God and of their conflict. It is hoped that this thorough-going analysis of the message to Thyatira will enable Jezebel once again to speak.

Such an enterprise requires a sound interpretive methodology, and the formulation of such a methodology is undertaken in Chapter 2: Methodology, Reading Strategy and Interpretation.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY, READING STRATEGY AND INTERPRETATION

A Feminist Comparative Literary Analysis of the Conflict between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel

As noted by Aune, “only the viewpoint of one side is represented” in the conflicts recorded within the early Christian churches of Asia Minor. This viewpoint, moreover, is often characterised by the use of “an arsenal of stereotypical insults.” Aune considers that possessing only one side of the argument makes it “difficult if not impossible to discover the *real* issues in the conflict.”¹ Despite this major obstacle, this study aims to discover the “real” issues in and the “real” nature of the conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the author of Revelation, which is inscribed in the Book of Revelation as the conflict between the Woman Jezebel and the Son of God. This conflict is found in the message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29), one of the seven messages to the Churches that are in Asia (Rev 1:4-3:22). This study also aims to reconstruct the argument from the viewpoint of the Prophetess of Thyatira.² In order to formulate the methodology and reading strategy necessary for such an analysis, it is necessary to take into account the criteria identified by a number of feminist critics, foremost amongst them being Schüssler Fiorenza.

2.1. Strategic Criteria for Making a Feminist Interpretation of a Text

Schüssler Fiorenza considers that pretending to oneself and to one’s readers that a biblical interpretation is entirely objective, neutral and historically accurate belongs to the positivism of the nineteenth century, when women, their concerns and questions were marginalised, if considered at all.³ She stresses the importance of grounding any feminist interpretation in a sound hermeneutical and methodological framework. She herself uses a framework of feminist critical theory, which is capable of embracing “various modes of analysis and interpretation” and points out that a feminist world view is not in itself a valid method of analysis, but a political position. Feminist interpretation must be rooted in feminism’s history of the struggle for emancipation, and not in “malestream” academic

¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 143 (the author’s emphasis).

² Alice Bach writes: “In biblical texts a crucial ambiguity for the feminist reader revolves around the narrator’s text providing one version of how female characters behave within the situations in which they have been placed, and another imagined version that might be provided by the female figure – if one could construct her story.” Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 24.

³ Schüssler Fiorenza, “Remembering the Past in Creating the Future,” 49-54.

theories. Although there are many different types of feminism, most are united in their critique of male elitism and women's subordination. They all agree that gender is neither essential nor divinely ordained, but a social construct.⁴

2.1.1. *The Use of the Historical-Critical Method in a Feminist Analysis*

Mary Ann Tolbert points out that there is no reason why a feminist interpretation which sets out to liberate the voices of female characters in biblical texts should not use “the tools of discourse” of “clarity of thought, logical argument, and analysis” traditionally associated with malestream critiques.⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza is adamant that she does not oppose the use of literary theory in feminist interpretations. She does not set up a political feminist interpretive analysis in opposition to a theoretical approach. She does, however, object to a feminist analysis being subordinate to a method of analysis, such as postmodernism. She rather advocates the filtering of the method of interpretation, “including postmodernism and other malestream theories” through the lens of a critical feminist hermeneutics of suspicion. Interpretive frameworks constructed by “malestream” academic “godfathers” must be engaged with critically. Part of the problem is that some postmodern theorists who undertake feminist critiques are under the impression that feminist analysis needs to progress from its beginnings in the emancipatory struggle. In doing so, they disengage feminist biblical studies from its objective of “liberation and emancipation.” Feminism is not a method of approach to be ranked alongside other methods such as reader response criticism, rhetorical criticism or psychological criticism “under the umbrella of postmodernism.” Further, she particularly critiques a postmodern approach which deconstructs the text, but fails to reconstruct or transform the text's portrayal of “wo/men's agency and subjectivity.”⁶

⁴ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word: Feminist Biblical Interpretation in Context* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), xiii, 3, 4, 7, 19-20.

⁵ Mary Ann Tolbert, “Defining the Problem: The Bible and Feminist Hermeneutics,” *Semeia* 28 (1983), 114-15.

⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 17-20 and 191-92, Footnote 60.

2.1.2. *The Importance of Using a Hermeneutics of Suspicion Coupled with a Deconstructive, Reconstructive and Transformative Methodology in a Feminist Analysis*

Schüssler Fiorenza stresses that, when making a search for the socio-historical reality underlying the oppression of the female voices in the Book of Revelation, it is important to remember the manipulative quality of its author's rhetoric. It is all too easy to make an interpretation using John's constructions and "to privilege the biblical text itself or malestream frameworks of interpretation."⁷

Schüssler Fiorenza thus rightly points to the necessity of a hermeneutics of suspicion when interpreting both a book such as Revelation *and* the interpretations of ostensibly objective critics, in order to make it relevant and liberating for contemporary women. The books of the New Testament must be interpreted using a hermeneutics of suspicion to expose them as "theological interpretations, argumentations, projections, and selections rooted in a patriarchal culture." It is just as important, however, to use historical-critical methods of interpretation in order to evaluate the book, and its author, within their historical, religious, social and cultural contextual framework. Only then may the text be reconstructed through a transforming feminist analysis.⁸

A feminist interpretation must not only deconstruct a biblical text but reconstruct it. Schüssler Fiorenza proposes a model for interpretation which is constructed of seven "interactive hermeneutical 'moments and strategies: a hermeneutics of experience that socially locates experience, a hermeneutics of domination, a hermeneutics of suspicion, a hermeneutics of assessment and evaluation, a hermeneutics of reimagination, a hermeneutics of reconstruction, and a hermeneutics of change and transformation." She also proposes that this model should be understood as having the four "hermeneutical poles" of "interpreter, text, world, [and] ideology."⁹

A feminist hermeneutics of suspicion with "its roots not in the rationalism but in the emancipatory struggles of the Enlightenment" which is coupled with a deconstructive, reconstructive and transformative methodology avoids reinscribing the "historically and socially constructed" androcentrism and kyriarchy of the text and reifying its grammatical gender.¹⁰ The words "man" and "woman" are not fixed in

⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 78.

⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 56-57.

⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 76-77.

¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 81, 88 and 90.

meaning through language, and the grammatical gender of words is not equivalent to the realities to which the words point. It should be remembered that the language of kyriarchy reflects not “dualistic opposites or fixed linguistic gender slots,” but social, political, cultural and religious practices, and cultural and sexual constructions. Within a particular historical context, the concepts of “men” and “women,” and relationships of domination and submission are determined, and then “codified in language.” This is true both of the world reflected in the text being interpreted and of the world of the interpreter. A hermeneutics of suspicion must investigate both.¹¹

Texts are read differently according to the reader’s social and political location, and the literary allusions, intertextual connections and “frames of meanings” that they bring to it. It is thus important that the feminist interpreter who is focused upon the women in the text should avoid reinscribing or “naturalising” the kyriarchal orthodoxy of the text’s world view by means of reconstruction and transformation.¹² Equally, grammatical gender must not be confused with “natural gender.” If it is, the interpretation simply “reifies sociocultural gender constructs as natural, commonsense, and self-evident.”¹³

Comment

It should not be thought that the female characters in a text do not reflect reality. Women in biblical books are not merely the constructs of a male-centred culture and language. Women can and do speak with authority which is not derived from men, or from other, dominating women. It is here that a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion coupled with a deconstructive, reconstructive and transformative method is at its strongest. It allows women authority and respects their abilities to speak for themselves and with power. A purely deconstructive approach may parody and expose the weaknesses of an androcentric text, but insists that the women in the text are male constructs. The method fails if the women are taken seriously, because the deconstructive approach assumes only masculine presence and feminine absence.¹⁴

¹¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 90-92 and 95.

¹² Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 96.

¹³ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 96-97.

¹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 102-103.

In order to formulate an analytical approach to the message to Thyatira, which combines a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion coupled with a deconstructive, reconstructive and transformative method, it is necessary to consider the strategic criteria required.

2.2. Strategic Criteria for a Feminist Critique and Reconstruction of the Conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of Revelation

As rightly pointed out by Pippin, the malignant portrayal of Jezebel by the author of Revelation, coupled with the no less hostile presentation of her namesake, has caused “Jezebel” to be a byword for female promiscuity, manipulation of men for nefarious purposes and abuse of power.¹⁵ This portrayal has been exacerbated by interpretations of the text which accept as objective the author of Revelation’s androcentric view of Jezebel’s activities.¹⁶

2.2.1. Countering the Seductive Wiles of the Author of the Book of Revelation: The Importance of Reading as a Woman

The accusations made against Jezebel of leading her followers into the practices of πορνεία (“sexual immorality”) and eating εἰδωλόθυτα (“food sacrificed to idols”) have traditionally be interpreted in two, not necessarily mutually exclusive, ways.¹⁷ Colin J. Hemer and Robert H. Mounce understand the accusations against Jezebel literally or interpret them as signifying either a liberal attitude on her part towards Roman religion and its cult practices or accommodation to Roman socio-economics (Rev 2:20).¹⁸ These

¹⁵ Tina Pippin, “Jezebel Re-Vamped,” in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Samuel and Kings* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1994), 201-204.

¹⁶ Jonathan Culler notes that, like anything else, it is necessary to learn to read, and that both pupils and teachers are influenced by their culture’s sexual and gender codes. Too often in literature the experiences and perspectives of masculine characters are presented as the normative human experiences and perspectives with which readers, both men and women, are taught to identify. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1983), 50-51.

¹⁷ This study refers to this historical woman by the name given to her by the author of Revelation. As noted by Marshall, the name “Jezebel” was designed to slander her. Marshall, “Collateral Damage,” 41. Nevertheless, it is the only name by which she can be known.

¹⁸ Hemer considers that Jezebel was “an unknown woman who had undue influence in the local church and met the problem of Christian membership of the trade-guilds with permissive antinomian or Gnostic teaching.” Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting* (JSNTSup 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 117. With regard to Jezebel’s teaching, Hemer considers that: “The emphasis here seems to be on the tendency to immorality, whether literal or figuratively of apostasy. The temptation to immorality and idolatry here is likely to have been connected particularly with the practices of the trade guilds. Jezebel probably taught that a Christian should participate in them for the sake of his livelihood and represented moral scruples as a denial of Christian liberty.” Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*,

interpretations understand the viewpoint of the author of Revelation as the one with which the reader should agree. They do not take into account the author's intentional use of literary allusion to lead interpreters astray in their assessment of Jezebel.¹⁹

In order to counter such interpretations, it is necessary for the feminist interpreter to read "as a woman." Jonathan Culler makes the telling point that reading "as a woman" is not the same thing as a woman reading. Women, "seduced and betrayed by devious male texts," have both read and continue to read "as men."²⁰ Whether one reads as a man or as a woman is not done instinctively, but is an inculcated and a learned process. Women readers, in order to identify with the voice and perspective of a male author, are obliged to read as, and to identify with, men.²¹ It is important to remember, not only that male authors have been adept at seduction, but also that readings made by men "omit and distort" aspects of the text under review.²² One of the objectives of reading "as a woman" is "to avoid reading as a man, to identify the specific defenses [*sic*] and distortions of male readings and provide correctives."²³

Arguably the most effective weapon wielded by the author of Revelation in his seduction of the reader is his widespread use of multivalent literary allusions.

128. Mounce describes Jezebel as "probably some prominent woman within the church," "the self-styled prophetess [...] whose seductive teachings had led some of the believers at Thyatira into fatal compromise with the secular environment," and who "aggressively promoted" "antinomianism." Mounce also interprets *πορνεία* and *ειδωλόθυτα* in a "literal sense," that is, in his view, these words refer to participation in feasts characterised by "sexual promiscuity" and "licentiousness." Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1978), 102-104.

¹⁹ Leonard L. Thompson notes that, by describing Jezebel as deceiving (*πλανῶ*) others in the Thyatiran community (Rev 2:20), he associates her with Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10), the Beast from the Earth (Rev 13:14) and Babylon (Rev 18:23). Similarly, the association of Jezebel and her followers and those who hold the teaching of Balaam (Rev 2:14) with *πορνεία* ("sexual immorality") also serves to group them with Babylon (Rev 14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3, 9) and with those who are excluded from the New Jerusalem and condemned to the lake of fire and sulphur (Rev 21:8; 22:15). Thompson notes: "Thus, prophetic groups in the churches, Babylon the Great Whore, and those condemned at the *eschaton* share characteristics and function homologously in their respective planes." Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 80-81. Duff explains the author of Revelation's attempt "to discredit his rival "Jezebel"" by a clever use of a combined methodology of "indirect accusation," irony, "homology" and "opposition and equivalence" which connects her with "the satanic realm." Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 71-82.

²⁰ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 49, 52.

²¹ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 50-51.

²² Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 58.

²³ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 54.

2.2.2. *Turning the Tables on the Author of the Book of Revelation: Re-Reading Revelation's Hostile Literary Allusions*

Jon Paulien is of the opinion that, in identifying possible literary allusions in Revelation, the interpreter runs the risk of being unjustifiably subjective. He considers that it is necessary to take into account the intention of the author of Revelation in making an allusion and to formulate criteria for the existence of allusions in the text.²⁴ However, Paulien concedes that, as pointed out by Steve Moyise, “the evident subjectivity in scholarly assessment of allusions is not so much the result of deficient criteria as it is a witness to the role the reader has in construing meaning.”²⁵ Moreover, the author’s use of “multivalent and ambiguous” allusions seems intentionally to invite readers to participate in assigning meaning to the text.²⁶

Moyise argues that the role of the reader is extremely important for the creation of the meaning of a text. It is difficult, if not impossible, to gauge the intention of the author of Revelation in his use of literary allusion. In writing his text he invested it with meanings derived from his own context and, along with the allusions, he did not necessarily assign the original contexts of the texts to which allusion is made. The reader of the allusive text, moreover, brings to it her or his own context of meanings and creates another text.²⁷ No reading is invalid but, since interpretation is to a certain degree dependent upon the reader’s “hermeneutical key,” it is important that the interpreter should set out this key before making an interpretation. Interpreters hear not just the voice of the author, but the echoes of voices contained in other texts, and each listener hears those voices in different ways.²⁸ It is incumbent upon the feminist critic who is using a

²⁴ Jon Paulien, “Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions to the Old Testament in the Book of Revelation,” in Steve Moyise, ed., *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh; New York: T&T Clark Ltd., 2001), 116-17.

²⁵ Paulien, “Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions,” 119, footnote 39.

²⁶ Paulien, “Criteria and the Assessment of Allusions,” 128-29.

²⁷ Moyise also questions whether or not the author has respected the contexts of the texts to which it is considered that he alludes. The intertextuality, or interaction of a text with its “subtexts,” causes a conflict between the context of the text being studied and the contexts of the various texts to which it alludes. This interaction or conflict results, not only in the new text being influenced by its subtexts, but also in those older texts being reinterpreted in the light of the new one. Texts alluded to are each given new meanings by being spliced together in the new text and the combination of subtexts and their contexts also produce a new meaning. Moyise concludes that the question of whether or not an allusion is “out of context” should be replaced with the question of whether or not its presence leads to conflict or harmony. Moreover, a modern interpreter is likely to view allusions differently to earlier readers or hearers of a text. How, or even whether, the original context of a subtext was important to the author is difficult, if not impossible, to fathom; it is however important always to bear in mind the original context, insofar as it can be known, of the subtext. Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd., 1995), 18-20.

²⁸ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 142-43

“hermeneutical key” of suspicion not only to hear these voices in different ways but also to enable them to speak differently.

2.2.3. *The Need for a Counter-Apocalyptic Feminist Critique*

Catherine Keller, however, warns against the dangers inherent in writing a feminist interpretation of Revelation. It is tempting to be drawn into writing not a critique of Revelation, but an “anti-apocalypse,” which is distinguished by its demonising of the “other,” a simplistic differentiation between good and a “diabolically overpowering” evil and the use of dualism and binary opposites. An anti-apocalypse is impossible; the result is simply another type of apocalypse. It will fall into the trap of seeking to unify and “homogenize,” to wipe out difference, and to use aggressive language.²⁹ It is sobering to reflect that Revelation was canonised by those belonging to the type of imperial and oppressive power structure as John was critiquing.³⁰ She suggests that a better approach for a feminist critique of Revelation to take is that of a “counter-apocalypse.” A counter-apocalypse dances with the “portentous tones of the original,” but avoids the danger of closing the text, which is “signified by an anti-apocalypse.”³¹

Comment

The foregoing serves to underline “[t]he ambivalence” with which feminist critics view Revelation;³² there is a need for women to reclaim a text which has wounded us.³³ Alison M. Jack notes Revelation’s battle to control the reader and “the power relationships within the text, particularly between Christ and the people with whom he has contact.”³⁴ Jack highlights the internal instability and subversive elements of the text, and calls for those voices which compete with the dominant voice of the author to be allowed to speak.³⁵

Taking the above into account, in order both to discover the causes and nature of the conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the author of Revelation, which is depicted in the message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29), to reconstruct the conflict from the

²⁹ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 11 and 15.

³⁰ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 18.

³¹ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 19.

³² Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 25.

³³ Cf. Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 25.

³⁴ Jack, *Texts Reading Texts*, 197.

³⁵ Jack, *Texts Reading Texts*, 203-204.

Prophetess's point of view and, as far as possible, to give her back her lost prophetic voice, the following reading strategy is undertaken.

2.3. Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of the Conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of Revelation

This study makes an analysis of the conflict between the Woman Jezebel and the Son of Man by means of a close reading of the text with a view to identifying allusions contained within both the descriptions and the interaction of the two combatants and to discuss the ways in which these allusions illuminate the conflict. Allusions which have traditionally been read in order to denigrate the character or standing of the Woman Jezebel are turned inside out and re-read positively. In addition, allusions to and echoes of texts not normally associated with the message to Thyatira imbue it with different possibilities for interpretation. The author of Revelation makes syncretistic use of texts and images from various traditions, both pagan and Jewish. Similarly, this reading draws upon a variety of literature and imagery which is likely to have been known by the author.

The methodology employed in this study is a feminist comparative analysis. This analysis has as its framework a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion within which it contextualises the presentation of the combatants and conflict depicted in the message to Thyatira. Using this methodology is crucial for the fourth aim of this study, which is to effect a transformative reconstruction, both of the characters and of the conflict, from the viewpoint of the Prophetess of Thyatira. To this end historical-critical tools are used. The methodology itself is based upon that used by Beverly Roberts Gaventa, who stresses the necessity, when writing about a woman in the New Testament, of contextualising her in a variety of ways.³⁶ It also takes into account the importance when making a feminist critique, identified by Friesen, of comparing the male and female characters in the text under consideration.³⁷

Reconstructing a historical conflict from the point of view of a woman is not easy. As pointed out by Schüssler Fiorenza, historical records written by men “do not reflect

³⁶ In a discussion of Acts' (silenced) prophesying daughters (Acts 21:9), Beverley Roberts Gaventa writes: “[...] there is still a need to contextualize Luke's women in a different way: first, by inquiring about the presentation of women in literature contemporary with Luke; second, by exploring the presentation of male characters in Lukan narrative; and third, by analyzing the place of both men and women in Luke's larger narrative program.” Gaventa, “What Ever Happened to Those Prophesying Daughters?” 53.

³⁷ Friesen states: “The threats against Jezebel and her children (2:22-23) have not been compared to the threats made against the followers of Balaam (2:14-16); or the destruction of the Whore (17:16) to the destruction of the Beast, the kings, and the soldiers (19:17-21); or the passivity of the Bride (21:2) to the passivity of Antipas (2:13).” Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 186.

women's historical reality."³⁸ Moreover, and of particular interest to a study of the Prophetess of Thyatira, Schüssler Fiorenza states that "ideological polemics about women's place, role or nature increase whenever women's actual emancipation and active participation in history become stronger."³⁹ However, even patriarchal texts retain glimpses of the reality of the participation of women in the early Christian movement. In order to recover something of this alternative "historical reality," it is important not to interpret passages featuring women in isolation. They should rather be interpreted within their "historical-ecclesial-social contexts."⁴⁰

In the New Testament, women are silenced even (or perhaps in particular) when, like Jezebel, their identity is dependent upon their speech. As noted by Schüssler Fiorenza, there is also a patriarchal conspiracy of silence about "women's historical experience and theological contributions in the early Christian movement."⁴¹ New Testament and other androcentric texts should not be viewed as providing objective information about women, but as "social constructions by men for men." Silences about women's lives and activities point to realities different to those presented by male authors. It is up to feminist scholars to find a way of filling these silences by creating "a feminist model of reconstruction." This can be done through "creative critical historical interpretation," which counteracts not only the source texts but also those androcentric interpretations which have been accepted for too long as objective or neutral.⁴² It is only by making such a reconstructive interpretation that women may be brought in from the margins and placed in the centre of early Christian history, along with men.⁴³

This study seeks to put the woman Jezebel at "the centre of reality" addressed by the Book of Revelation.⁴⁴ All that the reader knows about her is what the author of Revelation says. It is known, therefore, what the author thought about Jezebel and how he interpreted her within his apocalyptic-prophetic world view. In order to discover more information about Jezebel, to discover what she thought about herself and about John,

³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 57.

³⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 57.

⁴⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 59.

⁴¹ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 60.

⁴² Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 60.

⁴³ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 61.

⁴⁴ Bernadette J. Broonen states: "To write women's history, to place women at the center [*sic*], is to say that men are not at the center [*sic*] of reality, that what men do and are is not more important than what women do and are." Bernadette J. Broonen, "Early Christian Women and their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1985), 82.

and perhaps to hear her speak, in order to discover more about the socio-historical reality of Jezebel and her argument with the author of Revelation than can be gleaned from the Book of Revelation, it is necessary to turn to other texts whose relevance is determined either by the inclusion of representations of women who are presented as prophets or by their contemporaneity of their composition with the composition with that of Revelation. All are texts which tell us men's views of and reactions to women. As Bernadette J. Brooten rightly states, "a shift of emphasis is therefore required."⁴⁵ It is hoped that the analysis made in this study will provide just such a shift and that the outline drawing of Jezebel provided by Revelation will be coloured in, and even animated. In the search for this early Christian woman, moreover, it is hoped that more will also be learned about the man who wrote about her.⁴⁶

The use of the methodology outlined in the foregoing enables the analysis to "read against the grain" of the author of Revelation's use of hostile rhetoric in the depiction of the Woman Jezebel.⁴⁷ It also enables the analysis to make new interpretations of the Son of Man and the author of the Book Revelation. The author provides a particular difficulty for interpreters since, as explained below (§2.4.2), he is not identical with "John," who is a character in the story narrated by the author.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Brooten, "Early Christian Women," 65.

⁴⁶ Brooten states that "the goal of writing early Christian women's history is that it results in a new view of women and in a new view of men." Brooten, "Early Christian Women," 91.

⁴⁷ For example, Duff considers the author of Revelation's association, through literary allusion, of Jezebel with the Whore of Babylon and the False Prophet, to be an example of his "rhetoric of innuendo." Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 71. Pippin reads for "the rhetoric of gender" in the Book of Revelation. Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 16. Thimmes identifies "a *rhetoric of conflict*" used by the author to vilify his rival for prophetic authority. Thimmes, "'Teaching and Beguiling my Servants:' the Letter to Thyatira (Rev 2.18-20)," 72 (the author's emphasis). Schüssler Fiorenza considers that it is possible to "read against the grain" of Revelation's political rhetoric in connection with the portrayal of the woman the author names "Jezebel." This is because he deliberately besmirches the reputation of "an actual wo/man" who was a respected Christian leader, because he disagrees with her theology. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 222-23.

⁴⁸ From this point forward, this study will refer to the author of Revelation as "the Author," in order to distinguish him from the character "John."

2.4. Difficulties Inherent in an Analysis of the Conflict between the Son of Man and the Woman Jezebel: Distinguishing between the Author of the Book of Revelation and the Character “John”

The identity of the Author of the Book of Revelation is shrouded in mystery, and in this book he both diffuses that identity by splitting it between two characters and invests it with the gravitas of one who believes himself to have “divine authority” for his apocalyptic message (Rev 1:1).⁴⁹ This section, therefore, considers the identity of the Author of Revelation and sets out the importance of distinguishing between him and the character “John” who narrates the story which comprises the greater part of the book.

2.4.1. *The Identity of the Author of the Book of Revelation*

It is hazarded that the Author of the Book of Revelation was an itinerant Palestinian Jew, who understood himself to be a prophet and was a member, or possibly the leader, of a prophetic guild, who probably visited the churches in Asia mentioned in the first three chapters of Revelation (Rev 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1-3:22).⁵⁰ Revelation is written in Greek, but the many Semitisms in the text suggest that Greek was not the Author’s first language.⁵¹ He was probably a refugee from Jerusalem, who fled the city after the Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E.⁵² It seems, from the internal evidence of the text, that he was familiar with the Christian communities in the seven cities in Asia to which his letter is addressed.⁵³ It is agreed that the place of Revelation’s composition was in what is now known as Asia Minor, or off its coast, when it was a province of the Roman Empire. “John” states that, for reasons not made clear in the text, but associated with his witness to Jesus, he found himself upon the tiny island of Patmos (Rev 1:9).⁵⁴ There, “John” declares, he experienced a series of visions and auditions which, as commanded by the first of these visions and auditions, he wrote down in a scroll to be sent to the Seven Churches that are

⁴⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 22.

⁵⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, liii-liv; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, Book of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. V; ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 702-703. It is generally agreed that, although the name “John” is not pseudepigraphical, the author of the Book of Revelation was neither John the son of Zebedee nor the “beloved disciple” of the Fourth Gospel. Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation, 702. J. Massyngberde Ford proposed that the author was John the Baptist. J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975), 35. This suggestion, however, has not been taken seriously by other scholars. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 1. Aune considers that “John” was not the author of the Fourth Gospel, and that it is unlikely that he was a disciple of the Johannine School. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, liv-lvi.

⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 1.

⁵² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, lvi.

⁵³ Yarbro Collins, “Revelation,” 702-703.

⁵⁴ Yarbro Collins, “Revelation,” 701.

in Asia (Rev 1:4, 10-11, 19). It has been deduced that “John” was either deported to Patmos or chose to be there because of his missionary activities.⁵⁵ If Revelation was written on the mainland, the most likely location is the city of Ephesus.⁵⁶ It is generally, although not universally, agreed that Revelation was written in 95 or 96 C.E.⁵⁷

Thus, apart from some dispute about the date of the composition, scholarly opinion is united: in or off the coast of Anatolia in the second half of the first century C.E. a wandering Christian prophet, probably of Palestinian Jewish descent, composed the Book of Revelation. It is not questioned that the Author of Revelation and the character “John” who writes the Letter to the Seven Churches and both experiences and describes the visions and auditions related throughout the book as a whole, are one and the same person.⁵⁸ The ideology, world view, Christological and sapiential beliefs and knowledge of Jewish Scriptures and traditions and pagan mythology of the Author, which are found throughout Revelation, are those of the character “John.” Unfortunately, there is a serious flaw in this neat assumption.

2.4.2. *Distinguishing between the Author of the Book of Revelation and the Character “John”*

The text of the Book of Revelation as a whole, along with its world view, may be ascribed to the voice of the Author of Revelation. In the three introductory verses (Rev 1:1-3), the Author tells the reader what the book is about. It is the description of “the revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show his slaves what must soon take place” (Rev 1:1-2). He also informs the reader that this “revelation” is the “word of God” and the “testimony of Jesus” (Rev 1:2). It was made known by Jesus Christ, through his “angel,”

⁵⁵ Possible reasons for “John’s” deportation or banishment to Patmos could have been the interpretation of his prophecy by the provincial governor as astrology or magic. It is equally possible that he was banished because “his prophecy was viewed as a threat to order or Roman authority.” Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 102-4. Thompson notes that there is no indication that Patmos was used as a place of banishment, relegation or imprisonment by Roman officials. He considers that “John” may well have visited the well-populated island to preach to its inhabitants. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 172-73.

⁵⁶ Yarbro Collins, “Revelation,” 701-2.

⁵⁷ Irenaeus states that Revelation was extant at the end of the reign of the Emperor Domitian, which means that the latest date for composition is 95 or 96 C.E., and this date for its composition is generally, although not universally, agreed upon. Yarbro Collins, “Revelation,” 700-701. Marshall maintains that Revelation was written during or just after the “long year” of 69 C.E. Marshall, “Gender and Empire: Sexualized Violence in John’s Anti-Imperial Apocalypse,” 19.

⁵⁸ For example, Aune states: “The author of Revelation tells us four times that his name is “John” (1:1, 4, 9; 22:8).” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, xlix.

to his slave “John,” who then testifies “to all that he saw” (Rev 1:2). The Author of Revelation also declares that this testimony is a prophecy (Rev 1:3).⁵⁹

Up to this point (Rev 1:3), only the voice of the Author of Revelation is heard. He then proceeds to provide the reader with the text of a letter from “John” to “the Seven Churches that are in Asia” (Rev 1:4-3:22) which with the rest of the book (Rev 4:1-22:21), “has the framework of an ancient letter;”⁶⁰ it also bears a number of similarities with the letters of Paul.⁶¹ Revelation is particularly notable for its many similarities with the First Letter to the Corinthians;⁶² it is entirely probable that John was familiar with it.⁶³

“John,” the writer of the Letter to the Seven Churches, goes on to give some description of himself and his situation (Rev 1:9-10). He then describes his audition and vision of the angelic “Son of Man” (Rev 1:10-16). He narrates how this person describes himself in terms of one with supernatural powers, even divinity (Rev 1:17-18). “John” then relates that the “Son of Man” commands him to write down everything he sees (Rev 1:19). These visions are contained in Rev 4:1-22:4. Before that, however, “John” transcribes the dictated words of the “Son of Man” in a series of messages, each of which is addressed to the “Angel” of each of the Seven Churches in Asia in turn (Rev 2:1-3:22).

It is useful to pause here for a moment and consider carefully the nature of the text which is being studied, in terms of the voices which are being heard. As well as

⁵⁹ Yarbrow Collins, “Revelation,” 695-96.

⁶⁰ Yarbrow Collins, “Revelation,” 696.

⁶¹ “John’s” letter begins in a similar fashion to the letters of Paul (Rev 1:4-6) and its language also has much in common with that of Paul. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy: Reading the Apocalypse Theologically,” in Steve Moyise, ed., *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001) 6; Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 94-95.

⁶² This is noted by Ilaria L.E. Ramelli who, arguing that the illness and death referred to in 1 Cor 11:30 are spiritual, rather than literal, notes the similarity of this verse to Rev 3:1-2. Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, “Spiritual Weakness, Illness, and Death in 1 Corinthians 11:30,” *JBL* 130.1 (2011), 157. Ramelli also notes the following correspondences: 1 Cor 6:2 cf. Rev 20:4; 1 Cor 6:9-10 cf. Rev 21:8 and 22:15; 1 Cor 8:4 cf. Rev 9:20; 1 Cor 10:20 cf. Rev 9:20-21; 1 Cor 11:32 cf. Rev 3:19; 1 Cor 11:27-32; 16: 20-22 cf. Rev 22:18-19; 1 Cor 14:32 cf. Rev 22:6 (the only two places in the New Testament where the phrase “spirits of the prophets” occurs); 1 Cor 15:20, 23 cf. Rev 14:4; 1 Cor 15:23 cf. Rev 20:5 (on the resurrection); 1 Cor 15:23-28 cf. Rev 14:6-7; 1 Cor 15:26, 55 cf. Rev 20:14; 1 Cor 15:58 cf. Rev 14:13; 1 Cor 16:15 cf. Rev 14:4 (re. ἀπαρχή); 1 Cor 16:22 cf. Rev 22:20. Ramelli, “Spiritual Weakness,” 157-58, Footnotes 40, 41 and 42.

⁶³ The messages to the Seven Churches in Rev 2-3 may have been modelled upon “an early collection of ten of Paul’s letters to seven churches.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 130. It is also possible that “a collection of seven Pauline letters (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, and Philemon), with Ephesians as a pseudonymous “cover letter” provided a model for John’s collection of seven letters introduced by the “cover letter” of Rev 1:4-20.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 130, referring to a proposal made by E.J. Goodspeed, *New Solutions of New Testament Problems* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1927), 21-28.

recording visions, Revelation records auditions. It is a book full of voices competing for the attention of the reader; voices of people, animals, divine and demonic characters, even of the thunder(s) (Rev 10:3, 4; 14:2; 19:6). It also contains a mysterious silence (Rev 8:1) and women who are silenced by the Author.⁶⁴

2.4.3. *The Multiplicity of Voices and Viewpoints in the Book of Revelation*

Even before the alert reader confronts the majority of visions and auditions of Revelation, he or she does not hear just a single voice in the first three chapters of the book.⁶⁵ Revelation was probably written as a circular letter and with the intention of the whole book being read aloud in the Christian communities of Asia (Rev 1:3-4).⁶⁶ The text may have formed part of the liturgy; whether or not it would have been read aloud only by “the reader” (ὁ ἀναγινώσκων, Rev 1:3) or by several “participants” is unclear.⁶⁷ The reader must, in order to interpret this book, keep in mind the different voices. The Author of Revelation uses rhetoric to persuade, even to terrify, his audience into adopting his view of the world, his theology, his Christology and his ideology.⁶⁸ It is all too easy to find oneself identifying with the dominant voice and viewpoint of this male Author.⁶⁹

Whilst part of Revelation (Rev 1:4-3:22; 22:21) is most certainly a letter, Revelation may also be understood as a “complex story.”⁷⁰ The Author of Revelation claims, at the beginning of his story, that, from Rev 1:4 onwards, the book contains the words of God himself, which were given first to Jesus Christ and then handed in turn by him, through his Angel, to his slave John (Rev 1:1-2). It is inferred that the whole book is written by the character “John,” the faithful recorder of all that he sees (and hears) (Rev 1:2). However, if the reader does not subscribe to the view that the Author of

⁶⁴ Pippin rightly notes that the female characters in Revelation “are not allowed to speak their own identity” and are “silenced.” Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 103 and 107. Four of the characters in Revelation are described at least once with the word γυνή: the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:20); the Woman of Chapter 12 (Rev 12:1, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17); the Woman Babylon (Rev 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18); and the Wife of the Lamb (Rev 19:7; 21:9).

⁶⁵ The word φωνή (“voice” or “sound”) occurs more than fifty times in Revelation. Edmondo F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 108.

⁶⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 35; Yarbrow Collins, “Revelation,” 696.

⁶⁷ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 100.

⁶⁸ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 22.

⁶⁹ Bach underscores the need “to stand firm” against a male biblical narrator’s “self-serving authoritative vision.” Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 14.

⁷⁰ David L. Barr, “The Story John Told: Reading Revelation for Its Plot,” in *Reading the Book of Revelation: A Resource for Students* (ed. David L. Barr; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 13. Barr presents Revelation as “three interrelated, interacting stories, tied together by a common story-telling framework.” Barr, “The Story John Told,” 23.

Revelation is recording a literal divine revelation, but that this book is the work of a human being, and moreover of a man, it is possible to view it differently.⁷¹ It may be studied both as a letter addressed to a diverse group of people and as a narrative.

Responding in this way to Revelation allows the interpreter to identify the multitude of voices and viewpoints vying for the attention of the reader. As with all letters, Revelation reflects not only the viewpoint of the Author, but also, in its use of rhetoric and arguments, the different viewpoints of its addressees. The Author of Revelation does not provide the words spoken or arguments put forward by those who hold opposing views to his. However, in putting forward his side of the disputes, the Author must necessarily respond to, and reflect in his argumentation, in his rhetoric and in his use of literary allusion, the viewpoints with which he is engaging.⁷² Similarly, in narrative works, there are different characters, with different viewpoints and voices. Some of these reflect the viewpoint of the author and/or narrator; others reflect differing views. In Revelation, the “implied author” is presented as “John,” whose voice, which purports to be that of the “authorial narrator,” has what Alice Bach calls a “privileged position within the text, possessing the ability to move outside time and space.”⁷³ Always the Author of Revelation is trying to persuade the reader to empathise with his point of view. His voice has the advantage over those of his characters, who are “contained within the events of the story.”⁷⁴ Thus a feminist interpreter of Revelation must identify the book’s different voices and points of view in order to give voice to those characters silenced by the dominant voice of the Author. One way of doing this is by reading Revelation as a story.

2.4.4. *Reading the Book of Revelation as a Story*

Reading the Book of Revelation as a story, the following structure is discovered. The Author of Revelation introduces and describes his book (Rev 1:1-3) and introduces the character “John” (Rev 1:2). The Author then inscribes a letter from John which includes messages to each of the Seven Churches that are in Asia (Rev 1:4-3:22). In the

⁷¹ Antoinette Wire writes: “The problem with canonical texts is that believers tend to confuse the voice of the author with the voice of God.” Antoinette Wire, “1 Corinthians,” in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures: Volume Two: A Feminist Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 157.

⁷² A similar argument is made by Wire, writing about Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, a text in which, Wire explains, there are “major voices [...] other than the voice of the author” and the voice of the author is not the only authoritative voice. Wire, “1 Corinthians,” 157.

⁷³ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 17.

⁷⁴ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 17.

introductory part of this letter, John describes himself and the Son of Man (Rev 1:9-16). John then includes within his letter a transcription of the self-description of the Son of Man (Rev 1:17-18) and his messages to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:19-3:22). These messages report the words of the multiple personalities of the Son of Man (Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 2:1, 7, 14). However, also included within this dictated letter are several instances of the reported spoken self-descriptions of other characters. These are “those who say that they are Apostles but are not” (Rev 2:2), “those who say that they are Jews and are not” (Rev 2:9; 3:9) and “the woman Jezebel, who says that she is a prophetess” (Rev 2:20). It also contains, in “imputed speech,” the words of the Angel of the Church in Laodicea: “I am rich and I have prospered and I need nothing” (Rev 3:17).⁷⁵ The messages reveal that there are conflicts, differences of opinion or instances of factionalism in a number of the churches (Rev 2:2, 6, 9, 14-15, 20-24; 3:1b-2, 9, 15-16), but the reader is only given the Son of Man’s view of these disagreements, not those of the combatants. Even when the words of those with whom the Son of Man disagrees are provided, they are only reported or imputed. Finally, each of these seven messages is said by the Son of Man, as reported by John, to be “what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The seven messages are followed by John’s report of his visions and auditions in the heavenly throne room or court (Rev 4:1-11:19) and in the heavenly temple (Rev 12:1-22:20).⁷⁶ The final verse (Rev 22:21) is the closing epistolary blessing.⁷⁷

2.4.5. The Importance of Making the Distinction between the Author of Revelation and the Character “John” for the Interpretation of the Book of Revelation

The character of the “Son of Man” limits himself to dictating messages for the Seven Churches to the character “John.” John, however, does more than just write (Rev 1:11ff.): he also sees (Rev 1:2ff.), hears (Rev 1:10ff.), speaks (Rev 7:14), wonders (Rev 17:6-7), is “in the spirit” (Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10), falls down in fear or to worship (Rev 1:17; 19:19; 22:8), weeps (Rev 5:4-5), eats the Little Scroll (Rev 10:10), is transported by

⁷⁵ “Imputed” or “attributed” speech is not quite the same as reported speech. Mark D. Mathews explains that imputed speech “is marked by the use of a second or third person verb of speaking, followed by a phrase in the first person.” It does not function to report a person’s words, but “assigns to a person a belief or viewpoint that the writer regards as her or his defining characteristic.” Mark D. Mathews, “The Function of Imputed Speech in the Apocalypse of John,” *CBQ* 74 (2012), 319. “Imputed” speech is also found in the words attributed to Babylon in Rev 18:7. Mathews, “The Function of Imputed Speech in the Apocalypse of John,” 320.

⁷⁶ Barr, “The Story John Told,” 15.

⁷⁷ Yarbrow Collins, “Revelation,” 696.

angels (Rev 17:3; 21:10), follows the instructions of various heavenly characters (Rev 1:19; 4:1; 10:8-10, 11; 11:1-2; 21:5) and, to be on the safe side, curses anyone who attempts to alter what he has so painstakingly written down (Rev 22:18-19). What is unusual about John is that, despite being confronted by so many signs and wonders, he rarely makes value or moral judgements; for the most part he just reports on what he sees, hears and does.⁷⁸ In contrast, the Author of Revelation makes both value judgements and moral judgements upon his characters by use of literary allusion and through the use of hierarchical structures and the depiction of fellowship or enmity between various characters. This *includes* John.⁷⁹ This is why it is important to make the distinction between the Author of the Book of Revelation and the character “John.”

It should be emphasised here that this study is not arguing that the Author of Revelation does not put himself into his story in the guise of the character “John.” Nor does this study suggest that the first three verses of Revelation were written by a different author to that of the rest of the book.⁸⁰ However, for the purposes of understanding the competing points of view and the different voices in the Book of Revelation, it is essential to grasp that John, like other characters, does not have the all-encompassing knowledge of the Author. Nor does the character “John” necessarily share the world view of the Author or the Author’s opinions of other characters. For example, nowhere does the text state, or even infer, that the hatred showed by the Author of Revelation, the character of “the One Seated on the Throne” and the character of “the Scarlet Beast” for the character of “the Whore,” which is demonstrated by the use of explicit violence (Rev 17:16-17;

⁷⁸ Aune notes: “Though John very occasionally takes upon himself the role of analyst or commentator (cf. 6:9; 7:13-17; 9:6; 13:9-10; 14:4-5, 12; 20:6), he generally limits himself to a straight sequential narrative report.” David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2006), 177-78.

⁷⁹ A useful example is articulated by Christopher A. Frilingos. He points out that upon two occasions “John” “is thrust into an authoritative interpretive position, and twice he passes the hermeneutical reins to others.” On the first occasion, “John” is asked by one of the Twenty-Four Elders the identity of the multitude standing before the throne and the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands (Rev 7:9, 13). “John” disclaims all knowledge and tells the Elder, “My Lord, you know” (Rev 7:14). The Elder then embarks upon an explanation (Rev 7:14-17). On the second occasion, upon seeing the Woman Seated on the Scarlet Beast (Rev 17:3-6), “John” is so amazed he appears unable to speak, even to ask a question (Rev 17:6), and it is left to his angelic guide to explain “the mystery of the woman” (Rev 17:7-18). As succinctly noted by Frilingos, “in both cases a supernatural character articulates the *proper* interpretation.” Christopher A. Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire, Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 59 (my emphasis). Perhaps the author of Revelation feared that, left to her own devices, a woman reading “as a woman” might make a different, perhaps even subversive, interpretation.

⁸⁰ Aune points out that it is not unusual for the introduction to an apocalypse to be written in the third person, while the greater part of the work is written in the first person. He calls attention to the similarities of Rev 1:1-3 with the opening verses of *1 Enoch* (*1 Enoch* 1:1-2) and the title of the *Testament of Solomon*. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 8-9.

18:8-9; 19:2-3), is necessarily shared by the character “John.” John merely “wonders” at the sight of the Woman riding a Scarlet Beast (Rev 17:3, 6).

2.5. The Different Voices and Viewpoints in the Letter to the Seven Churches That Are in Asia

As seen above (§2.4), throughout Revelation, the Author of the Book of Revelation presents himself as the seer John, who records what he sees and hears. It is, however, misleading to understand John as presenting the viewpoint of the Author and to say, for example, that Jezebel and John hold opposing views. Nowhere does John say this. The reader is not told John’s view of Jezebel. What the reader is told is that John is the slave of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1) and that the Son of Man views Jezebel as a woman who is seducing his slaves into sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols (Rev 2:20). There can be no doubt that the Author of Revelation views the Prophetess of Thyatira as his rival in the Christian communities of Asia Minor.⁸¹ However, in order to analyse the conflict between the Son of Man and the Woman Jezebel, it is misleading and confusing to fail to distinguish between the voice of the character John and the voice of the Author of Revelation.

2.5.1. The Voice and Viewpoint of the Author of the Book of Revelation

In the Letter to the Seven Churches, it is the Son of Man, not John, who condemns “evil men,” especially “those who say that they are Apostles but are not” (Rev 2:2), the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6), “those who say that they are Jews but are not” (Rev 2:9; 3:9), those who hold the teaching of Balaam (Rev 2:14), those who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:15), Jezebel, her disciples and those who hold the teaching of “the deep things of Satan” (Rev 2:20-24), those in Sardis who are guilty of imperfect “works” (Rev 3:1b-2) and the “lukewarm” members of the Church in Laodicea (Rev 3:15-16). Thus the Author’s viewpoint is presented, not through the character of John, but through the character of the Son of Man. Those who are in conflict, both with the Son of Man and with those belonging to the Seven Churches who share the “Son of Man’s viewpoint, are in reality the enemies of the Author of the Book of Revelation.⁸²

⁸¹ Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling my Servants,” 75-6.

⁸² The consequences of the presentation of the Author’s enmity as being that of the Son of Man will unfold throughout this study.

2.5.2. *The “Divine” Narrative Voice of the Book of Revelation*

It was noted above (§2.4.3; 2.4.4) that the Author of Revelation presents his book as a story. As Bach points out, “[e]very story needs a storyteller,” and “storytellers are by definition biased.”⁸³ Throughout his story the Author of Revelation is doing his utmost to seduce the reader into sharing his bias. By placing himself in the story under the name “John,” he is able to present his story as the “true” account of what happened. In the Letter to the Seven Churches, the Author’s voice is *apparently* presented as that of “John,” but is *in reality* that of the “Son of Man.”⁸⁴ The Author thus invests both his narrative and his voice with divine authority. The feminist reader must resist the wiles of this seductive author, and be alert to those voices in Revelation which compete for attention with his, and which provide alternative readings of characters and the nature of beliefs and practices in the early churches.⁸⁵

2.5.3. *The Male Narrative Voice of the Book of Revelation and the Non-Ideal Reader*

Although Bach writes about the Hebrew Bible, her insights are valuable for a feminist reading of the Book of Revelation. She points out that the male narrator of a biblical text “controls the power to define both female and male characters.” He is “the prophet of prophets.” His “authority is secondary only to that of the deity, to whom he is scribe. The ultimate evidence of his omniscience is that he is privy to God’s feelings.”⁸⁶ If one understands the viewpoint of the voice narrating the story not as the “correct” one, equating to that of God, that voice becomes just “one of several possible voices directed to the narratee.”⁸⁷

Comment

Of particular importance for a feminist critic is to highlight the portrayal of women made by a male narrator.⁸⁸ A man’s interpretations of a woman’s actions are necessarily voiced in male terms, from a man’s point of view and from a man’s understanding of human interaction. He articulates the woman’s motives and intentions in terms which would not

⁸³ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 13.

⁸⁴ Aune considers that Rev 1:9-20 is one of two “call narratives” in Revelation (cf. Rev 10:8-11:2). These “call narratives” function to present the Author as “a receiver and transmitter of revelatory visions” and demonstrate that one of his “primary objectives was to secure the complete acceptance of his apocalyptic letter as a revelation of Jesus Christ.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 179-80.

⁸⁵ See Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 15 and 17.

⁸⁶ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 18.

⁸⁷ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 19.

⁸⁸ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 24.

necessarily be used by the woman herself. In the case of Jezebel, not only is the reader presented with an account of her actions as actions of which the Author, and by extrapolation God, disapproves, but also with a description of those actions as understood by a man. Part of the aim of this study is to search for and to attempt to reconstruct the actions of this woman in language which she might herself have used; in other words to allow her to speak for herself.⁸⁹

However, a particular difficulty presents itself to one who wishes to make a painstaking and reconstructive interpretation of Jezebel's voice and viewpoint, namely that "the Woman Jezebel" is both a historical person and a character in the story.

2.6. The Difficulty Inherent in the Analysis of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel: A Historical Person and a Character in the Story

Whilst it is agreed by scholars that she was a "real" woman who lived in a particular socio-historic situation, "Jezebel" is also a character in the Book of Revelation, defined not by her physical description or in relation to male relatives, but by means of literary allusion to, amongst others, Queen Jizebul of Israel, and as one in a long line of "strange" biblical women. In this, she may be said almost to personify the ambiguity inherent throughout Revelation.⁹⁰ The Son of God, meanwhile, is one of the self-presentations of the Son of Man, the creation of the Author and the angelic representative of his teaching about the risen and exalted Christ. The reader is presented with the Author of Revelation's assessment of Jezebel's teaching, motivations and actions, put into the mouth of the Son of Man.

⁸⁹ See Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 24-25.

⁹⁰ According to Schüssler Fiorenza, "Biblical scholars generally hold that the author of Rev. used the apocalyptic genre to depict the religious and political struggles of the churches in Asia Minor at the end of the first century." She considers that "three different aspects" are accentuated by those who make such an interpretation. Firstly, in terms of genre, Revelation is an expression of Jewish apocalyptic whilst simultaneously expressing Christian theology. Secondly, Revelation reflects the particular "politico-religious" situation experienced by Christians living in Asia Minor during the rule of the Emperor Domitian. Thirdly, Revelation as a whole is the polemical expression of its author's view of his dispute with those Christians, whom he calls "Nicolaitans," who hold different beliefs to his. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 114.

2.6.1. *The One-Sided Argument of the Message to Thyatira: The View of the Male Author of the Book of Revelation*

The message to Thyatira provides certain information about a historical woman living in the Asian city of Thyatira in the late first-century C.E. and the situation of conflict which exists between her and the Author of the Book of Revelation. However, instead of setting out the details of his argument with the Prophetess of Thyatira, the Author of Revelation presents only his side of the argument, which is put into the mouth of the Son of Man, the fictitious author of the seven messages, who is depicted as the Son of God, the other major character in the message to Thyatira and the enemy of the character “Jezebel.” The viewpoint of the Prophetess of Thyatira is not even suggested, let alone made explicit. It is the aim of this study, therefore, to reconstruct the message to Thyatira from the point of view of the Prophetess of Thyatira.⁹¹

2.6.2. *The Importance of Interpreting the Character of Jezebel Both as a Historical Person and as a Character in the Story*

In order fully to analyse the presentation of “Jezebel” and to present an alternative picture of this Christian woman to that depicted by the Author of Revelation through his hostile use of literary allusion, it is necessary to understand her both as a historical person and as a character in the story. If the Prophetess is interpreted solely as a historical person, in comparison, for example, with the women prophets of the First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:1-40) or with the prophesying sisters of Caesarea (Acts 21:8-9), the use of literary allusion in her description is redundant and important aspects of her character and situation are lost. If, on the other hand, Jezebel is interpreted solely as a character in the story, through literary allusion and in comparison with other “women”

⁹¹ In this aim, this study seeks to emulate the reconstruction of 1 Corinthians from the point of view of the Corinthian women prophets made by Wire. She approaches 1 Corinthians with the aim of painting a portrait of the Corinthian women prophets who are among those to whom Paul addresses his rhetoric of persuasion. She points out that 1 Corinthians is one side of an on-going argument with the Corinthians, at least some of whom must have been women. Only Paul’s side of the argument is inscribed in the letter; however, the views of those with whom he is in most disagreement may be reconstructed, since it is these very people whom he is trying hardest to persuade to come round to his way of thinking. Their points of view may be accessed especially through Paul’s most intensive arguments. Wire considers that the women prophets must have had a role in the situation which so irked Paul. She therefore sifts through 1 Corinthians “to determine what place these women have in the developing event of persuasion that is 1 Corinthians and whatever light this sheds on themselves, testing both by their adequacy in helping to provide an account of Paul’s argument.” Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul’s Rhetoric* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1990), 8-9.

in Revelation, it is impossible to compare her with historical women, and the historical situation which contributes to her definition and self-identification must be ignored.

Therefore, since the Author of Revelation has incorporated a “real” woman into his story, it is necessary and desirable to interpret the Prophetess both as a historical person and as a character in Revelation. It is thus possible to compare her with other historical women and at the same time to enrich the depiction of her character, actions and religious beliefs through a feminist re-interpretation of the literary allusions with which the Author of Revelation describes her.

Conclusions

In the Letter to the Seven Churches the Author of Revelation splits his own personality between the characters of “John” and of the “Son of Man.” John is designated as Christ’s slave (Rev 1:1) and scribe (Rev 1:19). This designation equates to the self-understanding of the Author of Revelation. The characters of “the Woman Jezebel” and of her followers are condemned by the Son of Man (Rev 2:20-23). This condemnation equates to the animosity felt by the Author of Revelation for this woman and her followers. From the very beginning of the Book of Revelation its Author invests his views of the world, of Graeco-Roman society, of Jesus, of God, of his fellow Christians and of women, with Christ’s authority (Rev 1:1-2), and presents them as a divine revelation. The character of “John,” meanwhile, although presented as a human being, is not equivalent to the Author of Revelation, but is simply a character in the story. He can therefore be analysed in relation to the characters both of the “Son of Man” and of “the Woman Jezebel.”

For an analysis of the conflict depicted in the message to Thyatira, the presentation of Jezebel poses a particular difficulty, since she is the opponent of the Son of God. This male character is of a completely different type to that of Jezebel. While she is both a historical person and a female human character in the story, he is a male character in the story, a supernatural angelic figure with divine powers, the creation of the Author of Revelation. It is the unlikely interaction of these two characters which comprises the greater part of the message to Thyatira.

This conflict is many-layered. It is presented as being between “the Woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess,” and “the Son of God.” However, the words describing the conflict are spoken by the “Son of Man.” This character is seen and described by the character “John,” who tells the reader that he is writing down the words of the “Son of Man,” as instructed by him. Yet “John” and his self-description are made

by the Author of the Book of Revelation as a whole. Meanwhile, “the Woman Jezebel” is not allowed to speak; even her self-description is made in reported speech. It is easier to understand this multi-layered and multi-voiced conflict as follows:

The Book of Revelation is written by:

The Author, who describes himself as:

John, who sees, hears and transcribes the words of:

The Son of Man, who describes himself as:

The Son of God, who describes his rival as:

The Woman Jezebel, who, he says, describes herself as:

A Prophetess, who is, however, silenced by:

The Author of the Book of Revelation.

The Author of Revelation has taken a “real,” historical woman and put her in a story peopled by fantastical characters. There are also brief mentions of a few other historical people in the seven messages: those who claim to be Apostles but are not (Rev 2:2); the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15); those who say that they are Jews but are not (Rev 2:9; 3:9); Antipas (Rev 2:13); those who hold the teaching of Balaam, and possibly Balaam himself (Rev 2:14); and those who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:15). Thus, there is no reason why the Prophetess of Thyatira should not be compared and contrasted with other “real” people and her situation with theirs. These people may be described in the Book of Revelation (for example, the Nicolaitans), or in other texts (for example, the Women Prophets of Corinth). Nor is there any reason why the Prophetess should not be compared and contrasted with those characters to whom allusions are made in her description, remembering that literary allusions replace her physical or biographical details. These characters may be in the Book of Revelation (for example, the Woman Babylon, Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:1-19:4), or in other texts (for example, Queen Jezebel of 1 and 2 Kings and the Strange Woman of Proverbs).

In its discussion of the Prophetess both as a “real” woman and as a created character in the story, this thesis differs from other analyses only in its method of interpretation of the information given about her. Whatever the aim of an interpretation of the Prophetess, she has to be interpreted in both ways: by comparison with “real” people and by comparison with created characters. Like other biblical writers, for the Author of Revelation his original ideal reader is no doubt male;⁹² or a woman in whom

⁹² Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 128.

patriarchal ideology has engendered the inability to read “as a woman.”⁹³ He, or possibly she, may be relied upon to react to and to interpret the characters, both male and female, as guided by the seductive Author.⁹⁴ However, for the non-ideal reader of Revelation, and perhaps particularly for a feminist reader, the characters in the Letter to the Seven Churches are out of the Author’s control.⁹⁵ The multivalent literary allusions employed by the Author enable those characters, with the help of the interpretive reader, to conspire to gain independence from the Author’s “narrative rhetoric,” and even from the text.⁹⁶ It is necessary for the feminist interpreter to read “as a woman,” to be what Judith Fetterley calls “a resisting rather than an assenting reader” and to aid and abet them in that conspiracy as much as possible.⁹⁷ To that end, it is important to analyse the conflict between “the Son of Man” and “the Woman Jezebel” from all angles: socio-historical, literary and gender; in relation to other conflicts in the message to Thyatira; in relation to conflicts in the other six messages; in relation to gendered conflicts throughout the Book of Revelation; and in relation to other relevant gendered literary-historical conflicts, pagan, Jewish and Christian.

This study aims to rectify unjustified readings of Jezebel as an unscrupulous woman who was in league with evil and demonic forces. In order to do this, Jezebel’s description is not analysed in isolation. Instead, her description is briefly compared with the descriptions of the other women of Revelation (the Woman of Chapter 12, the Woman Babylon and the Bride of the Lamb) and often contrasted with the description of the character “John.” It is in contrast with the description of the other character depicted in the message to Thyatira, the male Son of Man (Rev 1:13-3:22), in his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:18-29), however, that the major contrast and comparison of the description of Jezebel is made.

⁹³ Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 49. Schüssler Fiorenza considers that Revelation’s original audience included women. Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 223.

⁹⁴ Barr considers that the Author of Revelation deliberately links the “three interrelated, inter-acting stories” of Revelation through echoes of “characters, actions, and mythic paradigms.” He continues: “These echoes allow the author to *guide our reading* of each story so that it is read in the light of the others.” Barr, “The Story John Told,” 23 (my emphasis).

⁹⁵ Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 25.

⁹⁶ Moore notes the example of the doomed unrepentant (Rev 9:20-21), who display more courage than the redeemed martyrs. Moore continues: “at which point John’s narrative rhetoric begins to elude his control and conspire behind his back.” Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 277, Footnote 76.

⁹⁷ Judith Fetterley states: “Clearly, then, the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us.” Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), xxii; cf. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, 52-53.

With these aims in mind, the remainder of this study is divided as follows. Chapter 3 contextualises the conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of Revelation in its socio-historical situation. Chapters 4 and 5 respectively address the presentations of the Son of Man and of the Woman Jezebel in their socio-historical and literary settings. Finally, Chapter 6 contextualises the presentation of the Son of God's attack upon the Woman Jezebel in its literary and socio-historical settings. The Conclusion then reconstructs the conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of Revelation from a feminist comparative literary perspective.

Therefore, the first step towards this feminist reconstruction of the conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of Revelation, presented as the conflict between the Woman Jezebel and the Son of Man, is its contextualisation in its socio-historical situation, the Asian city of Thyatira towards the end of the first century C.E. This is undertaken in Chapter 3: The Thyatiran Background to the Conflict.

CHAPTER 3

THE THYATIRAN BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

Contextualisation of the Conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of Revelation in Its Socio-Historical Setting

The strife-riven message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) contains descriptions of five situations of conflict all of which are centred upon the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:20-24).¹ As well as being a character in the Book of Revelation, the woman whom the Author of Revelation calls “Jezebel” was a historical woman living in first-century C.E. Thyatira in “northern Lydia.”² Thyatira’s fame as a city of merchants and its plethora of blocks of streets, each dedicated to a different trade, may have owed something to its turbulent history. Set in “a broad vale bordered by gently rising hills,” on a route between several larger and more important cities, Thyatira was vulnerable to foreign armies, yet at the same time useful as a garrison. From the provisions made for the ever-changing troops who were stationed there, emerged Thyatira’s unusually large number of trade guilds. For with the establishment of Roman colonial rule, its position, which had in the past made it vulnerable to attack by marauding armies, suddenly became an asset. Since the city was situated at the crossing of several trade routes, it was viewed as “an ideal manufacturing and marketing centre.”³ Its guilds included “associations of clothiers, bakers, tanners, potters, linen workers, wool merchants, slave traders, shoemakers, dyers, and copper smiths.”⁴

¹ The five situations of conflict in the message to Thyatira are: (1) the difference of opinion of Jezebel between the Son of Man and the Angel of the Church (Rev 2:18); (2) the Son of God’s attack upon the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:20-22); (3) the Son of Man’s threatened attack upon Jezebel’s followers (Rev 2:22); (4) the Son of God’s murder of Jezebel’s “children” (Rev 2:23); and (5) the Son of Man’s judgement of those who hold Jezebel’s teaching (Rev 2:23). It may be noted that there appears to be no friction between those who hold Jezebel’s teaching and those who do not (Rev 2:24). The message to Ephesus contains four situations of conflict: between (1) the Son of Man and the Angel of the Church (Rev 2:4); (2) the Angel and “evildoers” (Rev 2:2); (3) the Angel and “false” apostles (Rev 2:2); and (4) the Son of Man, together with the Angel, and the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6). The message to Smyrna contains a situation of conflict between the Angel and “those who say that they are Jews, and are not” (Rev 2:9). The message to Pergamum contains two situations of conflict between: (1) Antipas and his unknown murderer(s) (Rev 2:13); and (2) the Son of Man and the Angel over his toleration of those who hold the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14-16). The message to Sardis contains a situation of conflict between the Son of Man and the Angel (Rev 3:1-3). The message to Philadelphia contains a situation of conflict between the Angel and “those who say that they are Jews, and are not” (Rev 3:9). The message to Laodicea does not contain a situation of conflict, but the Son of Man is sickened by the Angel’s indifference to him (Rev 3:15-16).

² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 201, 213.

³ Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 106-109.

⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 201.

Thus, at the time of Revelation's composition, the city of Thyatira was beginning to grow into the thriving, bustling and ethnically-mixed city which it would become during the second century C.E. and whose economic expansion would continue into the third century C.E. Its Christian church was likewise expanding. Its actual and prospective converts were a mixture of nationalities, including Persians and Egyptians, speaking various different languages.⁵ This ethnic mix was reflected in the inevitable syncretism of religious beliefs and in the name of the city's god; originally the sun god Tyrinnus, he came to rejoice in the name of "Helius Pythius Tyrinnaeus Apollo."⁶

Therefore, in order to discover the historical Thyatiran background behind, and any clues which it might provide to causes of, the situations of conflict portrayed in the message to Thyatira, this chapter is divided as follows: firstly, consideration is given to possible causes of the conflict centred upon the society to which Jezebel and the Author of Revelation belonged and their different attitudes to that society (§3.1); secondly, attention is given to the possibility of Jezebel's female gender being a cause of the conflict (§3.2); thirdly, a comparison is made between the Angel of the Church in Thyatira's "toleration" of the Prophetess and the Church in Corinth's "toleration" of a man accused of "sexual immorality" (Rev 2:20; cf. 1 Cor 5:1-3; §3.3); fourthly, situations of conflict in the Churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Smyrna and Philadelphia are considered in relation to the situations of conflict in Thyatira (§3.4); and finally, discussion is made of the evidence for two competing prophetic schools in the Seven Churches in Asia (§3.5).

In order to begin this analysis, therefore, attention focusses upon the society and culture in which the Prophetess and the Author of Revelation lived.

3.1. Trade, Pagan Worship, Status and Magic: Possible Causes of the Conflict between the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Author of the Book of Revelation

There are four possible causes of the conflict which, it may be seen from the message to Thyatira, existed between the Prophetess and the Author of Revelation. These are centred upon: (1) the membership by Christians of trade guilds and possible participation in pagan worship; (2) participation by Christians in the emperor cult; (3) the relative socio-

⁵ Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 109-11.

⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 201; Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 110-11.

economic status of the Author of Revelation and the Prophetess; and (4) the Author's belief in magic. All four possible causes have their roots in what Yarbro Collins describes as "two different perspectives on the relation between faith and culture" held by different Christians.⁷ These two perspectives resulted in two divergent responses by Christians to their socio-historical situation. Some embraced the culture in which they lived;⁸ others, like the Author of Revelation, responded with a call "toward even greater exclusiveness."⁹ To a certain extent there may also have been a difference in the perception of social realities by the rich and the poor, regardless of their religious affiliations.¹⁰ The Book of Revelation, including the messages to the Seven Churches, reflects the Author's "particular religious view of reality" and his resulting interpretation of the socio-historical situation in which he found himself.¹¹

Yarbro Collins argues that the Book of Revelation was written in response not to an actual external threat, but to a perceived situation of crisis caused by the circumstances in which the Author and other Christians were living. Like the rest of the book, therefore, the message to Thyatira reflects the Author's perception of the socio-historical situation in which the Christians of Asia Minor found themselves.¹² It also reflects the Author's appraisal of the Prophetess's reaction to the same situation. Her own understanding of the situation is not provided. That there was a situation of "crisis and trauma" in Thyatira at all is only attested by the Author, for whom there was an unresolvable conflict between his "vision of the kingdom of God and his environment."¹³

3.1.1. A Possible Cause of the Conflict: (1) Membership of Trade Guilds and Participation in their Attendant Pagan Worship

The first possible cause of the conflict between the Author and the Prophetess is centred upon the participation by Christians in social situations in which meat was sacrificed to a pagan deity. This is reflected in the accusation that the Prophetess was "beguiling" other Christians into the practice of *πορνεία* ("sexual immorality") and eating

⁷ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 87.

⁸ Yarbro Collins considers that Asian Christians were widely distrusted by their Gentile and Jewish neighbours. Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 98. Thompson, however, argues that most Christians in Asia "lived peacefully with their neighbors [*sic*] in the Roman political order. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 172.

⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 88.

¹⁰ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 88-9.

¹¹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 106-107.

¹² Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 165.

¹³ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 106.

εἰδωλόθυτα (“food sacrificed to idols,” Rev 2:20). Leonard L. Thompson considers that, while “sexual immorality” should be understood as a metaphor for “idolatry,” the accusation of eating “food sacrificed to idols” should be understood literally.¹⁴ However, these activities may also be interpreted in a broader sense to refer to membership of trade guilds with their attendant cultic rites.¹⁵ Indeed, Gregory K. Beale considers that the πορνεία of which the Prophetess is accused is “a metaphor for economic dealings involving trades that had numerous guilds throughout Asia Minor (cf. 18:3, 11-22), some known to have been in Thyatira.”¹⁶

Scholars have called attention to the link between the conflicts described in the message to Thyatira and the tension caused between those Christians who embraced the social and economic lifestyle of the merchant class of Thyatira and those who rejected trade as part of Roman cultural ideology. According to this analysis, Christians living in first-century Asia Minor faced a stark choice. They could thrive socially and economically, through membership of trade guilds, attending cultic pagan rites associated with these guilds and compromising their monotheistic beliefs. Otherwise they were obliged to live as social outcasts in poverty but with their religious scruples intact.¹⁷ However, Isbon T. Beckwith points out that there is no indication in the message to Thyatira that membership of trade guilds played a part in the conflict between Jezebel and the Author of Revelation.¹⁸

3.1.2. A Possible Cause of the Conflict: (2) Participation in the Emperor Cult

The second possible cause of the conflict was the participation of some Christians in the Emperor cult. The accusation made against Jezebel that she leads other astray into the

¹⁴ Thompson notes that, in the accusation that Jezebel both practises and colludes in the practice of “sexual immorality,” is an allusion to the story of the Israelite men who are invited to take part in idolatrous worship by the Moabite women, with whom they enter into illicit sexual relationships (Num 25:1-2). This idolatry consisted in eating sacrificial food and bowing down to pagan gods. Thompson considers that: “This close link between the two activities is kept in the indictments in the Book of Revelation” and the “sexual immorality” in the message to Thyatira should probably be understood metaphorically to mean committing idolatry, rather than literally, although “both meanings could of course be applicable.” Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 122 and endnote 23, 227.

¹⁵ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 87-88.

¹⁶ Gregory K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 262.

¹⁷ For example: Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261; Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 48-55; Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 123.

¹⁸ Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1967, c. 1919), 465. Exactly what the Author may have meant by causing the Son of Man to accuse Jezebel of leading others into the practices of πορνεία and of eating εἰδωλόθυτα is discussed in §5.3.

eating of sacrificial meat may also be interpreted as her toleration of her followers' periodic participation in worship of the Emperor, whose cult was particularly popular in Asia Minor.¹⁹ Hemer considers that those Christians who refused to take part in the imperial cult faced "commercial ruin."²⁰ Aune, however, disagrees, and states that neither Jews nor Christians were the victims of "economic sanctions."²¹ Similarly, Yarbro Collins does not consider there to be any evidence that Christians were either persecuted or forced to participate in the imperial cult under Domitian.²² Thompson is adamant that, far from being viewed as "a cruel tyrant" who demanded worship, Domitian was regarded in the provinces as "a benevolent emperor towards Jews and Christians alike."²³

3.1.3. *A Possible Cause of the Conflict: (3) The Difference in Socio-Economic Status between the Prophetess and the Author of Revelation*

The third possible cause of the conflict is the putative and relative wealth of Jezebel in comparison with the putative and relative poverty of the Author of Revelation.²⁴ If Jezebel were wealthy she would have had an advantage in terms of influence in the church. Moreover, as pointed out by Yarbro Collins, possession or lack of wealth would have contributed to the different social positions of Jezebel and the Author and to their accompanying "attitudes toward wealth" itself. In Asia Minor at the time of the writing of Revelation, boundaries were drawn not just between Christians who rejected Roman hegemony and those who were at ease in Graeco-Roman culture, but also between rich and poor, whatever their religious and cultural affiliations. Jezebel's social position may well have contributed to her attitude to "sexual immorality" and eating "food sacrificed to idols."²⁵ Yarbro Collins also suggests that some members of the Thyatiran Church were "mixing socially with influential local non-Christians" with a view to bettering

¹⁹ Aune notes: "The standard accusation raised against Christians was that they did not sacrifice to the emperor." David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 778. Beale states: "Revelation presupposes that Christians were being required to participate to some degree in the imperial cult (e.g. 13:4-8, 15-16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4)." Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 5. Yarbro Collins says: "The imperial cult was enthusiastically supported in Asia Minor, often beyond the expectations of the Roman authorities, and sometimes even in conflict with their sensibilities." Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 101.

²⁰ These Christians may be compared with those who are unable to buy or to sell in Rev 13:17. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 126-27.

²¹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 768.

²² Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 77.

²³ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 171-72. Jezebel's possible association with the imperial cult is discussed in full in §5.9.2.

²⁴ Duff states that "it is likely that the factionalism in the churches is related to the wealth/poverty issue." Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 47.

²⁵ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 88-89.

themselves financially. This socialising would have necessitated these Christians adopting the appearance at least of condoning “a certain religious syncretism.”²⁶ Thompson notes that Asian Christians were by no means all poor. Leaders, on the contrary, must have been relatively wealthy in order to be able to travel and to possess houses in which churches could meet and travelling missionaries could rest.²⁷ Moreover, those Christians of higher socio-economic status would have had “economic or civic responsibilities” and would have had opportunities to dine at private banquets. These occasions would have been denied to the poor, including other Christians, whose only opportunities for eating meat would have been on public feast days.²⁸

As both a prophetess and teacher (see Rev 2:20), Jezebel of Thyatira took a public role in the church. Ross Shepard Kraemer notes that it was not uncommon for the women of wealthy families to be seen in public in roles connected with the underwriting of public buildings and entertainments and occasionally in connection with charitable activities. This relative freedom also served to distinguish them, and their menfolk, from poorer members of society.²⁹ It is possible that Jezebel held her position of authority in the church less because of its ethos of gender equality than because her family had influence and money, and one of the conditions for making these available to the church was that she should advertise her family’s generosity and resources by having a prominent public position. As pointed out by Kraemer, in the Graeco-Roman world as elsewhere, “wealth and social class qualified the restraints that gender generally imposed on women.”³⁰ It is also quite possible that Jezebel possessed a house, which would have enabled her to be “a patroness or hostess of one of the house churches” of which the Thyatiran church was comprised.³¹

On the other hand, Duff points out that some Christians in Thyatira, and elsewhere, were probably merchants and craftsmen who had either been slaves themselves, or were the recent descendants of slaves. Thus, while they could not expect to be accepted by the higher ranks of society, they enjoyed a certain amount of status,

²⁶ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 132.

²⁷ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 172.

²⁸ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 122-23, with reference to Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Early Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. and with an introduction by John H. Schütz (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 127-32.

²⁹ Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women’s Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 87-88.

³⁰ Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 88.

³¹ Aune considers it possible that Jezebel was just such a “patroness” or “hostess.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 203.

and a reasonably comfortable standard of living. In relation to the not insignificant number of Christians who scraped a living doing menial work or were even destitute, both as a result of refusing to be assimilated into a society whose mores and religious rites and beliefs were repugnant to them, a person with a job which enabled them to provide him or herself and his or her dependants with food, clothing and lodging, would have seemed unimaginably wealthy.³² It is just as likely that Jezebel's relative "wealth" was as a result of her employment in Thyatira's famous clothing trade (see Acts 16:14) as of her putative family's affluence.³³ Notably, Jezebel is not described in relation to a father; if she had a father who enjoyed a position of high status in Thyatiran society, no doubt the hostile Author of Revelation would have pounced upon this as another means of denigrating her, and included it in the description of her.³⁴ In the message to Thyatira, moreover, the relative wealth or poverty of the members of the Christian community, including Jezebel, is not an issue for the Author of Revelation, as it is in the messages to Smyrna (Rev 2:9) and to Laodicea (Rev 3:17) and possibly in the message to Philadelphia (Rev 3:8).³⁵

3.1.4. *A Possible Cause of the Conflict: (4) The Author of Revelation's Belief in Magic*

The fourth possible cause of the conflict may well have been the Author of Revelation's belief in the power of magic. That he had knowledge of magical incantations and of the various accoutrements associated with magic is evident from the text.³⁶ Moreover, the Author is associated by tradition with the city of Ephesus.³⁷ Although magic was widespread throughout Asia Minor, Clinton E. Arnold points out that Ephesus, the region's major city, had a particular reputation for harbouring magicians, whose main preoccupation was "the acquisition of supernatural powers and the manipulation of the spirit world."³⁸ In Rev 1:9 John declares that he is writing from the Island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). If the Author had been relegated there, it may well have been because he was

³² Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 24-30.

³³ Jezebel's socio-economic status is discussed in §5.4.1.

³⁴ Cf. the Prophetess Anna, who is described in relation to her father and his tribe (Lk 2:36). Jezebel's presentation in comparison with that of Anna is analysed in §5.12.1.

³⁵ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 41-47.

³⁶ Rodney Lawrence Thomas states: "It is of note that the author of Revelation seems unequivocally opposed to φαρμακεία, and yet, he seems to embrace concepts and terms commonly associated with magic." Rodney Lawrence Thomas, *Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2010), 2-3. This is a subject to which this study returns in Chapter 5.

³⁷ Yarbrow Collins, "Revelation," 702.

³⁸ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians in Light of its Historical Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14, 20.

perceived by the local authorities to be a practitioner of magic.³⁹ A world view such as his, which included the belief that the world is peopled not only by human beings and animals but also by angels, demons and the spirits of the dead, presupposes the ability of certain human beings to be able to control those same demons and human spirits by means of occult practices.⁴⁰ Moreover, the Book of Revelation is littered with “magical motifs” which betray his intimate knowledge of magical practices.⁴¹

At the same time, however, the text demonstrates that the Author has an extremely negative attitude to magic and magical spells (φάρμακα, Rev 9:21), the practice of magic (φαρμακεία, Rev 18:23) and its practitioners (φάρμακοι, Rev 21:8; 22:15) are all roundly condemned.⁴² This ambivalence is reflected in other New Testament texts, where the presentation of practitioners of magic (μάγοι) as positive or negative characters is dependent upon their faith or lack of it (Mt 2:1-2, 7, 16; cf. Acts 13:6-11).⁴³ Paul’s Letter to the Galatians contains a “vice list” similar to those found in Revelation (Rev 21:8; 22:15), and which includes φαρμακεία (Gal 5:19). The difference is that in Galatians Paul condemns magic (φαρμακεία, Gal 5:20) as one of “the acts of the flesh” (τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, Gal 5:19), whilst the Author of Revelation condemns the magicians themselves (φάρμακοι, Rev 21:8; 22:15). One of the accusations made against Queen Jizebul was that she practised magical spells or “sorceries” (הַכַּשְׁפִּיּוֹת, 2 Kgs 9:22); by association Jezebel is tarred with the same brush. Moreover, it is said of Jezebel of Thyatira that she leads astray (πλανᾷ), which may be interpreted to mean that she uses magic.⁴⁴

As pointed out by Aune, magic and religion and their goals have much in common, and the boundaries between what is perceived to be acceptable or unacceptable

³⁹ Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 102. Aune notes that the practice of magic was condemned by the Roman authorities “on social rather than religious grounds.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, 379.

⁴⁰ Thomas states that, as “a man of his own times,” who was located in “a world immersed in themes and images that are derived from the realm of spiritual forces,” the Author of Revelation “has a view of these forces that is in keeping with that of much of his audience.” Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 1. See also Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), 4-5.

⁴¹ Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 194.

⁴² In Revelation the practice of any of these vices leads to being barred from entry into the kingdom of heaven (Gal 5:19-21), torment in the lake which burns with fire and sulphur (Rev 21:8) or being left outside the Heavenly City (Rev 22:15).

⁴³ See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 380.

⁴⁴ Smith points out that Jesus was accused of being “one who leads astray” (ὁ πλάνος) in connection with his resurrection (Mt 27:63) and of being not a “good” man, but one who leads the crowd astray (οἱ μὲν ἔλεγον ὅτι ἀγαθός ἐστιν, ἄλλοι [δὲ] ἔλεγον· οὐ, ἀλλὰ πλανᾷ τὸν ὄχλον, Jn 7:12). This has been interpreted to mean that his enemies understood him to be a magician. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 33.

is often difficult to distinguish.⁴⁵ Aune contends that it is a mistake to assume that magic was in some way a competitor with the various religious practices of the Roman Empire; on the contrary, it was a widespread “substructure” among them. Neither Judaism nor Christianity was immune to this “substructure” and “early Christianity, which already had a heritage of ‘Jewish magic,’ rapidly developed a distinctive form of magic which cohered with its reality construction.”⁴⁶ In attempts to refute accusations that they were guilty of “sorcery,” Christian writers like the Author of Revelation may have unintentionally revealed “the contours of Christian magic.”⁴⁷ In the same way, in attempting subtly to accuse Jezebel of practising magic, the Author of Revelation has revealed his own knowledge of magical practices.

Comment

The Author of Revelation accuses the Prophetess of Thyatira of encouraging others to eat “food sacrificed to idols” and to follow her own example of indulging in “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:20). These accusations have been interpreted to mean that she both participated in and tolerated others participating in cultic pagan rites. These are more likely to have been associated with meetings of trade guilds than in the context of the imperial cult. It appears that there was little pressure upon Christians to conform to the social norms of their pagan neighbours both for economic and social reasons or even to escape persecution. It is more likely that relative wealth and social responsibilities would have been factors in Jezebel’s putative participation in occasions involving sacrifices to pagan gods. However, as pointed out by Aune, such accusations as the Author makes against Jezebel were “stock slander” employed by a person wishing to bring disrepute upon a rival.⁴⁸ There is no reason to deduce from a rival’s invective that this Christian woman regarded pagan cultic rites with any less contempt than did the Author of Revelation.⁴⁹ As shown by Aune, Thompson and Yarbro Collins, moreover, these accusations are rooted in the world view of the Author and in his perception of the socio-historical situation in which he and other Christians found themselves. This world view

⁴⁵ Aune considers that: “The goals of Graeco-Roman magic [...] may be characterized as providing protection, healing, success and knowledge for magical practitioners and their clients, and harm for their opponents.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 379.

⁴⁶ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 380-81.

⁴⁷ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 381-82.

⁴⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 204.

⁴⁹ Beavis says: “Much to John’s disgust (and perhaps to hers), his female prophetic rival might also have recognized as disguised goddesses the larger-than-life female figures that erupt out of the prophet’s visionary experience.” Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks”, 132.

embraced both his understanding of what it meant to be a Christian and a belief in supernatural beings over which it was possible for human beings to exert control through the use of magic. It seems probable that the Author of Revelation and the Prophetess of Thyatira belonged to different socio-economic classes and held correspondingly different views of reality, and that these contrasting views affected their different responses to the socio-historical situation in which they found themselves.

3.2. The “Woman ... Who Calls Herself a Prophetess” (Rev 2:20): Jezebel’s Gender as a Possible Cause of the Conflict

There can be no doubt that that the woman whom the Son of Man calls “Jezebel” was a historical person who believed, along with others, that she was a Christian prophetess.⁵⁰ Although it is only said of her by the Son of Man that she called herself a prophetess (ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν, Rev 2:20), and her actual words are not recorded, it is the strongest clue that the interpreter has to this woman’s self-identification, and one, moreover, which is not denied by her rival (cf. Rev 2:2, 9; 3:9). As rightly observed by Susan Sheridan, “where women’s silence and absence are the cultural norm, then any instance of women speaking for themselves, or being recorded as speaking for themselves, is an interruption or a disruption of prevailing patriarchal definitions.”⁵¹ Jezebel’s prophecy and teaching, and perhaps her gender, certainly appear to have caused, or been part of, the factionalism in the Christian communities of Asia Minor.⁵²

Marshall argues that it is only in the Letter to the Seven Churches that Revelation’s violence is portrayed as part of an insider conflict, and asks, “[W]hat can explain the bitterness of the condemnation and the intensity of the threat?”⁵³ He considers that two factors provide an answer to this question, and both are centred upon group identity. The first factor is the hybridity which characterises groups of colonised subjects

⁵⁰ With regard to Jezebel and the Nicolaitans, Aune states: “[...] their use of prophecy to legitimate accommodationism suggests that they also stood within some kind of definite prophetic or oracular tradition.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 188.

⁵¹ Susan Sheridan, “Feminist Knowledge, Women’s Liberation, and Women’s Studies,” in *Feminist Knowledge, Critique and Construct* (ed. Sneja Gunew; London: Routledge, 1990), 41. This observation is made in a discussion of the “hidden history” of women silenced by the prevailing culture. Sheridan, “Feminist Knowledge,” 39-41.

⁵² Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122.

⁵³ Marshall argues that the violence of the language used against Jezebel by the Son of Man should be understood within the context of an in-group conflict amongst members of the Jewish Diaspora at the time of the Jewish War. This in-group conflict was itself “collateral damage,” a local manifestation of the conflict between the Roman armed forces and the Jewish rebels, and reaches its pinnacle of hostility and violence in the conflict portrayed in the message to Thyatira. Marshall, “Collateral Damage,” 41.

and leads them both to reject the ideology of their oppressors and at the same time to be moulded by it. The second factor is the understanding that women are the representatives of the subaltern group's purity or otherwise. A woman's demeanour and actions are perceived to demonstrate both her own virtue and the boundaries of the group. A woman who is seen to be virtuous bears the message that the group to which she belongs has high standards of morality and purity, that is, it is uncontaminated by outsiders. At the same time she acts as a member of the group, keeping interaction with outsiders to an agreed limit. A woman who interacts freely with outsiders and is thus viewed as morally impure, on the other hand, signals that the boundaries of the group are porous or easily breached, and in her actions assists the assimilation of the group into the outside world.⁵⁴ Women are representatives of the group and come under more scrutiny than men because, as in any androcentric society, women are seen as "tokens of argumentation in a discourse written by and primarily for men with reference to the wider situation of colonial empire."⁵⁵ Marshall notes that it is no secret that the boundary of the subaltern Christian group is seen by the Author of Revelation to be breached by any of its members eating food sacrificed to pagan gods.⁵⁶ The Son of Man accuses Jezebel both of πορνεία and of leading other members of the group into the practice of πορνεία and the eating of εἰδωλόθυτα (Rev 2:20-21). She is both a member of the group and is threatening its identity. At the same time, as a woman, she is signalling to outsiders that the purity of the group has been, or may be, contaminated.⁵⁷

Marshall's analysis certainly offers a plausible interpretation of the mind-set of the Author regarding the historical Christian community in Thyatira whose identity, in his view, is under threat from the action of one of its members and representatives. Her gender is important because, as a woman, she both embodies and represents the boundaries of the group. However, as pointed out by Marshall himself, this analysis does not provide any clue as to how Jezebel understood either herself or her actions.⁵⁸

The Angel of the Church in Thyatira, meanwhile, is in an ambiguous relationship with the Son of Man. Just as Jezebel is both a "real" woman and a character in Revelation, the Angel may be understood both as a character in Revelation and a representative of

⁵⁴ Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 42-45.

⁵⁵ Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 45-46.

⁵⁶ Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 43.

⁵⁷ Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 45.

⁵⁸ Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 40. The Woman Jezebel is analysed as a socio-historical woman, in relation to the literary allusions in her portrayal by the Author and as a prophetess in Chapter 5.

the historic Christian community of Thyatira.⁵⁹ He is not in direct conflict with the Son of Man by whom he is praised for his virtues (Rev 2:19). At the same time, the Angel is berated by the Son of Man over his relationship with the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:20).

3.3. The Angel of the Church in Thyatira: Caught in the Conflict between the Son of Man and the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:19-20; cf. 1 Cor 5:1-5)

The Son of Man commends the Angel for his works, especially the later ones, of love, faith, service and patient endurance:

“I know your works, and your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and your last works are greater than the first” (Rev 2:19).

Aune notes that those who performed tasks classed as *διακονία* are described in terms ranging from “menial to privileged,” and the Angel of the Church is being commended for undertaking “the ministry of service” on behalf of the whole Thyatiran church.⁶⁰ It seems probable that Jezebel participates in this “ministry of service” in her positions as Prophetess and Teacher. However, the relationship between the Son of Man and the Angel of the Church in Thyatira is under strain because the Angel does not share the hatred of the Son of Man towards Jezebel. On the contrary, he has a relationship of trust with her. The Angel is criticised by the Son of Man for “tolerating” Jezebel and allowing her to occupy the position of Prophetess and to teach, and thus with her seductive speech to lead others astray, not only by allowing them to eat food sacrificed to idols, but also by encouraging them to follow her example of practising *πορνεία* (Rev 2:20-21).

The toleration by a Christian community of a member of the church who is accused of *πορνεία* by an outsider echoes a similar, earlier situation in Corinth. In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul writes to the Corinthian Christians to express his horror that the church in Corinth has not cast out from their midst a man who is in a sexual relationship with “his father’s wife;” for Paul, this is a case of “sexual immorality” (*πορνεία*, 1 Cor 5:1). Paul explains that this lapse in moral standards affects the

⁵⁹ The Angels of the Seven Churches are different from the angels who appear at regular intervals throughout the visionary section of the Book of Revelation. Each of these seven Angels is a representative of his relevant Christian community as a whole. However, as pointed out by Aune, further interpretation has proved difficult. The Angels have been interpreted variously as (1) supernatural beings who either have a special interest in each of the churches or represent the earth-bound communities; (2) human beings such as messengers, prophets or the bishops of the churches; and (3) stars and planets. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 108-12. For the purposes of this study, the Angels of the Churches are treated as individual characters, each of whom represents the views of the majority of the members of his community.

⁶⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 202.

community as a whole (1 Cor 5:6-7). He commands the Corinthians to drive out any “wicked person” from the community (1 Cor 5:13). He also commands the Corinthians to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18), and avers that any man who has sexual intercourse with a prostitute (1 Cor 6:16) involves in this sexual liaison not only his own body, but also the body of Christ, which he thus corrupts (1 Cor 6:15-18).⁶¹

In much the same way, the Author of Revelation appears to be accusing the Angel of the Church in Thyatira of putting his Christian community at risk by not expelling Jezebel, whom he accuses of “seducing” others into the practice of “sexual immorality” (πλανῶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους πορνεῦσαι, Rev 2:20), in which she herself also indulges (τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, Rev 2:21). Members of the community who follow her example or agree with her teachings are accused of committing adultery with her (Rev 2:22). In the eyes of the Author of Revelation, these instances of “sexual immorality,” carry the risk of polluting not only the Thyatiran community, but possibly all the churches that are in Asia (Rev 2:23).⁶² For the singling out by the Author of the no-doubt socially well-connected Jezebel for vilification indicates that she was one of the leaders, if not *the* leader, of the prophetic group to whom he refers as “the Nicolaitans” (cf. §3.5).⁶³ These people are “influential” members of the Church in Pergamum (Rev 2:15); they have also at some time been members of the Church in Ephesus, where they encountered a more hostile reaction to their views (Rev 2:6).⁶⁴

Antoinette Wire points out that, in the First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul stresses that “the blame [for “immoral conduct”] does not fall on the individuals who have strayed, but on the community that has not reacted appropriately” to their conduct.⁶⁵ In the message to Thyatira the situation is different. The Son of Man is angry with the Angel of the Church in Thyatira for his “toleration” of Jezebel (Rev 2:20). However, unlike

⁶¹ It is noticeable that, in the situation in Corinth, Paul is exercised by the “sexually immoral” activities of men and the actions which he urges the community to take to stem these proclivities. Although women are partners in these actual or putative instances of “sexual immorality” (1 Cor 5:1; 6:16), Paul neither condemns them nor demands their expulsion from the community as he does with respect to the men. This may be because they are not members of the Christian community, or because of women’s relative lack of influence over choice of their sexual partners, or it may be because many Christian women in Corinth were choosing celibacy over marriage (1 Cor 7:1-10). Paul urges such women to change their minds and marry or remain with their husbands for the sake of the community and in order to prevent more polluting instances of “sexual immorality” (1 Cor 7:11-16, 32-34). Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 72-79. The situation of conflict in Corinth is discussed further in relation to the presentation of the conflict between the Son of Man and Jezebel in §6.2.

⁶² The nature of πορνεία is discussed in greater depth in §5.3.

⁶³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 213-14.

⁶⁴ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 187.

⁶⁵ Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 76.

Paul (1 Cor 5:5, 13), the Author of Revelation does not demand that his “leading individual example of immorality in the community” be expelled from the church.⁶⁶ Instead, he describes the violent expression of the Son of Man’s wrath falling directly upon those who are, in his eyes, guilty of “sexual immorality,” that is, the Woman Jezebel, her followers and her disciples (Rev 2:22-23).

There can be no doubt that, as noted by Aune, the messages to the Seven Churches “reveal conflict between competing authorities with Christian congregations.”⁶⁷ In the message to Thyatira the main conflict is between the Son of Man and the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:20-22); his conflicts with the Angel of the Church over his “toleration” of her behaviour and teaching (Rev 2:19-20) and with her followers and disciples (Rev 2:22-23) are corollaries of this main conflict. A brief survey of some of the conflicts in which either the Angel of the Church and/or the Son of Man is involved in the messages to the other six churches provides useful information both about the differences of opinion between the Author of Revelation and the Prophetess of Thyatira and the historical reality of the factionalism and squabbling in the little Christian communities of Asia Minor.

3.4. Questions of Prophetic Authority and Social Integration: Situations of Conflict in the Churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, Smyrna and Philadelphia

There are three types of conflict in the six other churches which are of particular interest to this study. The first is between the Angel of the Church in Ephesus and “Those who say that they are apostles but are not” (Rev 2:2).

3.4.1. The Conflict between the Angel of the Church in Ephesus and “Those Who Say that They Are Apostles but Are Not” (Rev 2:2)

These Apostles are probably itinerant missionaries and are therefore located on the boundary of the insider group. Unlike Jezebel, who reportedly calls herself a prophetess (Rev 2:20) and whose prophetic status is uncontested, those who call themselves Apostles have been “tested” by the Angel of the Church and found to be “false” (εἰς αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς, Rev 2:2).⁶⁸ As a holder of the two leadership positions of Prophetess and

⁶⁶ In contrast to the messages to the Seven Churches, “Paul’s leading individual example of immorality in the community is male.” Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 74.

⁶⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 143.

⁶⁸ Aune considers that these “false” Apostles do not equate to the Nicolaitans, who are probably a different group of people. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 143; cf. 145. Schüssler Fiorenza, however, considers that “the

Teacher in the Church in Thyatira, Jezebel would undoubtedly have been “tested” by the community.⁶⁹ If Jezebel were judged according to stipulations similar to those found in the *Didache*, therefore, she taught accepted precepts concerning righteous and unrighteous behaviour (*Did.* 1:1-6:3) and the performing of Christian ritual (*Did.* 7:1-10:7). Her teaching would have been judged to bring “righteousness and the knowledge of the Lord” (*Did.* 11:2). As a prophet she would have been judged, amongst other things, to be speaking “in the Spirit” (*Did.* 11:7), to “conduct herself like the Lord” (*Did.* 11:8) and to “teach the truth” (*Did.* 11:10).⁷⁰ To object to Jezebel’s appointment and condemn her, as the Author of Revelation does (Rev 2:20-23), may well have been seen as a contentious act which threatened to undermine the leadership of the church.

Both the Angel of the Church in Ephesus and the Son of Man feel a particular animosity towards “the Nicolaitans” (Rev 2:6). Additionally, the Son of Man is in conflict with the Angel of the Church in Pergamum over his toleration both of the Nicolaitans and of a group of people “who hold the teaching of Balaam,” which are described as being similar to that of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14-16).

3.4.2. *The Conflicts with the Nicolaitans and “Those Who Hold the Teaching of Balaam” in the Churches in Ephesus and in Pergamum (Rev 2:6, 14-16)*

The reason for the Angel of the Church in Ephesus’s and the Son of Man’s hatred of the Nicolaitans is that, like those who hold the teaching of Balaam, and those who following Jezebel’s teaching (Rev 2:20), they eat food sacrificed to idols and practise “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:6, 14-15).⁷¹ This teaching may have been based upon an understanding of Paul’s refusal categorically to set out teaching about the eating of sacrificial meat.⁷²

itinerant apostles belong to the prophetic circle of the Nicolaitans.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 144.

⁶⁹ Aune notes that it was commonplace for prophets (1 Cor 14:29; 1 John 4:1-3; *Did.* 11:7-12) to be “tested.” Apostles (1 Thess 5:21; Rev 2:2; *Did.* 11:3-6) and teachers (*Did.* 11:1-2) and even “ordinary Christians” (*Did.* 12:1-5) were also “tested.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 144.

⁷⁰ The *Didache* is considered further in relation to Jezebel’s ministry in §5.2.2; 5.4.2; 5.13.4.

⁷¹ Balaam” appears simply to be a reference to the legendary prophet of that name. It is possible, however, that he was a historical person living in or visiting Pergamum, who was given the sobriquet “Balaam,” just as the Prophetess was a historical person living in Thyatira and given the sobriquet “Jezebel.” A comparison is made of the relative presentations of Balaam and Jezebel in §5.2.2; 5.8.

⁷² Hemer considers it possible that members of the Nicolaitan faction held up Paul’s referral of “the question of sacrificial meats to individual judgment and social responsibility” as a “precedent” for a Christian under social pressure to be present at occasions when sacrifices were made to pagan gods and to partake of the sacrificed meat. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 92. That Balaam and the

Thompson rightly notes that, while in Ephesus the Nicolaitans were “outsiders,” in Pergamum they were members of the church “who “did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas” (Rev 2:13). Similarly, Jezebel and her disciples “were a part of the church at Thyatira, whose “latter works exceed the first”” (Rev 2:19). It is unlikely that there were separate house churches with different views in either of these cities.⁷³ This infers that belonging to the Nicolaitan faction and following Jezebel’s teaching did not impinge either upon the avowal of faith in Christ or upon the practice of this faith.

The teachings of “Balaam” and of Jezebel are described in almost exactly the same terms (Rev 2:14, 20). However, “the teaching of Balaam” (τὴν διδαχὴν Βαλαάμ) may have been “a current slogan, perhaps against Christianity generally;” it is here used by the Author of Revelation to describe the teaching of his rivals.⁷⁴ There are also three important differences in the descriptions of Balaam, Jezebel and their teachings: firstly, it is not obvious that “Balaam” is a “real” person living in Pergamum, while Jezebel is beyond doubt a “real” person living in Thyatira; secondly, the teachings are reversed. While in Balaam’s case eating sacrificed meat is put before committing “sexual immorality,” in Jezebel’s case, “sexual immorality” comes first; coupled with the third difference, the accusation that Jezebel is herself practising “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:21), this serves to emphasise her sexual depravity. No accusation of sexual misconduct is made against Balaam.

It seems that “those who hold the teaching of Balaam” and the Nicolaitans are either the same group of people or hold remarkably similar views to each other.⁷⁵ Unlike the Church in Ephesus, however, where the local community is at odds with two different groups of rivals for authority lurking on its boundaries and trying to enter (Rev 2:2; 6), in the Church in Pergamum, those with different views are part of the community. It is the Author of Revelation, not the Angel of the Church, who sees the minority group (or groups) as his adversaries. The Angel of the Church is partly commended for faithfulness to the Son of Man (Rev 2:13) and Antipas is held up as the epitome of this faithfulness.⁷⁶

Nicolaitans are an “identical” and “recognized movement” is possible, but no definitive conclusion may be reached on this point. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 93.

⁷³ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 122.

⁷⁴ Hemer describes this teaching as “an antinomian perversion” of Christianity. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 92.

⁷⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza considers that, if the Nicolaitans are connected to Nicolaus, one of “the seven Hellenists of Acts” (Acts 6:5), they may well comprise “a rival prophetic group” since some of these “Hellenists” were “considered to be prophets by the tradition.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 144.

⁷⁶ A comparison is made between the presentation of Antipas and that of Jezebel in §5.2.1.

This is despite, or perhaps because, the Author of Revelation sees the city as being in thrall to “Satan” (Rev 2:13). The male Antipas’s eulogy is in sharp contrast with the description of the female Jezebel, who is depicted as the epitome of sinfulness and rebellion against the Son of Man. At the same time, the Angel of the Church in Pergamum does not seem to be at odds either with those who hold the teaching of Balaam or those who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. If these are two different groups of people, any differences between their beliefs and practices are not indicated. Aune considers Balaam’s teaching to be the same as that of the Nicolaitans;⁷⁷ moreover, except in their emphasis, their teaching is almost identical to that of Jezebel. It appears that Jezebel’s followers in Thyatira, the Nicolaitans on the boundary of the Church in Ephesus, those who hold Balaam’s teaching and those who hold the Nicolaitans’ teaching in Pergamum, all belong to the same Christian faction.

The Angel of the Church in Smyrna, however, shares the animosity of the Son of Man towards the “Jews” of Smyrna. According to the Son of Man, the Angel is the victim of slander (βλασφημία) on the part of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοῦς καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ σατανᾶ, Rev 2:9). The Son of Man does not criticise them for being Jews, but for saying that they are Jews when he considers that they not; he makes a similar criticism in the message to the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:9).

3.4.3 *The Conflicts with “Those Who Say that They Are Jews and Are Not” in Smyrna and in Philadelphia (Rev 2:9; 3:9)*

Philip L. Mayo considers that “it is reasonable to conclude that these opposition groups are comprised of elements from the local Jewish communities.”⁷⁸ The reference to “slander” may therefore mean that the Author of Revelation believed that the Jews of Smyrna were saying unpleasant things about the Christians. Alternatively it may mean that he believed that they were “denouncing” the Christians to the local or Roman authorities for refusing to worship the Emperor.⁷⁹ However, Thompson argues that this depiction of the Jews, both of Smyrna and of Philadelphia (Rev 2:9; 3:9), owes more to

⁷⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 188.

⁷⁸ Philip L. Mayo, “*Those Who Call Themselves Jews*”: *The Church and Judaism in the Apocalypse of John* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 73-74.

⁷⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 162.

the Author of Revelation's "attitude toward Judaism rather than Jewish actions against Christians." This hostile attitude may have had its roots in the acceptance of Jews into the urban Asian society with which they identified and with whose members they "shared cultural traditions."⁸⁰

David Frankfurter considers that the "Jews" mentioned both in the message to Smyrna and in the message to Philadelphia (Rev 3:9) are "Gentile God-fearers." As with the other opponents of the Son of Man, these adversaries "appear to espouse not Jewish teachings but rather the diluted interpretations of meal and sexual purity laws we associate with Paul of Tarsus (2.14, 20; cf. 1 Cor 7-8)." These teachings seem to have become popular with Gentile God-fearers in Asia Minor who declared their "affiliation with Judaism" to be the foundation for their salvation in Christ.⁸¹ If Frankfurter is correct in his analysis, it infers that the authority of the Angel of the Church in Smyrna is in conflict not with a group of "outsiders" but with another faction on the boundaries of the church.

In Philadelphia the Son of Man, declares that he will make "those who say that they are Jews and are not" (Rev 3:9) come and bow down before the feet of the Angel, whom the Son of Man has "loved" (ἐγὼ ἠγάπησά σε, Rev 3:9), that is, deemed to be among his elect.⁸² Although they are not accused of "slander," the Son of Man declares that "those who say that they are Jews" are lying (ψεύδονται, Rev 3:9). As with "those who say that they are Jews" in Smyrna, more is learned here about the negative attitude of the Author of Revelation towards the "Jews" of Philadelphia than about their attitude to the Christian community of Ephesus. Thompson considers that it is "unlikely" that the Jews of Philadelphia were reporting their Christian neighbours to the authorities for "unsocial behaviour."⁸³

There are thus two connections between "those who call themselves Jews" and Jezebel: firstly, they are both linked to Satan (Rev 2:9; cf. 2:14), whose agents include those responsible for the imprisonment of some members of the church who hold the same Christology as the Author (Rev 2:10); and secondly, both "the Jews" and Jezebel were at ease with local customs and culture.

⁸⁰ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 172-74.

⁸¹ David Frankfurter, "Revelation: Introduction and Annotations," in *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 469.

⁸² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 238.

⁸³ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 174.

Comment

The Son of Man, representing the views of the Author of Revelation, considers that he has a variety of adversaries in Asia Minor. These adversaries include those inside, outside and on the boundaries of the various Christian communities. Broadly speaking, therefore, it may be concluded that, in the view of the Author of Revelation, there are in the Seven Churches of Asia Minor two warring views of the world and of the place of Christians in that world. These clashing viewpoints are particularly in evidence in the church in Ephesus, where the embattled Angel is in conflict with “evil men,” Apostles whom he deems to be “false,” the Nicolaitans *and* the Author of Revelation (Rev 2:2, 4-6). It can only be concluded that it is the bellicose attitude of the Author of Revelation and those who share his viewpoint that are the instigators of these conflicts. As noted by Thompson, for the most part the Christians of Asia Minor lived peaceful lives in reasonable harmony with their neighbours.⁸⁴

3.5. Evidence of Factionalism and Two Major Competing Prophetic Schools in the Seven Churches that Are in Asia

It seems unquestionable that the Author of Revelation is known to at least some of the Christians in the communities to which the Letter to the Seven Churches is addressed, and that he is aware of their social situations. Aune considers that the Author was “probably an itinerant prophet” who had at some point visited each of the churches.⁸⁵ From the seven messages it may be deduced that, since neither of the Angels of the Churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia is rebuked in any way, these Churches are comprised of Christians who share the Author’s views on the importance of strong group boundaries. These two churches have the common adversaries of “those who say they are Jews but are not” (Rev 2:9; 3:9).

The Son of Man also speaks approvingly of those in the Church in Ephesus who have “tested” “those who call themselves Apostles but are not” and are “false” (Rev 2:3) and who were probably, like the Author of Revelation, “itinerant missionaries.”⁸⁶ It is

⁸⁴ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 172.

⁸⁵ Being an “itinerant” prophet was not just the opposite of a “community” prophet. The Author of Revelation is most likely to have visited each of the seven congregations as part of his missionary route. However, some prophets visited churches with a particular message whilst yet others were wandering Christians who enacted their faith by travelling with no money or possessions and relying on the hospitality and good will of settled Christians for their sustenance. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 186-87.

⁸⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 144.

not stretching the bounds of probability to suggest that the Author has attempted without success to attain, or perhaps once held but has lost, a position of authority in the Church in Ephesus. This might well contribute to his hatred of Jezebel, who holds two positions of authority in the Church in Thyatira.

Both Aune and Schüssler Fiorenza consider that the followers of Jezebel are members of the group of prophetic rivals of the Son of Man, whom he calls “the Nicolaitans.”⁸⁷ This is because in the message to Pergamum those who follow the teaching of Balaam are accused, as are the followers of Jezebel, of eating sacrificial meat and of practising “sexual immorality.” The teaching of the Nicolaitans, who are active in the church in Pergamum and annoying the community in Ephesus, is remarkably similar to that of Balaam, which is rife in Pergamum (Rev 2:15).⁸⁸ This teaching goes hand in hand with a certain kind of knowledge, which the Son of Man derogatively calls “the Deep Things of Satan” (Rev 2:24) but which was probably known to its adherents as “the Deep Things of God.”⁸⁹

In the Seven Churches that are in Asia, therefore, there are two major factions: those who share the beliefs of the Author of Revelation and who are presented as the followers of the Son of Man; and the Nicolaitans, of whom it is probable that the Woman Jezebel, the resident Prophetess of Thyatira, is the leader. The seven messages, therefore, reflect a conflict between an itinerant missionary belonging to a prophetic circle which proclaims social exclusivism and a woman holding two official positions of authority in the church, as Prophetess and Teacher, and who is the leader of a rival prophetic circle. This prophetic circle is embedded in two of the seven churches to which the Son of Man directs his letter, Pergamum and Thyatira, but has failed to gain a foothold in Ephesus. In contrast, the prophetic circle to which the Author belongs, and which he may, at one time, have led, encompasses the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna and Philadelphia.⁹⁰ It is possible that the Author of Revelation had at some stage been based at Ephesus and perhaps held an official position in the church. Certainly the majority of the Ephesian

⁸⁷ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 188; Schüssler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit and Power,” endnote 47, 65.

⁸⁸ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 188.

⁸⁹ It is quite possible that the Author has either added the words “of Satan” to “the depths” or has “substituted “Satan” for “God”” in the same way that he describes the Jews of Smyrna and Philadelphia as members of “a synagogue of Satan” rather than “a synagogue of God.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 207.

⁹⁰ From their lack of conflict with “outsiders,” indifference to the Son of Man and the relatively-restrained tone of his threats (Rev 3:1-3, 15-17), it may be inferred that the Angels of the Churches in Sardis (Rev 3:1-7) and in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22) are committed neither to the teaching of the Nicolaitans nor to the teaching of the Author of Revelation.

Christians share the animosity of the Son of Man for those apostles and prophets who hold different teachings to them, and it appears that the Author's views are still influential in this church, despite the presence, on the boundaries of the community, of some Nicolaitans who are loyal to Jezebel.⁹¹

Conclusions

Jezebel is a woman in a position of leadership and authority and, as a woman, she both embodies the boundaries of her community and indicates to "outsiders" their permeability or otherwise. For the Author of Revelation, she is indicating that "outsiders" are welcome and is thus a danger to those boundaries.⁹² In retaliation, perhaps, he uses his knowledge of magical practices to link the Prophetess with the practice of sorcery. This knowledge suggests that he was of a lower social class than her;⁹³ this lack of status is exacerbated by his lack of an official position in one of the churches. The possible difference in social class between the Prophetess and the Author is also suggested by her less stringent attitude towards the eating of sacrificed meat than that demanded by the Son of Man, which may have its roots in a liberal interpretation of Paul's teaching (e.g., 1 Cor 10:14-33). The Prophetess is not only leader of a school of prophets named "the Nicolaitans," but also the patroness and/or hostess of a house church. The Author, on the other hand, is an itinerant, and no doubt impoverished, prophet with no permanent home and no responsibilities.⁹⁴ All these things imply that she views the world differently to him. Like the "strong" of Corinth (1 Cor 8:1-13), Jezebel probably regards idols as non-existent;⁹⁵ for the Author of Revelation they are all too horribly real. As well as embracing the apocalyptic belief that the world is full of good and evil spiritual forces, the world view of the Author appears to include the belief in the efficacy of magic to

⁹¹ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 187-88.

⁹² Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 42-46.

⁹³ There was an association both of belief in and of the practice of magic with those of lower social status, at least in the literature produced by the educated elite. Tellingly, the Greek of magical texts tends to be "the unpretentious common language of the people." Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 382.

⁹⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that Jezebel and the Author of Revelation were rivals vying for prophetic leadership in the community. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power Women in Early Christian Communities," in *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin; New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 40; Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 146. See also: Thimmes, "Teaching and Beguiling My Servants," 76. However, this interpretation does not fit well with the text, which indicates that, while Jezebel and her disciples are embedded in the Thyatiran church, John is an itinerant outsider.

⁹⁵ Thompson considers that Paul wanted to allow those Christians with a higher social status to continue to enjoy some of the privileges of that status, and be able to eat meat at private dinner parties. He only insisted that they refrain from eating meat when in the company of those with a lowlier status (1 Cor 8:1-13). Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 123. See, also, Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 176.

control those forces. The Author's preoccupation with threats to the boundaries of the Christian communities of Asia suggests that Jezebel does not share his concerns.⁹⁶

Readers of the Book of Revelation have only the Author's view of the situation which gave rise to his writing the messages to the Seven Churches. How his opponents in the churches understood the situation, how they viewed the Author and if they even understood themselves to be the Author's opponents, are questions to which it is difficult to find answers.⁹⁷ The Author of Revelation has responded to the socio-historical situation in which he and his rivals for power find themselves by portraying it as a situation of crisis. In contrast, Jezebel is a member of a church which is characterised by the Christian virtues of love, faith, service and patient endurance (Rev 2:9). Just as in the Church in Sardis, there is no indication of conflict between the Angel of the Church and "those who have not soiled their clothes" (Rev 3:4), there appears to be little dissent in the Thyatiran community between those who hold her teaching and those who do not (Rev 2:24); it is only the Son of Man and, by extension, the Author of Revelation, who are in conflict with some of its members.⁹⁸

The Author of Revelation's main concern is to effect the destruction of Jezebel's influence and possibly also of her prophetic circle (Rev 2:22-23; cf. 2:14-16). His agent is the character of the Son of Man in his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:18), and it is the presentation of this formidable character that is the subject of Chapter 4.

⁹⁶ It is also possible that members of the communities to which Jezebel and her followers belonged held a less conservative view of the position of women in society than that held by the Author. In early Christian communities there were widely-differing receptions of women in positions of authority. For example, the apparently respected women prophets of Corinth may be contrasted with the author of the First Letter to Timothy's demands that women should be confined to traditional roles. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 156. This topic is discussed further in §6.2.

⁹⁷ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 123.

⁹⁸ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 174.

CHAPTER 4

THE SON OF MAN AND HIS SELF-PRESENTATION AS THE SON OF GOD

Contextualisation of the Presentation of the Male Adversary in the Conflict in Its Socio-Historical and Literary Settings

Whilst the Son of God (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev 2:18), the male adversary in the conflict in the message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29), is a character in the Book of Revelation in his own right, he does not exist independently. He is, rather, but one of the seven self-presentations or personae of the Son of Man (Rev 2:1-3:22), an angelic character who appears to the Slave John (Rev 1:1), whilst he is “in the spirit” on the Island of Patmos (Rev 1:9-20). This chapter, therefore, focusses upon the presentation of the Son of Man as a gendered character as a whole, from his first, and vocal, appearance in Revelation (Rev 1:10) to his final exhortation to the community in Laodicea (Rev 3:22). At the same time, a large proportion of the chapter is devoted to the self-presentation of the Son of Man as the Son of God.

The chapter is thus divided as follows. Firstly, an overview is made of the portrayal of gender in Revelation, with particular reference to the influence upon the text of the Graeco-Roman gender hierarchy of penetration (§4.1) and, secondly, an analysis is made of the presentation of the Son of Man as a gendered character in terms both of his physical description and of his self-understanding (Rev 1:10-20; §4.2). The presentation of the Son of Man is then considered within his relationship with the Slave John (§4.3). After this, attention focusses upon the Son of Man’s self-presentations to the Seven Churches that are in Asia (Rev 2:1-3:22; §4.4). This is followed by an analysis of the Son of Man’s self-presentation to the Church in Thyatira as “the Son of God” (Rev 2:18; §4.5). In this section, consideration of this character’s name and description (Rev 2:18, 23, 26-28) provides the structure for the following analysis of the portrayal of the Son of God as: a warrior king (Rev 2:18, 26-28; §4.6); in terms of his physical description (Rev 2:18; §4.7); and as a divine judge (Rev 2:23; §4.8). Finally, analysis is made of the presentation of the Son of God as the son of Revelation’s God, the One Seated on the Throne (Rev 2:18, 28; 4:2, 3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5; §4.9). Throughout this chapter, particular consideration is paid both to the Author’s use of allusions to Jewish texts and traditions and to pagan mythology and imagery, and to the

influence upon him of the Graeco-Roman construction of gender prevalent in the culture of which he was, however unwillingly, a part.¹

As a first step in this analysis of the presentation of the Son of Man and of his self-presentation as the Son of God, therefore, attention is focussed upon the portrayal of gender in the Book of Revelation, with particular reference to the text's portrayal of maleness and masculinity.

4.1. The Portrayal of Maleness, Manliness and Masculinity in the Book of Revelation

Any analysis of the presentation of a male character in Revelation as a “man” immediately encounters a problem, since, although the book contains descriptions of four “women” (Rev 2:20; 12:1, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18; 19:7; 21:9), there are no “men.”² At the same time, however, the very first verse of the Book of Revelation demonstrates that within the text a hierarchy of power prevails and that this hierarchy of power consists entirely of male characters:

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave to him to show to his slaves the things which must happen quickly, and which he made known by sending them by his angel to his slave John (Rev 1:1).

This verse encapsulates, in broad terms, the hierarchy of status and power in Revelation: the character with the highest status is God, the One Seated on the Throne (Rev 1:1ff.);³ the character with the second-highest status is the Messiah of Revelation, Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1, 2, 5, 9; 11:15; 12:10, 17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4; 22:16, 20, 21), who appears in various incarnations as the Son of Man and his seven self-presentations (Rev 1:10-3:22), the Lamb (Rev 5:6ff.) and Faithful and True (Rev 19:11-16, 21);⁴ thirdly

¹ See Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks, 132-33; Conway, *Behold the Man*, 159-74; Christopher A. Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 306-17; Stephen D. Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 192-99; Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 28.

² The only occurrence of the word ἀνήρ is in the description of the New Jerusalem as ἡτοιμασμένην ὡς νύμφην κεκοσμημένην τῷ ἀνδρὶ αὐτῆς (“prepared as a bride adorned for her man,” Rev 21:2), where the word ἀνδρὶ indicates a “husband.” As pointed out by Rosalind Miles, “[m]asculinity’ has always been essentially a contract between men and men. As sub-contractors, however, women were vital to the scheme of things.” Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Man: Love, Sex and Death in the Making of the Male* (London: Grafton Books, 1991), 9.

³ References to “God” in Revelation are too numerous to list here.

⁴ References to the Lamb are found in: Rev 5:6, 8, 12, 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9, 10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3.

come the many angels of Revelation; and finally, at the lowest level of the hierarchy is the text's narrator John, who is described as a "slave" (Rev 1:1).⁵

Revelation's hierarchy of status, power and gender thus both reflects, and differs from, the prevailing Graeco-Roman gender hierarchy. Colleen M. Conway describes this hierarchy as being in the form of a vertical axis, at the top of which was the "perfect man;"⁶ theoretically at least, this was considered to be the Emperor, the epitome of elite masculinity and divinity.⁷ Below him on the hierarchy were all those who were less "perfect;" this did not just include other males, such as foreigners and slaves, but also women, who were perceived not as members of an opposite sex to "man," but as "imperfect, incomplete" men.⁸ A man continually measured himself in terms of "manliness" in relation to his difference to those above and below him on the "sliding gender scale" of the hierarchy.⁹

As noted by Christopher A. Frilingos, in Graeco-Roman culture, masculinity was determined by the ability and power to penetrate the bodies of others, and a body which was penetrated, either in the context of sexual intercourse or in the context of physical conflict, was "feminine" or "effeminate."¹⁰ Moore observes that Revelation is about a war led by the Davidic Messiah, and wonders if its "real purpose [is] to engender masculinity, to make men."¹¹ Moreover, and as rightly pointed out by Richard Bauckham, the "key concept" of Revelation is "conquering."¹² Moore considers that John's presentation of the Messiah and his faithful followers as "icons of masculinity," whilst "feminine imagery" is reserved for their enemies, suggests that the Author is concerned with "the cultural proclivity to construe domination as masculine and submission as feminine in the ancient Mediterranean world."¹³

⁵ Dale B. Martin points to the male hierarchy of Revelation, which is headed by God. Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, Ky.; Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 109-10.

⁶ Colleen M. Conway, "'Behold the Man!' Masculine Christology and the Fourth Gospel," in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 164.

⁷ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 23.

⁸ Conway, "'Behold the Man!'" 164-65; Conway, *Behold the Man*, 15.

⁹ Conway, "'Behold the Man!'" 165-66.

¹⁰ Frilingos, "Sexing the Lamb," 301-303; Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 70-71.

¹¹ Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 175-77, with reference to Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 68-69.

¹² Bauckham points out that "Revelation's key concept of conquering [...] is applied both to the Messiah himself (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and to his people, who share his victory (2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). [...] the image of conquering is a militaristic one." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 69. See, also, Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 184-85.

¹³ Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 190-91.

Just as the “divine” Emperor was considered to hold the highest position on the Graeco-Roman gender hierarchy, so the eternal and “all-powerful” God of Revelation (Rev 1:8) occupies the Throne in Heaven (Rev 4:2, 3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 21:5).¹⁴ Heaven is the equivalent of a royal or empirical courtroom, whilst the Throne (Rev 4:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10; 5:6, 11; 7:9, 11, 15; 8:3; 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:5; 20:11; 22:1, 3) is both literally Revelation’s seat of masculine power and also the symbol of that power;¹⁵ it represents the top of the hierarchy. The bottom of Revelation’s hierarchy, by contrast, is the “female space” of the Abyss (Rev 9:1-11), representative of fertile, but unclean, womanhood, both enticing and threatening to the male.¹⁶ Only the elect males virgins (παρθέναι, Rev 14:4), are marked with God’s seal (Rev 7:3-4; 9:4; 14:1) and are “safe” from the vagina-like mouth of the Abyss, a bottomless pit of demons and impurities (Rev 9:1-11; cf. *I Enoch* 21:1-10; *Apoc. Pet.* 8), which threatens to devour and emasculate them at any moment.¹⁷

Climbing up Revelation’s gender hierarchy and acquiring the status of belonging to the elect in Revelation, which may be interpreted as the equivalent of being granted the status of a “man” in Graeco-Roman culture, moreover, necessitates the complete rejection by males of heterosexual relationships; this is demonstrated in the notorious verse which states that those who have been redeemed from humanity comprise only those males “who have not defiled themselves with women” (Rev 14:4).¹⁸ This denigration of female sexuality demonstrates that Revelation’s abhorrence of feminisation extends beyond a Roman man’s fear of feminisation through penetration and the requirement that, as well as being a penetrator in war and sexual relationships, a Roman “man” should be careful not to be feminised by being too frequently in the society

¹⁴ In Graeco-Roman society it was even believed that “[m]asculinity was [...] more divine than femininity” because it was understood that men are the ones who create and impregnate, whilst women are passive raw material for creation and procreation. Conway, “Behold the Man!,” 168.

¹⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 284.

¹⁶ See: Tina Pippin, “Peering into the Abyss: A Postmodern Reading of the Biblical Bottomless Pit,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (JSNTSup 109; ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 256-57, 261.

¹⁷ See Tina Pippin, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic in the Apocalypse of John: Desiring Sophia,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott and William Johnston Wiseman; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 293-94; Pippin, “Peering into the Abyss,” 256-58.

¹⁸ Jorunn Økland, “Why Can’t the Heavenly Miss Jerusalem Just Shut Up?,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 94-96. Økland also finds E. Schüssler Fiorenza’s interpretation of Revelation’s gender-specific language as merely the result of Greek grammar, which should not be taken literally as an exclusion of women, “rather surprising.” Økland, “Why Can’t the Heavenly Miss Jerusalem Just Shut Up?” 99; see Schüssler Fiorenza *The Book of Revelation*, 190-91.

of women.¹⁹ However, Page duBois points out that “virility was in antiquity associated not with the heterosexual dyad but rather with mastery” and that, for many, the “most masculine” man was not one who “consorted with” women, but rather one who fraternised with and was the dominant partner in sexual intercourse with other males.²⁰ That this type of “virility” is also a feature of some of Revelation’s elite male characters becomes apparent in the analysis carried out in this chapter.

Also of importance in the Graeco-Roman hierarchy of manliness was the possession of a manly physique,²¹ and in Revelation the bodies of a number of high-status male characters are described in approving detail (Rev 1:13-16; 2:18; 10:1-2; 19:12-16). The phallus was the symbol of power in the Roman Empire, and it is noticeable that the Son of Man, in his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:26-28; cf. Ps 2:9), He Who Conquers (Rev 2:26-28), the Male Child (Rev 12:5) and Faithful and True (Rev 19:15) each possess an undoubtedly phallic “rod of iron,” while the Lamb is given a phallic “scroll” by the One Seated on the Throne (Rev 5:1-7) and the Angel Wrapped in a Cloud possesses a “little scroll” (Rev 10:2, 8-10).²² Moreover, the Son of Man, both in his appearance to John and in his self-presentation to the Angel of the Church in Pergamum, and Faithful and True each possess another phallic symbol: a sharp, two-edged sword (Rev 1:16; 2:12, 16; 19:15, 21).²³ Bearing physical evidence of masculinity and being an active and dominating penetrator, however, was not enough to make a Graeco-Roman male a man. It was necessary to act like a man, that is to be an “actor, rather than one acted upon,” and to exert one’s “dominion” over other, feminised or

¹⁹ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 25. Frilingos suggests that the requirement that the chosen males of Revelation should be virgins is similar to the Roman ideal of “manliness” as a combination of “morality” and courage in warfare. Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 307.

²⁰ Page duBois, “Ancient Masculinities,” in *New Testament Masculinities* (ed. Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson; Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 321.

²¹ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 16-20.

²² Conway notes the “pervasive presence of the phallus;” not only was it seen as “a sign of fertility and strength,” but also its representation was “used as an apotropaic charm.” Conway, *Behold the Man*, 22. For the “phallic” interpretation of Revelation’s “rods of iron,” see Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 180-82, with reference to Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 69. The above interpretation of the Angel Wrapped in a Cloud’s “little scroll” as being a phallus is made in light of the analysis of the scroll given by the One Seated on the Throne to the Lamb (Rev 5:1-7) made by Catherine Keller and Stephen D. Moore, who observe: “Thus encircled by the divine fingers, this mystified cylindrical object looks and acts suspiciously like a phallus.” Catherine Keller and Stephen D. Moore, “Derridapocalypse,” in *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments* (ed. Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart; New York: Routledge, 2005), 192. Aune also notes: “The sealed scroll would look like a cylinder held in the right hand of God who is seated on the throne, perhaps with the scroll resting on his lap.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 338.

²³ See Tina Pippin and J. Michael Clark, “Revelation/Apocalypse,” in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (ed. Deryn Guest et al.; London: SCM Press, 2006), 758.

“effeminate” beings lower in the hierarchy.²⁴ As already noted, this category included women and slaves, of either gender.

Jennifer A. Glancy emphasises “the corporeality of ancient slavery;”²⁵ she rightly points out that being a slave in the Roman Empire was to be a “body” which was “vulnerable to abuse and penetration” and could be both used and abused for “pleasure” by the slave’s owner.²⁶ Glancy notes that “[t]he Greek word *to sōma*, ‘body,’ functioned as a synonym for *ho doulos*, ‘slave,’” and she draws attention to Rev 18:13, in which verse she considers that the Author “may be emphasizing the bitterness of the slave trade when he lists the luxury products sold by the merchants of the earth,” which includes “bodies” (σῶματα).²⁷ In his study of “the body” in the First Letter to the Corinthians, Dale B. Martin points out that “[...] the Christian really does not have absolute freedom over his own body. His body has been ‘bought’; Christ was the buyer, something like a *sōmatemporos*, a slave-dealer, a dealer in ‘bodies’ (6:19-20). The individual Christian body, like that of a slave in Roman law, has no ontological status of its own.”²⁸ Similarly, the 144,000 virgins of Revelation have been “bought” like slaves in a market (ἡγορασμένοι, Rev 14:3; ἡγοράσθησαν, Rev 14:4; cf. ἡγοράσθητε, 1 Cor 6:20). In this study, therefore, “slave” is understood to designate a person with no rights or power over his or her own body, which may be abused at will by a character of higher status, whether or not the slave “belongs” to that character; for example, in Rev 1:1, John is described as being the slave of Jesus Christ. This concept of “slave” encompasses those explicitly described as δοῦλος or δοῦλοι (Rev 1:1; 2:20; 6:15; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 13:16; 15:3; 19:2, 5, 18; 22:3, 6) and those implicitly portrayed as slaves in their descriptions and/or treatment (for example, the tattooed or branded Woman Babylon in Rev 17:5).

Interestingly, each of the four “women” of Revelation (Rev 2:20; 12:1, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17; 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18; 19:7; 21:9) has, achieves or is given a position of power and/or high status (Rev 2:20; 12:1; 18:7; 19:7; 21:2, 10); it is noticeable that each woman loses that position at the hands, jaws or paws of a male character who is either an elite male or acting under the orders of an elite male (Rev 2:22; 12:5-6; 17:16-17; 21:2, 10).²⁹

²⁴ Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 301-302.

²⁵ Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

²⁶ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 12, 21.

²⁷ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 10, 11.

²⁸ Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 178.

²⁹ The Woman Jezebel is a Prophetess who is “thrown down” by the divine Son of God (Rev 2:20, 22); the Woman Clothed with the Sun is a goddess in Heaven, whose new-born son is snatched from her at the

A Roman man was known for his capacity to exert self-control over his bodily appetites, that is, for his “virtue.”³⁰ Thus lack of control, including sexual incontinence, was considered to be effeminate behaviour.³¹ A real man, moreover, did not lose his temper and display anger, either with his masculine peers or with his wife and members of his household; anger was a “feminine” weakness.³² At the same time, it was necessary for a man to bear physical pain courageously and to be able to watch scenes of extreme violence without flinching.³³ The Lamb certainly seems to have borne his injuries bravely (Rev 5:5-6), and is later depicted as presiding over the torture of God’s defeated enemies (Rev 14:10-11). Both God and the Lamb are, however, subject to bouts of anger, which lead them to acts of extreme violence in their quest for retribution (Rev 6:12-17; 16:1-21; 17:16-17; 18:3-8, 21; 19:1-3, 20-21; 20:11-18; 21:8; cf. 21:27). For the Romans, unrestrained anger was associated with women and beasts;³⁴ in the world of Revelation, however, it is not “unmanly” to express anger and to indulge in vengeance; quite the reverse.

Comment

Within the hierarchy of power and gender in Revelation the elite “man” must be a warrior and a conqueror, who bears physical evidence of his penetrative “manhood” and is willing and able to feminise his enemies by use of force. In Revelation, the feminine is the enemy and the enemy is feminised; defeating this female enemy requires unrestrained violence. In this regard, Revelation’s blatant enjoyment, not only of inflicting violent retribution upon its elite males’ enemies, including women (Rev 2:22; 17:16), but also of watching them suffer (Rev 14:10-11; 18:9; 19:3), sets it apart from the Graeco-Roman hierarchy which demanded of its elite “men” self-control over their emotions, magnanimity to their beaten and feminised enemies and self-restraint in dealings with their wives and members of their households.³⁵

behest of God and who loses her divine powers and falls to Earth (Rev 12:1, 5-6, 14); the Woman Babylon rules as a queen, but “falls” and is raped, eaten and burned by the Scarlet Beast on the orders of God (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:16-17; 18:2, 7); the Woman Jerusalem resides with God in Heaven, but upon her marriage to the Lamb is obliged to “come down” (Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9-10). This is a subject which is considered again in §5.5.

³⁰ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 22-23.

³¹ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 25.

³² Conway, *Behold the Man*, 25-27.

³³ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 29-30; Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 311.

³⁴ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 27, 170.

³⁵ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 22-27, 29; Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 65; Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 311.

Against this background of the portrayal of maleness, masculinity and fear of feminisation in Revelation, the presentation of the Son of Man as a gendered character uncovers some surprising ambiguities.

4.2. Just Like a Man? The Presentation of the Son of Man as a Gendered Character in the Book of Revelation

The Son of Man is introduced by John, the narrator of the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:1-2), to whom he appears while John is “in the spirit” on the Island of Patmos (Rev 1:9-10).

4.2.1. John’s Ideal “Man:” The Presentation of the Son of Man as an Elite Male Character in the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:10-17, 20; cf. Homer, Iliad XIII.17-19; Dan 7:9, 13; 10:5-6; 1 Enoch 14:20-22; 46:1; 106:2; Apoc. Ab. 17:1; Rev 2:12, 16, 18; 14:14-20; 19:11-12, 15)

By means of literary allusions to various characters in, for example, Dan 7:9, 13; 10:5-6, 1 Enoch 14:20-22; 46:1; 106:2 and Apoc. Ab. 17:1, the Author of Revelation indicates that the Son of Man (ὁμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, Rev 1:13) is to be understood as an angelic figure in the form of a male human being who at the same time has an aura of divinity.³⁶

³⁶ For discussions of the probable allusions contained in the description of the Son of Man, see, for example: Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 93-99; Peter R. Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels: Angelology and the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 150-70; Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation* (JSNTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 37-44; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 44-45; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1995), 211-13. A number of scholars discuss the possible reasons for the presentation of Christ in Rev 1:13-16 as “angelomorphic,” defined by Charles A. Gieschen as “an inclusive term which means having some of the various forms and functions of an angel, even though the figure may not be explicitly called an “angel” or considered to have the created nature of an angel.” Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 3, Footnote 2; cf. 27-29. Stuckenbruck points out that the depiction of Christ in the opening epiphany contrasts radically with his depiction as the “slaughtered” Lamb (Revelation 5), in which persona he is deemed worthy, along with God, of worship. The Author of Revelation may be responding to an “unhealthy” obsession with the worship of angels in the churches. Stuckenbruck argues that the combination of the “angelomorphic” presentation of Christ in Rev 1:13-16, which draws upon Jewish angelological traditions, his power over the angels of the churches (Rev 1:16, 20), the instances of the “refusal tradition” (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9) and his later presentation as the Lamb, demonstrates that Christ is both superior to “created” angels and “subordinate to God;” Christ is worthy of worship not because of his angelomorphic status, but because he is the slaughtered Lamb. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, 271-73. Cf. Carrell, who argues that “John ‘sees’ an angelomorphic figure but ‘hears’ one who participates in the eternal being of God.” Christ’s angelomorphic appearance is a “temporary measure” designed to enable him “to fulfil certain roles” and is “for the sake of his church.” Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 172-73; Gieschen, who points out that, although the New Testament authors make efforts to distinguish between Christ and “the ‘created’ angels,” there is a “significant influence of Jewish angelology” upon their depictions of Christ, and in particular traditions “growing from the Angel of the Lord traditions.” Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 4, 6 (the author’s emphasis); Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, who considers that “an

It is also notable that the emphasis upon gold and bronze in the description of the Son of Man (Rev 1:13, 15) echoes the descriptions of the Greek gods Zeus and Poseidon, as exemplified in their epiphanies as warriors in Homer's *Iliad* (*Iliad* VIII.41-44; XIII. 17-27). The Son of Man's golden girdle, moreover, is similar to that worn by warriors; this typically had a sheath in which to place a short sword, and both Zeus and Poseidon are described as donning golden clothes or armour before going into battle.³⁷ In this context, the Son of Man's bare feet may be another indication of divinity.³⁸ Additionally, the description of the Son of Man's face as being like the Sun (Rev 1:16) also echoes that of Phoebus Apollo, "the radiant, or shining, one," who later usurped from Helios his association with the Sun.³⁹

The Son of Man also has two attributes both of elite manhood in the Graeco-Roman penetration grid of gender hierarchy. The first is his possession of flaming eyes (Rev 1:14), which provide evidence not only of the penetrative and magical power of his gaze, but also of his divinity.⁴⁰ The second attribute is his sharp, and phallic, double-edged sword (Rev 1:16); since this is in reality his tongue, it indicates that he is being portrayed both as a warrior and as an orator.⁴¹ This inference is given weight by the

angelomorphic description does not necessarily deprive Christ [...] of his divinity or reduce his status to that of an angel." Christ's status is dependent upon his portrayal in a text as a whole, which includes his relation not only to human beings and to angels, but also to God. Matthias Reinhard Hoffmann, *The Destroyer and the Lamb: The Relationship between Angelomorphic and Lamb Christology in the Book of Revelation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 26-28.

³⁷ Aune notes that the epiphanies of the gods Zeus and Poseidon in the *Iliad* (*Iliad* VIII.41-44; XIII.17-27) "became the model for the use of gold in divine epiphanies." Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 94. The *Iliad* describes both Zeus and Poseidon preparing themselves for battle by donning golden clothes or armour and having golden whips, whilst the horses drawing their chariots have bronze feet and golden manes (Homer, *Iliad* VIII.41-4; XIII.17-27). With reference to: Homer, *The Iliad* (trans. Anthony Verity; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 119 and 200.

³⁸ Statues of the Emperor Augustus and of the Roman god Jupiter portray both these elite personages with bare feet. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 95-96. Homer describes Poseidon as striding upon "swift" and "immortal" feet which cause the mountains and woods to tremble (Homer, *Iliad* XIII.17-19). Homer, *The Iliad*, 200.

³⁹ Stephen L. Harris and Gloria Platzner, *Classical Mythology: Images and Insights* (2d ed.; Mountain View, Calif: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1998), 132.

⁴⁰ A person's gaze was considered by ancient people to be just as penetrative as a sword or knife and, just like a sword or knife, could wound its object. See Shadi Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self: Sexuality, Self-Knowledge, and the Gaze in the Early Roman Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 138. Additionally, fire was mysterious and was often interpreted as "divine, spiritual or angelic, depending on the context and the religious environment." Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 110. Aune points out that "In Greek tradition the eyes of the gods were thought to have a special quality, which was usually described as bright and shining" (for example, *Iliad* III.397). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 95.

⁴¹ Ben Witherington considers that the Son of Man's sharp two-edged sword (ῥομφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα, Rev 1:16) "may in fact be an allusion to the Roman short sword, which looked something like a tongue." Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 82. In contrast, Aune notes that ῥομφαία "was normally used to refer to a large sword used both for cutting and piercing, while μάχαιρα was used for a short sword or dagger." Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 98. The Son of Man is as skilled in the art of rhetoric and satire as a seasoned soldier is in warfare. Since the subjects most frequently spoken of by an orator were manly virtues, a relationship was made between "rhetoric and true masculinity."

“dignified style” of the Son of Man’s speech (Rev 1:11, 17-20; 2:1-3:22);⁴² moreover, the structure of his seven messages to the churches of Asia (Rev 2:1-3:22) resemble “imperial edicts.”⁴³ It is interesting to note here that the “One like a Son of Man” (ὁμοίον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου, Rev 14:14-20), who appears later in Revelation, seated upon a white cloud and wearing a golden crown, is presented as dispensing justice like the epitome of Roman manhood, the Emperor. Whether or not this is the same Son of Man who appears to John (Rev 1:13), or simply one of Revelation’s many angels, is the subject of some debate.⁴⁴ If this character is indeed another appearance of the Son of Man who is depicted in the Letter to the Seven Churches, it only adds to his elite status in Revelation.

Not only is the Son of Man thus portrayed as an “impenetrable penetrator,” it is also noticeable that, except in his persona of the warrior Son of God (Rev 2:22), he avoids the company of women, and thus the risk of feminisation.⁴⁵ As if this were not enough, John, the lowly “slave,” bestows honour and esteem upon this icon of divine manhood by gazing at him with awe and admiration (Rev 1:13-16).⁴⁶ He then indicates his fear,

Conway, *Behold the Man*, 31. Moreover, there was a direct link between “morality” and “manliness” (*virtus*), in being a man who was not afraid to participate in warfare. Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 307.

⁴² Aune points out that the language of the Son of Man’s speech in the messages to the Seven Churches (Rev 2:1-3:22) is notable for being “in a subtly higher register than that of the rest of the Apocalypse,” and its “dignified style” contrasts with the more workmanlike narrative style of the rest of John’s narrative. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 128, including Footnote 13.

⁴³ Conway points that: “The Angelic One Like a Son of Man” is revealed to have “imperial authority” in the letters which are more like “imperial edicts” than Graeco-Roman letters Conway, *Behold the Man*, 161-62.

⁴⁴ See, for example: David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 849; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 771-72; Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins, *King and Messiah as Son of God: Divine, Human, and Angelic Messianic Figures in Biblical and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 196-98; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 228-29; Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, 240-45. The harvest of the Earth carried out by this figure (Rev 14:15-16) is an allusion to Joel 3:13, as is the grape harvest (Rev 14:17-20), and it symbolises “eschatological judgement.” Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 849.

⁴⁵ Conway notes that elite men were differentiated from those lower down the gender hierarchy by their combined ability to penetrate the boundaries of others’ bodies and to protect the boundaries of their own bodies from penetration. They were thus “impenetrable penetrators.” Conway, *Behold the Man*, 21. See, also, Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 71.

⁴⁶ Carlin Barton writes about the ability of human beings both to shame and to honour others either by looking at them or by averting their gaze. In a scenario where one is likely to encounter naked human beings, such as in a contemporary gym, the gaze is averted in order to uphold the other person’s dignity. By treating certain parts of bodies such as the genitalia, both those of oneself and those of others, as shameful and as objects which one should not “invade with the eyes,” it is possible to bestow mutual honour and value upon each other. In Roman society, the act of averting one’s eyes from someone increased the other person’s standing and worth. For this reason, worshippers veiled their faces or cast down their eyes in the presence of a deity. On the other hand, a reverent gaze directed at a person of high standing contributed to their valuation by society. Carlin Barton, “Being in the Eyes: Shame and Sight in Ancient Rome,” in *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power and the Body* (ed. David Fredrick; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 216-18. A direct, uninhibited gaze, however, did not only shame its object; “the eyes of others” could also “violate and consume” their object. Barton, “Being in the Eyes,” 223. The relationship of the Son of Man with the Slave John is considered in more detail below (§4.3).

worship and obedience by veiling his eyes and falling down at his feet (Rev 1:17).⁴⁷ John's prostration before the Son of Man, moreover, may be contrasted with his later attempts to bow down to angelic characters, who declare that they share the lowly status of John and that only God should be worshipped (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9); it follows that the status of the Son of Man is close to that of the God of Revelation.

Both his theatrical emergence from amongst seven golden lampstands (Rev 1:12-13) and the possession of seven stars (Rev 1:16) demonstrate that, within the context of the world of Revelation, the Son of Man is a powerful character, who has authority over the angelic representatives of the Seven Churches in Asia to which his messages are directed and is able to be present in all seven church communities simultaneously.⁴⁸ Finally, allusions to the description of the Son of Man are found in the descriptions of three warriors in Revelation: (1) He Who Has the Sharp Double-Edged Sword (Rev 2:12, 16); (2) the Son of God, (Rev 2:18, 26-27; cf. Psalm 2); and (3) Faithful and True (Rev 19:11-16, 21).

All in all, the portrayal of the physical appearance of the Son of Man reveals that the Author of Revelation is presenting this character as an example of elite, even divine, manhood within the four interconnecting spheres of Jewish tradition, Greek mythology, Graeco-Roman gender hierarchy and the characterisation and hierarchy of the Book of Revelation.⁴⁹ However, as pointed out by Moore, the only problem with this picture is that John's ideal "man," an apparent paragon of penetrative and powerful masculinity, has a woman's breasts:⁵⁰

⁴⁷ It is not an unusual reaction, in ancient Jewish and Christian texts, for human beings who are confronted with a supernatural being bringing a revelatory message to fall upon their faces. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 99; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 110-11. This reaction is caused either by fear (for example, Ezek 1:28; Dan 8:17; 10:9-11; Lk 24:5) or by "reverential awe" (for example, Josh 5:14). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 99.

⁴⁸ As stated by the Son of Man himself (Rev 1:20), the seven stars symbolise the Angels, or representatives, of the Seven Churches that are in Asia, just as the seven golden lamp-stands in the midst of which the Son of Man is seen by John (Rev 1:12-13) symbolise the church communities. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 117. The Angels of the Seven Churches are different from the angels who appear at regular intervals throughout the visionary section of the Book of Revelation. Each of these seven Angels is a representative of his relevant Christian community as a whole. However, as pointed out by Aune, further interpretation has proved difficult. The Angels have been interpreted variously as (1) supernatural beings who either have a special interest in each of the churches or represent the earth-bound communities; (2) human beings such as messengers, prophets or the bishops of the churches; and (3) stars and planets. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 108-12.

⁴⁹ Moore considers that "[i]n Revelation, Jesus is not so much God become man as God become masculine." Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 190.

⁵⁰ Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 149; cf. §1.6.2.

[...] καὶ περιεζωσμένον πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς ζώνην χρυσοῦν
[...] and girdled at the breasts with a golden girdle (Rev 1:13).⁵¹

4.2.2. *The Breasts of the Son of Man (Rev 1:13; cf. Lk 11:27; 18:13; 23:29, 48; Jn 13:25; 21:20; Rev 15:6)*

In their study of the interrelation of human sexual hormones and genitalia with the cultural construction of gender, Gisela T. Kaplan and Lesley J. Rogers point out that biological definitions of “human nature” are influenced by a society and its culture and that the definitions of “male” and “female” owe more to cultural norms and values than to biology.⁵² In particular, they point out that “there is a wide amount of overlap between ‘male’ and ‘female’ physical types” and that individuals “do not fit the rigid physical stereotypes portrayed by the media, by medical journals, or biological textbooks.”⁵³ Moreover, they note that: “Most individuals can be categorized as male or female on the basis of their genitalia, but each individual’s particular set of secondary sexual characteristics and other less sex-specific characteristics is a combination which can lie anywhere along a continuum on which the categories of male and female overlap.”⁵⁴ This biological diversity underlying the gender “norms” imposed upon human beings by society uncannily reflects the Roman “one-sex model of humanity” considered above, in which being a “man” was not just reliant upon his possession of genitalia but also upon his behaviour, social interaction and even clothing (§4.1).⁵⁵ As already discussed, the rest of the physical description of the Son of Man, his dignified but aloof behaviour, social interaction with John, possession of a sword, his clothing and the allusions contained in his presentation all combine to indicate that he is both biologically male and a cultural “man.” His possession of breasts is an anomaly in a text in which women’s bodies are regarded with fear and loathing (Rev 14:4; 17:3-6; 16).

⁵¹ These are female breasts, even though the NRSV translates μαστοῖς as “chest;” it is notable that the KJV translates the word more accurately as “paps,” while the Vulgate has *mamillas*. See Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 149-50, including Footnote 54.

⁵² Gisela T. Kaplan and Lesley J. Rogers, “The Definition of Male and Female: Biological reductionism and the sanctions of normality,” in *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct* (ed. Sneja Gunew; London: Routledge, 1990), 205.

⁵³ Kaplan and Rogers continue: “The rigid either/or assignment of the sexes is only a convenient social construct, not a biological reality.” Kaplan and Rogers, “The Definition of Male and Female,” 214.

⁵⁴ Kaplan and Rogers, “The Definition of Male and Female,” 224.

⁵⁵ Conway, “Behold the Man!” 165; Conway, *Behold, the Man*, 32-33; see Kaplan and Rogers, “The Definition of Male and Female,” 224.

The phenomenon of developing breasts was greatly feared by men in ancient societies; since women were considered simply to be less “perfect” versions of men on the gender axis, it was thought that it was possible for men to slide down the scale by developing female sexual characteristics.⁵⁶ This belief resonates with Moore’s interpretation of the One Seated on the Throne (Rev 4:1-5:7) as a muscle-bound bodybuilder. Moore notes that the body of a man who both pumps iron and pumps himself full of steroids in order to enhance his musculature may react by causing his breasts to develop in an alarmingly female manner.⁵⁷ The Son of Man, who bears some resemblance to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue (Rev 1:15; cf. Dan 3:1, 5), is also displaying himself in a similar fashion to a bronzed and statuesque bodybuilder.⁵⁸ He is not the only one; the Angel Wrapped in a Cloud (who may be another persona of the Son of Man), comes down from Heaven, apparently discards his cloud and takes up a particularly “masculine” stance, with his manly bronzed legs splayed (Rev 10:1-2), in which he, too, can display his muscular body. According to Moore’s model, the incongruous size of the Angel’s “little scroll” (Rev 10:2, 8-10) would be a concomitant result of taking the drugs which increased the Son of Man’s pectoral muscles.⁵⁹ However, whilst it is tempting to interpret the Son of Man’s womanly breasts and the Angel’s “little scroll” as the result of too much weightlifting, it seems unlikely that either has access to steroids.⁶⁰

In order to interpret the Son of Man’s breasts, it is more helpful to turn to the only two other occurrences of the word *μαστός* in the New Testament, which are found in the Gospel of Luke, and which provide evidence that the Son of Man possesses a woman’s breasts which, moreover, are probably lactating (Lk 11:27; 23:29).⁶¹ As in Revelation, in Luke the word *μαστός* occurs both times in the plural; however, in both Lucan passages

⁵⁶ It was also, of course, possible for women to develop male characteristics. Conway, “Behold the Man!” 164-65. Cf. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 149.

⁵⁷ Stephen D. Moore, *God’s Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 121-22, including Footnote 193; Stephen D. Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” in Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins, eds., *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 183-86, 199.

⁵⁸ Moore, *God’s Gym*, 121, Footnote 193. Witherington suggests that the burnished bronze feet of the One like a Son of Man (Rev 1:15) probably “indicate his stability or unmoveableness.” Witherington, *Revelation*, 82.

⁵⁹ Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” 199.

⁶⁰ As already noted (§1.6.2), Moore himself interprets the ambiguously-gendered Son of Man within his analysis of Revelation’s Christ and Babylon in relation to the goddess Roma.

⁶¹ Jesse Rainbow, “Male *μαστοί* in Revelation 1.13,” in *JSNT* 30.2 (2007), 251. Cf. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 152.

μαστοί are used in relation to one or more women and specifically in connection with the breast-feeding of an infant:⁶²

“Blessed is the womb which bore you and the breasts (μαστοί) which you suckled” (Luke 11:27); and

“Blessed are the barren and the wombs which did not give birth and the breasts (μαστοί) which did not give suck” (Luke 23:29).

In contrast, the description of the Son of Man is echoed in the description of the Seven Angels with the Seven Plagues:

[...] καὶ περιεζωσμένοι περὶ τὰ στήθη ζώνας χρυσᾶς

[...] and girdled around the chests with golden girdles (Rev 15:6).

There is a difference, however: while the Son of Man is girdled at his *breasts*, the angels are girdled around their *chests*.⁶³ The word *στήθος* occurs in its plural form *στήθη*, but comparisons with other occurrences of the word in the New Testament (Lk 18:13; 23:48; Jn 13:25; 21:20) indicate that the reason for this is that there is more than one angel, each with one chest. It therefore seems highly probable that the undoubtedly male Son of Man has the lactating breasts of a woman who has recently given birth and is suckling her new-born child.

There are two other texts which feature male characters with breasts and which are of particular interest to this discussion: The *Odes of Solomon* and the *Testament of Solomon*.

⁶² Variations on the word *μαστοί* also occur in the following texts: LXX Gen 49:25; 2 Mac 3:19; 6:10; 3 Mac 5:49, 50; Ps 21:10; Song 1:2, 4, 13; 4:5, 10; 6:11; 7:4, 8, 9, 13; 8:1, 8, 10; Job 3:12; 24:9; Hos 2:4; 9:14; Joel 2:16; Isa 28:9; 32:12; 66:11; Jer 18:14; Lam 2:20; 4:3; Ezek 16:4, 7; 23:3, 21; Josephus, *War* 7.189; Philo *Opif* 38, 133; *Deus* 39; *Somn* 2.204; *Spec* 3.199; *Virt* 128, 129, 143; *Esdr.* 5:2; *T.Sol.* 9:4. Except in Lam 4:3, where it refers to female jackals, and in Song 1:2, where it is used in relation to the male lover (see §4.3.4), the word *μαστοί* is used either in relation to one or more women or as a metaphor. Cf. Rainbow, “Male *μαστοί*,” 251, Footnote 9.

⁶³ Carrell suggests that the similarities between the descriptions of the Son of Man and the Seven Bowl Angels lead to “John’s attempt in Apocalypse 19.10 and 22.9 to worship the bowl angel who functions as the revealing angel.” Carrell, *Jesus and the Angels*, 139. Stuckenbruck considers that the use of *στήθη* rather than *μαστοί* in the description of the angels “may reflect either a non-theological, stylistic [*sic*] variation or a subtle attempt to distinguish these angels from Christ.” Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, 228.

4.2.3. *Objects of Male Desire: Lactating Breasts and Divine Wisdom (Gen 49:25; Odes 8:16a-c; 19:2b-4b; T. Sol. 9:4-6)*

The early second-century C.E. *Odes of Solomon* contains descriptions of two male characters, each of whom possesses female breasts.⁶⁴ The first is God the Father, one of whose characteristics is his possession of milk-filled breasts (*Ode* 19:2b-4b).⁶⁵ The second is “the Revealer” who is, like the Son of Man, a male character with breasts who speaks about himself. He says:

*I fashioned their members,
and my own breasts I prepared for them,
that they might drink my holy milk to live by it (Ode 8:16a-c).*⁶⁶

Meanwhile, lurking in the late second- to mid-third century C.E. *Testament of Solomon* is a headless male demon named Murder (*T. Sol.* 9:1-7) who, in answer to Solomon’s query as to how he sees, declares: Διὰ τῶν μαστῶν μου (“Through my breasts,” *T. Sol.* 9:4).⁶⁷ Murder’s appearance and powers can only be understood within both the magical context and the plethora of strange hybrid demons of the *Testament of Solomon* as a whole, and the Son of Man is not portrayed as a demon.⁶⁸ However, the Apocalypse is known for its magical language and imagery, and there are two reasons why the Son of Man’s breasts may also be understood to have magical powers, both centred upon his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:18).⁶⁹ Firstly, in the opinion of Todd

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the date and provenance of the *Odes of Solomon*, whose “original language was probably Greek,” see Michael Lattke, *Odes of Solomon: A Commentary* (ed. Harold W. Attridge; trans. Marianne Ehrhardt; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2009), 5-11.

⁶⁵ Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 268. The translation and numbering of the verses in this and the other *Odes* in this study are those of Lattke. In reference to the “Father’s” possession of breasts, Lattke states: “But this is not a male chest (cf. Rev 1:13, literally “nipples”); the image bestows a “mother’s breast” on the “Father.”” Lattke’s assertion that the Son of Man possesses a “male chest” rather than female breasts is made in direct opposition to the conclusion he makes about the *Ode*’s “Father.” Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 272.

⁶⁶ Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 111. Lattke argues that *Ode* 8 is “not a revelation by God but a revelation of God by a Revealer, redeemed Redeemer, and Mediator of creation.” Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 113 (the author’s emphasis). In other words, the Revealer is demonstrating in his own body that God has breasts. With regard to the speaker in stanzas IVb-VIII (*Ode* 8:9a-21c), Lattke states that he is “a masculine ‘I.’” Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 112.

⁶⁷ On the date and provenance of the *Testament of Solomon*, see Todd E. Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon: Tradition, Conflict and Identity in a Late Antique Pseudepigraphon* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 35. It may be noted that a differentiation appears to be made between Murder’s “chest” (στήθους, *T. Sol.* 9:3) and his “breasts” (μαστῶν, *T. Sol.* 9:4).

⁶⁸ D.C. Duling notes the prevalence of magical language through the *Testament of Solomon*. D.C. Duling, “*Testament of Solomon: A New Translation and Introduction*,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 935.

⁶⁹ Like the author of the *Testament of Solomon*, the Author of Revelation was well-versed in magical lore and ritual. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 418-19; Rodney Lawrence Thomas, *Magical Motifs in the Book of Revelation* (London: T& T Clark International, 2010), 196-99.

E. Klutz, the *Testament of Solomon* is concerned with “illness and health care” and, like Murder (*T. Sol.* 9:5-6), the Son of God has the power to bring illness and distress and to cause children to fall sick and to die (Rev 2:22-23).⁷⁰ Secondly, it is more than possible that, as argued by Duff, the “fiery-eyed” Son of God has the power of the “evil eye.”⁷¹ The images of the above two characters thus combine to suggest that the Son of Man’s breasts are lactating, that their milk is intended to nourish and sustain his followers and that, like his flaming eyes (Rev 1:14; 2:18), they have magical powers.

A male divinity who is portrayed as possessing, not only female breasts, but also attributes associated with female divinity, is El Shaddai, “the God with Breasts.” The name El Shaddai, which was used as an alternative to the name Yahweh, has traditionally been understood as indicating that the Israelite god was almighty and awe-inspiring, and associated with destruction (e.g., Joel 1:15).⁷² There is, however, another tradition which associates El Shaddai with fertility (esp., Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:9-12; 48:3-4; 49:25; cf. 43:14),⁷³ and David Biale draws attention to Gen 49:25, in which the author also “associates Shaddai with *shadayim* (breasts).”⁷⁴ The association of the Israelite warrior god with fertility may have its origins in Canaanite mythology and the widespread worship of the fertility goddess Asherah, who was “typically depicted as a goddess with prominent breasts.”⁷⁵ Biale puts forward the theory that the god and goddess were later syncretised so that the warrior god also possessed the characteristics of the god(dess) of

⁷⁰ Klutz, *Rewriting the Testament of Solomon*, 53.

⁷¹ Paul B. Duff, “‘I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve’: Witchcraft Accusations and the Fiery-Eyed Son of God in Rev 2.18-23,” *NTS* 43 (1997), 125-26, 132-33. The power of “the evil eye” was well known and was often compared with a weapon. Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*, 138. The possibility of the Son of God possessing eyes with magical powers is discussed below (§4.7.1).

⁷² David Biale, “The God with Breasts: El Shaddai in the Bible,” in *History of Religions* 21.3 (1982), 245-46. Biale discusses the possible reasons for the use of this name. Etymologically, it must derive from the Akkadian word *shadu*, which means “mountain,” but may have originally had the meaning of “breast.” Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 240-41. However, this does not mean that the name El Shaddai was necessarily used of Yahweh in this context. Biale considers that, for the authors of exilic and post-exilic biblical texts, El Shaddai had the connotation of a storm god, which complemented the understanding of Yahweh as a warrior god. Biale, *The God with Breasts*, 241.

⁷³ Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 247.

⁷⁴ Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 248. Biale also notes that it is possible that the name El Shaddai owes its provenance to the Egyptian verb *shdi*, meaning “to suckle.” Biale, “The god with Breasts,” 249. This concept of a male god who suckles like a nursing mother complements the depiction of Yahweh as a god who is associated both with fertility and childbirth (Deut 32:18; Isa 49:15; 66:7-9) and with the power to withdraw these blessings (Hos 9:14). Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 252-53. In conjunction with her argument that Yahweh should be understood both as “divine midwife” and as “divine mother” (Ps 22:9-10 [10-11]), Phyllis Trible also calls attention to the “wordplay between the epithet *šadday* (“mountains”) and the noun *šādayim* (“breasts”)” in Gen 49:25 which, she considers, “connotes a maternal aspect in the divine.” Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 60-61.

⁷⁵ Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 253.

fertility.⁷⁶ Also to be taken into account in this syncretisation and “transformation of the “god of breasts” into the “almighty god of war”” was Anat, the Canaanite goddess of fertility and war. She was associated both with suckling breasts and with destruction, and her mythology may well have been used by the Yahwists in order both to empower Yahweh and to counteract the worship of the Mother Goddess;⁷⁷ the possibility that the divine Son of Man is similarly being portrayed with breasts in order to counteract the worship of the Mother Goddess cannot be discounted.

At the time of the Apocalypse’s composition, one of the most powerful goddesses in Asia Minor was the many-breasted goddess of fertility, childbirth and nature, Artemis Ephesia;⁷⁸ it therefore seems possible that it was both in order to thwart her worship and to acquire the powers of a new mother that John portrayed the Son of Man as possessing breasts.⁷⁹ Artemis Ephesia had a strong association with magic, and Arnold makes the interesting observation that her statue’s “breasts” were popularly imagined to have magical, possibly apotropaic, powers, and that these powers were available to her followers, just as a mother’s milk is available to her child.⁸⁰ However, not only were the “breasts” on her statue in reality representations of eggs, testicles or fruit, but if the purpose of depicting the Son of Man with breasts was to counteract the worship and magical powers of Artemis Ephesia, it seems strange that, neither in his self-description nor in his message to the Ephesian Church (Rev 2:1), is there any allusion to his breasts or any indication that his description is influenced by the goddess’s statue.⁸¹ For the Son of Man does not hesitate to affirm, not only that he possesses powers associated with the divine feminine, but also that the female aspect of his body is reflected in his self-understanding (Rev 1:17-18).

⁷⁶ Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 253-54.

⁷⁷ Biale, “The God with Breasts,” 255-56.

⁷⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 20-21.

⁷⁹ The cult of Artemis Ephesia influenced the religious, cultural and financial lives of the inhabitants not only of Ephesus but of the whole of Asia. Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 20-21.

⁸⁰ Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 25, with reference to Elisabeth Lichtenecker, “Die Kultbilder der Artemis von Ephesos,” Inaugural-Dissertation zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades einer hohen philosophischen Fakultät der Universität zu Tübingen, 1952, 124-125.

⁸¹ Arnold, *Ephesians, Power and Magic*, 25. The only possible allusion to the cult of Artemis Ephesia in the message to Ephesus is “the tree of life which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7), which may be an allusion to the tree located in her sanctuary Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 55.

4.2.4. *Divinely Feminine: The Self-Description of the Son of Man (Rev 1:17-18; 2:8; 3:14; Apuleius, Metamorphoses IX; PGM IV.2836-37)*

In his self-description to John (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος καὶ ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου, Rev 1:17-18), the Son of Man firstly declares that, having conquered Death, he considers himself to be in some sense divine.⁸² Secondly, he indicates, and even emphasises, that he understands his divine nature to be mostly feminine. The words ἐγὼ εἰμι (“I am,” Rev 1:17) echo the aretology spoken by the mother and wisdom goddess Isis, “Great of Magic,” who was famous for her “sympathetic magic” and, though Egyptian, was worshipped widely throughout the Mediterranean.⁸³

The Son of Man’s understanding of himself in terms of a Wisdom goddess is continued in his title “the First and the Last” (Rev 1:17; cf. 1:8); it is made even more explicitly in the message to Laodicea where, in an echo of Wisdom’s hymn of self-praise in Prov 8:22 (“*The LORD created me the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago*”), the Son of Man describes himself as “the Amen, [...] the beginning of God’s creation” (Rev 3:14).⁸⁴ Moreover, according to the *Metamorphoses* of Apuleius, Isis describes herself, amongst other things, as “the mother of the universe,” “the queen of the dead” and “Queen Isis;” she also takes pity upon those in need and gives them “aid and solace.”⁸⁵ At the same time, the two self-understandings of the Son of Man as “the First and the Last” (ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, Rev 1:17) and as the possessor of “the keys of Death and of Hades” (ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου, Rev 1:18) contain allusions to the goddess Hecate, the “keybearer” (κλειδοῦχος), in particular the bearer of “the keys to the gates of Hades.”⁸⁶ Hecate is described in the *Greek Magical Papyri* as follows:

⁸² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 102-103, 116-17. Aune points out that: “The “I am” formula in Revelation is uttered exclusively by God (1:8; 21:6) and Christ (1:17; 2:23; 22:16).” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 100-101.

⁸³ Barbara S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 170; Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 132-135; Elizabeth A. McCabe, *An Examination of the Isis Cult with Preliminary Exploration into New Testament Studies* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2008), 55-56.

⁸⁴ Yarbro Collins and Collins consider that “[t]he tradition about personified wisdom is probably the best context in which to understand the sayings of Rev 1:17 and 22:13,” and that “Christ is portrayed in terms of personified wisdom in the message to Laodicea.” Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 193. The Son of Man’s self-presentation as the Amen is considered both in §4.4.3 and in §4.9.1.

⁸⁵ Apuleius, *Metam.* XI 269:9-270:3, in Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses XI)* (ed., with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary, J. Gwyn Griffiths (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 75. In the *Metamorphoses*, Lucius says to Isis: “[...] thou bringest the sweet love of a mother to the trials of the unfortunate.” Apuleius, *Metam.* XI 286.18-19, in Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book*, 101.

⁸⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 104. Hecate was rather a “sinister divine figure,” who was “associated with magic and witchcraft, lunar lore and creatures of the night, dog sacrifices and illuminated cakes” and possessed

[...] *Beginning*

And end are you, and you alone rule all.

For all things are from you, and in you do

All things, Eternal one, come to their end (PGM IV.2836-2837).⁸⁷

It is here that it should be remembered that the Son of Man is, first and last, a character in a text which contains the depiction of a powerful Mother Goddess, who, like Asherah, Anat and Artemis Ephesia, is associated with fertility and childbirth. Since she has recently given birth she may be expected to have milk-filled breasts. She is also presented, by means of imagery and literary allusion, as both divine Wisdom and Isis. She is the Woman Clothed with the Sun.

4.2.5. *Wisdom and Motherhood: The Purloined Breasts and Wisdom of the Woman Clothed with the Sun (Rev 12:1-6; cf. Sir 24:4-5; 1 Enoch 42:1)*

Although she is described as a “woman,” the Woman Clothed with the Sun (γυνή περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, Rev 12:1) is being depicted as a goddess with cosmic powers;⁸⁸ whilst there are allusions to several goddesses, including Artemis Ephesia in her portrayal, her description closely resembles the iconography associated with the mother and wisdom goddess Isis.⁸⁹ For example, Apuleius describes her as follows:

*“A crown [...] had girt her lofty head, in its centre a flat disk above the forehead shone with a clear light in the manner of a mirror or indeed like the moon” (Apuleius, *Metam.* XI 268.6-9).⁹⁰*

Isis’s mythology may also provide the origins for the portrayal of divine Wisdom in Sirach,⁹¹ and indeed, the description of the Woman echoes Sir 24:4-5 and has parallels with the description of *1 Enoch* 42:1.⁹² However, while the Woman is at first depicted as a goddess dwelling in Heaven (Rev 12:1), as soon as she gives birth she loses her cosmic

“packs of barking hell-hounds. Simon Price and Emily Kearns, *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 242-43.

⁸⁷ Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells* (2d ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 91; Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 104.

⁸⁸ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 64-66; Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 62-67, 71-76.

⁸⁹ Yarbrow Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 71-76; Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 680; Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks, 134-135. The description of the Woman also echoes Sir 24:4-5 and has parallels with the description of Wisdom in *1 Enoch* 42:1.

⁹⁰ Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book*, 73.

⁹¹ Hans Conzelmann argues that the origins of Israelite Wisdom lie in the mythology of Isis. Hans Conzelmann, “The Mother of Wisdom,” in *The Future of our Religious Past: Essays in Honour of Rudolf Bultmann* (ed. James Robinson; trans. Charles E. Carlston and Robert P. Scharlemann; London: SCM Press, 1971), 243.

⁹² Conzelmann, “The Mother of Wisdom,” 233-40.

powers and plummets to Earth (Rev 12:5-6).⁹³ In addition, not only is she unable to nourish her new-born son, she also loses her ability to nourish even herself (Rev 12:5-6, 14). Rather than being depicted as a powerful goddess suckling her child, therefore, she is suddenly a *powerless* and *childless* woman.⁹⁴ In the abduction of the Woman's child (Rev 12:5) is a reflection of the fear prevalent in Roman society that being under their mothers' influence for too long would result in boys being feminised.⁹⁵ Moreover, the Woman demonstrates her "feminine" lack of self-control in her inability to bear agonising pain without crying out (Rev 12:2).⁹⁶ Along with her place in Heaven, her divinity and her creative and life-giving powers goes the Woman's motherhood.⁹⁷ The Woman is no longer a goddess and, as rightly pointed out by Amy-Jill Levine, she is "a mother, but she does not nurse."⁹⁸ It has already been established that the Son of Man has usurped the powers associated feminine divinity, but not from which particular goddess. Here is the answer, and with it the answers to the questions of why he possesses breasts and from whom he has usurped them. The Woman, whose robe made of the Sun and crown of stars echo aspects of the description of the Son of Man (Rev 12:1; cf. 1:16), is the embodiment of what the Son of Man, John's ideal "man," both fears and desires to be: a Wisdom and Mother Goddess with powers over creation and with the nourishing breasts of a woman who has just given birth. Thus the Son of Man, who yearns to be able to nourish his beloved followers with magical powers like a mother (cf. *Ode* 8:16a-c),

⁹³ Since the Male Child is snatched up to Heaven, and the Woman flees into the Wilderness, it may be concluded that she is now on the Earth. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 686. See also Beavis, "Jezebel Speaks," 139.

⁹⁴ Pippin says: "The Woman Clothed with the Sun is a goddess subdued, tamed, and under control. After her reproductive activity she is no longer useful. The traditional female values that accompany the act of mothering (nurture and caretaking) are suppressed; the child is taken to live in heaven, and traditional male values of competition and separation come to the foreground." Pippin, "The Heroine and the Whore," 72.

⁹⁵ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 29-34; cf. Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 67-68. See, also, Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Man: Love, Sex and Death in the Making of the Male* (London: Grafton, 1991), 47-49.

⁹⁶ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 23-30. The other two women with children in the Apocalypse are also presented as lacking self-control (Rev 2:20-23; 17:4-6).

⁹⁷ Keller rightly points out that: "In this particular case of Revelation's recurrent passive voice, exegetes presume rescue by God; they disregard the divinity of the woman." Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 71.

⁹⁸ Amy-Jill Levine, in conversation with Catherine Keller, in Catherine Keller, "Ms. Calculating the Endtimes: Additions and Conversation," in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Maria Mayo Robbins; London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 218 (original quoted text in italics). The association of the Son of Man with El Shaddai, the *Odes of Solomon* and the Woman Clothed with the Sun which is made in this study is as a result of reading in the conversation between Amy-Jill Levine and Catherine Keller the following: "AJL: *Does it surprise you that 'breast' imagery is absent in Revelation (contrast the Odes of Solomon)? The woman in Revelation 12 is a mother, but she does not nurse, and who nurses her son remains unexplored. Paradise appears to be a place of water, but not wine and not milk. CK: Interesting contrast – it puts me in mind of El Shaddai – the breasted one! And Genesis 49.25, 'Blessing of the breasts and of the womb'.*" Keller, "Ms. Calculating the Endtimes," 218. The association of the Son of Man with Murder in the *Testament of Solomon* is as a result of reading Rainbow, "Male $\mu\alpha\sigma\tau\omicron\iota$ in Revelation 1.13," 252.

purloins from the Isis-like Woman not only her divine Wisdom, but also her milk-filled breasts.

Comment

The Son of Man has usurped the cosmic powers associated with Isis, Wisdom and Hecate in order to counteract their worship.⁹⁹ It is, however, important to remember that, in his persona of the Amen, the Son of Man understands himself to be, like Isis, in the relationship of a mother to his “children;” it would therefore seem logical to surmise that, just as he has usurped powers over life and death from feminine divinities, he has also usurped lactating breasts from another divine female source, the Isis-like Woman Clothed with the Sun, in order to be a “mother” who has the physical power to nourish his followers with magical “milk.”

The Son of Man has purloined the Woman’s nourishing breasts firstly in order to be a mother to his followers and secondly as part of his countering the power of the Mother Goddess. In stealing the Woman’s breasts the Son of Man has redefined the concept of “woman” in Revelation. She is unfit to be a nurturing mother not only because of her lack of self-control, but is also unfit physically. At the same time, the Son of Man has enhanced the standing of the male Messiah of Revelation by masculinising breasts and endowing his persona with the ability to sustain and nourish new-born life, an extra weapon in the war against his enemies, who are still portrayed as “feminine,” but are no longer associated with nurturing motherhood.

In Gen 49:25 El Shaddai is associated with blessings not only of the breasts, but also of the womb; he has appropriated the whole concept of motherhood which encompasses the succouring by a woman of her child inside her womb, of her giving birth to that child and of nourishing it with her milk-filled breasts.¹⁰⁰ This is an important point; there is no indication that the Son of Man has a womb as well as breasts. As argued above (§4.1), in Revelation the womb-like Abyss (Rev 9:1-11) represents the mixture of darkness, demon-infestation and foulness associated with the female reproductive organs. The presentation of the Son of Man as ambiguously gendered does not represent

⁹⁹ Aune argues that Revelation contains “an extensive and creative antimagical polemic.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 367. See, also, Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 90, 99, 200. Aune also states that the author of Revelation “portrays Christ as usurping the authority of Hecate [*sic*] as well as that of every other natural or supernatural authority. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 117. See, also: Price and Kearns, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, 244.

¹⁰⁰ See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 60-61.

an embracing of womanhood within Revelation's portrayal either of elite status or of divinity. The Son of Man is first and foremost an elite male character, high on Revelation's hierarchy of masculinity and power, and is as ruthless and misogynistic as any of the text's other elite male characters in the suppression of femininity and avoidance of feminisation. This unpenetrated penetrator has merely usurped what are understood to be the desirable qualities and attributes of creative Wisdom, magical powers and the ability to nourish children from various female sources, whilst at the same time throwing "woman" further down the hierarchical ladder towards the Abyss. The Son of Man's assumption of the persona of divine feminine Wisdom in all her forms, like his purloining of the Woman's breasts, should not be understood as an embracing of femininity or womanhood into Revelation's construction of the divine.¹⁰¹

The presentation of the Son of Man is interwoven throughout by the presentation of the Slave John (Rev 1:1), the narrator of the Book of Revelation, and the scribe to whom he reveals himself and dictates his messages to the Seven Churches that are in Asia (Rev 1:9-11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). Although the Son of Man is an elite divine character and John but a humble "slave," the power dynamics of their relationship are as ambiguous as is the gender of the Son of Man.

4.3. The God/dess and the Magician: The Ambiguous Relationship of Gender and Power between the Son of Man and the Slave John

One of the main themes of the first chapter of the Book of Revelation is the relationship between John and the Son of Man (Rev 1:10-20). As has already been demonstrated (§4.1), the Son of Man is one of Revelation's most powerful characters who, in terms of the book's gender hierarchy, far outranks the character of the lowly Slave John (Rev 1:1). When subjected to an analysis in terms of gender construction, however, the relationship between the two characters proves to be surprisingly complex, ambiguous and multi-layered, and includes a power struggle in which they adopt different roles in terms of gender and power, by means both of speech and of the gaze. This struggle begins with John, like a magician invoking a god, conjuring up the Son of Man with his words.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Moore, *Untold Tales from the Book of Revelation*, 154. Nor should the Son of Man be understood as transgendered; he is not a character who feels himself to be either a woman trapped in a male body or a man trapped in a female body.

4.3.1. *The Supernatural Revealer and the Magician (Rev 1:1, 10, 17; cf. PGM XIII.704-705)*

As demonstrated in many of the *Greek Magical Papyri*, obtaining revelation was “a major concern of ancient magic,”¹⁰² and the very first verse of Revelation bears an uncanny resemblance to spells used in Graeco-Roman revelatory incantations.¹⁰³ This suggests that the Author of Revelation is describing the apparition of a “supernatural revealer.”¹⁰⁴ Moreover, two deities called upon by Greek magicians in their search for revelation were Apollo-Helios and Hecate, to whom allusion is made in the presentation of the Son of Man (see §4.2.1; §4.2.4).¹⁰⁵ The presence of the words ἐν τάχει (“quickly”) is yet another reason for the consideration of Rev 1:1 in relation to magical incantations; as pointed out by Aune, the injunction to come “quickly” often appears in the command

¹⁰² Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 351-52. A number of scholars call attention to the difficulties inherent in defining “magic.” Three problems in particular present themselves, suggested by methods of research in the field of anthropology: firstly, any definition of “magic” provided by an interpreter of ancient texts (and artefacts) is influenced by his or her cultural assumptions about magic; secondly, whether or not either those ancient people with whom those texts are concerned would have concurred with the interpreter’s definition is difficult, if not impossible, to determine; and thirdly, the term “magic” is itself a “modern” construction. In other words, the “modern” interpreter’s “outside” definition of ancient rituals and attitudes as magical or otherwise is necessarily “etic.” In contrast, the “emic” views of these matters held by those people whose practices are under analysis were formed and influenced by their own, very different, world view and cultural heritage. See Derek Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), xi, 2. Susan R. Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke’s Writings* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 27-29; Fritz Graf, “Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic,” in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 29-30. Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 17-20. Several scholars have concluded that the study of ancient magic is best attempted within the sphere of, or as contrasted with, religion. See, for example, Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 370-77; Garrett, *The Demise of the Devil*, 13; H.S. Versnel, “Some Reflections on the Relationship Magic-Religion,” *Numen* 38.2 (1991), 177, 184-85, 187. Collins, however, concludes that the best way to learn about ancient magic is to identify, by asking the right questions, “how key notions of sympathy, analogy, agency, and participation inform how an outsider ought to approach magical practice in any culture, not just in an ancient one.” Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World*, 24, 166-67.

¹⁰³ Although the *Greek Magical Papyri* are, for the most part, Egyptian documents dating to the third to sixth centuries C.E., they are still useful for comparison with the Book of Revelation in order to highlight the Author’s use of magical spells. In particular, the formulae show signs of having been in circulation as early as the first century C.E.; as with deities, the spells were subject to syncretisation, so that spells originating in Hellenistic milieus became fused with those from Egyptian sources. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 349-50.

¹⁰⁴ Aune states that in Rev 1:9-20 “[a] supernatural revealer “like a son of man” appears to John.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 353. As discussed above (§4.2.4), that the angelic Son of Man is presented as a “keybearer” like Hecate, (Rev 1:18) lends weight to the proposal that the Son of Man is a supernatural revealer. As well as being “the patron goddess of magic and sorcery,” Aune notes that Hecate was particularly important in “revelatory magic.” Moreover, Hecate often sent an angel in her place, and one of her many “epithets” was “*Angelos*.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 354, 361 (the author’s emphases).

¹⁰⁵ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 358. Betz notes that, while Hecate “is one of the deities most often invoked in the papyri, [...] the Greek god most often invoked is Apollo Helios.” Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xlvi-xlvii.

from the magician to the deity whom he has invoked, for example: ἦδη, ἦδη, ταχὺ ταχὺ (“Now, now! Quickly, quickly!”).¹⁰⁶

Aune also draws attention to one of the instructions given to the magician who has invoked a god to do his bidding.¹⁰⁷

*Now when the god comes in do not stare at his face, but look at his feet while beseeching him (PGM XIII.704-705).*¹⁰⁸

This passage from the *Greek Magical Papyri* is of particular interest, as it is not dissimilar to the reaction of John to the Son of Man who, after one searching look, falls down at his feet. He declares:

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead (Rev 1:17).

The possibility that John is being portrayed as a magician who has invoked a god to do his bidding immediately obtrudes, especially as this ambiguously-gendered godlike figure proceeds to describe himself in terms often used of Hecate:

*I am the First and the Last ... and I have the keys of Death and of Hades (Rev 1:17-18; cf. PGM IV.2836-37; see §4.1.2).*¹⁰⁹

John is described as “the slave” of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1); this may well be another reference to his role as magician:

*“I call on you, lord, that you may show me your true form. For under your order I serve your angel” (PGM XIII.583-585).*¹¹⁰

As noted above (§4.1.2), the Son of Man (Rev 1:13-16) is also being portrayed as a character who has a particular affinity with the Man Clothed in Linen, whose face is “like lightning” (Dan 10:6).¹¹¹ It follows that John the Slave (Rev 1:1), the character to whom this angelic apparition appears while he is “in the spirit” (Rev 1:10) is being portrayed as a “special interpreter” in the mould of the prophet Daniel.

¹⁰⁶ A particularly urgent example is found in a “Love spell of attraction” (PGM IV.1496-1595): “Attract her, NN, whose mother is NN, to me NN, whose mother is NN, now, now; immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly” (PGM IV.1590). Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 67. Aune points out the similarity of the “ritual impatience of magicians,” voiced in the words ἦδη, ἦδη, ταχὺ ταχὺ, with the phrase which occurs several times in Revelation: ἔρχομαι ταχὺ (Rev 2:16; 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 366.

¹⁰⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 96.

¹⁰⁸ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 189.

¹⁰⁹ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 91.

¹¹⁰ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 187. See, also, Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 136.

¹¹¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 99.

4.3.2. *The Power of Speech: A Verbose God and His Dumbstruck Interpreter (Rev 1:11, 17-20; cf. Dan 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47; 4:9; 7:9, 13; 10:1-2, 5-6, 8-12; 1QpHab VII, 5, 8, 14)*

By referring to the seven stars and the seven golden lamp-stands as a “mystery” (τὸ μυστήριον, Rev 1:20), the Son of Man uses a word associated both with dreams, as in the Book of Daniel (Dan 2:18, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 47; 4:9), and with prophecies hidden in ancient texts, as in *1QPesh Habakkuk* (1QpHab VII, 5, 8, 14). Both dreams and prophecies can only be revealed by God to “specially chosen human interpreters,” such as Daniel (Dan 2:16-19) or the Teacher of Righteousness (1QpHab VII, 4).¹¹² Through the use of literary allusion, then, the Author of Revelation suggests that John is just such a specially-chosen interpreter, worthy of receiving a prophecy from a manifestation of the divine in the person of the Son of Man. Moreover, as a complement to the presentation of the Son of Man as a compound picture of the Danielic “man dressed in linen,” “Ancient of Days” and “one like a son of man” (Dan 7:9, 13; 10:5-6; see §4.2.1), John is presented by the Author of Revelation in similar terms to the prophet Daniel. Both men, when faced with their visions, fall down (Rev 1:17; cf. Dan 10:8-9) and, like John in Revelation, Daniel is introduced by the author and then takes over the narration (Dan 10:1-2; cf. Rev 1:1-4). In addition, the reactions of the two angelic figures are similar. While the Son of Man places his right hand on John and tells him not to be afraid (Rev 1:17), the Man Clothed in Linen touches Daniel, rouses him to his hands and knees and tells him to pay attention to his words, stand on his feet and not to fear (Dan 10:10-12). Unlike Daniel, who eventually, after having his lips touched, manages to answer his “lord” (Dan 10:15-17), John remains speechless in the presence of his vision. Both angelic characters, however, speak at exhaustive length (Dan 10:20-12:4, 9-13; cf. Rev 1:17-3:22). There is, however, no dialogue between the two characters: while the Son of Man speaks both directly to John (Rev 1:11, 17-20) and indirectly to him as he dictates his messages to the Seven Churches (Rev 2:1-3:22), the scribe John does not speak; once he has recovered from his swoon, he merely proceeds to do as he is told, finds his writing equipment and takes dictation; just like a slave.

¹¹² The word “mystery” may also occur “to introduce eschatological scenarios” (for example, *1 Enoch* 103:1; 104:10, 12; 1 Cor 15:51-52). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 106-107.

4.3.3. *Master and Slave (Rev 1:1, 11, 17, 19; cf. 19:10; 22:8): An Unequal Relationship?*

Although he is portrayed as a magician who conjures up a “supernatural revealer,” John immediately loses his control over the divinity who appears and, as already noted (§4.2.1; §4.3.3), John bestows honour upon him with his gaze (Rev 1:13-16), prostrates himself before him (Rev 1:17) and unquestioningly obeys the Son of Man’s command to write to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:11, 19). If these features of the relationship were not enough to inform the reader that it is that of a “master” and his favoured “slave,” John explicitly describes himself as a “slave” (δοῦλος, see Rev 1:1), and thus upon one of the lowest rungs of Revelation’s hierarchy of power.¹¹³ This lowly position contrasts sharply with the high status of the Son of Man. As a “slave,” John is an “effeminate” character, who feels obliged to prostrate himself before higher-ranking angelic messengers (Rev 1:17; 19:10; 22:8). It should be noted, however, that the Son of Man treats John well, as would an elite Roman “man.” He touches him gently, speaks to him kindly and refrains from taking the opportunity afforded by John’s prone position of demonstrating his status by penetrating the “slave” sexually. To John the Slave, the Son of Man is perhaps the “ideal” master; one of whom he can be proud of serving. It is notable, however, that, although he responds to the Son of Man’s commands with the unquestioning obedience expected by a “master” of a slave, John makes no protest of unworthiness.¹¹⁴ Despite his low status, John is presented as being worthy of such a revelation.

At the same time, this disparity in status between the Son of Man and John echoes that between the two lovers of the Song of Songs. Moreover, this is not the only similarity between the two texts; both the Son of Man and the male lover of the Septuagint version of the Song are described as having female breasts (Rev 1:13; cf. LXX Song 1:2).

¹¹³ Despite it being used to describe prophets, both explicitly (Rev 10:7; 11:18) and implicitly (Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6), including Moses (Rev 15:3), and even an angel (Rev 22:9), the word δοῦλος in Revelation (see also Rev 6:15; 13:16; 19:18; cf. 18:13) does not imply high status or a position to be desired; on the contrary, the Author thus likens those male characters with a prophetic commission to the lowest of the low on the Graeco-Roman gender hierarchy. In Revelation “slave” is not used as a metaphor for prophet, while in the “real” “Graeco-Roman world a slave is a person in bondage. Rather, in Revelation a prophet is viewed as being in the same hierarchical relationship with the divine character whose words he speaks as is a slave in the “real” world with his/her master.

¹¹⁴ Aune notes “It is striking that the stereotypical motif of inadequacy or insufficiency, frequently included in OT prophetic call narratives [...], is conspicuous by its absence both here in Rev 1:9-20 and in 10:1-11.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 100.

4.3.4. “Better Than Wine” (LXX Song 1:2): The Son of Man and John as Ambiguously-Gendered Lovers (Rev 1:13, 17; cf. LXX Song 1:2; 3:6-11; 4:10; Rev 2:22; 3:20)

Jesse Rainbow argues that what he calls the “anatomical irregularity” of the Son of Man’s breasts in Rev 1:13 is a literary allusion to the portrayal of the male lover of the Song of Songs.¹¹⁵ Rainbow draws attention to the LXX version of Song 1:2, which translates the MT’s מִיֵּן דְדִיךְ כִּי־טוֹבִים (“For your *love* is better than wine”) as: ὅτι ἀγαθοὶ μαστοὶ σου ὑπὲρ οἴνον (“For your *breasts* are better than wine”).¹¹⁶ This is the only instance in the LXX of μαστοὶ being used in relation to a male human being, since in this verse it is the male lover who is being addressed.¹¹⁷ However, μαστοὶ is also used in the description of the woman (Song 4:10);¹¹⁸ J. Cheryl Exum notes that the “erotic” imagery throughout the Song “crosses conventional gender lines,” and she points out that, in terms of traditional gender imagery, the male lover is described in feminine terms, and the female lover in masculine terms.¹¹⁹ The possession of breasts both by the male lover and by his female beloved, therefore, needs to be understood within the Song’s context of the ambiguous gender imagery used by two mutually-besotted lovers to describe their own and each other’s bodies. It cannot be applied to the apparently lover-less Son of Man who has only one encounter with a woman, in his persona of the Son of God (Rev 2:22) and which is, to say the least, hostile.¹²⁰ However, just as the lowly young woman of the Song describes her “King” in infatuated detail, (Song 3:6-11), so does the servile John describe

¹¹⁵ Rainbow, “Male μαστοὶ,” 249, 252. In the Song, the LXX translates the MT’s “your love” as “your breasts” in 1:2, 4; 4:10 (twice); 7:13[12].

¹¹⁶ Rainbow, “Male μαστοὶ,” 250.

¹¹⁷ Rainbow, “Male μαστοὶ,” 250-51. Rainbow also notes that the only other two occurrences of μαστοὶ in the New Testament are those found in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 11:27; 23:29) and that the texts of the New Testament contain “no formula quotations or unimpeachable allusions” to the Song of Songs. Rainbow, “Male μαστοὶ,” 251. Rainbow therefore suggests that that, if there is an allusion in the description of the Son of Man to LXX Song 1:2, “it may amount to a very early attestation” of the allegorical interpretation of the male character as Christ, the lover of the female Church. Rainbow, “Male μαστοὶ,” 251.

¹¹⁸ In LXX Song 4:10, the male lover declares to his female beloved: “How beautiful are your breasts, my sister, my bride, “how much more beautiful are your breasts than wine.” This translates the MT מַה־יָפֶה דְדִיךְ מִיֵּן דְדִיךְ מִיֵּן דְדִיךְ בְּלֵה מִה־טֹב דְדִיךְ מִיֵּן דְדִיךְ (“How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride, How much better than wine is your love”). In the Song, the LXX translates the MT’s “your love” as “your breasts” in 1:2, 4; 4:10 (twice); 7:13[12]. Rainbow, “Male μαστοὶ,” 250.

¹¹⁹ The woman is described in imagery derived from architecture and warfare; as an example she describes herself as being “a wall” with “breasts like towers” (Song 8:10; cf. 4:4; 7:4). In contrast, the man is described as having a golden head (Song 5:10), “golden arms, set with jewels,” a body which looks like ivory, “encrusted with sapphires” and his legs are “alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold” (Song 5:14-15). Elsewhere, the man and the woman are each described as being like a dove (Song 2:14; 4:1; 5:2; 12; 6:9) and a gazelle (Song 2:9; 4:5; 8:14). This crossing of traditional gender imagery does not, however, imply “gender equality.” J. Cheryl Exum, “Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know about the Song of Songs,” in *The Song of Songs: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 30.

¹²⁰ The Son of God’s attack upon the Woman Jezebel is the subject of Chapter 6.

every inch of the elite “one like a son of man” (Rev 1:13-16); just as for the woman of the Song, her lover is the embodiment of an ideal, so for John the Son of Man is also the embodiment of an ideal. The thought cannot but obtrude that, if in the description of the Son of Man there is indeed an allusion to the ambiguously-gendered male lover of the Song, then it follows that John and his ideal, divine man are also lovers.¹²¹ It may also be noticed that the woman in the Song yearns for her lover’s left hand to be under her head and his right hand to be embracing her (Song 2:6); similarly the Son of Man caresses John with his right hand (Rev 1:17). Like a besotted lover, John’s eyes dwell upon various parts of the Son of Man’s anatomy (Rev 1:13-16); thus the Son of Man’s body is, like that of the female lover of the Song, “on display” and the object of his putative lover’s feminising male gaze (Song 4:1-15).¹²² However, this interpretation contradicts the analysis of John’s gaze within the economy of Graeco-Roman gender construction in which John’s gaze bestows male status upon the Son of Man (see §4.2.1).¹²³

As noted above (§4.2.3), there are strong resemblances between John’s description of the Son of Man as a male possessor of lactating breasts and the “Revealer” of *Ode* 8:16a-17. *Ode* 14 describes the Revealer and his follower and their interaction in terms which bear a number of similarities with the relationship between the Son of Man and John (*Ode* 14:1a-4b; cf. Rev 1:13-17).

4.3.5. *Mother and Son (Rev 1:13-17; cf. Ode 14:1a-4b): A Magical Relationship*

Ode 14, which Michael Lattke entitles “Childlike Trust in the Lord,” contains the following lines:

*As the eyes of a son upon his father,
so my eyes, Lord, are always toward thee.
Because with thee are my sources of milk and my delight.
Turn not thy mercy from me, Lord,
and take not thy kindness from me.*

¹²¹ As rightly pointed out by Moore, the allegorical readings of the Song made by “classical Jewish and Christian commentators,” who were uncomfortable with a literal reading of the text as a depiction of “a sizzling sexual relationship” between a man and a woman, resulted in the lovers both being interpreted as male: a “divine being” and his beloved “community or individual.” Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 27.

¹²² Exum, “Ten Things Every Feminist Should Know,” 32.

¹²³ Moreover, although the possibility of the Son of Man and John being lovers is interesting, it seems an inadequate reason for his portrayal as having a woman’s breasts in a text in which women’s bodies are described with revulsion (Rev 14:4).

*Stretch out to me, my Lord, thy right hand continually,
and be my guide until the end, to/according to thy will! (Ode 14:1a-4b)*¹²⁴

Here the speaker resembles John in several respects: his gaze is fixed upon his “Lord” (*Ode* 14:1b; cf. Rev 1:13-16.) and he begs his “Lord” to touch him with his right hand (*Ode* 14:4a; cf. Rev 1:17). The speaker of the *Ode* says that he gazes at his “Lord” as a son would upon his father (*Ode* 14:1a-b) but, since his “Lord” possesses his “sources of milk” it would seem more natural for him to be gazing at him as an infant would upon his mother. Perhaps John, too, gazes at the Son of Man as a hungry baby gazes upon his mother with her milk-filled breasts. Again it should be remembered that John is a “slave” in Revelation. In Roman society, male slaves were feminised, not only by sexual penetration, but also by being denied the status of an adult: they remained “boys,” sometimes literally by enforced castration, but always hierarchically, because they were not legally recognised as their children’s fathers.¹²⁵ As noted above, however, the “milk” secreted by the Son of Man’s breasts is a source of a particular kind of nourishment for his infant-like followers; it provides them with magical powers.

Thus the relationship of John and the Son of Man comes full circle: the magician who conjures up a “supernatural revealer” with his words is, in turn, bestowed with magical powers by the divine Son of Man.

Comment

Words are powerful magical tools which may be used to invoke deities. The Author of Revelation’s liberal use of literary allusion has also demonstrated that, not only may the Son of Man may be understood as a god (see §4.2.1), but he may also be understood to be a god who has been summoned by magic to provide prophetic revelations to the worthy magician John (Rev 1:17; cf. *PGM* XIII.704-5). Words may also be used to bring into being objects of desire, as evidenced by the lovers of the Song of Songs. Exum points to the way in which each of the two lovers of the Song of Songs “conjure” each other up with words and notes that “speech embodies desire by calling bodies into being” (e.g.,

¹²⁴ Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 197. Lattke, *Odes of Solomon*, 420.

¹²⁵ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 24-26. Female slaves fared a little better, since they were recognised as their children’s mothers and might be allowed to nurse their infants; this did not, however, prevent their children being sold to another owner. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 18.

Song 1:2).¹²⁶ There are, however, differences in their “spells” and one particular difference is apposite to the interpretation of John as a narrative magician who conjures the Son of Man into being through words: although the male lover does not invoke his beloved’s speech, the female lover narrates her beloved’s imagined words (Song 2:10-15; 5:2).¹²⁷ Also of interest is that it is the woman who takes the initiative in using language to make “immanent” that which is “absent;” the second verse of the Song is an “incantation” or “act of conjuring” in which “[as] if in response to articulated desire, the lover materializes, brought into being, as he is elsewhere (2:8-3:5; 5:2-6:3), by poetic imagination.”¹²⁸ Just so does the Son of Man materialise in response to the “articulated desire” of John’s “act of conjuring” (Rev 1:4-5).¹²⁹ However, as soon as the Son of Man appears before him, John is dumbstruck (Rev 1:17): in his silence he again resembles the female lover of the Song, but this time as invoked by the man, who “does not imagine her words.”¹³⁰ Just as there is a disparity in social status between the male lover of the Song, who is described as a “king” (Song 3:6-11), who is, in Duane Garrett’s words, “so wonderful that he is larger than life,” and the female lover, who is “little more than a pretty peasant girl” there is an extremely wide social disparity between the high-status Emperor-like Son of Man and John, who is but a lowly slave.¹³¹

The presentation of the Son of Man’s physical description and self-understanding as ambiguously-gendered is continued in his self-presentations to the Seven Churches that are in Asia (Rev 2:1-3:22).

¹²⁶ J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 6-7.

¹²⁷ Another difference is that the male lover conjures up the woman in gradual stages (Song 4:1-5, 12-15; 6:4-10; 7:1-6 [2-7 H]) while the female lover conjures up the man and then allows him to disappear so that she may repeat the process (Song 2:8-17; 3:1-5; 3:6-11). Exum, *Song of Songs*, 6.

¹²⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 7.

¹²⁹ Aune notes the possibility of Rev 1:4 being an incantation (see, also, Rev 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13). Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 418.

¹³⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 6.

¹³¹ Duane Garrett and Paul R. House, *Song of Songs, Lamentations* (WBC 23B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 129.

4.4. Male and Female: The Son of Man's Self-Presentations to the Seven Churches That Are in Asia

In each of his messages to the Seven Churches in Asia (Rev 2:1-3:22) the Son of Man presents himself in a different way (Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), describing himself in terms of his physical appearance and/or self-understanding and portraying himself in ambiguously-gendered language.¹³² He alludes both to his physical presentation as an elite male character (Rev 2:2; cf. 1:12, 16, 20; 2:12, 16; cf. 1:16; 2:18; cf. 1:14-15; 3:1; cf. 1:16, 20) and to his self-understanding in terms both of male and of female divinity (Rev 2:8; 3:7, 14; cf. 1:17-18). In some of these self-presentations, however, he also reveals new facets of his personality, which are again both male and female (Rev 2:18; 3:7, 14). This personality is often portrayed as violently threatening towards those whom he perceives to be his enemies (Rev 2:16, 22-23, 26-27) and emphasis is placed upon his association with, and ability to break through, boundaries (Rev 2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 7-8, 20). The Son of Man's violent nature is at odds with his desire for nurturing motherhood and love; this paradox is exemplified by his self-presentation in the message to Laodicea (Rev 3:19-21).

4.4.1. Powerful, Violent and Threatening: The Son of Man's Self-Presentations as an Elite Male Character in Revelation (Rev 2:1, 5, 12, 16, 18, 26-28; 3:1, 3; cf. Ps 2; Rev 1:4, 12-13, 16, 20)

In his self-presentations to the Seven Churches, the Son of Man alludes four times to his physical description, and on all occasions it is in order to present himself as an elite "man." In the message to Ephesus (Rev 2:1-7), he alludes to his possession of the seven stars (Rev 2:1; cf. 1:16) and to his appearance amongst the seven golden lamp-stands (Rev 2:1; cf. 1:12-13, 20). He describes himself as one who has cosmic powers, for he has power over both the heavenly angels and the Angels of the Seven Churches and is

¹³² Moyise debates whether the description of the Son of Man in John's vision (Rev 1:2-20) and the Son of Man's descriptions of himself in the seven messages (Rev 2:1-3:22) are the result of a composite use of literary allusions which are then adapted to fit into each message or, conversely, the vision is the result of the Author of Revelation wishing his angelic creation to be relevant to the situation of each church and making an amalgamation of each of the seven individual descriptions. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 28-29. Moyise comes to the conclusion that the Author first of all created a character from a composite picture of allusions, a suitable selection of which he then used in each message. Moyise says that "it is more natural to see John applying already chosen Scripture to the local situations than the local situations suggesting the Scripture texts." Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 36. However, Moyise later notes that it is "not impossible" that knowledge of defining characteristics of each church's socio-historical location coloured the Author's choice of allusions. Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 43.

present among all seven Christian communities of Asia.¹³³ In the message to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17) he alludes to his possession of a sharp two-edged sword (Rev 2:12; cf. 1:16), which is in reality his tongue, and with which he threatens to make war against his enemies (Rev 2:16). He is thus presenting himself as a combination of a penetrator, a warrior and an orator, whose loquacity is powerful enough to subdue those who hold teachings of which he disapproves (Rev 2:14-16), just as a veteran soldier's skill with his weapon enables him to cut down his enemies in battle. In the message to Thyatira (Rev 2:18-29) the Son of Man alludes to his penetrative gaze and to his bronze feet (Rev 2:18). At the same time, by presenting himself as "the Son of God" who will authorise his followers to rule the Gentiles with a rod of iron (Rev 2:18, 26-28), he alludes to Psalm 2 and demonstrates that he is a divinely-anointed and powerful warrior king (see §4.5.1). In his self-presentation in the message to Sardis (Rev 3:1-6), the Son of Man combines an allusion to his possession of the seven stars (Rev 1:16) with a declaration that he also possesses the seven spirits of God (Rev 3:1), an allusion to the epistolary opening of John's Letter to the Seven Churches (Rev 1:4).¹³⁴ The Son of Man thus stresses that, not only does he hold power over the Angels of the Seven Churches, as he does in his self-description to John and the message to Ephesus (Rev 1:16; 2:1), but that he also has power even over the Angels before the Throne.

Each of these four messages involves either the threat of, or actual retribution for, lack of "repentance" (Rev 2:5, 16, 21-23; 3:3). In the messages to Ephesus and Sardis, where the Son of Man presents himself as having power over the Angels, the threat of retribution involves his use of this power: in Ephesus, where he is torn between approval and disapproval of the community (Rev 2:2-6), he threatens to remove the Angel's lampstand from its place, meaning that he threatens "to obliterate the Ephesian congregation as an empirical Christian community" (Rev 2:5);¹³⁵ in Sardis, where he accuses the community of being lazy and always asleep (Rev 3:1-2), he threatens to break into the Angel of the Church's house like a burglar in order to wake him up and rout him from his bed (Rev 3:3). Both in the message to Pergamum and in the message to Thyatira, the Son of Man finds himself in conflict with those whom he accuses of eating food which has been sacrificed to pagan deities and of indulging in "sexual immorality" (Rev 2:14-

¹³³ See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 97, 142.

¹³⁴ Aune explains that "the seven stars are angels, just as the seven spirits are angels." Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 219.

¹³⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 147.

15, 20-22). In doing so, they are following the teachings associated with the prophet Balaam, the Nicolaitans and Jezebel, the Prophetess of Thyatira. It seems an appropriate, if hyperbolic, reaction for the Son of Man to counter the teachings of his enemies with cutting words and to dispatch the followers of Balaam and the Nicolaitans with the well-chosen words of an orator (Rev 2:14-16). However, responding to opposition with physical, sexualised violence, and even murder (Rev 2:22-23) is astonishing.¹³⁶ In Pergamum the Son of Man's enemies are merely followers of particular teachings; the teachers themselves, that is the prophet Balaam and the Nicolaitans, are not members of the community. In Thyatira, however, the teacher, the Prophetess, is a resident member of the community.¹³⁷ Also, it is she who is the probable leader of the Nicolaitans (cf. §3.3; 3.5). As a character who is explicitly associated with the feminising pollution so feared by male characters in Revelation (see §4.1), she is thus portrayed as the Son of Man's most powerful enemy, who, despite being a mere "woman" (Rev 2:20), merits his most violent self-presentation as a divine warrior and impenetrable penetrator.¹³⁸

4.4.2. *The Son of Man's Self-Presentations as Both Male and Female Divinities (Rev 2:8, 18, 23, 28; 3:7; cf. Ps 2; Rev 1:17-18)*

In the messages to the Churches in Ephesus, Thyatira, Smyrna and Philadelphia, the Son of Man describes himself in terms of divinities. Whilst, to the Church in Ephesus, he describes himself as having cosmic powers (Rev 2:1), it is noticeable that the Son of Man does not describe himself with allusion to the goddess Artemis Ephesia; this is despite his earlier portrayal as having breasts (Rev 1:13) which may, like those of Artemis Ephesia, have magical powers (see §4.2.5).¹³⁹ There is no reason why his self-presentation as an elite male "man" to this church (see §4.3.1) would sit uneasily with a self-portrayal as a goddess, since the figure described as an elite male by John does not hesitate to present himself in terms of feminine divinity (see §4.2.7). As indicated above

¹³⁶ See Marshall, "Collateral Damage," 41.

¹³⁷ Comparisons of the presentation of the Prophetess of Thyatira and of the prophet Balaam are made in §5.2.2; 5.8.

¹³⁸ A detailed analysis of the presentation of the Woman Jezebel is made in Chapter 5.

¹³⁹ The only possible allusion to the cult of Artemis Ephesia in the message to Ephesus is "the tree of life which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7). Hemer considers that this may be an allusion to the tree associated with Artemis Ephesia which was located in her sanctuary, where unrepentant felons sought refuge from the authorities; in contrast "the tree of life" may represent Christ's cross, where repentant sinners may find refuge. Hemer, *The Letter to the Seven Churches*, 51-52, 55. Hemer also notes that: "The numismatic evidence suffices to show that the tree, like the bee and the stag, was distinctively associated with Artemis Ephesia." Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 46.

(§4.2.4-5), the reason may be that it is not the powers of Artemis Ephesia that the Son of Man has usurped in his possession of breasts, but those of the Woman Clothed with the Sun (Rev 12:1-6).

In contrast, both in the message to Smyrna and in the message to Philadelphia the Son of Man alludes to his appropriation of Hecate's powers (Rev 2:8; 3:7; cf. 1:18). To the Angel of the Church in Smyrna the Son of Man describes himself as "The first and the last, who was dead and came to life" (Rev 2:8), alluding to part of his self-description to John (Rev 1:17-18), in which he claims both the nature of pre-existent divine creative Wisdom and the eternity of God.¹⁴⁰ To the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia, the Son of Man describes himself as "the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one closes and who closes and no one opens" (Rev 3:7). Here he enhances his allusion to his self-description as a Keybearer like Hecate (Rev 1:18), who has authority over the boundaries between Earth and the afterlife, by declaring that he also has authority over access to "the Davidic or Messianic kingdom."¹⁴¹

The Son of Man's self-presentation to the Angel of the Church in Thyatira as "the Son of God," who claims God as his father (Rev 2:18, 2:28), combined with the use of the divine "I am" (ἐγώ εἰμι) formula in this persona's self-description (Rev 2:23; cf. 1:17; see §4.2.4), indicates that in this message he is also presenting himself as a deity, although in this case a male one. It is also in this persona that the Son of Man has the most unequivocally hostile of his relationships with the members of the Seven Churches (Rev 2:20-23).¹⁴²

Of his seven self-presentations to the churches, however, that of the Son of Man to the Church in Laodicea is arguably the most complex, in terms both of his gender and in his relationship with the community.

¹⁴⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 100-102; Yarbrow Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 193.

¹⁴¹ The "key of David" is an allusion to the appointment of Eliakim as royal treasurer during the reign of Hezekiah (Isa 22:22). Aune interprets the possession of this key as indicating that, as Eliakim was invested with authority over David's house, the Son of Man has been given authority over access to "the Davidic or Messianic kingdom, i.e. to the true Israel". Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 235.

¹⁴² The conflict between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel is analysed in Chapter 6.

4.4.3. *A Mother, a Lover, a Daughter and a Conqueror: The Son of Man's Self-Presentation as Wisdom in the Message to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-21; cf. Prov 8:22, 30; Song 5:2-6; Rev 19:11-21)*

In the message to Laodicea, the Son of Man describes himself as “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation” (ὁ ἀμὴν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ; Rev 3:14).¹⁴³ This name, like “the Son of God” (Rev 2:18) and “Holy and True” (Rev 3:7), is a new facet of the Son of Man’s self-presentation. The allusions contained in “the Amen [...], the beginning of God’s creation,” to Prov 8:22 (κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ, literally “The LORD created me the beginning of his ways”), indicates that the Amen should be understood as divine, creative and feminine Wisdom, who either pre-existed God’s creation of the world or was his first creation and helped him to create all living things (cf. Rev 1:17-18).¹⁴⁴ However, the qualification of the Amen’s name as “the faithful and true witness,” which also alludes to the description of Jesus Christ as “the faithful witness” in the epistolary prescript of the Letter to the Seven Churches (ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, Rev 1:5), proclaims a relationship between “her” and “Faithful and True” (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, Rev 19:11), Revelation’s most fearsome and successful warrior.¹⁴⁵ In this persona of the Son of Man, therefore, there may be echoes of El Shaddai’s appropriation of the attributes of Anat, the Canaanite Wisdom and warrior goddess (cf. §4.2.4).

This complex, and female, persona has an equally complex relationship, sometimes in terms of gender, with the members of the community in Laodicea. She

¹⁴³ Aune states: “Three important and related christological titles occur in this introductory clause: (1) the Amen, (2) the faithful and true Witness, and (3) the Origin of the creation of God.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 254. This is the only use of the title ὁ ἀμὴν in the New Testament. Aune considers that it is an allusion to Isa 65:16, in which verse “the name of God is mentioned in connection with the use of both blessings and oaths.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 255. Lou H. Silberman argues that the Son of Man’s three titles in Rev 3:14 are taken from descriptions of Wisdom in Prov 8:22 and 30, in which חָכְמָה is “misunderstood and faultily transliterated as (ὁ) ἀμὴν,” and a midrash upon Gen 1:1; he translates *Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμὴν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ* as “Thus says the Master Workman, the faithful and true witness, the foremost of his creation.” Lou H. Silberman, “Farewell to ὁ ἀμὴν: A Note on Rev 3:14,” *JBL* 82 (1963): 213-215. See, also, Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 256-57.

¹⁴⁴ Aune explains that the word ἀρχὴ can mean: “(1) beginning (temporal or aspectual), (2) ruler, authority, office, (3) cause.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 256.

¹⁴⁵ An echo of this phrase is also found in the description of Antipas, the “faithful witness” (ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου) of the Son of Man, who was killed “where Satan lives,” and to whom reference is made in the message to Pergamum (Rev 2:13). Since “faithful witness” occurs in the middle of the description of the “Amen,” this title appears “to define the essential meaning of ‘Amen.’” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 255-56. Aune also notes the allusion to the Amen in Faithful and True’s name. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1053. Faithful and True is also described as ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. In the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel Christ (ὁ λόγος) is also described as having appropriated the identity of God’s creative Wisdom (ἀρχὴ, Jn 1:2-3). See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 256. It is also noticeable that the members of Faithful and True’s army wear the white clothing recommended by the Amen to the naked Laodiceans (Rev 3:18; 19:14).

firstly speaks of them with disgust, as though they are something which she has begun to eat but, because of their foul taste, she vomits out of her mouth (Rev 3:16). Then, like personified Wisdom in Proverbs, she encourages them to follow her teaching and acquire the wisdom which is better than riches (Rev 3:18; cf. Prov 2:4; 3:14-15). This is followed by a depiction of herself as a parent (Rev 3:19). As already noted (§4.2.6), the Son of Man understands himself to be, or wishes to be, in a relationship of a mother with his followers. This yearning for motherhood is made explicitly in the message to Laodicea where the Amen speaks of herself in terms of a stern but loving mother with wilful children:

“Those whom I love I reprove and discipline [παιδεύω]” (Rev 3:19).

In the next verse, however, the Amen turns from mother to lover:

Ἴδου ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἔάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπήσω μετ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ’ ἐμοῦ.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I shall come in to him and dine with him and he with me (Rev 3:20).

As noted above (§4.2.1), there is a possible allusion in Rev 3:20 to LXX Song of Songs:

Ἐγὼ καθεύδω, καὶ ἡ καρδία μου ἀγρυπνεῖ.
φωνὴ ἀδελφίδοῦ μου, κρούει ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν
Ἄνοιξόν μοι, ἀδελφὴ μου [...]
I sleep, but my heart is awake.

The voice of my beloved! He is knocking on the door:

“Open to me, my beloved [...] (LXX Song 5:2).¹⁴⁶

Here the female lover either awakes from sleep to hear, or dreams that she hears, her (male) lover knocking at the door and demanding entrance, a “double entendre” for his desire to make love to her.¹⁴⁷ The language of the Song uses the imagery of a door, bolt, hand and opening to indicate the lovers’ genitalia, and dew and myrrh to indicate their respective sexual arousal (Song 5:2-6).¹⁴⁸ In the case of the message to Laodicea, the lover knocking on the door is a male character in the guise of a female one, and the

¹⁴⁶ My translation.

¹⁴⁷ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 190.

¹⁴⁸ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 191-96.

owner of the house is (grammatically) male. As in Song 5:2, the language seems to have a double meaning: like the male lover of the Song who, it may be remembered, has female breasts (Song 1:2; see §4.3.4), the Son of Man, in his persona of the female Amen, is battering on the “door” of her lover, demanding entrance into the dark inner (female) space of the house; like the female lover of the Song (Song 5:2), the householder appears to be asleep (cf. Rev 3:3). Like the male lover of the Song (Song 5:1, 2, 5), the Amen hungers for love, and in her depiction there is an association between sexual arousal and food. This does not sit ill with her portrayal as Wisdom, who is portrayed as the ultimate object of desire (Prov 8:11).

It may be argued that Revelation’s Heaven is represented by a woman who is a personification of wisdom (Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9-10),¹⁴⁹ as noted above (§4.1), however, there is no room for anything female inside that Heaven. Nevertheless, the Amen declares that she has sat down with her Father upon his Throne (Rev 3:21). In this verse, the Amen, as well as being a mother and a lover, is being presented as God’s “daughter:”

The LORD created me the beginning of his work,

the first of his acts of long ago (Prov 8:22)

[...]

then I was beside him, like a little child;

and I was daily his delight,

rejoicing before him always (Prov 8:30).

The only two other personae of the Son of Man to claim God as their father are the male Son of God (Rev 2:28) and He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars (Rev 3:5); neither is given a place on the Throne. A possible reason for the Amen being granted such an accolade is because she has “conquered” (Rev 3:21) and, specifically, conquered femininity.¹⁵⁰ The femaleness of the Amen, like that of the Son of Man, is not an affirmation either of female sexuality or of the female body, but a means of incorporating into the male gender those qualities and attributes associated with the female which are considered desirable; in the case of the Amen they are: the creative

¹⁴⁹ Barbara R. Rossing, *The Choice between Two Cities: Whore, Bride and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harvard Theological Studies 48; Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 150-51; cf. Pippin, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” 138-39, 147-50; 291-95.

¹⁵⁰ Conquering is a requirement of characters who hope to achieve an elect place in Heaven which equates to a position of high status on the gender hierarchy (see, for example, Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 17:14; 21:7; see §4.6).

Wisdom associated with feminine divinity; maternal love; and being the object of “her” beloved’s consuming desire.¹⁵¹

Comment

As well as being endowed with breasts (Rev 1:13), the Son of Man declares that he has assumed those powers associated with three feminine personifications of the divine: the Egyptian goddess Isis, creative Wisdom of the Jewish tradition and the Greek goddess Hecate, guardian of the crossroads and of the underworld (Rev 1:17-18). Furthermore, he presents himself to the Seven Churches in both male and female guises. To the churches in Ephesus and Sardis he presents himself as a divine and apparently male figure who has cosmic powers, for he has power over both the heavenly Angels and the Angels of the Seven Churches and is present among all seven Christian communities of Asia (Rev 2:1; 3:1; cf. 1:14, 16). To the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira he presents himself as an undoubtedly male warrior (Rev 2:12, 16, 18, 26-28; see §4.2.3), to the Churches in Smyrna, Philadelphia and Laodicea he alludes to his self-description to John (Rev 1:17-18) and presents himself in terms associated with Hecate and with divine feminine Wisdom (Rev 2:8; 3:7, 14; see §4.3.1). In his manly body the elite Son of Man has assumed the female capacity to nourish infants with wisdom or magical powers by means of his lactating breasts. In his self-understanding, he has purloined the divine female powers of creation, life and death.

In his persona of the Amen, the Son of Man has assumed the mantle of creative Wisdom which is also seen flung over the warrior Faithful and True, also known as “the Word of God” (Rev 19:11, 13; cf. Jn 1:1). She both reaches out to her uncommitted followers as the motherly Wisdom of Proverbs who teaches and reproves her ignorant children (Rev 3:18-19; Prov 8:5, 10-11, 18-19, 21, 32-36) and offers herself as a lover firstly to the Angel of the Church in Laodicea (Rev 3:15-16) and secondly to the desirable householder (Rev 3:20; cf. Song 5:2-6). Like Wisdom, she is in turn God’s child: his darling daughter (Rev 3:14), who played like a child at the beginning of his creation (Prov 8:30). She has also “conquered,” a term which, as has been seen (§4.1), has connotations not only of victory in battle, but also of sexual conquest, specifically of a “feminine” object, and which confirms her depiction as a “faithful and true” warrior (Rev 3:22). The

¹⁵¹ The gender ambiguities in the relationship of the Son of Man in his persona of the Amen with the Laodiceans reflects those in his relationship with John, who may be interpreted either as the Son of Man’s child, eager for maternal nourishment, or as his sexual conquest (§see 4.3.4-5).

Amen has, therefore, extremely high status in the gender hierarchy and is able to sit upon her heavenly father's lap, with her longed-for child, Him Who Conquers, in turn upon her lap (Rev 3:22; cf. 21:7), an image which reflects the iconography of Isis and her son Horus or the infant pharaoh.¹⁵²

At the same time, the personae which the Son of Man presents to the Seven Churches demonstrate that he is not lacking either in hatred for his enemies (Rev 2:6, 9, 14-15, 20; 3:9-10) or in the desire, and ability, to wreak sometimes violent vengeance upon those who cross him – and to delight in their suffering (Rev 2:5, 16, 22-23, 26-28; 3:3, 9). The Son of Man may truly be said to be the epitome of “manhood” in Revelation (see §4.1).

If, in his persona of the Amen, the Son of Man may be said to be showing his most feminine and nurturing face, in his persona of the Son of God, he is seen to be showing his most masculine and aggressive. As is demonstrated below (§4.5-9), the Son of God is a pitiless warrior, who eschews all things female.

4.5. The Son of Man's Self-Presentation to the Church in Thyatira: “The Son of God” (Rev 2:18-23, 26-28; cf. Psalm 2; Jn 5:19-29)

As in the message to Philadelphia, where he identifies himself as “the Holy One, the True One” (Rev 3:7), and in the message to Laodicea, where he calls himself “the Amen” (Rev 3:14), in the message to Thyatira the Son of Man gives his Thyatiran persona a completely new name: “the Son of God” (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev 2:18). This is the only description of the Son of Man as “the Son of God” found in Revelation, and Ben Witherington considers that the reason for the use of this unusual name in the message to Thyatira is because of the later allusion to LXX Ps 2:9 (“You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel;” cf. “And he will rule them with a rod of iron as when earthen pots are shattered” (Rev 2:27)).¹⁵³ However, there may well be another reason for the Son of Man's self-description as “the Son of God” in this message. As pointed out by George W.E. Nickelsburg, there is in the Fourth Gospel a

¹⁵² Isis, whose name is a transliteration of the Egyptian *aset*, meaning “throne,” was originally “the Egyptian throne personified and deified [...] Isis the throne made the king of Egypt.” Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, 156. Moreover, early mythology concerning Horus as a youth recounts his “struggle for the kingship” and Isis was understood to be the “protector of the dead king and mother of his heir, Horus, the living king. Thus her original identity as the personification of the throne is preeminent.” Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*, 158-59.

¹⁵³ Witherington, *Revelation*, 104.

“double tradition” (Jn 5:19-29), where Jesus describes himself both as “the Son of God” (τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, Jn 5:25) and “the Son of Man” (υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου, Jn 5:27).¹⁵⁴ Although in the Fourth Gospel Jesus is called the “Son of Man” and in Revelation he is described as “one like a son of man” (ὅμοιον υἱὸν ἀνθρώπου), and there are major Christological differences between the two texts, there are similarities in the way in which the titles are used.¹⁵⁵ Adela Yarbro Collins and John J. Collins note that both the Fourth Gospel and Revelation “present Jesus as preexistent and as divine in some sense. In the Gospel, he is either an emanation of God or God’s first creature, namely, the only-begotten god. In Revelation, the evidence suggests that he is God’s first creature, namely, the principal angel.”¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the pericope in the Fourth Gospel, in which Jesus speaks of judgement both actual and eschatological (Jn 5:19-29), has certain similarities with the self-description of the Son of Man as the Son of God in the message to Thyatira.

In his persona of the Son of God the Son of Man presents himself as a particularly judgemental character, who casts Jezebel into sickness (Rev 2:22), her adulterous “lovers” into great distress (Rev 2:22) and declares that he will kill her “children” (Rev 2:23). He speaks of himself using the divine “I am” formula in order to declare that he has the divine ability to search people’s hearts and minds (ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, Rev 2:23). Moreover, he threatens them all with pitiless judgement after death (δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστω κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν, Rev 2:23) and declares that he has authority from his father (δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν [...] ὡς καγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου, Rev 2:26, 28). Similarly in the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks of himself as both the Son of God (Jn 5:25) and Son of Man (Jn 5:27) whose father has granted him authority (ἐξουσίαν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ) to execute judgement (Jn 5:27) and at the sound of whose voice all who are in their tombs will come out either to resurrection of life or to resurrection of judgement (Jn 5:28-29).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ George W.E. Nickelsburg, “Son of Man,” in David Noel Freedman ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. VI, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 146. Cf. Aune, who is of the opinion that the depiction of the Son of Man appears to be uninfluenced by the use of the Son of Man tradition in the Gospels or Acts, where the title, unlike in Revelation, usually has the definite article. In the New Testament the title “Son of Man” only occurs without the definite article in Jn 5:27; Heb 2:6; Rev 1:13; 14:14. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 90.

¹⁵⁵ Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 202-203.

¹⁵⁶ Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 203.

¹⁵⁷ Yarbro Collins notes that in the Fourth Gospel the Son of Man is presented as “the eschatological judge.” In relation to the passage discussed here, she continues: “This judgment is eschatological in a realized sense, because it takes place during the ministry of Jesus.” There is a probable allusion in Jn 5:27 to Dan 7:13-14. Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament,” in John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel, with an essay, “The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament,”* by Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 101. Raymond E. Brown also considers that Jn 5:27 alludes to Dan 7:13 where, he states, “the figure of a “son of man” appears in the

It may, therefore, be concluded that the Son of Man is presenting himself in the message to Thyatira as the Son of God (Rev 2:18) to establish his credentials as: (1) the conquering warrior king described in Psalm 2 (Rev 2:18, 26-28); (2) a divinity with flaming eyes which, in Witherington's words, give the impression of "one who sees all, penetrating right to the heart" (Rev 2:18, 23),¹⁵⁸ and bronze feet, another indication of his divinity (Rev 2:18); (3) a divine eschatological judge who has the ability to see into people's minds (Rev 2:23); and (4) a conquering hero who rules with a rod of iron and has God as his father (Rev 2:18, 26-28).

These four self-descriptions of the Son of Man are analysed below (§4.6-9), beginning with the presentation of the Son of God as a warrior king.

4.6. A Divine Warrior King: The Self-Description of the Son of God

The presentation of the Son of God contains allusions to Psalm 2 (cf. §4.5), which contains a portrayal of the "ideal" king, the divinely-anointed messianic warrior.

4.6.1. Sex and Violence in the Presentation of the Son of God as the Warrior King of Psalm 2 (Rev 2:18, 26-28; cf. Ps 2:1-11)

Psalm 2 is a royal psalm or, more exactly, a coronation psalm. It has a dramatic character and was probably written for a liturgical setting in the temple or palace in which a new king is anointed and Peter C. Craigie considers that the words of Ps 2:7-9 "may well be words which were formally declared by the new king after his anointing and installation, during the course of the coronation."¹⁵⁹ At the same time, he rightly notes that "the psalm breathes an atmosphere of violence (2:9)."¹⁶⁰ By alluding to this psalm in the description of the Son of God (Rev 2:26-28), the Author of Revelation presents him, therefore, not only as a divinely-anointed king, God's heir and with authority over all the peoples of

context of final divine judgment. And *final* judgment seems to be what is in mind in John v 26-30" (the author's emphasis). Whereas Jn 5:25 refers to those who are "spiritually dead," Jn 5:28 describes those who are "physically dead." Brown considers that Jn 5:29 is "a clear echo of Dan xii 2, the first passage in the OT to proclaim clearly a resurrection into the afterlife." Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Gospel according to John (i-xii): Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 220.
¹⁵⁸ Witherington, *Revelation*, 104.

¹⁵⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (WBC 19; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 67. Although in its original context Psalm 2 was a coronation psalm, it was interpreted by early Christians as "a messianic psalm par excellence," and quotations from or allusions to it are found throughout the texts of the New Testament. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 68. In particular, Craigie notes the "many references" to Psalm 2 in Revelation. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 69.

¹⁶⁰ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 69.

the Earth (Ps 2:7-8), but also as a pitiless warrior, who delights in sexualised violence for its own sake:

*You shall break them with a rod of iron,
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps 2:9).*

This penetrative violence, undertaken with the divine son's "rod of iron," is reflected in Revelation's depiction of the humiliating destruction of the Gentiles by Faithful and True (Rev 19:15). Unlike Faithful and True, the Son of God is not explicitly portrayed as possessing a euphemistic phallus, but the allusion, which is almost a quotation, to Ps 2:8-9 in Rev 2:26-27, confirms not only that he has such a weapon, but that he delights in using it.¹⁶¹ Moreover, it is implied that he uses it in his attack upon a woman, the Prophetess of Thyatira, whom he "throws down" upon a couch or bed (Rev 2:22).¹⁶²

The presentation of the Son of God is also similar to the description of another Son of God, which is found in *4QAramaic Apocalypse* (4Q246 I, 1-9; II, 1-9).

4.6.2. *A Comparison of the Description of the Son of God with the Son of God of 4QAramaic Apocalypse (Rev 2:18, 26-28; cf. 4Q246 I, 1-9; II, 1-9)*

The Son of God of *4QAramaic Apocalypse* has been interpreted in various ways, including the possibility that he is a "self-deified king" and/or a "historical character" such as Antiochus IV.¹⁶³ However, Frank Moore Cross draws attention to the similarities between 4Q246 and "the Aramaic portions of Daniel," and points out that the description of the Son of God in 4Q246 also contains allusions to: the Ancient of Days and the "one like a son of man" of Dan 7:9, 13-14; the Son of Man of *I Enoch* 46:1-4; 48:1-10; and to "His Anointed" of *I Enoch* 52:4. Frank Moore Cross argues that this Son of God should

¹⁶¹ See Moore, *God's Beauty Parlor*, 180-81.

¹⁶² Gail Corrington Streete considers that the attack upon Jezebel is "a rape and punishment" and "sexual humiliation." Gail Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 154-55. Marshall considers the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel to be "sexualized violence." Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 17, 19. Pippin argues that the text implies that Jezebel is "stripped naked" like the Woman Babylon (ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν [...] γυμνήν), Rev 17:16). Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 92.

¹⁶³ Frank Moore Cross, "The Structure of the Apocalypse of 'Son of God' (4Q246)," in *Emanuel: Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (ed. Shalom M. Paul et al.; Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2002), 151. For a list of a number of scholars' interpretations of 4Q246, see Cross, "The Structure of the Apocalypse of 'Son of God' (4Q246)," 151, Footnote 2. See, also, Karl A. Kuhn, "The 'One like a Son of Man' Becomes the 'Son of God,'" *CBQ* 69 (2007), 22-23.

be interpreted as the “Messianic King.”¹⁶⁴ Of particular interest is Cross’s reconstruction of lacunae in 4Q246 I, 7-II, 1, which enables him to translate these verses as follows:

“(7) [And there shall arise a son of man.] [ויקום בר אנש]
He shall be a great [king] over the [whole] earth (8).
[And all of mankind] shall serve [him],
And all shall minister (9) [to him.]
[The Holy One of the g]reat [God] [קדוש אלוקה רבא] he shall be called,
And by his name he shall be surnamed.
(1) Son of God [ברך די אל] he shall be called,
And Son of the Most High [ובר עליון] he shall be surnamed.”¹⁶⁵

Just as in Cross’s reconstruction the “son of man” (4Q246 I, 7) is called “the Son of God” (4Q246 II, 1), so Revelation’s Son of Man is described as being “(like a) son of man” (Rev 1:13), who presents himself as “the Son of God” (Rev 2:18). It seems probable, therefore, that the Author of Revelation either knew 4Q246 or knew the underlying tradition and used it in his own composition. Moreover, like the Son of God of 4Q246, Revelation’s Son of God is portrayed as a judge and as having the support of God in his campaign to be the ruler of all people (4Q246 II, 6, 7, 9; Rev 2:23, 26-28).

4.6.3. *The Portrayal of the Son of God as a Warrior in the Book of Revelation (Rev 2:18, 26-28; cf. 1:16; 2:12, 16; 12:7-9; 19:11-16, 21)*

Revelation is about war and the Son of God is not its only warrior. The Son of Man is described by John as possessing a sword-like tongue (Rev 1:16), and in turn the Son of Man presents himself to the Angel of the Church in Pergamum as “He who has the sharp two-edged sword” (Rev 2:12, 16). Michael, with his angelic army, fights and succeeds in defeating the Dragon and his angels and throwing them down to Earth (Rev 12:7-9).

¹⁶⁴ Cross, “The Structure of the Apocalypse of ‘Son of God’ (4Q246),” 152-53. In support of his hypothesis, he firstly points to the dating of the composition of 4Q246 in “the early second century B.C.E.,” which is “coeval with the four apocalypses of Daniel (Chapters 7, 8, 9, and 1-12 of the Book of Daniel).” Cross, “The Structure of the Apocalypse of ‘Son of God’ (4Q246),” 152. Secondly, he makes an analysis of 4Q246 in which he identifies the overlapping themes of “The War and the Perishing of Kings” (4Q246 I, 4-6; II, 1b-3) and “The Coming of the Messianic King” (4Q246 I, 7-11; II, 1a, 4-9). Cross, “The Structure of the Apocalypse of ‘Son of God’ (4Q246),” 153. Kuhn agrees that “the writer of the *Aramaic Apocalypse* intended to recast the Danielic ‘one like a son of man’ as a figure to be known by the titles ‘Son of the Most High’ and ‘Son of God.’” Kuhn, “The ‘One like a Son of Man’ Becomes the ‘Son of God,’” 30. He considers that “the figure designated as Son of the Most High and Son of God is best regarded as a Davidic (messianic), eschatological redeemer.” Kuhn, “The ‘One like a Son of Man’ Becomes the ‘Son of God,’” 24.

¹⁶⁵ Cross, “The Structure of the Apocalypse of ‘Son of God’ (4Q246),” 154-57.

Finally, another persona of Revelation's tripartite Messiah, Faithful and True, is presented as a victorious general (Rev 19:11-16, 21). Brief comparisons of the portrayals of these four warriors with the portrayal of the warrior Son of God serve to bring to the fore further aspects of his character.

John observes that from the mouth of the Son of Man protrudes a sharp double-edged sword (ρόμφαία δίστομος ὀξεῖα, Rev 1:16). Aune notes that is not unusual for divine utterances to be likened to a weapon in biblical texts, and this description may be an allusion Isa 49:2 ("He made my mouth like a sharp sword") combined with Isa 11:4 ("[...] he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked").¹⁶⁶ The Son of Man, it is implied, has the ability to fell his enemies simply by speaking. His possession of this powerful gift is confirmed by taking into account that, in terms of Graeco-Roman gender construction, he is being portrayed both as a warrior and as orator. In contrast, and despite his semi-divine status as a messianic warrior in the mould of King David, the Son of God is not being presented as a statesman, able to urge men to follow him by means of rousing speech; still less is he able to persuade the powerful Prophetess Jezebel to listen to him (Rev 2:21). His rough and ready manner of speaking is part and parcel of his presentation as a brutal soldier, who prefers action to words (Rev 2:22-23).¹⁶⁷

To the Angel of the Church in Pergamum, the Son of Man identifies himself as "He who has the sharp two-edged sword" (ὁ ἔχων τὴν ρομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν, Rev 2:12). Like that of the Son of Man (Rev 1:16), this character's "sword" is in reality his tongue, which is made apparent when he threatens his enemies as follows: "I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth" (Rev 2:16). Antipas, a former member of the Church in Pergamum, whom he describes as his "faithful witness," was killed, presumably for his public teaching or testimony (Rev 2:13). The church now contains members who hold teachings of which he disapproves (Rev 2:14-15), and it is these whom he threatens with a tongue-lashing so severe it will be like a war (Rev 2:16). This message is concerned with teaching and speaking; thus the Son of Man presents

¹⁶⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 98-99.

¹⁶⁷ As already noted (Footnote 42), the Author of Revelation takes great care to present the Son of Man's style of speech as relatively sophisticated, as befits a male character of his status. When he comes to address the Angel of the Church in Thyatira, however, the Son of Man seems to forget his dignified role; in this message his speech bears a closer resemblance to John's speech throughout the rest of the Book of Revelation. In particular, this may be seen in the frequent use of the word καί at the beginning of sentences or phrases voiced by the Son of God (Rev 2:21, 23, 26). Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 128, including footnote 13.

himself as a warrior with words. In contrast, as already demonstrated (§4.5.1-2), the Son of God is a “real” warrior, who physically maims, rapes and kills his enemies.

The archangel Michael is mentioned only briefly in Revelation where, in Aune’s opinion, he is portrayed as a “field marshal” [*sic*], an elite soldier leading an angelic army to rout the Dragon and his angels (Rev 12:7).¹⁶⁸ Whilst Michael and his angels defeat the Dragon and his angels, it is noticeable that they restrain themselves from slaughtering them; they are merely thrown down to Earth (Rev 12:8-9). This forbearance reflects the conduct expected of a triumphant Roman general; whatever losses his army had borne, as an elite male he would exercise restraint over his own emotions and not allow his soldiers to avenge their fallen comrades by putting the defeated enemy to the sword.¹⁶⁹ Michael thus stands in stark contrast with the warrior Son of God, who not only urges his followers to smash their enemies like pottery (Rev 2:27), but does not hesitate in attacking a woman and her children (Rev 2:22-23). Yet again, the comparison of the Son of God with another of Revelation’s warriors demonstrates that, even in a text which glorifies violence, the Son of God’s brutality is extreme.

The last of Revelation’s warriors is Faithful and True (Rev 19:11-16, 21) who, like the Son of Man and the Lamb, is a persona of the tripartite Messiah. His portrayal as seated upon a horse and wearing “many diadems” indicates that he is more than a warrior; he is a king or emperor (Rev 19:11-12).¹⁷⁰ He is also triumphant in warfare against the Beast from the Sea and his armies (Rev 19:19-21). Unlike Michael, however, Faithful and True lacks Graeco-Roman “manly” self-restraint and glorifies in unnecessary bloodshed; although the leader of the enemy army and his henchman are captured and executed (Rev 19:20), Faithful and True appears to throw off his mantle of leadership and revert to being a brutal killing-machine; alone he slaughters the enemy army (Rev 19:21). The sword with which he wreaks this mayhem (Rev 19:21) may, like that of the Son of Man and that of the warrior of Pergamum, be in reality his tongue (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, Rev 19:15; cf. 1:16; 2:12, 16); however, like the Son of God and his followers, he also possesses a “rod of iron” with which, after striking down the Gentiles with his sword/tongue (πατάξει τὰ ἔθνη), he will shatter them (ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, Rev 19:15; cf. 2:26-27).

¹⁶⁸ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 694.

¹⁶⁹ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 46, 163, 181-82.

¹⁷⁰ Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1054.

Like the Son of Man and the Son of God, Faithful and True has a penetrative, and possibly deadly, gaze (οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός, Rev 19:12; cf. 1:14; 2:18).¹⁷¹ Another similarity to the Son of God is found in his description as a judge (Rev 19:11). His name (πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, Rev 19:11), as noted above (§4.4.3), however, alludes to the Son of Man's self-presentation to the Church in Laodicea as the female Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation (Rev 3:14), in which he presents himself as divine feminine Wisdom; this unexpected hint of divine creative femininity in his character is also reflected in his other name: "the Word of God" (ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev 19:13 cf. Jn 1:1).¹⁷² Faithful and True is a far more complex character than the Son of God. Whilst, of the four warriors considered here, his portrayal is arguably the closest to that of the Son of God in its sheer brutality, destructiveness and ruthlessness, like the Son of Man and the Amen (Rev 1:17; 3:14; see §4.2.4-5; 4.4.3), he has also appropriated the "feminine" characteristic of creation associated with Wisdom.

Comment

Allusions contained in the presentation of the Son of God combine to create a portrayal of a resolutely male character, a warrior king who considers that he rules by divine right, is brutal in his subjugation of his enemies, ruthless in his suppression of dissent and singularly lacking in grace and magnanimity towards his enemies, including one who is a woman. If the Author is indeed alluding to *4QAramaic Apocalypse* in his depictions both of the Son of Man and of the Son of God, it is possible also to infer that he envisages this character as the messianic king who, aided by his God, triumphs over his enemies, and before whom all those people whom he and his God have not slaughtered will serve (cf. 4Q246 I, 8). The declaration that "All his ways are truth," "All will make peace (with him)" and that "The sword shall cease from the earth" (4Q246 II, 5-9) sound jarring notes, but need not mean that they are not implied in the message to Thyatira; the Son of God will bring peace, but only in the wake of brutality and slaughter, his rule will be mercilessly enforced and his judgements will be incontestable. In other words, after "conquering" his feminised enemies with his "rod of iron," the Son of God will turn from being a brutal warrior into a pitiless tyrant.

¹⁷¹ Faithful and True is also described as "treading the wine-press of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty" (Rev 19:15), which calls to mind the Angel Seated on a White Cloud (Rev 14:14, 19), who is another possible representation of the Son of Man.

¹⁷² At the same time, however, this name is tattooed upon his thigh, "a common ancient euphemism for genitals." Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 78.

The Son of God is also presented by means of allusion to the physical description of the Son of Man (Rev 1:14-15).

4.7. Flaming Eyes and Bronze Feet: Magic, Divinity and Idolatry in the Physical Description of the Son of God

In the message to Thyatira, the Son of God is described with reference to the Son of Man's eyes and feet: "He who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze (ὁ ἔχων τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς καὶ οἱ πόδες αὐτοῦ ὅμοιοι χαλκολιβάνῳ, Rev 2:18; cf. 1:14-15).

4.7.1. Dangerously Divine: The Flaming Eyes and Bronze Feet of the Son of God (Rev 2:18; cf. LXX Ps 103:4; Rev 1:14-15; 2:12, 16; PGM 1.295-330)

In the description of the eyes of the Son of God being "like a flame of fire" (ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς, Rev 2:18), Aune notes the possible allusion to LXX Ps 103:¹⁷³

He who makes his angels winds

and his servants fire and flame [πῦρ φλέγον] (LXX Ps 103:4).¹⁷⁴

Alternatively, the Author of Revelation may be alluding to the "scriptural florilegium" known to the author of the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 1:5-14), and with the same twofold purpose:¹⁷⁵ firstly, to emphasise that the messianic Son of God is indeed God's acknowledged son from all eternity, who was involved in creation; and secondly, to emphasise that the Son of God is superior to God's angels, whose nature is created.¹⁷⁶

There is, however, another reason for the portrayal of the Son of God with flaming eyes. Duff argues that the "fiery-eyed" Son of God is being portrayed as having the power of the "evil eye," with which he sets out to "overlook" his enemy Jezebel and her followers and cause them to fall ill and even to die (Rev 2:22-23).¹⁷⁷ The Author was well-acquainted with the vocabulary of magic (cf. §3.1.4) and Revelation contains

¹⁷³ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 202

¹⁷⁴ My translation.

¹⁷⁵ William L. Lane considers that this passage is possibly dependent upon "a scriptural florilegium" derived from "a traditional testimony collection," which appears to have also been known by the author of *1 Clement*. Lane notes that there are "obvious similarities between Heb 1:5-14 and *1 Clem.* 36.1-6," including "christological concepts." *4QFlorilegium* also contains combinations of quotations from Ps 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 (cf. 4Q174 1, 2, 7) and Ps 2:1-2 (cf. 4Q174 1, 18-19), amongst others. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (WBC 47A; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 23-24.

¹⁷⁶ Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 24-25.

¹⁷⁷ Duff, "I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve," 118. Duff's argument that the Son of God has appropriated the power of the "evil eye" from the goddess Hecate in order to "overlook" Jezebel and her "children" is considered in §6.4.1.

several mentions of sorcerers and sorcery (Rev 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15) and “magical motifs.”¹⁷⁸ Since it was believed that the “evil eye” was as effective as any weapon, it might well have been thought fitting that a divine warrior such as the Son of God should have the magical power to fell his enemies with a glance;¹⁷⁹ it is noticeable that the warrior Faithful and True also possesses eyes like “a flame of fire” (φλόξ πυρός, Rev 19:12).¹⁸⁰

Duff argues that the Son of God is being portrayed as having the powers of Hecate, who “was known for her ‘evil eye.’”¹⁸¹ Furthermore, according to Simon Price and Emily Kearns, Hecate also wore “the bronze sandal of her who holds Tartarus.”¹⁸² However, the foregoing analysis of the presentation of the divinely-anointed warrior Son of God has demonstrated that, unlike the Son of Man, he is emphatically and exclusively “male;” the association of his penetrative and feminising gaze with a *female* divinity does not ring true. Hecate was not the only deity known for the possession of flaming eyes,¹⁸³ nor was she the only deity associated with striking down mortals with dread diseases; moreover, while Hecate was indeed frequently invoked in magical incantations, according to Hans Dieter Betz, Apollo was “the Greek god most often invoked” by

¹⁷⁸ Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 22, 196-99. See, also: Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 120-21.

¹⁷⁹ See Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 120. Duff argues that the reason for the Son of Man turning his flaming eyes upon the members of the Church in Thyatira, but not upon those of any other church, is the Author’s veiled accusation that its Prophetess practises magic. In order to thwart her, the Son of Man usurps the powers of the “evil-eyed” Hecate and, in his persona of the Son of God, “pays back ‘Jezebel’ in kind for her association with witchcraft” by means of witchcraft. Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 132. Although, in his article Duff does not challenge the Author’s use of hostile rhetoric in order to suggest that Jezebel is a practitioner of magic or “witchcraft,” he does acknowledge that the Author only implies that Jezebel is a practitioner of magic. Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 131.

¹⁸⁰ See Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 125. Moreover, for ancient people, seeing was akin to knowing, as is demonstrated by the similarity of the two verbs in Greek (εἶδον and οἶδα). Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*, 42-43, including Footnote 84. This is particularly true for the Son of God with the flaming eyes, who says to the Angel of the Church “I know (οἶδα) your works” (Rev 2:18) and declares that he has a gaze strong enough to penetrate people’s bodies far enough to see, and thus to know, what is in their hearts and minds (νεφροῦς καὶ καρδίας, literally “kidneys and hearts;” Rev 2:23). See Witherington, *Revelation*, 104.

¹⁸¹ Duff also notes the allusions to Hecate contained both in the Son of Man’s self-understanding (Rev 1:17-18; see §4.2.4) and in his self-presentation to the Angel of the Church in Smyrna (Rev 2:8). Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 125.

¹⁸² Price and Kearns, *The Oxford Dictionary of Classical Myth and Religion*, 243. This is in spite of Duff’s assertion that the Son of God’s bronze feet pose a problem for his association with Hecate. Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 124, Footnote 48.

¹⁸³ Duff calls particular attention to the thunderbolt which flashed from the powerful eyes of Zeus (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 468-70). Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 123. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 95.

magicians (cf. §4.3.1).¹⁸⁴ In relation to the Son of God’s bare bronze feet, it is particularly interesting to note that the feet of Apollo were said to be “beautiful” (Callimachus, *Hymn* 2.3).¹⁸⁵ In the *Iliad*, Apollo is a warrior who fights on the Trojan side and inflicts the Greek army with a deadly plague (Homer, *Iliad* I.9-10, 48-53);¹⁸⁶ similarly, the bronze-footed Son of God declares that he will kill Jezebel’s children either with “death” or with “plague” (Rev 2:23).¹⁸⁷

An “Apollonian invocation” (*PGM* 1.262-347), which gives instruction to a magician, is of particular interest here:

“[...] call the god with this chant:

“O lord Apollo, [...]

First angel of [the god], great Zeus.”

[...]

And when he comes, ask him about what you wish, about the art of prophecy [...], about causing disease [...]

(*PGM* 1.295-300, 328-330).¹⁸⁸

There are two further allusions, one literary and one visual, contained in the depiction of both the Son of Man and the Son of God as having feet “like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace” (Rev 1:15; 2:18). Both are centred upon golden or bronze statues.

4.7.2. *The Statuesque Son of God (Rev 1:18; cf. Dan 3:4-6, 22-25)*

Various theories have been put forward regarding the meaning or derivation of the word χαλκολίβανος, none of which Moyise considers to be entirely satisfactory. This is partly because Dan 10:5-6, the text usually regarded as that to which allusion is made in this description, “cannot explain John’s choice of χαλκολίβανος.”¹⁸⁹ Moyise considers it

¹⁸⁴ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, xlvii-xlviii. Examples of incantations invoking Apollo are: *PGM* I.262-347, entitled “Apollonian invocation;” and *PGM* VII.727-739, entitled “Charm for a direct vision of Apollo.” Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 10-11, 139.

¹⁸⁵ Homer also describes Poseidon as striding upon “swift” and “immortal” feet which cause the mountains and woods to tremble Homer, *Iliad* XIII.17-19, with reference to Anthony Verity’s translation, Homer, *The Iliad*, 200. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 95-96.

¹⁸⁶ Apollo was believed to have the “power to inflict (and protect from) contagious disease.” Barbara Gaziosi, “Explanatory Notes,” in Homer, *The Iliad* (trans. Anthony Verity; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 411.

¹⁸⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 198. The Son of God’s infliction of sickness upon Jezebel, her followers and her children, and the possible role of his feet in this attack, is considered in §6.4; 6.5.4.

¹⁸⁸ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 10-11.

¹⁸⁹ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 32-33.

possible that the description “burnished bronze” is influenced by Thyatira’s “smelting industry,” which manufactured metals used in the construction of weapons.¹⁹⁰ Since, in the description of the Son of Man, the burnished bronze of his feet are “refined as in a furnace” (Rev 1:15), there is a possible allusion in the Son of God’s description to Dan 3:4-6.¹⁹¹ This passage describes the golden statue which King Nebuchadnezzar commands all people to fall down and worship and the fiery furnace which awaits those who refuse to do so. Moyise points out that there are other possible allusions to this story about the three Judaeans who refuse to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s statue (Dan 3:1-30): firstly, in the Beast’s command that those who refuse to worship its image should be killed (Dan 3:6; cf. Rev 13:15); and secondly, in the frequent echo of “peoples, nations and languages” (Dan 3:4, 7, 29; cf. Rev 5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Moyise says: “it is possible that John is setting the scene of his book by alluding to the fiery furnace of Daniel.”¹⁹²

It is here that there occurs an instance of the Author of Revelation’s liberal use of literary allusion backfiring upon him and, as a consequence, his loss of control of his characterisation. Dan 3:22-25 describes how the servants of the king are consumed in the furnace (Dan 3:22) whilst the three Judaeans are delivered from its flames (Dan 3:22) by “one like a son of God(s)” (לבר־אלהין, Dan 3:25). The Author may well have intended his audience to interpret the literary echoes of this scene in the message to Thyatira to infer that in the same way Jezebel and her followers will be consumed (perhaps by the fiery gaze of the Son of God) whilst those who object to her teaching will be saved by him (Rev 2:22-24).¹⁹³ The dominant image in the description of the Son of God, however, is of Nebuchadnezzar’s golden statue.¹⁹⁴ The resemblance of the Son of God to the statue

¹⁹⁰ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 32 and 41-42.

¹⁹¹ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 41. Aune considers that this is another allusion to the “man clothed in linen” (“his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze,” Dan 10:6). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 95. Witherington considers that the Son of Man’s lack of footwear may “indicate his stability or unmoveableness.” Witherington, *Revelation*, 82.

¹⁹² Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 41.

¹⁹³ Beale notes: “Here and in 1:15 the phrase ὡς φλόγα πυρὸς (“as a flame of fire”), together with χαλκολιβάνω (“bronze”), may echo the “furnace” in which Daniel’s three friends were thrown (Dan. 3:24-25, 49, 93, Theod.)” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 259. John J. Collins acknowledges the interpretation in “Christian tradition” of the angelic character in the furnace as Christ, but notes that “[i]n Jewish tradition opinions differed whether God sent an angel (most usually identified as Gabriel) or delivered the youths Himself.” John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel, with an essay, “The Influence of Daniel on the New Testament,”* by Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1993), 190.

¹⁹⁴ Moore draws attention to the similarity of the Son of God to a statue. Moore, *God’s Gym*, 121, including Footnote 193. The Son of Man and the Son of God are not the only characters whose descriptions contain allusions to statues; the description of the Angel Wrapped in a Cloud (Rev 10:1-6) alludes to the Colossos of Rhodes. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 556-57.

of a pagan god is further enhanced when it is remembered that statues of pagan gods abounded in the towns of Asia Minor. For the members of the Church in Thyatira in particular, it is more than probable that, upon hearing the description of the Son of God, their thoughts would have strayed to the magnificent bronze statue standing in a place of honour in the centre of their city: the statue of Thyatira's patron god, Apollo Tyrimnaeus (cf. §3.Introduction).¹⁹⁵ If the visual allusion to Thyatira's bronze statue dedicated to its syncretistic pagan god is overlaid onto the (unintended) literary allusion to Nebuchadnezzar's idol, the overwhelming picture being drawn is that of a gleaming statue of a pagan god. The self-proclaimed Son of God, the divinely-ordained messianic warrior king, is unintentionally being depicted by the Author of Revelation as a brazen idol.

Comment

The Son of God broods menacingly over the members of the community in Thyatira like the bronze statue of Apollo Tyrimnaeus in the middle of their city. His penetrative and flaming eyes rake them with evil intent and his bronze feet glisten in the sun, reminding them that he is a warrior god. It is unlikely that the similarity of the Son of God both to this statue, and to the statue made by Nebuchadnezzar, would have induced in them the fear and trembling no doubt intended by the Author. Instead, as Gentile converts to Christianity, who had renounced their former beliefs, they would have reacted with disgust; like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, they would have refused to bow down to this pagan idol created by the Author of Revelation.

The Son of Man presents himself to the Church in Thyatira as a statuesque image of a divine warrior with eyes as piercing as any weapon. The Son of God, however, describes himself as a divine judge.

¹⁹⁵ Hemer comes to the conclusion, similar to that of Moyise, that χαλκολίβανος was a product of Thyatiran industry, "a 'copulative compound', literally rendered 'copper-zinc.'" Hemer considers it probable that the Author of Revelation had this god in his mind when writing this description. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 116.

4.8. Just Beastly: The Self-Presentation of the Son of God as a Divine Judge (Rev 2:23; cf. Jer 17:10; Rev 19:11; PGM IV.3045-47)

The message to Thyatira is the only one of the seven messages in which the Son of Man uses the divine “I am” formula of himself, as he does in his self-description to John (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, Rev 1:17). However, in his persona of the Son of God he does not describe himself in terms associated with divine Wisdom, as he does in the messages to Smyrna (Rev 2:8) and to Laodicea (Rev 3:14, 18), but as a divine judge: (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν, Rev 2:23). The description of the Son of God as “He who searches kidneys and hearts,” and as giving to those who hold Jezebel’s teaching according to their “works,” indicates that, like the warrior Faithful and True (Rev 19:11), the anointed warrior king is also being presented as a divine judge.¹⁹⁶

The only other place in the Jewish and early Christian texts where the combination of a divine figure judging kidneys and hearts with the judgement of works is found in relation to Yahweh is in the Book of Jeremiah:¹⁹⁷

*“I the LORD test the mind [καρδίας]
and search the heart [νεφροὺς],
to give to all according to their ways,
according to the fruit of their doings”* (Jer 17:10).

Aune considers that this allusion indicates that, for the Author of Revelation, the Son of God has been given Yahweh’s “omniscience” of people’s actions. At the same time, a similar concept is also found in “a magical procedure possibly of Jewish origin” contained in the *Greek Magical Papyri*.¹⁹⁸ In this spell (PGM IV.3007-3086), which is described as being “for those possessed by daimons,” the magician declares:

*[...] because I conjure you by god, light-bearing, unconquerable, who
knows what is in the heart of every living being* (PGM IV.3045-47).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ The Son of God’s presentation as a judge also links him to Revelation’s God (Rev 6:10; 11:18; 14:7; 16:5, 7, 8; 17:1; 18:8, 10, 20; 19:2; 20:12, 13). The only other characters depicted as judges are unnamed persons who seat themselves upon thrones and are given the authority to judge” (Rev 20:4). It is not explained who these judges are. They do not appear to be the Twenty-Four Elders for, while they are certainly described as being seated on thrones (Rev 4:4; 11:16), there is, as pointed out by Aune, “no hint anywhere that they exercised a judicial function.” It seems that being enthroned does not bestow upon these people the authority to judge; it is rather that they are already judges and have been given thrones “to emphasize their exaltation.” Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1084-85.

¹⁹⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 206-207.

¹⁹⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 206.

¹⁹⁹ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 96-97.

One of the gods often invoked in magical spells was the Egyptian god Anubis, described by Joyce Tyldesley as “the jackal-headed guardian of the cemeteries, ‘the dog who swallows millions.’”²⁰⁰ Like Jeremiah’s Yahweh (Jer 17:10) and the judgemental Son of God (Jn 5:19-29; Rev 2:23), Anubis is also associated both with judgement of the dead and with knowledge of what is in people’s hearts. In particular, as noted by Geraldine Pinch, Anubis was the “terrifying canine god” associated with death and burial, and especially of mummification rites and assisting in the judgement of the dead. Anubis was also known as the “Keeper of the Keys to the Underworld” and as “an enforcer of curses.” The *Book of the Dead* depicts him in this latter role “supervising the weighing of the hearts of the dead.” He was usually portrayed “as a seated black jackal or as a man with the head of a jackal or wild dog.” This imagery owed itself to the constant danger of dead human bodies being dug up out of their shallow graves by the wild dogs of the desert.²⁰¹ According to the *Book of the Dead*, Egyptians believed that a person who had recently died was obliged to appear in a court where his or her heart would be weighed in a pair of scales, in which it was balanced against the wisdom goddess Maat’s feather, which symbolised “truth and justice.” The heart was placed in the scale by the god Anubis. It was believed that the heart was “the seat of intelligence rather than emotion,” and the criterion for admittance to the “kingdom of Osiris” was not “purity, piety or bravery” but knowledge.²⁰² If a person’s heart was too heavy, he or she would be condemned to “permanent death.”²⁰³

The Author of Revelation no doubt wishes the Son of God to be understood as having the omniscience associated by Jeremiah only with Yahweh (Jer 17:10). However, the description “He who searches kidneys and hearts,” which follows hard on the mention of Death (Rev 2:23), may well also have called to the minds of the Thyatiran Christians, with their heritage of syncretised beliefs (cf. §3.Introduction), the image of the jackal-

²⁰⁰ Joyce Tyldesley, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt* (London: Penguin Books, 2010), 110.

²⁰¹ Geraldine Pinch, *Handbook of Egyptian Mythology* (Santa Barbara, Ca.: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 104-105.

²⁰² Tyldesley, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, 160, 163-64. This knowledge could be found in the *Book of the Dead*, and with copies of which the wealthy were buried. It consisted in being able to recite a list of all the evil actions which the person had not committed. Tyldesley, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, 160-63.

²⁰³ Tyldesley, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, 164. Tyldesley explains that this death was not destruction but “a horrific future of eternal chaos.” The imagined fates of those thus condemned became over time more and more unpleasant. One fate was to be “burned in the lake of fire” (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14; 21:8) or consumed by a beast such as Ammit, “with the head of a crocodile, the fore-parts and body of a lion or leopard and the hind-parts of a hippopotamus” (cf. Rev 13:2). Tyldesley, *Myths and Legends of Ancient Egypt*, 165. Aune notes that it is only in the Book of Revelation (Rev 20:14; 21:8), the *Coffin Texts* and the *Book of the Dead* that the two concepts of the “second death” and the “lake of fire and sulphur” are found together. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 350.

headed judge of the underworld, who was half man and half ravening dog.²⁰⁴ This image, combined with the Son of God's "unmanly" desire for violent vengeance upon his enemies, effectively renders him no better than a beast.²⁰⁵

Finally, the Son of God declares that God is his father, who has given him authority to rule over the Gentiles with his "rod of iron" (Rev 2:27-28; cf. Ps 2:9).²⁰⁶

4.9. His Father's Son: The Presentation of the Son of God as a Child of the One Seated on the Throne

As well as the Son of God (Rev 2:18, 28), the One Seated on the Throne (ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον/τοῦ θρόνου/τῷ θρόνῳ, Rev 4:2, 3, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:10, 15; 19:4; 20:11; 21:5) has several other children (Rev 3:5, 21; 12:5; 21:7). In this section, therefore, the presentation of the Son of God as his father's son is firstly analysed in comparison with the other two children of God in the messages to the Seven Churches: He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars (Rev 3:1, 5) and the Amen (Rev 3:14, 21).

4.9.1. The Three Lustful and Boundary-Breaking Children of God in the Messages to the Seven Churches (Rev 2:18, 28; 3:1, 5; 3:14, 21)

There are three personae of the Son of Man's self-presentations to the Seven Churches who claim God as their father (cf. §4.4), who all possess divine and/or cosmic powers: (1) the Son of God (Rev 2:18, 28); (2) He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars (Rev 3:1, 5); and (3) the Amen (Rev 3:14, 21). The Son of God declares that he has the divine power of knowing people's thoughts and describes himself as an eschatological judge (Rev 2:23). He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars has power over the Angels before God's throne and over the Angels of the Churches

²⁰⁴ Plutarch reports that the Egyptians believed that Anubis possessed the same ability to "see with his eyes both by night and by day alike" which the Greeks believed to be possessed by Hecate (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 368E). Plutarch, *Moralia V* (LCL; trans. Frank Cole Babbitt; London: William Heinemann, 1936), 107. There is also inscriptional evidence that Anubis was worshipped in or around various cities of Asia Minor. In particular, Yarbro Collins calls attention to a third-century B.C.E. "dedication" to Sarapis, Isis, Anubis and other divinities found in the region of Ephesus. Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 255-56; see "Ephesos 884;" cf. "IvP II 336" and "Smyrna III." Whilst in the first two of these inscriptions Anubis is named along with other deities, in "Smyrna III" the dedication made "on behalf of "Queen Stratonike" is to the canine god alone. See <http://epigraphy.packhum.org/search?patt=%CE%91%CE%BD%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%B2%CE%B9>. Last accessed 3.3.2016.

²⁰⁵ See Conway, *Behold the Man*, 27, 170.

²⁰⁶ The word υἱός ("son") appears only seven times in the Book of Revelation and, except in the case of the wayward sons of Israel, to whom some members of the Church in Pergamum are likened (Rev 2:14), υἱός is used in a resoundingly positive way in Revelation (Rev 1:13; 2:18; 7:4; 12:5; 21:7, 12).

(Rev 3:1; cf. 1:4, 16, 20); and the Amen has the divine power of creation associated with Wisdom (Rev 3:14). The three are also linked by their desire to enter a house (Rev 2:22; 3:3, 20). However, in all three cases, the owner of the house in question is unwilling to allow him access:²⁰⁷ the Prophetess of Thyatira (Rev 2:20-22); the Angel of the Church in Sardis (Rev 3:1-3); and the owner of the house upon whose door the Amen is knocking in Laodicea (Rev 3:20).²⁰⁸ The Son of God, it is implied, breaks into Jezebel's house before throwing her down upon a couch or bed (Rev 2:22); He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars becomes so frustrated by his desire to “come upon” (ἤξω ἐπὶ) the Angel of Sardis, obviously asleep in his bed, that he is forced to break into his house like a burglar (Rev 3:3); in contrast, the Amen waits patiently for the Householder to “open the door” (ἀνοίξει τὴν θύραν) and grant him/her permission to “come in to him” (εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν, Rev 3:20). As argued above (§4.4.3), the Amen may be interpreted, in part, as an ambiguously-gendered lover desirous of entering the house of the object of his/her desire; the other two children of God resort to violence.

Each of the three children of God of the seven messages, therefore, is defined by his/her desire for intercourse with an unwilling householder and by the ability to break through boundaries - structural, physical and gendered – in order to satisfy that desire:²⁰⁹ the Son of God is a hyper-masculine character who “punishes” a female character's defiance with sexual assault;²¹⁰ He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars is a male character who desires another male character and is willing to break into his house to force himself upon him; and the Amen is a male character intertextually-dressed in the mantle of a female character (Prov 8:22, 30), who desires a male character, but is willing to wait for the object of his/her desire to reciprocate that desire by “dining” with him/her (Rev 3:20). This apparent forbearance should not, however, be interpreted to indicate that the Amen is a gentler character than his/her two siblings. It is possible that the Son of Man deliberately dresses in female “clothing” in order to trick the male

²⁰⁷ It may be noted that, despite the Son of Man possessing the keys of Death and of Hades (Rev 1:18) and, in his persona of Holy and True, the key of David (Rev 3:7), the powers of these three children of God do not extend to them having keys to the houses which they wish to enter.

²⁰⁸ That the Prophetess of Thyatira owned a house has been suggested in §3.1.3 and is demonstrated in §5.2.4.

²⁰⁹ As so aptly pointed out by Alison M. Jack, in Revelation Jesus is “a mercurial figure” and an invader of boundaries, whose constant metamorphoses make him a threatening character “more likely to provoke anxiety than reassurance.” Alison M. Jack, *Texts Reading Texts, Sacred and Secular* (JSNTSup 179; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 199. The Son of God's attack upon the Woman Jezebel, and its possible interpretation as a sexual assault, is considered in §6.3.1.

²¹⁰ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 154-55.

Householder of Laodicea into believing s/he is female and thus harmless. As pointed out by Donald Lateiner in his study of transsexuality and transvestism in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, "Cross-dressing (if not cross-sexing) as women offered the gods a throwaway tool for rape."²¹¹

As well as being one of the only three personae of the Son of Man described as a child of God, the Son of God is one of only two characters of Revelation who can claim both to be God's son and to have unmissable textual evidence of physical masculinity: "a rod of iron."

4.9.2. *The Two Bloody Sons of God: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Son of God with the Presentation of the Male Child (Rev 2:26-28; cf. Rev 12:2, 5)*

In his description, explicit reference is made to the divine and murderous powers of the Son of God's flaming eyes and to his divine bronze feet (Rev 2:18; see §4.7); he shares both these physical features with the Son of Man (Rev 1:15-16). Whilst, however, the Son of Man's manly body (Rev 1:13-16) is marred by his womanly breasts (Rev 1:13), the statuesque physique of the Son of God does not have any "feminine" defects. Moreover, although it is not stated explicitly, the Son of God is the possessor of a "rod of iron," with which he has authority from his father to shatter the Gentiles (Rev 2:26-28). It is this blatant physical evidence, both of maleness, and of the ability to subdue the Gentiles by its use, which the Son of God shares with his brother- (and babe-) in-arms, the Male Child (Rev 2:27; 12:5). Indeed, the emphasis upon the gender of the Male Child ([...] υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ (Rev 12:5) is startling, especially in light of, or perhaps because of, his textual, physical and blood-drenched proximity to the epicentre of femininity (καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, καὶ κράζει ὠδίνουσα καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν, Rev 12:2).²¹² Similarly, the Son of God finds himself in direct physical, sexual and perhaps bloody conflict with the Woman Jezebel (Rev

²¹¹ Donald Lateiner notes that the usual reason for gods adopting "the clothes and bodily features of humans (male or female)" is in order to have sexual relations. One particularly successful ploy is for a god to pretend to be an elderly woman in order to gain access to a young one." Donald Lateiner, "Transsexuals and Transvestites in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (ed. Thorsten Fögen and Mireille M. Lee; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 128, 130.

²¹² Ford states: "The phrase is a peculiar one and although it may sound redundant it probably stresses the "manliness" of the son, his characteristics as a warrior, which may be confirmed by Ps 2:7." Ford, *Revelation*, 200.

2:22). God's "biological" son is necessarily born soaked in female blood;²¹³ he will only rid himself of this feminisation and uncleanness by feminising others through bloodshed. In order to ensure that this promising youngster is tainted no further by his mother's femininity, he has him wrenched from the yawning abyss of "impurity" between her thighs and whisked up to the security of the male Heaven.²¹⁴ In contrast, the Son of God is God's "anointed;" the son whom he has chosen because of his prowess in shedding the blood of his female or feminised enemies.

4.9.3. *A Conquering Hero: The Relationship of the Son of God with Him Who Conquers*
(Rev 2:18, 28; cf. 1:6, 13; 2:23; 3:5, 21; 7:4; 12:5; 14:1; 17:5; 21:7, 12)

The allusion to Psalm 2 in the description of the Son of God underlines his status both as divinely anointed and as in a covenantal relationship of sonship with God.²¹⁵ It also serves to emphasise that this character is a violent warrior king who, like many ancient kings before him, believes that "he is empowered to act as God's surrogate on earth" and has the God-given right to rule over all people, whether or not they accept him as their king.²¹⁶ Yarbro Collins and Collins point out that a designation of a king as God's son did not carry with it the concept of the king having equality with God.²¹⁷ Nevertheless, "God's surrogate on earth" has the authority to promise Him Who Conquers that, by demonstrating his "manhood," he will, like the Son of God, become a conquering hero and thus achieve both divine sonship and a high-ranking place in Revelation's hierarchy of gender, status and power.²¹⁸ The Son of God might be understood to be the big brother

²¹³ It seems likely that the God of Revelation is the father of the Male Child. See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 689; Ford, *Revelation*, 200. However, Keller points out that the Dragon might equally be the Male Child's father, whose desire to eat the child "refracts the oedipal pattern already set forth in Sumerian and Greek cosmogonies, in which father gods try to nip their sons in the bud. Does the dragon carry Yahweh's shadow?" Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 68.

²¹⁴ In her study of contemporary masculinity, and in an eerie echo of Rev 12:5, Rosalind Miles notes that, throughout history and across cultures, the "boy child" has been brutally and forcibly removed from the influence of his mother in order to be established in "the kingdom of his birthright, the world of men." Miles, *The Rites of Man*, 47-48. Miles also notes that "For thousands of years, human society has recognized and reinforced the life-and death power of the father. In all that time, however, the real control of the child, from the moment of birth, lay with the mother." Miles, *The Rites of Man*, 20. Keller points to the misogyny of Revelation's Heaven. Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 67.

²¹⁵ See Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 67.

²¹⁶ Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 22.

²¹⁷ Yarbro Collins and Collins, *King and Messiah*, 22.

²¹⁸ "Conquering" in Revelation equates to achieving a high-ranking place in its gender hierarchy, either by proof of worthiness of high status (He Who Conquers, Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7; the Amen, Rev 3:21; the Lion of Judah, Rev 5:5; the Rider of the White Horse, Rev 6:2; God and his Messiah, Rev 12:11; Those Who Have Conquered the Beast, Rev 15:2; the Lamb, Rev 17:14) or by the usurping of power (the Beast from the Abyss, Rev 11:7; the Beast from the Sea, Rev 13:7).

of Him Who Conquers: an example for him to emulate and a suitable object of his hero-worship.²¹⁹

4.9.4. *Magical Masculinity: The Promise Made by the Son of God to Him Who Conquers (Rev 2:26-28; cf. 2:7, 11, 17; 3:5, 12, 21)*

After his devastating attack upon Jezebel and her followers, the Son of God declares that he is coming to each individual member of the Church in Thyatira who is left (Rev 2:24-25).²²⁰ Moreover, he comes bearing two bribes: (1) his father's authority to rule over (ποικμανεῖ) the Gentiles with a "rod of iron;" and (2) "the morning star" (Rev 2:26-28), which may be a reference to the oracle about the warrior messiah which, ironically, was spoken by that much-maligned prophet Balaam:²²¹

*"[...] a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the borderlands of Moab,
and the territory of all the Shethites" (Num 24:17).*

The Son of God's two bribes to Him Who Conquers, therefore, combine to form a promise of sharing with him in his divinely-approved subjugation of the Gentiles.²²² The Son of God does not clarify why he thinks that the Christians of Thyatira, who appear to be a peace-loving group of people on terms of friendship with their Gentile neighbours (cf. §3.1), should wish for his first gift of the authority "to rule" or, as Ford more appositely translates the word ποικμανεῖ, "to devastate" them.²²³ The Son of God is a warrior messiah, however, and Thyatira was known for its military background. The two-part promise made by the Son of Man that He Who Conquers will become his brother, with authority to rule over subject peoples, may, therefore, be appropriate in the message to Thyatira. It is, however, inappropriate in the other messages, and the bribes offered by

²¹⁹ Cf. the Son of Man and John in Rev 1:13-17.

²²⁰ Aune points out that in Rev 2:24 the Author stops addressing the Angel of the Church and addresses "a specific group of people;" cf. Rev 2:13. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 208.

²²¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 213; Ford, *Revelation*, 404.

²²² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 212, 214.

²²³ As noted by Ford, ποικμανεῖ is a military metaphor which seems out of place, unless it is an allusion to Thyatira's history as a military garrison (cf. §3.Introduction). Ford points out that ποικμανεῖ is difficult to translate into English, since here it contains two different meanings. Whilst it certainly may mean "to shepherd," with the idea of ruling, this is nonsensical in this context, since the Gentiles are shattered into pieces by the action of the Him Who Conquers. She suggests that that the Author of Revelation "must therefore have intended a double entendre" and the verb also has the meaning of "to devastate." Ford, *Revelation*, 404. Thyatira was originally a garrison and those stationed there were in a constant state of battle readiness. This is reflected in the city's coins, which "show a horseman with a battle ax [*sic*] over his shoulder going to conquer and to dash his enemies to pieces." Ford, *Revelation*, 404-405.

the Son of God are just two of a wide range of inducements held out to Him Who Conquers by the various personae of the Son of Man, including: (1) “the enjoyment of eternal life” as a member of “the elect community” in Paradise (Rev 2:7); (2) being saved from eschatological torture and the “second death” (Rev 2:11; cf. 20:6, 14; 21:8); (3) eternal life combined with divine protection from malignant magic (Rev 2:17); (4) “ritual, moral, and spiritual purity” combined with eternal life (Rev 3:5); (5) “eschatological salvation” (Rev 3:12); and (6) being seated with Wisdom on her throne (Rev 3:21).²²⁴ It was mooted above (§4.2.3) that the rationale behind the Son of Man’s possession of breasts is that he might nourish his followers, who are epitomised by Him Who Conquers, with magical, perhaps apotropaic, power. As well as being a “militaristic” image,²²⁵ “conquering” is also, as pointed out by Aune, “a popular expression in magical literature used of the success of the magician.”²²⁶ As a child of the enthroned and Isis-like Amen, therefore, the Horus-like He Who Conquers not only has a phallic “rod of iron” with which to subdue his enemies, but also magical powers.²²⁷ Thus in promising Him Who Conquers a high-status position of masculine authority, just like him, the Son of God may also be saying that a magician who calls upon him will receive the “masculine” power to “conquer” the Gentiles: a magic “wand” indeed.

4.9.5. *Just Like His Father: The Presentation of the Son of God as a Guardian of the Throne from the Threat of Contaminating Female Blood (Rev 2:18, 20-22, 26-28; cf. 4:2-10; 12:2, 5; 16:19; 17:16-17; 19:2-3)*

As already noted (§4.1), the Throne (Rev 4:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10; 5:6, 11; 7:9, 11, 15, 17; 8:3, 12:5; 14:3; 16:17; 19:5; 20:11; 22:1, 3) symbolises the hegemony of maleness and masculinity in Revelation; it follows, therefore, that The One Seated on the Throne possesses the attributes most admired and desired in a male character. He is presented as

²²⁴ See: Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 152-53, 168, 189-91, 227, 241, 261.

²²⁵ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 69.

²²⁶ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 418.

²²⁷ The verb *νικάω* occurs frequently throughout the whole Book of Revelation and not just in the Letter to the Seven Churches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 (twice); 5:5; 6:2 (twice); 11:7; 12:11; 13:7; 15:2; 17:14; 21:7). As is discussed above (§4.1), the verb’s meaning of “I conquer” often seems inappropriate in its context. However, if it is interpreted as a term used of a successful magician, its use immediately makes sense. As expounded by Aune, *νικάω* is not the only word associated with magic which is found in the Book of Revelation. Various other words, phrases and titles in Revelation have associations with magic. For example, as already noted (§4.3.1), the adverb *ταχύ* (“quickly,” Rev 2:16; 3:11; 11:14; 22:7, 12, 20), is often found “at the conclusion of magical incantations” in magical papyri” in the summoning by the magician of his supernatural helper. The numbers three and seven are used in magical formulae and the “white stone with a new name” (Rev 2:17) is a reference to an amulet inscribed with magical incantations. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 419.

an omnipotent ruler (Rev 1:8; 11:15-16; 19:6), with powers of life and death over those who displease him (for example, Rev 16:1-21), and is a judge (Rev 6:10; 11:18; 18:8, 20; 19:2; 20:11-15). He presides over a court (Rev 4:2-11) and is attended by the courtier-like Twenty-Four Elders (Rev 4:4). He is also divine (Rev 1:1ff).²²⁸ In short, he bears striking similarities with the Roman Emperor, regarded as being the theoretical epitome of masculinity (see §4.1).²²⁹ The One Seated on the Throne has handed over the scroll which he held in his right hand, the symbol of penetrative masculinity, to the feminised Lamb (Rev 5:1-7); he does, however, possess a weapon, and one that is close at hand: like the Emperor Domitian, he has a bow with which to bring down his enemies (Rev 4:3).²³⁰ Nevertheless, the One Seated on the Throne does not need to lead his armies into battle personally; he has military commanders in the persons of the Son of God (Rev 2:18, 26-28), Michael (Rev 12:7-9) and Faithful and True (Rev 19:11-16, 21); as Moore rightly comments, the God of Revelation is the “Commander-in-Chief.”²³¹ As far as his personality is concerned, the One Seated on the Throne is consumed with desire for vengeance upon his enemies (Rev 6:10; 14:10-11; 16:19; 17:17; 19:2), and is prone to bouts of uncontrollable anger (Rev 6:16, 17; 11:18; 14:10; 16:19; 19:15). Although these characteristics would have drawn criticism in Graeco-Roman societies, in Revelation they simply confirm his high masculine status (see §4.1).

God, the One Seated on the Throne, however, has companions at the top of Revelation’s hierarchy, who have qualifications which allow them to share his Throne.²³² These comprise: (1) The conquering Son of Man in his persona of the Amen, the “daughter” of God (Rev 3:21); (2) He Who Conquers, the adopted son of the One Seated on the Throne (Rev 3:21; 21:7); (3) the Male Child, the “biological” son of God (Rev 12:5); and (4) the conquering Lamb (Rev 5:5), the heir of the One Seated on the Throne.²³³ A brief analysis of these four characters demonstrates in what ways, if any,

²²⁸ Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” 180-92; see, also, Moore, *God’s Gym*, 117-29. References to “God” in Revelation are found throughout Revelation and are too numerous to list here. That “the One Seated on the Throne” and “God” are one and the same is evident from verses such as Rev 4:8 and 7:10. See Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1100-1101.

²²⁹ Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” 192.

²³⁰ Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” 198-99. The One Seated on the Throne differs here from Yahweh who, after the flood, hung up his bow (Gen 9:13). Moore, “Hypermasculinity and Divinity,” 198.

²³¹ Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 184.

²³² Aune suggests that the Throne is an example of “a double-throne,” well-known in the ancient world, and upon which two rulers of equal status could sit. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 262.

²³³ Martin notes: “It is hard to avoid the image, once we actually picture it, of a bunch of men scrambling all over one another and sitting on one another’s laps on a huge throne in the sky.” Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 111.

each resembles his/her father and what each brings to the Throne of maleness and masculinity to maintain and strengthen its hegemony.

Like the One Seated on the Throne, the Son of Man is an elite male worthy of worship (Rev 1:17; see §4.2). In his persona of the Amen, he brings to the Throne the creative powers of divine Wisdom, the ability to have a relationship with his followers of a strict but loving mother with Him Who Conquers and the textual transvestism to seduce the unwary into desiring him (Rev 3:14, 19-21; see §4.4.3; 4.9.1).²³⁴ In Revelation, conquering is associated both with the possession, and successful use, of power that is martial, magical and sexual, and represented by a “rod of iron” (see §4.1; 4.6). In the message to Thyatira, He Who Conquers is promised that he will subdue, feminise and be a ruler over God’s enemies. He thus brings to the Throne penetrative masculinity (Rev 2:26-28). The same is true of the Male Child who, although a new-born infant, has the physical endowment necessary for conquering his father’s enemies (Rev 12:5). The Lamb has been feminised through the injuries he has sustained (Rev 5:6); at the same time, he is described as “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev 5:5). D.H. Lawrence sums up this paradox neatly: “John of Patmos’ Lamb is, we suspect, the good old lion in sheep’s clothing. It behaves like the most terrific lion. Only John insists that it is a Lamb.”²³⁵ As pointed out by Aune, the Lamb is not just a “*sacrificial metaphor*,” but also a “*metaphor for a leader or ruler*” and is “depicted as a mighty warrior able to conquer those who make war against him” (17:14).²³⁶ This progression of the One Seated on the Throne’s heir from “femininity” to “masculinity” may be understood as the result of the rite of passage which he has undergone in order to attain the position of his father’s heir;²³⁷ this is symbolised by the handing over to the Lamb of the physical symbol of divine masculinity (Rev 5:7). Of the four characters who share the Throne with God, the Lamb is the one who most resembles him: he is a pitiless judge (Rev 14:10), a king above all others (Rev 17:14), worthy of worship (Rev 5:11-12), prone to anger (Rev 6:16-17), desirous of vengeance (as evidenced by his opening of the seven seals set upon his scroll, Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1) and delighted by

²³⁴ The transvestism of the Amen, a persona of the male Son of Man who is dressed in the “clothes” of divine feminine Wisdom (Rev 3:14, 18-20; cf. Prov 2:4; 3:14-15; 8:22, 30), may be compared with that of the Bride, a female character whose clothing is woven from “the righteous deeds” of the male elect (Rev 19:8). See Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 110.

²³⁵ D.H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse: And the Writings on Revelation* (ed. Mara Kalnins; London: Penguin Books, 1995), 99.

²³⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 368-69 (the author’s emphases).

²³⁷ See Miles, *The Rites of Man*, 46-61.

watching the suffering of his vanquished and feminised enemies (Rev 14:10). Whilst the Lamb is the object of the gaze (Rev 5:5-6; 6:1; 7:9; 14:1), it is the gaze either of worshipful awe or of fear.²³⁸

Each of these characters is an asset to the Throne. It may, therefore, seem surprising that the hyper-masculine Son of God does not also have a place thereon. It is true that he is never described explicitly as a conqueror. Nor, however, is the Male Child, and there can be no doubt that both these possessors of rods of iron are indeed conquerors. This apparent anomaly, however, is explained by the way in which the Son of God resembles his father: both are guardians of the Throne against feminisation, the One Seated on the Throne through the agency of his minions, and the Son of God through his own exertion. Both the Father and the Son find their personal authority and the purity of the Throne threatened by “impure” but high-status women with frightening amounts of power and pernicious influence over male characters. Both God and his Son take active and ruthless action to strip these women of their status, power, influence and, perhaps most importantly of all, of their motherhood. As already noted (§4.2.5), the One Seated on the Throne firstly has the new-born son of the divine Woman of Chapter 12 taken from her “impure” bleeding body and feminising influence (Rev 12:5).²³⁹ In order to ensure that she is no longer a threat, he ensures that she loses her divine powers and high status as a resident of Heaven and is incarcerated in the female space of the Wilderness (Rev 12:6, 14).²⁴⁰ Secondly, the One Seated on the Throne “judges” the Woman Babylon (Rev 18:20; 19:2) who, as both a prostitute and a queen (Rev 17:1, 15, 16; 18:7; 19:2), has power and influence over even the most elite of male human beings, the Kings of the Earth (Rev 18:3, 9), as well as over the Gentiles (Rev 14:8; 18:3, 23), merchants (Rev 18:3, 11, 15, 23), and slaves (Rev 18:13). Her “impure” female body threatens the purity of the Throne with the blood of her own menstruation and the blood of those whom she has had murdered (Rev 17:3, 6; 18:24).²⁴¹ As the only woman in Revelation to be

²³⁸ Cf. Frilingos, who states: “[...] as the creature slides between subject positions – between object and subject of the textual gaze – so the Lamb is feminized and masculinized.” Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 299.

²³⁹ The Red Dragon who both threatens to gobble up the Male Child (Rev 12:4) and attempts to drown the Woman may represent the threat of death posed to them both by childbirth.

²⁴⁰ Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 110.

²⁴¹ The Woman Babylon’s cup full of blood and impurities may represent menstruation. See Frankfurter, “The Revelation to John,” 489. The Scarlet Beast upon which she sits (Rev 17:3) and which later devours her (Rev 17:16) is also the colour of blood and comes up from the Abyss (Rev 17:8). Thus he too is associated with the demonic female procreative organs and their secretions. It is notable that in Rev 20:11, when all the enemies of the One Seated on the Throne have been vanquished, the Throne is described as being white (Rev 20:11), a colour “associated with purity.” Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1100.

explicitly described as a “mother” (μήτηρ, Rev 17:5), combined with her portrayal as being “seated as a queen” (κάθηναι βασίλισσα, Rev 18:7), she poses a direct threat not only to Revelation’s masculine hierarchy, but to its most elite member, the Father who is seated on the Throne. The One Seated on the Throne, therefore, has the Woman Babylon raped, mutilated and killed (Rev 17:16-17). Similarly, the Son of God “throws down” the Woman Jezebel, a Prophetess in the Church in Thyatira, who has enticed his own slaves from his household to hers, teaches and has power over male members of the church and allows her followers to eat food sacrificed to pagan gods (Rev 2:20-23). Her seductive and feminising teaching (Rev 2:20, 24), combined with her “impure” female body (Rev 2:21-22), is a seductive lure for Him Who Conquers and threatens his “pure” masculinity and thus that of the Throne. The Son of God even declares that he will kill the fruits of Jezebel’s “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:22-23) in order to ensure that the threat is removed.²⁴²

Jezebel, the Woman of Chapter 12 and Babylon all threaten the purity and maleness of the White Throne with the blood from their menstrual or postpartum female bodies.²⁴³ From his perch at the top of the hierarchy, the One Seated on the Throne can see the mouth of the Abyss yawning wider beneath him. He and his warrior Son must do all that they can to keep its feminine foulness at bay. This is why the Son of God’s place is not, like that of the Amen, ruling from the seat of power; like the warrior Faithful and True, the job of the hyper-masculine Son of God is devastating their feminine enemies on Earth and ensuring that the foundations of the hierarchy upon which the Throne is built do not crumble. Another possible reason that neither the Son of God nor Faithful

²⁴² The presentation of the Woman Jezebel is analysed in depth in Chapter 5, partly in comparison with the Woman of Chapter 12 and the Woman Babylon; the presentation of the conflict between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel is analysed in depth in Chapter 6. The above interpretation chimes with that made by Yarbro Collins, who interprets Revelation’s “feminine symbolism” using a psychological approach in the tradition of Carl Jung. She draws attention to the dominance of the maternal image in the developing male consciousness, which is seeking independence, and which has given rise to myths concerning fertility and growth symbolised by the Great Mother who both nourishes and destroys. Yarbro Collins, “Feminine Symbolism,” 126-27. The development of independent, analytical consciousness is in turn expressed in myths concerning the male hero battling the dragon, or “Great and Terrible Mother,” who “possesses masculine, but not paternal, features.” These features are invariably “aggressive and destructive” and may be symbolised in separate entities, usually animals. In patriarchal societies which wish decisively to separate the positive from the negative traits of the Great Mother, the aspects of the Terrible Father are to be found in males aligned with her destructive element. Yarbro Collins, “Feminine Symbolism,” 127. In Revelation, the Whore symbolises the aggressive aspects of the Great Mother, who demands blood sacrifice, and represents female unconsciousness and participation, while the Woman of Chapter 12 symbolises the good mother who “supports the patriarchy” and represents the emerging consciousness of individuality. Yarbro Collins, “Feminine Symbolism,” 128-29.

²⁴³ In contrast, the childless Bride of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem, is associated with purity (Rev 19:7-8; 21:27). All four of Revelation’s women are considered again in §5.5.

and True can sit on the Throne is that they are stained with the blood of their female or feminised enemies (Rev 2:22-23, 26-28; 19:13, 21).²⁴⁴ It is notable that the One Seated on the Throne is not obliged to get his hands bloodied in the suppression of femininity.

Comment

Seated together on the Throne of power, status and gender is a family consisting of: the ruling paterfamilias One Seated on the Throne; his heir the Lamb, struggling to control his anger and to assert his authority; the abducted Male Child, well endowed with phallic power; his adopted son, He Who Has Conquered, and thus feminised, God's enemies, and the Son of Man. The Son of Man is not, however, seated upon the throne in his persona of the Son of God who, like Faithful and True, is too preoccupied governing God's kingdom by ruling the nations with his magical rod of iron and protecting the Throne from feminisation. Instead, the Son of Man sits enthroned in his persona of the motherly Amen, enhancing his feminine cleavage with the robe which he has taken from Wisdom and suckling Him Who Has Conquered with the breasts which he has stolen from the Woman Clothed with the Sun.²⁴⁵

Conclusions

For John, the deity whom he conjures into being (Rev 1:4-5, 9-10) is the embodiment of a dream. As well as being a god in the form of a high-status male, his bearing, commanding voice, oratorical skill, shining face and hair, penetrative gaze, bronze feet and sword-like tongue combine to demonstrate that this is a god in the form of an elite "man" (Rev 1:13-16). At the same time, this vision incorporates both in his body and in his self-understanding the female powers of nourishing motherhood and divine creative Wisdom (Rev 1:10-19). For a moment John gazes in rapture at this idol in order to bestow honour upon him (Rev 1:13-16). He then falls down before the angelic apparition in a mixture of awe and desire (Rev 1:17); he thus indicates both that he acknowledges the Son of Man's superior status in Revelation's hierarchy of gender and power and that he is his slave (Rev 1:1), with whom his "master" may do as he wills. At the same time, the relationship between John and the Son of Man is ambiguous, in terms both of gender

²⁴⁴ Aune notes that Faithful and True's clothing is stained not with "atoning" blood, but with "the blood of those he has slain." Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1057.

²⁴⁵ Yarbro Collins notes that Revelation uses both male and female symbolism to portray divinity. However, "all the feminine symbols of Revelation are ambiguous when viewed from the point of view of the desirability of mutuality between men and women." Yarbro Collins, "Feminine Symbolism," 130.

representation and of power. John may be a slave-magician and his “master” divine, but they may also be interpreted as lovers (cf. Song 1:2; 3:6-11; 4:9-15) and as a child and his mother (cf. *Ode* 14:1a-4b).

The Son of Man, as befits a god/dess conjured into being by a slave-magician, also has magical powers, which are centred upon his breasts (Rev 1:13); like the goddess Artemis Ephesia, the Son of Man is able to nourish his followers with the magical “milk” from the lactating breasts which he has stolen from the Woman Clothed with the Sun (Rev 1:13; 12:5-6) to enable them to “conquer” their, and his, enemies (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21).

The Son of Man’s self-descriptions to the Angels of the Seven Churches (Rev 2:1-3:22) indicate that the Son of Man is not afraid to present himself in both male and female guises in order to demonstrate the powers that he wields over the Christian communities in Asia. The Son of Man behaves with the dignity to be expected of an elite Graeco-Roman man towards his slave John (Rev 1:17). He is sympathetic and encouraging towards those members of the community who are working and/or suffering on his behalf (Rev 2:2-3, 9-10, 13, 24-25; 3:8). He understands himself to be in a relationship of a mother with those members of the community in Laodicea whom he favours (Rev 3:19). However, towards anyone whom he sees as his enemy, he is prepared to wreak vengeance, if necessary by the use of violence (Rev 2:5, 16, 22-23; 3:3, 9, 16). Reasons for this enmity include: (1) opposition to his will or to his followers (Rev 2:6, 9, 14-15, 20-21; 3:9); (2) indifference towards him (Rev 3:1-2; 15); and (3), in the case of the Woman Jezebel, the perceived threat of her womanity and motherhood (Rev 2:20-21).

It is thus that, in the message to Thyatira, the Son of Man presents himself as the Son of God (Rev 2:18), a completely masculine character: he is the anointed warrior king who delights in the violent suppression of dissent and does not hesitate to “devastate” his enemies (Rev 18, 2:26-28; cf. Ps 2; 4Q246). Like the Son of Man, the divine Son of God has flaming eyes, with the magical and penetrative powers to cause those who oppose him to fall ill and even to die (Rev 2:22-23). His bronze feet are those of a god like Apollo and, indeed, he bears certain resemblances to a golden idol (Rev 2:18; cf. Dan 3:4-6; Rev 10:1-2). His masculinity and credentials as an “impenetrable penetrator” are demonstrated both in his possession of, and in his unrestrained use of, a “rod of iron” (Rev 2:26-28; cf. 12:5; 19:15) with which to subdue, militarily, magically and sexually, his feminised enemies. This includes a woman, into whose house, and perhaps body, he

does not hesitate to force his way (Rev 2:22-23). The Son of God, then, is in some ways an ideal Roman “man;” he is a successful general and looks like a god. However, his rough and ready speech, his desire for unforgiving vengeance upon his enemies, and its concomitant use of unnecessary violence, especially against a woman, demonstrates that the Son of Man does not possess the restraint and decency associated with the ideal of Graeco-Roman manhood. For, while being a successful warrior was a masculine quality prized in Roman leaders, it was expected that triumph in warfare should be accompanied by magnanimity towards defeated enemies.²⁴⁶ The abuse of a woman in her own home would, therefore, have put him beyond the pale.

This behaviour, however, does not disqualify the Son of God from elite male status in the world of Revelation, where its Roman Emperor-like God, the One Seated on the Throne, is characterised by his desire and capability not only to avenge himself upon his enemies but to annihilate them (Rev 17:16-17; 19:20; 20:10, 13-14). Revelation is riddled with violence and the “conquering,” or “throwing down,” of the enemies of God and his Messiah is associated with, and is sometimes portrayed as, sexual penetration.²⁴⁷ The feminine, bestial and demonic enemies of the One Seated on the Throne and of his tripartite Messiah are penetrated and thus (doubly) feminised by their defeats and being “thrown down:” from a position of power to humiliation on a bed (Rev 2:20-22); from Heaven to Earth (12:7-9); from ruling as a queen into prostitution and slavery (Rev 17:1-6; cf. 18:7) followed by death (Rev 17:16); or into the lake of fire and sulphur (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 13-14).

Motherhood is seen as particularly threatening to Revelation’s hierarchy, at the top of which sits its only “father” (Rev 2:18, 28; 3:6, 21: 21:7). This is demonstrated by the portrayal of, arguably, God’s most powerful, hated and feared enemy as the only woman explicitly described as a “mother” (Rev 17:5): the Woman Babylon, a queen whose femininity is equated with impurity (Rev 14:8; 17:3-6; 18:2, 7). Upon the orders of the One Seated on the Throne, Babylon is “punished” by being raped, eaten and murdered (Rev 17:16-17). The Son of Man aids his father in his battle against both femininity and woman-as-mother by stripping Revelation’s Mother Goddess, the Woman Clothed with the Sun, of her female powers; while God has their new-born son removed from the contaminating influence of her femininity and whisked up to the top of the male

²⁴⁶ Conway, *Behold the Man*, 46, 163, 171.

²⁴⁷ Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 180-84.

hierarchy, the Son of Man steals her milk-filled breasts, her cosmic rule and her Wisdom (Rev 1:13, 17-18; 12:1, 5-6).

It is in his self-presentation as the Son of God, moreover, that the Son of Man most resembles his father, the One Seated on the Throne. Like his two other personae, He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars (Rev 3:1) and the Amen (Rev 3:14), the Son of God is associated with the guardianship of the symbol of Revelation's masculine hegemony, the Throne. He Who Has the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars ensures that the Angels who guard the Throne and the Angels of the Churches are not neglecting their duties in the battle against God's enemies (Rev 1:4, 16, 20; 3:1-2); he is prepared to break into the house of anyone who is deemed to be doing so and punish him, perhaps sexually (Rev 3:3). The Amen brings to the Throne creative Wisdom and nurturing motherhood stolen from Woman Wisdom (Prov 8:2:4; 3:14-15, 22, 30; Rev 3:14, 18-19); s/he uses a mantle of femininity to seduce the reluctant into his/her service (Rev 3:20). The Son of God, however, is in charge of the battle against God's enemies on Earth. The divinely-anointed and hyper-masculine warrior king delights in conquering his enemies with sexualised violence (Rev 2:22, 26-28). He thus provides an example to Him Who Conquers (Rev 2:26-28) of how to behave as God's son. For the members of the Church in Thyatira, however, whilst the Son of God is certainly a brutal warrior, he is just an idol; it is as though the city's statue of Apollo Tyrimnaeus had come to life, demanding obeisance.

The presentation of the Son of Man, his self-understanding and his self-presentations to the churches combine to demonstrate both the threat of woman-as-mother to Revelation's male hierarchy and to the desirability of certain female attributes. In his body and self-descriptions are condensed both the male fear of the pollution which women harbour in their life-giving wombs and the desire both for a woman's ability to nourish children with her lactating breasts and for the divine creative powers of the Mother and Wisdom goddesses. In Revelation, the true object of worship is the masculine ideal, as symbolised by the Throne and the One Seated upon it. It is, however, continually under threat from powerful womanhood. Only through a combination of sexualised violence, the use of magic and the abrogation of female powers can "impure" womanhood be "thrown down" to its rightful place: on a bed; in the wilderness; or in the jaws of a beast.

Thus in his only encounter with a woman, who is both a mother and a “real” person, a member of the Christian community in the city of Thyatira, the Son of Man presents himself as the Son of God, a divine hyper-masculine warrior, who delights in using his martial, sexual and magical powers in the suppression of femininity. Much to the Son of God’s disgust, and almost as though throwing down her handkerchief as a challenge to his masculinity, she has dared to entice his slaves away from his service into her polluting household (Rev 2:20). The presentation of the Woman Jezebel, who calls herself a Prophetess, is analysed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

THE WOMAN JEZEBEL, SHE WHO CALLS HERSELF A PROPHETESS Contextualisation of the Presentation of the Female Adversary in the Conflict in Its Socio-Historical and Literary Settings

The message to Thyatira differs from the other six messages of the Letter to the Seven Churches by featuring a conflict between the Son of Man, in his persona of the Son of God (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev 2:18), and a female adversary, “the woman Jezebel, she who calls herself a prophetess” (τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν, Rev 2:20).¹ The unnecessary use of the word γυνή (“woman”) suggests that Jezebel’s gender is important for the Author of the Book of Revelation.² As a first step towards an in-depth analysis and discussion of Jezebel, therefore, Part I of this chapter considers Jezebel as “The Woman.” This is done by contextualising her presentation within the various spheres in which she moves: as a historical woman who belongs to a Christian church in a Graeco-Roman culture (§5.2); as a woman within the Graeco-Roman discourse of gender and dining in public (§5.3); as a woman in contrast with the Slave John (§5.4); and as one of the four women of the Book of Revelation (§5.5).

Before these analyses are undertaken, however, it should be remembered that the real name of the Prophetess of Thyatira is unknown.³

5.1. A Nameless Woman

In the culture in which Revelation was written, to make a public reference to the name of a “respectable” woman was to offer her a grievous insult.⁴ Since both his accusations and the “term of derision” by which he labels her indicate that the Author is hostile to Jezebel, this appears to be a lost opportunity to add another layer to his accusations of seduction and “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:20-21).⁵ A possible explanation is that the Author did not actually know Jezebel’s real name; this would infer that he had never met

¹ Although the NRSV describes the Prophetess as “that woman Jezebel,” the word “that,” which serves to emphasise Jezebel’s supposed female delinquency (“that woman”), is not found in the Greek text. This study therefore translates τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ as “the Woman Jezebel.”

² Lupieri considers that, “by referring specifically to Jezebel as a woman,” the Author appears to be saying that “the femininity is in itself a negative.” Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 51, 122.

³ The use of a sobriquet to portray the Prophetess contrasts with the use of the “real” name of Antipas (Rev 2:13). See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 184.

⁴ Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition*. Peabody, Mass.; Hendrickson, 1993, 42-43.

⁵ Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling My Servants,” 80.

her, but had only received distorted information about her teaching and influence from a hostile source.⁶ A similar scenario may be found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, where Paul berates the Corinthians for not excluding from their community a man who, "it is heard" (ἀκούεται) is "having a sexual relationship with his father's wife" (1 Cor 5:1). There is no indication that the accusation made against the unnamed man is anything other than the slander of someone who hates him; it may be noted that Paul has only hearsay evidence of this man's πορνεία. Similarly, it seems quite probable that the accusations made against Jezebel are hearsay; that they are also slanderous is argued throughout this chapter.⁷

PART I: "THE WOMAN"

The Woman Jezebel in Her Religious, Social and Textual Settings

This chapter seeks to make a transformative analysis, from a feminist perspective, of the presentation of the Woman Jezebel. Like the unnamed and slandered member of the Church in Corinth, Jezebel is a member of the Church in Thyatira, and it is in this capacity that the analysis of Jezebel as "The Woman" begins.

5.2. A Christian Woman: Contextualisation of the Presentation of Jezebel as a Woman in the Church in Thyatira

Jezebel is not the only character in the messages to the Seven Churches (Rev 2:1-3:22) who is also a "real" historical person.⁸ There are two other named characters, both of whom are mentioned in the message to Pergamum (Rev 2:12-17): "Antipas" (Rev 2:13) and "Balaam" (Rev 2:14). Consideration is firstly given to a comparison of Jezebel and Antipas.

⁶ Aune considers it probable that the Author has at some stage visited the seven churches to which the seven messages are addressed. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 187. See also: Boxall, "Jezebel of Thyatira to John of Patmos," 147.

⁷ Aune considers that the accusation made against Jezebel of teaching her followers to practise "sexual immorality" is a reflection of "the stock slander" used by "ancient writers." "Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 204.

⁸ As pointed out by Friesen, Jezebel is one of only a few "actual" people in the Book of Revelation. Friesen, *Imperial Cults*, 186 and 254, Endnote 37. See also: Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122; Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 17; Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 222; Vander Stichele, "Re-membering the Whore," 113.

5.2.1. *Speaking Authoritative Words about Christ: A Comparison of Jezebel and Antipas (Rev 2:13, 20-24)*

Two points stand out in a comparison of Jezebel and Antipas. The first point is that, while Jezebel is described by the Son of Man as “saying that she is a prophetess” (Rev 2:20), Antipas is described by the Son of Man as his “faithful witness” (Rev 2:13). It appears, therefore, that it is not gender that is important in the two conflicts, nor even the actual words of witness or prophecy spoken by Antipas and Jezebel, but the source of authority for their words. Antipas’s words are confirmed as having the authority of the Son of Man; in contrast, Jezebel’s words are declared to be prophetic on her own authority. The second point is that the Son of God says he is going to kill (ἀποκτενῶ) Jezebel’s “children”, just as Antipas was killed (ἀπεκτάνη).⁹ Since Antipas was presumably killed for his words of witness, an association is made between what Yarbrow Collins describes as “verbal testimony” and violent death.¹⁰ Speaking authoritative words about the Christian faith, by whomever it is made, results in a violent physical attack upon the speaker by his or her opponent(s): Antipas appears to have been killed by human agency while Jezebel and her followers are assaulted and her “children” are killed by the Son of God.¹¹

The second historical person in the messages to the Seven Churches is “Balaam” (Rev 2:14) who, on first glance, is the character in the Letter to the Seven Churches described in terms closest to those used of Jezebel of Thyatira.

5.2.2. *A Person of Influence and Authority in the Church: A Comparison of Jezebel and Balaam (Rev 2:14, 20-24)*

Like the Prophetess of Thyatira, the Prophet of Pergamum is given the sobriquet of a scriptural Gentile who is remembered with hostility or even hatred; it seems probable that both were Gentiles converted to Christianity by Pauline teaching.¹² While both

⁹ The messages to Pergamum and to Thyatira contain the only two occurrences of the verb ἀποκτείνω in the Letter to the Seven Churches.

¹⁰ Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 102.

¹¹ It therefore follows that Jezebel’s “children” are in some way associated with her “verbal testimony,” that is, her words of prophecy, an association which is considered below (§5.12.7).

¹² Elaine Pagels suggests that, since “Jezebel” and “Balaam” are “the biblical names of despised Gentile outsiders,” these names refer to two “*Gentile converts to Paul’s teaching*.” Elaine Pagels, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy, and Politics in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Viking, 2012), 55 (the author’s italics). Beckwith suggests that the Church in Thyatira was “planted” by Paul or one of his disciples and that “like the other churches,” it was “predominantly Gentile in its composition. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 464.

Balaam and Jezebel are described by the Author as teaching (Rev 2:14, 20), neither is directly described by him as being either a prophet or a teacher. Nevertheless, both are generally accepted to have been recognised as prophets by some, if not all, members of their respective churches.¹³ Holding the position of Prophet/ess would have required each to act also as a teacher in his or her respective church.¹⁴ In addition, and again like Jezebel, Balaam is accused of being responsible for teaching others to eat meat sacrificed to “idols” (φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυστα) and to commit “sexual immorality” (πορνεῦσαι). Nevertheless, there are also a surprising number of differences in the presentation of Balaam in the message to Pergamum and of Jezebel in the message to Thyatira.

If both Balaam and Jezebel are accepted as more or less contemporary prophets, whose similar teaching resulted in the same attitudes to Gentiles which were so abhorred by the Author, it is undeniable that the reaction of the Son of Man is notably more violent and severe towards Jezebel and her followers than he is towards Balaam’s followers.

¹³ Whereas “Jezebel” is undoubtedly a nickname for a contemporary woman, “Balaam” may simply be a derogatory reference to the legendary character who came to be seen as “disreputable.” Similarly derogatory references to Balaam are found in the Second Letter of Peter (2 Pet 2:15) and in the Letter of Jude (Jude 11). Linking some members of the Church of Pergamum with this character serves to taint them with “guilt by association.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 185. Yarbrow Collins considers that both Jezebel and Balaam were viewed by some, but not by all, as prophets, and that: “The leader called “Balaam” was probably a prophet, since his teaching was similar to “Jezebel’s” and since his Scriptural prototype was a seer.” Adela Yarbrow Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders in the Book of Revelation and Its Social Context,” in *“To See Ourselves as Others See Us”: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity* (ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs; Chico, Calif: Scholars Press, 1985), 217-18. It is probable that, like “Jezebel,” “Balaam” is a nickname for a historical person who was a contemporary of Jezebel. Margaret Barker asserts that “Balaam” is a reference to Paul, saying “[t]he Hebrew Christians identified Paul as the Balaam of their time.” Margaret Barker, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ: Which God Gave to Him to Show to His Servants What Must Soon Take Place (Revelation I.I)* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 51; see also 99-100; Yarbrow Collins considers that the name “Balaam” describes “the teacher active in Pergamum.” Yarbrow Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders,” 214. Whilst it is clear that both the characters of Jezebel and Antipas are “real” people, more or less contemporary with the Author, it is unclear whether “Balaam” is also a near contemporary or whether this name refers only to the legendary prophet (Num 22:1-24:25). Since it is probable that he is a near contemporary of the Author, Balaam is treated as such for the purposes of this brief comparison. Jezebel’s attitude to πορνεία and to eating εἰδωλόθυστα and the possible content of her teaching are analysed further in §5.3, 13. The legendary Balaam is analysed in relation to Jezebel in §5.8.

¹⁴ Both the positions of Prophet and Teacher were recognised in the early churches (1 Cor 12:10; Eph 4:11; *Did.* 13:1-2). Thimmes considers that, while Jezebel holds two “recognized” positions of authority in the church, both of which were regarded as being “gifts of Christ” (1 Cor 12:4; Eph 4:7-8, 11), Balaam only holds the position of teacher in the Pergamum Church. Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling my Servants,” 79, inc. Footnote 37. However, as pointed out by Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, in the community which produced the *Didache*, “teaching was one of the functions the prophets were expected to perform” (*Did.* 11:10). Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2002), 342. The *Didache* is a text comprising the redaction of traditional teachings by an editor who wishes to address the problems faced by his community, which may have been extant at the time of the composition of Revelation and is concerned only with a particular community which was probably located in “some Greek speaking part of (Western) Syria.” Van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 28. Nevertheless, it throws light upon the nature of the relationships between a first-century Christian community and its “authority figures,” which included apostles, prophets and teachers, in particular those who were itinerant. Van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 48-49, 52, 340.

Thimmes considers that the “harsher and sexualised rhetoric” of the attack upon Jezebel is motivated both by Jezebel’s superior authority in the church and by her gender.¹⁵ However, it does not immediately seem clear that Jezebel’s female gender is the motivating factor in the violence meted out to her. It has already been mooted that, in addition to being a prophetess in the Church in Thyatira, Jezebel was the leader of the Nicolaitans (cf. §3.5) and it is possible that it is her more extensive influence which merits this sexualised violence. At the same time, Balaam does not, like Jezebel, have “children,” whom the Son of Man emphatically declares that he will kill (Rev 2:23); Jezebel’s possession of “children” is certainly a factor in his violent attack (cf. §5.2.1). Moreover, while Balaam does not appear to be, and perhaps never was, a member of the Church in Pergamum, Jezebel is a fixture of the Church in Thyatira. Another possible factor is that Balaam’s claim to have divine authority for his prophecies is implicit in his sobriquet (see Num 24:2-3).¹⁶ In contrast, it is stressed that it is Jezebel herself who declares her prophetic authority; indeed, there is an implicit suggestion in her description that it is *only* Jezebel who says that she is a prophetess.

Whether it is Jezebel’s gender, the wider extent of her power, her possession of “children,” her residence in Thyatira, the uncertainty about the authoritative source of Jezebel’s prophecies, or all five, which is the cause of the Author’s “harsher and sexualised rhetoric” is a question which cannot, at the moment, be answered satisfactorily and which will be considered at the end of this chapter.

Jezebel certainly appears to hold a position of great authority in the Church in Thyatira. By means of a comparison with another Christian woman, Phoebe of Cenchreae, it is possible to make a fuller assessment of the extent of her authority.

¹⁵ Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling My Servants,” 78-79.

¹⁶ The name “Balaam” is an allusion to a legendary prophet, who was initially held in respect, but whose reputation came to be traduced. The besmirching of Balaam’s reputation as a prophet is discussed below (§5.8).

5.2.3. *A Travelling Businesswoman with Authority in the Church: A Comparison of Jezebel, the Prophetess of Thyatira, with Phoebe, the Deacon of Cenchreae (Rom 16:1-2)*

Like Jezebel the Prophetess, Phoebe of Cenchreae holds a position of leadership in her church as a Deacon (διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς, Rom 16:1).¹⁷ Both women are valued and trusted by other Christians and their gender is no hindrance to them in their activities on behalf of their respective churches. In addition, Phoebe is or has been “the protector or patroness” (προστάτις) of a number of Christians, including Paul himself (Rom 16:2).¹⁸ Since Phoebe is travelling, she is probably a businesswoman, who is based in Cenchreae.¹⁹ That she is able both to travel and to act as patroness of those Christians who are less wealthy than her means that she must be in possession of a reasonably large income.²⁰ There is no mention of a male relative.²¹ Jezebel the Prophetess lives in, and probably originates from, the trading centre of Thyatira. Like Phoebe the Deaconess, therefore, Jezebel may well be an independent and relatively wealthy businesswoman who both acts as a patroness and protectress of Christians in need who are either resident in or visiting Thyatira. Like Phoebe, and as evidenced by the presence of the Nicolaitans in Ephesus and Pergamum (Rev 2:6, 15), she uses her business trips as opportunities to visit churches in other cities of Asia Minor.²²

Another example of a Christian businesswoman is Lydia.

¹⁷ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Romans,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (3d ed.; ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 555. The title διάκονος literally means “servant.” Thus, although she holds a position of authority, Phoebe is also understood to be a person who serves in some capacity in her church. Consideration of Jezebel as a servant-leader is made in §5.13.5.

¹⁸ Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2d ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 60. It may be noted here that, although an autonomous woman of independent means, Phoebe is given the seal of authoritative male approval by Paul.

¹⁹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 60.

²⁰ Gaventa, “Romans,” 555.

²¹ In these two aspects Phoebe is similar to the independent merchant Lydia (see §5.2.4).

²² Aune considers that Jezebel may well have been the “patroness or hostess of one of the house churches” of which the community was comprised. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 203. As noted in §3.5, Jezebel was probably the leader of the Nicolaitans.

5.2.4. *A Travelling Christian Businesswoman with a House: A Comparison of Jezebel with Lydia (Acts 16:11-15, 40)*

The only other mention of Thyatira in the New Testament also concerns an encounter between a woman and a Christian letter-writer. This occurs in Acts, where a meeting is recounted between a merchant whom the author names “Lydia,” and Paul (Acts 16:11-15).²³ Lydia is a woman living in Philippi, but who is originally from the city of Thyatira. She is a dealer in purple cloth, for which luxury Thyatira was famous, and this trade infers that she is probably a freedwoman. She is also a god-fearer (σεβομένη τὸν θεόν, Acts 16:14) who, after listening to Paul’s teaching, is baptised along with her “household” (ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς, Acts 16:15); this indicates that she has dependants and slaves.²⁴ Indeed, Lydia is presented as an autonomous and relatively wealthy woman since, not only does she possess slaves, but she is able to afford a house and to offer hospitality to Paul and his companions (Acts 16:15).²⁵ Later, since her house becomes the focus of the embryonic Philippian church (Acts 16:40), it may be inferred that Lydia becomes the head of a house church.²⁶

²³ Barker states on no grounds at all that Jezebel and Lydia are the same person. Barker, *The Revelation to John*, 100. See also: Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 150.

²⁴ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 33, Footnote 46; Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 30. In a discussion of the occupations of women at Pompeii, Sarah B. Pomeroy points out that freedwomen, “since they came from the East, frequently sold luxury items or exotic merchandise, such as purple dye or perfumes. They also sold more mundane merchandise, such as clothing and food.” Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (London: Pimlico, 1994), 200. Chloe is also described as having a household (1 Cor 1:11).

²⁵ Gail R. O’Day, “Acts,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 310. The Author of Revelation makes a sharp distinction between those of high social status and wealth and those of low social status and poverty (for example, Rev 3:17). However, the social status and wealth of Christian businesswomen such as Lydia (and Jezebel) must not be over-estimated. As pointed out by Shelly Matthews, a former slave now employed in the clothing industry from which she made a modest living, would have been held in contempt by the truly elite, aristocratic and affluent members of society. Shelly Matthews, “Elite Women, Public Religion, and Christian Propaganda in Acts 16,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 124, 126.

²⁶ Recent scholarship in the combined fields of New Testament criticism and archaeology has demonstrated that it is by no means certain that early Christians would have held their meetings only, or even primarily, in private houses. Peter Oakes, “From Archaeology to Commentary Writing via House Churches,” in *Text, Image, and Christians in the Graeco-Roman World: A Festschrift in Honor of David Lee Balch* (ed. Aliou Cissé Niang and Carolyn Osiek; Eugene, Or.: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 132, 139; cf. David L. Balch, *Roman Domestic Art and Early House Churches* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008). Edward Adams argues moreover that, whilst shared meals certainly formed the focus of meetings, the New Testament provides little “firm evidence” for early Christians meeting “almost exclusively” in private houses, and the term “house churches” is misleading. It is even questionable whether “the household unit” should be understood as the primary model for the organisation of the early churches. Edward Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places: Almost Exclusively Houses?* (LNTS 450; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 200-201. In particular, open-fronted shops and workshops on the street level of apartment blocks (*insulae*) would have provided the requisite space for meetings of what Robert Jewett terms “tenement churches.” Robert Jewett, “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church,” *Biblical Research* 38 (1993), 23-43. See, also, David L. Balch, “Rich Pompeiian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge

Thompson considers that any conclusions which may be reached about Lydia, her social standing as a merchant and her beliefs can have no bearing upon the interpretation of Jezebel or the situation depicted in the message to Thyatira.²⁷ Whilst there is no indication that Jezebel was a native of Thyatira, a former slave, or that she was in any way involved with trade, she may equally have been all three.²⁸ Nor is it entirely clear that Lydia, whose name may be purely symbolic for Asian womanhood, is not a figment of the imagination of the author of Luke-Acts.²⁹ He was eager to promote amongst the Roman elite a vision of a conflict-free Christianity whose female members knew their subordinate places and were content to serve Christ in traditional feminine roles.³⁰

Nevertheless, this point may well be of significance for a comparison of Lydia and Jezebel. If Lydia is not a “real” historical woman, she must be a symbol of the “typical” Asian Christian woman: a freedwoman or daughter of a former slave, of Gentile stock, a god-fearer converted by Pauline teaching, a merchant or businesswoman who was wealthy enough to travel and to own a house and slaves.³¹ If the “woman” Lydia is such a symbol, then she offers an extraordinary affirmation of the conclusions which have already been tentatively proposed about the historical woman Jezebel. In particular,

Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline House Churches,” *JSNT* 27 (2004): 27-47; Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2009), 94-95; Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 6-8. Other locations suggested for early Christian meetings include a variety of public buildings, such as restaurants, hotels, taverns, warehouses, shops and even bathhouses. Taking into account the prevailing Mediterranean climate, meetings could also have taken place outside, in places as diverse as gardens attached to inns, the waterfront, the marketplace and at the sides of tombs. Adams, *The Earliest Christian Meeting Places*, 43, 67, 156, 179-80, 196-97; David L. Balch, “The Church Sitting in a Garden (1 Cor 14:30; Rom 16:23; Mark 39-40: 8:6; John 6:3, 10; Acts 1:15; 2:1-2)” in *Contested Spaces: Houses and Temples in Roman Antiquity and the New Testament* (ed. David L. Balch and Annette Weissenrieder; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 232.

²⁷ Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 124. Matthews points out that Lydia’s status, response to Paul and deferential role in the founding of the Philippian church belong to the rhetorical and narrative strategies of the author of Luke-Acts, in which it is the marginalised who are depicted as responding to the Christian message. While in the Gospel of Luke, the marginalised are “tax collectors, sinners, and the poorest of the poor,” in Acts the marginalised are the Gentiles. Matthews, “Elite Women,” 125-26. This being so, the only bearing which the story about Lydia may possibly be said to have upon Jezebel is that it was not unusual for Asian women of the merchant class to travel widely and to have independent means; they may also have encountered Judaism in their home towns. Even this may be making too much of an assumption. O’Day notes that it is erroneous “to generalize about “women in the early church,” whose different social backgrounds and varying and “complex” life histories are hinted at in the Book of Acts. O’Day, “Acts,” 311.

²⁸ It is not possible to come to a conclusion on these points by comparing her with Lydia. With regard to Paul’s teachings, it is possible that Lydia returned to Thyatira and spread them amongst her friends and associates, and that these teachings became associated with women. However, this is again speculation; there is no reason to suppose that Lydia ever set foot in Thyatira again.

²⁹ Matthews, “Elite Women,” 131, inc. Footnote 82.

³⁰ O’Day, “Acts,” 312.

³¹ Meeks notes that, in the Pauline correspondence, the ““typical” Christian” is “a free artisan or small trader,” some of whom “had houses, slaves, the ability to travel, and other signs of wealth.” Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 73.

on the evidence provided by the story about Lydia, and taking into consideration the ethnic mix of Thyatiran inhabitants, it seems that Jezebel is of Gentile stock. Since the symbolic Lydia is also a dealer in purple cloth, and hails from Thyatira, it seems extremely probable that Jezebel too is a merchant involved in the production of Thyatira's most famous product. It is likely that Jezebel would have come into contact with Jews both in her home city of Thyatira and on her travels. This combination strongly suggests that Jezebel was also a god-fearer before her conversion. That her conversion to Christianity was the result of deutero-Pauline teaching seems most probable.³² If Jezebel is, or has been, a merchant, she is possibly also a former slave like Lydia, and it was her trade which enabled her to save the money to buy her freedom.³³ If she travelled on business, like Lydia and Phoebe, this would have provided opportunities for her to contact Christians in other Asian cities; perhaps this is the secret of Jezebel's putative leadership of the Nicolaitans.

Lydia is described as having a house which she makes available for meetings of the local Christian assembly (Acts 16:15, 40). She is not the only Christian woman to be so described; other examples are Mary, the mother of John Mark, in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) and Nympha, in Laodicea (Col 4:15).³⁴ Moreover, although it is not explicitly stated, it seems probable that Phoebe was also the owner of a house in which she provided lodging for itinerant preachers, such as Paul.

The comparisons of Jezebel with both Phoebe and Lydia allow it to be concluded with some assurance that Jezebel is a "typical" female Asian Christian: a freedwoman, a relatively wealthy businesswoman involved in the production and trading of purple cloth, a seasoned traveller, a slave-owner and the owner of a house which provides lodging for itinerant Christians and serves as a locus of the assemblies of members of the Thyatiran Christian community.³⁵ However, in one very important aspect, Jezebel is not at all a "typical" Christian woman, for she dares to speak.

³² Pagels, *Revelations*, 55.

³³ Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 195.

³⁴ Mary, the mother of John Mark, her unnamed slave girl and their relationships of status with Peter are analysed in §6.6.1.

³⁵ Boxall, "'Jezebel' of Thyatira to John of Patmos," 148-49.

5.2.5. *A Christian Woman Who Dares to Speak (the Truth)* (Rev 2:20; cf. Acts 5:8-10; 12:13-15; 16:15-18; 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5; 14:34-5; 1 Tim 2:11-12)

Although none of her prophetic words are recorded, Jezebel is one of only three women in the early Church who is described as literally speaking (λέγουσα, Rev 2:20).³⁶ The other two are (1) Lydia, who speaks (λέγουσα) to offer hospitality to Paul and his male companions (Acts 16:15); and (2) Sapphira, who is found to be complicit with her husband Ananias in withholding money from the community (Acts 5:1-2). Upon being asked by Peter to confirm that they sold their land for the amount of money which they handed over to the apostles, “she said (εἶπεν), “Yes, for that amount”” (Acts 5:8). The only other female who is portrayed as literally speaking in Acts is the unnamed prophetic Slave Girl who follows Paul and his companions around (Acts 16:16-17): “She cried out, saying (λέγουσα), “These men are slaves of the most high god”” (Acts 16:17).

The two women who speak and are presented “negatively” in Acts are treated by the apostles Peter and Paul with exceptional brutality and a startling lack of ethical concern (Acts 5:9-10; 16:18). It is only Lydia who is portrayed “positively.” The reasons for this are not hard to find: (1) Lydia is converted by Paul, the hero of the Book of Acts; (2) she speaks not in public but only to Paul and his male companions; (3) she submits to the men’s “judgement;” and (4) she speaks to voice her suitably submissive and “womanly” concern for the comfort and sustenance of men. In contrast, the other women in some way challenge the assumed superiority of authoritative men: Sapphira sees no reason why she should give all her money to the apostles; the Slave Girl owes her insight to a divine rival of Paul’s god.³⁷ When Jezebel speaks, it is to declare on her own authority the validity of her prophetic status and her qualification to teach other Christians; in doing so she throws down the gauntlet, so to speak, to the Author of Revelation. Lydia’s words meet with the wholehearted approval of Paul and the author of Luke-Acts; however, despite both speaking the truth in the view of the author of Luke-Acts, Sapphira is murdered by Peter (Acts 5:9-10) and the Slave Girl is forcibly deprived both of her prophetic spirit and of her livelihood by Paul (Acts 16:18). Jezebel is likewise assaulted by the Son of God (Rev 2:22). It was noted in the comparison of Jezebel and Antipas (§5.2.1) that speaking words of testimony or prophecy is a dangerous activity. The examples of Sapphira and the Slave Girl confirm this conclusion, and also demonstrate

³⁶ By “speaking” is meant the use of a form of one of the verbs λαλέω and λέγω.

³⁷ The brutal silencing of Sapphira is discussed in §6.5.3.

that it is not because a woman's words are untruthful that she is punished; she is punished because her words challenge the authority of an elite male character. That Jezebel, whose prophetic words challenge the authority of the Son of God, is portrayed "negatively" by the Author does not, therefore, invalidate the legitimacy of those words.³⁸

Since she is not presented in relation to a man, it appears that Jezebel is unmarried. However, the Author considers that Jezebel is, or at least should be, subject to the authority of the Angel of the Church. Consideration both of the identity of the Angel, his relationship with Jezebel and of a textual variant on the words with which the Son of God accuses him (Rev 2:20) may shed some light both upon Jezebel's marital status and upon her relationship with the Christian community.

5.2.6. *A Married Woman (Rev 2:20)?*

No information is given concerning either Jezebel's family background, for example the name of her father, or her marital status. However, one of the textual variants on this verse describes Jezebel as the wife of the Angel of the Church (τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζάβελ, Rev 2:20).³⁹ If the Angel is a "real" person in the church, he has great authority and probably holds an official position of leadership, perhaps as the church's bishop, and marriage to such a high-ranking man could only enhance Jezebel's status in the church. The Angel may, however, simply be an angelic or metaphorical representative of the majority opinion in the local Christian community (cf. §3.3). A pleasing interpretation of the relationship between the Angel of the Church and the Prophetess, which takes into account the possible historical accuracy of τὴν γυναῖκα σοῦ, is to view it as a

³⁸ It may also be noted that Martha, another of the Lukan women who speaks (εἶπεν, Lk 10:40), is compared unfavourably with her silent sister Mary by the Lukan Jesus (Lk 10:38-42).

³⁹ (A *add τὴν after σου*) 1006 1841 1854 2351 Byz [046] syr^{ph} Cyprian Primasius. Lupieri notes that this textual variant is "very ancient, and is widely diffused within the mss." Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 123. If the relationship of the Angel and Jezebel is interpreted as a literal marriage between a man of position of authority in the community and its Prophetess, it is also possible to translate the phrase ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα σου Ἰεζάβελ as "you are divorcing your wife Jezebel" (Rev 2:20). The verb ἀφήμι is used in this way in 1 Corinthians, where Paul is pleading with the Corinthians not to leave their spouses (1 Cor 7:11, 12, 13). Since this makes little sense, it is more appropriate to imitate Aune, whose translation reads: "But I have this against you, that you have tolerated that woman 'Jezebel' and, instead of ἀφεῖς, uses the textual variant ἀφῆκας (8¹ 1611. 2050 *pc* vg^{ms} sy co): "But I have against you that *you have divorced* your wife Jezebel". Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 196. The reason for this hypothetical divorce is not hard to find; Jezebel is accused of committing πορνεία and of having adulterous "lovers." However, since the Angel's action (ἀφεῖς/ἀφῆκας) meets with the disapproval of the Author, divorce cannot be the meaning here. On the contrary, the Author is displeased because the Angel has *not* "divorced" Jezebel for her "crimes," but instead "tolerates" her. In addition, the example of the married couples in Corinth demonstrates that it was women rather than men who initiated separation in order that the wives might be free to pursue their vocations as prophets (1 Cor 7:11, 12, 13). Wire, *The Corinthian Women*, 91-93.

metaphorical marriage.⁴⁰ The Angel is not a man, but a representation of the church community as a whole and, since she is the church's Prophetess, Jezebel is its "wife;"⁴¹ just like a real wife, she represents to the outside world her husband's honour or shame. The Author thus declares that the Angel is just like a husband who refuses to divorce his erring wife who, by her deviant behaviour, has brought shame upon him.⁴²

Whether or not Jezebel actually has, or ever had, a husband is a question which must remain unproven. However, since both Phoebe and Lydia are presented as single women, it seems more probable that Jezebel is also unmarried. The text does, however, describe Jezebel unambiguously as having "children" (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς), (Rev 2:23). At the same time, it is generally agreed that these "children" are not Jezebel's biological, adopted or step-children.⁴³ The combination of Jezebel's probable possession of a house and the familial structure of the early churches provides a possible answer to the identity of these "children."

5.2.7. *A "Mother" in the Church in Thyatira (Rev 2:23; cf. Rom 16:1, 13): The Familial Structure of the Early Churches*

Wayne A. Meeks observes that the hierarchy of a typical Christian community appears to have been modelled upon a Graeco-Roman household.⁴⁴ As demonstrated by the Book of Acts and the letters of Paul, private houses were the loci of assemblies of Christian groups. Occasionally, a church member was wealthy enough to own a house capable of hosting the whole church (Rom 16:23), but it was the norm for more modest houses to provide meeting places for smaller groups. It was also not unusual for these houses to be owned by women (cf. §5.2.4). In a first-century C.E. Graeco-Roman society like Thyatira, houses would have been the homes not only of the relatively wealthy owner

⁴⁰ Aune considers that either the Angel was the bishop of the church or that τὴν γυναῖκα σου is "a metaphor that means a prominent woman in the community." Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 197.

⁴¹ Beale is adamant that the textual variant "does not demand that "your wife" be the literal wife of the purported bishop of the church or any other leader" but rather signifies the formal recognition of the relationship between the Prophetess and the Church in Thyatira. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 262.

⁴² Augustus made it a crime for a married woman to have a sexual relationship with a man other than her husband. The wife would be tried in a court of law and, if she was found guilty of adultery, she would be deprived of half of her dowry and her lover part of his property. In addition, both she and her lover would be exiled to separate locations. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 159.

⁴³ The possible meanings of Jezebel's "children" are discussed below (§5.12.7).

⁴⁴ It is, moreover, clear that Paul's later followers approved of this hierarchy and provided instructions for maintaining the socially-approved hierarchy of the Christian "households," including those in Asia Minor (Eph 6:5-9; Col 3:18-22; 4:1). Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 63-64.

and his or her close relatives but also of his or her “slaves, freedmen, hired workers, and sometimes tenants and partners in trade or craft.” This mixture of people of different ages, genders and social status comprised the household.⁴⁵ Upon the conversion to Christianity of the master or mistress of the household, it appears to have been the norm for the whole household, both slave and free, to have been baptised (for example, Acts 16:15, 31-34; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16).⁴⁶ For this reason, as indicated by Meeks, the “local structure of the early Christian groups” was closely related to “the basic unit of the society.”⁴⁷ It is thus not surprising that the relationships of authority and submission which characterised a Graeco-Roman household should have greatly influenced the hierarchical structure of the household churches.⁴⁸

Jezebel was probably the independent owner of a house, which she would have made available to the church for its meetings (cf. §5.2.4). She would thus have been the head of a household in the literal sense of owning slaves and perhaps also of housing persons who worked for her in her business. Also possible is that she had dependent family members living with her. Upon her becoming a Christian, it was likely that Jezebel’s whole household would have followed her example (see §5.2.4). Her wealth and her house would also have enabled her, like Phoebe (§5.2.3), to be the patroness and protectress of less wealthy, and perhaps itinerant, Christians.

It is notable that Paul describes his patroness Phoebe as “our sister” (τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, Rom 16:1). Even more relevant for an understanding of Jezebel’s standing in the Church in Thyatira is Paul’s description of the mother of Rufus as “my mother” (τὴν μητέρα [...] ἐμοῦ, Rom 16:13). Meeks considers it plausible that, similarly to Phoebe,

⁴⁵ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75-76.

⁴⁶ It was, however, not unknown either for members of a household to be converted to Christianity whilst their master or mistress was not (e.g. Rom 16:10, 11, 14, 15) or for a slave not to be converted to Christianity at the same time as his or her master or mistress (see Philem 10-16). Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 76.

⁴⁷ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 75.

⁴⁸ Meeks explains that, while the household may have been the primary influence upon their internal structures of authority and responsibility, it was not the only one; three other institutions were also significant. Firstly, voluntary associations, which were often characterised by the “common trade or craft” of their members, were particularly influential; house churches often included Christians who practised the same profession. Moreover, like the members of voluntary groups, Christians regarded their churches as the focus of their loyalty. Also like voluntary associations, house churches were often financially dependent upon a wealthy patron or patroness. A second significant influence upon the Christian house churches were the synagogues which were to be found in many Graeco-Roman cities. Their scriptures and worship rituals, including the common meal, were of particular significance. The third influence upon the house churches was the “philosophic or rhetorical school,” as is witnessed in particular by the Pauline churches. Indeed, the Epicurean schools strove to base their institutions upon an idealised household, in which all members, whatever their gender or social status, lived together in harmony. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 78, 80-81, 83-84.

the Mother of Rufus was Paul's "benefactress."⁴⁹ Perhaps here lies a clue to another possible meaning of Jezebel's "children" (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Rev 2:23). Her putative house and probable wealth may well have been used for the benefit of itinerant prophets and other members of the Christian family; like Paul, they may have addressed their patroness as "Mother."

5.2.8. *A Symbol of Asian Christian Womanhood*

As noted above (§2.6), Jezebel is not only a "real" woman in a particular socio-historical situation; she is also a character in the story of Revelation. Like the other women in Revelation, Jezebel may also be a symbol. Scholars have suggested three possible concepts which Jezebel might symbolise.

The first concept is that of "officially recognized teachers," who have what Beale designates as a "close, formal relationship with the church."⁵⁰ This relationship may have been akin to a metaphorical marriage, since the authoritative Jezebel would have represented the church's honour and standing in the community to the outside world (cf. §5.2.7). The second concept possibly symbolised by Jezebel is that of the Church in Thyatira, while her "children" symbolise the members of the church. The combination in her description of "the woman" (τὴν γυναῖκα) and "her children" (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς) contains echoes of the "elect lady" and her children of the Second Letter of John (ἐκλεκτῆ κυρία καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις αὐτῆς, 2 Jn 1).⁵¹ Scholars, however, are divided as to whether this "elect lady" is the church itself or a woman who was the head of the church.⁵² The third concept possibly represented by Jezebel, which is suggested by Keller, is that of a "tendency" in Thyatira for women finding empowerment and a certain amount of independence from men through their faith in Christ.⁵³ It certainly appears that Jezebel was single or separated from her husband, a woman of some wealth and head of a household, and perhaps also head of a house church.

⁴⁹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 60.

⁵⁰ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 262.

⁵¹ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 260-61; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power," 40 and 65, Endnote 49.

⁵² O'Day considers that the "elect lady" is a metaphor for the church community and her "children" are metaphors for the members of that community. Gail R. O'Day, "1, 2, and 3 John," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (3d ed.; ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 623. Schüssler Fiorenza, however, states that "the similarity in wording in Apoc. 2:20 and 2 John 1 suggests that the "elect lady" is the head of the community as "Jezebel" is the prophet-leader in the Apocalypse." Schüssler Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power," 65. See also Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122.

⁵³ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 45.

However, taking into account the analyses made so far in this chapter, it may be concluded that, if Jezebel symbolises anything, it is the “typical” Christian Asian woman who is liberated from traditional feminine seclusion, is unmarried, independent, earns her own living, is head of a household, owns her own house which she makes available for meetings of the local Christian community, and, through her ministry or teaching, is taking over the public leadership roles commonly thought of as belonging to men.⁵⁴ Moreover, as the metaphorical “wife” of the church, she thus also symbolises to the outside world that the “typical” Christian community of Thyatira is like a family whose household is ruled by a hardworking and hospitable mother.

Comment

The historical Prophetess of Thyatira was an authoritative member of the Church in Thyatira and respected by the majority of its members, as represented by the Angel. As a woman she would also have been representative of the community within wider society. That she should have signalled that Christian women were able to be autonomous and independent of a man’s authority again appears to have been acceptable to the church.⁵⁵ However, the comparisons of Jezebel with Antipas and Balaam, the other “real” characters in Revelation, suggest that it is not just her gender which is a contentious issue for the Author, but also the perceived lack of authority for her prophecies. The editing of Jezebel’s prophetic words should not be understood as evidence that they were either unauthorised or dangerous; both Luke-Acts and the letters of Paul provide evidence that it was the norm for respected Christian women to be portrayed as voiceless.⁵⁶

Of particular interest in the foregoing brief survey is the association of the extremely rare literal “speaking” (λέγουσα, εἶπεν) by women with *physical* punishment by a male character who, for his authorial creator, is the epitome of male authority:

⁵⁴ Karen Jo Torjesen rightly notes the influence of “the cultural milieu of patriarchal Mediterranean society” upon the male authors of the history of the early Church. In this patriarchal society there was “the cultural assumption that male activity is normative.” The “arena of freedom and civilized culture” that was the public domain belonged to men, while women’s activities and authority were confined to the house. Karen Jo Torjesen, “Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History,” in *Searching the Scriptures: Volume One: A Feminist Introduction* (ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, with the assistance of Shelly Matthews; London: SCM Press, 1994), 290.

⁵⁵ The Book of Acts and the Letters of Paul refer to a number of women in varying positions of authority in various churches. Although little information is given about them, this does not imply that their authority was in any way disputed or regarded as controversial. O’Day, “Acts,” 306. In particular, Priscilla is portrayed as being regarded with trust and respect by Paul (Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor 16:19). Although she is always mentioned in conjunction with the male Aquila, her name sometimes precedes his, and they are portrayed as “genuine partners in ministry” (Acts 18:2; cf. 18:18, 26). O’Day, “Acts,” 311.

⁵⁶ The silencing of prophesying women in the New Testament is discussed in §6.2.

Jezebel is assaulted, perhaps sexually, by the Son of God (Rev 2:22); Sapphira is struck down dead by Peter (Acts 5:9-10); and the unnamed Slave Girl is forcibly deprived of her prophetic voice by Paul (Acts 16:16-18). As was demonstrated above (§5.2.1; 5.2.5), speaking is a dangerous activity. It is also notable that the author of Luke-Acts portrays both Peter and Paul as using supernatural methods to enforce the submission of dangerous, speaking women: Peter curses Sapphira (Acts 5:9) and Paul casts out the Slave Girl's prophetic spirit (Acts 16:18). It appears that when a woman speaks dangerous words she either merits a different fate from a man because of her gender or her female gender allows for silencing by supernatural means. This raises the possibility of the Author portraying the Son of God as using a supernatural method to silence Jezebel both because of her words and because of her gender, a topic which is addressed in Chapter 6.

As well as being defined as “she who speaks,” Jezebel is also portrayed as a notorious and seductive woman who both abuses her authority by leading astray lower-status members of the church into idolatry and “sexual immorality” and is known for her personal “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:20-21). In order to understand why Jezebel might have been so perceived by the Author it is necessary to consider her description as a Christian woman within the Graeco-Roman discourse of gender and dining in public.

5.3. A “Liberated” Woman: Contextualisation of the Presentation of Jezebel as a Christian Woman within the Graeco-Roman Discourse of Gender and Dining in Public

The Woman Jezebel is presented as a woman who leads the “slaves” of the Son of God astray into the practices of πορνεία and the eating of εἰδωλόθυτα (Rev 2:20). It is notable that, although Jezebel is also accused by the Son of God of personal πορνεία (Rev 2:21) and of having adulterous “lovers” (τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς, Rev 2:22), she is *not* herself accused of eating εἰδωλόθυτα. These accusations raise three issues which need to be addressed in an analysis of Jezebel as a woman living in a first-century C.E. Graeco-Roman culture whose identity would have been defined in part by its discourse of gender and dining in public. Both Jezebel's authoritative position in the church and the desire of the Author of Revelation to slander her reputation preclude this accusation being that of indulgence in literal physical sexual intercourse with a man to whom she is not married. Therefore the first issue is the question of what exactly the Author means by saying that

Jezebel and the “slaves” of the Son of God are committing πορνεία and that some men are involved in μοιχεία with her.⁵⁷

5.3.1. *The Importance of Understanding Πορνεία and Μοιχεία in Their Lexical, Textual and Socio-Historical Contexts*

Kyle Harper points to the dangers of translating πορνεία as “fornication,” “illicit sex” or “sexual immorality;” these are terms which inevitably carry with them preconceived connotations for contemporary interpreters.⁵⁸ Harper also rightly highlights the importance of remembering that there is no definite evidence for the meaning of πορνεία for its ancient users and that, even during its use, its meaning changed over time. It also held different shades of meaning for Jews, for early Christians and for their pagan neighbours.⁵⁹ Moreover, the accusation made in Rev 2:21-22, which pairs τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς with τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς, reflects the original ancient Greek understanding of πορνεία within the context of the word μοιχεία. This is usually translated inaccurately by contemporary readers as “adultery,” a word which is imbued with connotations which μοιχεία did not have for its original users.⁶⁰

In the original Greek socio-historical context, there were two main differences between πορνεία and μοιχεία and their cognate verbs. “The “overwhelming connotation” of μοιχεία was the “violation” of the “honour” of an ἐλεύθερα, a “free” and “respectable” woman, with its contingent effect upon her “lord,” that is, her father or husband. Μοιχεία described an act which could only be carried out by a male;⁶¹ in contrast, πορνεία was the action of selling one’s body for the sexual gratification of another person, and might be done either by a female prostitute (πόρνη) or by a male one (πόρνος).⁶² The word

⁵⁷ Contemporary interpreters are divided as to whether the πορνεία of which Jezebel and her followers is accused should be understood metaphorically or literally. See: Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 204-205; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 262; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122; Beavis, “Jezebel Speaks,” 132.

⁵⁸ In their translations of πορνεία contemporary scholars influence, or perhaps are influenced by, their interpretations of the meaning and significance of the word and their attitudes to Jezebel. Kyle Harper, “*Porneia*: The Making of a Christian Sexual Norm,” *JBL* 131 (2011), 364-65.

⁵⁹ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 365-366.

⁶⁰ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 376, Footnote 53.

⁶¹ Whether or not a μοιχός, that is, a man who carried out μοιχεία, was married was not the issue, and nor was the consent or otherwise of the woman to the sexual act. There was no “female equivalent” of a μοιχός and to indicate that a “respectable” woman was a willing participant in the sexual act required the rather awkward use of a passive form of the verb. Harper, “*Porneia*,” 366-67.

⁶² Harper, “*Porneia*,” 368-69. Since many prostitutes were also slaves, they were viewed just as bodies which might be bought and sold for the service of their masters. It follows that πορνεία meant not “illicit intercourse,” “sexual immorality,” “prostitution” or “fornication,” but “the practice of selling access to one’s body.” Harper, “*Porneia*,” 367-69.

μοιχεία continued to have the meaning of “violation” in Roman, Jewish and Christian circles.⁶³ However, whilst in Roman society πορνεία also continued to have the meaning of selling one’s body, in early Christian communities its meaning was influenced by those communities’ Jewish heritage.⁶⁴

5.3.2. *The Meanings of Πορνεία and Μοιχεία for First-Century Hellenistic Jews (Sir 23:23)*

For first-century C.E. Jews living in a Graeco-Roman culture, the word πορνεία retained both its original scriptural meaning of “the public sexual availability of the prostitute” and its association with Gentile sexual licence, but had also acquired the general meaning of any act, by a married man or woman, which was seen as a “sexual transgression” against his or her spouse.⁶⁵ Thus a Jew who acted in a manner which in any way suggested that he or she was not sexually exclusive was considered to be as “sexually immoral” as a Gentile. Moreover, the conjunction of πορνεία with the verb μοιχεύω would have indicated the willing participation of a supposedly “respectable” woman in sexual intercourse with a man who was not her husband. An example is found in Sir 23:23 which, by pairing πορνεία with a passive form of μοιχεύω (ἐν πορνείᾳ ἐμοιχεύθη), both indicates the woman’s violation and emphasises her “volition” in an act which brings shame upon herself and her husband.⁶⁶ For Philo, meanwhile, sexual intercourse was legitimate only in marriage and then only in moderation. The “violation” of a “respectable” woman was μοιχεία or φθορά, in opposition to πορνεία, the “sexual use of other women.” Thus for first-century C.E. Hellenistic Jews πορνεία had been transformed into “the chief vice in a system of sexual morality rooted in conjugal sexuality.”⁶⁷

⁶³ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 367.

⁶⁴ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 369.

⁶⁵ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 374-375.

⁶⁶ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 371.

⁶⁷ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 374. Glancy, however, challenges this view. She notes that, while both Paul and Philo certainly considered sexual intercourse with a prostitute to be πορνεία, “there is no evidence that Paul, Philo or any other first-century Greek-speaking Jew used the term πορνεία to refer to a man’s exploitation of a woman who was his property.” Jennifer A. Glancy, “The Sexual Use of Slaves: A Response to Kyle Harper on Jewish and Christian Porneia,” *JBL* 134.1 (2015), 227. Nor is there any indication that “Paul challenged that sexual norm.” Glancy, “The Sexual Use of Slaves,” 229.

5.3.3. *The Variations in Meanings of Πορνεία for First-Century C.E. Christians (Acts 15:20, 29; cf. 21:25; 1 Cor 5:1, 9-11; 6:9; 7:12-16)*

Although the exact meaning of what is forbidden by the word πορνεία in the “Apostolic Decree” of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 15:20, 29; cf. 21:25) is difficult to assess, Harper considers that it certainly functions to encapsulate “the vast cultural differences between sexually pure “insiders” and sexually deviant “outsiders.””⁶⁸ For Paul, however, πορνεία is something committed not by a woman, but by a man, a πόρνος (1 Cor 5:9-11; 6:9), who has “a lascivious lack of self-control;” his example of πορνεία concerns the man accused of a sexual relationship with his father’s wife, an act which, Paul declares, would be condemned even by the Gentiles (1 Cor 5:1). In contrast, Paul uses the word μοιχός to mean a “violator” of “honourable” women (1 Cor 6:9). It may be deduced that for Paul the meanings of the words πόρνος and μοιχός are influenced by Graeco-Roman culture; in neither case is the man condemned because he is married.⁶⁹

Moreover, far from condemning those Christians who are married to pagans, in 1 Corinthians Paul urges them not to divorce their spouses, but to do what they can to convert them to Christianity (1 Cor 7:12-16). “Sexual immorality” (πορνεία) is to be avoided, but this term does not include “mixed marriages.”⁷⁰ For the Author, with his absolute ideals of purity, such marriages would be unclean and would be examples of what the Son of God condemns as πορνεία.⁷¹ Since he accuses Jezebel herself both of πορνεία and of being involved in adulterous liaisons, the question of a possible husband again obtrudes (cf. §5.2.6). If Jezebel is either married to or divorced from a pagan, this situation would go some way toward explaining the Son of God’s forceful condemnation of her in sexualised language (οὐ θέλει μετανοῆσαι ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς [...] τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς, Rev 2:21-22) which, similarly to the example of Sir 23:23, emphasises the woman’s willing participation in her violation.⁷² As a woman with a husband, any social interaction with other men on her part might well be viewed by the Author as the “indecent” behaviour of a “sexually immoral” woman. At the same time, if she were married to a pagan the Author may have viewed her purity as compromised, however virtuous she may have been.

⁶⁸ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 376.

⁶⁹ Harper, “*Porneia*,” 377-78.

⁷⁰ Pagels, *Revelations*, 54-55.

⁷¹ Pagels points out that those adversaries of the Son of Man whom he condemns for their lackadaisical attitudes both to the provenance of food and to sexual purity “look very much like *Gentile followers of Jesus converted through Paul’s teaching*” (author’s emphasis). Pagels, *Revelations*, 54.

⁷² The allusion to the woman of Sir 23:22-27 in the description of Jezebel is discussed in §5.7.

From the foregoing, it appears that the Author is implying that Jezebel, the symbol of the Church in Thyatira to outsiders, is in some sense being “violated” by those who do not share his beliefs and is thus bringing shame upon it, just as a wife who is “violated” by another man brings shame upon her husband. Moreover, by the use of both *πορνεία* and *μετ’ αὐτῆς*, the Author indicates that Jezebel is complicit both in her “violation” and in the dishonouring of the community’s social standing. The association of *πορνεία* with pagan vices, which was inherited by Christians from Jewish tradition, suggests that the Author is also indicating that those who are “violating” Jezebel are Gentiles.⁷³ The circumstances under which Jezebel might both have been in the company of Gentile men and acting in a manner which seemed to the Author to be “sexually immoral” are clarified by the consideration of the reason for Jezebel being accused of “illicit” sexual behaviour (*πορνεία*) and yet not, like those who follow her teaching, being accused of eating food sacrificed to Gentile gods (*εἰδωλόθυτα*). This seeming anomaly also forms the second issue to be addressed in an analysis of Jezebel as a woman living in a first-century C.E. Graeco-Roman culture.

5.3.4. (Not) Eating *Εἰδωλόθυτα* (Rev 2:20, 24; cf. Acts 15:29; 1 Cor 8:1-13; 10:19, 28)

It is not immediately apparent what circumstances are envisaged by the Author in his charge that Jezebel teaches other Christians that it is permissible for them to eat *εἰδωλόθυτα*.⁷⁴ Whether or not to eat sacrificed meat and whether or not to eat with Gentiles are points which appear to have caused much heart-searching and disagreement amongst Jewish Christians from the earliest beginnings of Christianity (Acts 10:9-11:18). Moreover, along with “sexual immorality,” eating sacrificed meat was an activity forbidden by the “Apostolic Decree” of Acts 15:23-29.⁷⁵ Similar disagreements are also

⁷³ As noted above (§5.3.1), *μοιχεύω* is used to infer violation; a woman can only be the object of this violation, even if she is the subject of the passive form of the verb. Harper, “*Porneia*,” 375-76. The words *μετ’ αὐτῆς* (“with her”) therefore infer Jezebel’s compliance or consent in this act of violation, which is further suggested by the use of *τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς* (Rev 2:21). As pointed out by Harper in a discussion of Mt 5:32 and 19:9, *πορνεία* “evokes the shame of the woman’s actions.” Harper, “*Porneia*,” 376. For first-century C.E. Hellenistic Jews *πορνεία* “condensed the cultural differences between the observers of the Torah and Gentile depravity.” Harper, “*Porneia*,” 374-75.

⁷⁴ The term *εἰδωλόθυτον* (plural *εἰδωλόθυτα*) is used both in Revelation (Rev 2:14, 20) and in 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 8:1, 4, 7, 10; 10:19, 28). It is a “pejorative” rendition of the word *ιερόθυτος* (1 Cor 10:28) or *θεόθυτος*, meaning “sacrificial victim,” and refers to the offerings made to Graeco-Roman deities, some of which is eaten by the priests and worshippers present at the sacrifice and the rest of which is sold in the markets. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 186.

⁷⁵ Aune points out that there is a similarity in the phrase *οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βάρος* (“I am not throwing upon you another burden, Rev 2:24), addressed to the “rest” of those in Thyatira who do not hold Jezebel’s teaching, to the “Apostolic Decree (which is addressed to Gentile Christians in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:23):” *ἔδοξεν γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βάρος πλὴν τούτων*

evident in the First Letter to the Corinthians, where Paul does not condemn the practice amongst those who understand that the gods to whom the sacrifices are made do not exist, but urges these “strong” Christians not to offend those who are “weak” by eating sacrificed meat in their presence (1 Cor 8:4-13).

Aune considers that the most likely situations in which those whom Jezebel is “leading astray” would have eaten sacrificed meat would be either at the public banquets associated with pagan festivals or in private homes, either their own or those of others, where the meat had been purchased in the market.⁷⁶ However, considering that the free male members of the church are almost certainly artisans or small businessmen, the most likely circumstances under which those whom Jezebel “leads astray” would have eaten sacrificed meat would have been at meetings of the trade guilds.⁷⁷ This immediately explains why Jezebel is not accused of this practice herself: as a woman, even a businesswoman, she would have been excluded from these essentially male clubs.⁷⁸

Since Jezebel was wealthy, she would, if she so chose, have been able to afford to eat meat regularly, and in her own home. The very familiarity and insignificance of the consumption would have caused the provenance of the meat to be a matter of indifference to her. It was the less well-off who would have been acutely conscious of the “numinous associations” of the meat which was available to them only on special occasions, in the context of public sacrifices.⁷⁹ The Author of Revelation, however, appears to have been careful not to accuse Jezebel of herself eating such meat;⁸⁰ there is no reason to suppose that sacrificed meat was served in Jezebel’s house. It seems that,

τῶν ἐπ’ἀνάγκης (“For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no further burden apart from these necessary things,” Acts 15:28). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 187. Aune, however, continues: “The problem with this conclusion is that the letter in Acts 15:23-29 is part of Luke’s editorial work, and it is extremely doubtful that John of Patmos knew and used the Acts of the Apostles [...], though it is possible that both Revelation and Acts were dependent on a popular catchword.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 208.

⁷⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 186. Pagels notes that it was not unusual for “meat left over from sacrifice in local temples” to be bought for family celebrations. For “strictly observant Jews,” however, this meat would have been regarded as “polluted.” Pagels, *Revelations*, 50.

⁷⁷ Yarbrow Collins suggests that Jezebel and her fellow Nicolaitans allowed Christian artisans who were amongst those who “had separated from the Jewish communities in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira” to join the Gentle guilds. Yarbrow Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders,” 213.

⁷⁸ Pomeroy points out that, although wealthy women were known to be patronesses of men’s guilds, “there is no evidence that women were permitted to belong to the professional or craft guilds of men, even when they worked in the same occupation.” Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 200-201.

⁷⁹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 69, with reference to Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Early Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (ed. and trans. and with an introduction by John H. Schütz; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).

⁸⁰ Mark D. Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful: Perspectives on Wealth in the Second Temple Period and the Apocalypse of John* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 156.

although Jezebel abstained from eating sacrificed meat herself, she understood the reasons for some of her Gentile followers' consumption and did not condemn them. In this attitude, she would have resembled Paul who, although he abstained from eating meat himself (1 Cor 8:13), did not condemn those who did.⁸¹

It may be concluded, therefore, that Jezebel is commonly to be found in the company of male Gentiles, who have been newly converted by her to Christianity and, because of their occupations, continue to attend banquets at which sacrificed meat is served and libations are made. These Gentile Christians, some of whom are no doubt married, perhaps to women who are still pagans, are viewed by the Author as outsiders who, in their interactions with Jezebel, are acting like violating adulterers. This conclusion leads to the third issue to be addressed in an analysis of Jezebel as a woman living in a first-century C.E. Graeco-Roman culture; it is the question of the circumstances under which Jezebel and her "idolatrous" followers might have behaved in ways which the Author deemed to be "sexually immoral" or "indecent" and under which they might, with her consent, have "violated" her, bringing shame upon the Christian community. The answer is provided by the example of well-to-do Graeco-Roman women who, in the teeth of disapproval by traditionalists, dared to attend dinner parties with, and sometimes even without, their husbands.

5.3.5. *The Presence of "Liberated" Women at Public Meals in Graeco-Roman Society*

It is probable that, at the time Revelation was written, elite women throughout the Roman Empire would have attended dinner parties with their husbands. The more traditional hosts would have in their houses separate dining rooms for the male and female guests, but in some instances women would sit next to their reclining husbands and the most avant-garde wives would recline on couches alongside them.⁸² This was a relatively new practice and it did not find favour in more conservative circles, where these women were perceived to be "overstepping ideal womanly roles;" they were even accused by some contemporary writers of "sexual misconduct or unchastity."⁸³

⁸¹ Mathews, *Riches, Poverty, and the Faithful*, 154.

⁸² Carolyn Osiek and Margaret Y. MacDonald, with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2006), 159-60. In Roman society, married women undoubtedly accompanied their husbands to public meals. However, the women may not necessarily have been present for the whole meal, and it is probable that it was only on special occasions that they would have been included among the guests. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 28-31.

⁸³ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 25. The reason for this attitude has its origins in ancient Greek society, where "respectable" women spent most of their lives in the innermost parts of their homes and the only women who attended dinner parties were prostitutes, dancers and musicians, for the purpose of

Although it was not unusual for “respectable” Roman women to have enjoyed an education in philosophy and literature, they were not encouraged to take part in the debates which took place at dinner parties. A properly “submissive” woman would keep silent in the company of men.⁸⁴ A woman who dared to demonstrate her knowledge of philosophy was acting like one of the *ἑταῖραι*, some of whom were hired not just for sexual pleasure but also for “their ability to participate in the conversation of the men.” Some *ἑταῖραι*, moreover, were celebrated for “their wit and rhetorical skills in philosophical repartee.”⁸⁵ At the same time, a “respectable” woman who took part in philosophical debate was characterised as trying inappropriately to act like a well-bred man.⁸⁶ Women’s eloquence was not admired by contemporary authors; on the contrary, these “liberated” women were depicted as “libertine” and “overly-talkative and chatty.”⁸⁷ In addition, instead of being abstemious as was thought to befit well-bred women, some “liberated” women dared to drink alcohol, an activity which, like speaking in public, was associated with prostitution.⁸⁸

Thus a woman who attended a public meal and even more a woman who dared to take part in philosophical debate and to drink alcohol, was seen by traditionalists as acting like a prostitute. It is not, therefore, surprising to discover that one of the many practices for which the early Christians were criticised was their “inclusive dining practices,” which were interpreted by some as allowing and even encouraging drunkenness and lewd behaviour.”⁸⁹

5.3.6. *Christian Women and the Community Meals of the Assembly*

There is no reason to believe that meals in the context of the Christian assembly differed particularly from other banquets at the time. At meals hosted by pagans food was served, libations were made to one or more deities, and these were followed by philosophical discussion and entertainment. In Christian house churches, after the meal, including the rite of blessing and sharing the bread and the cup, there would have been teaching and

entertaining the male diners. The view that any woman, however “chaste,” who attended anything other than a family meal, was a prostitute was held by the conservative-minded long after it became common for “respectable” women to be present at public meals. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 25-31.

⁸⁴ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 44.

⁸⁵ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 27.

⁸⁶ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 44.

⁸⁷ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 56-57.

⁸⁸ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 57.

⁸⁹ Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 75.

discussion.⁹⁰ Since these community meals were often held in houses owned by women, the women would have hosted the meals and said the blessing. Even if the host were male, his wife would, as household manager, have organised the banquet and the entertainment. As noted above (§5.2.4), it is probable that Jezebel was the owner of a house in which the church met to celebrate the community meal. However, even if she were not, as a teacher in the church she would have led the discussion of scripture or missionaries' letters after the meal "reflecting aloud on the meaning of what was just read, with exhortation and spiritual guidance."⁹¹ In other words, Jezebel the woman teacher would have taken the role at a meeting of the Christian assembly that, at a Graeco-Roman banquet, was taken by a (male) philosopher. For a hostile conservative commentator like the Author, however, Jezebel was taking the role of a prostitute.

Comment

It appears, therefore, that Jezebel's "sexual immorality" (Rev 2:21) is simply her attendance at and active participation in gender-inclusive Christian community meals. It may be inferred from the mention of her couch (κλίνην) and men who "violate" her with her consent (τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς [...] τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς, Rev 2:21-22) that upon these occasions, in a similar manner to her "liberated" pagan sisters, Jezebel reclined at table amongst men and took an active part in the discussions which followed the meal. As the head of a prophetic school, the owner of a house and head of a house church, it seems more than probable that the community meals which Jezebel attended, and at which she might have reclined with men, would have been in the context of her hosting meetings of some of the Thyatiran Christian community. As hostess, she would also have blessed the bread and the wine-cup.⁹²

Taking into account his hostile attitude, both to those who eat sacrificed meat and to Jezebel, and his traditional views of female behaviour, it is not difficult to see why such a situation should enrage the Author; in his opinion, not only are women like Jezebel behaving like prostitutes at the community meals, they are doing so with men who have eaten and drunk with pagans at meals where libations to pagan deities are the norm and the food has been sacrificed to these "idols." Moreover, many of those present may well

⁹⁰ Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 161.

⁹¹ This does not infer that Jezebel could necessarily read; reading letters aloud was the task of "a reader," who was specially trained (see Rev 1:3). Osiek, Donald and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 161-62.

⁹² Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 161.

be married to pagans (cf. 1 Cor 7:14). They are all ritually “impure.” Even if the “slaves” of the Son of God, who are supposed to share the strict halakhic views of the Author, refrain from eating sacrificed meat, observe the ritual purity laws and are both chaste and unmarried, they are being polluted both by the presence of the other diners and by their consumption of the shared food and wine.⁹³

While Jezebel is portrayed as a woman who leads astray the “slaves” of the Son of God (Rev 2:20), John is portrayed as being the Slave of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1).

5.4. A Woman, Not a Slave: A Comparison of the Presentation of Jezebel with the Presentation of John

As a relatively wealthy freedwoman who holds the formal position of Prophetess in the Church in Thyatira and acts as a patroness to other church members, Jezebel’s status in the church could scarcely be higher for a woman. This status contrasts sharply with that of John, described by the Author as a “slave” (Rev 1:1) and perhaps viewed with as much suspicion by members of several churches throughout Asia Minor as the Son of Man views them (Rev 2:4-5, 16, 22-23; 3:2-3, 15-17).

5.4.1. A Comparison of the Woman Jezebel and the Slave John: A Question of Social Status, Freedom and Wealth (Rev 2:20; cf. 1:1; 22:9)

In the introductory paragraph to this chapter it was noted that, through the unnecessary use of the words τὴν γυναῖκα, the Author is negatively emphasising Jezebel’s female gender.⁹⁴ There may, however, be an additional reason for the use of the word “woman.” Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald and Janet H. Tulloch point out that in Roman society being a woman was not just the opposite of being a man; to be a woman, or a man, was not to be a slave. Slaves were not thought of as being “men” or “women;” they

⁹³ As pointed out by Pagels, those activities contained under the umbrella terms of “practising sexual immorality” and “eating food sacrificed to idols” may have included anything from a generally liberal attitude to sexual relationships to approval of marriages between Christians from a Jewish background and Gentiles who may or may not have converted to Christianity. Pagels, *Revelations*, 50. If the Author is alluding to the “Apostolic Decree” in his condemnation of those who eat sacrificed meat, he may well consider that the important issue is not only “table fellowship” between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, but also the “halakhic status” of Gentile Christians. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 187.

⁹⁴ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122.

were just slaves.⁹⁵ In Revelation John is nowhere described as a man.⁹⁶ The reason for this may be that, in terms of Graeco-Roman gender construction, John is not a man: he is just a slave. It is quite possible, therefore, that the free and wealthy Jezebel is described as a γυνή as a contrast to John, who is described as a δοῦλος (Rev 1:1; cf. 22:9), in order to emphasise the social gulf between them.⁹⁷ As noted by Schüssler Fiorenza, the Author approves of those who are poor and who lack the status, power and respect which might protect them from “harassment” (Rev 2:9-10; 3:8); in contrast, he disapproves of those who are relatively wealthy and at ease with society (Rev 3:17).⁹⁸ It is also more than probable that, as a freedwoman of wealth, Jezebel would have herself owned slaves, and her Christian faith would not have affected this situation.⁹⁹ This means that, while John is himself one of the Son of Man’s slaves, Jezebel, like the Son of God, possesses them. Indeed, the text indicates that Jezebel’s teaching has caused some or all of the slaves of the Son of God to run away from his service and join her household (Rev 2:20).¹⁰⁰

5.4.2. *A Comparison of the Mother and the Brother: A Question of Prophetic Status and Authority (Rev 1:1-2, 9; 2:20)*

From the evidence it appears that Jezebel had lived for a long time in Thyatira and that she and her prophetic school were “well established” in the Christian community.¹⁰¹ The

⁹⁵ Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch, *A Woman’s Place*, 96.

⁹⁶ The word ἀνὴρ, meaning “man” as opposed to “woman” (γυνή), occurs only once in Revelation, to describe the husband of the bride which the New Jerusalem resembles (Rev 21:2).

⁹⁷ This does not infer that Jezebel would have been “spectacularly wealthy.” Pomeroy notes that: “Most freedwomen [...] comprised a large part of the Roman working class, serving as shopkeepers or artisans or continuing in domestic service. The occupations pursued by freedwomen were commonly those for which they had been trained as slaves.” Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 199.

⁹⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy,” 16-17.

⁹⁹ It was not unusual in Asia Minor for wealthy women to own slaves and to have the power to free them from bondage. Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy,” 17. Moreover, as noted above (§5.2.4), two other Christian women are described in terms which suggest that they were owners of slaves (Acts 16:15; 1 Cor 1:11).

¹⁰⁰ Perhaps it is in an effort to bolster his status that, while the Author names the Prophetess “Jezebel,” after a woman who is remembered only as a murderess (1 Kgs 21:5-15) and, inaccurately, as a “promiscuous” and “painted” woman (2 Kgs 9:22, 30), he names his book’s narrator “John” (Rev 1:1, 4, 9; 22:8). This name might have been expected to be associated by the ideal reader either with the baptiser of Jesus (Mt: 3:13-17; Mk 1:4-11; Lk 3:1-22; Jn 1:6-8, 15, 19-37) or with one of Jesus’s disciples (Mt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mk 1:19, 29; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2, 38; 10:35, 41; 13:3; 14:33; Lk 5:10; 6:14; 8:51; 9:28, 49, 54; 22:8). These are just two of those who have, at various times, been proposed as either the real or pseudonymous name of the Author. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, pp. 1-liv, lvi; Yarbro Collins, “Revelation,” 702. It may incidentally be noted that John the Baptist is portrayed as being put to death at the whim of a conniving woman (Mt 14:1-12; Mk 6:14-29).

¹⁰¹ See Schüssler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit and Power,” 41 and the words of the Son of God: “I have given her time to repent” (Rev 2:21). In contrast, Yarbro Collins suggests that the conflicts inscribed in the messages to Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira may reflect “a conflict over scarce status” between two itinerant prophets who were vying both for authority in the churches of Asia Minor and for the hospitality

Author, however, was an itinerant prophet.¹⁰² Unlike the Author, Jezebel was a patroness of a house church (cf. §5.2), and she would have offered rather than been in need of hospitality.¹⁰³ From the point of view of the majority of the Christian community in Thyatira, therefore, it was not the wealthy, house-owning and officially-sanctioned Prophetess who was the troublemaker, but rather the itinerant and homeless Author, who may well have looked consistently for hand-outs from the Asian churches on the basis of his claims of prophetic and revelatory visions.¹⁰⁴

Jezebel reportedly describes herself as “a prophetess” (Rev 2:20) and holds the position of Prophetess in the Church in Thyatira. She is quite possibly also the leader of the Nicolaitans. She is held in respect by the majority of the members of the Church in Thyatira and is the “mother” of “children,” who are probably either members of her prophetic school and/or less wealthy members of the church “family,” to whom she acts as a patroness or benefactress. As rightly noted by Aune, however, the Author does not once present the character John as a prophet, although it is implied that “he plays that role” and the grammatically masculine *προφήτης* is used in an unequivocally positive sense in Revelation (cf. §5.12.3).¹⁰⁵ Instead, John identifies himself as a “brother” of those to whom he addresses his letter (Rev 1:9); this brotherhood to which he belongs may be a “prophetic circle or guild,” which has adherents in some or all of the Seven Churches.¹⁰⁶

Aune states that the Author compares the “direct claim to prophetic authority by ‘Jezebel’” (Rev 2:20) with “John’s greater claim to mediate divine revelation from Jesus Christ to the seven churches” (Rev 1:1-2).¹⁰⁷ It should, however, be remembered that it is only the Author, as represented by John, who claims to have received divine revelations from Jesus Christ; he cites no corroborating affirmation from any of the Angels of the Churches. As pointed out by Walter Bauer, it is not immediately apparent from the text

customarily afforded to such prophets by the assemblies they visited. Yarbro Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders,” 217-18. See also Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling My Servants,” 76.

¹⁰² Yarbro Collins, “Revelation,” 702-703.

¹⁰³ That it was customary for prophets to settle in communities is evidenced from the *Didache* (*Did.* 13:1).

¹⁰⁴ The *Didache* provides evidence for situations of conflict between churches and the many “itinerant authority figures (especially apostles and prophets),” who were in the habit of imposing themselves upon Christian communities, either alone or in groups (*Did.* 11:1-12:5). Van de Sandt and Flusser, *The Didache*, 340-41.

¹⁰⁵ Revelation is described as a prophecy (Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), and the “revelatory angel” describes himself to John as being “your fellow slave with you and your brothers the prophets” (Rev 22:9). See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 178.

¹⁰⁶ Aune considers that “John is one of a number of prophets who may constitute a prophetic circle or guild” (Rev 22:9, 16). Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 178.

¹⁰⁷ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 178.

of Revelation that the Author had any influence at all in the churches of Asia Minor. There is certainly no evidence that he was viewed by anyone as “an intellectual and spiritual leader of an important band of Christians.”¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, Jezebel was viewed by many in Asia Minor as just such an “intellectual and spiritual” leader.¹⁰⁹

The Author is, therefore, hindered from describing his alter ego John as a prophet because he was not considered to be one amongst the communities of Asia Minor.¹¹⁰ An association appears to be made in the churches between the responsibilities of parenthood and those of Prophet/ess; the status of the Prophetess Jezebel, a settled and responsible house- and slave-owning “mother,” contrasts sharply with that of the Slave John, the irresponsible and itinerant “brother.”¹¹¹ It is, moreover, not beyond the realms of possibility that at some time Mother Jezebel had provided lodging and food for the Author.¹¹²

5.4.3. *Patient Endurance and Faith (Rev 1:9; 2:2, 3, 13, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12)*

Despite their differences Jezebel and John have one thing in common; both have the quality of “patient endurance” (ὕπομονή). There the similarity begins and ends, however, since this patient endurance is contextualised differently in the two cases. John’s self-description to the Seven Churches is “I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance” (Rev 1:9). Jezebel, on the other hand, is a member of the Thyatiran community praised for its “love, faith, service, and patient endurance” (Rev 2:19).

There are only two other occurrences of the word ὑπομονή in the Letter to the Seven Churches: (1) the Angel of the Church in Ephesus is commended by the Son of

¹⁰⁸ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1972), 77-78.

¹⁰⁹ As noted by Pagels, it is more than possible that Jezebel was a Gentile convert to a form of Christianity which was heir to Paul’s teachings. Pagels, *Revelations*, 55 (see §5.2.2, Footnote 12). Like Paul and the “spiritual” Corinthian Christians, then, Jezebel may well have experienced a revelation of “the depths of God” (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ) through the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10; cf. Rev 2:24). Similarly, she may well have believed that she had received “the Spirit which is from God” and that she spoke “in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:12-13; see §5.12.4).

¹¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza rightly points out that that the Author never gives John the title of “prophet,” “either because he did not consider himself a prophet or because his prophetic status was in dispute.” Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy,” 17.

¹¹¹ It is apparent that Jezebel was viewed by many Christians throughout Asia Minor as having more authority than the Author. If the wealthy and powerful Prophetess and the itinerant Author were indeed rival claimants to prophetic authority, the Prophetess has won hands down. This rivalry contains an echo of the enmity between Jezebel’s namesake, the Queen of Israel, and the prophet Elijah, to whom the Author evidently wishes the slave John to be likened. Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy,” 17.

¹¹² As suggested by Boxall, the Author may have been the recipient of Jezebel’s hospitality and eaten with her and her “children,” proclaimed the good news to them and stayed overnight in her house. Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 149.

Man for his patient endurance, which is paired with his “toil” (Rev 2:2, 3); and (2) the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia is praised for keeping the Son of Man’s “word” of patient endurance (Rev 3:10). In the visionary part of Revelation, “patient endurance” is associated with the “saints” (Rev 13:10; 14:12). In both these instances, as in the message to Thyatira, “patient endurance” is also associated with faith (πίστις). The only other occurrence of the word πίστις in Revelation is in the message to Pergamum, where the Angel is commended for not denying his faith in the Son of Man (Rev 2:13). The Angel of Ephesus receives more praise than criticism from the Son of Man, and the Angel of Philadelphia receives only praise. Since, however, the Angels of Pergamum and Thyatira are chastised for tolerating his adversaries (Rev 2:14-16, 20), it appears that unqualified approval by the Son of Man is not the *sine qua non* of an upstanding Christian. A particular association is made between the possession of patient endurance and faith in Christ, which two qualities are possessed both by the “saints” (Rev 13:10; 14:12) and by the members of the Church in Thyatira, to which Jezebel belongs (Rev 2:19). Unlike John, Jezebel does not claim any virtues for herself. There is, however, every reason to suppose that Jezebel is both characterised by and proclaims the Christian virtues of patient endurance and faith in Christ. Perhaps because in Thyatira patient endurance and faith are nothing without the associated virtues of self-giving love and service (see §5.13.3-8), she is thus far closer to qualifying as a “saint” than is John, in whose self-description patient endurance is associated with perceived personal persecution.

5.4.4. *The “Mother” of Slaves and the Childlike “Slave” of the Son of Man (Rev 2:20; cf. Philem 10; Rev 1:1, 11, 13, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14)*

The Son of God explicitly says that he has slaves, some, possibly all, of whom are so disenchanted with serving in his household that they are prepared to risk his wrath and run away to find refuge and succour with Jezebel (Rev 2:20).¹¹³ It seems likely that the household of a woman belonging to a church known for its love, faith, service and patient endurance (Rev 2:18), is far more congenial for slaves than that of a master known for his violence (Rev 2:16, 22-23). In an echo of Paul’s relationship with the slave Onesimus (τοῦ ἐμοῦ τέκνου, Philem 10), it is possible that Jezebel stands in a relationship of a

¹¹³ Mitzi J. Smith points out that a runaway slave would, if caught, have suffered a harsh punishment, have been “branded like cattle or fitted with an iron collar.” Mitzi J. Smith, “Philemon,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 606.

parent to her slaves (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Rev 2:23). In contrast, John is the envoy and scribe of the Son of Man (Rev 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14), roles which it was not unusual for a slave to hold.¹¹⁴ At the same time, he views himself as being in the relationship of a child with the breasted Son of Man (Rev 1:13) who yearns to be a nourishing mother to his conquering children (cf. §4.3.5).

Comment

In both spheres in which she moves, historical reality and the Book of Revelation, the status of the Woman Jezebel is vastly superior to that of the Slave John, and not just in terms of Graeco-Roman gender hierarchy. Her high status in the church of the busy trading city of Thyatira, her relationship of “mother” with other Christians and with her “slaves,” her position of trust and authority and her saint-like virtues of patient endurance and faith combine to demonstrate that she is worthy of the title “Prophetess.” Meanwhile, marooned upon the remote island of Patmos, the Slave John portrays himself as the brother of those suffering persecution and patiently enduring for the coming kingdom (Rev 1:9) and who, like a child, yearns for the motherly embrace of the angelic Son of Man (Rev 1:13, 17). While, therefore, Jezebel is a loving, home-based and hospitable “mother,” John is an alienated, peripatetic and orphaned “brother.”¹¹⁵

Jezebel, of course, is neither the only woman nor the only mother in the Book of Revelation.

5.5. A Powerful Woman: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with the Presentation of the Other Three Women of Revelation (Rev 2:20-23; cf. 12:1-6, 13-17; 14:8; 17:1-19:4, 7-8; 21:1-22:5, 17)

Revelation contains depictions of four women, who may be compared and contrasted under six headings: (1) status; (2) femininity; (3) motherhood; (4) (lack of) purity; (5) symbolism; (6) speaking; and (7) having her feminine power brought under control or destroyed by a bestial character.

¹¹⁴ In his discussion of the circumstances which might have led to Onesimus the Slave being in prison with Paul (Philem 10), J. Albert Harrill comes to the conclusion that Onesimus was not a runaway slave, but had been despatched by his master Philemon in order to bring succour to Paul (cf. Phil 2:25). Onesimus may well have remained with Paul in order to serve him as “a servant, scribe, letter carrier, personal assistant, or a combination of all these things.” J. Albert Harrill, *Slaves in the New Testament: Literary, Social, and Moral Dimensions* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2006), 12.

¹¹⁵ It is also interesting to note that both Jezebel and the Son of Man are portrayed as mother figures. The vastly contrasting relationships of Jezebel and John with the Son of Man are analysed in §6.6.2.

(1) Status

Each of the four women of Revelation is initially presented as having high status, which she then loses: Jezebel is thrown down to incarceration in her bed (Rev 2:22); the Heavenly Woman of Chapter 12 falls down to Earth and incarceration in the Wilderness (Rev 12:6, 14); Babylon is thrown down to humiliation, torture and death (Rev 17:16); and Jerusalem comes down to enslavement to male domination (Rev 21:2; cf. 21:10).

(2) Femininity

In the cases of the Woman Jezebel, the Woman of Chapter 12 and the Woman Babylon, femininity is associated with lack of self-control and the consumption of food or drink. The feminine gender of the Woman Jezebel is emphasised (Rev 2:20), she is described as “sexually immoral” (Rev 2:20-23) and she is associated with food which has been sacrificed to pagan deities (Rev 2:20). The Woman of Chapter 12 is presented as being in the exclusively-female situation of birthing a child (Rev 12:2, 5) and her agonising labour causes her to cry out (Rev 12:2). She is described twice as being nourished (Rev 12:6, 14). The Woman Babylon is described as a whore (Rev 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2) with a voracious sexual appetite (Rev 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2). She also drinks human blood (Rev 17:6). On the other hand, the Wife of the Lamb, the New Jerusalem, neither eats nor drinks, whilst providing nourishment for the Elect (Rev 22:2).¹¹⁶

(3) Motherhood

Jezebel, the Woman of Chapter 12 and Babylon, have children (Rev 2:23; 12:5, 17; 17:5). Moreover, in each case, the woman’s motherhood seems in some way to pose a threat to a high-status male character: Jezebel undermines the Son of God’s power by having motherly authority over his runaway “slaves” (Rev 2:20) and by possessing her own “children” (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Rev 2:23); the Woman of Chapter 12 threatens both the masculinity of her son (υἱὸν ἄρσεν) with her femininity (Rev 12:5) and the power of the Son of Man with her divine wisdom and nourishing breasts (Rev 12:1; cf. 1:13, 17-18 and §4.2.5), while the Woman, her Male Child and the rest of her (male) children (τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, Rev 12:17) all pose a threat to the ravenous Dragon (Rev 12:4; 13-17); and Babylon, the Mother of Whores (ἡ μήτηρ τῶν πορνῶν, Rev 17:5) and self-proclaimed Queen (Rev 18:7), threatens the right to rule of God the King (Rev 12:10;

¹¹⁶ The references cited are those verses in which the four characters are each described as “woman” (γυνή).

15:3), the Father of the anointed warrior king (τοῦ πατρός μου, Rev 2:28) and of his adopted “conquering” son (Rev 21:7; cf. §4.9). All three women are forcibly separated from their children: Jezebel’s children are killed by the Son of God (Rev 2:23); the Woman’s son is snatched up to God (Rev 12:5); and Babylon is murdered (Rev 17:16). In contrast, the Bride has no children of her own, but is forced to be a maternal refuge for the elect (Rev 21:7, 24-26).¹¹⁷

(4) (Lack of) Purity

Three of the women are portrayed in terms of impurity: Jezebel is described as indulging in “sexual immorality” and “adultery” (Rev 2:20-22); the Woman is impure after recently giving birth (Rev 12:5); and Babylon is impure because of her “sexual immorality” and association with blood (Rev 17:2, 4, 6). In contrast, the Bride is described as clothed in “fine linen, bright and pure” (καθαρόν, Rev 19:8), and nothing “unclean” (κοινόν) will be allowed to enter her (Rev 21:27).

(5) Symbolism

All four women may be interpreted as symbols: Jezebel of autonomous and powerful womanhood; the Woman of Chapter 12 of divine feminine power; Babylon of female depravity combined with a devastatingly powerful sexual allure; and the Bride of powerless asexual femininity.

(6) Speaking

Despite the appalling situations in which they find themselves, it is also notable that all four women raise their voices, and three of them speak, although it is difficult to hear what they are saying above the cacophony of the text.¹¹⁸ Speaking in Revelation can be hazardous (cf. §5.2.1, 5) and, since both Jezebel and Babylon speak to declare their self-

¹¹⁷ It may be argued that God’s conquering and adopted son (Rev 21:7), along with the redeemed from the Gentiles (Rev 21:24-26), are amongst those for whom the Bride provides the maternal embrace in which they may be nourished by the Throne and the Tree of Life which she encloses (Rev 22:1-2). God declares that He Who Conquers will be given water from the spring of the water of life (Rev 21:6-7), and the river of the water of life is found in Jerusalem (Rev 22:1), and that He Who Conquers is compared with those who are barred from entering her (Rev 21:7-8, 27).

¹¹⁸ The Woman Jezebel, of course, reportedly says that she is a prophetess (Rev 2:20); the Woman of Chapter 12 cries out doubtless unprintable words during labour (Rev 12:2) and calls for help from the Earth Goddess (Rev 12:16); the Woman Babylon, in the face of degradation and an agonising death, declares “I rule as a queen!” (Rev 18:7); and from the eternal captivity for which He Who Conquers is supposed to yearn (Rev 3:12) the Wife of the Lamb perhaps begs the non-ideal reader to rescue her: “Come!” (22:17).

authorised status and thus threaten divine male power (Rev 2:20; 18:7), both meet with violent reprisals. On the other hand, the Bride speaks in conjunction with Revelation's Spirit (Rev 22:17); whether she does so of her own free will is a moot point.¹¹⁹

(7) Controlled by a Beast

The power of each of the four women is destroyed by a bestial character: the Woman Jezebel is silenced and thrown down and her children are to be killed by the Anubis-like Son of God (Rev 2:22-23; see §4.8); the Woman of Chapter 12 is threatened and then attacked by the Dragon (Rev 12:4, 13-17);¹²⁰ the Woman Babylon is killed by the Scarlet Beast (Rev 17:16); and even the Bride is controlled by marriage to the Lamb (Rev 19:7-8; 21:2, 9-10).¹²¹

Comment

Pippin aptly sums up the presentation of the women of Revelation: "The Apocalypse is not a tale for women. The misogyny which underlies this narrative is extreme."¹²² The foregoing comparison of the presentation of the four women supports Pippin's view. At the same time, however, it highlights the power which is associated with "woman" in Revelation. This is the female power to birth, to nurture and to influence the development of children. Coupled with their unfeminine trait of refusing to remain silent, this power renders Revelation's women forces with which to be reckoned. It is notable that, in the case of each woman, the only way in which her power can be brought under male control is by the agency not of a "man," but of beastliness, be it demonic or divine.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Økland, "Why Can't the Heavenly Miss Jerusalem Just Shut Up?" 102.

¹²⁰ It is also notable that, after losing her divine status and nourishing breasts to the Son of Man, the Woman herself becomes half-woman, half-beast (Rev 12:14).

¹²¹ By means of a psychological approach in the tradition of Carl Jung, Yarbro Collins finds traces in Revelation of the feminine symbolism associated in the unconscious of a developing male with his mother: "the Great Mother who both nourishes and destroys." Yarbro Collins, "Feminine Symbolism," 127. In particular, Yarbro Collins draws attention to the Whore's symbolisation as "the Terrible Mother" aspect of "the Great Mother," who demands blood sacrifice. Yarbro Collins, "Feminine Symbolism," 128. The male consciousness is only liberated from domination by, and fear of, "the terrible side of the female" by killing her. Yarbro Collins, "Feminine Symbolism," 129.

¹²² Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 105. Feminist critiques of Revelation's misogyny have been fully analysed in Chapter 1, and are not reiterated here.

¹²³ The conquering of feminine power by bestial characters is discussed again in §6.6.3.

Feminist Reconstruction I

For a pagan neighbour, Jezebel would have seemed in most ways to be an unremarkable woman. Like many inhabitants of Thyatira, female and male, she had started life as a slave and worked hard in the local purple cloth industry to earn her freedom. Indeed, she continued to be a hardworking woman, perhaps out of necessity as she was apparently unmarried, and was involved in the local textile industry from which she made a decent living. She certainly had enough money to have purchased a modest house and some slaves and to be able to support her household. She was often absent from Thyatira on business trips, but when at home appeared to enjoy entertaining and held regular dinner parties. Her small dining room would be packed with business associates and friends. For some, it was shocking that an unmarried woman should host parties which were attended by both men and women. Not only would the lack of space necessitate the women dining with the men, but it appeared that they remained for the after-dinner entertainment; Jezebel had acquired the habits of fashionable Roman women. This “manliness” was also evident in her sometimes startling lack of deference to supposed male superiority and the assertion of her own views. She was, however, a businesswoman, and would have been accustomed to haggling with customers and suppliers and having to assert her authority.

However, despite her rather forward manners, there was no suggestion that Jezebel was anything other than a respectable woman.¹²⁴ She was a generous one as well; not only did she provide food and wine for the regular gatherings of her friends, she often provided lodging for strangers, who would appear out of nowhere, usually tired and dirty from long journeys, remain with her for a night or two and then leave as suddenly as they had arrived (cf. *Did.* 11:6). She might have lacked the feminine quality of subservience, but her concern for the welfare not only of her household but also of her guests demonstrated that she was not lacking in motherliness.¹²⁵

Jezebel was, of course, one of those strange Christ-worshippers, who did not participate in holiday festivities; it was even said that she never purchased meat in the market. This was unusual, as several Thyatiran merchants, who were known to have converted to Christianity, did not hesitate to eat the meat served at meetings of their

¹²⁴ Torjesen notes: “Although a woman, practically speaking, could undertake leadership roles based on her social status, wealth, and power, in so doing she failed to manifest those culturally defined characteristics of personality that signified a woman’s concern for shame and risked being regarded as morally corrupt.” Torjesen, “Reconstruction of Women’s Early History,” 302.

¹²⁵ Torjesen points out that: “[...] maleness symbolized authority and prestige, and femaleness, submission to authority, deference and passivity.” Torjesen, “Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History,” 302.

guilds. However, she appears to have been held in high regard, and even awe, by other members of her community, of whom the majority were merchants and the members of their households. She also had great influence over them.¹²⁶ At the same time, if any of the high-status men who attended her banquets were threatened by her combination of feminine power and masculine authority it was not apparent in their deference to her. Often, after one of her dinner parties, her homebound visitors, both male and female, free and slaves, were heard speaking of “Mother Jezebel” with respect for her “teaching” and with thankfulness for her generous hospitality. It was said that she was held in similar esteem as far afield as Ephesus and Pergamum, in which cities her other children resided; a number of travelling merchants had heard her spoken of by their Christian contacts with admiration. Thus the gossip about Jezebel, far from causing her pagan neighbour to view Christians with disdain, might very well have encouraged her or him to respond to Jezebel’s invitation to join one of her “assemblies” and hear “the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

For the Author of Revelation, however, it is the very qualities so admired in Jezebel by this pagan neighbour which cause him so much disgust and impotent rage. In particular, he fears three things about her. Firstly, he fears her uninhibited challenge to the exclusive and androcentric version of Christianity to which he adheres. For him, she is symbolic of the “typical” Asian Christian woman of pagan origin who symbolises the Church to outsiders: an independent woman possessing an authoritative position in the church which should rightly belong to a man; challenging male hegemony with her own publicly-expressed opinions; and bringing the reputation of the community into disrepute both by her own unchaste behaviour and by refusing to insist upon her converts adhering to the rules he considers necessary for membership of that community. Secondly, he fears her motherhood. He sees in the woman who stands in the relationship of a mother to the members of her household and to less wealthy Christians a threat to his vision of Christ; these “children” belong to, are nourished by and defer to the Woman Jezebel instead of the Son of Man. Thirdly, he fears her generous hospitality, which is centred upon her house. Being able both to accommodate wandering preachers and to provide the space for meetings of the assembly enables her to influence the views and practices of those dependent upon her generosity. The Author has neither the wealth nor the maternal

¹²⁶ It seems more than probable that some, at least, of those converted to Christianity by Jezebel were those with whom she was upon terms of friendship before her own conversion. See: Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 148.

instinct to challenge this woman. He knows, moreover, that in the eyes of the “mother” who works hard to support others and to spread the good news, he is as spoilt and irresponsible as a child, refusing to take paid employment and living off the generosity of others, quite possibly at some time even her own.¹²⁷ However, he does have two weapons at his disposal: his encyclopaedic knowledge of the Jewish scriptures and his knowledge of magical incantations. For the Author, a woman who dares to voice in public her challenge to male supremacy cannot go unpunished and by means of his two weapons he proceeds to undertake this punishment. Whilst his use of the second weapon is not discussed until Chapter 6, his use of the first weapon in his presentation of the Woman Jezebel is analysed in Part II.

¹²⁷ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 149.

PART II: “JEZEBEL”

The Use of Literary Allusions in the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel

Jezebel is, in part, a character in Revelation who is defined by the Author’s use of literary allusion and “homologies,” a technique which, as noted in the concluding segment of Chapter 3, sometimes slides out of his control.¹²⁸ To this end, in Part II discussion is made of her in comparison with: Queen Jezebel (§5.6), the Woman Who Bears Illegitimate Children of the Book of Sirach (§5.7), the prophet Balaam (§5.8), other characters in Revelation who “lead astray” (§5.9), the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom of the Book of Proverbs and the Seductress of *4QWiles of the Wicked Woman* (§5.10) and the Woman Babylon (§5.11).

By describing her as a woman who “leads astray” (πλανᾷ, Rev 2:20) and who indulges in πορνεία (Rev 2:21), the Author connects Jezebel through literary allusion both to other characters in the Book of Revelation and to a number of female characters in ancient Jewish texts. The Author’s most obvious use of literary allusion in his presentation of the Prophetess, however, is the sobriquet “Jezebel,” which is an allusion to Queen Jizebul of Israel, one of the most negatively-portrayed women in the Jewish scriptures.¹²⁹ By alluding to her, the Author betrays how much he hates the Prophetess of Thyatira.

5.6. A Hated Woman: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with Queen Jizebul of Israel (1 Kgs 16:31; 18:4, 13, 19; 19:1-3; 21:5-16, 23-24; 2 Kgs 9:10, 22, 30-37)

By giving the Prophetess of Thyatira the name “Jezebel,” the Author of Revelation is alluding to the Phoenician princess Jizebul, who became a queen of Israel and whose story is told in 1 and 2 Kings (1 Kgs 16:31; 18:4, 13, 19; 19:1-3; 21:5-16, 23-24; 2 Kgs 9:10, 22, 30-37).¹³⁰ Herein lies the blueprint for the hostile presentation of Jezebel of Thyatira made by the Author of Revelation, whose hatred for the high-status Prophetess

¹²⁸ Thompson notes the Author of Revelation’s use of “homologies” to link Jezebel with Satan, the Beast from the Earth and, especially, Babylon. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 80-81. On the subject of interpretation of characters slipping out of their creators’ control, see: Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 25; Moore, *God’s Beauty Parlor*, 277, Footnote 76.

¹²⁹ Josephus also portrays Jizebul in less than flattering terms (*Ant.* 8.316-59; 9:47, 108, 122-24).

¹³⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 203. Beale notes the allusion to “Ἰεζάβελ ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ (“Jezebel his wife”) in 3 Kgdms. 20:25,” and comments that the “irregular syntax” of ἡ λέγουσα (Rev 2:20), which should be in the accusative case after τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, is “not due to carelessness but is an attempt to attract attention to the OT allusion, where ‘Jezebel’ is followed by ‘wife’ (ἡ γυνή), itself nominative as the subject in its clause (3 Kgdms. 20:5, 7; dative in 19:1).” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 263 (the author’s emphasis).

echoes that of the authors of the Books of Kings for Queen Jizebul, who held the highest status possible for a woman in Israel in the ninth century B.C.E.¹³¹ Firstly, Jizebul is portrayed as a Phoenician woman who both worshipped Baal and Asherah and is accused by her hostile biographers of introducing the worship of the god Baal to Israel (1 Kgs 16:31; 18:19); similarly, Jezebel is depicted as being of Asian stock and of pagan origin and of allowing her followers to attend banquets at which sacrifices are made to pagan gods (see §5.2.3-8; 5.3.4). Secondly, Jizebul is portrayed as vindictive and murderous either in the protection of the worship of the god for whom she is named (1 Kgs 18:4, 13) or on behalf of the ambitions of her husband, King Ahab of Omri (1 Kgs 21:5-16). In particular she is presented as the powerful enemy of Elijah (“Yahweh is my god”) the Tishbite (1 Kgs 17:1; 19:2-3), the hero of the Books of Kings. Meanwhile, Jezebel is portrayed in stark contrast to John, the Author of Revelation’s alter ego. Thirdly, Jizebul is perceived to have wielded power over her husband Ahab (1 Kgs 16:31-33) and Jezebel is depicted as having power over the Angel of the Church (Rev 2:20), the “slaves” of the Son of God (Rev 2:20), her “lovers” (Rev 2:22), her “children” (Rev 2:23) and those who hold her teaching (Rev 2:23). Fourthly, Jizebul is wrongly remembered as a seductive and sexually voracious woman who dabbled in sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22) and Jezebel is presented in exactly the same way (Rev 2:20-22).¹³² Finally, both Jizebul and Jezebel are “thrown down” by warrior kings (2 Kgs 9:33; cf. Rev 2:22) who proceed to murder their children (2 Kgs 10:7; cf. Rev 2:23).¹³³

¹³¹ Jizebul was a princess, as the daughter of King Ethbaal of the Sidonians (1 Kgs 16:31), a queen, as the wife of King Ahab son of Omri (1 Kgs 16:30) and queen mother, as the mother of two kings, Joram and Ahaziah. Beach, *The Jezebel Letters*, 192.

¹³² There is no reason to suppose that Jizebul was anything other than a faithful and loyal wife to Ahab. Aune points out that the accusations of her murderer Jehu that she is guilty of whoring and sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22) are nowhere else supported, and that they are “metaphors for abandoning the worship of Yahweh.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 203. The story of Jizebul reflects not so much the politics of the ninth century B.C.E. as the overriding concerns of its seventh-century B.C.E. authors and/or editors, who portrayed any form of worship which was not exclusively centred upon Yahweh as “sexual promiscuity.” “Thus,” points out Claudia V. Camp, who might well be talking about the Prophetess of Thyatira, “Jezebel is often interpreted today not as the woman of political power that she was, but as a seductress.” Claudia V. Camp, “1 and 2 Kings,” in *The Women’s Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 104. Jezebel is accused both of “sexual immorality” (πορνεία) and of “leading astray” (πλανᾶ, Rev 2:20-21). The verb πλανᾶω also has connotations of sorcery (see §5.9). Duff, *Who Rides the Beast*, 116.

¹³³ Witherington, *Revelation*, 104. It may be noted that, while the sons of King Ahab are murdered by agents of Jehu at his behest, Jezebel’s children are murdered by the Son of God with the assistance of personified Death; this is considered further in §6.5.7.

Comment

Throughout the Books of Kings, and despite their never meeting or speaking with each other, Jizebul is presented as yoked together in a relationship of mutual hatred and political power-play and through what Phyllis Trible calls a “convergence of opposites” with the prophet Elijah.¹³⁴ Similarly, although they are not portrayed in the same scenario, the Author of Revelation presents the Woman Jezebel, at least in part, in a “convergence of opposites” with the Slave John, his representative in the story (see §5.4).¹³⁵ Elijah curses Queen Jizebul, in the name of Yahweh, to be brutally murdered (1 Kgs 21:23-24);¹³⁶ this murder (2 Kgs 9:30-37) is carried out by Jehu, a captain in King Hazael’s army, and who has been secretly anointed king by one of Elisha’s band of prophets (2 Kgs 9:6). Because of the undoubted similarities between Queen Jizebul and Jezebel of Thyatira the question thus obtrudes as to whether the murderous Son of God, an anointed king like Jehu (Rev 2:18, 26-29) is, by attacking Jezebel, her followers and her children (Rev 2:22-23), also acting as the agent of a divine curse, pronounced upon the Prophetess of Thyatira by John (Rev 1:2, 4, 19).¹³⁷

The Author’s hatred for Jezebel is also demonstrated by the allusions contained in her description to the depiction of a woman with illegitimate children in the Book of Sirach.¹³⁸

5.7. A Woman with “Illegitimate” Children: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with the Woman of Sirach 23 (Sir 23:22-27)

The Book of Sirach, whose misogyny is arguably unrivalled in the biblical texts, includes a passage describing the three offences of a woman who bears children through sexual intercourse with a man who is not her husband (Sir 23:22-23).¹³⁹ This is followed by her judgement and the punishment both of herself and of her children (Sir 23:24-26).

¹³⁴ Phyllis Trible, “The Odd Couple: Elijah and Jezebel,” in *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible* (ed. Christina Büchmann and Celina Spiegel; London: Pandora, 1995), 166 and 178-79.

¹³⁵ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 150.

¹³⁶ Jizebul is cursed both by Elijah and by Elisha in the name of Yahweh (1 Kgs 21:23-24; 2 Kgs 9:10).

¹³⁷ This is a question which is addressed in §6.5.

¹³⁸ Revelation contains other allusions to Sirach: Rev 1:18, cf. Sir 18:1; Rev 4:11, cf. Sir 18:1; Rev 5:7, cf. Sir 1:8; Rev 8:7, cf. Sir 39:29; Rev 20:12, cf. Sir 16:12.

¹³⁹ In his “literary analysis” of the presentation of women in the second-century B.C.E. Book of Sirach, Warren C. Trenchard comes to the conclusion that the text’s author exhibits a “personal, negative bias against women.” Warren C. Trenchard, *Ben Sira’s View of Women: A Literary Analysis* (Brown Judaic Studies 38; Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1982), 173. Pamela Eisenbaum concurs in this analysis and states: “Among the books of the Bible, Sirach easily stands out as the most misogynistic.” Pamela Eisenbaum,

There are five startling similarities between the presentations of the Woman of Sirach 23:22-27 and of the Woman Jezebel, and it seems that the Author of Revelation is deliberately alluding to this character in his description of Jezebel and of her fate in order to discredit both her personal and her professional reputations (Rev 2:20-23). In particular: (1) both are accused of being willing partners in their sexual violation (ἐν πορνείᾳ ἐμοιχεύθη, Sir 23:23; τῆς πορνείας αὐτῆς, Rev 2:21; τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς, Rev 2:22);¹⁴⁰ (2) both have children (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Sir 23:24; τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Rev 2:23); (3) Sirach says of the Woman that “her punishment will extend to her children” (Sir 23:24) and the Son of God declares that he will kill Jezebel’s “children” (Rev 2:23); (4) Sirach considers that the terrible example of the Woman and her children will cause “those who survive her” to “recognize that nothing is better than the fear of the Lord, and nothing sweeter than to heed the commandments of the Lord” (Sir 23:27), while, after throwing down Jezebel and murdering her “children,” the Son of God warns the members of “all the churches” that he is able to see into their hearts and minds and will give everyone their just desserts (Rev 2:23); and (5), as explained by Warren C. Trenchard, the punishment of a woman hauled “before the assembly” (Sir 23:24) would have involved either divorce or a beating followed by being shamed and dishonoured for the rest of her life. The woman’s punishment is thus much harsher than that of the man who “sins against his marriage bed” and who “will be punished in the streets of the city” (Sir 23:18-22). The reason for this is that the “mistakes” she has committed in “her quest for motherhood” are seen as far graver than the desire of the male “adulterer” for “sexual gratification.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, the Author of Revelation depicts Jezebel as meeting with violence in retribution for her actions (Rev 2:22) while those who hold the teaching of Balaam, who is described in similar language as Jezebel (Rev 2:14), are treated more leniently than her (Rev 2:15; cf. §5.2.2).

“Sirach,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 410.

¹⁴⁰ Harper notes that: “The addition of ἐν πορνείᾳ here emphasizes [the woman’s] dishonorable behavior [*sic*]” and “her volition in the dishonorable [*sic*] act” Harper, “*Porneia*,” 371.

¹⁴¹ Trenchard, *Ben Sira’s View of Women*, 108. The Man Who Disgraces His Bed (Sir 23:16, 18-21) is just one of three male characters depicted as involved in illicit sexual relationships in Sir 23:16-21. Each of the other two is described as ἄνθρωπος πόρνος (Sir 23:17). Harper, “*Porneia*,” 371.

Comment

Claudia V. Camp points to the author of Sirach's view that the proximity of other men's wives reclining at banquets posed a danger to the male diners of their sexual arousal, and it is possible that the Woman of Sir 23:22-27 conceived her children as a result of attending such parties.¹⁴² If this is the case, the allusion to this woman in the presentation of Jezebel confirms the suggestion made above (§5.3.5-6) that Jezebel's supposed "sexual immorality" and "violation" (Rev 2:21-22) occurred at celebrations of the community meal. It must, of course, be remembered that the context of Sirach's pitiless portrayal of a woman who has been sexually unfaithful to her husband and borne children by another man is quite different to that of the Author of Revelation's portrayal of Jezebel.¹⁴³ However, by alluding to this text, the Author wishes to infer that Jezebel, the symbolic "wife" of the Angel and the representative of the church community, has been complicit in her "violation" by means of her interaction with those men with whom she dines and that, since these men included Gentile converts, her prophetic "children" are in some way "illegitimate" (cf. §5.12.7).¹⁴⁴

A point of particular importance is made by Trenchard, who notes that even after her death the memory of the Woman of Sir 23:22-27 "will still be cursed" (Sir 23:25-26).¹⁴⁵ This fate uncannily echoes that of Jizebul, who is remembered as "that cursed woman" (2 Kgs 9:34); since there are allusions both to Jizebul and to the Woman of Sir 23:22-27 in the portrayal of Jezebel, it can only be concluded that the Prophetess of Thyatira is also in some way being cursed.

As well as being connected through literary allusion to female characters in her description, as noted above (§5.2.2), Jezebel is also linked to the prophet Balaam. As with the allusions to Jizebul and to the Woman of Sir 23:22-27, the intention is to harm Jezebel's standing in the church.

¹⁴² Camp calls particular attention to Sir 9:1: "Through woman's beauty many have perished/and love of it burns like fire." Claudia V. Camp, "Understanding a Patriarchy: Women in Second Century Jerusalem Through the Eyes of Ben Sira," in *Women Like This: New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1991), 21. This does not seem to have prevented the author of Sirach from attending such banquets.

¹⁴³ Eisenbaum suggests that the Woman may be an example of a wife who, because her family is in need, has been forced to prostitute herself with the result that she has conceived a child by a man other than her husband. Eisenbaum, "Sirach," 413.

¹⁴⁴ Jezebel's "children" are discussed below (§5.12.7).

¹⁴⁵ Trenchard, *Ben Sira's View of Women*, 108.

5.8. An Untrustworthy Woman? A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with the Prophet Balaam (Num 22-24; 31:16; Deut 23:3-6; Josh 24:9-10; Neh 13:1-3; Mic 6:5; Rev 2:14)

The description of Jezebel (Rev 2:20) alludes to that of Balaam, as described in the message to Pergamum (Rev 2:14; cf. §5.2.2). Like “Jezebel,” the nickname “Balaam” is an allusion to a historical character whose name came to be associated with characteristics viewed by Jews and Christians alike as wicked. In the long progression of the tradition surrounding Balaam, he was transformed from a respected prophetic seer, with direct access to the divine, who gave voice to future messianic hope, into a foreigner who plotted with a foreign king to lead the Israelites astray from worship of Yahweh and faithful adherence to his commandments into fornication with foreign women and idolatrous worship of their gods. In particular, the tradition found in Deuteronomy 23 states that Balaam, who had no claim to be a prophet or seer, attempted to place upon Israel a curse, which was changed by Yahweh into a blessing (Deut 23:3-6). The authors of this text would have been extremely hostile to the concept of a foreigner having access to Yahweh’s words and knowledge.¹⁴⁶

Comment

By connecting Jezebel to Balaam through the use of literary allusion, the Author wishes to imply that she is, like the prophet as portrayed by hostile commentators, a malignant foreigner whose prophetic gift should be distrusted. In contrast, it may be noted, the description of Balaam in Numbers 22 to 24 as a legitimate prophet is echoed by the

¹⁴⁶ A verse traced to the tradition of the Priestly school links the enigmatic prophet Balaam to the women who led the Israelites from worship of Yahweh, and thus brought the plague upon them (Num 31:16). Similar hostility may be found in Joshua (Josh 24:9-10) and in Nehemiah (Neh 13:1-3) and a more ambivalent reference is found in Micah (Mic 6:5). Philo merely came to the conclusion that Balaam was “not a true prophet” (*De vita Mosis; De migratione Abrahami*). Jo Ann Hackett, “Balaam (Person)”, in vol. I of *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 569-570, 572. Josephus, meanwhile, not only describes Balaam as being unable to curse the Israelites, but also casts Balaam as the instigator of the plot to use beautiful Midianite women to entice the Israelite soldiers to marry them, forsake their laws and worship the local gods. This, Balaam predicted, would have the result of bringing down Yahweh’s wrath upon them. With his favour temporarily withdrawn, they would then be weakened sufficiently to be conquered for a short while. Josephus, *Ant.* 4.100-1158. The story of Balaam is also found in Pseudo-Philo’s *Biblical Antiquities*, a first-century C.E. narrative based upon the texts of the Hebrew Bible from Adam to Saul, but written in a creative style which embellishes the biblical stories with traditions from other sources. Pseudo-Philo’s picture of Balaam is not entirely negative; however, it contains the view that Balak took his advice to use the Midianite women to lead the Israelites astray. The story ends with Balaam declaring that for this he has been cursed. It also contains one of Pseudo-Philo’s favourite themes, that the Israelites, Yahweh’s chosen people, could only be destroyed if they sinned. Frederick J. Murphy, *Pseudo-Philo: Rewriting the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-5, 84, 89.

Author's description of John.¹⁴⁷ Just as Balaam was able to hear and to speak to God (Num 22:9-12), John sees and hears the Son of Man (Rev 1:10-20). Whilst Balaam declared that he knew "the knowledge of the Most High" and was able to see "the vision of the Almighty" (Num 24:16), John sees the One Seated on the Throne (Rev 4:2-8; 5:1). Balaam was able to bless or curse only by speaking the word which God put in his mouth (Num 22:38). Similarly, John is only able to prophesy after eating the Little Scroll, which is given to him by an Angel at the behest of a voice from Heaven (Rev 10:8-11). Thus, in contrast to Balaam in Deuteronomy 23 and Jezebel, both Balaam in Numbers 22-24 and John receive their prophecies from a source which has the approval of the author of their exploits.

Unlike Balaam, however, Jezebel is directly accused of the offence of "leading astray" the Son of Man's slaves (Rev 2:20).

5.9. A Charismatic Woman: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with Characters in Revelation Who "Lead Astray"

"Leading astray" or "seduction" is a defining characteristic of the main opponents of the Messiah and God of the Book of Revelation. As well as the Woman Jezebel, three other characters practise this nefarious beguilement of various unsuspecting victims: (1) Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 10); (2) the Beast from the Earth, also known as the False Prophet (Rev 13:14; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10); and (3) the Woman Babylon (Rev 18:23).

5.9.1. Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 9; cf. 2:20, 24)

Whilst Jezebel is accused of beguiling the "slaves" of the Son of God to associate with Gentiles (Rev 2:20), Satan is described as beguiling the Gentiles, or even the whole world, to oppose the Messiah of Revelation (Rev 12:9; 20:3, 8, 9).¹⁴⁸ Notable is that in the Books of 1 Chronicles, Job and Zechariah שָׂטָן ("satan") is used in the sense of "accuser" or "adversary;" however, in the Septuagint, it is translated as "(ὁ) διάβολος," which has the meaning of "'one who separates,' 'the seducer,' 'the enemy.'"¹⁴⁹ It seems

¹⁴⁷ As told in Numbers 22-24, the story has a reasonably favourable view of Balaam. Hackett, "Balaam," 569.

¹⁴⁸ As noted in §3.4.2, Satan is also associated with Pergamum (Rev 2:13) and with the Jews of Philadelphia (Rev 3:8).

¹⁴⁹ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 697. As well as being identified as Satan, the great Fiery Red Dragon is also called "the Ancient Serpent, the Devil [...] the one leading astray the whole world" (Rev 12:9; cf. 20:2). The appellation "the Ancient Serpent" in turn identifies Satan with the crafty serpent who persuades Eve

quite possible that the Author thought of Jezebel not only as his seductive enemy or adversary, but also as a woman who was the cause of separation or schism in the Christian communities in which her teaching was held by some, but not by all, of their members (Rev 2:15, 24).¹⁵⁰

5.9.2. *The Beast from the Earth, the False Prophet (Rev 13:14; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10; cf. 2:20; 1 Cor 14:2, 27-28; Aeschylus, Agamemnon 1150-1153)*

The False Prophet (ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης), also known as the Beast from the Earth (Rev 13:14; 16:13; 19:20; 20:10), leads astray (πλανᾷ) those who dwell on the Earth through the “signs” which it has been allowed to make in the presence of the Beast from the Sea, commanding them to make an image of the Beast (Rev 13:14; cf. 16:13-14).¹⁵¹ The most plausible interpretation of this character, a hybrid of a man and a monster, is that of Aune, who argues that the False Prophet represents “the priesthood of the imperial cult, the most important cult in the province of Asia.”¹⁵² Since the verb πλανᾷ contains with it a suggestion of sorcery, it is possible that the Author is suggesting that, like the False Prophet, Jezebel uses magic to perform “signs” in order to convince her “children” that

to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 3:1-7). David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 696. Satan’s “four aliases” (Rev 12:9; 20:2) may be an allusion to “the reptilian trinity” of Isa 27:1, which consists of “Leviathan the fleeing serpent,” “Leviathan the twisting serpent” and “the dragon that is in the sea.” Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 698.

¹⁵⁰ The Author deliberately refers to Jezebel’s teaching as “the deep things of Satan” (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ, Rev 2:24), probably a derisory term used by those opposed to her (ὡς λέγουσιν, Rev 2:24) and derived from her teaching about “the depths of God” (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ θεοῦ; see §5.13.3). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 207, 214.

¹⁵¹ Aune considers that this character is best considered as the False Prophet, since he is called by this name three times (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) and only once designated as a “beast” (Rev 13:11), in which description is an allusion to “Behemoth, a mythical male monster.” Versions of this myth may be found in *1 Enoch* 60:7-11, 24; *4 Ezra* 6:47-54; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 29:4. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 755.

¹⁵² Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 780; cf. 756. Aune notes that the word ἐνώπιον followed by an object in the genitive case (“in the presence of” or “before”) is “primarily used” by the Author with relation either to God, his throne or the Lamb. Its use suggests that the one standing “before” God, his throne or the Lamb is playing the role of a priest. Aune continues: “That the second beast or the false prophet is said to exercise authority and perform miracles *in the presence of* the beast hints at a priestly role for the false prophet.” Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 758 (the author’s emphasis). Duff makes a similar argument in his contention that the False Prophet represents “the pagan substructure” supporting “Greco-Roman culture.” This “pagan substructure” includes not only the imperial cult, but also pagan cultic rituals in general and magic, with all three of whose practices “signs” such as bringing down fire (Rev 13:13) were associated. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 114. It is thus difficult to understand how Jezebel, a woman and a Christian, could in any way be involved in this priesthood. Moreover, there is no mention of “false” in the descriptions either of Balaam or of Jezebel. The suggestion made by Rodney Lawrence Thomas that the προφήτης is a ψευδοπροφήτης and the interpretation made by Beale that she and the False Prophet are one both seem to be straining the bounds of literary allusion. See: Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 45-46; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261-62.

her teaching has divine authority.¹⁵³ F. Gerald Downing notes that the priests of the imperial cult were able, and did not hesitate, to use magic tricks in attempts to impress upon their audiences that the supposed powers of the Emperor were present even in his statues. It is not clear how many of those present genuinely believed in the supernatural powers either of the Emperor or of his statues. However, what *is* clear is that the Author of Revelation “seems to accept the *son et lumière* at face value” and believes that the “onlookers” are gullible innocents who are “genuinely deceived.”¹⁵⁴ In other words, the Author believes that certain people have the ability to perform magical spells, which includes being able to make statues speak.

That the Author views the False Prophet, along with the Dragon and the Beast from the Sea, as a figure to be mocked is evidenced by his later description of “three unclean spirits like frogs” coming from their mouths (Rev 16:13).¹⁵⁵ Stephan Witetschek argues that, in line with texts roughly contemporaneous with Revelation, these frog-like characters are figures of fun, which provide a brief comedic respite from the apocalyptic horrors of the book. Frogs were mocked in particular by ancient authors for their “unintelligible but intrusive croaking and their supposed silliness.”¹⁵⁶ By imbuing the False Prophet with such a spirit, therefore, the Author implies not only that he is possessed of a demon, but also that his words are of no more worth than the croaking of a frog. Because of his association of Jezebel with this character, the Author thus manages to imply both that Jezebel’s prophetic words are unintelligible nonsense and that they are the result of her possession by an unclean demon.¹⁵⁷ However, since Jezebel was a Prophetess, she might well, when in the grip of prophetic inspiration, have addressed the assembly in divine, and incomprehensible, words (cf. Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1150-1153).¹⁵⁸ Another possibility is that she sometimes addressed God in the equally

¹⁵³ The great signs made by the False Prophet (Rev 13:13-14) are also suggestive of “acts of sorcery.” Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 116.

¹⁵⁴ F. Gerald Downing, “Magic and Scepticism in and Around the First Christian Century,” in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon* (JSNTSup 245; ed. Todd E. Klutz; London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 96.

¹⁵⁵ Stephan Witetschek argues that interpreting the Frogs solely in relation to the Exodus plagues is inadequate. Stephan Witetschek, “The Dragon Spitting Frogs: On the Imagery of Revelation 16.13-14,” *NTS* 54 (2008), 565.

¹⁵⁶ Witetschek, “The Dragon Spitting Frogs,” 559. Examples of such literature are: Aesop’s *Fables*; Aristophanes, *The Frogs*; Plutarch, “On the Delays of Divine Vengeance;” and Dio Chrysostom, *On Virtue*. Witetschek, “The Dragon Spitting Frogs,” 559-61.

¹⁵⁷ Witetschek draws attention to the apparent Levitical prohibition on the consumption of frogs (Lev 11:1-12). Witetschek, “The Dragon Spitting Frogs,” 565-66.

¹⁵⁸ In *Agamemnon* the Chorus addresses Cassandra as follows: “Whence do you get this possession coming violently upon you, this futile misery, and sound out these fearful things in song, at once in tones hard to interpret and in notes loud and shrill?” (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1150-1153). Aeschylus, *Oresteia*:

incomprehensible words of glossolalia (cf. 1 Cor 14:2, 27-28).¹⁵⁹ To a person like the Author of Revelation, who was acquainted with the “*voces magicae*” of magicians, it may well have appeared that Jezebel was neither prophesying nor praying, but reciting a magical incantation.¹⁶⁰

5.9.3. *The Woman Babylon (Rev 18:23; cf. 2 Kgs 9:22; Rev 2:20)*

Another female character who both “leads astray” and is linked with the practice of magic, this time explicitly, is the Woman Babylon (ἐν τῇ φαρμακείᾳ σου ἐπλανήθησαν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, Rev 18:23). The literary connection between them, however, goes far deeper than that between Jezebel and Satan and that between Jezebel and the False Prophet. There can be no doubt that the Author of Revelation wishes his readers to make a connection between Babylon and the Prophetess of Thyatira:¹⁶¹ as well as being accused of “leading astray” (Rev 2:20; 18:23), both women are: (1) accused of indulging in πορνεία (Rev 2:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3, 9; 19:2); (2) condemned for their “works” (Rev 2:22; 18:6); and (3) “thrown down” (Rev 2:22; 18:21). Moreover, the description of Babylon’s purple clothing (Rev 17:4) calls to mind the textile industry of Thyatira (Rev 2:18).

Furthermore, it has been pointed out by a number of interpreters that there is a triangular relationship between Jizebul, Jezebel and Babylon, since the name “Jezebel” (Rev 2:20) is an allusion to Jizebul (cf. §5.6) and the description of Babylon also contains a number of allusions to this Queen of Israel:¹⁶² firstly, like Thyatira, Tyre was famed for

Agamemnon; Libation-Bearers; Eumenides (LCL 146; ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein; Cambridge, Mass; Harvard University Press, 2008), 137.

¹⁵⁹ Another possible interpretation of Jezebel’s incomprehensible words is made in §5.12.4.

¹⁶⁰ Aune points out that there are two similarities between glossolalia, or “the phenomenon of speaking in tongues” (see Acts 2:1-13; 10:44-46; 19:6), and the “*voces magicae*,” or formulae, of magical incantations. Firstly, to the uninitiated ear, they sound remarkably similar; and secondly, Christians speaking in tongues (e.g. 1 Cor 14:2, 27-28) or, as Paul phrases it, “in the “language of angels” (1 Cor 13:1),” and magicians reciting incantations are all addressing the divine. The difference is that, while magicians used “*voces magicae*” in order to achieve a specific outcome, glossolalia appears to have had no particular objective. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 412-14.

¹⁶¹ Bauckham interprets Babylon as an economic critique of Rome and, since there is a “resemblance” between Jezebel of Thyatira and Babylon, Jezebel is thus “the local representative of the harlot of Babylon within the church at Thyatira and is implicated in “the seductive power of Rome’s alliance of commerce and idolatrous religion.” He also considers that Jezebel was encouraging the Christians of Thyatira “to participate without qualms of conscience” in the interconnected commercial life and idolatry of a city under Roman rule. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 377-78.

¹⁶² See Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 89-90, and Vander Stichele, “Re-memembering the Whore,” 113. Boxall considers that this triangular relationship is achieved both through literary allusion and through each of the women’s association with forbidden sexual intercourse and with food. Boxall, “The Many Faces of Babylon the Great,” 66; cf. Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling my Servants,” 83-84. Bauckham notes that

its purple dye (cf. Rev 17:4; 18:12); secondly, Babylon is said to describe herself as a queen (Rev 18:7); thirdly, Jizebul and Babylon are accused of sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22; Rev 18:23); fourthly, both women are thrown down to their destruction (2 Kgs 9:33; Rev 18:21); and fifthly, their bodies are eaten by beasts (2 Kgs 9:35-36; Rev 17:16) at the behest of the divine will (2 Kgs 9:36; Rev 17:17; 19:2).

It is, moreover, of particular interest to note that both Jizebul and Babylon are portrayed within relationships of conflict with divine characters and their agents: Jizebul is cursed by Yahweh through the instrumentation of Elijah (1 Kgs 21:23) and the curse is carried out by Yahweh's agent Jehu (2 Kgs 9:7-10, 30-37); and Babylon is "judged" by God (Rev 16:19; 18:6, 8; 19:2) and his retribution is carried out by God's agent, the Scarlet Beast from the Abyss (Rev 17:16-17).¹⁶³ It has already been proposed that, since Jizebul is cursed, so Jezebel may also be cursed (§5.6); the association of both women with Babylon implies that she too may be under a curse.¹⁶⁴ Since Jezebel is attacked by the brutish Son of God (Rev 2:20-23), and taking into consideration the complex web of literary allusions described above, it can, therefore, only be concluded that, like Jehu and the Scarlet Beast, the Son of God is acting as the agent of a curse upon the Prophetess of Thyatira; the curse is cast upon her by none other than the Author of Revelation, whose authorial powers are similar to those of a malign cosmic god.

Comment

By means of the use of the verb *πλανάω*, the Author of Revelation makes a literary link between Jezebel, Satan, the False Prophet, Babylon and, through the last-mentioned, Jizebul. The Prophetess is being presented as a woman whose teaching is that of Satan, who is as evil as the priests of the imperial cult and who uses her magical powers to lead astray the gullible "slaves" of the Son of God, just as Jizebul led astray her husband's subjects.¹⁶⁵ Since *πλανάω* has connotations of magical practices and is associated with the demonic, the Author of Revelation implies that the success of his prophetic rival in "beguiling" members of his prophetic school must be due to her magical abilities.¹⁶⁶ By

Babylon is "also in part modelled on" Queen Jezebel, "who seduced Israel into idolatry in the time of Elijah," murdered Yahweh's prophets and was accused of being a whore and sorceress (1 Kgs 18:13; 2 Kgs 9:22; cf. Rev 18:7, 23, 24). Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 377-378.

¹⁶³ The need for a comparative analysis of the conflict between the Woman Jezebel and the Son of God with that between the Woman Babylon and God is indicated and is undertaken in §6.4.3.

¹⁶⁴ The possibility of the Woman Babylon being cursed is discussed in §6.5.7.

¹⁶⁵ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 118.

¹⁶⁶ It is quite possible that the Author himself believed this; he has seen magic done by the priests of the imperial cult and he believes in its efficacy (see §5.9.2).

linking her with the demon-possessed False Prophet, moreover, the Author infers that Jezebel's words are those not of the Spirit of God, but of a demonic spirit (Rev 16:13).

Like Jezebel (Rev 2:22), Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:2-3, 10) and the False Prophet (Rev 19:20), Babylon is also thrown down (Rev 18:21). However, it is notable that the Woman Who Bears Illegitimate Children (Sir 23:22-27) receives a harsher "punishment" for her "sexual immorality" than the Man who "sins against his marriage bed" (Sir 23:18, 21). Similarly, Jezebel is violently assaulted by the Son of God (Rev 2:22) while the followers of Balaam's teaching merely receive a tongue-lashing (Rev 2:15). Likewise, the female Babylon is punished "with violence" (Rev 18:21) and her fate is recounted in lubricious detail (Rev 17:16; 18:6-19, 21-23; 19:2-3), while the descriptions of the fates of the male characters who "lead astray," Satan and the False Prophet, are more restrained (Rev 19:20; 20:10). The Author subtly undermines Jezebel's authority by explicitly stating that the Dragon, the Beast from the Sea, the False Prophet and the Woman Babylon are all depicted as demon-possessed (Rev 16:13-14; 18:2). Since three of these characters are already linked to Jezebel by the verb *πλανάω*, and her prophecy and teaching are said to originate with Satan, the "ideal" reader is led to conclude that Jezebel is also possessed of a demon whilst prophesying.

As pointed out by Athalya Brenner, it is notable that Ezekiel inveighed against "magician prophetesses," women whose divining skills made them popular, but which Ezekiel considered to be unsanctioned by Yahweh (Ezek 13:17-23).¹⁶⁷ Moreover, allusion is made to Ezekiel in the characterisation of John (Rev 10:8-10; cf. Ezek 2:8-3:3).¹⁶⁸ Like the Author of Revelation, Ezekiel's view of women (and men) cannot be relied upon for its accuracy. Indeed, Katheryn Pfisterer Darr's summing up of Ezekiel's attitude to those with whose religious practices he disagreed might well be made of the Author of Revelation: "he sought to discredit those intermediaries whose methods and messages conflicted with his own."¹⁶⁹ However, as pointed out by Mary Rose D'Angelo, the association in antiquity of women with the practice of magic was not so much because there were more female than male magicians, but because magic was seen as the only power available to those lacking political and physical power, that is, men of low status

¹⁶⁷ Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 74-75.

¹⁶⁸ Ezekiel was a "priest called to prophesy." Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, "Ezekiel," in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 183. The scene in which John eats the Little Scroll (Rev 10:8-11) is analysed in §6.3.2.

¹⁶⁹ Pfisterer Darr, "Ezekiel," 188.

and women. The literary portrayal of women as practitioners of magic may well have its cause less in reality than in the status of the men writing about them. Of particular interest here is D'Angelo's observation that Apuleius, whose *Metamorphoses* abound with sorceresses, "was himself accused of magic;"¹⁷⁰ as noted above (§3.1.4), the Author may have been relegated to Patmos as punishment for the practice of magic.¹⁷¹ He certainly lacked both the social and the prophetic status of Jezebel (see §5.4.1) and his self-portrayal in Revelation is that of a low-status slave (Rev 1:1; 17). It may, therefore, be concluded that it is the Author of Revelation, not the Prophetess of Thyatira, who is the practitioner of magic, a sorcerer who not only knows how to perform magical spells, but also knows the destructive potential of insinuating that an enemy, especially if female, dabbles in occult practices.¹⁷² Coupled with the implication that her prophecies have their source not in God but one or more demons, this implied accusation would have been extremely harmful.

It is, however, interesting to note that, if the fodder for the Author's insinuations were the charismatic nature of Jezebel's prophesying, this in itself would not have been seen as evidence either of her being a "false" prophet possessed by a demon or of her practising magic. Meeks points out that speaking in tongues was not only valued in the Corinthian churches, but also practised by Paul (2 Cor 12:12; cf. Rom 15:19). Whether she was seen as speaking in the Spirit or as being in the grip of demonic possession appears to have depended on the viewpoint of the listener; her charismatic prophesying and possible performance of "signs" would have made her no more a "false" prophet than Paul himself.¹⁷³ Moreover, the unintended consequence¹⁷³ of the Author of Revelation's malicious coupling of Jezebel with the imperial priesthood implies, for the non-ideal reader, that her job of Prophetess of Thyatira involved the cultic duties of a priest.

¹⁷⁰ Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View," *JBL* 109.3 (1990), 458, Footnote 55.

¹⁷¹ The Author of Revelation may have been on the Island of Patmos because of "some form of Roman repression." One reason for such relegation was being found guilty of the practice of magic, which was considered a criminal offence "when used with the intent to do harm." Yarbrow Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 102.

¹⁷² It seems that Revelation was understood by some of its readers to include magical formulae, for example: "Thus says the Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David, who opens and no one closes, and who closes and no one opens" (Rev 3:7). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 235-36. Magical language in Revelation is considered again in Chapter 6.

¹⁷³ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 138.

The use of the verb *πλανάω* in the description of Jezebel suggests that the Author may not only be categorising Jezebel with the False Prophet, Satan and Babylon, but may also be indicating that she is one in a long line of “strange” women.¹⁷⁴

5.10. A Woman Who Speaks: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom of Proverbs 1-9 and with the Seductress of 4QWiles of the Wicked Woman

In order to discover whether the Woman Jezebel is indeed a “strange” woman, it is useful to consider similarities between the descriptions of Jezebel and of the Strange Woman of Proverbs 1-9. Since the portrayal of the Strange Woman is so intimately entangled with that of Woman Wisdom, it is necessary to consider this character at the same time.

5.10.1. The Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom (Prov 2:16-19; 5:3-8, 20; 6:24; 7:5-27; 8:1-9:6)

Descriptions of the Strange Woman are found throughout the first nine chapters of the Book of Proverbs (Prov 2:16-19; 5:3-8, 20; 6:24; 7:5-27).¹⁷⁵ She is presented as the personification of the dangerous feminine, and foreign, teaching against which the fatherly narrator warns his sons. It is of particular note that, although she is described as beautiful (Prov 6:25), it is her speech, not her appearance, which is portrayed as the Strange Woman’s weapon of seduction (Prov 7:21). Since her goal is to lead unsuspecting young men into the worship of foreign deities, by listening to her “strange” wisdom, they are putting themselves in danger of committing adultery and thus breaking the covenant and the commandments (Prov 6:23-24).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ According to the authors of various Hebrew texts, these women made a point of scheming and manipulating unsuspecting men for their own nefarious purposes, which often had a sexual element. Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 6-8, 17-19.

¹⁷⁵ There are other references to strange or adulterous women in the Book of Proverbs (Prov 22:14; 23:27-28; 30:20), but as the first nine chapters appear to comprise an originally separate collection of sayings to the later chapters, this sub-section will confine itself to discussion of references only in the first nine chapters. These chapters, which provide an introduction to the remainder of the book, were probably written after the return from exile in Babylon. Roland E. Murphy, *Proverbs* (WBC 22; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), xix-xx. At this time there was, according to the Books of Nehemiah and Ezra, (especially Ezra 9-10), a campaign to prevent or rescind marriages between Israelite men and foreign women. Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 135.

¹⁷⁶ See Deut 6 and 11. Murphy, *Proverbs*, 44-45. In the MT, the woman is described sometimes as זרה (“strange,” Prov 2:16; 7:5), and sometimes as נכרית (“foreign,” Prov 2:16; 5:20; 6:24). The only places that the words “foreign woman” occur are in the context of women who use sweet words to entice men into illicit sexual intercourse. Matthew Goff, “Hellish Females: the Strange Woman of Septuagint Proverbs and 4QWiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184)”, *JSJ* 39 (2008), 25-26. However, the LXX describes her as πόρνη, usually translated as “loose” (e.g. Prov 5:3), suggesting the association of foreign women and “promiscuity.” The Strange Woman is also described in the MT as אשה רע (“the evil woman,” Prov 6:24),

The Strange Woman is contrasted with Wisdom, also personified as a woman (Prov 8:1-9:6), and there are crucial differences between them. Wisdom is portrayed as being in public places during the day (Prov 8:2-3), addressing the crowds, and even possibly proclaiming her message from the city walls;¹⁷⁷ in contrast, the Strange Woman goes out hunting at night for a man on his own (Prov 7:12-13). Wisdom is sought after (Prov 8:17), while the Strange Woman seeks men out (Prov 7:10). Whoever finds Wisdom finds life and favour from the LORD (Prov 8:35), while whoever follows the Strange Woman is led to death (Prov 5:5; 7:27).¹⁷⁸ At the same time, however, there are a number of similarities between the two female characters:¹⁷⁹ both have houses (Prov 7:27; 9:1); both go out alone in public (Prov 7:11-12; 8:2-3); and both direct their words to the foolish or simple (Prov 7:7, 21; 8:5). Moreover, it is abundantly clear, from the descriptions of the Strange Woman and of Woman Wisdom, that it is difficult to differentiate between these two female characters.¹⁸⁰

Jezebel's teaching about τὰ βαθέα (Rev 2:24) may be considered to be "strange" feminine wisdom, and Jezebel certainly appears to have been a foreign woman of pagan origin, and whose sexual mores may, therefore, be suspect (cf. §5.3.2-4). Moreover, it is notable that the strongest similarities between Jezebel and the Strange Woman are not only in their portrayals as prostitutes and adulteresses, but also in their seductive speech which "beguiles" young men into illicit sexual relationships (Prov 7:5, 14-21; cf. Rev 2:20). Moreover, just as an ignominious fate awaits Jezebel and her followers and her children are put to death, the "father" of Proverbs tells his son(s) that the "seductive and inviting" speech of the Strange Woman "leads to death and disaster" (Prov 5:3-5; 6:24; 7:5, 21-23),¹⁸¹ just as the Son of God bewails Jezebel's unrecorded words of prophecy and instruction with which she is "seducing" his "slaves," so the fatherly instructor

translated in the Septuagint as γυναικὸς ὑπ'άνδρου ("the wife of another man"). She is thus portrayed as "strange" in the sense of being foreign, which carries connotations of being both licentious and an active danger to a worshipper of Yahweh. Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1-9*, 141.

¹⁷⁷ Murphy, *Proverbs*, 49.

¹⁷⁸ *I Enoch* 42:1-3 contrasts Wisdom and unrighteousness in a similar manner.

¹⁷⁹ Camp considers that the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom represent chaos and order respectively. Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (JSOTSup 320; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 78.

¹⁸⁰ Both women are described either as embracing and grasping or as being embraced and grasped; both are encountered in public places (Prov 1:20-21; 7:12); and both issue invitations to their houses (7:15-10; 8:34; 9:1-6, 14-16). Woman Wisdom and Woman Folly both offer him bread (Prov 9:5, 17) and the young man receiving instruction may choose to be satisfied in love by either his wife or the Strange Woman (Prov 5:19; 7:18). Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, 76.

¹⁸¹ Carole R. Fontaine, "Proverbs," in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 147-148.

stresses that it is the speech of the Strange Woman which “has the power to entrap and destroy” and “brings the unsuspecting fool within the orbit of her destruction;”¹⁸² and, despite their “strangeness” and being anomalies in their respective communities, they both have uncontested positions within those communities.¹⁸³

On the other hand, it may be argued that Jezebel bears more than a passing resemblance to Woman Wisdom since, like Jezebel, Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 is a teacher.¹⁸⁴ Gerlinde Baumann notes that Woman Wisdom “affirms the possibility of change, the ability of people to mend their ways” and, because she is both “intimate” with men and women and yet at the same time “a heavenly being close to YHWH,” she “embodies both human and divine wisdom” and “enhances the theological value of human wisdom that is based upon experience.”¹⁸⁵ Much the same thing might be argued about Jezebel who, by sharing meals, and thus being “intimate,” with Christians who have not yet discarded all their pagan ways, demonstrates that she has faith that they will do so. As a trusted Prophetess and Teacher, Jezebel is no doubt knowledgeable both of God’s will and of the concerns of her followers.¹⁸⁶

It may, therefore, be concluded, and for three reasons, that the Author of Revelation does not intend to allude to the Strange Woman in his presentation of the Prophetess. The first reason is the difficulty of distinguishing between the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom, which is not echoed in the message to Thyatira; the Woman Jezebel certainly cannot be confused with the Son of God. The second reason is that both the Strange Woman and Wisdom are partly portrayed by using descriptions commonly used of goddesses.¹⁸⁷ Jezebel is a human being and, while it has certainly been demonstrated that the Son of Man understands himself in terms of female divinities, including Wisdom (§4.2.4, 5), the Son of God is both resolutely masculine and quite

¹⁸² Scott C. Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy: A Comparison of Proverbs VII and 4Q184,” *Vetus Testamentum* 53.1 (2003), 68-69.

¹⁸³ Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, 79.

¹⁸⁴ Gerlinde Baumann, “A Figure with Many Facets: The Literary and Theological Functions of Personified Wisdom in Proverbs 1-9,” in *Wisdom and Psalms: A Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 69.

¹⁸⁵ Baumann, “A Figure with Many Facets,” 69-70 and 75.

¹⁸⁶ Additionally, like the unnamed women of Tekoa (2 Sam 14:2-20) and Abel-Maacah (2 Sam 20:16-22), Jezebel may have been known as a “wise woman,” in other words a “clever speaker” like those “quick thinkers” who were either consulted by (2 Sam 14:2), or represented a community to, a king’s general (2 Sam 20:16-17). Jo Ann Hackett, “1 and 2 Samuel,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 161-62.

¹⁸⁷ The Strange Woman is associated with death and Sheol (Prov 5:5; 7:18, 27; cf. Woman Folly in 9:18), while Woman Wisdom is described as Ma’at, “the scribal goddess of justice” (Prov 3:16) and similarly to part of Isis’s aretology (Prov 8:15-16). Fontaine, “Proverbs,” 147-48.

unlike a wisdom goddess.¹⁸⁸ The third reason is that the words of the Strange Woman are recorded; or to be more exact, the male author puts his own words into her female mouth.¹⁸⁹ The Author makes use of the Woman Babylon in the same way (Rev 18:7), and yet, inexplicably, refrains from doing so with Jezebel. It may only be concluded that the words spoken by the Prophetess are those not of a “strange” woman but of a wise one.

There is, however, another female character who “leads astray,” who is modelled on the Strange Woman of Proverbs, and to whom it is far more likely that the Author of Revelation is alluding in his description of Jezebel:¹⁹⁰ she is the “Seductress” of *4QWiles of the Wicked Woman*.¹⁹¹

5.10.2. *The Seductress (4Q184 1, 1-17)*

Unlike the Strange Woman of Proverbs, who is distinctly lifelike in her representation, the Seductress of *4QWiles of the Wicked Woman* lacks all traces of humanity, and there are two competing theories concerning her symbolism: firstly, that she is a demoness, and secondly, that she is the symbol of a community with a teaching to rival that of the community of the author of 4Q184. Joseph M. Baumgarten argues that the lone figure of the Seductress is “the seductive demoness who resides in the darkness of the netherworld but issues forth stealthily to lure the unsuspecting to apostasy and perdition.”¹⁹² He

¹⁸⁸ As noted in §4.7, although Duff argues that the Author may in part be presenting the Son of God as Hecate, it seems far more likely that he is presenting him as Apollo. Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 125-26.

¹⁸⁹ The voice which purports to be that of the Strange Woman (and indeed that of Woman Wisdom) is of course in reality that of the male author; she is speaking the words which he puts into her mouth, rather like a ventriloquist’s doll. See: Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), xvii.

¹⁹⁰ Goff, “Hellish females”, 20-21. Eileen M. Schuller considers it likely that *4QWiles of the Wicked Woman* is a non-sectarian document, and its female imagery relies to a great extent upon that to be found throughout the Hebrew Bible. Eileen M. Schuller, “Women in the Dead Sea Scrolls”, in *Methods of Investigation of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Khirbet Qumran Site: Present Realities and Future Prospects* (Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences 722; ed. Michael O. Wise, Norman Golb, John J. Collins and Dennis G. Pardee; New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1994), 126. Melissa Aubin writes: “Even if the text was not produced at Qumran, it is plausible to see how the text might have been at home there”. Melissa Aubin, “She is the Beginning of All the Ways of Perversity’: Femininity and Metaphor in 4Q184,” in *Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 2:2 (2001), 3.

¹⁹¹ “The Seductress” is the name given to the female character of 4Q184 by Joseph M. Baumgarten, “On the Nature of the Seductress in 4Q184,” in *RevQ* 15/57-58 (1991), 133-143. It is the best “name” that can be given to the female character so described, in a similar vein to “the Strange Woman” of Proverbs. Whether “the Seductress” is more or less misogynistic than “the Wicked Woman” is debatable.

¹⁹² Joseph Baumgarten, “On the Nature of the Seductress in 4Q184,” 138, 143. As evidence to support this interpretation, Baumgarten notes in particular the “emphasis on her association with the netherworld.” He translates בנפיה (4Q184 1, 4) not, as is possible, “in her skirts,” but as “in her wings,” and points out that

considers that: “For the author of 4Q184 she was a very real and dangerous embodiment of the sinister powers which ruled the realm of darkness.”¹⁹³ Matthew J. Goff, however, considers Baumgarten’s theory that the Seductress is a demoness to be unsupported by evidence from relevant ancient Jewish literature.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Philip S. Alexander notes that, although in the Dead Sea Scrolls demons “seduce into error” and cause “stumbling,” just as the Seductress is accused of doing, this does not prove beyond all doubt that she is a demoness. He continues: “Moreover, in Qumran demonology the gendering of a demon would be problematic.”¹⁹⁵ The alternative interpretation of this female character is that she represents a community with a teaching which rivals that of the group to which the male author of the text belongs.¹⁹⁶

For the author, the identity of the group in which *4Q Wiles of the Wicked Woman* was produced, whether or not it was the Qumran *Yaḥad*, was under threat from “apostasy,” and Melissa Aubin considers that the use in this text of gender-specific language to describe “apostasy” is caused by a perceived threat.¹⁹⁷ The portrayal of the Seductress, which uses the “otherness” of femininity to describe this threat, gives voice to the fear that out-group members might penetrate the in-group’s boundaries. For the author of 4Q184 the only defence is to guard the boundaries with absolute adherence to the Torah. To allow the slightest infringement would be to open up the boundaries to those with a more relaxed view of its observance, those whose boundaries, like those of the Seductress, are uncontrolled.¹⁹⁸

“bird-like wings” were characteristic of demons in the mythology of the ancient Near East such as Lilit, and of “a Lilit-like form” in the Talmud. Moreover, the Seductress is associated with darkness (4Q184 1, 4-6), which is “the essential feature of the netherworld.” Baumgarten also notes that the verb $\text{שׁוּבַ$ used in the description $\text{וְשׁוּבָהּ לְכֹל חֹמְכֵי כָה}$ (“and she despoils all who possess her,” 4Q184 1, 8) is suggestive of “the demon Queteb in Psalm 91, 6.” The Seductress’s propensity to stealth and concealment and her habit of displaying herself in order to lead astray righteous men (4Q184 1, 12-17) are similar to those of both a Babylonian sorceress and the *Zohar*’s description of Lilit, “the female counterpart of the evil Samael. Baumgarten, “On the Nature of the Seductress in 4Q184,” 139, 141-42.

¹⁹³ Baumgarten, “On the Nature of the Seductress in 4Q184,” 142.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew Goff, “A Seductive Demoness at Qumran? Lilith, Female Demons and 4Q184,” in *Evil, the Devil, and Demons: Dualistic Characteristics in the Religion of Israel, Ancient Judaism, and Christianity* (WUNT II; ed. Benjamin Wold, Jan Doehorn and Susanne Rudnig-Zelt; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2015), 59-60, 69-70, 76.

¹⁹⁵ Philip S. Alexander, “The Demonology of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (Vol. 2; ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 345-46.

¹⁹⁶ Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy,” 77.

¹⁹⁷ Aubin, ““She is the Beginning of All the Ways of Perversity,”” 1-3.

¹⁹⁸ Aubin, ““She is the Beginning of All the Ways of Perversity,”” 2-3. In a similar manner to Tamar (Gen 38:14) and Rahab (Josh 2:15), “the Seductress operates at boundaries.” Aubin, ““She is the Beginning of All the Ways of Perversity,”” 19.

In 4Q184, as in the message to Thyatira, readers are presented with “a polarized reality” to enable them to choose between good and evil.¹⁹⁹ Like Jezebel, the Seductress is described as leading men astray and seducing the sons of men “by flatteries” (4Q184 1, 17).²⁰⁰ The Seductress also speaks, but her words, which she seeks continually to sharpen (4Q184 1, 1), are not recorded (cf. Rev 2:20).²⁰¹ Just as Jezebel has a couch or bed (Rev 2:22), the Seductress has beds which are “couches of corruption” (4Q184 1, 5) and “her lodgings are beds of darkness” (4Q184 1, 6). As in the portrayal of Jezebel and her followers (Rev 2:22-23), stress is laid upon the death which is the consequence of following her teaching (4Q184 1, 9-11).

Comment

Whilst in their presentations they share certain similarities, the Strange Woman and the Seductress serve different purposes for their authors. The Strange Woman is presented as the antithesis of Woman Wisdom, and yet the ambiguities in their portrayals at times make it difficult to differentiate between them and their teachings. This complication provides a useful tool for instructing a young man in making decisions in his daily life.

The description of the Seductress, however, is stripped of any ambiguity. As pointed out by Scott C. Jones, “[t]he cosmic dimension is emphasized, and the instruction is imbued with the dualistic elements of the religion of the Dead Sea sect.”²⁰² Ignorance of the Seductress’s words inhibits reconstruction of the group which she represents, an observation which might well be made about the words of the Woman Jezebel.²⁰³ Goff considers that “it is obvious that the woman is wicked,” and that 4Q184 is emphasising that “the female represents wickedness in a general sense.”²⁰⁴ It may be argued that, through the use of literary allusions throughout Revelation, the Author is leading the reader to reach a similar conclusion about Jezebel.

Jezebel, as portrayed by the Author, undoubtedly shares the Strange Woman’s promiscuous nature and seductive speech; however, it seems far more likely that the Author intends an allusion to the Seductress to be read into his portrayal of the

¹⁹⁹ Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy,” 79.

²⁰⁰ Quotations of the text and translation of 4Q184 are taken from John M. Allegro, with the collaboration of Arnold A. Anderson, *Qumrân Cave 4: I (4Q158-4Q186) (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan V)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968): 82-85.

²⁰¹ Goff, “Hellish females”, 38.

²⁰² Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy,” 66.

²⁰³ See Goff, “A Seductive Demoness at Qumran?” 76.

²⁰⁴ Goff, “A Seductive Demoness at Qumran?” 76.

Prophetess. In Proverbs 1-9 both “ways” are portrayed as women, if excessively stereotyped. In stark contrast, the Seductress is scarcely human. Dangerous teachings are portrayed as associated not only with the feminine but also with the demonic. It is notable that for the author of Proverbs 1-9 both his “women” represent alternative ways of living and both have uncontested places in their community. In contrast, the author of 4Q184 personifies in feminine and even demonic form the perceived threat of “apostasy” to his community’s identity. In much the same way, while the Church in Thyatira considers Jezebel to be part of their community, the Author of Revelation associates “apostasy” and the demonic with Jezebel and her teaching. He demonstrates that in her feminine person the boundaries of the Thyatiran community have already been breached. The Author of Revelation has more in common with the author of 4Q184 than with the Author of Proverbs 1-9. It therefore follows that he is more likely to have the Seductress in mind than the Strange Woman as his model for Jezebel.

Jones points out that the “theme” of speech is significant for both Proverbs 7 and *4QWiles of the Wicked Woman*. There is, however, one vital difference between the attitudes of the two texts to women and speech. Jones notes: “While the Strange Woman is allowed to speak (Prov. vii 14-20), the Wicked Woman is not.”²⁰⁵ Similarly to the description of Jezebel made by the Son of God (Rev 2:20), the author simply records that the Seductress “utters vanities, and [...] errors” and “mockingly flatters” (4Q184 1 1-2). While Jezebel symbolises “wicked” teaching, she is also a “real” woman with the unfortunate habit of speaking in public. For the authors both of Revelation and of *4QWiles of the Wicked Woman*, a woman who speaks to men on her own authority, rather than with male authorial sanction, must be “sexually immoral” and “wicked,” and her words are judged too dangerous and enticing to be recorded, even in order for them to be mocked.

However, for the “non-ideal” reader, there can be no doubt that the house-owning, generous and hospitable Jezebel, who eats with and teaches back-sliding Gentile converts, bears a strong resemblance to Woman Wisdom, who invites the “simple” to come into her house, to eat her bread and drink her wine and learn to “walk in the way of insight” (Prov 9:4-6; cf. 8:5).

²⁰⁵ Jones, “Wisdom’s Pedagogy,” 77.

The final woman with whom the Woman Jezebel is connected by means of literary allusion is the Woman Babylon. In the portrait of this character are exposed both the Author's fear of Jezebel and the reason for that fear.

5.11. A Dangerous Woman: A Comparison of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel with the Woman Babylon (Rev 14:8; 17:1-19:4)

Although Babylon is undoubtedly a city (Rev 17:18; 18:10, 18 19, 21), she is also, and first and foremost, a woman (Rev 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18).²⁰⁶ As a portrayal of a woman who is linked by means of literary allusions and homology to the Woman Jezebel (see §5.9.3), Babylon provides a means by which the Author can undermine both the ministry and the support of the community in Thyatira for the Prophetess.

5.11.1. Babylon: An Educated Courtesan or a Drunken Brothel-Worker?

Babylon is presented as a woman preening herself (ἐδόξασεν) as she delights in her wealth and power and declares that she is a glorified queen (Rev 18:7). She is dressed in fine clothes and is festooned with jewels (Rev 17:4; 18:16). She is described as having a luxurious lifestyle (Rev 17:7) and her expensive tastes (Rev 18:4) provide employment for a large number of merchants (Rev 18:11). John's reaction to this woman (Καὶ

²⁰⁶ Babylon is presented as a woman in various ways: she is described six times by the use of the word γυνή (Rev 17:3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 18); she is linked through the use of literary allusion to three undeniable women, Jezebel (Rev 17:4; 18:3, 23), Jizebul (Rev 17:16; 18:21, 23) and Cleopatra (Rev 18:7; cf. *Sib. Or.* 3:75-84); she wears feminine clothing and jewellery (Rev 17:4); she is described as a mother (Rev 17:6); she "speaks in her heart" and describes herself as a queen and widow (Rev 18:7); the text indicates that she has a physical body since she is able to sit (Rev 17:1, 3, 9, 15) and to mix wine (Rev 18:6), wears clothing and jewellery (Rev 17:4; cf. 18:16), which is later stripped from her (Rev 17:16), has at least one hand (Rev 17:4) and has flesh (σάρξ, Rev 17:16), the only female character in Revelation who does (cf. 19:17-21). She is also able to take part in sexual intercourse (Rev 17:1, 2, 5; 18:3, 9) and to become inebriated (Rev 17:6) and is described four times as a prostitute (πόρνη, Rev 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2). Pippin states: "Having studied the evils of Roman imperial policy in the colonies, I find the violent destruction of Babylon very cathartic. But when I looked into the face of Babylon, I saw a woman." Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 80. Jean K. Kim analyses Babylon as a woman forced into prostitution. Jean K. Kim, "'Uncovering Her Wickedness': An Inter(Con)Textual Reading of Revelation 17 from a Postcolonial Feminist Perspective," *JSNT* 21 (1999): 61-81. Jennifer A. Glancy and Stephen D. Moore do not analyse Babylon as a woman, but discuss her presentation as a certain type of Roman prostitute. Jennifer A. Glancy and Stephen D. Moore, "How Typical a Roman Prostitute Is Revelation's 'Great Whore'?" *JBL* 130.3 (2011): 551-569. The interpretation made in §5.11 of Babylon as a woman is intended neither to ignore nor to critique those interpretations of the description of the Whore of Babylon as a fierce, moving and persuasive indictment of structural oppression and an ideology which normalises the abuse of colonised and powerless individuals. See Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, 98; Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 8; Kim, "'Uncovering Her Wickedness,'" 65-66. Frankfurter points to the Author's use of literary allusions in the presentation of Babylon to Oholah and Oholibah, the women/cities of Ezekiel 23. At the same time, he considers that "the emphasis on her 'fornication' (Gk 'porneia') allows this figure to refract broader issues of purity and the body (cf. 2.20-22; 14.4; 22.15)." Frankfurter, "The Revelation to John," 489.

ἑθαύμασα ἰδὼν αὐτὴν θαῦμα μέγα, Rev 17:6) indicates that she is also sexually attractive.²⁰⁷ It may logically be inferred that Babylon the Whore is being presented as a high-class courtesan (ἑταίρα), who dispenses her favours upon one chosen man at a time and has a certain amount of “social and economic independence.”²⁰⁸

At the same time, however, both the large number of her sexual partners (Rev 17:2; 18:3, 9; 19:2) and the tattoo or brand on her forehead (Rev 17:5) combine to indicate that she is, rather, being described as a prostitute who is of no higher status than a slave, and whose existence is almost entirely confined to the brothel where she is treated as a commodity.²⁰⁹ Similarly, whilst both the image of the Woman holding a wine-cup (Rev 17:4) and the chorus of wealthy and powerful men who are in thrall to her (Rev 18:3, 9) suggest that she is a demure and educated courtesan attending the type of refined dinner party commonly found in the literature of the time, her lewd behaviour (Rev 17:4-6) indicates that she is in reality a “vulgar” πόρνη enjoying a party at which everyone, herself included, is drunk.²¹⁰ She is the only Woman of Revelation to be explicitly described as a mother (μήτηρ), but she is in no position to prevent her “abominable” children from also being forced into prostitution (Rev 17:5). Moreover, the Author undermines her sexual attractiveness in two ways: firstly, by implying that she is menstruating, which is indicated by her association with the colour scarlet (Rev 17:3, 4; 18:16), with blood (Rev 17:6) and symbolised by her cup (Rev 17:4);²¹¹ and secondly, by declaring that her porous and permeable female body is infested with demons (Rev 18:2).²¹² In the presentation of the Woman Babylon, therefore, the Author of Revelation is indicating that, although she is both dressed as and acts like a queen, in reality she is

²⁰⁷ Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 66-67.

²⁰⁸ Glancy and Moore, “How Typical a Roman Prostitute?” 558-60.

²⁰⁹ Frankfurter, “The Revelation to John,” 490; Glancy and Moore, “How Typical a Roman Prostitute?” 553-60; Pippin, *Death and Desire*, 65.

²¹⁰ Glancy and Moore, “How Typical a Roman Prostitute?” 561.

²¹¹ Frankfurter, “The Revelation to John,” 489; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 265.

²¹² Babylon is described in Rev 18:2 as being “a dwelling-place of demons, and a lair of every unclean spirit and a lair of every unclean and hateful bird [and a lair of every unclean beast],” and Martin explains that in the ancient world it was generally believed, especially amongst the less educated members of society, “that disease was the result of attack by the gods or *daimones*.” Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 153. Disease was understood to be related to “pollution,” much as today it is understood to be related to infection. However, this “pollution” was caused not by viruses but by supernatural activity. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 139. Human bodies, especially the more permeable “wet” bodies of women, could be invaded by demons (or gods) which caused them to suffer illnesses. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 155, 242.

just an abused and polluted “brothel-worker,” who parades in her finery outside a brothel in order to lure men into its foetid interior.²¹³

5.11.2. The Dangers Posed to Male Members of the Community by Jezebel’s Female Body

The complex literary link to Jezebel contained in the description of the Woman Babylon is undisputed (cf. §1.4.6, 7), and Bauckham rightly notes that the members of the Thyatiran church would undoubtedly have recognised “the resemblance between Jezebel, as John portrays her in the message to Thyatira and the harlot Babylon, as he portrays her in chapters 17-18.”²¹⁴ The Woman Babylon is, in part, a grossly-distorted reflection of her real-life counterpart, the Woman Jezebel, and the scenario in which she is initially presented, in which she is holding a cup full of wine which she has herself mixed (Rev 17:3-6; 18:6), resembles a dinner party.²¹⁵ It follows, therefore, that this portrayal of Babylon as a drunken and menstruating brothel-worker offering her wine cup “full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality” (Rev 17:6) to her fellow-diners is a parody of the Prophetess presiding over a celebration of the weekly meeting of the assembly, at which she, as hostess, is blessing the wine to be shared in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. It can, therefore, only be concluded that, in his depiction of Babylon as a menstruating prostitute whose body has been further contaminated by her sexual relationships with countless men, the Author is warning the male members of the Church in Thyatira of the dangers posed to them by sharing the cup of the Lord with Jezebel.

This leads to the difficulty of discovering to what extent, if at all, the Gentile members of the Asian churches observed Jewish purity laws.²¹⁶ Lupieri considers that Jezebel “disregards the laws of purity and of proper Jewish practice;”²¹⁷ indeed, since she was of Gentile origin (cf. §5.2.1-4, 8), it seems likely that Jewish purity laws would have been incomprehensible to her. This is underlined by her lenient attitude to those

²¹³ This apparent paradox in the presentation of the Woman Babylon is explained by Glancy and Moore. They note that prostitutes in the Roman world were often dressed in fine clothes and jewellery and made to stand outside the brothel in order to attract customers. Glancy and Moore, “How Typical a Roman Prostitute?” 560-61.

²¹⁴ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 377.

²¹⁵ Boxall’s Jezebel is depicted as saying to the Author: “It is as if you want to suggest that when Babylon holds a glass to her face, she sees in it my own reflection.” Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 150.

²¹⁶ Yarbro Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders,” 203.

²¹⁷ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122.

Christians who eat sacrificed meat (cf. §5.2.3, 4, 8). No historical information is available on the subject of Gentile Christian women's (or men's) attitude to menstruation. Since, however, the Jewish purity laws surrounding menstrual women concern the defilement of men, and many Christian women appear to have been celibate, this may have been of little concern to them.²¹⁸ It is notable, however, that the Author lays great stress upon male purity being under threat by contaminating women (Rev 14:4). This suggests that menstrual purity regulations were not observed among the sexually active members of the churches.²¹⁹

The Prophetess was probably a freedwoman (cf. §5.2). This interpretation necessitates her, for part of her life, having been a slave. It is thus more than probable that she would have had no choice but to commit πορνεία.²²⁰ The Woman Babylon, who appears to be a high-class courtesan, is in reality a brothel-worker. Just so, the Author seems slyly to be inferring, the respected and authoritative Prophetess, who sits or reclines upon her couch (Rev 2:22) during the community meal of the assembly in her house, engaging in debate and instructing her followers, is in reality a former πόρνη, an abused prostitute-slave, who may well be infested with demons. As Prophetess of the Church in Thyatira, Jezebel prophesied and taught (Rev 2:20). In her position of authority it seems likely that she would also on occasion have prayed in public (cf. 1 Cor 11:5, 13) and perhaps also spoken in tongues (see §5.9.2). Of these four activities, all except teaching might well either have been mistaken by the uninitiated or deliberately misinterpreted by the hostile as drunkenness (cf. 1 Sam 1:9-9-15; Acts 2:1-4, 13).²²¹

As a woman, it is entirely possible that Babylon is menstruating. Moreover, just as Babylon “fornicates” with “the Kings of the Earth” (οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς, Rev 18:3, 9), Jezebel dines with Gentile Christian merchants who attend guild banquets at which

²¹⁸ Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 143.

²¹⁹ Kraemer points out that: “It would be hard to imagine that Paul instructed Corinthian Christian wives to observe the laws of menstrual purity. Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessings*, 144.

²²⁰ Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch note that a slave, whether female or male, was viewed by her or his owner as “an article of property.” Female slaves were obliged to be sexually available to their masters, and possibly to his male slaves. Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch, “A Woman’s Place,” 103. See also: Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, 192. Glancy and Moore note that being a slave equated to being a prostitute and vice versa. Glancy and Moore, “How Typical a Prostitute?” 557.

²²¹ Writing about Plutarch’s dialogue *On the Obsolescence of the Oracles*, Martin states: “Sounding like the medical writers of his own day, the speaker proceeds to compare the “prophetic current” to the way fumes from wine rise into the head, affecting thought and perception” (Plutarch, *Moralia* 432D-E). Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 239. The Author of Luke-Acts describes how, when those gathered together on the day of Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues and to prophesy, some of those observing them sneeringly remarked that they were drunk (Acts 1:1-4, 13). Similarly, Hannah’s passionate and tearful prayer to the LORD for a son is misinterpreted by Eli as evidence of her drunkenness (1 Sam 1:9-9-15).

sacrificed meat is served and libations poured to pagan deities; in this way also she is polluted.²²² In his association of the Prophetess with Babylon the Whore, therefore, the Author is issuing a not particularly discreet warning to “the rest” of those he is addressing in Thyatira, who do not hold her teaching (Rev 2:24): by drinking from her wine-cup, which this former prostitute shares with impure tradesmen, other men participating in the Lord’s Supper at her house are not only becoming impure but are also putting themselves at risk of demonic possession.²²³

Comment

In his slighting association of the Prophetess with the Woman Babylon, the Author of Revelation reveals his fear of the female body, which is also found in Rev 14:4. It is difficult to decide whether the Author’s fear is directed solely towards Jezebel or whether it is a fear of women’s bodies in general. It certainly appears that he has a deep-seated and general terror of women’s penetrable bodies and of their secretions.²²⁴ This terror echoes the fear of women’s bodies found in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls which, as noted by Sidnie White Crawford, include “prayers and blessings applicable only to women.” In particular, she notes that, while women at Qumran appear to have been included in some way in “the ritual life of the community,” *4QPurification Liturgy* indicates that they were required to abstain from its “pure food” for seven days while menstruating (4Q284 2 ii 1-4; 3 1-3).²²⁵ The horrors that the Author imagines to be lurking within Jezebel’s body repel a man for whom purity appears to be of overriding importance (Rev 14:4).²²⁶ Of particular concern is that, in her position of Prophetess, she blesses the cup

²²² A point made by Corley is apposite here. In connection with gratuitous insults made by authors, she draws attention to Dio Chrysostom’s opinion that “many who are called kings [βασιλείς] are only traders, tax-gatherers [τελώναι], and keepers of brothels [πορνοβοσκοί].” Corley, *Private Women*, 41, quoting Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 4.96-98. Just as a “liberated woman” who dined in public was dubbed by conservative authors a prostitute, so a tradesman was described as a “tax-collector,” or sometimes “prostitution tax-collector,” the latter being an insult alternatively paired in various Hellenistic texts with ‘procurer,’ ‘pimp,’ or ‘brothel-keeper.’” Corley, *Private Women*, 65.

²²³ Cf. 1 Cor 10:21, where Paul warns his readers not to incite the Lord to jealousy by drinking both from his cup and from “the cup of demons.”

²²⁴ Frankfurter, “Revelation,” 489.

²²⁵ Sidnie White Crawford, “Not According to Rule: Women, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran,” in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (ed. Shalom M. Paul et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 136. Although these requirements must be considered within the context of the “stringent” purity laws of the Qumran *Yahad*, it should be noted that, since a large proportion of these laws are concerned with “bodily secretions,” women were particularly restricted in the extent to which they could participate in the ritual life of the community. White Crawford, “Not According to Rule,” 134-35.

²²⁶ The requirement that the elect should be virgins in Rev 14:4 exceeds even the purity rules of the War Scroll, of which Crawford writes: “The practical implications of the heightened consequences of touching

containing wine prepared in her house for consumption by all at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Since she is a former prostitute and shares her table with Gentile Christians, the wine is contaminated by the demons present both in the sacrificed meat and in her vagina; those who drink from her wine-cup are sharing not only in the blood of Christ but in the "abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality" (Rev 17:5) and putting themselves at risk of demonic infestation.²²⁷ For the Author of Revelation, women in general certainly pose a risk, but can be avoided; however, as the powerful Prophetess of Thyatira, Jezebel is for him a truly terrifying and dangerous woman.

Feminist Reconstruction II

For a member of the prophetic "brotherhood" to which the Author of Revelation belonged (Rev 1:9), the experience of attending an assembly of the local Christian community at Jezebel's house would have left a lasting impression upon him. It seems unlikely that he would have followed the Author's example and stayed in her house, but rather lodged with a member of the church who did not hold Jezebel's teaching, and who took him to an assembly in her house in order that he might understand her dangerous allure.

The hospitable Jezebel would have made the "Brother" very welcome with an invitation to come into her house and eat and drink of her food and wine (cf. Prov 9:5). It was, however, only upon entering the dining room that he would have appreciated both the Author's and his host's warnings. The small room would have been crowded with people: merchants, craftsmen and slaves. Most of them would have been converts from paganism, and from their conversation it would have emerged that their newly-acquired faith in Christ Jesus did not prevent them from attending banquets held by their trade guilds and there eating meat sacrificed to pagan deities. In addition, these men, with their unclean hands, would have had no appreciation of the Jewish purity laws attached to meals. Even worse, in the "Brother's" eyes, would have been the presence of shameless women, any of whom might have been menstruating and thus posing a threat of polluting

an impure person are seen [...] in the War Scroll, where women (and children) are banned from the war camp in order to prevent impurity through ejaculation in sexual intercourse, and the impurity of menstruating women (1QM VII, 3-4; based on Num 5:1-3)." White Crawford, "Not According to Rule," 135-36.

²²⁷ Cf. Pippin's interpretation of the Abyss as a nightmarish vision of a demon-infested vagina. Tina Pippin, "Peering into the Abyss," 257-58.

the shared meal. All those present, who in his eyes were no better than prostitutes and adulterers, sat or reclined together; it would have seemed to him nothing short of indecent.

As hostess, the Prophetess would have broken and blessed the bread before the meal, led the assembly in prayer and in singing a psalm, and perhaps she would have bidden their honoured guest to speak.²²⁸ There would then have been a discussion and perhaps, afterwards, Jezebel would have stood to prophesy, speaking seemingly nonsensical words. To the Brother they would have sounded suspiciously like the magical incantations of the priests of the imperial cult. He may have been informed by a fellow-diner that Jezebel had been given by the Spirit the gift of tongues, but the Brother would probably have considered that she was either speaking demon-inspired words or was just drunk. Indeed, Jezebel and some of the other women present would have reminded him of prostitutes at pagan dinner parties, hired to provide entertainment. The Prophetess, however, would have been the worst culprit, listening to her guests' incomprehensible ramblings and answering them apparently in their own languages. Finally, Jezebel would have filled a wine-cup with the wine which she had herself mixed, blessed it (cf. 1 Cor 11:25-26), taken a mouthful and passed it to her neighbour, who would have done the same.²²⁹ For the Brother, the thought of sharing the wine, polluted by the demon-filled bodies around him and in particular by that of Jezebel, a former slave and probably a former prostitute, who might also have been menstruating, would have been intolerable; he would no doubt have made his excuses and left.

The Brother's experience would have caused him to understand why the Author hated the Prophetess so much; most of the members of the church in Thyatira believed that this woman, who welcomed to her table the ritually impure and demon-infested, was a wise woman and that she had the divine gift of prophecy. He may well have encouraged the Author in his belief that the only way to counteract Jezebel's power and to destroy her prophetic legacy was to bring her down with a holy curse, just as Elijah did with the perfidious queen after whom the Author so aptly called her. A woman whose public behaviour would have seemed to him to challenge both divine and male authority would have deserved, in his eyes, to be dragged before the assembly and publicly shamed for bringing it into disrepute. He would not have considered her to be a legitimate prophetess,

²²⁸ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 145-47, 158.

²²⁹ Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 155, 158.

for she did not speak, like the Author, of visions of the kingly messiah and of the Lord's awful vengeance, but sounded more like Paul, who taught that there was no harm in eating sacrificed meat and that Gentile converts might remain married to their unbelieving spouses. Certainly the Lord known to the Brother and to the Author was not the source of the prophecies of the woman who called herself a prophetess.

Jezebel's reported self-identification as "She Who Calls Herself a Prophetess" is considered in Part III of this chapter, with the aim of discovering both the nature and source of Jezebel's prophesying (§5.12) and the content of her teaching (§5.13). Finally, both an ancient Jewish text and the Author's technique of using literary allusion in his characterisation are brought together in order to refute the accusation made by some of Revelation's interpreters that Jezebel is but a "self-proclaimed" prophetess who lacks divine authority (§5.14).

PART III: “SHE WHO CALLS HERSELF A PROPHETESS”

The Reported Self-Description of the Woman Jezebel

The Author of Revelation does not explicitly describe Jezebel as “a Prophetess;” instead he presents her as reportedly calling herself by this title (ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν, Rev 2:20). There is a distinct hint of antagonism in the phrasing of this reported self-description, which echoes the self-descriptions of “those who call themselves apostles” (τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους, Rev 2:2) and “those who say they are Jews” (τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους, Rev 2:9; 3:9). However, the Author does not take the opportunity to refute Jezebel’s self-description as he does in the other three cases by saying “but she is not” (cf. καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, Rev 2:2, 9; 3:9). The reason for this paradox emerges throughout Part III.

5.12. A Prophesying Woman: Contextualisation of the Woman Jezebel’s Reported Self-Description as a Prophetess in Its Literary Setting

Since she is both a historical woman and a symbol of Asian Christian womanhood (cf. §5.2), it seems likely that Jezebel was one of several prophetesses in the Asian churches. However, there are only two references to other prophesying Christian women within the New Testament (ἦσαν θυγατέρες τέσσαρες παρθένοι προφητεύουσαι, Acts 21:9; πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα, 1 Cor 11:5) and only one other woman in the New Testament is explicitly described as “a Prophetess” (προφῆτις); she is Anna (Lk 2:36).²³⁰

5.12.1. The Prophetess Anna (Lk 2:36-38)

Unlike the Author of Revelation’s portrayal of Jezebel, the author of Luke-Acts’ portrayal of Anna (Lk 2:36-38) is approving. Great emphasis is placed upon Anna’s long-term celibacy (Lk 2:36-37) and it is notable that her presentation is both secondary to and much shorter than that of Simeon (Lk 2:25-35). It seems probable, therefore, that two aspects of Jezebel’s behaviour are responsible for the Author of Revelation’s disapproval. Unlike Anna: (1) Jezebel does not behave with the modesty and circumspection that he considers appropriate to a prophetess; and (2) as an official teacher, she is not being submissive, as befits a woman, but is in a position of authority over men. However, the two prophetesses have one thing in common: despite being recorded as “speaking”

²³⁰ The relationships of prophesying women with men in the New Testament are analysed in §6.2.

(ἐλάλει, Lk 2:38; λέγουσα, Rev 2:20), neither Anna's nor Jezebel's prophetic words are recorded;²³¹ their enforced silences contrast sharply with the long speeches of the two male characters with whom they are associated (Lk 2:29-32, 34-35; Rev 2:18-29).

5.12.2. *Prophetesses in the Hebrew Scriptures (Ex 15:20-21; Num 12; Judg 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-28; Neh 6:14; Isa 8:3)*

Several women, each of whom is described by the title “Prophetess” (נביאה), are also found in a variety of Jewish texts. Deborah (Judges 4-5) is described as both “Prophetess” and “Judge” (Judg 4:4); she has authority over men, including Barak, the commander of the Israelite army (Judg 4:5-7) and the words of her three prophecies are recorded (Judg 4:6-7, 9, 14). Nevertheless, her status appears to be in part dependent upon her being the wife of Lappidoth (Judg 4:4) and, although she is later vindicated and feted as a heroine (Judg 4:15-22; 5:12, 15), the divine source of her prophesying is initially called into question (Judg 4:8).²³² The high status of Miriam (Ex 15:10; Num 12) is evident both in her title of “Prophetess” and in her precedence in the text over her brother Aaron, who does not bear the title of “Prophet,” and in the recording of her prophecy (Ex 15:20-21); however, it is Aaron who is paired with Moses in the performance of miracles (Ex 7:19-20). Both Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses' prophetic authority (Num 12:1-2) but, although Aaron appears to believe that they are both being reprimanded, it is only Miriam who has to bear the physical and social punishments (Num 12:10, 15), possibly because she is a woman issuing a challenge to male authority.²³³

In contrast, as pointed out by Brenner, the Prophetess Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22) is consulted in preference to the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah; this suggests that she “may have been more respected than her colleagues were during her lifetime.”²³⁴ Moreover, her words of prophecy are also recorded (2 Kgs 22:15-20; 2 Chr 34:23-28). However, this respect for her prophetic authority is probably due to the high social status

²³¹ As pointed out by Brigitte Kahl, Anna's “words, unlike the detailed speech of Simeon (2.29-32) are not rendered.” Brigitte Kahl, “Reading Luke Against Luke: Non-Uniformity of Text, Hermeneutics of Conspiracy and the ‘Scriptural Principle,’ in Luke 1,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Marianne Blickenstaff; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 84.

²³² Deborah is discussed further in relation to Jezebel below (§5.15).

²³³ Another possible reason for only Miriam being punished is that it would have been unthinkable for Aaron, a priest, to be portrayed as suffering from a skin disease. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, “Numbers,” in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated*. ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 84. The physical punishment of Miriam is considered again, in relation to the Son of God's assault upon Jezebel, in §6.5.3.

²³⁴ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 59-60.

of her husband (2 Kgs 22:14; 2 Chr 34:22). On the other hand, while she is described as “the Prophetess,” the prophetic words of the wife of Isaiah (Isa 8:3) are not recorded. Indeed, nothing at all is said about her; she is defined solely in relation to her son and, by association, in relation to Isaiah, and is not even dignified by a name.²³⁵

The anomaly amongst this group of respected prophetesses is Noadiah (Neh 6:4), who is the only one not described in relation to a male character; instead she is simply described as “the Prophetess Noadiah” (נועדיה הנביאה, Neh 6:14). She is also the only one of these five prophetesses who is presented as the enemy of the narrator of the text (Neh 6:14). Although no indication is given of her prophetic words, she and Shemaiah are the only two members of their prophetic group who are named, which may be “a measure of her importance and political power.”²³⁶ Nevertheless, she is subservient to the male Shemaiah in the text for, although he is not given the title of “Prophet,” Shemaiah is described as pronouncing a prophecy (Neh 6:12) and its words are recorded (Neh 6:10); he is also depicted as Nehemiah’s primary enemy amongst the group of prophets hired to frighten him into sinning (Neh 6:12-14).

From the foregoing analysis it may be seen that authorial approval of a prophetess does not necessarily infer that either her prophecies or her name are preserved; nor does a woman’s unqualified description as “prophetess” and a respected position in her community necessarily depend upon a relationship of blood or marriage with a high-status male character. A prophetess who questions the authority of a male character, has authority over male characters or possesses superior prophetic status to prominent male characters (Num 12:1-2; Judg 4:5-7; 2 Kgs 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-28) does not necessarily call down approbation; she may even be viewed with approval. However, as shown by the example of Noadiah (Neh 6:14), being a woman who has the title of “Prophetess,” who is independent of any male relation, who has authority over men and who is presented as the enemy of the narrator, all combine to ensure that she is remembered, rightly or wrongly, as an evil woman whose prophecies do not come from the approved deity, and whose prophetic words are suppressed: just like Jezebel.

²³⁵ Patricia K. Tull, “Isaiah,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated*. ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 259.

²³⁶ Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 60-61.

5.12.3. *Prophets in the Book of Revelation* (Rev 10:7; 11:10, 18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6, 9)

Jezebel is the only prophetess in the Book of Revelation, but there are several prophets. Moreover, unlike the grammatically feminine προφήτις, the grammatically masculine προφήτης is invariably used in a positive sense in Revelation (Rev 10:7; 11:10, 18; 15:3; 16:6; 18:24; 22:6, 8-9).²³⁷ This makes it doubly strange that John is neither described, nor describes himself, as a “Prophet.” As noted above (§5.4.1), however, he does describe himself as a “Slave” of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1; cf. 2:20; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6), and there is undoubtedly an equivalence between “slave” and “prophet” in Revelation (esp. Rev 10:7; 11:18).²³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza considers that the reason for John neither claiming that he is a prophet nor being described as one is either because the Author of Revelation “did not consider himself a prophet or because his prophetic status was in dispute.”²³⁹ In contrast, Jezebel’s reported avowal of her prophetic status is upheld by the church in Thyatira and not disputed even by the Son of God. There is, moreover, no association or equation of the title “Prophetess” with being a slave of Jesus Christ, God or anyone else. It appears that the titles “Slave” and “Prophet” are bestowed upon the holder by one of Revelation’s divine characters to denote his ownership. In contrast, the title “Prophetess” appears to be conferred upon the holder by the human community to which she belongs and in which she has authority over others, including “slaves.” In other words, in Revelation the difference between a Slave-Prophet and a Woman-Prophetess is that the former has no will of his own and performs the tasks or speaks the words given to him by a divine or other supernatural personage, whilst the latter is autonomous and her actions and words are given authority by her acceptance in the Christian community.

²³⁷ Prophets are grouped with “saints and all who fear your name” (Rev 11:18); with saints (Rev 16:6); with saints and apostles (Rev 18:20); with saints and “all who have been slaughtered on Earth” (Rev 18:24); and with the Angel who shows John his auditions and visions and with those who keep the words of the Book of Revelation (Rev 22:8-9). Except in one instance, where “the Two Witnesses” are also described as prophets (Rev 11:10), the word “prophet” is used to refer in a general way to the prophets of Jesus Christ or God (Rev 10:7; 11:18; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:6, 9).

²³⁸ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, liii-liv, 17.

²³⁹ Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy,” 17.

5.12.4. *Speaking Words of Fire: A Comparison of the Prophetess of Thyatira and the Two Witnesses, Also Known as the Two Prophets (Rev 2:18, 20; cf. 11:3-13; Acts 2:1-13)*

There is one exception to the general use of the term προφήτης in the Book of Revelation. It is found in the description of the testimony, death and resurrection of the Two Witnesses, who are also described as prophesying (προφητεύουσιν, Rev 11:3) and as “these two prophets (οὗτοι οἱ δύο προφῆται, Rev 11:10). Together with their witnessing, their prophesying leads to them being put to death by the Beast from the Abyss (Rev 11:7).²⁴⁰

The Two Witnesses possess two divine gifts, both associated with speaking. Firstly, they are able to prophesy (Rev 11:3); and secondly, when they are threatened, fire pours out of their mouths to consume their enemies (Rev 11:5).²⁴¹ This deadly gift is not dissimilar to that possessed by the False Prophet, who is able to call down fire from Heaven like Yahweh’s faithful prophet Elijah (Rev 13:13; cf. 1 Kgs 18:36-38). Now it is evident that the Slave John does not possess this miraculous ability. On the other hand, the message to Thyatira blazes with fiery allusions and imagery: Jezebel resides in, and was probably born in, a city which both boasted a bronze statue of its patron god Helios Pythius Tyrimnaeus Apollo and was known for its smelting furnaces (cf. §3.Introduction and §4.7.2), and one of the textual variants on the Greek text indicates that the flaming-eyed and brazen-footed Son of God (Rev 2:18) is throwing her into just such a furnace (κλίβανον, Rev 2:22).²⁴² Moreover, Jezebel is linked by means of literary allusion to the False Prophet, representing the priesthood of the imperial cult, which indicates that she may have performed “signs” as part of her ministry (cf. §5.9.2). If one of these “signs” were the ability to speak “words of fire” like the Two Prophets (Rev 11:5), it would go a long way to explaining the Author’s visceral jealousy and fear of the Prophetess, his desire to vilify her as a “false” prophetess and his suppression of her fiery words, especially if some of these words had scorched him personally.²⁴³ It would also indicate both that the Prophetess had demonstrably divine authority for her position of prophetic

²⁴⁰ In being killed (ἀποκτενεῖ, Rev 11:7) by the Beast of the Abyss, the Two Witnesses/Prophets are like both Antipas, the Faithful Witness of Him who has the sharp two-edged sword, who was killed (ἀπεκτάνθη) for his testimony (Rev 2:13), and Jezebel’s “children” who are to be killed by the Son of God (ἀποκτενω) in connection with her prophesying (Rev 2:23).

²⁴¹ Aune notes that the ability of the Two Prophets to prophesy “could be attributed to either God or Christ (Rev 11:3).” Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 586

²⁴² κλίβανον is found in the Armenian version of the text.

²⁴³ Boxall, “‘Jezebel’ of Thyatira to John of Patmos,” 147.

authority in the community (cf. 1 Rom 15:19; 2 Cor 12:12) and that this position included the duties not only of a teacher but also the duty of a priest, which consisted in presiding over the blessing of the bread and wine at the Lord's Supper.²⁴⁴

It may be noted here that Acts describes the physical manifestation of the Pentecostal inspiration of those called to spread the word, both male and female, with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14-15; 2:1) as “tongues as of fire [...] resting on each one of them” (γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς, Acts 2:3), which phenomenon enabled them “to speak in other tongues” (λαλεῖν ἑτέραις γλώσσαις, Acts 2:4).²⁴⁵ There is no reason not to conclude that the Prophetess of Thyatira, the woman who keeps on speaking (ἡ λέγουσα, Rev 2:20), and the woman who had commercial dealings with a wide variety of traders, possessed a similar “divine” facility with languages, which enabled her “to speak in other tongues” to those who had come to Thyatira from other countries and with little knowledge of Greek (cf. §3.Introduction).²⁴⁶ In this regard, the Prophetess is more suited to the position of Prophet/ess than the Author of Revelation, since there is no indication that he has knowledge of any languages other than Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.²⁴⁷

5.12.5. Angels, Revelations and the Male Hierarchy of Worship in Revelation (Rev 11:13; 19:10; 22:9; cf. 1 Cor 11:3-10; Ascen. Isa. 7:21-22; 8:5)

Writing about the similarities of the Christianities of Revelation and of the *Ascension of Isaiah*, Richard Bauckham notes that both these texts “contain (a) a vision of the worship of Christ in heaven, and (b) a prohibition of the worship of angels” (Rev 19:10; 22:9;

²⁴⁴ Hemer suggests that there is merit in the proposal that Jezebel was a local “Sibylline priestess” named Sambathe. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 117-18, 128. Beale, however, considers that “this is improbable, since she apparently holds a respected position within the church.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261.

²⁴⁵ Margaret Aymer notes that from the very beginning women, as well as men, were called “to travel to other lands and bear witness” (Acts 1:8), were “among the number of the early movement” (Acts 1:14-15) and were present and experienced “the outpouring of Spirit” upon them at Pentecost (Acts 2:1) which enabled them to speak in foreign languages. Margaret Aymer, “Acts of the Apostles,” in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated*. ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 538-39. Conzelmann also interprets “other tongues” as foreign languages, and notes that the author of Luke-Acts “identifies it with prophesy [sic] (10:4, 6; 19:6). Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Eldon Jay Epp, with Christopher R. Matthews; trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 14-15.

²⁴⁶ It may be noted that Paul's list of “the manifestation of the Spirit” (1 Cor 12:7-11) includes both prophecy and “various kinds of tongues” (1 Cor 12:10).

²⁴⁷ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, cxcix-cc. If he had ever heard Jezebel speaking in “other tongues,” the Author might well have dismissed her words as either incomprehensible and demon-inspired nonsense or drunkenness (see §5.9.2).

Ascen. Isa. 7:21-22; 8:5);²⁴⁸ they also both contain instances of their seers falling or bowing down before angelic visions.²⁴⁹ Bauckham considers it possible that the incident in which John prostrates himself before the angelic Son of Man (Rev 1:17) is part of an attempt “to counter a tendency to angel-worship in the Asiatic churches,” and that Jezebel “justified her teaching by appeal to visionary revelations given by angels.”²⁵⁰ The Son of Man is John’s vision of Jesus appearing to him as an angel; unlike Revelation’s other angels, however, Jesus is “the source, not the intermediary, of revelation.” Thus it is permissible for John to worship him. This is not, however, to deny that, according to the Apocalypse of John, God is the origin of the revelation. The book’s very first verse indicates that it observes a strict hierarchy in the “communication of the revelation: God, Jesus, angel, John, Christians.”²⁵¹

Bauckham’s proposal infers that, like the Author, Jezebel subscribed to a Christian faith based upon visionary experiences and personal revelation. Moreover, Bauckham suggests that these hypothetical revelations may, according to Jezebel, have been made by angels before whom she prostrated herself; this imputed prostration may in turn have been interpreted by the Author as worship.²⁵² However, Jezebel’s reluctance to follow John’s example of prostrating himself at the feet of angelic beings (Rev 2:22; cf. 1:17; 19:10; 22:9) suggests firstly that she did not so demean herself and secondly that, like the women prophets of Corinth, she did not recognise a patriarchal hierarchy of divine revelation (1 Cor 11:3-10; cf. §6.2).²⁵³ Also, unlike John, Jezebel makes no claim that the source of her prophecies is either angelic or visionary; there is no reason to suppose that she perceives herself to be inspired by any source other than the Holy Spirit (cf. §5.12.4).

²⁴⁸ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 119-21. Bauckham states that Revelation and the *Ascension of Isaiah* both reflect “a common tradition in apocalyptic Christianity, just as they elsewhere reflect common traditions about Antichrist (Rev 11:13; AscIsa 4:2-14).” Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 121.

²⁴⁹ Bauckham identifies two different types of prostration both in Revelation and in the *Ascension of Isaiah*. The first “involuntary” type is the result of fear, in which the seer falls down in a faint; the second “voluntary” type is deliberate prostration as a result of “awed reverence.” Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 121. In his comprehensive analysis of the worship of angels, Christology and monotheism in Revelation, Stuckenbruck argues that the two instances of angels refusing to allow John to worship them serve “(1) to safeguard monotheism over against an exalted view of angelic mediation and (2) to legitimate his [John’s] prophetic message.” Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, 255-56.

²⁵⁰ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 133.

²⁵¹ Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 135.

²⁵² As noted above (§4.7.1), the Author of Revelation is at pains to demonstrate that the Son of God is superior to the angels.

²⁵³ Jouette M. Bassler, “1 Corinthians,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 562.

5.12.6. *A Respected Woman Prophet/Priest or a Despised Prostitute? A Comparison of Jezebel with the Woman Who Anoints Jesus (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 12:1-8)*

In the message to Thyatira, the Son of God voices his disapproval of the Angel of the Church in Thyatira's "tolerant" attitude towards Jezebel's prophetic authority and actions (ἀφεῖς τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, Rev 2:20). At the same time, the Son of God deliberately describes Jezebel, who is accepted by the Angel as a prophetess, as a prostitute (Rev 2:20-21).²⁵⁴ There is an echo here of a story in Luke, where a woman who is depicted by the authors of Matthew, Mark and John as being accepted by Jesus both as a prophet and as a priest (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Jn 12:1-8), is described by the author of Luke as a prostitute (Lk 7:36-50).²⁵⁵ The changes both in the presentation of the woman and in the meaning of ἀφίημι in the tradition surrounding "this woman" (Lk 7:44) sheds a surprising amount of light, not only upon the meaning of ἀφεῖς and its implications in the message to Thyatira, but also upon the reason for the portrayal of Jezebel as a prostitute and the questioning of her prophetic authority.

In all four gospels, the scene takes place at a dinner party at which Jesus is a guest. An unnamed woman anoints Jesus' head with expensive ointment, by which action, as pointed out by Amy-Jill Levine, she proclaims her "role of priest and/or prophet."²⁵⁶ In Mark and Matthew the social status of the woman, who may or may not have been participating in the meal, is not defined, while in the Fourth Gospel she is Mary, one of the two sisters of Lazarus (Jn 12:1-3) and appears to be present at, although not participating in, the meal.²⁵⁷ In the Gospel of Mark and in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus tells those who object to the woman's actions to "leave her alone:" ἄφετε αὐτήν (Mk 14:6); ἄφετε αὐτήν (Jn 12:7). In Mt 26:6-13 ἀφίημι is not used, but the story closely follows Mk 14:3-9. In the Lukan version of this episode (Lk 7:36-50), however, there are three changes: firstly, the woman has been stripped of her prophetic/priestly status and is presented as "a woman of the city who was a sinner" (γυνὴ ἥτις ἦν ἐν τῇ πόλει ἁμαρτωλός, Lk 7:37), meaning that she is a prostitute;²⁵⁸ secondly, she is neither

²⁵⁴ Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122.

²⁵⁵ Amy-Jill Levine, "Gospel of Matthew," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley; 3d ed; Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 476.

²⁵⁶ Levine, "Gospel of Matthew," 476.

²⁵⁷ It is notable that Mary's sister Martha is again found to be serving (διηκόνει, Jn 12:2; cf. Lk 10:40); cf. §5.13.5).

²⁵⁸ Jane Schaberg, "Luke," in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 286.

participating in nor even present at the meal but, perhaps symbolically, comes into the house from outside (Lk 7:37); and thirdly, the verb ἀφίημι is used with the meaning of “to forgive.”²⁵⁹ Moreover, ἀφίημι is given more importance than in Mark and in the Fourth Gospel, since it is used four times (Lk 7:47 (twice), 48, 49).²⁶⁰

If in Rev 2:20 ἀφεῖς is translated as “you tolerate” with the sense of “you leave alone” (cf. Mk 14:6; Jn 12:7), it implies that, just as in the earlier tradition Jesus appreciated the motivation, faith and prophetic calling of the woman who anointed him, the Angel of the Church in Thyatira regards Jezebel as a true and faithful prophetess of Jesus Christ, however much her actions may be misinterpreted by others, including the Son of God. If, however, ἀφεῖς is translated as “you tolerate” with the sense of “you forgive” (cf. Lk 7:47-49), it implies that the Angel disapproves of Jezebel’s actions, as does the Son of God, but that, unlike him, he is willing to forgive her and allow her to carry on with her teaching.²⁶¹ It also serves to underline both the supposed sinfulness of Jezebel’s “works” and her own contrary conviction that what she is doing is right. There is thus ambivalence in the meaning of ἀφεῖς in Rev 2:20 which serves only to undermine Jezebel’s prophetic status. The Angel of the Church is allowing Jezebel to hold the position of Prophetess, to act freely and to do as she thinks best in the service of Christ.²⁶² In the view of the Author of Revelation, however, the Angel is forgiving Jezebel her

²⁵⁹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (2d ed.; London: SCM Press, 1994), 129.

²⁶⁰ The Lukan Jesus informs his hosts the Pharisees (cf. his host Simon the Leper in Mt 26:6; Mk 14:3; and Lazarus in Jn 12:1) that the woman is forgiven her “many sins” “because she has loved much” (Lk 7:47) and then tells the woman “your sins are forgiven” (Lk 7:48). Schüssler Fiorenza points out that “Luke especially stresses over and over again that “Jesus called sinners to repentance.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 129.

²⁶¹ Cf. those “committing adultery” with Jezebel, who are advised to repent or they will reap the consequences (Rev 2:22). The interpretation of ἀφεῖς as “you forgive” in Rev 2:20 seems viable, as there is a corresponding mention of Jezebel’s stubborn lack of “repentance” for her “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:21). However, in the Lukan story Jesus does not require repentance from the woman as a prerequisite of his forgiveness; he tells her that it is her faith, presumably in him, which has saved her (Lk 7:50).

²⁶² What is unclear is how the word ἀφεῖς should be understood in this context. The usual translation of ἀφεῖς in Rev 2:20 is “you tolerate,” while Lupieri makes the interesting translation of “you allow Jezebel to act (freely).” Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 51, 123. It could equally well be translated as “you leave alone” or as “you forgive.” Cf. Mt 26:12, 14, 15; 9:2, 5, 6; 12:31, 32; 18:21, 27, 32, 35; Mk 2:5, 7, 9, 10; 3:28; 4:12; 11:25, 26; Lk 5:20, 21, 23, 24; 7:47, 48, 49; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3, 4; 23:24; Acts 8:22; Rom 4:7; Jas 5:15; 1 Jn 1:9; 2:12). Since the Son of God acknowledges the “love, faith, service and patient endurance” of the Angel of the Church (Rev 2:19), it seems likely that the Angel would practise forgiveness of transgressions. Witherington states that “this church, perhaps out of love, has tolerated aberration in the form of a prophetess, here called Jezebel.” Witherington, *Revelation*, 104. Interestingly, the translation of ἄφες (Jn 12:7) has posed problems. Aune notes that the sentence ἄφες αὐτήν ἵνα εἰς τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ ἐνταφιασμοῦ μου τηρήσῃ αὐτό is usually divided, so that it may be translated as “Leave her alone, so that she may keep it [the ointment] for the day of my burial.” However, another possibility is: “Permit her to keep it for the day of my burial.” This is part of a discussion by Aune of the grammatical problems posed by the present indicative active διδάσκει occurring after ἀφεῖς in Rev 2:20. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 197.

sinful “works” of which she stubbornly refuses to see any need to “repent” (Rev 2:21-22). The first translation suggests that Jezebel is an autonomous prophetess who is regarded with respect and affection by some in the community, as evinced by the Angel of the Church, just as the woman prophet/priest was regarded with respect and affection by the Markan Jesus (Mk 14:6). The second translation, however, indicates that there are those who, like the Author of Revelation, the “rest of you” in Thyatira (Rev 2:24) and the Pharisee dining with Jesus (Lk 7:39), regard the prophetess with disdain.

These two contrasting presentations of the unnamed woman prophet-priest have significance for the interpretation of Jezebel’s “works” and their condemnation by the Author of Revelation (Rev 2:22). Jezebel’s prophesying is understood by the Author of Revelation as the action of a prostitute. In light of the story of the woman prophet who anoints Jesus, this interpretation could only be made because Jezebel’s prophesying takes place in the context of a public meal. As previously discussed (§5.3.7-8), any “respectable” woman who attended dinner parties was, for all but the most broad-minded, behaving like a prostitute.²⁶³

The woman who anoints Jesus is a prophetess, yet for many present at the dinner party she was behaving so much like a prostitute that it was easy for the author of Luke to state that this was what she actually was.²⁶⁴ It seems plausible that the Author of Revelation both views and presents the Prophetess of Thyatira, his symbol of authoritative Asian Christian womanhood, as acting like a prostitute because of her prophetic (and priestly) activities at public dinner parties.

²⁶³ Paul also associates prophesying women with prostitution. When he appeals to the women prophets of Corinth to cover their heads (and hair) whilst prophesying (1 Cor 11:2-16), he declares that, by having their heads uncovered they may as well be going around with shaven heads; as pointed out by Antoinette Wire, this may have been the norm among female slaves and prostitutes. Paul’s purpose was to shock the women prophets into covering their heads in a symbolic act of submission to the men of the congregation. Wire, “1 Corinthians,” 176-77; Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 118-19.

²⁶⁴ As noted earlier (§5.2.4), in order to present the Christian faith in the most favourable light, the author of Luke-Acts determinedly presents autonomous and authoritative women as demurely feminine and subject to male authority. He thus portrays as a prostitute supplicating forgiveness for her “sins” a woman who in the earliest version of the story is portrayed as a prophet-priest and one, moreover, who was accepted in this role by Jesus.

5.12.7. *Τὰ Τέκνα Ἀὐτῆς: The Sexualisation of Prophetic Inspiration and Jezebel's Prophetic Legacy (Rev 2:21-23; cf. Ovid, Tristia I.i.105-108; I.vii.17-20)*

It is generally agreed that τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς (Rev 2:23) is a reference not to Jezebel's biological, adopted or step-children, but to the members of her prophetic school.²⁶⁵ However, whilst this interpretation rightly associates Jezebel's "children" with their "mother's" position as Prophetess of Thyatira, it fails to take into consideration that children are of course the products of sexual intercourse.

By describing Jezebel's prophetic activities at dinner parties both as "sexual immorality" and as sexual violation by her "lovers" (Rev 2:21-22) the Author of Revelation demonstrates that he understands prophecy to be the result of physical "possession" or penetration by a deity. This was a commonly-held view amongst ancient people and is linked to the belief that thoughts and emotions were located in organs such as the heart, liver and intestines.²⁶⁶ An analogy was made with sexual intercourse, especially in the case of a female seer, whose prophetic "inspiration" was understood as her response to the possession or penetration of her innermost parts by a male deity.²⁶⁷ Moreover, when referring to a woman the generic word for the internal organs, σπλάνγχνα, included her womb. Thus the language of sexual impregnation, fertilisation and childbirth was applied to the concept of a prophetess's mind being penetrated by divine inspiration which caused her to think and to speak divine words.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 206; Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 145; Schüssler Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power," 40. In Beale's opinion, "the "servants" of God being "led astray" by Jezebel (v 20), those "committing adultery with her," and "her children" are probably all the same people." Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 264. Whilst it is possible that Jezebel's adulterous "lovers" may equate both to the "slaves" of the Son of God" and to those who hold her teaching, it seems implausible that her "lovers" are also her "children." It seems more likely that "those committing adultery" with Jezebel are a group of people (presumably all male), which may include the former "slaves" of the Son of God, that is, members of a prophetic school loyal to which the Author of Revelation belongs. Τέκνον (child) is a neuter noun, which may refer either to a male or to a female. In the plural, as here, it seems probable that it embraces both men and women. Taking into account the Author of Revelation's hostility to the Prophetess, it seems likely that, had her prophetic school consisted entirely of women, as suggested by Keller (§5.2.4), he would have used the word "daughters" (θυγατέρες). It is noticeable that the word θυγάτηρ is entirely absent from Revelation.

²⁶⁶ Ruth Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," in *Images of Women in Antiquity* (ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt; London: Routledge, 1993), 10.

²⁶⁷ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 241.

²⁶⁸ Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," 11. In a discussion of first-century C.E. understandings of the body, Dale B. Martin comments that "one can hardly read accounts of the physiology of prophecy, especially descriptions of prophecy enacted by a male god on a female seer, without detecting the sexual connotations of the language." Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 239-40. The possibility of the Son of God's assault upon Jezebel being a sexualised analogy of his attempt to force her to prophesy his words is discussed in §6.3.2.

It seems logical to consider her “children” to be the fruit of Jezebel’s “violation” by her “lovers.” Since, as argued above (§5.3.5-8), these “lovers” are those (men) present at the community meal, and if these terms are understood metaphorically, it may be said that Jezebel’s interaction with those present at church assemblies results in her “birthing” prophetic utterances, just as sexual intercourse with a man may result in a woman birthing children.

That prophesying took place at meetings of the assembly is evidenced from the First Letter to the Corinthians, where Paul criticises the lack of order and decorum (1 Cor 14:26-31). If the assembly described so vividly by Paul is anything like the assemblies attended by Jezebel, her adherents and other members of the Church, her prophecies would have been made as a result of listening to and evaluating the prophecies of others (cf. 1 Cor 14:29), assuming that one could distinguish between the babble of voices. No doubt the Author of Revelation would have considered such a gathering of enthusiastic and voluble Christians, men and women mixing together, as a veritable “orgy” of “adulterers” or “violators” of supposedly “respectable” women.²⁶⁹

Within this context, a satisfying interpretation of Jezebel’s “children,” and one which takes into account the Author’s association of a woman prophesying with her birthing a child, is provided by the Roman poet Ovid;²⁷⁰ as argued by Donald Lateiner, Ovid regarded his books of poetry both as his intestines (*Tristia* I.7.19-20) and as his children (*Tristia* I.1.114).²⁷¹ For Ovid, it appears, his poetic words were formed in, and entwined with, the innermost parts of his body which, upon being written, became his children. Similarly, it may be said that, for the Prophetess, her prophetic words are “conceived” in her *σπλάγγνα*, as a result of her “penetration” by intercourse with her followers and to which, by speaking them aloud, she “gives birth.”

However τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς are interpreted, whether it is as members of “Mother” Jezebel’s prophetic school, as her slaves (see §5.4.4) or as her prophetic words, they are most certainly her prophetic legacy, which the Author of Revelation will attempt to

²⁶⁹ Of interest in the above-mentioned passage from 1 Corinthians is the inference that those taking part in such a gathering ideally sat down while listening to others and stood up when it was their “turn” (1 Cor 14:29-30). Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 147.

²⁷⁰ It should be noted that the foregoing does not invalidate the understanding of τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς as the members of Jezebel’s prophetic school; just as the Author of Revelation’s allusions have multiple interpretations, so do his metaphors.

²⁷¹ Lateiner, “Transsexuals and Transvestites in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” 128.

“murder” through the agency of the Son of God (Rev 2:23), and which it is the duty of the feminist interpreter to attempt to save.²⁷²

Comment

While Jezebel reportedly says that she is a prophetess, John is neither described as, nor says that he is, a prophet, even though the Book of Revelation is described as a prophecy (Rev 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). Indeed, as noted above (§5.12.3), the Author of Revelation appears to make a conscious effort not to describe John as a prophet, whilst declaring, through the Son of God, that Jezebel “calls herself a prophetess” (Rev 2:20). The only reason can be that the Author had no authority to do so since in the churches of Asia Minor “Prophet,” like “Prophetess,” was an official title which he did not possess.

The prophetic status of the woman who anointed Jesus (Mk 14:3) has been undermined by a male author intent both upon keeping women in their subordinate places in the hierarchy of the Christian community and upon emphasising that autonomous women were synonymous with prostitutes (Lk 7:37-39). In just the same way, the Author of Revelation both undermines Jezebel’s prophetic status and attempts to equate her prophesying with πορνεία. However, neither being silenced, like the prophetesses Anna, the wife of Isaiah and Noadiah, nor having her ministry depicted as “sexual immorality” invalidates Jezebel’s prophetic status. Despite having her fiery and foreign words suppressed and being presented as a “sexually-immoral” woman, all the evidence points to the legitimacy of Jezebel’s prophetic “children,” to the divine source of her prophetic words and to her worthiness of the position of trust which has been bestowed upon her by her church community. It may, therefore, be concluded beyond doubt that it is only the Author of Revelation’s desire to put Jezebel in “her place” that has led to her being viewed as a prostitute who has acquired the position of Prophetess in the Church by means of her sexual and magical powers. The reality is that Jezebel was viewed by the majority of the members of her church as a community-sanctioned Prophetess.

As well as holding the official position of Prophetess in the Church in Thyatira, Jezebel is also described as a woman who teaches.

²⁷² The Son of God’s attempt to murder Jezebel’s “children” is addressed in §6.4.

5.13. A Woman Who Teaches: Contextualisation of the Presentation of the Woman Jezebel as a Teacher in Its Literary Setting

Since Jezebel is the only person in the message to Thyatira who is described as “teaching” (διδάσκει, Rev 2:20), it seems logical that her teaching is τὴν διδαχὴν ταύτην, which is designated by those opposed to it as “the deep things of Satan” (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ, Rev 2:24). It should be noted, however, that Jezebel’s teaching appears to be held by the majority of its members, whose “kidneys and hearts” the Son of God declares that he is going to search and to whom he is going to give according to their works (Rev 2:23); that is, they will have to suffer his pitiless judgement in the underworld.²⁷³ It seems logical to infer that the group condemned by the Son of God for holding Jezebel’s teaching includes, or is comprised of, her followers (τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς, Rev 2:22), and the members of her prophetic school (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Rev 2:23).²⁷⁴ Moreover, as noted above (§5.2.2), not only does the community, as represented by the Angel of the Church, “tolerate” Jezebel’s teaching (Rev 2:20); as an official Prophetess Jezebel is also a Teacher in the church.²⁷⁵

Whilst the Author of Revelation is careful not to criticise Jezebel’s teaching directly, some contemporary scholars are less restrained.²⁷⁶ It is perhaps because of their hostility that no serious attempt seems to have been made to discover the “real” content of Jezebel’s teaching. Before remedying this serious gap in scholarship, however, attention should be paid to the description of Jezebel as teaching (διδάσκει), for she is the only woman in the whole of the New Testament to be so described.

²⁷³ It seems quite probable that the group opposed to her teaching is either comprised of or includes those “slaves” of the Son of God who have not defected from his service (Rev 2:20). Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling My Servants,” 76. The judgement of the Son of God is discussed in Chapter 6.

²⁷⁴ Yarbro Collins, “Insiders and Outsiders,” 214.

²⁷⁵ Beale states: “The possibly original σου after γυναικα (“your wife”) would imply a close, formal relationship of Jezebel with the church (A 1006 1841 1854 2351 91^K sy Cyp Prim), perhaps underscoring a reference to officially recognized teachers.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 262.

²⁷⁶ Beale links Jezebel’s teaching to the accusation that she leads others astray into the practices of “sexual immorality” and eating sacrificial meat, activities which would have been part of meetings held by trade guilds, and which those Christians who were involved in commerce would have felt obliged to attend, lest their businesses suffer. “This economic factor,” states Beale, “was likely the reason that the teaching of Jezebel gained such a following.” Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261. Beale’s interpretation ignores the impossibility of a woman belonging to a trade guild and attending its banquets (see §5.3.4). Mounce, quite without foundation, declares: “It is questionable whether her teaching was in any sense formal. It may only have taken the form of popular persuasion built upon unexamined assumptions.” Mounce, *Revelation*, 103. Witherington considers Jezebel’s teaching to have been “heresy” and that it “involved some sort of promise to know the deep things of God, which actually turned out to be the deep things of Satan.” Witherington allows that: “Real necromancy or Satan worship is unlikely to be meant.” Witherington, *Revelation*, 105. Aune also calls Jezebel’s teachings “heretical opinions.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 204.

5.13.1. *Teaching: An Unsuitable Job for a Woman (Rev 2:20; cf. Lk 10:42; Acts 18:2-4, 18, 26; Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor 16:19; 1 Tim 2:11-12; 2 Tim 4:19)*

The reason for this dearth of women teachers may be found by the study of the attitudes towards teaching in general and women teachers in particular of the authors of the Acts of the Apostles and of the First Letter to Timothy.²⁷⁷

Although, apart from Jezebel, the only named characters described as teaching in the New Testament are men (Acts 4:2, 18; 5:21, 25, 28, 42; 11:16; 15:35; 18:11, 25; 20:20; 21:21, 28; 28:31; 1 Cor 4:17), there are a few references to “teachers” in the plural (διδάσκαλοι), which groups could in theory include women (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28, 29; Eph 4:11; 2 Tim 4:3; Heb 5:12), as could “some who have come down from Judaea” (Acts 15:1). However, it is noticeable that Priscilla, a woman who is portrayed positively by the author of Acts (Acts 18:2-4, 18, 26), by Paul (Rom 16:3-4; 1 Cor 16:19) and by the author of the Second Letter to Timothy (2 Tim 4:19), is not described as teaching, even in a situation in which she, along with her husband Aquila, is acting in the capacity of a teacher to Apollos (ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο τὴν ὁδὸν [τοῦ θεοῦ], Acts 18:26). As rightly noted by Barbara E. Reid, “This seems a deliberate attempt by Luke to downplay Priscilla’s teaching ministry, a ministry he considers more properly belonging to male disciples.”²⁷⁸ Reid points out that, although Luke tells “more stories about women than any other evangelist,” when it comes to the important jobs, including teaching, women are side-lined in favour of men. Those who are perceived to have overstepped the boundaries of their approved roles are “reprimanded,” while those women “who remain silent and receptive are said to have ‘chosen the better part’” (Lk 10:42).²⁷⁹ The author of the First Letter to Timothy takes this further and declares:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. But I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence (1 Tim 2:11-12).

This reiterated insistence upon enjoining the silence and submissiveness of women provides four pieces of information about the early second-century Christian community which the author of the First Letter to Timothy was addressing. Since he felt

²⁷⁷ The author of the Letter of James points out the pitfall of anyone being a teacher, which certainly seems to be applicable to Jezebel: “Let not many become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we shall receive a greater judgement” (Jas 3:1; cf. Rev 2:20, 24).

²⁷⁸ Barbara E. Reid, “‘Do You See This Woman?’ A Liberative Look at Luke 7.36-50 and Strategies for Reading Other Lukan Stories against the Grain,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Marianne Blickenstaff; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 118.

²⁷⁹ Reid, “‘Do You See This Woman?’” 118, Footnote 28.

the need to proscribe certain behaviour on the part of women, he must have been reacting to just such behaviour. It may, therefore, be assumed that: (1) women in this community were teachers and held positions of authority over both women and men; (2) women prayed and taught in public; (3) women were vocal and opinionated members of the church; and (4) not all members of the church shared the author's views about women's roles.²⁸⁰

Similarly, (1) Jezebel is teaching at least some men; this is evident from the text, which declares that she is leading astray the "slaves" of the Son of God (πλανῶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους, Rev 2:20).²⁸¹ (2) She speaks and prays in public; this has been demonstrated throughout this chapter. (3) Jezebel holds and articulates her own opinions about who are worthy to be counted amongst the faithful; this is implicit in the Author's pejorative description of her morals, her teaching and her followers. (4) Both the Angel and at least some of the members of the church find it acceptable for Jezebel to teach; this is evident from the Son of God's bewailing the Angel's toleration of Jezebel and of his "slaves" succumbing to what he sees as her seductive teaching (Rev 2:20).²⁸²

From the foregoing, it is apparent that it is not just the content of Jezebel's teaching which has provoked the ire of the Son of God, but also the action of her teaching. Jezebel is a woman and, whether or not their teaching is understood by the author of the text to be sound, women should not teach men; they should rather be submissive, not have opinions of their own and be silent when in public.²⁸³ Whilst in reality the Author of Revelation has been unable to prevent Jezebel from teaching and to persuade her to adopt a subordinate role, in his text he has done his best to silence and subdue her. Notwithstanding his suppression of Jezebel's words, however, the Author has been unable to resist the temptation of making a withering, and surprisingly illuminating, allusion to the core of her teaching.

²⁸⁰ Joanna Dewey, "1 Timothy," in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 353-55.

²⁸¹ The grammatically masculine δούλους could theoretically include women.

²⁸² A similar attitude is exhibited by Irenaeus towards an influential woman teacher named Marcellina, of whom he appears to have disapproved strongly; he described her as "heretical" and declared that "she destroyed many." Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 162, with reference to Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.25.6.

²⁸³ The decree that women should be silent in church found in 1 Cor 14:33-35 is discussed in §6.2.

5.13.2. *Τὰ Βαθέα: Jezebel's Teaching (Rev 2:20, 24; cf. Rom 11:33; 1 Cor 2:10; Eph 3:18)*

Jezebel's teaching is described by the Son of God as "the depths of Satan, as they say" (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ σατανᾶ ὡς λέγουσιν, Rev 2:24). It is likely, however, that the reference to Satan is part of the Author of Revelation's diatribe against Jezebel. Aune considers that her teaching may simply have been known in the churches as "the "profound" teachings of "Jezebel";" the Author has either replaced "Jezebel" with "Satan" or "has added "Satan" to the term "depths" in the same way that he asserts that the Jews of Smyrna and Philadelphia are "a synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9; 3:9). Alternatively, Jezebel's teaching may in reality have been known as τὰ βαθέα τοῦ θεοῦ ("the depths of God"), and the Author has replaced the word "God" with the word "Satan."²⁸⁴ Presumably "those who say" that it is the teaching of Satan are those who share the view of the Author, that is, "the rest" of the community who do not hold Jezebel's teaching concerning τὰ βαθέα (Rev 2:24).

Τὰ βαθέα τοῦ θεοῦ echoes a phrase used by Paul: τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ (1 Cor 2:10).²⁸⁵ Moreover, the word βαθέα occurs in the message to Thyatira soon after the Son of God has declared that he is "the one who searches kidneys and hearts" (ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας, Rev 2:23).²⁸⁶ Similarly, Paul declares that "the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God (τὸ γὰρ πνεῦμα πάντα ἐραυνᾷ, καὶ τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ, 1 Cor 2:10). Thus in both 1 Corinthians and in the message to Thyatira is found a combination of supernatural "depths" and of the divine activity of "searching." As noted by Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, a similar combination of words is also found in Paul's Letter to the Romans:²⁸⁷

*O the depth (βάθος) of the wealth
and wisdom and knowledge of God (θεοῦ)!*

²⁸⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 207, 214.

²⁸⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 207; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 123.

²⁸⁶ Witherington explains that "the first word, *nephos*, means literally kidneys, which were seen as the seat of affections, much as we would use the term "heart." Whereas heart in the text has a sense closer to what we mean by mind – the rational faculty or intellect." Witherington, *Revelation*, 104-105.

²⁸⁷ Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer note that 1 Cor 2:10 is a revelation of God's glory through the Holy Spirit "to those for whom it is prepared." This is knowledge which could not have been accessed by a human being's "ability and research," for the word ἐραυνᾷ expresses "the activity of the Spirit in throwing his light upon the deep things of God, for those in whom He dwells." Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1999), 43-44. That "searching" is a divine activity has been demonstrated in §4.8.

*How unsearchable (ἀνεξεραύνητα) are his judgements
and how untraceable are his ways! (Rom 11:33)*

It is notable that in this verse, similarly to 1 Cor 2:10 and Rev 2:24, both βάθος [...] θεοῦ and ἀνεξεραύνητα (a compound of the verb ἐραυνάω) are used in close proximity.²⁸⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield compares the “metaphorical use” of βάθος in Rom 11:33 with 1 Cor 2:10 and Rev 2:24. He says: “The thought expressed is of profundity and immensity.”²⁸⁹ It may fairly be concluded, therefore, that “the depths of Satan” is a pejorative way of speaking about Jezebel’s teaching, which was known as “the depths of God;” this teaching was not peculiar to her, but was a well-known, authoritative and authorised teaching transmitted from Paul or from one of his disciples to the Gentile Christians of Asia Minor.

In the Letter to the Ephesians is found a concept of the immeasurable dimensions of Christ’s love, which includes the word βάθος (Eph 3:18). The whole of the relevant passage may be translated as follows:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in Heaven and on Earth is named so that, according to the wealth of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; so that you, having been rooted and grounded in love may be strong enough to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth (τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος), and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. And to him who, by the power working within us, is able to do far more abundantly than all that we request or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen (Eph 3:14-21).

Victor Paul Furnish notes that the pseudonymous Letter to the Ephesians was probably written just some few years earlier than the Book of Revelation, by a convert from “Hellenistic Judaism,” with its intended recipients being situated in the southwestern part of Asia Minor.²⁹⁰ Andrew T. Lincoln considers that it has a “post-

²⁸⁸ Also found in Rom 11:33 is the theme of judgement which is so important in the message to Thyatira.

²⁸⁹ C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans Volume II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 589.

²⁹⁰ Victor Paul Furnish, “Ephesians, Epistle to the,” in vol. II of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 541.

apocalyptic perspective” and that it is probable that its first readers were “Gentile Christian members of churches of the Pauline mission.”²⁹¹ As suggested above (§5.2.3, 4, 8), Jezebel was a Gentile converted to Christianity by a follower of Paul. There seems to be every reason to suppose firstly that Jezebel would have known the prayer of Eph 3:14-21 and that she would have recited it during meetings of the Christian community and secondly that Jezebel’s “profound” teaching reflects the beliefs found within it. It is also possible that the passage holds the key to unlocking the mystery of why her teaching was so hated by the Author of Revelation.

5.13.3. *Power, Magic, Love and Service (Eph 3:14-21; cf. Rev 2:19, 24; PGM IV.930-1114)*

Arnold points out that the “combination” of “the four dimensions” found twice in the “Prayer for divine alliance” (PGM IV.930-1114) is “an expression of supernatural power:”

Let there be light, breadth, depth, length, height, brightness (καὶ γενέσθω φῶς, πλάτος, βάθος, μῆκος, ὕψος, ἀύγῃ), and let him who is inside shine through (PGM IV.970-71); and

I conjure you, holy light, holy brightness, breadth, depth, length, height, (πλάτος, βάθος, μῆκος, ὕψος), brightness, by the holy names which I have spoken and am now going to speak (PGM IV.978-80).²⁹²

Arnold suggests that, rather than the spells such as those found in the *Greek Magical Papyri* owing a debt to Ephesians, it is far more likely that use is being made in Ephesians of a well-known pagan formula requesting divine power.²⁹³ However, if she recited the prayer found in Eph 3:14-21, Jezebel would not have been requesting “esoteric knowledge” as might have been the case for a practitioner of magic.²⁹⁴ Rather, she would have been requesting firstly that her followers be strengthened with power to ensure that they become the dwelling-places of Christ, and secondly that they might be “rooted and grounded in love” and thus have the strength to apprehend the immeasurability both of God’s power and of Christ’s love and to be the vehicles by which God’s loving purposes for the world are fulfilled (Eph 3:17-19).²⁹⁵ For Jezebel, as for the recipients of the Letter

²⁹¹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), lxxiii, lxxix.

²⁹² Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 91-92; see also: Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 208.

²⁹³ Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 92.

²⁹⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 213.

²⁹⁵ Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 98.

to the Ephesians, “supernatural power” would have meant divine love and, as pointed out by Lincoln, “knowledge” would have meant “the shared insight gained from belonging to the community of believers.”²⁹⁶ Lincoln also notes that the author of the Letter to the Ephesians appears in this prayer to have been responding to his readers’ insecurities by praying that they might receive “inner strength, roots, foundations, Christ dwelling in the heart, faith, knowledge, love and complete experience of God;”²⁹⁷ so Jezebel may well have responded to the insecurities of the members of the Thyatiran community by praying that, by knowing “the deep things of God” (Rev 2:24), they might receive similar gifts and reassurance and thus become known for their love, faith, service and patient endurance (Rev 2:19). Arnold points out that: “In the prayer of 3:14-19 the writer solemnly prays for inner divine strengthening on behalf of his readers.”²⁹⁸ However, as has already been noted (§3.1.4; §5.9.2), the Author of Revelation believed in the reality, power and efficacy of magic; he also believed in the reality and powers of demons and pagan gods. If he had heard the Prophetess reciting this prayer in the assembly, he may well have interpreted it as a magical incantation, that is, literally a plea for supernatural powers from a demonic source.

As well as designating Jezebel’s teaching as “the deep things of Satan,” the Author disapproves of the way in which that teaching manifests itself in action or, in his parlance, in “her works” (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, Rev 2:22).

²⁹⁶ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 213. Lincoln notes that it is difficult “to choose between Wisdom and the love of Christ as the reference of the dimensions.” He considers that “the choice depends on whether one places more weight on likely associations from the Wisdom background or on immediate contextual factors.” For him, the way in which “language functions in its present context” is the most important factor, and thus “a reference to the love of Christ is probably to be preferred.” Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 213. Nils Alstrup Dahl considers that the author of Ephesians “makes it very clear that he does not have a rational or experimental but a revealed knowledge in mind. Knowledge of God depends on the gift of ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ (1:17).” Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians: Introductory Questions, Text- and Edition-Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes* (ed. David Hellholm, Vemund Blomkvist, and Tord Fornberg; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 2000), 377.

²⁹⁷ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 201.

²⁹⁸ Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*, 85. Dahl concludes that the language not only of Eph 3:18, but of Ephesians as a whole, bears the same message: “the author calls his readers to remember what has already been granted to them in Christ, to realize the full implications of their calling, and to live up to it.” Dahl, *Studies in Ephesians*, 381-82.

5.13.4. *Rewards, Retribution and Lack of “Repentance:” Contextualisation of Jezebel’s Works within the Message to Thyatira and the Messages to the Other Six Churches (Rev 2:19, 21-23, 26; cf. 2:2, 5-7, [9,] 11, [13,] 17; 3:1, 2, 5, 8, 12, 15, 21)*

“Works” appear to be of great importance in the message to Thyatira, since it contains five (Rev 2:19 (twice), 22, 23, 26) of the thirteen [or fifteen] occurrences of ἔργα in the seven messages.²⁹⁹ The Son of Man approves of the Angel’s works, especially the most recent examples, of love, faith, service and patient endurance. Since he also approves of those who do not hold Jezebel’s teaching (Rev 2:24), whilst disapproving of Jezebel’s works (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, Rev 2:22), it may be inferred that Jezebel’s works equate to her teaching, as exemplified by her actions (cf. *Did.* 11:10-11). The Author of Revelation, however, disapproves strongly of these works. Jezebel has already forfeited the chance to avoid the Son of God’s retribution because, alone amongst the characters featured in the seven messages, she has already been commanded to “repent of her sexual immorality” and has refused, and continues to refuse, to do so (Rev 2:21).³⁰⁰ At the same time, Jezebel’s followers are given the option of repentance of *her* works; a lack of repentance will result in them being thrown into great distress (Rev 2:22).³⁰¹ As noted by

²⁹⁹ The other eight [or ten] mentions of “works” in the messages to the Seven Churches are: Rev 2:2, 5, 6, [9,] [13]; 3:1, 2, 5, 8, 15). Occurrences of “works” in the messages to Smyrna and to Pergamum (Rev 2:9, 13), which in both cases are the works of the Angel of the Church, are found in agreements of “the Koine tradition proper” and manuscripts with “the commentary on Revelation by Andreas of Caesarea” and in the Syriac version of the New Testament of Thomas of Harkel. See: *Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament* (ed. Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland et al.; 9th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 20*, 24*.

³⁰⁰ Elsewhere in Revelation, there are similar associations of works and reward or retribution (Rev 18:6; 20:13, 13; 22:12). The Angel with Great Authority, who comes down from heaven, urges his hearers to render to the Woman Babylon even as she has rendered and repay her double according to her works (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῆς, Rev 18:6). (The similarities between the judgement upon (Rev 18:9, 18, 21; 19:2) and fate (Rev 17:16) of the Woman Babylon and the condemnation and fate of Jezebel (Rev 2:22) are analysed in §6.4.3; 6.5.7) The dead, great and small, are judged according to their works (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν, Rev 20:12-13); the dead from the Sea and from Death and Hades are all judged according to their works (κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν, Rev 20:13; cf. 2:23); and the Messiah of Revelation declares: “Behold, I am coming soon (cf. Rev 2:16; 3:3, 11), bringing my wages to give to each, according to his work (ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ, Rev 22:12). This is the only instance of the singular word ἔργον (“work”) in Revelation. There are only two other occurrences of the word “works” in Revelation. The first is in connection from the blessed who die in the Lord, whose works follow them (τὰ γὰρ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ’ αὐτῶν, Rev 14:13); and the second is a description of the works of the Lord God Almighty (μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου, Rev 15:3) in the Song of Moses the Slave of God and the Song of the Lamb (Rev 15:3).

³⁰¹ In two other instances of “works” in Revelation, a lack of repentance is linked to physical suffering, as is Jezebel’s (Rev 2:21-22). Strangely, in both these other instances, the lack of repentance does not result in suffering as Jezebel’s does, but rather results from it. In the first instance, a third of human beings have been killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur which are emitted through the mouths of the Locusts from the Abyss (Rev 9:18). The remaining human beings, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands (τῶν ἔργων τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, Rev 9:20), that is the creating of idols, nor did they repent of their murders or their magical practices or their sexual immorality or their

Aune, it is difficult to understand why Jezebel's "lovers" should be in danger of retribution unless they "repent" of *her* actions.³⁰² A focussed analysis of the problem is required, in which it should be remembered that Jezebel's "followers," who are accused of "violating" her, must be *male* (see §5.3).

The threat made by the Son of God to "all the churches" (Rev 2:23) and the promise made to "Him Who Conquers" (Rev 2:26) indicate that, while a reward is promised for doing the works of which the Son of Man approves, condemnation is threatened for lack of repentance either for doing works of which he disapproves or for failing to behave in ways of which he approves; this is a feature not only of the message to Thyatira but also of the messages to the other six churches (Rev 2:2, 5-7, 9-10, 14-17; 3:1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, [13,] 15-16, 19, 21).³⁰³ Although the works of the Son of Man are not specified in the message to Thyatira, they seem to be connected with military activities, since the Son of Man identifies himself as the Davidic warrior king, and the reward to his favoured ones, who conquer and keep his works to the end, is also connected to the warlike "shattering" of the Gentiles (Rev 2:26-27; cf. 2:7, 11, 17; 3:5, 12, 21).³⁰⁴ The option of repentance of works of which the Son of Man disapproves in order to forestall his threatened retribution is given to the Angels of the Churches of Ephesus (Rev 2:5), Sardis (Rev 3:3) and Laodicea (Rev 3:15-16, 19). In these three instances, repentance is required from the Angels for their own works. In the message to Pergamum, the Angel of the Church is also given the option of repentance; crucially in this instance, however, this repentance is not linked to his or to anyone else's works but of having in the community some who hold the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14-

thefts (Rev 9:21). In the second instance, human beings are portrayed as suffering anguish and terrible sores after the Fifth Angel has poured out his bowl upon the throne of the Beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. Despite being in so much pain that they gnawed their tongues and cursed the God of Heaven (Rev 16:10), they did not repent of their works (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν, Rev 16:11). It seems that Jezebel is not alone in finding the divinity portrayed by the Author of Revelation unworthy of worship.

³⁰² Aune asks, "why should those who commit fornication with "Jezebel" repent of *her* behavior [*sic*]"? Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 205 (the author's emphasis).

³⁰³ The works of which the Son of Man approves are: toil (Rev 2:2); patient endurance (Rev 2:2; 3:10); tribulation (Rev 2:9); poverty (Rev 2:9); suffering the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not but are a synagogue of Satan (Rev 2:9); holding fast to the name of the Son of Man and not denying his faith (Rev 2:13); love (Rev 2:19); faith (Rev 2:19); service (Rev 2:19); having little power (Rev 3:8); and keeping the word of the Son of Man and of not denying his name (Rev 3:8). The works of which the Son of Man disapproves are: the works of the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6); having the name of being alive, but actually being dead (Rev 3:1); and being neither cold nor hot (Rev 3:15), that is, being neither "for" nor "against" the Son of Man.³⁰³ The Son of Man also disapproves of the Angel of Pergamum for tolerating those who hold the teachings of either Balaam or the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:14-15) and of the Angel of Thyatira for tolerating the Woman Jezebel (Rev 2:20).

³⁰⁴ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 76. The promises made by the Son of Man to "Him Who Conquers" have been discussed in §4.9.3.

16). Moreover, it is not the Angel who is threatened with retribution if he does not repent, but those who hold the teachings of Balaam or the Nicolaitans. Thus the Angel's lack of repentance for allowing those who hold the teachings of Balaam or of the Nicolaitans to be part of the community will result in these people being punished, *not* the Angel himself (Rev 2:16).

An important point arises here. In the case of the Church in Pergamum, if the Angel does not repent of having in his church those who hold the teaching of Balaam and those who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans, He Who Has the Sharp Two-Edged Sword will attack them. In other words, he will attack *those who hold the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans*. In the case of the Church in Thyatira, if those male members of the Church who attend assemblies at Jezebel's house do not repent of her works, the Son of God will attack them. In other words, he will attack *those male members of the community who carry out Jezebel's works by holding her teaching*, or by putting her teaching into practice. The crucial difference between those who hold the teachings of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans and Jezebel's followers is the passivity of those in Pergamum and the activity of those in Thyatira. The former do not appear to put the teachings they hold into practice, whilst the latter, on the contrary, do so enthusiastically.

The matter may be clarified still further by a Jezebel-like refusal to translate the verb μετανοέω as "to repent (of)." "To repent" is only the third of three possible translations of this verb. The first possibility is "to perceive afterwards or too late," while the second possibility is "to change one's mind or opinion."³⁰⁵ The second possibility would make sense; the Son of Man is urging both the Angel of the Church in Pergamum and Jezebel's "lovers" to change their minds about "incorrect" teachings. This translation is, however, perhaps not emphatic enough. It is proposed, therefore, that μετανοέω should be translated either as "to disassociate oneself from" or as "to repudiate."³⁰⁶ Thus, those holding the teaching of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans in Pergamum are threatened with retribution if the Angel of the Church refuses to disassociate himself from or repudiate *them*, that is if he refuses to cast them out of the community. However, Jezebel's

³⁰⁵ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1891), 439.

³⁰⁶ Either of these possible translations of μετανοέω would make sense in all its other occurrences in Revelation.

followers are threatened with retribution if they refuse to disassociate themselves from or repudiate *her works*, that is, if they refuse to cease putting her teaching into practice.

This leads to the question of how exactly Jezebel's teaching is put into practice and why the Son of God is so incensed about its practice by her *male* followers.

5.13.5. Fit for Service: Teaching Men to Become Servants and Women to Become Leaders (Rev 2:19-21, 24; cf. Mk 1:31; 9:34-35; 10:35, 43; 14:3-9; 15:41; Lk 5:30; 7:34; 15:1; 22:27; Acts 6:1-6)

The Angel of the Church in Thyatira is criticised for “tolerating” a woman as a leader in the church, not least because those over whom she has authority and is teaching include men (τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους, Rev 2:20). At the same time, and as noted above (§5.13.4), the Thyatiran community, which includes the Prophetess, are commended, for their “service” (σου [...] τὴν διακονίαν, Rev 2:19); they are the only Asian church to be so described.³⁰⁷ This service is a different concept to that of the serfdom promulgated by the Author, who portrays John as singing the praises of being a lowly slave in a hierarchy of male power (Rev 1:1).

The Book of Acts contains a description of how, after an argument between the Hellenists and the Hebrews about service (τῆ διακονία τῆ καθημερινῆ, Acts 6:1), a group of people, “of good repute, full of the Spirit and of Wisdom” (Acts 6:3) are chosen by the Twelve to serve tables (διακονεῖν τραπέζαις, Acts 6:2); in an unusual instance of traditional role reversal, the text unequivocally asserts that this group of seven, who are assigned the task of serving at tables, and in particular, serving *women* (αἱ χῆραι, Acts 6:1), is comprised of *men* (ἄνδρας, Acts 6:2; cf. 6:5).

David W. Pao investigates “the apparent inconsistency” of the actions of “the Seven,” who are appointed to “table service” (Acts 6:3-6) and yet appear to neglect this role to preach the good news (Acts 6:8). Pao argues that this inconsistency is explained by examining this story within “the framework of table fellowship.”³⁰⁸ He notes that the author of Luke-Acts portrays meals as breaking, rather than reinforcing, group boundaries, and in particular draws attention to the example of Jesus’ challenge to “the traditional boundaries of God’s community” by the inclusion of “outcasts,” such as tax

³⁰⁷ Indeed, Rev 2:19 contains the only mention of διακονία in the Book of Revelation.

³⁰⁸ David W. Pao, “Waiters or Preachers: Acts 6:1-7 and the Lukan Table Fellowship Motif,” *JBL* 130 (2011), 129, 131.

collectors, and “unclean and impure” “sinners” at his table (Lk 5:30; 7:34; 15:1).³⁰⁹ Since it is done in imitation of Jesus, who described himself as “He Who Serves” (ὁ διακονῶν, Lk 22:27; cf. Mk 10:45), table service is transformed from being a “menial task” fit only for women to the important job of enabling fellowship with those outside the community and providing the means of ministering the word.³¹⁰

In his analysis of gender relations in the Gospel of Mark, Ched Meyers argues that, while Jesus’ “power-hungry” male followers were arguing over who was the greatest and most worthy of holding a position of leadership and authority (Mk 9:34; 10:35), Jesus’ female followers were following his example of leadership by serving (Mk 10:45) and proving themselves to be his true servants (Mk 1:31; 15:41). Jesus recognised the dangerous allure of power and put his seal of approval upon the humble leadership of those denied by a patriarchal culture any role other than that of “a servant of all” (Mk 9:35; cf. 10:43), in other words: women.³¹¹ This situation is mirrored in the message to Thyatira; while the Woman Jezebel and other members of the church, both male and female, demonstrate their faith not only by loving others, including the Gentiles, but also by serving others, the hyper-masculine Son of God and his male followers equate faith with having power over others, including the Gentiles (see §5.13.4).

It may be argued from a feminist perspective, and rightly, that honouring women for being servants is simply a means of keeping women firmly in their lowly places in the hierarchy of gender and power.³¹² However, in this particular instance, such a critique ignores both the authoritative position of the Prophetess in the church, her high social status as a “woman” (cf. §5.4.1) and the inclusion among her followers of men (πλανᾶ τοὺς ἐμοὺς δούλους, Rev 2:20; τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς, Rev 2:22). It is this important point, moreover, that reveals the gender-bending nature of Jezebel’s teaching concerning the service that is such a defining quality of the members of the Church in Thyatira. As has already been demonstrated (§5.3), the inclusion of outcasts, the unclean and the impure at the dining table is a feature of Jezebel’s prophetic and teaching

³⁰⁹ Pao, “Waiters or Preachers,” 133.

³¹⁰ Pao notes that one of the seven is later described as “the evangelist” (τοῦ εὐαγγελιστοῦ, Acts 21:8). Pao, “Waiters or Preachers,” 139.

³¹¹ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Twentieth Anniversary Edition; Maryland, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2008), 280-81.

³¹² For example, Schüssler Fiorenza rightly points out that “the Christian proclamation of the kyriarchal politics of submission and its attendant virtues of self-sacrifice, docility, subservience, obedience, suffering, unconditional forgiveness, male authority, and unquestioning surrender to “G*d’s will” covertly promotes, in the name of G*d and love, [...] patriarchal-kyriarchal practices of victimization as Christian virtues.” Schüssler Fiorenza, *Sharing Her Word*, 147.

ministry. It has, moreover, also been demonstrated (§5.10.1) that her table fellowship mirrors that of Jesus. It follows, therefore, that in a similar fashion to Jesus, Jezebel is teaching her *male* followers that, in order to follow her (and Jesus) and proclaim the good news of inclusion at the Lord's table, they must become like women, and be servants of all, including the Gentiles.³¹³ At the same time, by her example, the Prophetess is teaching her *female* followers that they are fit to be leaders of men. For Jezebel's male followers, therefore, keeping her works means acting like women.³¹⁴

5.13.6. Keeping the Works and the Word of the Son of Man and Holding the "Correct" Teaching about Christ (Rev 2:26; 3:8, 10)

Just as Jezebel's works are kept not by her but by her followers, so also are the Son of Man's works kept not by him but by his followers. Aune considers that "keeping my works" is a possible reference to the Johannine idea of keeping the "word" (λόγος) or, in other words, the command, of Jesus (for example, Jn 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 Jn 2:3, 4: 3:22, 24; 5:3).³¹⁵ He notes that, in both the Fourth Gospel and in the First Letter of John, the two phrases "to keep the word" and "to keep the commandments" are used "interchangeably, just as they are in Revelation."³¹⁶ Aune concludes that "obeying the commands of Christ involves not denying his name." "Denying his name" is, in effect, "the rejection of the Christian faith."³¹⁷ However, as pointed out by Yarbro Collins, the churches of the late first century C.E. were characterised by disagreements about "the formulation of their beliefs." Yarbro Collins considers that the most important requirement of a Christian was "the acknowledgement of Jesus as the anointed of God, as son of God, or as one in some other terms having a key role in relating humanity to the divine realm."³¹⁸ Thus, denying the name of the Son of Man may be interpreted to mean holding teachings about Christ which are contrary to that approved by the Author of Revelation.

³¹³ Pao writes: "It is their status as "waiters" that allows the Seven to continue the mission of Jesus in becoming "preachers" to the outcasts and the oppressed." Pao, "Waiters or Preachers," 144.

³¹⁴ Phoebe the Deaconess may also be interpreted as a woman who leads by serving and serves by leading (Rom 16:1-2; see §5.2.4).

³¹⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 209.

³¹⁶ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 237. Instances of "keeping the word(s)" or "keeping the commandments" in Revelation are found in the following verses: Rev 1:3; 2:26; 3: 8, 10; 12:17; 14:12; 22:7, 9. In the messages to the Seven Churches the only character who is commended for "keeping the word (of patient endurance)" of the Son of Man is the Angel of the Church in Philadelphia (Rev 3:8, 10).

³¹⁷ Aune states: "Failure to hold the correct doctrine about Christ can also be construed as denying Christ (1 John 2:22)." Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 237.

³¹⁸ Yarbro Collins, "Insiders and Outsiders," 203.

Nowhere is Jezebel accused either of denying Christ's name either in word or in deed or of teaching her followers to deny his name, and it is certain that, had she been perceived to have done so, it would have been pointed out by the Author of Revelation. It seems far more likely that, in the view of the Author, the Prophetess did not hold the "correct" teaching about Christ; that is, she disagreed with him over his interpretation of Christian belief. This translates, in the message to Thyatira, as her refusal to accord due reverence to the Son of God by keeping his works, with which is connected the concept of "conquering:"³¹⁹

Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου [...]

And he who conquers and keeps my works until the end [...] (Rev 2:26).

In this creation the Prophetess fails to recognise either the Jesus Christ whom she serves or his generous hospitality which she imitates.

5.13.7. A Woman Who Welcomes Idolaters and Fornicators to Her Table: Jezebel, Jesus and Wisdom's Inclusive Table Fellowship (Rev 2:20; cf. Prov 9:1-6; Mt 9:10; Mk 2:15; Lk 5:29)

Jezebel includes among her followers, and welcomes to her house church, those who eat sacrificed meat and commit "sexual immorality" (Rev 2:20). As pointed out above (§5.10.1), the presentation of Jezebel may be interpreted as bearing a marked similarity to Woman Wisdom, and it is notable that Wisdom describes herself as offering her generous hospitality towards those who seek her out (Prov 9:1-6); she invites "the simple" and "those without sense" to turn into her house (Prov 9:4) in order to eat her bread and drink her wine (Prov 9:5), which equate to acquiring maturity, living and walking "in the way of insight" (Prov 9:6). Moreover, evidence from the Gospels demonstrates that Jesus' earliest followers, and perhaps Jesus himself, understood him to be a prophet of divine Wisdom (Lk 7:35).³²⁰ Indeed, by sitting down to dine with tax-collectors and "sinners," Jesus also exemplifies Woman Wisdom's generous hospitality to the despised (Mt 9:10; Mk 2:15; Lk 5:29).³²¹ For the Author of Revelation, Jezebel's inclusive table fellowship threatens the nature and boundaries of the Christian

³¹⁹ The consequences of this refusal are discussed in Chapter 6.

³²⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 139-43.

³²¹ Schüssler Fiorenza states: "One of the oldest Jesus sayings states that "Sophia is justified by her children" (QLk 7:35). This saying most likely has its "setting in life" in the inclusive table community of Jesus with sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes. She is justified, "made just," in and by all of them." Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet*, 140.

community (cf. §3.2; §5.10.2), pollutes the cup of Christ (cf. §5.11) and demonstrates that she holds the exclusive rules of membership of the Christian community which he espouses (Rev 21:8; 22:15) in contempt. It is notable that Jesus was criticised by Pharisees for welcoming those who did not strictly observe regulations concerning purity to his table and thus, in their eyes, demonstrated his contempt both for the covenant and for their exclusive interpretation of “righteousness” (Mk 2:16; 7:2).³²² Far from being the actions of a “strange” and “false” woman prophet, Jezebel’s “works” are, therefore, those of a child of Wisdom, just like Jesus (Lk 7:35).

Pippin notes that, for the Author, wisdom has apocalyptic and revelatory dimensions and its acquisition is dependent upon seeing and believing; it is bestowed only upon those who understand the mysteries which he sets out to explain.³²³ Wisdom is a requirement of entry to the New Jerusalem, but “the female personification and deity” appears in Revelation only in diluted form and diffused between the characters of the Son of Man, the Woman of Chapter 12, the Bride and the Spirit.³²⁴ As noted above (§4.2.4), the Son of Man has purloined the powers over life and death which properly belong to divine Wisdom (Rev 1:17-18). He has also stolen from the Woman of Chapter 12, who is at least in part an embodiment of Isis/Wisdom, her lactating breasts (Rev 1:13; 12:5-6; §4.2.5); his purpose is to be able to offer the nourishment of magical powers to his followers. However, unlike the generous hospitality of Woman Wisdom, Jesus and Jezebel, which is offered to the foolish, “sinners,” the excluded, the despised and the impure, the Son of Man’s “nourishment” is offered only to the elect few who “conquer” (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Indeed, in the message to Laodicea, where he describes himself in terms of Wisdom (Rev 3:14, 18) and as a parent to his followers (Rev 3:19), the Son of Man does not issue an open invitation, but demands firstly “repentance” (Rev 3:19) and secondly an invitation to dine in the repentant person’s own house, presumably at his host’s expense (Rev 3:20).

An understanding of *μετάνοια* not as “repentance,” but as “disassociation” or “repudiation,” thus sheds light upon Jezebel’s thinking. Jezebel disassociates herself from or repudiates not the Son of Man’s word of patient endurance (Rev 3:10; cf. 2:2,

³²² James D.G. Dunn, “Pharisees, Sinners, and Jesus,” in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee* (ed. Jacob Neusner et al.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 279-82.

³²³ Pippin, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” 286-87, 291.

³²⁴ Pippin, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” 294-95.

19; see §5.4.3) but his work of conquering (νικῶν), which is rewarded with “authority” over the Gentiles.³²⁵ In other words, Jezebel’s followers may be said to “keep” her works not only by sharing the community meal with backsliding Gentile converts, but by taking the subservient role of women and serving them; conversely, the followers of the Son of God “keep” his works by taking the penetrative role of men and conquering them. Thus also an answer is provided to the question of why Jezebel’s male followers, rather than Jezebel herself, face punishment unless *they* repudiate *her* works.

Comment

The above analysis has revealed the difference in opinion between the Prophetess and the Author over what constitutes following Christ, as demonstrated in the vastly-differing “works” of Jezebel and of the Son of God performed by their male followers. For the Author, following Christ appears to be “conquering,” an activity linked to power over demon-infested Gentiles. For the Prophetess, in contrast, following Christ is loving service of others, including the Gentiles. The power needed to perform this service is divine love, the vastness of which is immeasurable. There appear to be two major differences between Jezebel’s “works” and those of the Son of God: the first difference is that, while Jezebel teaches her followers to welcome Gentiles into their fellowship, the Son of God rewards Him Who Conquers with authority to “devastate” the Gentiles; the second difference is that, while the Son of God both threatens those who oppose him and offers rewards to those who follow him, the Prophetess does neither. However, to the idolaters and fornicators, that is the members of the community who have not completely given up their pagan ways, who sit at her table, partake of her fellowship and listen to her teaching, Jezebel offers knowledge of “the deep things of God,” that is his limitless love. In this, she is following the examples both of Woman Wisdom, the generous hostess who welcomes the “simple” into her house to learn the ways of wisdom, and of Jesus, who ate at table with outcasts and “sinners.”

The servant-leader Jezebel, a woman despised and criticised by the Author and his male interpreters, but recognised by the Angel of the Church as a true disciple of Jesus Christ (Rev 2:20), teaches her followers, *both female and male*, and both in her words (τὰ βαθέα τοῦ θεοῦ, Rev 2:24) and in her “works” (τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς, Rev 2:21), that Christian leadership is service of others and Christian service is leadership. In other

³²⁵ For the possible meanings of “conquering” see §4.9.3, 4.

words, by her own example, she is teaching the men over whom she has authority to be like subservient women in their relationships with others. In being such a servant-leader she follows the example of the unnamed prophetess who anointed Jesus (Mk 14:3-9): a woman who was despised and criticised by men, but whom Jesus recognised as his true disciple.³²⁶

In the introductory paragraph of this chapter it was noted that much emphasis is put upon Jezebel's feminine gender (τὴν γυναῖκα Ἰεζάβελ, ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφήτιν, Rev 2:20). It has also been suggested by those interpreters who are hostile to her that there is no basis for her claim to prophetic authority.³²⁷ Yet in the apparently unnecessary description by the Author of Revelation of Jezebel as "the Woman [...] who calls herself a Prophetess," are distant echoes of a description in an ancient text of another woman, another prophetess, upon whose feminine gender there is particular emphasis and whose prophetic authority was questioned. This woman is Deborah, Prophetess and Judge of Israel.

5.14. A Woman of Fire: Allusions in the Description of the Prophetess of Thyatira to Deborah, Prophetess and Judge of Israel (Judges 4-5)

Whilst their socio-historical situations are very different, there are a number of illuminating similarities between Jezebel, the Prophetess and Teacher of Thyatira and Deborah, the Prophetess and Judge of Israel (Judges 4-5).³²⁸ Deborah is described as follows:

*And Deborah, a woman, a prophetess, the woman of Lappidoth, she judged Israel at that time (Judg 4:4).*³²⁹

³²⁶ Pao notes that in Luke's Last Supper narrative, not only does Jesus, who is sharing a meal with his disciples "on the table" (ἐπι τῆς τραπέζης, 22:21), identify himself as "the one who serves" (ὁ διακονῶν, 22:27); he also calls the disciples to be "like the one who serves (ὁ διακονῶν, 22:26) as he himself is." Pao, "Waiters or Preachers," 141.

³²⁷ Several contemporary commentators, who have pounced upon this phrasing in Jezebel's description further to denigrate her memory. For example: Mounce describes Jezebel as "the self-styled prophetess;" Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 102; Beale makes an explicit connection between "false prophecy" and Jezebel's title of "prophetess;" Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 261; and Hemer baldly describes Jezebel as "a false prophetess." Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 117.

³²⁸ Josephus' version of the story (*Ant.* 5.198-209) is broadly the same as that of Judges 4-5, although of Deborah he simply says that she was "a certain prophetess among them" (5.200) and notes that her name means "Bee" (*Ant.* 5.201).

³²⁹ My translation.

Just as undue emphasis is laid upon Jezebel's femininity, and as pointed out by Trent C. Butler, the author of the story about Deborah "does everything the Hebrew language allows to emphasise that this is a female, not a male."³³⁰ Jezebel is presented as holding two positions of authority in the Thyatiran church, those of Prophetess and Teacher. Similarly, Deborah is presented as holding two positions of authority in Israel, those of Prophetess and Judge. In Jezebel's description there is the possibility that she is the "wife" of the Angel of the Church (τὴν γυναῖκα σου; see §5.2.6). Deborah is described as אשת לפידות, which is usually translated as "wife of Lappidoth." However, Lappidoth may not be her husband, but her "place of origin;"³³¹ and, since the literal translation of לפידות is "torches," Deborah may hail from a place associated with flames.³³² Moreover, Danna Nolan Fewell points out that אשת לפידות may be translated as "woman of fire."³³³ Thyatira is associated with the furnaces of the smelting industry; moreover, it has been suggested above (§5.12.4) that, as a Prophetess, Jezebel may well have spoken the fiery words associated with glossolalia and have been known as a "woman of fire." Like Jezebel, Deborah assumes a powerful role normally associated with a male leader, out and about in public, with authority over men, including Barak, the commander of the Israelite army (Judg 4:5-7). Deborah is also depicted as a mother (Judg 5:7) and, just as there is ambiguity about the precise meaning of Jezebel's "children" (Rev 2:23; see §5.12.7), it is not immediately clear whether the text implies that Deborah is "a "national" mother or an ordinary mother of children."³³⁴

Of particular interest in the depiction of Deborah is the questioning of her prophetic authority. In the message to Thyatira, Jezebel "says" that she is a prophetess (Rev 2:20). Although, as noted in the introductory paragraph to Part III, the Author of Revelation does not question her prophetic authority, by this phrasing he manages to imply that the Angel of the Church in Thyatira only has Jezebel's assurance that her prophecies have their source in God. Brenner points out that in Judges 4 Deborah's claim to have received an oracle from Yahweh is not witnessed and the manner of its transmission is not recorded (Judg 4:6-7).³³⁵ By declaring that Jezebel "says" that she is

³³⁰ Trent C. Butler, *Judges* (WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 90.

³³¹ Butler, *Judges*, 80.

³³² Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2003), 33.

³³³ Danna Nolan Fewell, "Judges," in *The Women's Bible Commentary* (ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe; London: SPCK, 1992), 69. See also Butler, *Judges*, 80.

³³⁴ Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 33.

³³⁵ Brenner points out that: "No introductory formula, such as '... and the word of Yahweh came to ...' actually appears in the text." Brenner, *The Israelite Woman*, 63.

a prophetess, the warrior Son of God questions the legitimacy of her claim. Similarly, although Deborah is described firmly by the chronicler of her story as a prophetess (Judg 4:4), and the words of her prophecy are recorded (Judg 4:6), her claim to divine legitimacy for her oracle is questioned, in her case by the warrior Barak (Judg 4:8). Only when she demonstrates that she is willing to stand by the words she has spoken as those of the LORD (Judg 4:9), does Barak muster his army and agree to do as commanded (Judg 4:10). Barak only has “this woman’s word for it” that the military strategy is of divine devising.³³⁶ So too do the members of the Church in Thyatira only have the Woman Jezebel’s word for it that she is a divinely-legitimated prophetess. It may, however, be inferred that, like Deborah, Jezebel stands by the words she has spoken as being the words of her Lord.

Comment

Unlike Jezebel, Deborah is presented not by the use of hostile rhetoric, but as a heroine of Israel. However, Lillian R. Klein rightly points out that, despite Deborah being “a woman in a position of power in the world of men, [...] the narrative binds her with constraints on all sides.”³³⁷ This observation may just as well be made about Jezebel. It is also notable that Deborah is an anomaly in Israel’s history. In a prefiguration of the Author of Revelation’s presentation of the Prophetess of Thyatira as a danger to the community (§5.10.2), Deborah too may well be “an implicit warning to men of the possible consequences of women in public life.”³³⁸ Although initially questioned, the legitimacy of Deborah’s prophetic status is later vindicated. Whether or not they are viewed by their community as legitimate, however, women prophets are considered by those who write about them to be a danger to the androcentric construction of that community’s perception and memory, and must be silenced.³³⁹

However, as pointed out by Elie Assis, the “main role in the story” of Deborah (דברוה) is to speak (דבר, Judg 5:12);³⁴⁰ likewise, Jezebel is presented as “she who keeps on speaking” (ἡ λέγουσα, Rev 2:20). It is up to feminist interpreters to discover ways of

³³⁶ Fewell states: “It is unclear whether Barak’s response [4:8] indicates cowardice, lack of self confidence [...], or distrust of Deborah’s authority.” Fewell, “Judges,” 69.

³³⁷ Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 33.

³³⁸ Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 33.

³³⁹ The subject of the silencing of women who prophesy is discussed further in §6.2.

³⁴⁰ Elie Assis points out that the Song of Deborah contains a pun upon her name and speaking: עורי עורי (דברוה עורי עורי דברי שיר (“Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!”) (Judg 5:12). Elie Assis, “Man, Woman and God in Judg 4,” in *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 20 (2006), 124.

freeing women from the narratives which imprison them and, where necessary, of enabling them to speak. Just as the people of the LORD urged their “mother” Deborah to awake and to speak (Judg 5:7, 12), so it is the aim of this study to find a means of enabling “Mother Jezebel,” imprisoned upon her sickbed (Rev 2:22), also to awake, to arise and to continue to speak her prophetic and fiery words.³⁴¹

Feminist Reconstruction III

For the Angel of the Church in Thyatira, Jezebel admirably fulfilled the criteria for the position of community Prophet/ess. There was no question of her having acquired the position dishonourably; her prophetic gift had been tested by an evaluation of her prophecies by other official Prophets and Prophetesses and by members of the Thyatiran community (cf. 1 Cor 14:29-32; *Did.* 11:7). Only a few members of the community found it objectionable that a woman should speak in public and teach men as well as women (Rev 2:24; cf. 1 Tim 2:12). Moreover, the Prophetess possessed another divine gift: the ability to speak in tongues, which enabled her to converse in other languages with prospective foreign converts (cf. Acts 2:3-4; 1 Cor 14:22). Jezebel taught in accordance with the precepts handed down by the followers of Paul by whom she had herself been converted and prayed that her followers might learn “the depths of God” and become rooted and grounded in divine love (Eph 3:17-18). She taught that this immeasurable love would enable them, as it enabled her, to be the dwelling place of Christ (Eph 3:17), and in her prayers and prophecies she responded like a wise and loving mother to the concerns of those in her care. Both by her words and by her example she taught the members of the Thyatiran Church to love, and not only to love each other, but to love those pagan outsiders who sought to enter the community.

For a freedwoman recently converted to Christianity, the Thyatiran community’s unique emphasis upon loving service (Rev 2:19; cf. §5.13.3; 5.13.5) was a revelation. As a woman married to a man who clung to his pagan beliefs, she was unable to avoid either consuming sacrificed meat or sexual relations with a Gentile. One or two members of the community seemed to find this situation abhorrent, but not the motherly Prophetess, who accepted her new convert without a word of reproach. The woman was not surprised to learn that, along with the other women, she was expected to wait at table at the shared community meal; she was astonished, however, to find men doing the same. Moreover,

³⁴¹ As yet, this is not possible, and is a task deferred to the Conclusion of this study.

the Prophetess encouraged her to use the opportunity to speak about the good news of Jesus Christ to those who sought to enter the community (cf. 1 Cor 14:20-25). The Prophetess taught her followers that service equated to leadership and leadership to service.³⁴² There was a family atmosphere in her house, and the Prophetess herself performed menial tasks of service as well as teaching. This was why she was so popular among the female members of the community; she taught that those who followed her, and through her followed Jesus, both women and men, should be servants of all, both women and men. In other words, she taught men to be like women and to serve and taught women to be like men and to lead.

Conclusions

For the feminist interpreter, the misogyny of Jezebel's portrayal has blurred the amazing reality that a *woman* was the most powerful, influential and respected Christian leader in a late first-century C.E. church and that, as part of her position as Prophetess, she not only spoke divinely-inspired words of wisdom and taught her followers to imitate her and Jesus through loving service of outsiders, but also performed the priestly rites of blessing the bread and wine-cup at the community celebrations of the Last Supper. As a community which was known for its love, faith, service and patient endurance (Rev 2:19), it may be assumed that its members looked for these very same qualities in prospective leaders. Indeed, it may have been Jezebel who seeded and cherished these qualities in the first place, by her example of leadership by service. Requesting God to give her followers divine-like strength, that is love, would fit well with Jezebel's reported inclusive attitude. The Author, through the sharp tongue of the Son of Man, exhorts and commands the Asian Christians to strengthen their barriers against any who do not conform to his strict ideals of individual and community exclusivity. Jezebel, who, contrary to the Author's insinuations, keeps herself from idols (cf. 1 Jn 5:21), is more understanding of human weakness. She urges her followers to serve by loving those converts who have not yet completely thrown off their superstitious beliefs and still sacrifice to "idols" or who associate with or are married to pagans and to include them in

³⁴² Schaberg comments: "The term *diakonia* referred in the early Christian community not to domestic chores but to eucharistic table service and to proclamation of the word (Rom. 11:13; 15:31; 1 Cor. 12:5; 2 Cor. 4:1; 5:18; Acts 6:1, 4). Schaberg, "Luke," 287.

the community.³⁴³ In the eyes of the Author, however, she is the embodiment of a dangerous and seductive teaching which is corrupting the purity of the community. Nevertheless, comparison with the portrayal of prophetesses and women who speak demonstrates that the silencing of the Prophetess does not imply either that her prophetic words did not have a legitimate divine source or that she spoke untruthfully (Ex 15:20-21; Num 12; Judg 4:4; 2 Kgs 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-28; Neh 6:14; Isa 8:3; Lk 2:36-38). The Author's use of sexualised language to describe Jezebel's prophetic inspiration is a commonplace of the culture in which he lived and should be understood neither literally nor as derogatory of her prophetic legacy; a feminist hermeneutic of reconstruction reveals that the Author's accusations of sexual immorality do not harm but, on the contrary, validate Jezebel's prophetic status and words. Moreover, the comparison of Jezebel with the woman who anoints Jesus (Mk 14:3-9; cf. Lk 7:36-50) demonstrates beyond doubt that the Author's portrayal of the Prophetess as a prostitute is the result only of his hostile attitude to the presence of women at public meals, and especially those who take an active and leadership role; it is not a reflection of reality. All combine to proclaim the validity of Jezebel's prophetic status and her worthiness for the role of Prophetess.

Since the Author portrays himself as a Slave-Prophet who serves only Revelation's Messiah (Rev 1:1, 17), the clash of prophetic authority is inscribed as being not between him and the Woman-Prophetess but between the slave-owning woman, who speaks words of fire and serves the foolish and impure like an indulgent mother, and the (formerly) slave-owning and fiery-eyed Son of God (Rev 2:20). Jezebel translates her teaching into "works" by imitating and following the hospitable and generous Jesus, the embodiment of divine Wisdom, and welcoming to her table, serving and eating with Gentile converts who continue to attend guild banquets and/or are married to unbelievers. These "works" contrast with the Son of God's "works" of "conquering" and ruling these Gentiles with a rod of iron (Rev 2:26-27). The Son of God approves of loving service (Rev 2:19); he cannot, however, abide that service being extended to those who threaten the boundaries of the Thyatiran community. He demands, therefore, that Prophetess's

³⁴³ Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 48-60. As noted by Duff, while the Prophetess "advocated engagement with the larger society (probably with an eye to reforming it from within)," the Author "recommended withdrawal into the ghetto." Duff, *Who Rides the Beast?* 61.

male followers in particular repudiate her “works” – “women’s work” – and assert their masculinity by following the Warrior King (Rev 2:23, 26-28).³⁴⁴

At the end of §5.2.2, the question was posed as to whether it is Jezebel’s gender, the wider extent of her power, her possession of “children,” her residence in Thyatira, the uncertainty about the authoritative source of Jezebel’s prophecies, or all five, which is the cause of the Author’s “harsher and sexualised rhetoric” in his portrayal of Jezebel in comparison with that of Balaam.³⁴⁵ With the contextualisation of Jezebel in her religious, social and textual settings complete, it is possible to answer this question. A woman with power over both women and men, who is a “mother” with influence in various Asian communities and the resources of money and a house, whose prophecies have their source in her loving response to her followers’ needs and whose gender-bending teaching and works challenge male authority, merits physical punishment, if necessary by means of a “holy” curse. It is possible to say more: despite his strong criticisms, abject disapproval and unpleasant threats, the only characters in the whole of the seven messages whom the Son of Man categorically condemns are the Woman Jezebel and her “children,” and the reason is the Prophetess’s avowed lack of “repentance” for her “sexual immorality” (Rev 2:22). In other words, he condemns her for being a woman who: (1) both attends and takes an active role at celebrations of the community meal, at which she (2) speaks prophetic words whose progenitor is not the Son of Man; (3) teaches her (male) followers to know “the deep things of God” and to be servants of all (like women); (4) welcomes to her table those Gentile Christians who continue to eat sacrificed meat; (5) is “violated” by the men present; (6) produces prophetic words born of her interaction with these men; and (7) despite being infested with demons, because of her association with the “unclean,” and possibly being ritually impure because she is menstruating, blesses the shared bread and wine-cup and thus pollutes them. Jezebel is condemned because she has refused to repudiate her works of loving service to the Gentiles, and instead repudiates the Son of God’s works of conquering them; she thus poses a direct challenge to the Son of God’s authority.

Nevertheless, and as noted at the beginning of Part III, nowhere does the Author dispute Jezebel’s worthiness to hold the position of Prophetess of the Church in Thyatira. The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that this uncharacteristic forbearance is forced

³⁴⁴ “Conquering” in the Book of Revelation has been analysed in §4.9.3, 4.

³⁴⁵ Thimmes, “Teaching and Beguiling My Servants,” 78-79.

upon him for three reasons. The first reason is that Jezebel held the officially-sanctioned position of “Prophetess” which he could not refute. The second reason is that Jezebel, with her divine gifts of prophecy and speaking in tongues, was more than worthy both of holding such a position and of the trust placed in her by the Angel of the Church. The third reason is that Jezebel’s wise teaching, which imitated that of Jesus, was winning converts to Christianity and the Author was outnumbered. He therefore declares that, just as there is no place for personified divine Wisdom in his grand apocalyptic vision (cf. *I Enoch* 42:1-2), and no place for the outcasts and sinners in his heavenly city, so there is no place for the Prophetess and her prophetic “children,” who must be destroyed by the brutish and unwise Son of God.³⁴⁶ However, in the words of Jesus, in whose tradition of generous hospitality to the “foolish” the Prophetess of Thyatira followed, “Wisdom is justified by all her children” (πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς, Lk 7:35).

It seems likely that the Prophetess learned about the Christian faith through the teachings of Paul as handed down by those who remembered him. It is, therefore, more than probable that the prayer quoted above (Eph 3:14-21; §5.13.3) was spoken by her in the assembly. It constitutes the gentle and loving counterpoint to the violent and hate-fuelled attack upon her, her followers and her “children.” The presentation of this attack is analysed in Chapter 6.

³⁴⁶ Pippin considers that divine Wisdom “both is and is not in the text; [...]. She is subdued and passive, deferring to the male authorities (Jesus and God).” Pippin, “Wisdom and Apocalyptic,” 294.

CHAPTER 6

PROPHECY, MAGIC AND MOTHERHOOD

Contextualisation of the Presentation of the Son of God's Attack upon the Woman Jezebel in Its Socio-Historical and Literary Settings

The analysis of the presentation of the Prophetess of Thyatira made in Chapter 5 has demonstrated that her teaching about the Christian faith is in sharp contrast to the beliefs of the Author of Revelation. Similarly, whilst the community in Thyatira accepts that the source of Jezebel's prophetic utterances is the Holy Spirit, in the Author's eyes her teaching is "leading astray" the slaves who properly belong to the Son of Man (Rev 2:18, 20). The Author thus sets out to silence her prophetic voice, which he does in two ways: firstly, by his hostile use of allusion both to the Jewish scriptures and to pagan legends and imagery; and secondly by the portrayal of this attack as being carried out by the Son of Man in the most masculine of his seven personae, the fearsome warrior-king, the Son of God (Rev 2:22-23). The Author uses both literary allusion and the Son of God as weapons with which to harm the Prophetess. However, the feminist interpreter, who seeks not only to lay bare the nature of the Author's attack upon Jezebel but also to reconstruct it from her point of view, is able to use both literary allusion and the presentation of the Son of God not as weapons but as brushes with which to paint a different picture of the attack and of the situations of conflict in the message to Thyatira.

The analysis of the Son of God's attack upon the Woman Jezebel, which is made in this chapter, is thus divided in accordance with the reader's knowledge of the two characters; at the same time the analysis deflects the damage which the Author attempts to wreak upon the Prophetess. Firstly, therefore, consideration is given to the scenario in which the Author has set the situation of conflict between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel (§6.1). This is followed by a brief analysis of the attempts by early Christian authors to suppress the female prophetic voice (§6.2). Discussion is then made of four different interpretations of the Son of God's attack. The first interpretation analyses the attack as a "sexual" assault either by means of the Son of God's penetrative gaze or by forcible prophetic possession (§6.3). The second interpretation considers the attack as the Son of God's use of his magical powers to cause the Prophetess and her "children" to fall ill and to die (§6.4). This leads to the third interpretation of the attack as the enactment of a curse which the Author has pronounced upon the Prophetess and which is carried out through the agency of the Son of God (§6.5). This is followed by the fourth interpretation of the attack as the Author's presentation of the conflict between the Son

of God and the Prophetess as a conflict of gender and status in which the Son of God attempts to deprive Jezebel of her motherhood (§6.6). Finally, the strokes of the feminist interpreter's literary paintbrush allows her to depict Jezebel rising from her bed and dashing the Son of God's "rod of iron" from out of his hands (§6.7). As in the other chapters of this study, the conflict is at all times considered both in its socio-historical and literary settings.

In order to begin this analysis, therefore, consideration is given to the scenario of the attack, which both sheds light upon the reality behind its portrayal by the Author as an attack upon the Prophetess by means of a supernatural agency and enables interpretations to be made of the conflict.

6.1. Defiance in the Dining Room: Contextualisation of the Scenario of the Son of God's Attack upon the Woman Jezebel in Its Literary and Socio-Historical Settings

It has already been argued that, for a Thyatiran Christian, the Son of God would have appeared to be nothing more than a statue like that of Apollo Tyrimnaeus or the golden idol of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3:1-30; Rev 2:18; cf. §4.7.2). Confronted with this apparition, it seems entirely probable that the autonomous and independent Prophetess, who refused either to disavow her teaching or to bow down to angels (cf. §5.12.5), would also have refused to bow down before the Son of God and thus submit herself to his authority. In this refusal is an echo of the uncompromising attitude of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego towards Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue.¹

6.1.1. "We Will Not Bow Down" (LXX Dan 3:18): A Comparison of the Woman Jezebel's Defiance of the Son of God with Shadrach's, Meshach's and Abednego's Defiance of King Nebuchadnezzar (Rev 2:21-22; cf. Dan 3:1-30)

In the conflict between the Son of God and Jezebel are found a surprising number of interesting and thought-provoking echoes of the conflict between King Nebuchadnezzar and the three Jewish men named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, recounted in the Book of Daniel (Dan 3:1-30). In the story, the people are commanded by the Babylonian

¹ One of the Author's weapons in his attack upon the Prophetess is his use of literary allusion, a technique which, when used by the non-ideal interpreter, may be used to undermine his hostile portrayal (cf. §5.II).

King Nebuchadnezzar to bow down before the golden statue which he has set up (Dan 3:4-5). Whilst everyone else obeys the edict and falls down and worships the golden statue (Dan 3:7), Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to do so even when so commanded by the enraged King himself (Dan 3:12-18). As a penalty for their disobedience, they are thrown into a fiery furnace (Dan 3:21). As observed by Nebuchadnezzar himself, the three young men “disobeyed the king’s command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God” (Dan 3:28). This suggests that there are two reasons for Jezebel’s defiance of the words of the kingly Son of God by refusing to “repent” of her “sexual immorality” and prostrate herself before him as John prostrates himself before the Son of Man (Rev 1:17). Firstly, just as Nebuchadnezzar’s statue of himself is both an idol and an image of his self-deification, she sees the Son of God as nothing more than an idolatrous image of the Author of Revelation’s understanding of the exalted Christ and possibly, since he puts his own thoughts and opinions into the mouth of this character, a self-deification.² Secondly, Jezebel’s beliefs about Jesus Christ and her calling are as strong as those of the Author of Revelation. Obeying Nebuchadnezzar’s decree and bowing down to his idolatrous statue would have meant the young men “contravening a fundamental aspect of their religious commitment.”³ In the same way, for Jezebel, bowing down to the Son of God, as does the scribe John, would mean “contravening a fundamental aspect” of *her* “religious commitment.” Just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego give up their bodies to be thrown into the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar, so Jezebel gives up her body to be thrown, not literally into one of Thyatira’s furnaces, but onto a couch, by the flaming-eyed warrior king of Revelation, rather than honouring or bowing down before any god but her own (cf. Eph 3:14; §5.13.2).⁴

Unlike Jezebel, however, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are silenced neither by King Nebuchadnezzar nor by the author of the text of the Book of Daniel. The king

² John E. Goldingay points out that Nebuchadnezzar’s statue “embodies not only a religious and a national commitment but a personal one. Nebuchadnezzar’s own standing was tied up with the statue.” John E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (WBC 30; Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1989), 73. Similarly, in the message to Thyatira, the Son of God embodies the Author’s personal commitment to Christ, and his prophetic standing is “tied up” with his creation.

³ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 67.

⁴ Jezebel is, of course, thrown onto a couch (εἰς κλίνην, Rev 2:22. One of the textual variants on κλίνην, however, is κλίβανον (“furnace”). Thyatira was renowned for its smelting industry, and the messages to the Seven Churches appear to have been written with knowledge both of the Hebrew Scriptures and of local customs and culture in Asia Minor (cf. §4.2, 3). Similarly, the story of Daniel 3 “combines factual allusions and traditional motifs,” including “brick furnaces,” and it may either be based on a “factual reference” or be a “fiction” to which the narrator has given “local color” [*sic*]. Goldingay, *Daniel*, 67-68.

tells the young men that if they do not fall down and worship his statue they will immediately be thrown into a fiery furnace. In reply, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say:

*“[...] be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your idol and we will not bow down to the golden statue that you have set up” (LXX Dan 3:18).*⁵

The words of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego spoken to King Nebuchadnezzar provide an inkling of the words which the Prophetess of Thyatira, both on her own behalf and on behalf of her followers, may have spoken to the Author of Revelation about his idol: “We will not serve your idol and we will not bow down to the flaming-eyed and bronze-footed statue that you have set up.” Again, it is important to remember that Jezebel is both a character in the story of Revelation and a historical woman. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage at the young men’s reply, no doubt the Author of Revelation was also filled with rage and thus, like Nebuchadnezzar, decreed that he would have the Prophetess thrown onto a sickbed, perhaps with a burning fever which made her bed like an oven. This proposal provokes the question of how the Author’s retribution might be achieved. For the time being it must remain unanswered, but it is raised again below (§6.4; 6.5).

The catalyst for the Son of God’s attack upon the Woman Jezebel is her refusal both to repudiate her own religious beliefs, teaching and actions and to worship the idolatrous warrior king of the Author’s creation. In order to understand the occasion of the attack, however, it is important to take into account its location.

6.1.2. A Meeting of the Assembly in Jezebel’s House: The Location and Occasion of the Son of God’s Attack upon the Prophetess of Thyatira and Her Followers (Rev 2:22-23)

The Son of God describes himself as throwing Jezebel onto a couch (ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτὴν εἰς κλίνην, Rev 2:22), which is generally interpreted to mean either that the Son of God is sexually assaulting Jezebel or that he is in some way causing her to fall ill and thus to

⁵ Dan 3:18 (Theod.) has: “[...] we will not serve your gods, and we will not bow down to the golden statue that you have set up.”

be obliged to take to her bed.⁶ Both of these interpretations have merits, but it is important to understand that the pivotal word in this phrase is κλίνην; this may be understood either as a bed for sleeping upon or as a couch which might be found in the dining room of a Graeco-Roman house and upon which a diner would recline.⁷ Since Jezebel's prophesying and teaching take place in the context of celebrations of the community meal in the dining room of her house (cf. §5.3), it is logical to understand κλίνη as having the meaning of a dining couch.⁸ At the same time, however, the Author of Revelation associates these occasions with behaviour which he deems to be "sexually immoral" (Rev 2:20-22). Jezebel's couch, therefore, should be understood primarily as a dining couch, but one upon which, in the Author's eyes, she indulges in "sexual immorality" (Rev 2:21). It is the place where she sits to eat and to drink, to speak with and to teach her fellow diners and from which she rises to prophesy (cf. 1 Cor 14:30).⁹ It is the place where Jezebel's "womb," or mind, is "fertilised" and her "children," that is her prophetic words, are "conceived" and "birthed" (cf. §5.12.7). Jezebel is either sexually assaulted or rendered unwell, or indeed both, by the actions of the Son of God in the context of her uttering prophetic words to her fellow diners. This is further indicated by the Son of God's implication in his words "I am throwing her down" that the Prophetess is standing and prophesying before she is attacked.

⁶ Marshall considers the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel to be "sexualized violence." Marshall, "Gender and Empire," 17, 19. See, also, Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 154. Mounce considers that Jezebel's couch is "a bed of sickness or pain." Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 104. Aune, Beale, Ford and Witherington all interpret the Son of God's action as causing Jezebel to become ill. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 205; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 263, including footnote 125; Ford, *Revelation*, 406; Witherington, *Revelation*, 104.

⁷ Whilst Beale argues that "Jezebel's punishment of being "cast on a bed" is metonymic for illness, which itself is generally figurative for suffering," with the sense in this verse of her being "cast upon a bed of illness," he also considers that the "couch" may refer to "the idolatrous and immoral banqueting couch of the guild feasts." Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 263, including Footnote 125. The other occurrences of κλίνη in the New Testament indicate that this word is used in the context of sickness or physical incapacitation (Mt 9:2, 6; Lk 5:18; Acts 5:15 (κλιναρῖον)), in the context of demonic possession (Mk 7:30), for sleeping (Lk 17:34) or merely as a piece of furniture (Mk 4:21; Lk 8:16).

⁸ It is interesting to note that one of the textual variants on εἰς κλίνην ("onto a couch") is εἰς ἀσθένειαν ("into weakness"). Indeed, depending upon which textual variant is read, the Son of God declares that he is throwing Jezebel: (1) onto a (sick)bed or a reclining couch (εἰς κλίνην); (2) into prison or a lair of demons (εἰς φυλακὴν); (3) into a furnace (εἰς κλίβανον); or (4) into sickness or weakness (εἰς ἀσθένειαν). The most satisfying interpretation seems to be that the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel, whether by means of a sexual assault or by means of an illness, weakens her so much that she is imprisoned upon her couch with a burning fever.

⁹ In 1 Cor 14:30 Paul says, "If a revelation is made to another who is seated nearby, let the first be silent," which Wire logically interprets to mean that whoever is prophesying is standing up; one prophet or prophetess stands up to prophesy, and if another is inspired, he or she does not wait for the other to sit down, but stands up expecting the first prophet to concede his or her place. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 147.

This context also explains the inclusion of the Son of God's threat to those "committing adultery" with Jezebel, that is, her followers (Rev 2:22), between his attacks upon her and her "children" (Rev 2:23). They are those members of the community who are present in her dining room and are thus witnesses to the consequences of defying the Son of Man; unlike her "children," they are given the opportunity to avoid "distress" by repudiating her "works" and abandoning her to her fate. It may, therefore, be concluded that the attack upon Jezebel, which imprisons her upon her couch, should be understood within the context of her prophesying to members of the Thyatiran assembly who are present in her dining room during a celebration of the community meal.

As discussed in the Introduction to this study, the female prophetic voice in the early churches was seen as a direct challenge to male authority.

6.2. "Women Must Be Silent in the Churches" (1 Cor 14:34): The Suppression of the Early Christian Female Prophetic Voice (Lk 2:36-38; Acts 21:9; 1 Cor 11:5-6; 14:33-35)

The only two women in the New Testament described with the word *προφήτις* are Jezebel (Rev 2:20) and Anna (Lk 2:36; cf. Introduction; §5.12.1). Like Jezebel, Anna is presented in comparison with a male character, in her case Simeon (Lk 2:25-35). Unlike Jezebel, however, Anna is portrayed by the author of Luke-Acts with approval (Lk 2:36-38). The reason for this authorial approbation is the presentation of Anna in relationship to her father, as sexually chaste and as textually- and vocally-subordinated to Simeon. This portrayal demonstrates that, although women may have important roles in the churches, they must defer to male authority.¹⁰ Similarly to Anna of Jerusalem, the four unnamed prophesying sisters of Caesarea are defined in relationship to their father and in terms of their (lack of) sexuality. Despite being described as "prophesying" (*προφητεύουσαι*, Acts 21:9), moreover, the women are silent throughout the story. In contrast, the prophet Agabus not only speaks in prophetic words directly to Paul, but makes a physical demonstration of his prophecy (Acts 21:10-11).¹¹

¹⁰ Schaberg rightly points out that "Even as this Gospel highlights women as included among the followers of Jesus [...], it deftly portrays them as models of subordinate service, excluded from the power center [*sic*] of the movement and from significant responsibilities." Schaberg, "Luke," 275. While Anna's words are not recorded and are only briefly reported (Lk 2:38), Simeon has two speeches (Lk 2:29-32, 34-35).

¹¹ Like Lydia (cf. §5.2.4), Anna and the four sisters of Caesarea are some of Luke's "ideal" women: they have positions of authority but accept that they are inferior to high-status males.

Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians letter provides evidence that women as well as men were accepted as prophets in the Christian community at Corinth.¹² Paul however, declares that "any woman who prays or prophesies" must do so only if she has covered her head with a veil (1 Cor 11:5-6). By speaking in public with uncovered (or shaved) heads, the women are acting like men and perhaps, as rightly noted by Jouette M. Bassler, "demonstrating that they have taken seriously the baptismal affirmation used in Paul's churches: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3:28)."¹³ In veiling her head, however, a woman acknowledges her lowly place in the hierarchy of worship (1 Cor 11:3, 7-9).¹⁴ The wearing of a veil indicates the supposed submission of a woman.¹⁵ It also, as pointed out by Loren T. Stuckenbruck, has "strong sexual connotations."¹⁶ Paul, therefore, demonstrates both that he considers women to be inferior to men and that a woman, whether a prophetess or not, is first and foremost a sexual being.¹⁷

Towards the end of Paul's letter, furthermore, is the declaration that women should be silent in the assembly; not only should they neither pray nor prophesy, they

¹² Jouette M. Bassler points out that in Corinth no distinction was made between men and women concerning "participation in worship." Jouette M. Bassler, "1 Corinthians," in *Women's Bible Commentary: Revised and Updated* (ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley. 3d ed.; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 563.

¹³ Bassler, "1 Corinthians," 562.

¹⁴ Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels? (1 Corinthians 11:10)," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4 (2001), 217-18. Stuckenbruck points out that the women's "prophylactic" veils would have provided protection for the "cosmic order" "by helping to draw boundaries" not only between men and women but also between women and angels. Paul's warning that women should be veiled "because of the angels" (1 Cor 11:10) may also reflect both a (male) fear of the vulnerability of women's bodies to "invasion" and the belief that when the community worshipped they did so in the company of possibly sexually-active angels. Stuckenbruck, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads because of the Angels?" 231-32. Bassler notes that Paul seems to consider that "evil angelic beings (see 2 Cor. 12:7) [...] would be sexually tempted by the women's self-exposure, and through them gain access to the community. Bassler, "1 Corinthians," 563. Wire concurs that this may be a reference to the "sons of god" in Gen 6:1-6 or the "angels" in *I Enoch* 6-16. Alternatively, they form a heavenly court, continually worshipping God; since when Adam was created he reflected "God's glory," they attempted also to worship him, there is a danger that they might worship the reflection of men's "glory" found in women. Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 121. Wire continues: "Sexual implications may not be completely absent, but Paul is more concerned with the unthinkable thought of mutiny in God's heavenly host than with angelic rape." Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 122. Whilst it is certainly possible to interpret the Son of God's attack upon the Prophetess as "angelic rape," there is no question of him being tempted to worship her.

¹⁵ Stuckenbruck states: "It is hard to escape the notion that Paul's instruction in 1 Cor 11:2-16 implies that a woman, even when she prays or prophesies, is the social inferior of the man." Stuckenbruck, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels?" 233-34.

¹⁶ Stuckenbruck, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels?" 228. Stuckenbruck also points out that one of the functions of clothing is "to keep gender categories distinct." Stuckenbruck, "Why Should Women Cover Their Heads Because of the Angels?" 228.

¹⁷ See Bassler, "1 Corinthians," 563.

should not even ask questions (1 Cor 14:33-35). Whether or not these are Paul's words or a "marginal gloss" is disputed.¹⁸ What is undisputable is that the silencing of the Prophetess of Thyatira's voice does not infer either that her prophetic words were generally seen as lacking divine authority (1 Cor 12:4-11) or that a prophesying woman in a first-century C.E. Christian community was an anomaly.¹⁹

The author of Luke-Acts suppresses the voices of prophetesses by portraying them as inferior to men and failing to record their words. Paul enjoins upon women silence and the subordination of women to males. The Author of Revelation, however, is satisfied with neither of these strategies. After denigrating her as "sexually immoral," both implicitly (Rev 2:20) and explicitly (Rev 2:21-22), he proceeds to portray the Prophetess of Thyatira as being forcibly silenced by means of a physical attack by a supernatural being. This is the Son of God (Rev 2:18), and consideration of his attack upon Jezebel is firstly interpreted as an attempted "sexual" assault.

6.3. "Thou Hast Raped Me" (Jer 20:7): Interpretation of the Son of God's Attack upon the Woman Jezebel as a Sexual Assault

Corrington Streete rightly points out that "distinctly sexual overtones" colour the description of the attack upon Jezebel and that the combination of the word κλίνη and the mention of "those committing adultery" with Jezebel (τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς) "suggests a rape."²⁰ Frilingos's "investigation of ancient sexuality," moreover, provides a possible reason for the sexualisation of this attack.²¹

¹⁸ One of the interpretations of 1 Cor 14:34-35 is that Paul has previously assumed "the full participation of women in the worship services, but his growing concern over the chaotic practices in Corinth leads him in 14:34-35 to an unfortunate reversal." Many have concluded that these verses were not written by Paul; they may be "a marginal gloss" which has come to be included in the letter itself. However, "The fact that the verses could be so readily received as Paul's own words reflects [...] the ambiguity of Paul's position (see esp. 1 Cor. 7:36-38; 11:7-9)." Bassler, "1 Corinthians," 564-65.

¹⁹ Bassler notes: "The right to pray or prophesy – and this involves a prominent role in the service [...] is bestowed by the Spirit and cannot be contested (12:4-11)." Bassler, "1 Corinthians," 563.

²⁰ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 154.

²¹ Frilingos, "Sexing the Lamb," 299.

6.3.1. “Look!” (Rev 2:22): Interpretation of the Son of God’s Attack upon the Woman Jezebel as (Visual) Rape (Rev 2:22; cf. Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* III.19; Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 2.17)

Frilingos explains that the second-century C.E. *Daphnis and Chloe*, despite being a romantic novel, demonstrates that during their first experiences of sexual intercourse a youth becomes a man while the heroine is described as “wounded, penetrated, murdered” by hers: “[...] she will cry out and weep and bleed a good deal as if she had been stabbed” (Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* III.19)²² The prevailing hierarchy of power associated penetration with manliness and “activity” and being penetrated with femininity and “passivity, and the point of the story is that “sex is not a private act [...] but a public performance authorized by the civic gaze.”²³ The Son of God’s attack upon Jezebel may be analysed in a similar way. “Look!” shouts the Son of God, “I am throwing her down onto a bed!” (Rev 2:22). With these triumphant words, the Son of God draws the audience’s own gaze to Jezebel’s physical humiliation, his masculinity and the concomitant buttressing of Revelation’s hierarchy of power. Like Chloe, and Photis in Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*, Jezebel is presented as a sexual object and as ““to-be-looked-at-ness;”²⁴ as in *Daphnis and Chloe* III.19, in the flaming-eyed Son of God’s attack upon Jezebel there is little, if any, distinction made between sexual penetration and (attempted) murder, and in *The Golden Ass* between sexual penetration and warfare:

“Fight!” she [Photis] cried “[...] Advance to meet me face to face and hand to hand, if you’re a man, attack with a will, lay down your life to take mine. There’ll be no quarter given in today’s combat” (Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* 2.17).²⁵

Moreover, in Roman society association was made between the penetrative gaze and sexual penetration. Shadi Bartsch notes that on the one hand a person may look upon another with loving desire, which is reflected in the connection between the verbs ὁράω (I see) and ἐράω (I love, I desire).²⁶ On the other hand, however, a person may look upon on another with violent lust: Bartsch states “[...] one can be tortured by the presence of

²² Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 300; Longus, *Daphnis and Chloe* (LCL; trans. George Thornley; revised and augmented J.M. Edmonds; Cambridge, Mass; Harvard University Press, 1978), 157.

²³ Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 301.

²⁴ Frilingos, “Sexing the Lamb,” 304, with reference to Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16 (1989): 6-18.

²⁵ Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (trans. Sarah Ruden; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 33. Photis uses this analogy despite being a willing and eager “combatant” in sexual “warfare.”

²⁶ Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*, 67-68.

another's gaze upon one's body."²⁷ In joining the Son of God at "looking" at Jezebel being (visually) raped, the reader/viewer becomes "the bearer or subject of the gaze" and attains a higher position upon the hierarchy of power than "the object of the gaze."²⁸ In other words, the Son of God co-opts the reader, willingly or otherwise, in his "sexual" attack upon the Woman Jezebel.

However, the description of Jezebel in sexualised language owes nothing to her literal sexual behaviour, but is linked to her prophetic activities. Moreover, being prophetically inspired was in ancient times analogously understood in terms of sexual possession by a deity (cf. §5). It therefore follows that, if the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel is interpreted as an attempt to rape her, it may be understood in terms of forced possession of a prophetess by a god.

6.3.2. "My Destroyer!" (Agamemnon 1081): *Interpretation of the Son of God's Attack upon the Prophetess as an Attempt at Forcible Prophetic Possession (Rev 2:22; cf. Jer 20:7; Aeschylus, Agamemnon 1215; Virgil, Aeneid VI.47-49, 80; Rev 10:9-10)*

Ruth Padel notes that such "possession" was thought to be painful and was often "resisted;" it was therefore not unusual for the divine penetration of a woman to be described as analogous to rape.²⁹ Apollo in particular is associated with the forced penetration of prophetesses.³⁰ His possession of Cassandra, who has refused to submit to his desire (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1204, 1207-8), is described as "terrible agony" (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1215) and his possession of Deiphobe in the *Aeneid* causes her face to become flushed, her hair to become dishevelled and her heart almost to burst (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.47-49);³¹ moreover, he "tames her wild heart, and moulds her by constraint" (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.80).³²

²⁷ Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*, 150. Bartsch notes that there may be a connection between the Latin verbs *videre* (to see) and *violare* (to violate). Bartsch, *The Mirror of the Self*, 149-50.

²⁸ Frilingos, "Sexing the Lamb," 304, with reference to Jennifer A. Glancy, "Text Appeal: Visual Pleasure and Biblical Studies," *Semeia* 82 (1998): 63-78.

²⁹ Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," 12, 14. See, also, Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 240-41.

³⁰ Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," 14; see, also, Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 240.

³¹ Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, 145, 147; Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid* I-VI (LCL; revised ed.; trans. H. Rushton Fairclough; London: William Heinemann, 1935), 509.

³² Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid* I-VI, 513.

It has been noted that the portrayal of the flaming-eyed Son of God contains allusions to Apollo (cf. §4.7); since the Son of Man, of whom the Son of God is one persona, is divine and Jezebel is a prophetess, his “sexual” attack upon her must be an attempt to force her to prophesy his words by penetrating her kidneys and heart, in other words by possessing her mind (Rev 2:24), and causing her to “give birth” to his “children” in place of those who are murdered (Rev 2:23). Since, however, there is no indication that, like the Cumaean Sybil, Jezebel then speaks the Son of God’s prophetic words in a voice that does not have “a mortal ring” (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.50) nor that, like Cassandra, she experiences “god-bearing” (θεοφόρους) possession (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1150), it seems that she successfully resists his attempt to possess her, even though the encounter leaves her feverish upon her bed (Rev 2:22).³³

Prophesying was a dangerous occupation for a woman, since the “porous” nature of her body was understood to make her particularly vulnerable to penetration by supernatural beings.³⁴ It could on occasion, however, be similarly hazardous and painful for male prophets. Moreover, the gender of the prophet did not affect the use of sexualised language to describe the experience of divine possession. A case in point is that of the prophet Jeremiah, whose bewailing of his treatment by Yahweh is translated by Abraham J. Heschel as follows:

*O Lord, Thou hast seduced me,
And I am seduced;
Thou hast raped me
And I am overcome* (Jer 20:7).³⁵

There is a startling similarity between Jeremiah’s experience of divine possession and that of the Sybil Deiphobe (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.77-80) in that it is also analogous to rape. This example of the depiction of the divine inspiration of a male prophet as

³³ Aeschylus, *Oresteia*, 136-37. Martin points out that it was believed that a woman who was “unwilling” to act as the mouthpiece of a god put her physical health, and even her life, at risk. Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 241.

³⁴ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 241-42.

³⁵ The Hebrew reads: פתיתני יהוה ואפת חזקתני ותוכל. In making this translation, Abraham J. Heschel notes the “specific meaning of the individual words,” in particular פתה and חזק. When Jeremiah speaks of his experience using פתה, he uses the same word as that used to describe the (forbidden) seduction of an unmarried woman (Exod 22:15 (16); Hos 2:16 (14); Job 31:9). Jeremiah’s use of חזק indicates that his reluctance to consent to Yahweh’s enticement has caused the god to possess him with violence which is akin to rape (cf. Deut 22:25; Judg 19:25; 2 Sam 13:11). Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 113. William L. Holladay also notes the sexual overtones of the verse and calls attention to the “brute force” and deceptiveness of Yahweh. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (Hermeneia; ed. Paul D. Hanson; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 553-54. See, also, Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 298, Endnote 57.

analogous to sexual intercourse is also not very different to the portrayal of the Son of God's attempted possession of Jezebel's mind as a sexual assault. Nor is it very different from the account of John's reception of his prophecy from the Angel Wrapped in a Cloud (Rev 10:8-11).³⁶

In this scene the Angel Wrapped in a Cloud (Rev 10:1) is described as holding in his hand a phallic "little scroll" (Rev 10:2, 8).³⁷ Like Ezekiel, upon whose "prophetic call" this episode is partly based (Ezek 1:1-3:27, especially 2:8-3:3), John's prophecy is literally handed to him to swallow (Rev 10:10).³⁸ Since the Author portrays Jezebel's prophesying as "sexual immorality" (cf. §5.3), it takes no leap of the imagination to interpret John's eating of the prophetic scroll (Rev 10:9-10) as an act of oral sexual intercourse and, moreover, one which is viewed with approbation by the Author.³⁹

Comment

Although John is depicted as suffering from a severe attack of indigestion after his "sexual" encounter with the Angel (Rev 10:10), he recovers in order to "prophesy again" (Rev 10:11); the Angel has successfully inseminated John with his prophecy.⁴⁰ Similarly, Jezebel is laid low upon her couch or bed after the Son of God's sexual assault upon her (Rev 2:22). This result would tally with the ancient association of divine possession of a prophet or prophetess with (forced) sexual intercourse and, in the case of a woman seer, the "fertilisation" of her mind/womb, which results in her birthing her prophecies/children. However, there is no indication that the Prophetess then proceeds to

³⁶ As noted in §4.2.1, this character may be another appearance of the Son of Man.

³⁷ In their discussion of the phallic imagery of Revelation, Pippin and J. Michael Clark observe that the scroll is "phallus-shaped." Tina Pippin and J. Michael Clark, "Revelation/Apocalypse," in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (ed. Deryn Guest et al.; London: SCM Press, 2006), 758. That the scroll is described as "open" (ἡνεωγμένον, Rev 10:2) does not mean that it is "unrolled" [...]; rather it means "unsealed." Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 558.

³⁸ Aune states that "the act of eating the scroll is a metaphor symbolizing the prophetic word that enters into Ezekiel (see Ezek 3:1). The meaning is similar in Rev 10:10-11." Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 575.

³⁹ David J. Halperin argues that the scroll which Ezekiel is commanded by the LORD GOD to eat (Ezek 2:8-3:3) is "a representation of a penis." He considers that this scene is a "hallucination," which reflects "a fantasy or memory of having been compelled to perform fellatio on some adult male." David J. Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel: Text and Psychology* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 134. See, also, Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 15, 17, 20-21, 218; Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 171. Ezekiel's "reluctance" to eat "[t]he phallic 'scroll'" which is being held out to him is reflected in the LORD GOD'S repeated injunctions to him to do so (Ezek 2:8; 3:1, 3). Halperin, *Seeking Ezekiel*, 133, 218. John, however, complies readily with the command to eat "the little scroll" held out to him by the Angel (Rev 10:8-10).

⁴⁰ Since she is female, Jezebel's mind is associated with her womb and her prophetic utterances with her birthing of "children" (cf. §5.12.7). Since, however, John is male, it appears that his mind is associated with his stomach. Padel notes: "'Belly-talkers' were known in society (Eurycles is one named from classical Athens [...])." Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," 14.

speak the Son of God's prophetic words or to "give birth" to his children. Moreover, neither the interpretation of the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel as literal or visual rape nor its interpretation as prophetic possession provides an answer to Hemer's question of why "the judgment upon the children seems more severe than upon Jezebel herself."⁴¹ It should, moreover, be remembered that it is the Author who portrays Jezebel's prophetic activities in sexualised language; like those gathered together at Pentecost in Jerusalem, Jezebel's experience of prophetic inspiration was not akin to sexual possession, but similar to intoxication (cf. Acts 2:13, 15; §5.12.4).

In order, therefore, to discover an interpretation of the attack upon the Prophetess which offers a satisfactory explanation not only of her own "incarceration" upon her couch, but also of the distress of her followers and of the death of her "children," it is necessary to turn to another interpretation of the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel by means of the power of his flaming eyes, but this time as an imposition of sickness.⁴²

6.4. Sickness and Death: Interpretation of the Son of God's Attack upon the Woman Jezebel, Her Followers and Her "Children" as the Use of Malevolent Magic

The couch upon which Jezebel is thrown down by the Son of God (Rev 2:22) has been interpreted by a number of scholars as a "sick-bed" (cf. §6.1.2), and the use of the word κλίνη in the New Testament certainly supports such an interpretation. Moreover, as suggested by Hemer, the "pestilence" (θανάτω) with which Jezebel's children are killed

⁴¹ Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 121. Aune also raises this question. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 205.

⁴² The Author is implying, by means of intertextual similarities between Jezebel and the Woman Babylon, that the Prophetess is possessed of demons (cf. §5.11), and it may be noted that Rev 2:22-23 bears a passing resemblance to the Marcan account of Jesus' exorcism of the Syrophenician Woman's daughter (Mk 7:24-30; cf. Mt 15:21-28). Another act of exorcism with which Rev 2:22 may be compared is Paul's casting out of the spirit of Apollo from an unnamed slave girl (Acts 16:16-18) who, like Jezebel, keeps on speaking (λέγουσα, Acts 16:17). There are, however, crucial differences between these two scenarios and that of Rev 2:22-23. The author of Mark portrays Jesus as reluctantly being persuaded by a Gentile woman, who challenges his authority, to rid her beloved daughter of a demon; in contrast, the Author portrays the Son of God as attacking a woman of Gentile origin and then enlisting the services of the demon Death to rid him of the Woman Jezebel's pestilential "children." The author of Luke-Acts portrays Paul as being moved by annoyance to deprive a wretched pagan slave-girl, who confirms his authority, of her only means of earning money for her owners (Acts 16:19); in contrast the Author portrays the Son of God as being fired by anger at the "leading astray" of his slaves and the challenge to his authority, to attack a Prophetess of the church. Moreover, the Son of God is not a completely autonomous and "real" person like Jezebel, but is a persona of the Son of Man, a divinity summoned into being by the authorial magician.

(Rev 2:23) is “to be linked with the ‘sick-bed’ of Jezebel, with emphasis upon the fatal results of the disease.”⁴³

6.4.1. *The “Evil Eye” of the Son of God? (Rev 2:22-23)*

In ancient times, sickness was often attributed to the malign actions of a supernatural being, and Duff has interpreted the Son of God’s possession of flaming eyes as indicating that he has the power of the “evil eye” with which he might “overlook” his enemies and cause them to fall ill (cf. §4.7.1).⁴⁴ The likeness of the Son of God to Apollo, who was associated with the imposition of disease, makes this interpretation of his attack upon the Prophetess a strong possibility. In addition, Duff suggests that, as a result of being “overlooked” by the Son of God’s flaming eyes, Jezebel and her followers are struck down by a “wasting disease,” which might well be the meaning of *θλιῖν μεγάλην* (Rev 2:22). Since children were considered to be more susceptible to the ill-effects of malevolent magic than adults, this explanation would explain why it is only Jezebel’s “children” whom the Son of God declares that he is going to kill (Rev 2:23).⁴⁵

At the same time, as noted above (§6.1.2), it is important to take into account the occasion of the attack, which is at the community celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the Prophetess’s house.

6.4.2. *Consuming the Eucharist “Unworthily”? (Rev 2:22-23; cf. 1 Cor 11:27-30)*

Mounce considers that Rev 2:22-23 portrays the Prophetess, her followers and “children” suffering the “magical” consequences of consuming the Eucharist “unworthily” (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-30).⁴⁶ As the hostess, the Prophetess would have blessed the wine cup. In the eyes of the Author, this action by a woman who was “impure” on account of her “sexual immorality” and possible menstruation, would have polluted its contents and rendered “impure” all those who shared it. Moreover, the inclusion of those who eat food sacrificed to “idols” in the celebrations would have posed a further risk of pollution to members of the assembly who did not “hold” Jezebel’s teaching (Rev 2:24) but drank from the wine

⁴³ Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches*, 121.

⁴⁴ Duff considers that, in his use of the “evil eye,” the Son of God is being presented as the goddess Hecate (cf. §4.7.1). Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 132-33.

⁴⁵ Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 122.

⁴⁶ Mounce makes a connection between Jezebel’s “bed of sickness or pain” and the fates of her followers and Paul’s declaration that “participation in the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner” (1 Cor 11:27-29) will result in weakness, illness and even death. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 104.

cup. No doubt the Author, with his belief in magic, would have shared Paul's view that the Eucharistic bread and wine had the power not only to bless those who consumed them "worthily," but also to curse those who consumed them "unworthily" (ἀναξίως, 1 Cor 11:27).

Nevertheless, this explanation of the Son of God's attack has four flaws. Firstly, it does not answer Hemer's question of why the attack has more severe consequences for Jezebel's "children" than it does for herself. Secondly, as pointed out by Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, the "weakness" and "death" suffered by anyone who, according to Paul, "eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily" (1 Cor 11:27), was understood by Paul to be spiritual, rather than physical;⁴⁷ the attack upon Jezebel is blatantly physical. Thirdly, the "weakness" and "death" suffered by the "unworthy" Corinthians occur as a direct result of eating food and drinking wine; in contrast, the "weakness" and "death" suffered by the Prophetess, her followers and "children" occur as a direct result of the attack by a man-like warrior-god. Fourthly, the exact words used by Paul to describe what he considers to be the results of consuming the Eucharist "unworthily" are:

[...] because of this, many of you are weak and ill and some are sleeping
(διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοὶ καὶ κοιμῶνται ἱκανοί,
1 Cor 11:30).

However, although, by using one of the textual variants on εἰς κλίνην, it is possible to translate Rev 2:22 as "I am throwing her down into weakness (εἰς ἀσθένειαν), the Son of God does not declare that he will make Jezebel's "children" "fall asleep;" rather, he says, with great emphasis, that he will "kill them with death" (ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ, Rev 2:23).

The Son of God's attack upon the defiant Woman Jezebel contains certain similarities with the fate of the "unworthy" Corinthians. It bears an even closer resemblance to God's "judgement" of the Woman Babylon.

6.4.3. "The Wine Cup of the Fury of His Wrath" (Rev 16:19; cf. 17:16-17; 18:6, 18)

As demonstrated above (cf. §5.11), the portrayal of the drunken Woman Babylon brandishing her cup "full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality" (Rev 17:4) is a parody of the Prophetess presiding over the celebration of the Lord's

⁴⁷ Ramelli, "Spiritual Weakness, Illness, and Death in 1 Corinthians 11:30," 146, 149, 162-63.

Supper. Moreover, God declares that he has given Babylon “the wine cup of the fury of his wrath” (Rev 16:19), and ordered “a double draught” to be mixed in her cup as repayment for her “works” (Rev 18:6);⁴⁸ this results in her experiencing the “plagues” of death (or “pestilence”), mourning and famine (Rev 18:6) and being burned up in fire (Rev 18:8). This scenario may also be interpreted as a magnified reflection of the scenario in which the Prophetess and her fellow-diners drink from the cup containing the wine which she herself mixed and blessed; they experience, as deserved “judgement,” death and mourning and famine and burning fever (cf. Rev 2:22-23). This literary link between the fates of Jezebel and of Babylon reveals an important factor in the attack upon the Prophetess: God’s “judgement” of the Woman Babylon, and its brutal and physical enactment by God’s agents, the Scarlet Beast and its Horns (Rev 17:16-17), looms like a monstrous and distorted shadow over Rev 2:22-23. If the Woman Babylon is a parallel of the Prophetess, the Scarlet Beast a parallel of the Son of God and the Horns a parallel of his henchman Death, then it follows that there must also be a parallel for God; a powerful male who has “judged” the Prophetess, just as God has “judged” Babylon. Babylon, the powerful “woman” and “mother,” is presented as a rival to God (cf. §4.9), and Jezebel, the powerful “real-life” woman prophet and mother, is viewed by the Author as his rival for authority in the churches. It may, therefore, be concluded that the “real-life” parallel of God, who “judges” Babylon, is none other than the Author of Revelation, who “judges” Jezebel.

⁴⁸ For an analysis of the Prophetess’s “works,” see §5.13.4. If, as implied by the parallel in Rev 18:6, the Author is “repaying” the Prophetess in kind, it implies that he is taking revenge upon her, and twice as unpleasantly, for something which she has done to him. It has been argued that the Prophetess was not a practitioner of magic (§5.9.2); there can, therefore, be no question of the Son of God “punishing” Jezebel with evil magic in return for her own use of magic. Cf. Duff, “‘I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,’” 132-33. It is more likely, given the propensity of the Author for the use of magic, that the Prophetess reported him to the authorities, that is, a local representative of the Emperor, for using evil magic. This would have merited his being relegated to Patmos as punishment. See Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*, 102. Alternatively, like Elijah responding to Jezebel’s threat to kill him after his murder of her prophets (1 Kgs 19:1-3), the Author may have fled to Patmos in fear of his life after the Prophetess threatened to have him judicially punished. Simon J. De Vries states: “Jezebel’s message to Elijah is meant as a challenge, perhaps symbolically pitting her name ‘Where is the Prince?’ against his name ‘Yahweh is my God’ [...]. ‘By this time tomorrow’ [...] is a threat formula; cf. Exod 9:18. The threat is a convention because if Jezebel had actually intended to arrest Elijah she would have sent her bailiffs and not her messenger, giving him a day’s head start.” Simon J. De Vries, *1 Kings* (WBC 12; Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985), 235. On the other hand, the Author may have viewed the words of the prayer which the Prophetess was accustomed to recited (Eph 3:14-21) as a magical incantation (cf. §5.13.3) and is paying her back “double” for praying that “Christ may dwell in your hearts” (Eph 3:17) by portraying the Son of God as searching the minds and hearts of the Thyatiran Christians and punishing them in the afterlife (Rev 2:23). Aune notes that “[t]he notion of a “double recompense, which cannot be regarded as just retaliation (Exod 21:24-25; Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:21), is probably based on Jer 16:18 [...] (cf. Isa 40:2).” David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22* (WBC 52C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 992 (the author’s emphasis).

Comment

These parallels are important, because of their implications for the nature of the malevolent magic used in the “throwing down” of Jezebel. The Son of God, as a persona of the Son of Man, who has been conjured into being by John, the representative of the authorial magician, is not an autonomous character. As the Scarlet Beast is the agent who enacts God’s “judgement” of Babylon, so it follows that the Son of God must be the agent who enacts the Author’s “judgement” of the Prophetess. If, as seems increasingly likely, this “judgement” involves the use of malevolent magic, it follows that this malevolent magic is being invoked by the Author.

In other words, Rev 2:22-23 is, in some way, a curse which has been pronounced upon the Prophetess by the Author and is being enacted by the angelic and divine Son of Man in his persona of the Son of God.

6.5. “The Bed of Punishment” (DT 156.10-11): Interpretation of the Son of God’s Attack upon the Prophetess of Thyatira as the Enactment of a Curse

Throughout this study, it has often been noted that the Author has knowledge of magical practices (cf. §3.1.4; 4.3.1; 4.7; 5.9.2). Evidence that he has knowledge of magical incantations is provided by Rev 3:20 which, like Rev 2:22-23, may be interpreted as being related to a celebration of the Last Supper.⁴⁹

6.5.1. “I Am Standing at the Door and Knocking” (Rev 3:20): A Magical Incantation in the Message to Laodicea

Aune considers that the meal which the Son of Man hopes to share with the Householder of Rev 3:20 is a celebration of the Last Supper, and the wording of the verse may allude to either of two different types of “sacral meal” which were common in Graeco-Roman society. The first type is a dinner held in a private house, to which invitations were issued in the name of a deity who would have been understood to be present at the meal, or even its host; Rev 3:20 bears a certain similarity to these invitations.⁵⁰ However, Aune stresses that in Rev 3:20 there is no possibility of interpreting the Son of Man as the host; he is

⁴⁹ Aune points out that “[t]he motif of dining together” in Rev 3:20 has been interpreted as: (1) “a metaphor for intimate fellowship;” (2) “an allusion to the eschatological messianic banquet;” and (3) “a reference to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.” There is, however, “no real justification” for interpreting it in relation to the Lukan parable of the doorkeeper (Lk 12:35-38). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 250-51.

⁵⁰ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 251.

the guest of the Householder.⁵¹ It may also be noted that it is not possible to interpret the Son of Man as a deity in whose name an invitation to dine has been issued; he is knocking on the door for admittance. The second type of “sacral meal” described by Aune is that shared between a magician and a “supernatural revealer,” with which Rev 3:20 has more similarities. In this verse are reflections of those magical incantations which summoned either a “πάρεδρος δαίμων, “assistant god,” whom the magician sought “to attract” and with whom he hoped to “establish a permanent bond,” or “a god or *daimon* for (amongst other things) purposes of divination.” After being summoned, a πάρεδρος δαίμων would thenceforth be bound to the magician in order to serve him, either by doing his bidding or by acting as “a prophetic or oracular medium.”⁵²

Rev 3:20 may thus be interpreted in three ways. Firstly, it may be interpreted as the words of a “supernatural revealer” who, like a πάρεδρος δαίμων summoned by a magician, is describing himself as standing at the door of his house and knocking for admittance so that he may share the “sacral meal” with the magician and do his bidding. Secondly, since in the message to Laodicea the Son of Man’s self-portrayal as the Amen contains an allusion to the male lover of the Song of Songs (Song 5:2; cf. §4.3.4),⁵³ this verse may be interpreted as a love charm, in which the Son of Man, the “supernatural revealer,” in his persona of the Amen, is describing his carrying out of the authorial magician’s instructions to capture the heart of the uncommitted Householder of Laodicea (see Rev 3:15-16), and thus to persuade him to ally himself, or “fall in love” with the Author.⁵⁴ Thirdly, the similarity of Rev 3:20 to the appearance of a man dressed as a

⁵¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 261.

⁵² Aune notes that: “A πάρεδρος δαίμων is a divine being, for the Greeks used the terms δαίμων and θεός interchangeably [...], and the terms δαίμων, θεός, and ἄγγελος are used interchangeably in the magical papyri.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 252. Aune also notes that the formulae for summoning either of these supernatural entities, found throughout the *Greek Magical Papyri*, are essentially the same. Both involve a meal shared by the magician and by the god or *daimon*. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 253. Moreover, Rev 3:20 “has a parallel in Callimachus *Hymn to Apollo* 3: καὶ δὴ πού τὰ θύρετρα καλῶ ποδὶ Φοῖβος ἀράσσει, “It must be that Phoebus, with beautiful foot, kicks at the door.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 260. Both the Son of Man and the Son of God are described as having bronze feet, which may be an allusion to Apollo (Rev 1:15; 2:18; cf. §4.2.1; 4.7.2).

⁵³ See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 250.

⁵⁴ Rev 3:20 bears a similarity to a number of love charms, in which the male magician carries his πάρεδρος δαίμων (a wooden “winged Eros wearing a cloak, with his right foot lifted for a stride and with a hollow back” enclosing a leaf bearing a magical motto, *PGM* 1841-50) to the house of his female beloved in order to bind her and cause her to fall in love with him, for example: *Go late at night to the house [of the woman] you want, knock on her door with the Eros and say: “Lo, she NN resides here; wherefore stand beside her and, after assuming the likeness of the god or daimon whom she worships, say what I propose.” And go to your home, set the table, spread a pure linen cloth, and seasonal flowers, and set the figure upon it. Then make a burnt offering to it and continuously say the spell of invocation. And send him, and he will act without fail* (*PGM* IV.1851-67). Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 253; Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 71.

shepherd who appears to Hermas (*Hermas* 5.1)⁵⁵ suggests that the Son of Man, the supernatural revealer, may be explaining to anyone in Laodicea with a bent for magic that he may be summoned in this way, just as the slave-magician John has done (Rev 1:1, 10, 13; cf. §4.3.1).

6.5.2. *A Present Conflict (Rev 2:22; cf. Rev 3:20)*

Whichever of the three types of incantation described above (§6.5.1) Rev 3:20 is interpreted as resembling, it is always the same in one respect: the verse does not actually contain an incantation; rather it comprises the words of the Son of Man, in the role of “supernatural revealer” or “πάρεδρος δαίμων,” which he speaks in order to describe the way in which he carrying out or enacting the spell pronounced by the magician whose command he is obeying. Moreover, the Son of Man is describing *what he is doing at the present moment*. Similarly, in the message to Thyatira, the Son of Man describes his action of throwing Jezebel down upon a couch as *what he is doing at the present moment*. It is only in Rev 2:22 and 3:20 that the Son of Man neither threatens to undertake an action nor states that he will undertake an action, but actually carries out that action, and he describes these actions by the use of the present indicative (“I am throwing her down,” βάλλω αὐτήν, 2:22; cf. “I am knocking,” κρούω, 3:20).⁵⁶ Furthermore, of all the conflicts contained in the seven messages, the conflict with Jezebel in Rev 2:22 is the only one expressed both in the present tense and with no caveat.⁵⁷ The Son of God is neither threatening Jezebel nor declaring what he is about to do or will do to her. He is describing *what at the present moment he is doing* to her.⁵⁸ Since it is possible to interpret the words of the Amen as the words of a “πάρεδρος δαίμων” reporting that he is carrying out the instructions of a magician, it may also be possible to interpret the words of the Son of God in the same way. As already noted (§6.5.1), there is evidence which points to Rev

⁵⁵ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 253.

⁵⁶ The variant βαλῶ (“I will throw”) is attested as follows: “ \aleph^2 0025 fam 1006 fam 1611¹⁶¹¹ 2050. 2329 2351 it^{gig} t vg^{c1} cop^{sa} Tertullian.” Aune states that βάλλω is “a futuristic present, a judgment confirmed by the fact that the fut. ind. verb ἀποκτενῶ, “I will kill,” is used in v 23.” Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 198. Nevertheless, it remains that in the text the Son of God says firmly, “I am throwing” in the present indicative. Whichever tense is preferred, there is an inevitability about the attack upon Jezebel. It cannot be prevented since she has refused to “repent.”

⁵⁷ Cf. the threats in Rev 2:5, 16, 22 (against Jezebel’s “lovers”); 3:3 and the warnings of future action in Rev 2:10, 23; 3:9, 16.

⁵⁸ Similarly, he is currently throwing Jezebel’s “lovers” into great distress (βάλλω [...] τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ’ αὐτῆς). The two actions, which share a verb, are connected. See Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 198. However, Jezebel’s “lovers” have a chance to escape from this distress if they turn away from her (ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς). In contrast, the Son of God declares that he *will* kill Jezebel’s “children” (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ, Rev 2:23; cf. 3:9).

3:20 containing a magical incantation consisting of the Son of Man, in his persona of the Amen, enacting a love spell. In the message to Thyatira, the Son of God is a divine being who is, amongst other things, a syncretism of Apollo and Anubis, both of which deities were favourites of magicians in their performance of magical spells (cf. §4.7.1; 4.8). There is a strong possibility that the Son of Man has been conjured up by the authorial magician, not only to cause the Householder of Laodicea to “fall in love” with him, but also to cause harm to and to silence the Prophetess of Thyatira.

If Rev 2:22-23 does indeed contain the report of the enactment of a magical spell, it is certainly not a love charm. However, as pointed out by Duff, illness was often perceived to be the result of the “evil eye;”⁵⁹ as affirmed in the foregoing section, there is textual evidence not only that magic is being used in the Son of God’s attack, but that that the attack is being directed by the Author, who is using the Son of God as his agent. If, therefore, the Son of God’s attack upon Jezebel is interpreted as an attempt to cause her to fall ill by means of the use of magic, it should be understood in terms of the Son of God’s enactment of a curse which has been pronounced by the Author.

Several of the women with whom the Prophetess has been compared are silenced, and sometimes murdered, by means of a curse pronounced upon them by elite males (cf. §5.6; 5.7. 5.12.2). These males are either characters in the stories which feature the women or are the narrators of the stories.

6.5.3. *Cursed Women (Numbers 12; 1 Kgs 21:23-24; 2 Kgs 9:10, 30-37; Sir 23:22-27; Acts 5:7-11)*

There are several important features of these examples of cursed women, who comprise: the Prophetess Miriam (Numbers 12); Queen Jizebul of Israel (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:10, 30-37); the Woman with illegitimate children of Sirach 23 (Sir 23:22-27); and the early Christian woman Sapphira (Acts 5:7-11). The women are all described differently, are of widely differing social status and have differing amounts of power. Miriam is a prophetess, who vies for power with her brother Aaron and with Moses. Jizebul is a queen, a wealthy widow with wide-ranging political power, the highest possible status for a woman at that time. The Woman of Sirach 23 is defined only as an unfaithful wife; if she has any power at all, it is only her sexual attractiveness. Sapphira is a married

⁵⁹ Duff, “I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve,” 121-22.

woman of substance. Nor is the status of the woman an indicator of the viciousness with which she is portrayed, either by the author or narrator or by a male in the text. Since she is far and away the most powerful of the four women, it may seem appropriate for Jizebul to be cursed not only by Elijah (1 Kgs 21:23), but also by his disciple Elisha via by one of the “sons of the prophets” (2 Kgs 9:1-10) and for the warrior Jehu, who carries out the curse, to refer to her as “that cursed woman” (2 Kgs 9:34). However, the Woman of Sirach 23 has little if no power and yet she is not only cursed by the author of Sirach through the agency of members of the community to which she belongs (Sir 23:24), but is further condemned by him as leaving behind “an accursed memory” (Sir 23:26). Only Jizebul and the Woman of Sirach 23 are explicitly described as mothers; their children are also cursed (1 Kgs 21:21-24; 2 Kgs 9:21-26; Sir 23:24-25).⁶⁰

The one connecting theme which unites all four women, and which is the catalyst for them to be cursed, is that each one, however powerful or powerless, explicitly challenges the authority of a male who features in the same text, and implicitly challenges the authority of the male deity whom he worships, both of whom have the approval of its author or narrator. In the case of Miriam this is the prophet Moses and implicitly the LORD (Num 12:1-2, 6-9); in the case of Jizebul it is both the prophet Elijah and Yahweh (1 Kgs 21:23);⁶¹ in the case of the Woman of Sirach 23 it is both the woman’s husband and the Most High (Sir 23:23); and in the case of Sapphira it is Peter and the Spirit of the Lord (Acts 5:8-9).

The various curses pronounced upon the four women have two features which are of interest to the present study. The first feature is that, for a curse to be effective, it need not be pronounced in the presence or hearing of the victim. Elijah, according to the text of 1 Kings, prudently keeps a great distance between himself and Jizebul (see, especially, 1 Kgs 19:1-3) and he curses her from Naboth’s vineyard in Jezreel while she, presumably, is in the palace (1 Kgs 21:17-18).⁶² This cursing from a distance is also a feature of Paul’s curse, which he pronounces upon the Corinthian accused of “sexual immorality” (1 Cor 5:3; cf. §6.5.5). It is also true of Ahijah’s cursing of King Jeroboam and of his son Abijah (1 Kgs 14:7-13). The second feature is that, in three cases, the curse

⁶⁰ Ahab’s and Jizebul’s son Joram (2 Kgs 8:16; 9:22) is also cursed to death by Elijah (1 Kgs 21:21-22, 24), but because of his father’s behaviour (1 Kgs 21:20), not that of his mother.

⁶¹ Furthermore, the Baal- and Asherah-worshipping Jizebul is accused of enticing Ahab into the worship of Baal (1 Kgs 16:31-33; 21:25-26).

⁶² Tribble points out that Jizebul and Elijah “never speak face-to-face, nor do they even meet.” Phyllis Tribble, “The Odd Couple,” 178; see, also, 174.

is actually carried out through the agency of a third party: Jizebul is cursed by Elijah (1 Kgs 21:23), but the curse is carried out through the agency of Jehu (2 Kgs 9:30-37); the Woman of Sirach 23 is cursed by the text's author, but the curse is carried out through the agency of the assembly (Sir 23:23-26); and Sapphira is cursed by Paul, but the curse is carried out through the agency of the young men (Acts 5:9-10). Again, this feature is found in the cursing of Abijah by Ahijah; the curse is, presumably unwillingly, carried out through the agency of the boy's mother (1 Kgs 14:12, 17). Moreover, in the cases both of the mother of Abijah and of the young men of Acts, it is their feet which literally bring the curse into the house where the victim is situated (1 Kgs 14:12, 17; Acts 5:9).

All the various features of the above examples of accounts of curses pronounced upon females by authorial or otherwise authoritative males are found in the account of the attack upon Jezebel. She is a prophetess, a woman of some wealth, who has power over men and has challenged the authority of a male prophet. She is accused by the Son of Man, representing the view of the Author, and via the narrator John, of worshipping, and leading her followers, into the worship of a deity which is not that of the author, and whose divine authority she refuses to acknowledge. In the eyes of the Author, the Prophetess is challenging both his authority and that of his god. The Author's attack upon Jezebel and her children is enacted in her house, through the agency of the Son of God, he of the bronzed feet.⁶³

The Author of Revelation wishes comparison to be made between the Prophetess of Thyatira and Queen Jizebul, and there are obvious similarities in the attacks upon them. However, it is the cursing of Sapphira by Peter which bears the most similarities with the account of the attack upon the Prophetess.

6.5.4. *Treading a Curse into the House: The Mother of Abijah, Peter's "Young Men" and the Son of God (1 Kgs 14:1-18; Acts 5:1-11; Rev 2:18, 22)*

The circumstances of the cursing of Sapphira occur when Peter discovers that she and her husband Ananias have reneged upon their promise to hand over all the profits from the sale of some land to the Apostles (Acts 5:1-4). Peter accuses Ananias of lying, at

⁶³ Women, of course, are not the only victims of curses. For example, Ahab and his descendants are cursed along with Jizebul (1 Kgs 21:17-24) and in Acts 13:6-12 Paul curses Elymas with blindness (Acts 13:6-12). See Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 415. Strangely enough, it is only men who are portrayed as pronouncing curses.

which point he falls down dead and his body is carried out to be buried by some young men (Acts 5:5-6). When Sapphira, unaware of her husband's fate, comes in, Peter asks her for how much the land was sold, and she confirms the price given by her husband (Acts 5:7-8). Peter replies, "Look, the feet of those who buried your husband are at the door and they will carry you out" (Acts 5:9). Sapphira immediately falls down at Peter's feet and dies. She too is carried out and buried by the young men, and the whole church and everyone who hears about these events are very frightened (Acts 5:10-11). Hans Conzelmann notes that this account "derives from conceptions of corporate and magical power."⁶⁴ Aune, meanwhile, comments that Sapphira's death is "preceded by a curse [...] which becomes immediately effective." Ananias, however, is not cursed.⁶⁵

There are seven similarities between the assault upon Jezebel and the cursing of Sapphira: (1) Both women are accused of offending a divine male (Acts 5:9; Rev 2:20). In the eyes of the authors of Acts and Revelation these women are (2) threatening the cohesion of the community and its standing in the eyes of outsiders and (3) challenging the authority of Peter and the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:9) and that of the Author of Revelation and the Son of God (Rev 2:20). (4) Sapphira is cursed by Peter through the agency of the return of the young men who buried her husband; she immediately falls down at his feet and dies (Acts 5:9-10), and Jezebel is verbally attacked by the Author of Revelation through the agency of the Son of God, who throws her down onto a couch (Rev 2:22-23). (5) Neither woman is subordinate to a man. Although she is married, Sapphira has not been commanded or coerced into going along with her husband's plan; they seem to have contrived it together (Acts 5:1-2, 8-9); meanwhile, Jezebel appears to be without a husband and the Angel of the Church, whom the Author of Revelation thinks should have authority over her, allows her to act as she thinks best (Rev 2:20). (6) Both women speak: the words uttered by Sapphira in answer to Peter's asking her to confirm that they sold the land "for so much" are given: ἡ δὲ εἶπεν· ναί, τοσούτου (And she said, "Yes, for so much," Acts 5:8); Jezebel reportedly says that she is a prophetess (ἡ λέγουσα ἑαυτὴν προφῆτιν, Rev 2:20). Finally (7), in both stories the feet of the agents of the attack are emphasised (Acts 5:9-10; Rev 2:18).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 38.

⁶⁵ Aune states: "In the story of Ananias and Sapphira, Peter presides over the death of Ananias (Acts 5:5), who dies without the invocation of a curse, while the death of his wife Sapphira (5:10) is preceded by a curse (5:9) which becomes immediately effective." Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 415.

⁶⁶ Peter begins his curse by calling Sapphira's attention either to the sight or to the sound of the feet of the young men and, upon either seeing their feet coming through the door or hearing their footsteps, she falls

As already noted (§6.5.3), the association of feet with the cursing of Sapphira echoes the story of the cursing of Abijah. When his son falls ill, King Jeroboam sends his unnamed wife for help to the Prophet Ahijah of Shiloh (1 Kgs 14:1-4). The Prophet tells the Wife of Jeroboam that, because the king has not kept the commandments of the LORD, but has done evil and made images of other gods, the LORD will curse the house of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 14:7-16). In particular, he informs the unfortunate mother that, when she returns to her house and her feet enter the city, their son will die (1 Kgs 14:12).⁶⁷ The Wife of Jeroboam is then described as literally treading this curse into the house in which the sick boy is languishing and thus being the agent of the death of her own son:

As she came to the threshold of the house, the child died (1 Kgs 14:17).

This emphasis that it is the Wife of Jeroboam's feet which tread the curse upon her son into the house is echoed in the account of Peter's cursing of Sapphira:

"Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Immediately she fell down at his [Peter's] feet and expired (Acts 5:9-10).

Similarly, the Son of God breaks into Jezebel's house in order to attack her and her children (Rev 2:22-23), and in his description emphasis is put upon his feet (Rev 2:18).

Duff argues that the Son of God is using his magical flaming eyes to fell Jezebel.⁶⁸ However, the Son of God also has burnished bronze feet and, like both the Wife of Jeroboam and the young men in the service of Peter, may well be treading a curse into Jezebel's house. Moreover, the Son of God is not a completely autonomous character (cf. §4.Introduction), but is a persona of the divine Son of Man, who has been conjured into being by the slave-magician John, the character in which the Author of Revelation puts himself into the text (cf. §2.4). Just as the Wife of Jeroboam is the presumably unwilling agent of the curse pronounced upon her child Abijah by Ahijah, and just as the "young men" are the apparently willing agents of the curse pronounced upon Sapphira by Peter, the Son of God is the enthusiastic agent of a curse pronounced upon Jezebel and her "children" by the Author of Revelation.

down dead at his own feet (Acts 5:9-10). In his self-description as the Son of God, the Son of Man draws attention to two parts of his anatomy: his eyes and his feet (Rev 2:18).

⁶⁷ Attention is called to the feet of the Wife of Jeroboam when she comes in at the door of Ahijah's house (1 Kgs 14:6).

⁶⁸ Duff, "I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve," 118, 132-33.

It may seem speculative to interpret the Son of God's attack upon the Woman Jezebel as the enactment of a curse. However, there is an instance of a curse being pronounced in the New Testament which bears a striking resemblance to the assault upon Jezebel. This is found in Paul's pronouncement of a curse upon a man accused of having a sexual relationship with his father's wife in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-5).

6.5.5. *Cursing Jezebel (Rev 2:22; cf. Sir 23:22-27; 1 Cor 5:1-5; 1 Tim 1:19-20; Rev 2:23; 3:20; DT 156.2-4, 7-12, 31-36; PGM IV.3046-47)*

It has already been noted that there is a similarity between the slanderous accusation of "sexual immorality" made against Jezebel and the possibly malicious and unfounded accusation made against a member of the Corinthian church (1 Cor 5:1; cf. §3.3). Paul expresses horror that the members of the community do not appear to be concerned, and commands them to expel this man from the Christian community: "Let him who has done this deed be removed from among you" (1 Cor 5:2). Similarly, the Son of God berates the Angel of the Church in Thyatira for allowing Jezebel to hold the position of Prophetess in the community, and threatens dire consequences upon those who follow her teaching, unless they repudiate her "works" (Rev 2:20, 22).

Paul "pronounces judgement" upon the Corinthian as follows:

For I, though absent in body, am present in spirit; as if present, I have already pronounced judgement upon him who has perpetrated this thing, in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you must hand over this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:3-5).⁶⁹

This "judgement" has three similarities with the cursing of the Woman of Sirach; firstly, like the unnamed man in Corinth, the unnamed woman of Sirach 23 is "judged" by the author of the text, but her "punishment" is to be carried out by members of the community to which she belongs (Sir 23:24); secondly, like the "judgement" pronounced by the Author of Sirach, the "judgement" pronounced by Paul is a curse;⁷⁰ and thirdly,

⁶⁹ Conzelmann draws attention to the different possible ways of constructing the translation of 1 Cor 5:3-4. Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; trans. James W. Leitch; Philadelphia; Fortress, 1975), 97.

⁷⁰ As already noted (§6.5.3), cursing someone from a distance through the agency of a third party is also a feature of Ahijah's cursing of Abijah through the agency of the boy's mother (1 Kgs 14:12) and Elijah's cursing of Jizebul through the agency of Jehu (1 Kgs 21:23; 2 Kgs 9:33).

the curse is pronounced by an authorial magician who is not present. There is also a marked similarity between Paul's "judgement" of the Corinthian and God's "judgement" of Babylon:

"And the Ten Horns which you saw and the Beast, they will hate the Whore and they will make her desolate and naked, and they will devour her flesh and burn her up with fire" (Rev 17:16).

Conzelmann contends that this is "a judicial act of a sacral and pneumatic kind."⁷¹ However, Morton Smith considers that Paul's curse is a magical incantation. Smith notes: "Such sending of spirits and giving people over to them was often attributed to magicians and much feared."⁷² He also notes the similarity of Paul's language in 1 Cor 5:3-5 to a spell which is an example of a *Defixio*, a plea to "underworld gods" for the "damage or destruction" of those whose names are mentioned.⁷³

*Eulamon, receive [him – the victim]. Osiris, Osiris Mnevis, Phre ... [and other underworld gods] inasmuch as I give over to you Adeodatus the son of Cresconia, I ask you to punish [him] in the bed of punishment ... and bind him down from the present day and hour. Now, now! Quick, quick! (DT 156.2-4, 7-12, 31-36).*⁷⁴

Similarly, it may also be argued that Peter sets himself up as a judge-like figure in his condemnation and cursing of Sapphira; the actual "judgement," or curse, is enacted by the "young men" (Acts 5:9-10). There is certainly a difference between these two examples in that the Son of God declares that it is he who is both the judge (ὁ ἐραυνῶν νεφροῦς καὶ καρδίας, "He who searches hearts and minds," Rev 2:23) and the agent of that "judgement." However, the Son of God is a supernatural figure resembling Anubis, who was not only a judge, but was also known as "an enforcer of curses," and could be

⁷¹ Conzelmann states: "The destruction of the flesh" pronounced by Paul (1 Cor 5:5) "can hardly mean anything else but death." He continues: "Here is not a case of mere exclusion from the church, but of a dynamistic ceremony." By being excluded from membership of the body of Christ, "the accursed man" is "thrust [...] into the realm of wrath." Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 97-98.

⁷² Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), 110.

⁷³ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 110.

⁷⁴ The Greek reads: Εὐλάμων κατέχει Οὐσίρι Οὐσίρι Μνε Φρι [...] εἶνα ὡσπερ ὑμῖν παραδείδω Ἀδευδάτον τὸν υἱὸν Κρησκωνίας, ἀξιῶ ὑμας εἶνα κατὰ κράβατον τιμορίας τιμωρήσητε [...] καὶ συνδήσητε αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας καὶ ὥρας, ἦδη ἦδη ταχύ ταχύ. Augustus Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae quotquot innotuerunt: tam in Graecis orientis quam in totius occidentis partibus praetor Atticas in "Corpore Inscriptionum Atticarum" editas* (Paris: Fontemoing, 1904), 212-13. The translation is Smith's. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 110 (see also note on 196). The format is mine. In his review, W.H.D. Rouse describes the *Defixionum tabellae* as "a complete collection of *Defixiones*," edited with notes and "admirable indices" by Audollent. Rouse points to the "social and psychological" interest of the collection and states: "[...] pathetic indeed it is to read of all these petty spites and ambitions of men long since dead." W.H.D. Rouse, "Audollent's *Defixionum Tabulae*," *The Classical Review* 20, 4 (1906): 236.

summoned from the Underworld to enact the spell pronounced by a magician;⁷⁵ just so, it may be argued, the Son of Man in his persona of the Son of God is being summoned from the depths of Revelation's cosmos to enact the spell or "judgement" pronounced by the authorial magician upon the Prophetess of Thyatira and to "punish her in the bed of punishment" (*DT* 156; cf. Rev 2:22).⁷⁶

The Son of God's words, "Behold, I am throwing her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great physical suffering, and I will strike her children dead with the help of Death" (Rev 2:22-23) may be interpreted as being similar to a curse. However, as pointed out by Aune, the "two characteristic features" both of "magical prayers" and of "formulas of cursing" are "the use of imperatives" and "the lavish use of threats."⁷⁷ The Son of Man litters his diatribes in the messages to the Seven Churches with threats (Rev 2:5, 16, 22 (against Jezebel's followers); 3:3), but no imperative verbs are used. However, as noted above (§6.5.2), the conflict between him and Jezebel is currently taking place and he is confident that the conflict between him and her "children" will take place; it is as if the Son of God is providing a running commentary on his enactment of the curse pronounced upon Jezebel and her "children" by the Author of Revelation. Thus, by describing what he is doing to Jezebel, the Son of God is responding to the Author's unwritten curse.⁷⁸

That magical language is present in the message to Thyatira is noted by Aune, who draws attention to the similarity between the Son of God's declaration that "I am He Who Searches Hearts and Minds" and the god addressed in *PGM* IV.3046-47, which he describes as "a magical procedure possibly of Jewish origin:"⁷⁹

"[...] *I conjure you by god, light-bearing, unconquerable, who knows what is in the heart of every living being [...].*"⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Pinch, *Handbook of Egyptian Mythology*, 104-105. Examples of the summoning of Anubis, holder of the keys to Hades, are found in *PGM* IV.340 and 1467. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 44, 66.

⁷⁶ It may be thought that, if indeed Rev 2:22-23 constitutes a curse pronounced by the Author of Revelation upon the Prophetess of Thyatira, the similarity with Paul's "judgement" of the Corinthian is dependent upon the accusations of "sexual immorality" made upon the objects of the two "judgements" (1 Cor 5:1; Rev 2:21). However, as pointed out by Smith, the curse pronounced by Paul is also echoed in the First Letter to Timothy in a completely different context. Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 110. The author of 1 Timothy declares that he has cursed some people who have "turned their backs on their good conscience" and thus "have made a shipwreck of their faith" (1 Tim 1:19). These, the author says, "I have delivered to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Tim 1:20).

⁷⁷ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 415.

⁷⁸ Similarly, in his persona of Holy and True (Rev 3:7), the Son of Man cries "I am coming quickly" (ἔρχομαι ταχύ, Rev 3:11), perhaps in response to the Author's unwritten magical command "Now, now! Quick, quick!" (ἦδη, ἦδη, ταχύ ταχύ; cf. §4.3.1).

⁷⁹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 206.

⁸⁰ Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri*, 96.

In his commentary on ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτήν εἰς κλίνην (Rev 2:22), Aune notes that this is the Greek form of “a Hebrew idiom that means “to cast upon a bed of illness,” i.e., to punish someone with various forms of sickness.” He compares it with a phrase from “a complex curse” which is written on “a Jewish amulet from the Cairo Geniza (TS K1.42, lines 31-33),” which reads as follows:

“[...] *may they fall into bed with sickness* [יפול במטה בחדירה].”⁸¹

Aune also draws attention to a curse from the sixth century C.E., which “appeals to the Holy God, Gabriel, and Michael to

“[...] *strike down Philadelphie; and her children, lord lord lord God God, strike them down with her*” (Daniel-Malomini, *Supplementum Magicum* 2:61, lines 1-3).”⁸²

It may, therefore, be concluded that, in Rev 2:22-23, the Son of God is describing his enactment of the curse pronounced upon the Prophetess of Thyatira by the Author of Revelation, which may have been as follows:

“I have pronounced judgement upon “Jezebel,” and I give her over to you, Son of Man, Son of God, fiery-eyed, bronze-footed, He who Searches hearts and minds, unconquerable, for the destruction of the flesh. I ask you to punish her in the bed of punishment and to bind her down from the present day and hour. Strike down “Jezebel,” may she fall into bed with sickness; and strike down her children, lord lord God, strike them down with her. Now, now! Quick, quick!”

6.5.6. *The Author of the Book of Revelation as Prophet-Magician*

The Author of Revelation was remarkably familiar with magical formulae and accoutrements and did not hesitate to make use of curses (Rev 22:18-19). Aune, however, is adamant that the Author uses undeniably magical formulae “in such a way that the validity of the religious and magical assumptions behind them are implicitly denied.” Moreover, the Author’s use of magical terms is part of “an extensive and creative antimagical polemic.”⁸³ Aune thinks it probable that the Author’s use of this “polemic”

⁸¹ Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 205.

⁸² Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 206.

⁸³ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 367. The *Shepherd of Hermas* is another text whose author “has been profoundly affected by notions associated with Hellenistic revelatory magic.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 188-89.

was because those who opposed him “stood in the tradition of Hellenistic revelatory magic.”⁸⁴

This study, however, maintains that the Author had a wide-ranging knowledge of magic, believed in the power of magical spells and had no hesitation in using them to summon the spirit of Jesus in order to gain revelation (Rev 1:1), to curse the woman whom he viewed as his prophetic rival (Rev 2:22-23) and in an attempt to bind the wavering Laodicean Christians to the risen Jesus (Rev 3:20).

Rodney Lawrence Thomas points out that the use of language and imagery associated with the practice of magic by the Author of Revelation seems strange and unreasonable in one who is so judgemental both of φαρμακεία and of those associated with it (Rev 9:21; 18:23; 21:8; 22:15).⁸⁵ It is not unusual for those who practise magic to condemn its practice by others; for example Peter, who considered himself to be under the guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, cursed Sapphira (Acts 5:9), and Paul, also described as being possessed by the Holy Spirit, cursed not only the Corinthian, but also Elymas the Magician (Acts 13:8-11; 1 Cor 5:3-5). What is condemned is not the use of supernatural powers, but the spirit, god or demon which the magician or prophet has summoned or by which he or she is possessed (see, for example Acts 16:16-18).⁸⁶ For one with the world view of the Author, the world was full of spirits, gods and demons, and φάρμακον (Rev 9:21), φαρμακεία (Rev 18:23) and φαρμακος (Rev 21:8; 22:15) were the pejorative words used of those persons who prophesied or performed miraculous acts by the power of a supernatural being other than his god, and were either his rivals and/or refused to bow down to his vision of the risen Jesus as the Messiah of Revelation. As the examples of the prophets Ahijah, Elijah, Peter and Paul demonstrate, it is deemed acceptable by them and/or by those who write about them to use malevolent magic to harm or even to kill those who are their enemies or whom have behaved in ways which they deem to be unacceptable to their gods.

In order to be effective, however, malevolent magic may rely upon supplementary action.

⁸⁴ Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 189. Aune identifies four different kinds of spells in the Greek Magical Papyri: (1) “protective and apotropaic;” (2) “aggressive and malevolent;” (3) “love magic,” and (4) “revelatory magic.” Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 349.

⁸⁵ Thomas, *Magical Motifs*, 2-3, 200. See, also, Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic*, 367

⁸⁶ In this story, Paul exorcises a slave girl of a spirit of prophecy, despite it causing her to declare that he and his companions are “slaves” of the Most High God, because her inspiration comes from Apollo.

6.5.7. “A Mixed Cup of Poisons” (Rev 2:22-24; cf. Num 5:11-31; Rev 16:14; 18:6; T. Ab. (A) 17:16)

Janet S. Everhart rightly points out that Jehu’s successful enactment of the curse pronounced by Elijah upon Jizebul relies heavily upon the collusion and betrayal of “two or three eunuchs,” who were trusted members of her household (2 Kgs 9:32). These eunuchs appear either to have transferred their allegiance to or to have been bribed by Jehu to push Jizebul out of the window (2 Kgs 9:33).⁸⁷ In Revelation God’s “people” (ὁ λαός μου, Rev 18:4) are commanded to “repay” the Woman Babylon “double” and to “mix for her a double draught in the cup which she mixed” (Rev 18:6); in other words, these agents of God’s vengeance are commanded by him to mix into Babylon’s cup of wine a poisonous substance which will cause her to suffer “death and mourning and famine and being burned up in fire” (Rev 18:8). In this verse is an echo of the *Sotah*, a “ritual” which involves forcing a woman accused by her husband, possibly on no grounds at all, of infidelity, to be humiliated by drinking a “magical brew” prepared by a priest in order to determine her “innocence” or “guilt” (Num 5:11-31). If she is “innocent,” nothing will happen to her; if she is “guilty,” the “noxious concoction” will cause her to suffer grievous damage to her reproductive organs and to become barren;⁸⁸ Bach wonders whether the *Sotah* is “a divine forerunner of [...] a chemically induced abortion.”⁸⁹ By means of literary allusion in his portrayal of the “sexually-immoral” and “adulterous” Jezebel, the Author thus infers that, although his *Defixio* might not cause Jezebel to be “thrown down” with sickness upon her couch, a dose of a “magical brew” associated with divine “judgement,” but essentially poison, slipped into her cup will definitely ensure that this happens; it will also ensure that she “miscarries” any prophetic “children” which she may be carrying.

Like Death in the *Testament of Abraham* (Recension A), the Son of God may be envisioned as hypostatized, demonic “Death,”⁹⁰ in which persona he has discarded “all

⁸⁷ Janet S. Everhart comments: “[...] the eunuchs’ willingness to throw Jezebel into the street might represent a prearrangement between Jehu and the court officials in Jezreel.” Janet S. Everhart, “Jezebel: Framed by Eunuchs?” in *CBQ* 72.4 (2010), 698.

⁸⁸ Alice Bach, “Good to the Last Drop: Viewing the Sotah (Numbers 5.11-31) as the Glass Half Empty and Wondering How to View it Half Full,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum and David J.A. Clines; JSOTSup 143; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 33-34, 39, 52.

⁸⁹ Bach, “Good to the Last Drop,” 31.

⁹⁰ “Death,” as opposed to “the second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8), appears fourteen times in Revelation (Rev 1:18; 2:10, 23; 6:8 (twice); 9:6 (twice); 12:11; 13:3, 12; 18:8; 20:13, 14; 21:4). Aune considers that Death is “personified” in Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 401. Lupieri states that “Death and Hades are personified, or rather hypostatized as superhuman and therefore angelic figures.” Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 112. Lupieri also considers that the Son of

the bloom of youth and beauty and all the glory and the sunlike form which he had worn” towards “the righteous” (*T. Ab. (A)* 17:7, 12; cf. Rev 2:18) and dons his “robe of tyranny,” while in appearance he becomes “more ferocious than any kind of wild beast” “with a fierce and merciless look” with which to confront “sinners” (*T. Ab. (A)* 17:8, 9, 13; cf. Rev 2:18, 22-23).⁹¹ While Abraham languishes upon his couch (ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης αὐτοῦ, *T. Ab. (A)* 17:2), Death demonstrates the various ways in which he appears, the last of which is “a mixed cup of poisons” (ποτήριον μεμεστωμένον φαρμάκων, *T. Ab. (A)* 17:16).

The chapter concludes:

And from the great bitterness and ferocity, male and female servants [παῖδες καὶ παιδίσκαι], numbering about seven thousand, died. And the righteous Abraham [ὁ δίκαιος Ἀβραάμ] entered the depression of death, so that his spirit failed (T. Ab. (A) 17:18-19).

By substituting “Jezebel” for “Abraham” in the above passage and discounting the improbable number of Abraham’s slaves, these two verses might well be tacked onto Rev 2:22-23. The Son of God is being portrayed in Rev 2:22-23 as the personification of bitter and ferocious Death; and he comes “a mixed cup of poisons” with which to make Jezebel ill, to cause her “lovers” suffering and to kill her “children.”

There is no reason to suppose that the Author does not supplement his curse upon Jezebel by enlisting the help of one or more of her followers, who may have secretly transferred their allegiance to the Author or returned to the household of the Son of God (see Rev 2:20, 24). The addition of a phial of “magical” poisons (φαρμάκων) to Jezebel’s wine cup would not be noticed in the crowded and noisy dining room (cf. 1 Cor 14:26-33), and would ensure that the Author’s reputation both as a prophet and as a magician, like that of Elijah, was enhanced, while that of the Prophetess, whose illness would be ascribed by her enemies to God’s “judgement,” would be besmirched.

God states that he will kill Jezebel’s “children” “[...] perhaps, with the help of Death, already mentioned in 1:18.” Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John*, 122-23. Frankfurter notes that Death is a “minor demon” like “the ancient Canaanite drought-monster Mot, who is portrayed as “an agent of divine wrath” in Rev 6:7-8. Frankfurter, “The Revelation to John,” 483.

⁹¹ The *Testament of Abraham*, which dates from the first to second centuries C.E. “is regarded as having been originally written in Greek” and “its most likely place of origin is Egypt.” E.P. Sanders, “*Testament of Abraham*,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 875. E.P. Sanders comments that “the soteriology of [Recension] A is simple: If sins not repented of or punished by premature death prior to the judgment outweigh or outnumber righteous deeds, the soul is sentenced to punishment. If righteous deeds predominate, the soul goes to life.” Sanders, “*Testament of Abraham*,” 878. The similarity both with Rev 2:23 and with the allusion contained therein of the Son of God as Anubis weighing a dead person’s heart on his scales (cf. §4.7) immediately comes to mind.

Comment

Jizebul, after whom the Prophetess of Thyatira is named, is cursed by Elijah (1 Kgs 21:23; cf. 2 Kgs 9:10) and the curse is carried out through the agency of Jehu (2 Kgs 9:29-37). Sapphira, an early Christian woman, is cursed by Peter through the agency of the young men (Acts 5:9). The man accused of “sexual immorality” in Corinth is cursed by Paul through the agency of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:3-4). The words used by the Son of God to describe what he is doing to Jezebel bear a startling resemblance to a number of ancient curses. Rev 3:20 may well be the description by the divine being summoned by the Author of Revelation to perform a love spell. Taking all these elements into consideration, it may be concluded that Rev 2:22-23 is the description of the enactment of the curse placed upon the Prophetess of Thyatira and her followers by the Author of Revelation, who has a wide-ranging knowledge of magic, through the agency of the Son of God, the divine being whom he has summoned to do his bidding.

As in the message to Thyatira, in which an authoritative figure is brought to her bed by a sickness caused by a divinity assisted by Death, in the *Testament of Abraham (A)*, an authoritative figure is brought to his couch by a sickness caused by Death, which his servants find more difficult to combat than he does himself (*T. Ab. (A)* 17:18-19). Abraham’s protection against Death consists of his righteousness and generous hospitality (*T. Ab. (A)* 17:7, 19), and it has been demonstrated that the Prophetess is also characterised by a high degree of personal morality, piety and charity, as well as being known for her generosity and hospitality (cf. §5.2). It is, therefore, possible that another answer to Hemer’s question is that the members of Jezebel’s prophetic school (τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, Rev 2:23), whose Christian faith is more “childlike” than hers (Rev 2:20; cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3), have fewer spiritual defences against malignant magic than the “righteous” and hospitable Prophetess (Rev 2:22-23).

There is a third and final way of interpreting the Son of God’s, and by extension the Author’s, attack upon the Woman Jezebel. This interpretation views his “throwing down” of Jezebel as an action which symbolises the elite male character’s throwing of the woman who has assumed too much (male) authority down the gender hierarchy to the place where she belongs: on a bed.

6.6. “I Am Throwing Her Down” (Rev 2:22): Interpretation of the Son of God’s Attack upon Jezebel within Revelation’s Hierarchy of Gender and Status

Meeks points out that churches were comprised of “a mixture of social levels” and people of varying degrees of status. These included “wealthy, independent women;” they also included slaves.⁹² Women with a relative degree of wealth, especially if they were house-owners, were able to command a certain amount of status and authority in the early churches (cf. §5.2). They were tolerated as long as they in no way undermined the status of male leaders. The example of Mary, the mother of John Mark, provides a prime example of the treatment to be expected by women who are perceived to overstep the parameters of their authority and, in so doing, to challenge the superiority of a male.

6.6.1. *Ridiculing a Woman of High Status in the Early Church: The Presentation of Mary, the Mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12-17)*

Mary, the owner of a house in Jerusalem and the head of the house church which meets within its walls, features in an amusing story in Acts 12:12-17.⁹³ In this story, Mary continues to lead members of the assembly praying for Peter’s release from prison (Acts 12:12) whilst, unbeknownst to them, he has been rescued by an angel (Acts 12:7-10) and is knocking on the gate of the house for admittance (Acts 12:12-13). Upon realising his identity, Mary’s slave Rhoda omits to unlock the gate and leaves Peter outside in the street whilst she hurries to inform her disbelieving mistress and her companions (Acts 12:13-15); it is some time before he is admitted and is able to inform them of what has happened (Acts 12:16-17).⁹⁴

As rightly pointed out by Kathy Chambers, however amusing this story, it makes a serious point concerning the status of females in the church.⁹⁵ In its reversal of the relative status of Mary and her slave, Rhoda, the norms of gender and status construction

⁹² Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 73.

⁹³ Unlike Jezebel, Mary is identified in relation to, and is thus implicitly subservient to, a man, her son John Mark (Acts 12:12). However, it is Mary, not her son, who is both the owner of the house in Jerusalem and the head of the house church which meets within its walls (Acts 12:12). Apart from being a useful device by which to identify Mary, John Mark does not feature in the story at all.

⁹⁴ That Mary owns a house with a gate (Acts 12:13-14), not just a door onto the street, implies that she lives in a high-status neighbourhood. Kathy Chambers notes that the text does not explicitly state that Rhoda is Mary’s slave, but since the action takes place in her house, it is implied. Kathy Chambers, ““Knock, Knock – Who’s There?”: Acts 12.6-17 as a Comedy of Errors,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff; London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 93.

⁹⁵ Chambers notes that this story makes a serious challenge of “the dominant cultural construction of status and gender, of ecclesial authority, slaves, and women.” Chambers, ““Knock, Knock – Who’s There?”” 89.

are certainly turned topsy-turvy. Arguably, however, this is done only to shore up Peter's male authority, recently undermined by his "feminising" incarceration (Acts 12:1-6) and his further ridiculing by being left standing in the street (Acts 12:14).⁹⁶

In the view of the author of Luke-Acts, a woman was able to have authority and status in the church comparable with those that were acceptable for a woman in wider Graeco-Roman society. Thus a Christian woman's authority and status were centred upon the home and upon her submission to the higher status and authority of a man, either her husband and/or a male authority figure in the church.⁹⁷ Mary, however, is initially portrayed as being of higher status than Peter, since she is free and exercising authority in her own house over other members of the assembly and over her slave girl, whilst he is chained up in prison and is thus of lower status than the soldiers, the guards and the angel. This is an intolerable position for the author of Luke-Acts. In order to restore Peter to his high-ranking place on the hierarchy of status, the woman to whom he is forced by circumstances to turn in his need, and who thus briefly outranks him, must in turn be put back not merely in her "place" but must visibly have her status lowered.⁹⁸ The author thus throws Mary down the hierarchy of status and power by portraying her as being: firstly, even more ridiculous than Peter by futilely leading a prayer-meeting whilst the object of the prayers, an authoritative male, is banging on the door for admittance; and secondly, as having less faith, and a temporarily lower status, than her slave who, as a proclaimer of the "truth," is given "the characteristics that one might expect to be accorded to a free, male, apostle."⁹⁹ Moreover, it is not the slave Rhoda who eventually admits Peter to the courtyard, but the members of the assembly, including Mary, who are thus presented as performing a task fit only for slaves (Acts 12:16).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Peter, who has already been portrayed as a figure of fun in the story of his release from prison by the angel (Acts 12:8-9, 11), is again made to look absurd by Rhoda's failure to admit him to the courtyard of the house. Chambers points out that "Peter enters Acts 12 as completely passive, and completely clueless: the angel must instruct him not only to get up, but also to dress." Chambers, "Knock, Knock – Who's There?" 96.

⁹⁷ Similarly, in a discussion of the silencing of women in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 14:33-35), Meeks notes: "The subordination of women within the household order was taught in the paraenesis of the Pauline congregations, and reinforced in the letters to Asian churches written by disciples of Paul (Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:22-24)." Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 71.

⁹⁸ The portrayal of Mary the mother of John Mark may be compared with that of Martha, another woman who is both head of a household (Lk 10:38) and active in ministry (ἡ δὲ Μάρθα περιεσπᾶτο περὶ πολλὴν διακονίαν, Lk 10:40). She is belittled in favour of her sister Mary, who passively submits herself to male authority (Lk 10:41-42). Similarly, it is noticeable that, despite being an independent businesswoman who owns a house which later becomes a house church (Acts 16:15, 40), Lydia too submits docilely to male authority (Acts 16:14). Chambers, "Knock, Knock – Who's There?" 96-97. Moreover, unlike Mary, Lydia's submission to Paul allows her to speak and her words to be recorded in the text (Acts 16:15).

⁹⁹ Chambers, "Knock, Knock – Who's There?" 94.

¹⁰⁰ Chambers, "Knock, Knock – Who's There?" 95.

At the end of the story, therefore, the respected and high-status Mary, with authority over men and women, is humbled thrice over by being portrayed: (1) as of lower status than a female slave;¹⁰¹ (2) as a woman under the authority of an indigent and homeless man on the run from the law; and (3) as lower in the hierarchy than “James and the Brothers,” to whom she and her followers must act as mere messengers of Peter’s words, rather than as the honoured first recipients.

Similarly, Jezebel is an authoritative and respected member of the local church, a house-owner and prophetess, who teaches other members of the assembly, both women and men (Rev 2:20). Her refusal to acknowledge the supposedly superior claim to authority of the Author, an indigent and peripatetic male, possibly also on the run from the law (cf. §6.6.2), results in him portraying her as being “thrown down” by the Son of God (Rev 2:22), from a high social status similar to that of Mary to the low status of a slave girl like Rhoda, a body to be abused by a high-status male (cf. §5.4.1).

Just as Mary loses her face and status whilst the Slave Rhoda, briefly at least, rises up the status hierarchy of Acts, so Jezebel’s forced descent onto a couch and loss of status may be contrasted with the Slave John’s rise up the hierarchy of power in Revelation.

6.6.2 A Comparison of the Interaction between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel with the Interaction between the Son of Man and the Slave John (Rev 2:20-23; cf. 1:1-2, 11, 19; cf. 21:10; 22:8-9)

The relatively high-status “woman” Jezebel has treated with contempt the elite Son of God’s demand that she should renounce her “works” and has refused to demean herself and act like the slave she may once have been by prostrating herself before anyone other than her God (Rev 2:20-21; cf. Eph 3:14; cf. §5.12.5). The Prophetess is not addressed directly by the Son of God, but only spoken of pejoratively in the third person. She is then thrown down by the Son of God onto a couch, in an act which both forces her to desist from prophesying (cf. 1 Cor 14:30; see §6.1.2) and re-portrays her as no better than a lowly slave, a being defined by her body in terms of penetrability, sexuality, child-

¹⁰¹ As rightly noted by Chambers, the author of Luke-Acts does not hesitate to present a mere slave-girl as the only member of the church to have grasped the truth and in consequence to “exalt” her above her wealthy, slave-owning mistress, a woman who is head of a household and of a house church. Chambers, ““Knock, Knock – Who’s There?”” 93-94.

bearing and sickness (Rev 2:22).¹⁰² In contrast, the particularly penetrable slave John gazes with admiration and awe at the Son of Man (Rev 1:12-16) and falls down prostrate before his idol (Rev 1:17). John is addressed directly and kindly by the Son of Man, and behaves with the submissiveness of a trusted slave holding the position of a scribe to the Son of Man's commands (Rev 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14).¹⁰³

The Author puts himself in the text in the guise of the Slave John who, by prostrating himself before the Son of Man (Rev 1:17; cf. 19:10; 22:8), is both putting himself in a position for his body to be penetrated sexually and acknowledging that his social position means that for his master John is just a body to be used as he wills;¹⁰⁴ he is therefore touched kindly by the Son of Man. In contrast, the Son of God's attack upon Jezebel is a physical, and perhaps sexual, assault upon a woman of relatively high social status. In Graeco-Roman culture a "respectable" free woman would have been regarded as penetrable only by her husband, if she had one; this treatment, which was properly the lot of disobedient and recalcitrant slaves, would have been an unforgivable violation of her body and of her putative husband's honour.

However, John gradually climbs up Revelation's hierarchy and, by the end of the book, has been: admitted to the heavenly court (Rev 4:1-2); commissioned as a prophet (Rev 10:11); and permitted a view of the Heavenly City (Rev 21:10). This is not to suggest that John thus achieves the status of a penetrator; merely that he achieves parity with the Angels before whom he attempts to abase himself (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9). This translates into the hierarchy of Roman serfdom: an overseer may have more power than other slaves, and be entrusted with his master's business, but he is still a slave.¹⁰⁵

Amongst those present at celebrations of the community meal in Jezebel's house are her slaves, some of whom have entered her household after running away from the Son of God (Rev 2:20; cf. §5.4.4). It seems possible that, as well as throwing Jezebel down to her rightful "place" on the gender hierarchy, another of the Son of God's

¹⁰² All four of Revelation's "women" are thrown or come down from their positions of high status to imprisonment and/or enslavement and, in the case of the Woman Babylon, to death (Rev 17:16; 18:21; cf. §5.5). Moreover, while Jezebel's sickness prevents her from saving her children from the murderous Son of God (Rev 2:20-23), the Woman of Chapter 12 sees her new-born son taken from her by force (Rev 12:5) and appears to be separated from her other children (Rev 12:17).

¹⁰³ On the status of slaves on the "axis of penetration," see Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire*, 71. John also attempts to bow down to, or to make himself available for sexual penetration by, two angels (Rev 19:10; 22:8).

¹⁰⁴ Glancy stresses "the corporeality of ancient slavery" and notes that a slave was viewed not as a person, but as nothing more than "a body." This body was "subject to insult, abuse, and penetration." Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 3, 93.

¹⁰⁵ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 115-16.

objectives in his attack is to reclaim, by force, those whom he sees as his personal property. The only way in which he can do this is by overpowering Jezebel and thus removing her motherly protection.

6.6.3. *The Son of God's Attempt to Enslave the High-Status Woman Jezebel and to Deprive Her of Her "Children" (Rev 2:22-23; cf. 2 Kgs 9:32-34; Rev 12:1-6, 13-17; 17:5, 16)*

Unlike the Son of Man, whose spurious motherhood of his followers is dependent upon the lactating breasts which he has stolen from the Woman of Chapter 12 (cf. §4.2.), the Woman Jezebel holds the position of a Mother in the Church in Thyatira, and has a maternal relationship with her slaves and the members of her prophetic school (cf. §5.4.4). It is more than possible that she is also a "real" mother of biological children. As a prophetess, she also "gives birth" to prophetic words which are "conceived" by her interaction with her followers at meetings of the assembly. The God of Revelation, the One Seated on the Throne, views the maternal power of the Woman Babylon" (Rev 17:5) as a threat to his paternal power (Rev 2:18, 28; 3:5, 21; 21:7) and the femininity of the Woman of Chapter 12 as a danger to the masculinity of the male child who may be his son (Rev 12:5; cf. §4.9). The policy of the One Seated on the Throne towards the Woman Babylon is firstly to reduce her from the status of a "queen" to that of a slave and then to have her raped, humiliated and murdered by the Scarlet Beast and Its Horns (Rev 17:5, 16-17; 18:7; cf. §4.9.3). Since they have a prostitute-slave as a mother, Babylon's children (Rev 17:5) are also slaves;¹⁰⁶ their lack of status and power means that they are no threat to the One Seated on the Throne. Similarly, the high-status Woman of Chapter 12 is thrown down the gender hierarchy by the loss of her divine powers and ability to nourish her child to the Son of Man (cf. §4.2.5). In his abduction of her Male Child (Rev 12:5), moreover, God treats her as a man might treat a slave who has borne him a fine son; not only does the child's vigorous masculinity save it from death by exposure (perhaps as symbolised by the Dragon), it also causes him to acknowledge it as his own.¹⁰⁷ In the absence of a legitimate heir the boy will be brought up to inherit his father's kingdom, but the Woman has no rights at all over her own child, not even to breast-feed him: just like a female slave.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 26, 36-37, 74-77.

¹⁰⁸ Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 18.

Similarly, the “throwing down” of the Woman Jezebel upon a couch may be interpreted as the casting of her down from her high status as a Prophetess to the lowest level of Revelation’s hierarchy as a slave who may be physically abused.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Jezebel’s “children” appear to pose a particular threat to the hierarchy of Revelation. It is not enough that, like a slave-mother, and like the Woman of Chapter 12, Jezebel should be deprived of and stripped of her rights over her own “children;” it is not enough that they should be sold or raised as slaves like those of the Woman Babylon; it is not enough that those of her “children” who are slaves who have fled from the Son of God’s household to hers should be returned to their “rightful” owner and perhaps be beaten, branded or tattooed upon the face (cf. Rev 17:5) and fettered.¹¹⁰ It is necessary that these “children” should be put to death. The only reason can be that the Prophetess’s “children” may also be interpreted as her prophetic words (cf. §5.12.7), whose content poses a terrifying threat not only to the Son of God, but to the Author of Revelation. These words must not just be suppressed, but be seen, or heard, to be “killed.” Like a disobedient slave girl, who has been punished not only by physical, perhaps sexual, abuse, but also by having her “children” “murdered” before her eyes, the Prophetess is left writhing upon her couch, as “desolate and naked” as the Woman Babylon (Rev 17:6), as powerless and bereft as the Woman of Chapter 12 (Rev 12:6).¹¹¹

Comment

When understood within a Graeco-Roman hierarchical construction of gender, the Son of God’s attack upon the Prophetess is a physical assault by a marauding soldier upon a “respectable” woman in her own home. Within Revelation’s hierarchy of gender and power, the Son of God is an elite male character with authority from the One Seated on the Throne to rule his enemies with a “rod of iron” in order to ensure their feminisation and to remove any threat which they may pose to that throne (cf. §4.9); meanwhile, Jezebel is a “sexually-immoral” woman whose autonomy and power over the males whom she has “feminised” sits uneasily with her maternal femininity. The Son of God’s

¹⁰⁹ Glancy notes that: “The “membrane dividing free bodies from enslaved bodies,” however, was extremely permeable, as demonstrated by the large number of slaves who acquired freedom; “the boundary between slave and free could be, and often was, crossed. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 93-94.

¹¹⁰ Glancy notes that “A slave who ran away would be placed in fetters or permanently tattooed to forestall future attempts to flee.” Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, 13.

¹¹¹ In Roman culture both male and female slaves were understood to be the possessions of their owners, who could do with them as they wished, including forcing sexual intercourse upon them. Osiek, MacDonald, and Tulloch, *A Woman’s Place*, 99. Pippin argues that the text implies that Jezebel is “stripped naked” like the Woman Babylon. Pippin, *Apocalyptic Bodies*, 92.

forcing of the Woman Jezebel onto a couch (Rev 2:22) may thus be understood as the action of a high-status male whose superiority has not been acknowledged by a mere “woman.” In casting a Prophetess in the local church, who teaches and has authority over men, has wealth, a house and slaves, some of whom formerly belonged to him, onto a couch, he is physically and literally throwing her down the hierarchy and making her into his own slave.

In the Author’s dream of vengeance, “that cursed woman” is thrown down from her position of power, which properly belongs to a male, that is the Author himself, and back to her rightful feminine place at the bottom of the gender hierarchy as a slave, subject to the brutality of her “master” (Rev 2:20, 22). John, representing the Author, meanwhile, is whisked up from the lowest rungs of the gender hierarchy (Rev 1:1; 4:1-2) and achieves parity with the Angels and Prophets (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9).

This attack upon the Prophetess, however, poses dangers to the Son of God which have been unforeseen by the prophetic Author of Revelation.

6.7. “Into the Hand of a Woman” (Judg 4:9): The Unforeseen Dangers Facing the Son of God in His Assault upon the Woman Jezebel

In whichever way the attack upon the Prophetess of Thyatira is interpreted, its outcome is not indicated in the message to Thyatira; to all intents and purposes Jezebel is left languishing upon her couch, probably abandoned by her terrified “lovers,” and with her prophetic “children” dead. However, since nothing is said, this is not necessarily the case; in contrast, the murders of Jizebul, of Sapphira and of the Woman Babylon are depicted in detail and even gloated over (2 Kgs 9:33-37; Acts 5:10-11; Rev 17:16; 19:1-4). This lacuna in the text, and its lack of closure, leaves room for a number of reconstructions of the next scene in the drama, when the Prophetess, surrounded by her followers, is being attacked by the Son of God. These reconstructions are made by seizing from the Author his weapon of literary allusion and using it as a brush with which to paint a different picture of the outcome of the Son of God’s attack.

6.7.1. Jezebel’s House: A Woman’s Place and a Dangerous Space (Rev 2:22; cf. Acts 12:12-17; Rev 12:6, 13-17)

In first-century C.E. Mediterranean societies, the house was understood as the private “female sphere” in which the woman exercised authority, in contrast with the public

“male sphere” of the city.¹¹² However, since the members of the assembly regularly meet there to celebrate the community meal, Jezebel’s house also forms the locus of her power in the Thyatiran church. As the owner of the house and the provider of the food and drink, she inevitably acts as hostess and presides over the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Since she is also the community Prophetess, she also prophesies and teaches. By depicting the Son of God as attacking Jezebel in her own house (cf. §6.1.2), the Author may consider that he is portraying the warrior king as both forcibly entering the symbol of Jezebel’s womanity and attempting to destroy the seat of her power. However, this assault immediately places the Son of God in great danger, since the dark and enclosing interior of the house was traditionally understood to be, like a woman’s vagina, a source of impurity and even physical harm for any male foolish enough to enter it.¹¹³

Peter certainly knows the danger posed to a male by a house belonging to a woman. It is noticeable that, when Mary and her followers finally open the gate upon which Peter is frenziedly knocking for admittance, he only steps into the porch; he does not enter the house and, after delivering his news, hastens away to find a safer lodging (Acts 12:16-17; cf. 9:36-43).¹¹⁴ Jezebel’s male followers are safe, since they may be regarded as having been feminised by their adherence to her teaching (cf. §5.13.5); for the unwelcome and aggressively masculine Son of God, the consequences of his forced entry can only be as catastrophic for him as he states that they are for the Prophetess.¹¹⁵ This is demonstrated by a comparison of the Son of God’s attack upon Jezebel with the Dragon’s attack upon the Woman of Chapter 12. Just as the attack upon Jezebel takes place in the female space of her house, the attack upon the Woman takes place in the female space of the Wilderness (Rev 12:6, 13). Moreover, both scenarios feature a woman who is attacked by a male character whom she has angered (Rev 2:20-22; 12:13-17) and who, when he fails to kill her, is intent upon the destruction of her children (Rev

¹¹² Torjesen, “Reconstruction of Women’s Early Christian History,” 290-91.

¹¹³ Pippin, “Peering into the Abyss,” 256-58. Writing about Athenian society, Padel states: “The interior space, sacred or domestic, which encloses women in cult or home, is emblematic of the female interior itself, as perceived by men.” Padel, “Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons,” 8. The enclosing womb-like space of the New Jerusalem is almost the opposite of the Abyss: whilst impure and demonic creatures crawl out of the smoke-filled Abyss (Rev 9:2-3), only the pure elect enter the divinely-illuminated Jerusalem (Rev 21:23-27; 22:5); the locusts have as their king Apollyon, “the Destroyer” (Rev 9:11) while God’s throne is in Jerusalem (Rev 22:1).

¹¹⁴ Chambers suggests that “[...] it is safer in the street than in a Jerusalem house church run by a woman. Peter is much safer in Joppa, but only because Dorcas (or Tabitha), who is the central figure in what might be a house church, is dead throughout most of the pericope.” Chambers, ““Knock, Knock – Who’s There?”” 91.

¹¹⁵ Jehu, who succumbs to the temptation of the feast laid out in Jizebul’s palace (2 Kgs 9:34), later also succumbs to the temptation of idolatrous worship (2 Kgs 10:29-31).

2:23; 12:17).¹¹⁶ In addition, just as the Son of God declares that he will kill Jezebel's "children" either with, or in the person of, "Death" (Rev 2:23), so the Dragon is also associated with hypostatized Death (cf. *T. Ab. (A)* 17:16; cf. §6.5.7).¹¹⁷

Upon being attacked by the Son of God, it would be natural for the Prophetess to call out for help; in her terror the Woman certainly does so (Rev 12:16).¹¹⁸ The Prophetess's "distressed" followers appear too scared to answer her putative cry, but the Woman receives immediate and wonderfully effective aid. This comes from Γῆ, or Gaia, the Earth Goddess, who absorbs the Dragon's attack with almost contemptuous ease (Rev 12:16). This leads to the consideration of the possibility both of powerful female help being at hand for the Prophetess, as unrecorded as her fiery prophetic words, but no less "real," and of the Son of God being thwarted and forced to abandon his murderous attack. A goddess, like the Woman of Chapter 12, deprived of her divine power, receives succour in her hour of need from another goddess with the divine power to fend off Death. It follows that a prophetess, like the Prophetess of Thyatira, temporarily deprived of her spiritual power, receives succour in her hour of need from another woman with the spiritual power to fend off the Son of God.

Padel notes that: "Divinity can be an unwelcome guest in a house and a female body;"¹¹⁹ that this is so is evident in the cases of Cassandra and Deïphobe (and, incidentally, that of the male Jeremiah; cf. §6.3). However, just such an "unwelcome guest" could be exorcised through the offices of a sorceress. Upon finding herself "possessed" by the Son of God, who is attempting to force her to "give birth" to his prophetic "children," the Prophetess may well have called upon the services of just such a sorceress. Any males present would have been hustled from the house, the doors shut and Jezebel and her female followers would have blocked their ears to the frantic voice

¹¹⁶ Although the Fiery Red Dragon, like the Scarlet Beast from the Abyss, appears to be male, he may, again like the Scarlet Beast, symbolise the female reproductive organs, genitalia and fluids. Keller notes of the Woman: "As the red mouth of her womb opens, the red dragon appears, perverse mimesis, mouth open to eat the issue," and points to "the feminized status of whatever is "wild," "organic," "disorganized," "fluid" – bodily" in "Western orthodoxies." Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 67, 70. The portrayals of the Woman of Chapter 12 being threatened with death by, and of the Woman Babylon being eaten up by, bright red beasts, may be indicating Revelation's horror of femininity, which it portrays as being able to turn even upon its hostess.

¹¹⁷ See Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 684.

¹¹⁸ Although the Woman is not explicitly described as crying out for help, the use of the verb βοηθέω, meaning to "run in response to a call," to describe the Earth's response to her plight (Rev 2:16) indicates that she does so. See Max Zerwick, S.J. and Mary Grosvenor, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (5th revised ed.; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 761.

¹¹⁹ Padel, "Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons," 14.

of the Son of God. The sorceress would cast her spell, speak her magical words, ears would be unstopped and the doors opened to allow the deity to escape.¹²⁰

On the other hand, a “strange” and seductive woman, who “leads astray,” like the Woman Jezebel as presented by the Author (Rev 2:20), also has her sexuality as a weapon with which to defend herself.

6.7.2. *“He Lay Still at Her Feet” (Judg 5:27): A Comparison of the Conflict between the Son of God and the Woman Jezebel and the Conflict between Sisera and Jael (Rev 2:22; cf. Judg 4:9, 17-22; 5:24-27)*

Within Revelation’s construction of gender and power (cf. §4.1), the two combatants in Rev 2:22 are: a male guardian of the Throne and a woman who threatens its masculinity, not only with her innate femininity and “impurity,” but also by means of her supposed seductiveness and through the grasping of male authority which propels her up towards the Throne. The scenario featured in Rev 2:22 is, therefore, that of a woman whom the Author portrays as “strange” and promiscuous (Rev 2:20-22) and a male whom he presents as a hyper-masculine warrior king (Rev 2:18, 26-28). Since the Son of God declares that he is throwing this female upstart down upon the bed where she belongs, it may be assumed that he is successful in throwing her back down the gender hierarchy. As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, however, the Author’s liberal use of literary allusion in the portrayal of these two combatants proves to be a dangerous weapon, which may be used against him. It has already been noted that there are strong, but probably unintended, allusions contained in the presentation of the authoritative Prophetess of Thyatira to Deborah, Prophetess and Judge of Israel (Judg 4:4; cf. Rev 2:20; cf. §5.14); at the same time the “strange” woman Jezebel may be compared with another “strange” woman, who features in the same story as Deborah, the alluring and ruthless Jael (Judg 4:17-22; 5:24-27).¹²¹ Both women are depicted as seducing the unwary (Judg 4:18; Rev 2:20); both find themselves in a conflict with a warrior with whom they submit to sexual intercourse (Judg 4:18; Rev 2:22); and the conflicts in which they are involved both take place in a woman’s dark and dangerous “place:” in the case of Jezebel in her house, and in the case of Jael in her tent (Judg 4:18; 5:24).

¹²⁰ See Padel, “Women: Model for Possession by Greek Daemons,” 13-14.

¹²¹ Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 57.

Jael, however, does not just use her feminine charms to seduce the marauding soldier who enters her tent; she uses a combination of her guile and courage and his masculine lust to kill him.¹²² The faint echoes of the story of Jael’s vanquishing of the warrior Sisera in the depiction of the conflict between Jezebel and the warrior Son of God provide the intriguing possibility that, like Sisera, the Son of God meets his (unrecorded) nemesis at the hand of a woman (Judg 4:9, 21; 5:26-27).¹²³ The body of Sisera is penetrated, violated and feminised by a woman taking on the role of a penetrative warrior who, in skewering his head to the ground with a tent peg, “screws” him, both sexually, and literally to death (Judg 4:19-21; 5:25-27).¹²⁴ It is similarly possible for the “non-ideal” reader to imagine the “strange” woman Jezebel inviting the Son of God to share her couch, and then “going into him” (cf. εἰσηλθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν, Judg 4:21), not with a tent peg, but with the sort of handy “domestic implement” that might be found in the dark inner space of a “strange” woman whose speech is “smoother than oil” (Prov 5:3): a sharp two-edged sword (μαχαίρας διστόμου, Prov 5:4; cf. Judg 4:21-22; 5:26-27; 9:53-54).¹²⁵

Alternatively, faced with the Son of God raking her with his “evil eye,” the Prophetess may have used a form of defence which, although less deadly, would have proved equally effective in disabling the Son of God: laughter.

¹²² Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman*, 58-61.

¹²³ There are two accounts of this drama, one of which is part of a narrative (Judges 4) and the other of which is part of a song (Judges 5). In the narrative account, Jael is presented as a woman who uses her sexuality to seduce Sisera into her tent and into her bed (Judg 4:18-19). However, as pointed out by Fewell, in the Song of Deborah and Barak “Jael does combat with a standing Sisera” (Judg 5:26-27). Fewell, “Judges,” 69. In both versions of the story, however, Sisera is penetrated by a woman.

¹²⁴ Klein notes: “When Jael approaches Sisera to kill him, the text uses the very phrase that is used for a male having sexual intercourse with a woman: *bô’* ... *‘el*, “come into;” cf. Judg 15:1; 16:1. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 38. Klein continues: “Her beating the peg into the ground is itself suggestive of sexual activity. Can we say that Jael literally “screwed” [or: “socially/sexually abused”] Sisera? That is the implication of the text.” Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 39. It was noted above (§5.10) that the Author is probably not alluding to the Strange Woman in his portrayal of Jezebel, because of the difficulty of differentiating between the Strange Woman and Woman Wisdom; this hypothetical reconstruction demonstrates that he may have had another reason: fear of the consequences for his hero.

¹²⁵ Gale A. Yee argues that, because of the close-knit nature of the small familial communities which characterised pre-monarchic Israel, warfare involved both men and women and “military organization was essentially domestic in character.” Although men were the warriors, women would have been involved in strategy and may also “have been trained in the martial arts themselves.” Gale A. Yee, “‘By the Hand of a Woman’: The Metaphor of the Woman Warrior in Judges 4,” *Semeia* 61 (1993), 110-11. In particular, she notes that the unnamed woman who kills Abimelech does so with a millstone, “a domestic implement” (Judg 9:53). Yee, “‘By the Hand of a Woman,’” 111-12.

6.7.3. *Laughter: The Best Medicine*

Writing about the paintings on the walls of the public baths in Pompeii, whose facilities were used both by men and by women, John R. Clarke notes the absurdity of many of the images. In particular, he calls attention to depictions of strange hybrid creatures with “huge, erect penises.”¹²⁶ Clark argues that the reason for the presence of these, and of other, amusing paintings was dictated by their setting. In a location where naked bodies were on display, the more beautiful of these bodies would have been the focus of the envious “evil eye;” their bodies were in danger of being pierced by “particles” from the “aggressor’s eye,” which might cause “sickness or death.” Since laughter was believed to have apotropaic properties against the power of the “evil eye,” the person who believed him/herself to be the object of a malevolent gaze had only to glance at the walls to be provoked to laughter and thus to ward off the “magic.”¹²⁷

The figure which the Son of God presents to the members of the Thyatiran church gathered in the Prophetess’s dining room is certainly that of a warrior, but at the same time it resembles an absurd hybrid syncretisation of the features of various pagan deities: he may have a well-developed manly body, and his penetrative gaze may have the power of the “evil eye,” but he also has clumping bronze feet, which force him to walk like the statue of Apollo Tyrimnaeus brought to life, a “rod of iron” and a head like that of a dog. His demand that the Prophetess should lay aside her authority and bow down to him would – perhaps after a moment of stunned silence – have been productive of nothing but mocking and apotropaic laughter. Moreover, by drawing attention to his peculiar physical appearance and in his commanding word: “Look!” (ἰδοὺ, Rev 2:22), the Son of God inadvertently makes himself the object of the non-ideal reader’s feminising, penetrative and ridiculing gaze.

Comment

The two murders to which allusion is made in the attack upon the Prophetess, that of the Woman Babylon (Rev 17:16) and that of Queen Jizebul (2 Kgs 9:33), are carried out neither by the male character who “judges” or curses her, nor by an elite male character, but by low-status characters in terms of gender and penetrability. The murder of the

¹²⁶ John R. Clarke, “Look Who’s Laughing at Sex: Men and Women Viewers in the *Apodyterium* of the Suburban Baths at Pompeii,” in *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power and the Body* (ed. David Fredrick; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 156.

¹²⁷ Clarke, “Look Who’s Laughing at Sex,” 156.

Woman Babylon is carried out at the behest of God, through the agency of the Scarlet Beast and with the help of its ten horns (Rev 17:3, 16-17; 19:1-2). A similar pattern is seen in the murder of Queen Jizebul; in the name of Yahweh she is cursed by Elijah (1 Kgs 21:23) and murdered upon the orders of Jehu by some of Jizebul's eunuchs, with the deed being finished off by Jehu's horses and some wild dogs (2 Kgs 9:32-33; see §6.5.3). In both cases, distance is thus placed between the elite male characters and the contaminating deeds of touching, and being touched by, and thus of running the risk of being polluted by, the bodies of their feminine victims; in both cases the most elite and impenetrable originator of the deed, a male divinity, is furthest removed from it. In other words, none of the elite males, God in the Book of Revelation and Yahweh, Elijah and Jehu in the Books of Kings, gets his hands covered in feminine blood.

However, the attack upon Jezebel and her "children" does not follow this pattern. They are certainly "judged" by the divine Son of God at the behest of the authorial magician, and the "children" are murdered by his henchman Death (Rev 2:23), but the attack upon the "impure" and female Jezebel is carried out by Son of God himself (Rev 2:22).¹²⁸ It should be remembered here that, although he is an elite, impenetrable male character, there is a bestial side to his nature in his similarity to the god Anubis; this comes to the fore when, in this attack, he takes on the roles of the Scarlet Beast and its horns and of Jehu's horses and dogs. In the presentation of the Son of God's attack upon the Woman Jezebel, the Author of Revelation thus inadvertently allows his paragon of "manhood" not only to be feminised and penetrated, but also to be bestialised - or simply "screwed" – at the hand of a woman.¹²⁹

Conclusions

Like the narrator of Proverbs 1-9, the Son of Man portrays himself as trying to instruct his inattentive, rebellious and gullible listeners (Rev 2:1-3:22) and, like the narrator of Proverbs, the main challenge to his authority comes from a "strange" woman "leading astray" the gullible with her seductive speech (Prov 7:5, 21; cf. Rev 2:20). The narrator of Proverbs finds his voice pitted against that of a sexually-promiscuous woman who seeks to steal his son(s) from him with promises of illicit physical pleasure (Prov 7:13-18). The Son of Man, however, must make himself heard above the voice of an

¹²⁸ It may also be argued, as in §6.5.7, that the Son of God murders Jezebel's "children" in the persona of Death.

¹²⁹ Cf. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 39.

authoritative woman who is in a relationship of a mother with her followers. She may be portrayed as a “strange” woman who seduces the Son of God’s “slaves” from his service to hers (Rev 2:20), but the Prophetess is in reality a Mother of the Church. Her call to know “the deep things of God” challenges both the Son of Man’s calls to conquer (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21) and his desire to be a nurturing “mother” to his followers (Rev 1:13; 3:19).

The Author has, therefore, arranged the scenario of the Son of God’s attack upon the Prophetess of Thyatira (Rev 2:22) so that four equally possible interpretations may be made, each of which explains its nature and the reasons for the violence of the attack which so disturb Marshall.¹³⁰ The first interpretation is that the Son of God is attempting to rape the Prophetess, either with the penetrative gaze of his flaming eyes, or by possessing her and causing her to “give birth” to his prophetic “children” or to speak his prophetic words. The second interpretation is that the Son of God is using his “evil eye” to cause Jezebel to fall ill and her children to die. The third interpretation is that, through the agency of the Son of God, the Author of Revelation is cursing the Prophetess and causing her to fall ill, and thus be silenced, by means of a malevolent magical spell. The fourth interpretation is that this attack is motivated by the Woman Jezebel’s welcome of the Son of God’s slaves into her household (Rev 2:20), combined with a refusal to comply with Revelation’s hierarchy of gender, which the hyper-masculine Son of God so zealously defends. Both in revenge and in order to maintain the purity of the higher reaches of the hierarchy, he is throwing down Jezebel from the high-status position of an autonomous Mother-Prophetess to the low-status position of a prostitute-slave. All four possibilities reflect the Author’s dream of the Prophetess receiving what he perceives to be her just desserts for her seizing of undeserved power through her womanly wiles.

As well as hating Jezebel’s unwomanliness and inclusive teaching, which feminises her male followers, the Son of God is exercised by the loss of some or all of his “slaves” to the service of Jezebel, whose womanly power, centred upon her possession of a house and her motherhood, threatens his own status. This resentment reflects that of his creator, the Author of Revelation, towards the woman whom he believes to be unworthy of holding her position of authority. The Author thus gleefully portrays the formerly free Jezebel as being cast down into imprisonment on her couch and treated like a slave by being assaulted and being forced to watch the murder of her

¹³⁰ Marshall, “Collateral Damage,” 41.

“children” (Rev 2:22). In contrast, the enslaved John, who begins his narrative incarcerated on Patmos (Rev 1:9), breaks free to explore the vast realm of Heaven (Rev 4:1-2).¹³¹

There is, however, a fifth, far more banal, but plausible way of interpreting this scene which, it should be remembered, is a distorted reflection of reality: the Prophetess has been struck by an infectious disease which has caused her to take to her bed. Those who have been in her company at the meal are liable to catch the sickness unless they leave her bedside (Rev 2:22). The consequence of Jezebel being confined to her bed by a severe illness (Rev 2:22), and being unable either to prophesy or to teach, is that her “children” will be left in a vulnerable position (Rev 2:23; cf. 12:4, 17). The Author of Revelation is simply attributing this illness to the supernatural intervention of the Son of God. Effectively Jezebel’s prophetic school, her “children,” and thus her prophetic legacy, will be “killed” as a result of the “pestilence” with which she has been struck down. Now there is an opportunity for a rival prophet, such as the Author of Revelation, to step in and either to disband her school or to persuade her pupils with smooth words to join the school to which he belongs.

However, in portraying the Prophetess as a “strange” woman, the Author inadvertently provides the feminist interpreter with the means to repair his textual destruction of “that cursed woman.” In an observation which might be made of the conflict between Jezebel and the Son of God, Susan Niditch states: “Judges 5:27 evokes a powerful scene of eroticism and death. Its language is charged with sexuality, sexual submission intertwined, doubling with language of defeat and death;”¹³² and it is the feminised warrior, not the woman, who dies. Like Jael, Deïphobe and the women prophets of Corinth (Judg 5:26-27; Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.49; 1 Cor 14:30), the Prophetess stands up tall to do battle with the Son of God. With the weapon of her two-edged sword of prophetic fiery words (cf. Acts 2:3-4) the woman s/word warrior (cf. Rev 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 19) damns the Son of God’s flaming eyes and he falls to his knees, unmanned, at her feet (cf. Judg 5:27).¹³³

Such an interpretation of what happened after the Son of God’s attack upon the Prophetess of Thyatira may be verging upon what Keller calls an “anti-apocalypse,”

¹³¹ Pippin, “Peering into the Abyss,” 259.

¹³² Susan Niditch, “Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael,” in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1989), 47.

¹³³ Fewell rightly notes: “In the song, Jael does combat with a standing Sisera. The killing and the dying take place in slow motion with Sisera falling between her legs, ravaged.” Fewell, “Judges,” 69.

which simply reflects back the violence, dualism and aggression of Revelation upon itself.¹³⁴ However, as Keller concedes, “[t]o some extent feminism must meet apocalypse on its own ground in order to be heard.”¹³⁵ The lack of “closure” in the message to Thyatira allows a more hopeful interpretation to be made of the aftermath to the conflict, a “counter-apocalypse” which attempts “to appreciate in irony” as well as to challenge the Author’s rhetoric of allusion and to dance inter(con)textually between the images and texts which he conjures up in the non-ideal reader’s imagination.¹³⁶

It is difficult to imagine the strong-willed and faithful Prophetess of Thyatira, whom this study has conjured up, submitting without a fight to an attack which threatens to kill her “children.” The Prophetess would have arisen “like a mother” from her couch (cf. Judg 5:7). She would have wielded the two-edged sword of her femininity and prophetic authority and skewered the rampaging male who attempted to destroy her, her Christian teaching and her prophetic legacy (cf. Judg 4:19-21; 5:25-27). Like Deborah and Jael, Jezebel’s imagined use of “prophecy and sex, [to] conquer the enemy” would not have been “for self-glorification or to achieve power over others,” but in order to protect others, especially her “children.”¹³⁷ It ill-behove the Author of Revelation to portray the Prophetess as a “strange” woman, whose seductive words are so much more alluring than his own (Rev 2:20, 29). As the Father of Proverbs, calling the attention of his son away from the smooth speech of another “strange” woman (Prov 5:1), could have told him:

*[...] in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword (Prov 5:4).*

The Prophetess of Thyatira would have been more than a match for the Son of God.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 15.

¹³⁵ Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 15, quoting Lee Quinby, *Anti-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 33.

¹³⁶ Partly with reference to Keller, *Apocalypse Now and Then*, 19-20.

¹³⁷ Klein, *From Deborah to Esther*, 39-40.

¹³⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza is convinced that “the “school” of “Jezebel” continued to be a part of the community at Thyatira,” and that “[t]he impact of the prophet-teacher “Jezebel” may be reflected in the fact that Thyatira later became a center [*sic*] of the Montanist movement, in which women prophets were prominent.” Schüssler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit and Power,” 41. Schüssler Fiorenza refers to “Epiphanius, *Haereses*, LI, 3.” Schüssler Fiorenza, “Word, Spirit and Power,” 65, Endnote 51.

CONCLUSION

“SHE KEEPS ON SPEAKING” (REV 2:20)

At the end of her reconstruction of the First Letter to the Corinthians from the point of view of the Corinthian women prophets, Wire notes that “The fitting end for a reconstruction would be [...] a clear voice from the other side of the argument.” and draws attention to Schüssler Fiorenza’s call for ““historical imagination”” in seeking this “lost voice.”¹ With these two injunctions in mind, therefore, this Conclusion provides the “fitting ending” to this reconstruction of the message to Thyatira through a feminist comparative literary analysis, combined with “historical imagination,” by means a letter which, after rising from her couch, the Prophetess of Thyatira might have written to the Author of Revelation, in words which he would understand:

“To our brother John on the Island called Patmos, on account of his sorcery, thus says the Prophetess of Thyatira, a Mother in the Church, who speaks in words of fire:

“I know your works, your tribulation and patient endurance, but I have against you that you have attempted to prevent my prophesying the words of the Spirit.

“Is it not written: ‘I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit’?

And did we not declare at our baptism into Christ, when we put on Christ: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus’?

“Yet you ask why I eat with those who practise “sexual immorality” and eat food sacrificed to idols. I answer that my teaching is not for the righteous but for sinners. The Gentiles are fellow heirs and members of the body of Christ and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the good news. To me, the very least of all the saints, was given this grace, to declare to the Gentiles the good news of the fathomless wealth of Christ.

¹ Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets*, 195, with reference to Schüssler Fiorenza. *In Memory of Her*, 60-64.

“Despite your poisonous spell, despite the anguish which caused me to take to my couch, I did not bow down like a slave to the evil-eyed and bronze-footed idol that you created. Though my spirit failed, the power of my heavenly God was with me. I arose as a mother to protect my children; I stopped my ears; I laughed in his dog-like face; I sharpened my words and spoke, saying, ‘Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me, have no fear.’ I skewered him on the two-edged sword of my mouth; he fell at my feet.

“Then I uttered a song, which I sing again to you:

“I bow my knees not before men or angels or those who say that they are sons of God, but only before the Father; not a father of those who conquer Gentiles and women, but the Father from whom every family in Heaven and on Earth is named. I pray that, according to the wealth of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith; so that you, having been rooted and grounded in love, may be strong enough to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.’

“Satan’s kingdom will not be thrown down by your usurper of Christ, but through inviting the Gentiles, the simple and unclean, to hear my voice and to turn into the house of the assembly and to eat of my bread and to drink of the wine I have mixed, to lay aside immaturity and to live, and to walk in the way of insight.

“You have not judged me to be faithful to the Lord; but I say to you, come and stay at my home, sit down with me upon my couch, partake with me of the body and blood of our Lord, and listen to what I am saying to the churches.”

As rightly pointed out by Schüssler Fiorenza, it is impossible to know what happened in the past.² It is equally impossible to know how its inhabitants thought. Historians and interpreters may make informed guesses, and the feminist reconstruction of the message to Thyatira undertaken in this study has been just such an informed guess.

² Schüssler Fiorenza, “Remembering the Past in Creating the Future,” 48-49.

Perhaps the model of the Prophetess of Thyatira proposed here is as far removed from the reality as is her portrayal by the Author of Revelation. The aim of this study has been to carry out the duty of a feminist interpreter and to give a maligned woman a voice in which to put her side of the story, even if it is not, indeed cannot be, the voice of that Christian woman who once lived, worked, loved, taught and served in the trading city of Thyatira in first century C.E. Asia Minor; that is lost to us forever.³

And yet, and yet ... echoing down the ages still come the words which this woman almost certainly arose from her couch in the midst of the assembly to speak, and which, thanks to the Author of Revelation, she forever keeps on speaking: ἐγώ εἰμι προφῆτις.

It is time that readers of the Book of Revelation began to listen to her.

³ Schüssler Fiorenza states: "The truly historical understanding of historical inquiry [...] invites active feminist participation in the writing of human history in order to keep "open" our unfulfilled historical possibilities for a more human future." Schüssler Fiorenza, "Remembering the Past," 54.

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