

## Scripturalization, the Production of the Biblical Israel, and the Gay Antichrist

### A Response to *The Babylon Complex*

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“A large part of our cultural confusion can be laid at the doorstep of the Supreme Court ... We must take back our culture from the courts.”<sup>1</sup>

“Corinth was a cent[re] of trade and so different cultures were constantly meeting there and so all kinds of sin broke out, thievery, incest, homosexuality.”<sup>2</sup>

### Introduction

“Do you ever think about the term ‘Homeland Security’? I mean *really* think about it?” asks Larry of Brad in Todd Field’s 2006 film *Little Children*, based on Tom Perrotta’s 2004 novel of the same title (Perrotta co-authored the screenplay of the film).<sup>3</sup> Larry is a former police officer, forced into retirement due to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after mistakenly shooting a teenager in a shopping mall. He is now spending his time persecuting a convicted sex offender, Ronnie McGorvey, who, having recently been released from prison, has moved in with his mother in the quiet suburb in which Larry and his family live. Larry justifies his attacks on Ronnie by appeal to a supposedly unimpeachable moral claim with an implicit grounding in a transcendent but unspecified authority which justifies an exception to the law: “Protect the children!” This particular appeal to an exception is fuelled by a fear of dangerous sexuality that Larry shares with a group of middle-class mothers who gather each day with their children at a local playground, their own fears managed and assuaged by a combination of their own highly regimented sexual lives, regulated within the framework of the patriarchal, heteronormative nuclear family, their outspoken desire for the sexual predator in their midst to be violently emasculated, and their coy fascination with “the Prom king” Brad—named Todd in the novel—a mesmerisingly handsome young father who visits the playground each day with his son. Underlying their unspoken fears are the fissures and fractures within the emotional and sexual lives of each of these characters: the unhappy marriages of the three young mothers (Mary Ann’s in particular, in the novel) and of Sarah (the fourth and odd-one-out among the mothers at the playground who resists her companions’ vitriol against Ronnie), the gender instabilities of Brad’s marriage to Kathy, who is the family breadwinner, and Brad’s secret fear that Larry is sexually attracted to him. In the background, perhaps more clearly in the film than the novel, are tensions around private and public space driven by tacit assumptions

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Bork, speaking at the 1995 Christian Coalition convention. Cited in Kintz (1997, 58).

<sup>2</sup> Pastor Phil Pringle of the Christian City Church, Sydney (now C3 Church), speaking at the Spiritual Warfare Conference, Jubilee Christian Center, San Jose, California, April 25, 1992. Cited in Joseph (1996, 129).

<sup>3</sup> Perrotta (2004).

about race, class, and gender, and the way that these, together with the characters' particular and collective fears and insecurities, serve to mediate a sense of American identity against the background of the United States' attempts to assert its global dominance through the war in Iraq (in the film, Kathy is making a documentary about the impact of the war on the bereaved families of soldiers killed in Iraq).

The complex of factors at play in *Little Children* are all present in the context addressed by Erin Runions' 2014 book *The Babylon Complex*. *The Babylon Complex* is a theoretically rich engagement with a particular instance of the phenomenon of scripturalization,<sup>4</sup> by which the cultural authority of the Christian scriptures in the contemporary United States,<sup>5</sup> mediated by a little over three centuries of Protestant reading practices, has enabled the polyvalent scriptural figure of "Babylon" to function, in a variety of sometimes competing discourses and media, to channel both the fears and the aspirations that contribute to shaping a sense of American identity in the (post)modern, globalized world. *Little Children* makes no explicit mention of Babylon, and neither religion in general nor Scripture in particular plays a part in it (though in Perrotta's novel the Roman Catholicism of Larry's wife and Ronnie's mother serves both to mediate and to complicate some of the fears and tensions to which I have just referred). Yet it mirrors, in its characters and in the unfolding of the plot, the key instabilities in public discourse in the United States with which Runions engages in relation to the cultural deployment of the Bible, and I use the film here as a foil to introduce some key themes.

Larry's appeal to the protection of children points to one such theme, namely the role of the abjection of deviant sexuality in the production of the identity of a community or nation. A key aspect of the discourse of the (usually Christian) Right is the appeal to the protection of children,<sup>6</sup> which is frequently used to justify the rejection of homosexuality. In *Little Children*, Larry's target is a paedophile, indeed an apparently heterosexual paedophile, not a homosexual,<sup>7</sup> but the two are all too

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<sup>4</sup> "Scripturalization" refers to the human activity of investing certain religious writings—in this case the Protestant Bible—with transcendental authority, and working to maintain that status. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith influentially suggested in 1993: "[N]o text is scripture in itself and as such. People—a given community—make a text into scripture, or keep it scripture: by treating it in a certain way" (Cantwell Smith 1993, 18).

<sup>5</sup> On this phenomenon, see further e.g. Burlein (2002, esp. 6-7).

<sup>6</sup> Burlein (2002, 8-16 in general; 150-57 on James Dobson and Focus on the Family in particular). Burlein refers, in her discussion of Dobson, to "sentimental and scandalous images of children used as an affective magnet for multiple moral panics" (2002, 150). Kintz sees the focus of the rhetoric of the Right-wing, absolutist Christianity she examines as less children *per se* than the sacred bond perceived to exist between mother and child (e.g. Kintz 1997, 17-53, esp. 30-31, 43-46).

<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, it is arguably the case that such appeals to "the Child whose innocence solicits our defense," not only as they are articulated within political discourse but as they in turn shape "the logic within which the political itself must be thought," are inherently resistant to any kind of queer alternative, and serve in myriad ways to prop up the "absolute privilege of heteronormativity" (see Edelman 2004, 1-31; quotations from p. 2). This is the case even for the putatively progressive and pluralist agendas of the Left, which, no less than the Right, can appeal to a "fight for our children" (Edelman 2004, 3; cf. Joseph 1996, 133). Such appeals give voice to an ideology Edelman terms "reproductive futurism." Edelman, by contrast, echoing the conclusion to Burlein (2002, 195-214) and to some extent anticipating Runions' "queerly sublime ethics of reading" (2014, 213-253; esp. 247-53), sees the queer ethical moment in a resistance to the politics of oppositionality, and to this fetish for an ideal future (embodied in the appeal to the fantasy Child) that entails and requires the exclusion of whatever does not submit to the compulsory logic of reproduction. For an example of

frequently conjoined in the Right-wing imagination, which has made plausible phenomena such as Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" campaign against the Dade County nondiscrimination ordinance in 1977.<sup>8</sup> Larry is using children as what Ann Burlein calls an "affective moral magnet" to negotiate a moral panic provoked by a sexuality constructed as deviant. In *Little Children*, Larry sees this deviant sexuality as a threat to the integrity and future of his community, symbolised by its children, but his oblique reference to "homeland security" hints that this is but a microcosm of a much larger issue, namely the way the nation may be policed ideologically by the abjection of particular kinds of sex and desire. The presence of the spectre of deviant and dangerous sexuality is, however, essential to the construction of the identity of the community or nation in question:<sup>9</sup> it remains present, in the form of its ardent exclusion. It is simultaneously outside and within the body of the nation.

*The Babylon Complex* makes it clear that the Bible has played a decisive, albeit at times ambivalent and contradictory, role in this sexualised policing in the religio-political discourse of the contemporary United States. Yet what I want to stress here is that *this reflects trends already at work within the Hebrew Bible itself*, inasmuch as the production of the biblical Israel is inseparable from the notion that certain kinds of sex and desire pose a mortal threat to the body of the ethnos. As Burlein puts it, "the Bible persistently associates sex with national threat."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the beginnings of scripturalization in Israel, which arguably can be traced to the identity politics of post-exilic Yehud,<sup>11</sup> are deeply implicated in this process. In view of this, how might one articulate the task of the biblical scholar in both exegeting the biblical texts, and explicating their role in contemporary discourse?

In this essay, I would like to explore some aspects of the relationship between sexuality, scripturalization, and the task of the biblical scholar, building on some of my own recent work in the nascent sub-field of reception history,<sup>12</sup> and bouncing

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the conservative defence of heterosexual marriage for the sake of the *legitimacy* of children and their consequent welfare (which claims no explicit religious basis for its argument but instead appeals to the evidence of cultural anthropology), see Murray (1994).

<sup>8</sup> On Bryant's rhetorical appeal based on the fear of homosexual recruitment of children, see the excellent critique in Jordan (2011, 143-47; cf. Edelman 2004, 19). The fear of male homosexuals recruiting children is a *leitmotif* of David Noebel's book *The Homosexual Revolution* (1984). Indeed, such recruitment is, Noebel claims, the *cause* of adult homosexuality: "Since homosexuals cannot reproduce, they must recruit the young" (Noebel 1984, 60; cf. Burlein 2002, 103-104). The conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia occurs in cartoon form in the 1991 Jack Chick tract *Doom Town* ([https://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0273/0273\\_01.asp](https://www.chick.com/reading/tracts/0273/0273_01.asp)), where Gen 19 provides the script for a conservative Christian attack on same-sex relationships. Among the more notorious recent proponents of this view is Scott Lively, whose views on the matter seem to have been one of the key influences on the anti-homosexuality legislation in Uganda. See e.g. the first of the video clips in Mariah Blake, "Meet the American Pastor Behind Uganda's Anti-Gay Crackdown" (*Mother Jones* (March 10, 2014)) (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2014/03/scott-lively-anti-gay-law-uganda>), and the speech by Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni on signing the anti-homosexuality bill into law (*Daily Monitor* (February 24, 2014)) (<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/Museveni-s-Anti-Homosexuality-speech/-/688334/2219956/-/vlnrt7/-/index.html>), which likewise appeals to the alleged homosexual recruitment of children in defence of the legislation.

<sup>9</sup> For this notion of abjection, see further Kristeva (1982; cf. also Long 2005, 12).

<sup>10</sup> Burlein (2002, 156; cf. 44-74).

<sup>11</sup> Albeit with earlier roots (cf. 2 Kings 22-23, but also the allusions to *writing* in Deuteronomy).

<sup>12</sup> Esp. Harding (2009; 2013; 2015).

ideas off certain parts of Runions' book. I would like to focus on two themes, both of which concern textual ambiguity and the rhetoric of sexuality. The first is the relationship between the abjection of the homoerotic and the policing of ethnic boundaries, especially as it pertains to the production of the ideal Israel in the Hebrew Bible, particularly Lev. 18:3, but with some additional connections to Ezra 9-10 and a number of other related texts. The second is the peculiar afterlife of Dan. 11:37, with its strange suggestion of a gay Antichrist. I will conclude by asking what these textual negotiations suggest about the role of the biblical scholar.

## The Production of the Biblical Israel

Inasmuch as the abjection of sexuality constructed as deviant, with the collusion of a Bible appropriated as sacred Scripture, has proved integral to certain constructions of American identity,<sup>13</sup> the production of Israel in the biblical texts themselves depends on the abjection of deviant sexuality.<sup>14</sup> In the process, Canaanite sexuality is invented. The ideal, biblical Israel requires the figure of the sexually transgressive Canaanite for its very identity (Canaanite religion is also invented as part of the same process, and the apparently misleading imbrication of sex and cult in biblical constructions of Canaanite devotion has required patient scholarly analysis to uncover the disjunction between the biblical representation and the likely historical actuality).

An enormous amount of ink has been spilt in recent decades on the theme of homosexuality and the Bible, as if "homosexuality" were a distinct and discrete theme within the thought worlds that are enmeshed in the biblical texts. This discourse depends on both modern, Western constructions of sexuality, and largely modern, Western concerns about the relationship between sexuality and scriptural authority: without this nexus, combined with the transnational economic empires of publishing in the field of Biblical Studies, there would be no debate. One of the tasks of the biblical scholar, it seems to me, in demystifying the modern debate, is to identify and probe the blindspots that limit the vision of some of those engaged in the debate. One of those blindspots is created by the idea that there is such a thing as "sexuality" within the biblical texts and the world behind them. It seems to me, on the contrary, that the Hebrew Bible, at least, principally deals with problematic sex in connection with the ideological policing of the borders of Israel, whether implicitly or explicitly. Thus in terms of the biblical texts, there is no question of (homo)sexuality *per se*, but there *is* a question of the nexus between certain kinds of sex and the ideal Israel.

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to Runions (2014), see, *inter alia*, Miranda Joseph's 1996 study of the way (some) gay people and (certain Right-wing) Christians, in defining "gays" and "Christians" in opposition to each other in a conflict over *national* arts funding in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s (the era of both the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the beginnings of the erasure of the power of the nation state through globalisation, an erasure which recent debates over trans-Pacific and trans-Atlantic partnership agreements have taken to a new level), "participated in a struggle over the reformulation of the nation-state, contesting the functions, boundaries, and membership of that nation-state" (Joseph 1996, 112).

<sup>14</sup> I am not going to speculate here on the way the Israel that putatively lies behind the biblical texts negotiated its identity (a valid task, though beset with innumerable methodological pitfalls): my concern is with *texts* that became *Scripture*.



The most obvious example is the case of Lev 18:22 and 20:13. In each case, there is a prohibition of some form of sex between men: a man is not to lie with another man *miškēbē 'iššāh* (“the lyings-down of a woman”), for it is *tô'ēbāh* (an “abomination”). Identifying the precise act in question is a legitimate avenue of investigation, but it is essential to note that, at least in the final, redacted form of the Holiness Code (H) within the book of Leviticus, the significance of this act is not for what it is in itself (whatever that might mean), but for the fact that it is marked as that which is to be avoided because it is one of the things that characterizes the customs of Egypt and Canaan (Lev 18:3). At the same time, it belongs to a certain symbolic world in which certain things are defined, in contrast with other things, as *tô'ēbāh*. The way the commandments of Lev 18:6-23 and 20:2aβ-21 are framed, moreover, brings the ethnic boundary between Israel and Canaan to the fore (Lev 18:1-5, 24-30; 20:22-26). One who commits such an offending act is to be “cut off” (*√krt niphāl*)<sup>15</sup> from Israel. The ethnically foreign Other and the sodomized/ing Other are constructed as one and the same. The term that marks the boundary in H is *tô'ēbāh*,<sup>16</sup> a term that here is connected especially with sex, albeit that it is used elsewhere in connection with other things forbidden.<sup>17</sup>

The association of the *tô'ēbāh* with the ethnic purity of Israel, and with the protection of Israel from an offended God, recurs in the Hebrew Bible in connection with sexual behaviour, though not explicitly *homosexual* behaviour. This lies principally within the purview of *moral* rather than *ritual* impurity, as Jonathan Klawans conceptualizes the distinction,<sup>18</sup> albeit that *tô'ēbāh* is also used to refer to the connection between food and ethnic boundaries.<sup>19</sup> The controversy over intermarriage in Ezra 9-10 is framed in terms of the ethnic purity of Israel, preserved through endogamous marriage. The people of Israel have failed to separate themselves from the peoples of the land(s),<sup>20</sup> whose abjection is indicated by reference to “their abominations” (*tô'abōtēhem*).<sup>21</sup> This is not a tradition independent of Leviticus, however, because the concern of Ezra in the text is shaped

<sup>15</sup> Lev 18:29; 20:18. YHWH is the subject of the *hiphāl* elsewhere in the immediate context, where the boundaries of Israel are likewise defined by the observance of the terms of YHWH's covenant with Israel: Lev 20:3, 5, 6.

<sup>16</sup> Lev 18:22, 26, 27, 29; 20:13. On this term and its cognates, in connection with issues of identity and the transgression of boundaries, see now Crouch (2015).

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Feinstein (2014, 21 and 195 n. 56 citing, as examples, Deut 17:1; 22:5; 25:15-16; Isa 1:13; Prov 6:16-19; 11:1, 20; 12:22; 17:15; 20:10, 23). In common with Feinstein (2014, 21), I would stress that the correlation of *tô'ēbāh* and synonymous terms “with foreign and idolatrous practices seems ... to be more of a reflection of the biblical authors' concerns than of the meaning of the terms themselves.” It is precisely the way that “the biblical authors' concerns” determine the meaning of pre-existing terms and categories, as they are appropriated and transmitted, that helps to determine their reception and effect.

<sup>18</sup> Klawans (2000, 26-31).

<sup>19</sup> Lev 20:25. For the food laws as falling on the boundary between ritual and moral impurity, see Klawans (2000, 31-32). These laws implicitly define the identity of the ideal *Israel* (i.e., as those who do not eat abominated foods), but the term *tô'ēbāh* is used elsewhere to explain why *Egyptians* do not eat with Israelites (Gen 43:32).

<sup>20</sup> The *nomen rectum* is consistently plural in Ezra 9 (*'ammē hā 'rāšōt*): see verses 1, 2, and 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ezra 9:1, 11 (cf. 9:14). See also Ezek 11:14-21.

by a particular reception and appropriation of earlier authoritative texts:<sup>22</sup> it is thus an early, inner-biblical example of the phenomenon of scripturalization. The language echoes both Leviticus and Deuteronomy,<sup>23</sup> even as the text constructs a distinctive, newly restrictive case against exogamy, which does not correspond precisely to either of its proto-scriptural precursors, in order to address a new crisis of threatened pollution in the wake of the return from exile. The identity of the “abominations” is left unspecified: does it refer to non-Yahwistic worship,<sup>24</sup> child sacrifice, deviant sex? The text does not say. What we do clearly have, however, is a policing of an ethnic boundary in terms of the language of *tô‘ēbāh* and a certain sort of sex, in this case between different ethnic groups.<sup>25</sup>

Alongside *tô‘ēbāh*, the term *nēbālāh* (“outrage”) is explicitly used to mark an ethnic boundary in connection with sex,<sup>26</sup> though it is once used to refer to a non-sexual outrage in connection with Israel.<sup>27</sup> It refers to adultery in Jer 29:23,<sup>28</sup> and it appears in several narratives concerned with rape, and while it is not always clear what exactly constitutes the *nēbālāh* in each case, it is clear that the *nēbālāh* is a marker of what should lie on the other side of the boundaries of Israel, and it has something to do with sex. Thus in Gen 34:7, Shechem, a Hivite man, apparently rapes (if this is the correct understanding of what  $\sqrt{nh}$  *piel* connotes here, which I

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Feinstein (2014, 141-155).

<sup>23</sup> Thus Feinstein (2014, 145). The language of “separation” ( $\sqrt{bdl}$ ) and “abomination” (*tô‘ēbāh*) strongly echo H, the latter also occurring prominently in Deuteronomy (see esp. Deut 7:25, 26, and n. 17 above), whereas the prohibition of exogamy combines the prohibition on intermarriage with Canaanites in Deut 7:1-5 with the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites, and Egyptians before the third generation, from the congregation of YHWH (Deut 23:4-9; the reading *Idoumaiōn* in 1 Esdr. 8:66 may derive from Deut 23:8). These traditions are recycled to produce in Ezra 9-10 an absolute prohibition on exogamy with the nations mentioned.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. esp. Deut 7:4; 1 Kings 11:1-8. In 1 Kings 11:1-8, the NJPS uses “abomination” to describe the gods of Ammon and Moab (verses 5 and 7), but the Hebrew term is *šiqquš*, not *tô‘ēbāh*. Nonetheless, that the roots  $\sqrt{t'b}$  and  $\sqrt{šqš}$  belong to the same semantic domain is clear from their collocation in e.g. Deut 7:26, where the context again concerns the separation of Israel from the Canaanites and their gods (cf. Ezek 11:18, 21). On the synonymy of these two roots, see further Feinstein 2014: 20-21.

<sup>25</sup> This, in point of fact, is the nub of the reason why, according to Feinstein (2014, 151-152), the text of Ezra does not specify the nature of the abominations when it applies Lev 18:6-23 to the new situation: “Whereas Leviticus 18 invoked foreign people in order to stigmatize particular behaviors, Ezra 9 invokes a general category of rejected behaviors in order to stigmatize particular people” (2013, 152). I.e., Ezra’s goal was to exclude all who did not belong to the congregation of the *gōlāh* from the body of Israel, lest they pollute it (2014, 153-155).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Phillips (1975, 138-139). Note also *zimmāh*, “abhorrent act” (Lev 20:14; cf. Judg 20:6).

<sup>27</sup> In Josh 7:15 the *nēbālāh b’yisrā’el*, which is an act by which the offender has transgressed the covenant (*‘ābar ‘eṭ b’rīt yhwḥ*), is the act of taking that which is proscribed (*haḥērem*) (Josh 7:11). While the act is not connected with sex, it is one that has implications for the boundaries of Israel vis à vis the Canaanites, and in particular, for their purity (Josh 7:13). On the use of *nēbālāh* in general in the Hebrew Bible, see Phillips (1975; also Feinstein 2014, 74-75), where it is understood to refer to “extreme acts of disorder or unruliness which themselves result in a dangerous breakdown in order, and the end of an existing relationship.”

<sup>28</sup> Arguably the *nēbālāh b’yisrā’el* encompasses not simply the adultery that the prophets are alleged to have committed, but also the fact that they had spoken a lie in the name of YHWH (*wayēdabbērū dāḇār šeqer bišmī ‘ašer lō’ šiwwītīm*) (cf. Phillips 1975, 241).

believe it is)<sup>29</sup> Jacob's daughter Dinah. The narrator comments that "he had committed an outrage in<sup>30</sup> Israel by lying with<sup>31</sup> Jacob's daughter; such a thing should not be done" (*kī nēḥālāh 'āsāh b'yisrā'el liškab 'et bat ya'qōḥ w'kēn lō' yē'āseh*). What is not entirely clear is whether the *nēḥālāh* is Shechem's act of rape, sex between a daughter of Israel and a Hivite man (i.e., a foreigner),<sup>32</sup> the ruination of Dinah's virginity,<sup>33</sup> or the way she had been treated as a whore.<sup>34</sup> It is, after all, a *nēḥālāh* in Israel for a girl to "fornicate [while under the authority of] her father's house" (*liznōt bēt 'ābhā*) in Deut 22:21, one that requires communal stoning to rid Israel of the evil, and it is precisely because Shechem has treated their full sister "like a whore" (*k'zōnāh*) that Simeon and Levi seek revenge (Gen 34:31).

There are two subsequent narratives in which a sexual *nēḥālāh*, ambiguously represented, marks the boundary of Israel, and both of them have strong similarities to Gen 34:1-31. Following the rape of his concubine, or secondary wife (*pīleges*),<sup>35</sup> by the men of Gibeah, the unnamed Levite of Judg 19:1-30, having cut her up and sent the parts around Israel in a grim call to tribal vengeance, explains to the gathered tribes of Israel that "they had done a shameful and outrageous thing in Israel" (*'āsū zimmāh ūnēḥālāh b'yisrā'el*).<sup>36</sup> The Levite, for some reason, does not

<sup>29</sup> Following Shemesh (2007), in addition to a number of recent works by Caroline Blyth (2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2010). See esp. Blyth (2010, 38-92). My point here is that while the rape need not always be the sense meant by  $\sqrt{nh}$  (see e.g. the careful word study in Feinstein 2014, 69-72, though I would question Feinstein's exegesis of Deut 22:23-24 on the grounds given in Shemesh 2007, 5-7), some narrative contexts make such a connotation abundantly clear.

<sup>30</sup> Here perhaps *b* = "against" (Feinstein 2014, 75).

<sup>31</sup> Or, "laying": note that *'et* could indicate the definite direct object of the verb *škb* in the *qere* of Gen 34:2 and 2 Sam 13:14 (cf. Tribble 1984, 46), not the preposition "with," as the Versions, and familiar Hebrew idiom, might suggest.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jdt 9:2, which emphasises that Simeon and Levi took revenge on "foreigners" (*allogenes*), that the crime was that they had "violated a virgin's womb" (*elusan mētran parthenou*), and that the result was "shame" (*aischunē*) and "disgrace" (*oneidos*); *Jub.* 30:7-17, where the story of Dinah serves to illustrate the total prohibition of exogamy, framed in terms of the mortal danger of compromising the purity of Israel, and of defiling Israel's seed; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.21.1, where Jacob is said to have not thought it "lawful to give his daughter in marriage to a foreigner" (... *oute nomimon hēgoumenos allophulō sunoikizein tēn thugatera* ...). These texts are undoubtedly interpreting Gen 34 through the lens of other scriptural texts where exogamous marriage carries with it dangers, such as non-Yahwistic worship, that are not specified in Gen 34 (cf. Feinstein 2014, 81-85).

<sup>33</sup> *Tg. Neof.* Gen 34:31, where Simeon and Levi have acted to prevented the uncircumcised, who are described as idol-worshippers, bragging that they had "defiled virgins" (*sā'ēbū b'tūlān*) (cf. 34:13, 27).

<sup>34</sup> This, at least, is her brothers' view (Feinstein 2014, 75-76). Feinstein's view is that "Shechem's offence was having sex with Dinah outside marriage ... Nothing in the language of [Gen 34:2b, 7b, 31] supports the view that Shechem's offence lay in crossing ethnic boundaries (exogamy), in having sex with an Israelite girl while uncircumcised, or in forcing Dinah to have sex with him (rape)" (2014, 77). I am yet to be wholly convinced that the second and fourth of these options are out of the question, or that more than one of these options are not simultaneously at work in the text, though Feinstein is surely correct that rape would not *ipso facto* explain the language of *pollution* to denote Shechem's act (Feinstein 2014, 78, 81).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Soggin (1987, 159). Mieke Bal rejects the term "concubine," and argues that the *pīleges* was a wife of the Levite, but was in a patrilocal, rather than virilocal, marriage (1988, 80-93).

<sup>36</sup> Judg 20:6 (cf. 20:10). The noun *zimmāh* may have been added under the influence of texts such as Lev 18:17; 19:29; 20:14, where it clearly refers to some sort of sexual offence, though the editor of *BHQ* at this point opines that there "is no reason for changing M" (Fernández Marcos 2011, 111). It

make it clear exactly what the *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* was: in particular, he fails to tell the men of Israel that the men of Gibeah had intended to rape *him*, perhaps seeking to avoid the homophobic derision that might have followed such an admission. What, in his view, was the *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh*? The term has already been used, by the Levite's host, the "master of the house" (*ba'al habbayit*). He assumes that in demanding to "know" (*yd'*) his guest, the men of Gibeah are intending to commit a *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* (Judg 19:23). That this is assumed to be sexual is clear when the host offers his own virgin daughter (*b'tūlāh*)<sup>37</sup> and his guest's *pīlegeš*, so that they may "rape" (*√'nh piel*)<sup>38</sup> them. For the host, the *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* can only be either the rape of a man, that is, the violent sexual penetration of a male outsider,<sup>39</sup> or the sexualised insult to the host's honour, given that he is described as the "master" (*ba'al*) of the house, though this would mean that the rape of the Levite would be a *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* and the rape of the two women not, or at least a lesser degree of *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh*.<sup>40</sup> But when the Levite picks up the term, he is referring specifically to what was done to his *pīlegeš*.

There are two layers of textual indeterminacy here. First, how does this relate to the *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* that was threatened against *him*? For it is noteworthy that he has made no mention of this,<sup>41</sup> perhaps, indeed, to protect the image of his own masculine honour. Second, is the *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* committed against his *pīlegeš* the rape against her, an act resulting in her death, or the offence against him? What *is* clear is that the moral boundaries of Israel are compromised by a sexual act, for it is the men of Israel who are bound to respond to an offence that affects not simply the Levite or his host (not to mention the *pīlegeš*), but that compromises Israel as such.<sup>42</sup>

The term is used again in the story of the rape of Tamar, and again, it is Israel that is compromised by a sexual offence. When Amnon demands that Tamar lie with him, Tamar's response is that he must not do this outrageous thing (*'al ta "šēh 'et hann<sup>e</sup>bālāh hazzō't*), for such a thing ought not to be done *in Israel* (*lō' yē 'āšeh kēn b'yiśrā'ēl*).<sup>43</sup> The *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* is unlikely to be incest, not only because of the general point that the nature of "incest" differs between different cultural contexts, but because of the contextual point that Tamar quickly suggests that Amnon could, in point of fact, ask the king for permission to have her (2 Sam 13:13). It is more likely to be a

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was absent from the Old Greek, with Codex Alexandrinus simply using *aphrosunē* where the MT has *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh*, and the editor of *BHQ* suggests that it "is possible that the omission has been produced at the level of the translation" (Fernández Marcos 2011, 111).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. 2 Sam 13:2 and perh. cf. *Tg. Neof.* Gen 34:31 (see n. 33 above).

<sup>38</sup> Even if this verb is softened to mean "have illicit sex" here and in Gen 34:7, there is little ambiguity about the force to which the *pīlegeš* is subjected in Judg 19:25 (*√'ll hithpael*), the effects of which in Judg 19:26 (cf. 20:5) are stark.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Carden (1999, 90): "There would appear ... to be a Mediterranean tradition of associating receptive anal intercourse with male foreigners."

<sup>40</sup> Because raping two women is less horrifying than raping a man? Cf. Bach (1998, 12): "Thus in the minds of the male formulators of the story and their ideal audience, the horror of homosexual rape is far greater than that of a male violating a female."

<sup>41</sup> For Reis (2006, 145-146), the fact that Levite covers up not only the sexual threat against his own body, but his own decisive part in the grim fate of his *pīlegeš*, is one example of how the narrator of Judg 19-21 highlights the moral bankruptcy of Israel (cf. Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

<sup>42</sup> This is especially clear in Judg 19:30; 20:7, 10.

<sup>43</sup> 2 Sam 13:12; cf. Gen 34:7. See further Feinstein (2014, 74-75).



combination of the removal of Tamar's virginity without her father's permission (cf. Deut 22:21), which would bring shame (*herpāh*)<sup>44</sup> on her, and of the rape itself, which takes place in 2 Sam 13:14 in response to Tamar's refusal and in spite of the warning of *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* that her refusal contained. We have, again, a nexus between illicit and violent sex, the moral norms of the ideal Israel, and the term *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh*. As in Gen 34:1-31 and Judg 19-21, the offence has to be avenged for the sake of masculine honour. In Judg 20:1-48, all the men of Israel (apart from Jabesh Gilead and Benjamin itself) are responsible for seeking vengeance. In 2 Sam 13:23-39, it is Tamar's full brother Absalom who takes this responsibility, as in Gen 34:1-31, where Dinah's full brothers do the same.<sup>45</sup>

The use of *n<sup>e</sup>bālāh* in Judg 19-21 brings us back to the sexual prohibitions of Leviticus, as they are framed in H. For at issue implicitly in Judg 19, and explicitly in the story of the destruction of Sodom in Gen 19 (which stands in an uncertain relationship to Judg 19:1-30, though the current scholarly preference seems to be for the dependence of Judges on Genesis at this point), is the question of who has the right to pass judgement on the inhabitants of Gibeah and Sodom. In both cases, it is a sojourner—Lot and the unnamed Ephraimite respectively—who does so, bringing to the fore the line between insider and outsider. In Lev 18:26, the rejection of sexual abominations is incumbent on both the native-born and the foreigner, the *'ezrāh* and the *gēr*.<sup>46</sup> It is this rejection that, at this point, defines the boundary of Israel.

In Judg 19, it is a sexual transgression that marks the boundary between inside Israel and outside, but there is an additional issue to do with the status of the Levite and his host in Gibeah of Benjamin. The Levite, of course, is landless, and his *pīlegeš* is the daughter of a man of Bethlehem in Judah, but they reside in Ephraim (Judg 19:1). The line between Israel and not Israel is to the fore in Judg 19:12, where the Levite refuses to lodge in Jebus, “a foreign city that is not of the sons of Israel” (*'ir nokrī 'šer lō' mibb<sup>e</sup>nē yiśrā'ēl*), the assumption being that there are ethical norms in Israel that will permit them to lodge in safety, which of course is meant to foreground the horror that actually takes place as something that should not be done *in Israel*.<sup>47</sup> There is, though, another layer of tribal definition: the old man who gave them hospitality was himself an outsider, a *gēr*, not a non-Israelite but an *Ephraimite* in a *Benjaminite* town (Judg 19:16). His warning in Judg 19:20 could be taken to imply that he knew exactly what the townsfolk could be like to an outsider. This becomes all the clearer when read alongside Gen 19:1-29, for there Lot is explicitly derided for being an outsider who presumes to pass judgement on the townsfolk

<sup>44</sup> 2 Sam 13:13. Note the prominent use of the noun *b<sup>e</sup>tūlāh* in this narrative (2 Sam 13:2, 18).

<sup>45</sup> Hence the specification of Dinah as “Leah's daughter, whom she had borne to Jacob” (*baṭ lē'āh 'ašer yā<sup>k</sup>dāh l<sup>y</sup>a' qōb*) in Gen 34:1 and the specification of Simeon and Levi as “[full] brothers of Dinah” (*'hē dīnāh*) in Gen 34:25: while the use of the noun *'āh* cannot intrinsically distinguish full and half-brothers (just as the use of *'āhōt* cannot intrinsically distinguish full from half-sisters), and can indeed be more broadly used elsewhere to mean, in effect, “fellow Israelite” (e.g. Judg 19:23), the context makes it clear that they, like Absalom, have a particular moral responsibility for their (full) sister's welfare and the honour of the house (both narratives additionally suggest moral failure on the part of the father, Jacob and David respectively). Cf. Judg 9:1-5 for the particular bond of honour that binds sons of the same mother.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Lev 19:33-34.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Gen 34:7; 2 Sam 13:12.

when they demand to “know” ( $\sqrt{y\delta}$ )<sup>48</sup> his angelic guests: “This one has come to live here as an outsider, and has dared to pass judgement!” (*hā’ehad bā’ lāgūr wayyišpōt šāphôt*) So in each case—the commandments of H and the narratives of Gibeah and Sodom—some form of illicit and/or violent sex, whether actual or merely threatened, is perceived to mark the boundary between what does and what does not constitute the morally ideal Israel.

There is another, very well known yet nonetheless obscure, passage that characterizes the figure on the other side of the ethnic boundary, namely Canaan, in sexually derisory terms: “Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father” (*wayyar’ hām ḥî k’na’an ’ēt ’erwat ’ābîw*) (Gen 9:22). The noun *’erwāh* and the mention of Noah exposing himself ( $\sqrt{glh}$  *hithpael*) make it clear that some form of sexual reference is meant,<sup>49</sup> and while it is not precisely clear what, the hint would seem to be towards sex between Ham and his father, resulting in shame adhering to Canaan’s line. Thus like Gen 19:30-37, where Lot’s daughters induce their drunken father to have sex with them, sex perceived as deviant is at the heart of a story of origins of Israel’s separation from the surrounding nations, Canaan (Gen 9:18-28), and Ammon and Moab (Gen 19:30-37).<sup>50</sup>

I have not sought to give comprehensive coverage here of the extensive secondary literature on many of the points I have just made, nor can I claim that everything I have just written is original. The point of this brief survey is, rather, not to claim originality for my reading of the texts, but to highlight the contribution the biblical texts themselves make to the use of sex perceived as deviant in constructing the boundaries of ethnic identity, which can then help to shape the way these texts are received and appropriated. We will see a fascinating example of this a little later on, where the term “Italian marriage” (*Welsche hochzeit*)<sup>51</sup> in the margins of Luther’s Bible not only marks such a boundary by virtue of its internal derogatory reference to something both sexual and *welsch*, but also marks it by associating such a horror with the Turks. The task of the biblical scholar, at this point, is to join the dots between trends evident in the biblical texts themselves and their deployment in later contexts far removed from their origins. For while the recent deployment of the polyvalent biblical figure of Babylon ostensibly takes the biblical texts far from their origins, it now seems clear that similar negotiations of identity around illicit sex (of several kinds)<sup>52</sup> are fundamental to certain traditions within the Hebrew Bible itself.

<sup>48</sup> Gen 19:5. As in Judg 19:22, the verb is polyvalent (“get to know” *versus* “have sex with”), but it is the presumptuous *gēr* who takes it in its least charitable sense: the men of Gibeah, regardless of their initial intentions, take the old man up on his suggestion, while the men of Sodom do not get the chance.

<sup>49</sup> This language is strongly reminiscent of Lev 18:6-23.

<sup>50</sup> Thus e.g. Steinmetz (1994, 198-200 and nn. 12 and 14). Regina Schwartz (1997, 106-109) disambiguates Gen 9:18-28 by reading it in light of Lev 18:6-23, Gen 19:1-29 and 19:30-37, and Judg 19:1-30, so that the curse of Canaan is defined as a response to the shame of homosexual incest between son and father.

<sup>51</sup> In my brief citations here, I have not sought to modernize Luther’s spelling.

<sup>52</sup> Taking account of the various textual indeterminacies: the perceived or actual threat of rape on a man or men lodging as guests in a town (Gen 19:5; Judg 19:22, 23, 24); sex of some sort between men (Lev 18:22; 20:13); the adulterous rape of a woman belonging to another man by a man, or men, of another tribal or ethnic group (Gen 34:7; Judg 19:25; 20:6, 10); a virgin daughter having sex

Indeed, they are part of the process of textual negotiation that rendered works such as Leviticus and Deuteronomy scriptural in the first place, and they are also part of the process by which the interpreted Bible was created, a process we see at work in ancient texts such as Ezra (within the Hebrew Bible itself), Judith (within the Greek Bible), *Jubilees* (arguably Scripture for some Jews in the late Second Temple period and now preserved within the Ethiopic Bible), and Josephus (in his rewriting of what became the Jewish scriptures).

One key conclusion at this point must be that it makes very little sense to think and write about sex and sexuality in the Hebrew Bible as if they can be separated either from the construction of tribal and ethnic identities, or from the code of honour and shame that keeps the symbolic violence of masculine domination (cf. Bourdieu 2001) in place: we should look, then, at the biblical texts as simultaneously part of the genealogy of both homophobia and xenophobia,<sup>53</sup> which in the biblical texts cannot be separated, not principally as sources of timeless wisdom about the ordering of sexual acts and the desires that help to provoke them. There is also, however, the important point that the way biblical texts function in their various contexts of reception now is related in complex ways to how they were already encoded at the point of their ancient origins with themes and issues that anticipate their eventual use today.

### The Gay Antichrist

From the role of the exclusion of deviant sex in the construction of Israelite identity, to the projection of deviant sexuality onto the supernatural figure who embodies opposition to the God of what some would like to term “biblical” Christianity: there is more in common than might at first appear between Dan 11:37 and Lev 18:22,<sup>54</sup> brought together artificially in a canon whose shape and contours belie the variety of origins of the texts it now contains. Its artificial claim to a kind of uniformity, moreover, belies the ambiguity—or rather, *ambiguities*, for there are various sorts of ambiguity here—of the texts the canon makes biblical.

The multiple contradictory appropriations of the figure of Babylon point to an intriguing paradox in the phenomenon of scripturalization: in general, the ambiguity or polyvalence of texts perceived as scriptural must be kept hidden, and their gaps (actual or perceived, accidental or intentional) papered over, so that the texts themselves can be made to speak with one voice.<sup>55</sup> The texts speak with a single

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without her father’s authority (Gen 34:2, 31 (cf. *Tg. Neof. ad loc.*); Deut 22:20-21; 2 Sam 13:2, 12, 14, 18); adultery (Jer 29:23); exogamous sex (Ezra 9:1, 2, 12; Jdt 9:2; *Jub.* 30:7-17; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.21.1).

<sup>53</sup> Thus Reis (2006, 146) on Judg 19: “[t]he sin of Gibeah, like the sin of Sodom which the biblical author pointedly recalls to our notice, is not homosexuality but xenophobic hatred—worse still than Sodom since the men of Gibeah and the Levite are brother Israelites.” I would add that this xenophobic hatred is inextricably linked to the genealogy of homophobia.

<sup>54</sup> The similarity between the two has to do with the role of binary oppositions and the theme of physical defilement in both apocalyptic texts (thus Long 2005, 8-13) and the biblical traditions connected with holiness.

<sup>55</sup> Compare the words of Linda Kintz, commenting on the tendency of Right-wing discourse to inculcate a sense of the familiarity, the naturalness, of the social order: “One last feature of this structure of clarity is the insistence that language is inherently simple, transparent, and clear, because it is at bottom linked to the natural order of the cosmos. In this view, true words or metaphors, such as ‘woman,’ ‘man,’ ‘nation,’ ‘family,’ are those that match God’s natural order, because his inherent natural law precedes all interpretation” (Kintz 1997, 9-10). Kintz’s point suggests that there is an

voice despite—or perhaps even because of—the fact that they are open to interpretation. Implicit here is, I would suggest, a belief that the language of Scripture is (that is, *must be*) clear and simple, ultimately reflecting the clarity and simplicity of the natural order instituted by God. This is hardly a modern phenomenon, and arguably finds its historical origins at the roots of biblical scripturalization itself, in the emergence of what James Kugel calls “the interpreted Bible” (Kugel 1998, xviii), and with some (though by no means all) the assumptions that guided the most ancient interpreters.<sup>56</sup> The irony here is that it is the very openness of these texts to multiple interpretations that helps to give rise to the existence of multiple contradictory construals of which each, paradoxically, claims to be the unambiguously correct one.

One especially peculiar example of a text that exhibits a slight, arguably unintentional gap is Dan 11:37, a certain reading of which has provoked the belief that the Antichrist will be gay. In a brilliant study of prophecy belief in modern American culture, Paul Boyer explores how evangelical authors predicting the imminence of the Rapture have tended to build their case by melding likely passages from Scripture with what most disturbs them in contemporary culture: “In making their case for the imminence of the Rapture, post-World War II premillennialists singled out those features of contemporary American life they found especially unsettling.”<sup>57</sup> Unsurprisingly, the increasing acceptance of same-sex relationships has proved to be one of these features:

Quoting scriptures that foretell an end-time upsurge in “unnatural affections,” prophecy writers reacted vehemently to the greater openness of homosexuality in post-1970 U.S. culture. Citing the rising tide of “sodomy, homosexuality and Lesbianism,” Boston evangelical leader Harold John Ockenga declared at the 1971 Jerusalem prophecy conference: “Between 1965 and 1970 the moral dam gave way and ... the resulting flood has played havoc with civilization ... Certain groups could hardly go any lower; they meet every day one of the many details predicted for the last days of this age.” The reason God destroyed Sodom, Wilbur Smith reminded the

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implicit theology of language—or perhaps better, a theological semiology—that underlies this tendency to simplify, clarify, and harmonize obscure scriptures, in which scriptures must ultimately signify a single, simple truth.

<sup>56</sup> Where this modern tendency to make polyvalent biblical texts speak with one voice as Scripture sometimes seems to differ from the assumptions of the most ancient interpreters is in the tacit belief that the Bible is not “a fundamentally cryptic document” (Kugel 1998, 15) but “means ‘just what it says’” (Kugel 1998, xviii). Yet the reason for this shift is nonetheless due to the *other* three assumptions of the ancient interpreters: the biblical texts *qua* Scripture are perennially relevant, Scripture is both perfect and perfectly harmonious, and Scripture is divinely inspired (Kugel 1998, 14-19). Taken together, these three assumptions can have the effect of obscuring the cryptic character of the text, creating the impression that God has communicated with us clearly and in a morally ordered manner. Indeed, the claim that Scripture “means ‘just what it says’” can be used rhetorically to paper over the fact that an oddity in the text has already been interpreted away, and with enough reiteration, the initial textual problem can be rendered invisible. Moreover, for contemporary scripturally oriented individuals and communities what emerges is “a world always already biblically written, as the Bible becomes the Book of the World” (Kintz 1997, 33), so that the interpreted Bible constitutes the lens through which all reality is perceived.

<sup>57</sup> Boyer (1992, 232). Cf. Thomas L. Long’s survey of the role of anti-homosexual panic in American evangelical discourse about the end times since the 1960s (2005, 1-28), building on Boyer’s earlier work.



same gathering, “was nothing else but homosexuality.” Many writers cited a cryptic phrase in the Book of Daniel describing the coming Evil One (“Neither shall he regard ... the desire of women”) to argue that Antichrist himself will be homosexual.<sup>58</sup>

In this section, I would like to explore what it is about Dan 11:37—in the original and in translation—that might suggest this, and what it is about recent apocalyptic discourse that makes the suggestion concrete.

For Runions, an examination of the figure of the Antichrist in recent apocalyptic discourse helps to explain a key contradiction at the heart of the Bush regime’s war on terror, namely, the marked contrast between attempts to declare same-sex marriage unconstitutional at home on the one hand,<sup>59</sup> and the willingness to regard torture as a necessary exception to law when dealing with terror suspects abroad:

[T]hese contradictory legal strategies on domestic and foreign fronts were jointly governed by the desires, fears, and apocalyptic temporalities represented by the images under examination and their precursors, and by the limit between the human and the inhuman that they mark. This apocalyptic logic makes clear why the rule of law is valorized for U.S. citizens whereas the exception to law becomes the norm in this war on terror; it is the same logic that holds homophobia in the United States together with the unconscionable and dehumanizing tactics of imperialism.<sup>60</sup>

The image of a homosexual Satan in bed with his gay lover Saddam Hussein in the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (1999) is a parodic illustration of several religious and cultural traditions, including the idea of the political enemy as Babylonian antichrist (a tradition with deep roots in the Hebrew Bible), the modern belief of some apocalyptically oriented Christians that the Antichrist will probably be gay, and orientalist notions embodied in certain popular depictions of terrorists

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<sup>58</sup> Boyer (1992, 234). For the sources of Boyer’s quotations, see Boyer (1992, 410 n. 25; cf. Long 2005, 4-5 and 201 n. 4). I quote below in this connection David Noebel, whom Boyer does not discuss, but also Luther’s marginal note on this verse, which illustrates that this rather bizarre interpretation of the phrase *hemdat nāšim* in Dan 11:37 was nothing new when it surfaced in recent American prophecy writing.

<sup>59</sup> While the SCOTUS decision of June 26, 2015 that legalized same-sex marriage throughout the United States and recognized same-sex marriages that have been validly performed in other jurisdictions may have altered the legal situation in the United States since the publication of Runions’ book, it has hardly altered the mindset of those for whom same-sex relationships must be excluded, as the backlash from the Christian Right—such as the phenomenon of Kim Davis, with all her manifold contradictions—makes clear. There is a strange, and deeply ironic, logic to the protest against Kim Davis lodged by the Westboro Baptist Church of “God Hates Fags” fame: Davis is, it seems, wrong for refusing to issue marriage licences to same-sex couples in Rowan County, for the United States government, in declaring same-sex marriage to be constitutional, is undertaking a divinely sanctioned role in provoking the wrath of God against the nation. In going against that, Kim Davis is disobediently transgressing her oath to uphold the constitution and laws of the United States (see the Westboro Baptist Church’s press release of October 11, 2015: <https://twitter.com/wbcfliers>). The logic here is almost Ezekielian (cf. Ezek 20:25-26).

<sup>60</sup> Runions (2014, 180-181).

concerning the sexuality of Muslim men.<sup>61</sup> It is the second of these three traditions that I intend to unravel here, building on Runions' own analysis.<sup>62</sup>

The nub of the problem is that a Hebrew phrase, which is *technically* open to more than one interpretation,<sup>63</sup> even if only one of them was intended by the ancient author, has been closed down in the history of translation in ways that—when the *translated* text is read by those who are less than conversant with Hebrew, largely allergic to and ignorant of historical criticism, and predisposed to see the unfolding of the immediate future encoded in Scripture (a fearsome combination of characteristics!)—can result in an interpretation significantly at odds with what the text may originally have been understood to mean. Thus due to the inherent ambiguities of the Hebrew construct chain, it is *technically* the case that the phrase *hemdat nāšim* in Dan 11:37 could mean either “the desire of women” (i.e. a man's sexual desire for women) or “the one desired by women” (i.e. the object of women's own desire).<sup>64</sup> The latter is generally favoured by historical critics, who would see Dan 11:37 as a reference to the rejection by the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BCE) of the worship of a particular god, usually Tammuz/Adonis<sup>65</sup> or Dionysus,<sup>66</sup> or (in the case of scholars before Ewald and Bevan) goddess.<sup>67</sup> This interpretation is implicitly or explicitly supported by a number of modern translations, such as “the Darling (desire) of women” (Montgomery),<sup>68</sup> “the god beloved of women” (NEB), “the god whom women love” (NJB), “the one beloved by women” (NRSV), “[le] Favori des femmes” (TOB), and “the one dear to women” (NJPS). It is noteworthy that those

<sup>61</sup> Runions (2014, 181).

<sup>62</sup> Runions (2014, 190-195).

<sup>63</sup> The difficulties presented by Dan 11:37 in this regard are well explored by Hävernicks (1832, 483-485), whose commentary *ad loc.* can still be read with profit, for he touches on a wider range of possibilities than most recent commentaries consider.

<sup>64</sup> An analogous ambiguity exists in the phrase *'ahbat nāšim* in 2 Sam 1:26: does it refer to the love of David (or Jonathan) for women (specific or in general), or their love for him? Cf. Harding (2013, 216-225, 268-273).

<sup>65</sup> See e.g. Ewald (1868, 3.463); Bevan (1900, 26); Montgomery (1927, 461-462); Collins (1993, 387; TOB n. *ad* Dan 11:36-40); Newsom and Breed (2014, 357). The female worship of the Mesopotamian deity Tammuz is explicitly referred to in Ezek 8:14.

<sup>66</sup> See Bunge (1973, specifically 177-182) for a thorough defence of this identification, which has not yet caught the scholarly imagination. Bunge's case is that, first of all, women were known to be connected with the cult of Dionysus (i.e. the ecstatic Maenads), and, secondly, that the two gods mentioned in Dan 11:37 stand for figures associated with their worship whom Antiochus had dishonoured: he had rejected the god (Apollo) of his ancestors (the Seleucids) by usurping the throne, and had dishonoured the one beloved of women (Dionysus) by going to battle with a dynasty devoted to him (the Ptolemies; cf. 3 Macc. 2:29). Daniel's terms “god of fortresses” (*'elōh mā'uzzim*) and “darling of women” (*hemdat nāšim*) in Dan 11:37-38 can be explained as “Jewish code names for *Zeus Olympios* and *Dionysos*” (*jüdische Decknamen für Zeus Olympios und Dionysos*) (Bunge 1973, 182), Antiochus IV Epiphanes having rejected his ancestral god Apollo in favour of the former, and dishonoured the latter by fighting the Ptolemies.

<sup>67</sup> Thus e.g. Hävernicks (1832, 484-485), suggesting Anaitis (= Persian *Anahita*) or Mylitta (which Herodotus (1.131, 199) suggests is the Assyrian name for Aphrodite; perh. = Assyrian *mulissu* (Dalley 1979; Stol 1999a)). Against the idea that *hemdat nāšim* could refer to the goddess Nanaia (= Gk. Artemis; cf. 1 Macc. 6:1-4; 2 Macc. 1:11-17; see further Stol 1999b), see Bunge (1973, 177-178 n. 2).

<sup>68</sup> Montgomery (1927, 460-461).

translations that explicitly mention a god are themselves importing a reference to a deity into a text that does not strictly contain it: it is hardly an unreasonable extrapolation, but it must nonetheless be supplied by the reader (translator), through close attention to the contexts, both literary (Dan 11:36-39) and historical.

Other translators, however, have taken a different route. Jerome, notably, and it would seem staggeringly at odds with the gay Antichrist interpretation,<sup>69</sup> has *erit in concupiscentiis feminorum* (Douay-Rheims: “he shall follow the lust of women”; Collins 1993, 387: “he shall be engrossed in lust for women”). It is, though, the King James Version of 1611 that, through its subsequent revisions and wide distribution, has exerted the greatest influence in the context of recent American prophecy belief. The original KJV has “Neither shall hee regard ... the desire of women,” a reading echoed later in the ASV, NASV, and Darby Bible. But perhaps most intriguing of all is Luther, who translates “He will honour neither love of women nor any god” (*Er wird weder Frawenliebe noch einiges Gottes achten*),<sup>70</sup> and in a marginal note connects the rejection of *Frawenliebe* with sodomy: “He wants to say that he will linger in the unnatural vice, with which God’s despisers are plagued (Rom. 1). That is called Italian marriage and silent sin.<sup>71</sup> For he should not have marriage and proper love, or the use of women.<sup>72</sup> As under the Pope and the Turks, it leads to all things most horrid.”<sup>73</sup> We have in Luther, then, the abjection of deviant sexuality connected not only with racial boundaries, but with interreligious polemic. Moreover, Heinrich Hävernick noted in 1832 that most older interpreters took *hemdat nāšim* as equivalent in sense to *’ah’bat nāšim* in 2 Sam 1:26, and as pointing in Dan 11:37 to a rejection of marital love that is either characteristic of the time of the Antichrist—“which will be a time of prevailing unchastity and lewdness” (*die eine Zeit der herrschenden Unkeuschkeit und Wollust sein werde*)—or to Antiochus,

<sup>69</sup> At least if we take the genitive to be objective, that is, “the desires which have women for their object,” rather than subjective, that is, “the desires which women have for others.”

<sup>70</sup> Correctly, I think, Luther takes the second *yābîn* as governing both *w’al hemdat nāšim* and *w’al kol ’elô’h*.

<sup>71</sup> Both these terms, *Welsche hochzeit* and *stummen sünde*, as well as the term “florentine bride” (*florentzische breute*), belong to Luther’s sexualised polemic against both the papacy and the Turks. For further references, and for the rendering “Italian wedding” for *Welsche hochzeit*, see Puff (2003, 240 n. 18; cf. 127, 264 and Ulrike Strasser’s review (Strasser 2005)).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the reference to the male rejection of *der natürliche brauch des Weibes* [= *hē phusikē chrēsis tēs thēleias*] in Rom 1:27.

<sup>73</sup> “Er wil sagen das er in dem unnatürlichen laster schweben wird, da die Gottes verechter mit geplaget werden Rom.j. Das man heisset Welsche hochzeit und stummen sünde. Denn den Ehestand und rechte Liebe oder brauch der Weiber sol er nicht haben. Wie es denn gehet unter dem Papst und Türcken auff’s aller grewlichst.” Although Luther also translates the Hebrew *’ah’bat nāšim* with *Frawenliebe* in 2 Sam 1:26, he does not make the connection with sodomy that he finds in Dan 11:37, presumably because what is predicated of Antiochus in Dan 11:37 simply *could not* be predicated of David in 2 Sam 1:26. By this I do not mean that Luther consciously excluded the suggestion of the homoerotic from 2 Sam 1:26, but that it may simply not have crossed his radar (on the similarity between the two phrases, cf. e.g. Hävernick 1832, 483-484). The marginal notes to the Geneva Bible in 1560 made the connection between the two verses, but regarded 2 Sam 1:26 as referring simply to the greatest intensity of love. On the phrase “the desires of women,” the comment reads: “Signifying that they shulde be without all humanities for the loue of women is taken for singular or great loue, as 2 Sam 1,26.”

“whose lewd life is well known” (*dessen wollustiges Leben bekannt ist*),<sup>74</sup> though no reference is made directly by Hävernick at this point to sodomy.

The revival of the idea of a sexually deviant Antichrist in the context of modern American prophecy belief has, then, much older echoes. One should not try, as may be tempting, to pit a history of deviant unscholarly misinterpretations against the wisdom of the historical critic in a struggle for the one true, authorised, and approved exegesis, for both reflect the convoluted attempt to bring order to an ambiguous text, merely within contrasting epistemic frameworks.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, such interpretations are rarely the work of the stupid and inept:<sup>76</sup> they are more often the result of an intelligent, albeit misguided, attempt to read the world through the lens of a difficult and complex biblical text.

As I noted above, it is not Luther but the King James Bible that has had the greater influence on modern prophecy belief, which has proliferated in the last two centuries in the United States in particular. The KJV is not, however, read in a vacuum, but under the influence of the culture wars that have raged in the United States, especially since the 1960s, over sexual morality. Where, then, in this KJV-influenced world of American prophecy belief, do we find Dan 11:37 functioning as a homophobic text of terror? In David Noebel’s 1984 book *The Homosexual Revolution*, we read this, in a short discussion of “Christ and Homosexuality”:<sup>77</sup>

Not only will homosexuality characterize the endtime as it characterized the endtime of Sodom,<sup>78</sup> but the Antichrist himself could well be a homosexual. In Daniel’s description of the anti-Christ, he says, “Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, *nor the desire of women*, nor regard any god, for he shall magnify himself above all.” (Dan. 11:37) Homosexuals not only have an aversion to human conception and to marital fidelity, but also have a marked tendency towards feelings of moral superiority.<sup>79</sup>

This reading is made possible by a number of factors: the authority of a mildly ambiguous English translation that obscures a deeper range of interpretive possibilities in Hebrew, an assumption that Daniel announces prophecies still to be fulfilled rather than recording *vaticinia ex eventu* concerned with, and contemporaneous with, the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a consequent understanding that the figure mentioned is a single Antichrist to be expected in the endtimes, and a complicated and multifaceted construction of a stereotyped other, the “homosexual.”

We have here an example of an ambiguous Hebrew text whose ambiguity is largely lost in translation, and which then yields a surprising new valence when read

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<sup>74</sup> See the reference in the previous note.

<sup>75</sup> I have touched on this elsewhere (Harding 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Thomas L. Long’s warning (2005, 1) against derisively lumping Pat Robertson together with “the clinically delusional” or “rural snake-handlers.”

<sup>77</sup> Noebel (1984, 151-153).

<sup>78</sup> Noebel has just cited Luke 17:28-29, which links the eschaton with the destruction of Sodom. Noebel presumably intends the reader to infer something inexplicit in Luke, that the destruction of Sodom is inextricable from divine judgement against what he repeatedly calls “the homosexual lifestyle” (cf. Noebel 1984, 144-147).

<sup>79</sup> Noebel (1984, 152).



through the lens of a particular set of modern concerns. Paradoxically, it is partly because the text was originally open to very *little* interpretation that such interpretive oddities become possible. The historical apocalypse in Dan 11:45 was written to yield *one* specific interpretation, yet because the hermeneutical key to understanding it was relatively quickly lost, it became, under the impact of scripturalization, artificially open to whatever unanticipated decodings its new contexts made possible. In Umberto Eco's terms, it would be a "closed" text, paradoxically *open* to a myriad unforeseen construals.<sup>80</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks (Or, the Re-Invention of the Biblical Scholar)**

One of the most significant roles for the biblical scholar today, especially the biblical scholar engaged with reception history, or the intersection between biblical and cultural studies, is to trace and demystify the effects of scripturalization on the modern societies that have received, and been shaped by, these ancient scriptures. At the heart of the biblical scholar's work is an ancient canon that continues to provoke modern effects. But this canon, and its effects, are profoundly (and at times disturbingly) ambiguous. Writes Burlein (2002, 212-13), for example:

... the same text that portrays God as radically on the side of the poor and disadvantaged (siding, for example, with the enslaved Israelites against their Egyptian oppressors) constructs the identity of those former slaves by scapegoating others, particularly Canaanites and women, as sexually and morally deviant. The same Bible that was used by white Christians not simply to justify an existing slave system but also actively to construct a slave system that hinged on race, was used by black Christians to mandate freedom.

This multifold ambiguity exists not only at the level of the various traditions that go to make up the biblical canon(s), but at the level of their contradictory appropriations by subsequent interpreters and interpretive communities, and at the level of the gaps in the discrete pericopae of which the books in the canon as a whole are constructed. The fundamental task of the biblical scholar, it seems to me, is to do the work of exegesis with attention to each moment of this process. Thus to do the work of exegesis on Gen 11:1-9 means, in part, to attend to the ways in which ostensibly contradictory appropriations of this narrative are themselves traceable, through the thicket of its reception history, to a narrative with suggestive gaps, gaps that themselves help to enable contradictory appropriations. To do this work on Dan 11:36-39 means attending not only to the way the coded historical apocalypse was perhaps originally meant to signify the attitude of Antiochus IV Epiphanes to the respective deities of the Seleucids and Ptolemies, but to the way the ambiguity of the code names in this pericope has been closed down by later translators and interpreters, and to how the resulting translations and interpretations have produced a prediction about a specific kind of Antichrist that would only become possible when this pericope was embedded in religio-political contexts that could not have been anticipated by the original author.

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Eco (1979, 8-9) on the way "model readers" of "closed texts" differ from *actual* readers unanticipated by the author, who can create an endless stream of "aberrant decodings." On the polysemy of apocalyptic discourse, cf. Long (2005, 8-13) *et passim*, esp. his appropriation of social semiotics (Long 2005, 17-20), which addresses the struggle for the production and ownership of meaning of texts, whose effects have outgrown what their authors could have envisaged.

This task involves certain competencies, as well as a fertile yet disciplined scholarly imagination. It is necessary, for example, to have mastered the linguistic and analytical skills appropriate to the exegesis of texts that have come down to us from a distant culture and unfamiliar, imperfectly understood ancient languages, filtered and refracted through additional cultures and languages, and frequently covered by a patina of accrued interpretive conventions. Yet it is also necessary to be alert to the geopolitical shifts that have helped to shape the modern rhetorical deployments of scriptural texts. Perhaps, additionally, it requires a critical alertness to the interpellation of biblical scholarship *itself* in such movements: after all, on the one hand, a considerable amount of contemporary Christian homophobia (to take one example) is propped up by the considerable skills of biblical exegetes,<sup>81</sup> and on the other, the vast edifice of modern biblical scholarship is enabled by the transnational movement of global capital, even as the same economic reality is putting the squeeze on particular individual schools and programmes whose members are increasingly feeling the need to demonstrate their value under the terms of this strange new world. In this environment, something akin to Runions' subversive "queerly sublime ethics of reading"<sup>82</sup> may be exactly what is needed.

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<sup>81</sup> Perhaps the two clearest examples of this would be Gagnon (2001) and Wold (2009). Wold is the quieter of the two, but Gagnon has become highly vocal and influential, having taken full advantage of the possibilities of modern technology in the form, for example, of a multicoloured, even rainbow presence on the internet (<http://robgagnon.net>). His website has link after link to Gagnon's many—many—contributions to the debate.

<sup>82</sup> See n. 7 above.

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