CHAPTER 5

Scripted Bodies: Paragesis and the Performative Poetics of Manhood

This chapter demonstrates how poetic parageses function as act-events that offer ways of reading biblical texts otherwise and, as such, offer themselves as particularly valuable modes of reading against normative interpretation. Prompted by the poets’ attempts to focus on what is happening in this wrestling bout, I will explore how this scene problematizes the constructions and performances of human and divine masculinities. In so doing, I shall also be exploring how biblical criticism and poetic paragesis contribute to what is seen and not seen when reading and interpreting biblical texts. As Moore and Sherwood highlight, quoting Sheehan’s index on the Enlightenment Bible, if the original project of the Enlightenment Bible consolidated under four fundamental headings—philology, history, aesthetics, and morality—biblical scholarship soon abandoned the aesthetic and the ethical. Theory has revived the aesthetic, in the form of literary criticism, and also, most importantly, the moral, in the form of feminist biblical criticism, ideological criticism, and other approaches that directly engage the ethics or ideologies of biblical texts.1

This revivification and merging of the aesthetic-ethical dimensions of biblical interpretation forms the backdrop to this section and provides an analysis of the ‘use-value’ of paragesis for biblical androcritical gender studies.

Although there is a burgeoning field of studies on various masculinities from a variety of critical idioms in other disciplines, work that directly addresses the formulation and performativity of biblical masculinities, whether in the biblical texts themselves or in the production of criticism by male authors, is still marginal.2 In order to orientate my own approach to these

questions, Daniel Patte’s book *Ethics of Biblical Interpretation: A Reevaluation*, seems to offer an insight into the possibility of an androcritical, multidimensional exegesis. However, it remains in the ante-room of the debates around gendered performances of identities, bodies, and knowledge production that have been continuously conducted in literary theory and cultural studies since second-wave feminism and the rise of gender studies. Patte concluded that “despite our denials, we [biblical exegesis] also have an advocacy stance. It is on behalf of male European-Americans (usually, a subgroup of them) that we practice critical exegeses. Being androcritical involves acknowledging this fact.”3 However, if we agree with Deborah F. Sawyer that biblical studies has “existed as an effective white, western/colonial, patriarchal discourse—a microcosmic affirmation of western culture,”4 ‘androcriticism’ is to be pursued further than merely *acknowledging* what Patte takes to be fact. As I have explored above, a ‘fact’ is also always a participatory knowledge and never stands alone. If a discipline does not have the resources within its own constitution to achieve a high-level of self-reflective discourse that is able to analyse the act-events of reading and writing then this must come from elsewhere. This chapter argues, then, that to become more androcritical, to understand more of how issues of power and gender delineate the interpretative field, more hermeneutic dimensions must be included when constructing a biblical reading and rewriting. This is where paragetical writing comes into its own, participating in both “an indeterminate surplus of meaningful possibilities”5

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