

○ PROPHETS POSTCOLONIALY

INITIAL INSIGHTS FOR A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Steed Vernyl Davidson

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary / Graduate Theological Union

This article examines the conception of the genre prophetic literature and how a postcolonial examination probes its production. A postcolonial engagement can offer more than simply anticolonial resistance discourse as can be gleaned from the theo-political contexts of prophetic material. Drawing on Homi Bhabha's reflection on 'the book', other postcolonial theorists, as well as genre theory, the article traces elements that constitute a 'prophetic book' and interrogates the power of the canonical category 'prophetic literature'. In the end it offers three defining features of a postcolonially resituated reading of prophetic literature.

The relationship between Biblical Studies and Postcolonial Studies rests on the presumption that at multiple levels the Bible exists as a product of empire. This presumption readily leads to the application of postcolonial theory to the reading of biblical texts without a preliminary interrogation of the literature that constitutes the body of texts called 'Bible.' While biblical critics pay attention to the socio-cultural milieus that generate major portions of the Bible such as Greco-Roman society (Moore 2006; Carter 2001; Liew 1999), classification of biblical material into prophetic literature, gospel, apocalypse, and so on remain unexamined from a postcolonial perspective. Since the synchronic/diachronic option that the general field of Biblical Studies insists on may be a false choice for most postcolonial biblical scholars, users of postcolonial theory in relation to the Bible tend to probe the Bible as literature from the perspective of what Homi Bhabha regards as 'the edict of Englishness and the assault of the dark unruly spaces of the earth' (Bhabha 1994, 107; Sugirtharajah 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001; Boer 2008). The production of the Bible as literature in its ancient context as well as its appeal to its presumed readers remains to be explored from a postcolonial perspective.

Prophetic literature poses many challenges to readers of the Bible, chief among them being what constitutes prophetic literature. To the extent that the prophets are seen as the predictors of Jesus, prophetic literature's treatment and insight on empire remain unexamined and opens a space for postcolonial exploration of these texts. Postcolonial readings of prophetic literature, however, present not only opportunities but challenges and possibilities. The question of what can postcolonial theory provide in reading prophetic literature should really focus attention on the suitability of postcolonial enquiry for prophetic literature. To the extent that we speak of prophetic literature as a specific genre, the question of compatibility arises not so much in response to the figure of empire in the text but moreso to the peculiarities that constitute this literature. The question of genre raises issues relating to the production of prophetic literature and their functions within the larger placeholder 'Bible.' These issues of production emerge for postcolonial theory since as a reading strategy,¹ postcolonial theory needs not only to delve into historical questions generated by and in prophetic literature but also to query the designators 'prophetic literature', 'prophetic book', or 'prophetic texts' to the extent that they are used as synonyms.² Bhabha alerts us to the disruption caused by literature, in particular the Bible, or as he puts it, 'the book.' He writes that the notion of literature or book operates as a Western sign of 'cultural

authority' that 'represents important moments in the historical transformation and discursive transfiguration of the colonial text and context' (Bhabha 1994, 105).³

This essay does not offer a full exploration of the production of prophetic literature as a genre, much as it is needed, but rather initial positions on this issue. The essay offers a postcolonial articulation of what can be viewed as descriptive markers of prophetic literature. A treatment of the notion of prophetic literature as a genre will be offered in order to outline spaces where a postcolonial reading of this literature can occur. The essay first traces critical moments in the scholarly approach to prophetic literature and then maps the space that enables an engagement of postcolonial theory with prophetic literature as a genre. The essay will then offer three aspects of prophetic literature, identified from a postcolonial perspective, that can lead to the development of postcolonial readings of prophetic literature.

In Biblical Studies, explorations of the prophetic books tend towards three main areas: the biography of prophets, prophetic institutions and prophetic literary forms. The traditional 19th century approach of Julius Wellhausen betrayed a theological interest in prophetic texts marking them as the vibrant point of 'late Judaism'. A hero status accorded the prophets celebrates the prophet as 'an agent of change' or a 'moral, ethical and theological innovator'⁴ marks this period. With the work of Sigmund Mowinckel in the 20th century, the focus shifts to the question of the social location of the prophet and with that shift the idea of the prophet as an opponent of cultic institutions recede (Blenkinsopp 1983, 32; Wilson 1980, 8). Although Mowinckel's interests lie more with form critical enquiry, initially form criticism in relation to prophetic literature merely serves as the entry point to reconstruct the history of the prophetic movement in ancient Israel (Floyd 2003, 299).

Robert Wilson's work on the prophet's position within ancient Israelite and Judean society represents a turning point in the historical work on the institution of the prophets (Wilson 1980, 297–308). Wilson's reconstruction of the development of prophecy in Israel and Judah presents the prophets both as marginal and central figures of power. As divine messengers, royal and/or cultic functionaries, reactionaries to foreign invasion and conquest, members of communities, these prophetic figures function within layered environments as ambiguous characters. This ambiguity enables them entry into several spaces while defying easy characterization. This spectral like appearance of the prophetic figure takes on what Bhabha characterizes as the 'third space of enunciation' (Bhabha 1994, 37), the ability to fit within the interstices of power and at times contradictory power.⁵ The prophetic task exists not simply to ferry words in a linear fashion from a divine source. The prophet stands as an intermediary in intersecting modes of power, bearing ambiguities of power, while dealing with issues like imperial power.

In general, between the 19th and 20th centuries, prophetic studies concentrate on prophecy as a religious phenomenon and the biography of the prophet. This concentration generates theological and historical insights about the institution of prophecy⁶ as well as interests in recovery of the original words of the prophet and, presumably, an original divine word (Mayes 1993, 25). The study of prophecy as a social institution in the ancient world may serve as a space for postcolonial theory to intersect with prophetic studies.⁷ Doing this would require a reading of prophetic historiography from a postcolonial perspective. Joseph Blenkinsopp's call, for instance, for a 'critical history' and a 'historical review' of the prophets hints at this (Blenkinsopp 1983, 14).⁸ This, however, serves as the foundation for understanding how prophetic texts are later

shaped by tradents and communities. The larger concern of this essay, lies in showing how postcolonial theory can probe prophetic literature at the point of its development of what Ehud Ben Zvi calls ‘the prophetic book’ and which he classifies as ‘an ‘authoritative book’ ... that communicates an explicit or implicit claim for social and theological/ideological authoritativeness’ (Ben Zvi 2003, 279–281).

A postcolonial foray into prophetic studies probes the notion of the prophetic book as part of the production of prophetic literature and therefore a set of literary forms regarded as prophetic and ultimately authoritative. The notion prophetic literature combines several ‘texts’ that exist in overlapping social contexts.⁹ These relationships are mapped in figure 1 and demonstrate the interlocking relationships that the traditional scholarship tends to fragment or blur in treatment of prophetic books. The representation in figure 1, however, is only the prophetic book and requires more elements in the transition to prophetic literature.

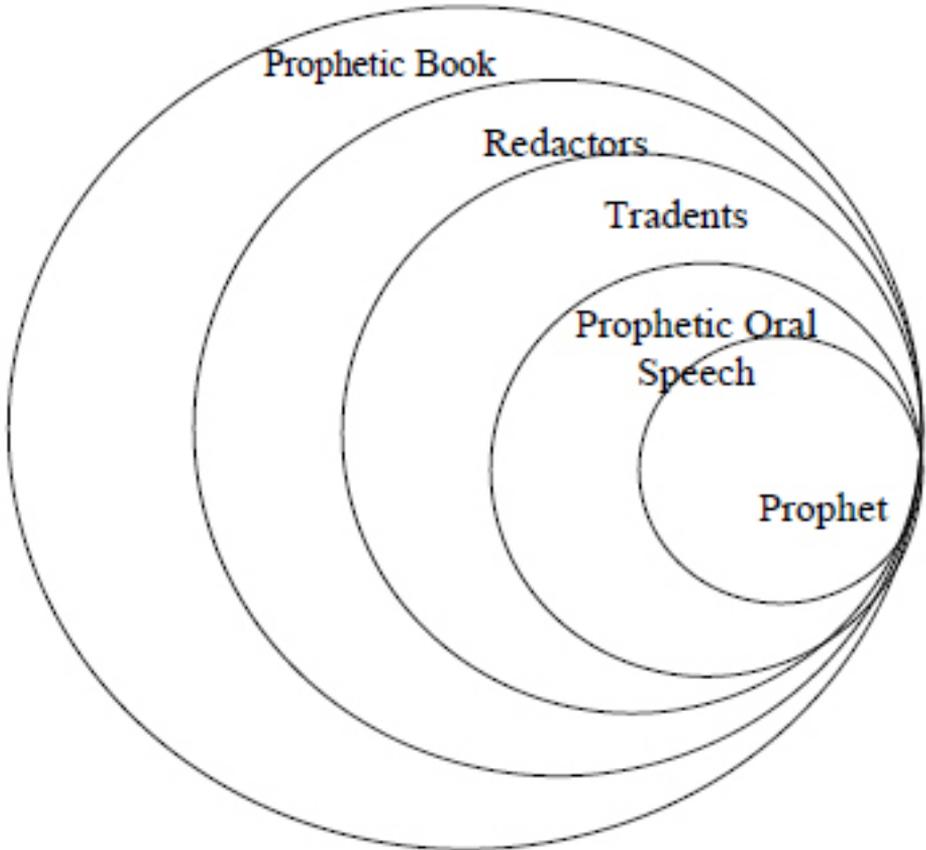


Figure 24.1

The category prophecy even though it surfaces as a title for a collection of books as early as the 2nd century BCE,¹⁰ offers no clear definition as to what constitutes a prophetic book or

prophetic literature.¹¹ Yet despite this, Biblical Studies proceeds on the notion that prophetic literature consists of a clearly delineated set of texts in a canonical category occupied by the Major Prophets and the Book of the Twelve with the ‘Former Prophets’ and Daniel being the variable factors between Jewish and Christian canons. Precisely what makes these books prophetic literature when the term *nabi*, even though the normative word for ‘prophet’ in Hebrew, appears not to be the only descriptor of what might be termed prophetic activity?¹² David Petersen distinguishes prophetic literature from ‘words that prophets spoke’ (Petersen 2002, 1) as a means of understanding what about the activity of prophets and later communities lead to the development of literature that we regard as distinctive. On the major question of what exactly is prophetic literature Petersen stutters an answer. He offers: ‘prophetic literature is literature that attests to or grows out of (i.e., is generated by) the activity of Israel’s prophets’ (Petersen 2002, 4).¹³ Petersen is not alone with an inadequate response to the question of what constitutes prophetic literature. Christopher Seitz speaks of the distinctiveness of this literature as its strangeness (Seitz 2007, 88). For Seitz this means that the religious individual closely associated with the literature remains absent from it, for the most part making the development of character and personality of the prophet an illusion. Petersen and Seitz open up the space where a postcolonial approach or just as well a postmodern approach, to prophetic literature appears to make sense. They both hint at the death of the author, the non-existence of authorial intent if that author is a single individual, the instability of the text for most of its history, the location of the text at several boundary intersections of time and communities, among other things (Petersen 2002, 5–7; Seitz 2007, 98–102). However, they both go in different directions of each other and where a postcolonial approach may go.¹⁴

The concerns of naming and categorization here deals with which books occupy the canonical category prophets. Using the terms of this essay, in order to clarify their usage, that means which prophetic books get to be considered prophetic literature. This essay expresses no interest in determining this question but is more focused on showing the constructed nature of this category and what a postcolonial treatment of the literature canonically assigned to this category can be like.

A postcolonial treatment of prophetic literature views it as what Bhabha sees as a ‘mode of civil authority and order’ (Bhabha 1994, 107) that comes with the literature of colonial power. The notion ‘prophetic literature’ springs out of canonical ordering to name and tame texts as well as readers. As the production of the prophetic book exists in expanding spheres of articulation, so too does the entity prophetic literature emerge from expanding circles of influence, ideology and authority. These relationships are mapped in figure 2 and trace the development of texts through historical spheres of influence that result in increasing accretions of power to the final form of the text presented canonically as prophetic literature. These spheres of power leading to the canonical category coincide with the production of prophetic literature, as J. Z. Smith indicates: ‘Canonization, as a secondary process, is inseparable from modes of production’ (Smith 1998, 307). Prophetic literature as a product of the canon represents authority in this text product defined as the words of a prophet from a divine source. Smith sees this authority as inhering less in the work itself as in its ability to be manipulated to create a *parole* (Smith 1998, 299).

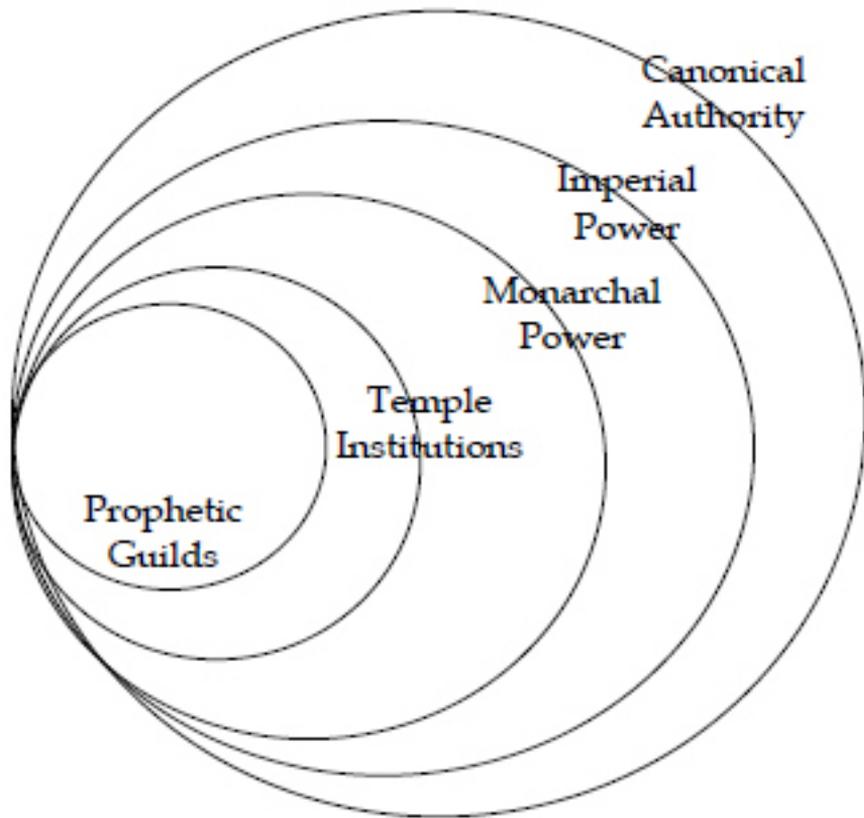


Figure 24.2

The framing of a canonical category of prophetic literature based upon literary conventions seen as typical of prophetic speech stands on shaky grounds. Petersen lists what he regards as five conventional prophetic forms based upon his understanding of prophecy as a social institution.¹⁵ He follows largely in the mould of Klaus Koch who views prophetic forms as ‘literary types’ that emerge from specific historical settings.¹⁶ While some overlap between Petersen and Koch exists, they produce differing lists of what constitutes the basic forms of prophetic literature. Alastair Fowler indicates that discrepancies such as these emerge due to the inability of literature to be classified based upon traits since genres change over time and their descriptions are only partial (Fowler 1982, 18 and 47). Fowler remains clear that genres are key to canons¹⁷ and therefore, correspondingly pass on their instability to canons and canonical decisions. But this means that the authority of texts derive precisely from their categorization and the decisions made about them. Aijaz Ahmad alerts us to this in his response to the notion and description of ‘Third World Literature’. He critiques the ‘cavalier’ historical notions that lead to the homogenization of various types of material ‘under a unitary insignia.’ Ahmad complains that this single designator must function as the ‘epochal ideology for cultural production in non-Western societies’ (Ahmad 1992, 243).

Applying Ahmad's postcolonial concerns to prophetic literature raises the similar issues of homogeneity and control. In the production of the archive that is prophetic literature, a system of control obtains to subject these texts and their readings to particular ideologies.¹⁸ While this concern renews issues relating to the place of books like Jonah and Daniel, it also calls into question whether or not Ezra-Nehemiah should not be considered as prophetic literature. Both Ezra and Nehemiah carry out divinely given commissions like Haggai and Zechariah, with more narrative material about the nature, context and focus of their work provided in the text than exists for the two prophets. Should the category 'Former Prophets' being seen as prophetic literature, then the books of Chronicles also contends for this designation, given that it covers much of the same material and it broadens the prophetic office to include even kings. A postcolonial approach may also take on as part of its agenda contesting the archive of prophetic literature given the diversity and multiple concerns that gather to the umbrella of the postcolonial (Goonewardena 2004, 659).

The postcolonial approach to prophetic literature acts as a disruptive presence to unmask the power behind the production of this category of biblical texts. A postcolonial approach both points out the unstable nature of the category as well as the tendency of categorization to homogenize, control and ultimately, for texts like these, to be deployed in the service of what Jeremy Punt refers to as 'colonialist, imperialist, or hegemonic interpretations of the texts of the Bible or its nature and status' (Punt 2003, 24). A postcolonial reading, therefore, stands in the space of instability of the category of prophetic literature. Bhabha speaks of this as the point at which the text 'emerges uncertainly' (Bhabha 1994, 107). For him this is the place where the ideals of 'Englishness' inherent in the texts fracture under the weight of the assault of British colonialism as a practice. That is to say, the practice of the power presumed by the text reveals its impotence. A postcolonial reading of prophetic literature opens the spaces where the power of the canon fractures in defining literature as well as in prescribing the reading of literature. It locates the spaces that can redefine the canonical category as heterogeneous and bring excluded margins into the center of readings. Three broad areas that articulate in a preliminary way a postcolonial approach to prophetic literature will now be outlined.

Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*, remains a high-water mark in postcolonial studies. In this work, he shows how the orient exists as a creation of the western imperial gaze rather than in its own right (Said 1979). Said expands the theoretical understandings of the production of knowledge and representation, particularly of marginalized peoples and groups. Yet as Said questions the imperial gaze he remains uncritical of the new mode of knowledge production that he advocates.¹⁹ This sort of blind spot appears in 19th century approaches to prophetic texts that deemed the prophets the heroes of 'late Judaism' and allows the texts to inveigh against several aspects of Jewish practices across large sections of history. In other words, relying upon the prophetic books with their thin biographical data and fragmented texts has proven to be dangerous.

In as much as postcolonial theory locates imbalances of power within literatures, it also needs to question epistemological assumptions inherent in prophetic literature. The epistemology of prophetic texts requires more urgent probing especially since it comes with a claim to exclusive knowledge acquired through the practice of 'secret art', a critical characteristic of prophetic literature. Postcolonial theorists should no more trust prophets, especially since it is clear that single

individuals do not stand behind these texts but rather generations of tradents, that they should other claimants to authority and power referenced in these texts.

The historical work that has been the hallmark of prophetic studies remains important, though insufficient for the level of enquiry that postcolonial theory requires. More than reconstructing ancient society, ancient prophetic practices or even unearthing original prophetic words, a critical interrogation of the literature and its epistemology would be needed. In some regards Robert Carroll performs this role in his work with the book of Jeremiah when he views with skepticism claims to a historical Jeremiah given that the hand of the Deuteronomists and other tradents are all over the text. For Carroll the historical moment of the book of Jeremiah lies not in the times of 'Jeremiah' and his words but rather in the later postexilic communities that hold certain visions of what the new and reconstituted community should look like (Carroll 2006, 68–69). Exposing the mechanics of the production of knowledge and therefore the channels of power in the text remains one of the functions of a postcolonial enquiry into these texts that purport to report directly the divine word unlike the self-claims of other sacred texts. This work needs to take place even if it means interrogating the prophetic name, figure and personality drawn by the text.

The canonical prophetic texts stand apart from the Deuteronomistic History or the Chronic History through a greater preoccupation with foreign nations as concrete entities. This marks the second aspect that emerges from a postcolonial approach to these texts. In the canonical prophets, foreign nations are real in their atrocities and the punishment that will be their due by Israel's god. This preoccupation and the nature of it signal a changed historical period that suggests more than the normal commerce of trade and interaction among nations. Rather, this level of interest and the visceral reaction imply a direct involvement and sharing with foreign nations, be those experiences positive or negative. The collection of oracles against the nations that form large sections of the major and some minor prophets and is the preoccupation of a book like Nahum, speak to the literature that is engaged in conversation with geo-political realities. Because these texts are dated during the period after the exile, the dislocations caused by landlessness, destruction of state apparatuses and the reconfiguration of power among nations make a profound mark upon the consciousness of the framers of the text. While the term nationalism may be misapplied as a reality to this historical period, reading the literature as nationalist texts from a postcolonial perspective may not be anachronistic. Lord Acton's dictum, 'exile is the nursery of nationality' (cited in Goonewardena 2004, 660) alerts postcolonial theorists that this literature provides a re-imagining of the relationship among nations. In that re-imagining, Jerusalem becomes the center of the world, as seen in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah and Zechariah unlike the parochial visions of restoration in say the Chronicler and Ezra-Nehemiah.

The preoccupation with the foreign, at least to the extent of creating new cartographies of power, may well be one of the hallmarks of prophetic literature. And at the same time, this preoccupation with things foreign stands as a feature of the writings of diasporic communities. Goonewardena argues that the choice presented to diasporic communities to reconstitute themselves and their identities by other than military confrontation is the choice between history and historiography. He argues that among the features of the historiography that emerges from such diasporic communities are misrepresentations and omitted representations in the historical record. Relying upon Althusser, he points out that this historiography is both illusion and allusion; a combination of imagination and reality. Further, he enlists Benedict Anderson's notion of the

nation as an imagined community to show how diasporic communities imagine their nation in a new relationship with history (Goonewardena 2004, 683). Goonewardena's insights hold critical implications for reading prophetic literature from a postcolonial perspective. The literature performs a historiography of the community both in its past and its future-present. The prophetic texts reconstruct either a pristine identity that was spoiled and need to be recovered or the constituting of a new identity after the disaster. At times these visions conflict as in the case of Isaiah or Jeremiah. At other times they become the reality as in parts of priestly prescriptions of Ezekiel, or the centrality of the temple in Haggai and Zechariah 1-8. Resituating prophetic literature as a reflection of the national imaginary brings new focus to parts of texts overlooked such as the oracles against the nations, the proto-apocalyptic sections of Isaiah and Second Zechariah and the book of Jonah. Focus on this 'prophetic imagination' has the potential to go beyond the work of Walter Brueggemann who describes how particular prophets and prophetic texts shape their message in response to prevailing power realities (Brueggemann 2001). A postcolonial approach pushes his work further to see how prophetic imagination envisages new futures for communities in light of imperial power.²⁰

The people to whom the words of the prophet are addressed neither speak, act, nor are mentioned in the records of the books. Such absences become more glaring when seen along gender lines. Except for the brief encounter with the worshippers of the queen of heaven cult (Jer 44), no women's voices are heard in prophetic books. The heightened gendered and sexual language of love, infidelity and punishment stands out in the Major Prophets and the book of Hosea, and a shorter gendered reference can also be found in Amos. Prophets occupy the main subject position of prophetic books even though the content of the books are directed to the large class presumed as the people of the community. This then is the third aspect to emerge in reading of prophetic literature from a postcolonial perspective, the absence of fully developed subject positions in the text.

This absence and silence resembles Gayatri Spivak's focus on the subaltern in colonialist discourse. Spivak does not simply mean the oppressed by her use of the term subaltern. She is more interested in those completely excluded and marginalized from any and most of the benefits of the society even though they are still required for the existence of the society. In part of her work, she focuses on the 'native informant' and how that figure functions/does not function in ethnographic discourse. The native informant serves the crucial role of supplying data for ethnographic studies but without being mentioned in the literature. She defines the native informant as 'a name for that mark of expulsion from the name of Man – a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation' (Spivak 1999, 6). By 'Man' she means precisely those who can enter into history, who can become the subject of texts, and who can be theorized. If those expulsions remove native males from the narrative focus of texts, Spivak believes that they push women even further out of the frame. Yet without the native informant the picture that is the ethnographic account cannot be taken and cannot exist. She also locates another source of power for the subaltern/native informant who turns up on the world stage as the migrant, 'a figure of the effacement of the native informant' (Spivak 1999, 18). Spivak suggests that those excluded in one environment appear in another, albeit in a different form, with different bases of power. As such she exposes the dangers of failure to pay attention to the silencing of the subaltern voice.

Prophetic texts contain silences. The objects of divine wrath and punishment hardly appear but are critical for the judgment to have any validity. The idealized woman that serves as the image of a faithful Israel is never seen but she only exists insofar as the unfaithful hyper sexualized woman appears as the caricature of the true woman. In these and other places prophetic texts perform this silencing function of the 'subaltern'. Postcolonial reading of the texts requires theorizing about these absent and silent subject positions. Apart from feminist critiques, not much attention has been paid to the violent and sexual representation of women in prophetic texts, both positive and negative. No adequate theory has emerged to reconstruct the role and place of women in the society where male produced images such as these will have both a warrant and effect on male listeners. Postcolonial theory with its embrace of subaltern studies stands to make a contribution to the recovery of these silences in prophetic literature. For the silences are acts of power and interrogating the power that is at work in relation to woman and the general class of people brings the power of institutions and divine power into focus. Postcolonial theory can probe the dominant discourses of prophetic texts on these points of silence and exclusion.

Postcolonial theory as an academic discourse seems to have run its course in the minds of some thinkers. They argue that given the reconfigurations of power in a global environment, approaches to geo-political power are better framed around the notions of cosmopolitanism and globalization.²¹ This argument suggests that the past manifestations of inequalities of power displayed by western European powers from the 16th century onwards are no longer of critical value when compared to the concentrations of power in a globalized world. Mishra and Hodge, though, caution about dispensing with the past too readily and with it the insights of postcolonial theory. They argue that postcolonial theory's future is tied up with its Marxist roots and it needs to claim these, particularly Marxist historiography. This historiography they suggest enables a recovery of the past where there are more than just victims and oppressors but there are orthodoxies, doctrines and differences that require interrogation. They aver, 'the past can be redeemed only through a radical consciousness of it' (Mishra and Hodge 2005, 391). This affirmation serves both postcolonial theory and prophetic studies well. It reaffirms the value of the historiographic work that has marked prophetic studies while interrogating, probing and challenging some of its assumptions and preoccupations.

Postcolonial theory brings these loyalties that can energize the study of the prophetic literature. It does not dispense with the traditional historically biased approach to prophetic texts but resists being led up a blind alley by undue dependence upon historicist approaches. It interrogates the methodologies used by interpreters and the assumptions and knowledge they have produced about the institutions of prophecy, prophets and prophetic literature. It calls attention to the literature and its special features as a distinct genre and explores what these mean in contemporary diasporic communities and communities reconstituting themselves after disaster. It regards historiography as necessary though not determinative. Postcolonial theory holds the promise to help reconcile disparate parts of prophetic studies as well as forge new areas of enquiry for these intricate and strange texts.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ R. S. Sugirtharajah offers a description of the scope of postcolonial theory: 'It is an interpretative act of the descendants of those once subjugated. ... It means engaging with the mass of knowledge which is produced on their behalf and which is in the domain of Euro-American interpretation. It is an act of reclamation, redemption and reaffirmation against the past colonial and current neo-colonising tendencies which continue to exert influence even after territorial and political independence has been accomplished. It is a tactic and a practice' (Sugirtharajah 2002a, 544).
- ² The term 'prophetic literature' will be used in this essay. When the term 'prophetic book' is used it will be defined for its appropriate usage.
- ³ Sugirtharajah adds: 'Colonialism played an important part in giving a new status to sacred texts' (Sugirtharajah 2008, 62).
- ⁴ Robert Wilson cites Heinrich Ewald and Bernhard Duhm as holding these views (Wilson 1980, 3). Lester Grabbe observes that even beyond the 19th century period the notion of the prophets as 'social reformers and critics' persist. He points out that the literature itself does not support this picture as in the case of Isaiah 1-35 where the focus of the text appears to be more on wickedness, rebellion and disobedience. He prefers to see them more as 'politic critics' (Grabbe 1995, 102).
- ⁵ The presentation of Isaiah of Jerusalem as royal advisor, advocate of Zion tradition, and divine messenger carries with it the multiple loyalties that the prophet navigates within the context of the Assyrian crisis.
- ⁶ Christopher Seitz observes that the marketplace for the production of textbooks on prophets yields a disproportionate trend towards the prophets as 'historical figures' (Seitz 2007, 28).
- ⁷ Postcolonial theory resorts to methods of literary criticism as a broad field for some of its presuppositions about texts. As such, it falls prey to some of the limitations of this methodology, one of them being the tension between the text as literary product and the text as a socio-historical product. Nicolas Harrison points out that this tension stands as one area in need of reconciliation in postcolonial studies. He sees them, not as opposite concerns, but as equally necessary given that postcolonial theory is broad enough to accommodate such diversity (Harrison 2003, 2, 9; Mishra and Hodge 2005, 378).
- ⁸ Blenkinsopp leans towards Max Weber's exploration of the prophetic movement even though he acknowledges its connection with the Hegelian and German theo-philosophical approaches to ancient Israel. Among the areas for exploration he cites: 'the nature and extent of the social support needed for mediation of this kind, the circumstances (social stress, political crisis, anomie) in which certain kinds of 'prophetic' activity tend to emerge, and the role of society, or a limited segment of society, in the process by which an individual assumes the function of intermediary' (Blenkinsopp 1983, 43). Blenkinsopp's reliance upon Weber stems in part from Weber's openness to recognizing that charisma, as he describes it, in the prophetic institution does not inherently place the prophet outside of systems of succession or restrict charisma from operating within institutions. The reality exists, as Grabbe, bluntly points out that the nature of prophetic texts makes them highly unsuited to historical reconstruction (Grabbe 1995, 7). Seitz similarly avers, 'The prophetic books really do not give us the kind of glimpse at religious consciousness or straightforward historical particularity we may come looking for' (Seitz 2007, 88).
- ⁹ The diagrams used in this essay are modeled on the stratal interpretation of texts in contexts that recognize that all texts exist in social and cultural contexts. The nested circles represent the interlocking contexts of the layers of development of the words that constitute a prophetic book (Martin and Rose 2008, 9-10).

- 10 The Prologue of Ben Sirach: 'Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law and the Prophets and the others. ... So my grandfather Jesus, who had devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other books.'
- 11 The place of the books of Jonah and Daniel among the prophets, for instance, has long been a source of debate. Gerhard Lohfink views the early categorization of the Bible into 'histories, instructional books and prophecies' as a 'superficial, mechanical division' that randomly assigned Jonah to the section of the prophets (Lohfink 1979, 66). Grabbe when engaging the notion of 'the end of prophecy' shows that a late book such as Daniel is considered as prophecy in early Jewish canons as seen in writings from the Qumran community and Josephus (Grabbe 2000, 238–239).
- 12 David Petersen lists four 'role labels' for prophets in ancient Israel. Among these are *bōzeh*, *rō'eh*, *'iš ha'elohîm*, and *nabî*. He maintains that this picture represents a diversity of prophetic activity that results in a diversity of prophetic literature (Petersen 2003, 270).
- 13 Petersen does argue, however, that texts relating to the 'man of God' role as well as the prophetic material utilized by the Deuteronomistic Historian should also be considered as prophetic literature (Petersen 2003, 272–273).
- 14 Petersen's focus remains traditionally text oriented with a concern for genre forms and the history of the text. He situates prophetic texts between the worlds of the historical prophet and the last tradents of their material along with everything in between. Seitz, on the hand, builds on the tradition-historical work of Gerhard von Rad and the canonical critical approach of Brevard Childs to look at prophetic literature within the context of the Christian canon. A postcolonial approach will find these directions useful, since their starting points and the questions they raise create insightful new ground for exploration in prophetic studies in general and a place where postcolonial theory can engage questions of the production, authority and nature of the literature.
- 15 Petersen offers divinatory chronicle, vision report, prophetic speech, legend and prophetic historiography as the five basic forms of prophetic literature (Petersen 2002, 274).
- 16 In a section on the forms of prophetic writings, Koch explores the following types: prophetic legends, speeches relating to disaster to the individual, disaster to the nation, prophecy of salvation, pronouncement accompanying a symbolic action (Koch 1969, 200–220).
- 17 Fowler states: 'Of the many factors determining canon, genre is surely among the most decisive' (Fowler 1982, 216).
- 18 Joseph Parker views the production of 'scripture' as an act of homogenization that acknowledges heterogeneity but suppresses it through exclusion. He thinks that 'capitalist and masculinist technocracies' are complicit in these exclusions (Parker 2008, 269).
- 19 Emily Bauman speaks of the contradiction inherent in postcolonial theory that at first appears blind to its own epistemological practices (Bauman 1998, 79).
- 20 A useful exploration of these notions from the perspective of utopia and dystopia in the prophetic texts can be found in Ben Zvi 2006.
- 21 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that postcolonial theory's preoccupation with past forms of empires blinds it to the modern form of Empire that is decentered and deterritorialized. While they do not use the term globalization, their descriptions of Empire come close to several understandings of this phenomenon (Hardt and Negri 2000, 137). Diana Brydon, on the other hand, argues that the postcolonial moment is not over but that a conversation with globalization is required to ensure its future viability (Brydon 2004, 691).

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, Aijaz. 1992. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso.
- Bauman, Emily. 1998. 'Re-dressing Colonial Discourse: Postcolonial Theory and the Humanist Project'. *Critical Quarterly* 40 (1998): 79–89.
- Ben Zvi, Ehud (Ed.). 2006. *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006.
- Ben Zvi, Ehud. 2003. 'The Prophetic Book: A Key Form of Prophetic Literature'. In *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Eds. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids Mi.: William B. Eerdmans.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Blenkinsopp, Joseph. 1983. *A History of Prophecy in Israel*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Boer, Roland. 2008. *Last Stop Before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Bruggemann, Walter. 2001. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Brydon, Diana. 2004. 'Postcolonialism Now: Autonomy, Cosmopolitanism, and Diaspora'. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73: 691–706.
- Carroll, Robert P. 2006. *Jeremiah vol 1*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- Carter, Warren. 2001. *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International.
- Floyd, Michael H. 'Basic Trends in the Form-Critical Study of Prophetic Texts'. In *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Eds. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids Mi.: William B. Eerdmans.
- Fowler, Alastair. 1982. *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press.
- Goonewardena, Kanishka. 2004. 'Postcolonialism and Diaspora: A Contribution to the Critique of Nationalist Ideology and Historiography in the Age of Globalization and Neoliberalism.' *University of Toronto Quarterly* 73: 657–690.
- Grabbe, Lester L. 2000. *Judaic Religion in the Second Temple Period: Belief and Practice from the Exile to Yavneh*. London: Routledge.
- Grabbe, Lester L. 1995. *Priests, Prophets, Diviners, Sages: A Socio-Historical Study of Religious Specialists in Ancient Israel*. Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International.
- Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press.
- Harrison, Nicholas. 2003. *Postcolonial Criticism: History, Theory and the Work of Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Koch, Klaus. 1969. *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form-Critical Method*. Translated by S. M. Cupitt. New York: Charles Scribners' Sons.
- Liew, Tat-Siong Benny. 1999. *Politics of Parousia: Reading Mark Inter(con)textually*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lohfink, Gerhard. 1979. *The Bible: Now I Get It!: A Form Criticism Handbook*. Translated by Daniel Coogan. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Martin, J. R. and Rose, David. 2008. *Genre Relations: Mapping Culture*. London: Equinox.
- Mayes, Andrew. 1993. 'Prophecy and Society in Israel'. In *Of Prophets' Visions and the Wisdom of Sages: Essays in Honour of R. Norman Whybray on his Seventieth Birthday*. Eds. Heather A. McKay and David J. A. Clines. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 162. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Mishra, Vijay and Hodge, Bob. 2005. 'What Was Postcolonialism.' *New Literary History* 36: 375–402.
- Moore, Stephen D. 2006. *Empire and Apocalypse: Postcolonialism and the New Testament*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix.
- Parker, Joseph. 2008. 'Racial and Colonial Politics of the Modern Object of Knowledge'. In *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. Ed. Vincent L. Wimbush. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

- Petersen, David L. 2003. 'The Basic Forms of Prophetic Literature'. In *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. Eds. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud Ben Zvi. Grand Rapids, Mi.: William B. Eerdmans.
- Petersen, David L. 2002. *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox.
- Punt, Jeremy. 2003. 'Why Not Postcolonial Biblical Criticism in Southern Africa: Stating the Obvious or Looking for the Impossible?' In *Seminar Papers Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting 2003*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Said, Edward W. 1979. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Seitz, Christopher R. 2007. *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Towards a New Introduction to the Prophets*. Grand Rapids, Mi: Baker Books.
- Smith, J. Z. 1998. 'Canons, Catalogues and Classics'. In *Canonization and Decanonization: Papers Presented to the International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions (LISOR), held at Leiden 9–10 January 1997*. Eds. A. van der Kooij and K. van der Toorn. Leiden: Brill.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press.
- Sugirtharajah, R. S. 2008. 'Known Knowns and Unknown Unknowns: Scriptures and Scriptural Interpretation'. In *Theorizing Scriptures: New Critical Orientations to a Cultural Phenomenon*. Ed. Vincent L. Wimbush. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Sugirtharajah, R. S. 2005. *The Bible and Empire: Postcolonial Explorations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sugirtharajah, R. S. 2003. *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology*. St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice.
- Sugirtharajah, R. S. 2002a. 'Postcolonial Theory and Biblical Studies'. In *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen*. Eds. Ismo Dunderberg; Christopher Tuckett; Kari Syreeni. Leiden: Brill.
- Sugirtharajah, R. S. 2002b. *Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sugirtharajah, R. S. 2001. *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilson, Robert R. 1980. *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress.

Cite this article as: Metzger, James. 2010. 'Disability and the Marginalization of God in the Parable of the Snubbed Host (Luke 14.15-24)'. *The Bible and Critical Theory* 6 (2): pp. 23.1–23.13. DOI: 10.2104/bc100023.