

A Comparative Analysis of Depictions of Female Beauty in the Hebrew
Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

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Abstract I

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This thesis compares the motif of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible and in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, contending that although these sets of texts share affinities, overall there is a marked divergence between them. Scholars have argued that the condemnatory characterisations of women in the intertestamental era are inherited from the biblical tradition and are the product of increasingly negative depictions of women during the Second Temple era (Archer: 1987; 1990). I argue that in contrast to the bleaker depictions of female beauty prevalent in the later literature, the Hebrew Bible offers more diverse and balanced perspectives. Rather than seeing the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical beauty-texts as the predictable outworking of biblical Hebrew thought, I argue that the primary explanations for these critical presentations of female beauty should be sought elsewhere.

Scholars have written extensively on the subject of sexuality in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature. Significantly less has been written about human beauty (Augustin (1988) is one notable exception). I focus on female beauty in Hebrew literature, which has received little attention as a topic in its own right.

In chapter two, I argue that in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha beautiful women are presented as seductresses undermining patriarchal control, whereas in the Hebrew Bible beautiful Israelite women are not seductresses, and foreign seductresses are not beautiful. In chapter three, I analyse the depiction of beauty as vanity. In chapter four, I assess biblical depictions of abused beautiful women. In chapter five, I consider positive associations between beauty and character. In chapter six, I summarise the comparisons, arguing that the differences between the literatures outweigh the similarities. I then assess Archer's explanation for the negative presentation of women in the post-exilic era, recommending a revised explanation that takes greater account of Hellenistic influences on Second Temple Judaism.

Abstract II

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In the second century BCE, the Jewish sage Yeshua Ben Sira wrote these cautionary words:

Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter, or she may make you a laughingstock ... Do not let her parade her beauty before any man ... for from garments comes the moth, and from a woman comes woman's wickedness. Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good ... (Ben Sira 42:11–14)

This text is one example among several of Ben Sira's disparagement of women in general, and female beauty in particular. Nor is Ben Sira alone amongst Hebrew authors in perceiving a woman's beauty to be a danger to male autonomy. Rather, this is a view that appears to have been accepted in many of the extant Jewish writings of the second century BCE to the end of the first century CE. When it comes to the texts of the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, the topic of female beauty is featured with surprising frequency, and the prevalent attitude espoused in these writings toward female appearance is one of wariness that repeatedly descends into outright condemnation.

In light of these negative views, reflecting a perspective that appears to have been sustained and perpetuated throughout an array of Jewish texts spanning roughly three centuries, the question that arises is where do these attitudes originate from in the first place?

To what degree are these writers responsible for endorsing and establishing a perspective that is particular to the concerns of their own specific cultural contexts, and to what extent are they merely perpetuating the pre-existing and long-established views inherited from their forebears?

Resolving this question is complicated by the extent of the influence of foreign powers on the Judean region during an era in which the Jews came under Persian authority from 538–332BCE, Hellenistic rule from 332–64BCE, and Roman domination from 64BCE onwards. Hence Palestine during the intertestamental era (circa 200BCE–100CE) could be described as a melting pot of varied cultural influences and foreign ideas.

In this thesis, however, I focus my research primarily on what the Hebrew Bible says about female beauty, and to what extent the views of these apocryphal and pseudepigraphical authors can be traced back to the Hebrew Scriptures.

The central question driving this thesis is divided into two halves. Firstly, what sort of attitudes towards female beauty are instigated and encouraged by the

authors of the Hebrew Bible? Secondly, what is the relationship between these biblical beauty motifs and the views found in later apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish literature?

By addressing this specific topic of female beauty in Hebrew literature, it is my hope to bring insight into an area of biblical studies that I consider to be currently under-explored, offering a new contribution to the broader discussions within biblical scholarship on the perceptions of women in Israelite and later Jewish society.

The body of scholarship on the development of women's social roles is already significant. For example, in *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, Carol L. Meyers argues that Israelite society moves from an egalitarian agricultural society to an increasingly oppressive environment for women.¹ Likewise, in *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine*, Leonie J. Archer highlights the stark contrast between the restrictions placed on women of the Second Temple era and the looser practices of earlier pre-exilic Israelite society².

Meyers' and Archer's accounts of an Israelite society in which, over time, an increasing emphasis is placed on controlling sexuality and limiting the freedom of women provide a broader contextual background within which to situate my own exploration of the shift in male perceptions of female beauty.

This thesis also owes much to a vast body of feminist scholarship, and in particular various works by Phyllis Trible, Athalya Brenner, Gale A. Yee, Mieke Bal and Cheryl Exum. Whether through their own interpretative work, or by offering a critique of the reception of biblical narratives, their thorough analyses of texts relating to gender and sexuality in the Hebrew Bible have laid the groundwork for this project.³

It is, however, noteworthy that while much has been written on *sexuality* in the Bible in general, even amongst feminist scholars little attention has been given specifically to the theme of female *beauty* as a concept in Hebrew culture and thought.

Rather, the primary contribution to scholarship on human beauty in Hebrew literature comes from Matthias Augustin, whose work *Der schöne Mensch im Alten Testament und im hellenistischen Judentum* directly engages with this topic. However, while Augustin focuses on human beauty in general, I am specifically concerned with the question of how these Hebrew views concerning human beauty pertain to gender-related discussions and perceptions of women in particular.

The other notable examples of research on the subject of physical beauty in the Hebrew Bible can be found within the field of disability studies of the Hebrew Bible. In his book *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical*

¹ Meyers 1991: 45.

² Archer 1990. See also Archer (1987: 1–16).

³ Trible 1992; Bal 1987; Yee 2003; Exum 1993, 1996. Other significant examples are Moughtin-Mumby (2008), Fuchs (2000), Bach (1997), Corrington Streete (1997), Day (1989), Dennis (1994), Thompson (2001), Loader (2011), and Trenchard (1982).

Differences, Saul M. Olyan goes so far as to claim that Yahweh ‘favor[s] the beautiful in the dominant stream of the biblical tradition’,⁴ an assertion that I challenge in my thesis.⁵

Consequently, what is currently missing from existing biblical scholarship is a comprehensive and comparative look at the inter-connected themes of beauty and gender in Hebrew literature, an avenue that I aim to explore in this thesis.

Given my chosen field of research, my thesis shares overlapping concerns with feminist biblical scholarship. However, while I am interested in the question of what these ‘beauty texts’ can reveal about biblical and extra-biblical Jewish perceptions of women, I do not consider this thesis to be specifically a work of feminist scholarship. For although engaging with the contribution of feminist scholars, it is not my intention to adopt a specifically feminist hermeneutic.

Likewise, although indebted to the sociological research of scholars like Meyers, nor is my intent to reconstruct the historic beauty practices of ‘Every-woman Eve’. Rather, instead of attempting to gain access to the world *behind* the text, or to place feministic concerns *before or over* the text, I want to focus on understanding the *content* of the text as it is presented to us by the authors/redactors of these writings. In the broadest terms, therefore, this thesis could be categorised as a work of *literary* analysis.

More narrowly, my methodological focus lies in interpreting the *semantic* meaning of these specific Hebrew writings on beauty: a meaning that is determined not only by philological considerations, but also by both the *historic* context and the *literary* context of the texts under consideration. In this sense, my methodological aim coheres with what John Barton terms as a search for the ‘plain sense’ meaning of a text.⁶

As such, this is not primarily an historical-critical exploration of these texts.⁷ However nor do I focus solely on the ‘final form’ of the text without reference to the historical context of these passages.

Rather, alongside addressing linguistic and textual considerations, I recognise that any setting in which the authors/redactors of a text lived will have had a profound impact on their writing, as these are the primary cultures that their words are both shaped by, and intended for. Consequently, even if there are limitations to our historical knowledge, in this thesis historical context is valued as a key tool for illuminating the ‘plain sense’ meaning of a text.

Likewise, just as placing the text *in situ* serves our understanding of semantic meaning, so too does interpreting the text within the broader scope of the overall Hebrew narratives.⁸ Indeed, given that this is a motif that runs throughout a variety of Hebrew genres of literature, the positioning of these texts in relation to one

⁴ Olyan 2008: 25.

⁵ See also Schipper (2006).

⁶ Barton 2007: 70.

⁷ Barton 2007: 70.

⁸ Barton 2007: 70.

another is of significant import to our understanding of the beauty motif in these particular Hebrew writings.

Consequently, my methodological approach is neither exclusively diachronic or synchronic. Rather, in my literary analysis of these texts I consider not only the words themselves but also their historic and literary contexts, in order to discern both the specific author's attitudes towards female beauty and the position of the text within the broader scope of Hebrew writings on this topic.

In order to bring the comparative element to the fore, I juxtapose the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the later writings throughout the entirety of the dissertation.

Consequently, instead of arranging the material chronologically or grouping the texts according to authorship, I organise the relevant 'beauty texts' into four chapters, each of which examines one particular aspect of the motif of female beauty.

Thus, having introduced the thesis in chapter one, in chapter two, entitled 'Beauty as a Threat', I focus on the texts that present women as intentionally using their beauty as a manipulative tool in order to gain power over men. I do so by first analysing the wide range of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts that depict beauty as a source of danger and destruction (such as Ben Sira, *1 Enoch*, Judith, Susanna, 1 Esdras 4, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*). I then focus on the texts of the Hebrew Bible that could be interpreted as displaying a similar attitude (Genesis 6, 39; Judges 12-14; 2 Kings 9; Proverbs 7-9), comparing them with later pseudepigraphical interpretations. I argue that the distribution and intensity of the material in this chapter highlights the fact that this is a theme that emerges with far more frequency and vitriol in the apocryphal literature than it does within the Hebrew Bible.

In chapter three, 'Beauty as Vanity', I consider the texts whereby both women and – unusually – men misuse their beauty to serve their own vanity, adopting a form of self-idolatry as they worship their own image rather than their creator. I argue that this particular theme appears to be unique to the narrative and prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible (1-2 Samuel; Jeremiah; Isaiah; Ezekiel), with no clear parallels found in the apocryphal literature.

In chapter four, 'Beauty as Vulnerability', I engage with texts that subvert the suggestion that beauty be seen as a weapon wielded by women against men, instead presenting women as the abused and vulnerable victims of physical attraction. While this motif is the exception within the later Jewish writings (Additions to Esther, Susanna), I argue that it is the most frequent way in which female beauty is depicted within the narratives of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 12, 20, 26, 34; 2 Samuel 11-13; Esther).

Contrasted with the three preceding chapters, in chapter five, 'Beauty as a Virtue', I engage with the more positive perceptions of female beauty found in the apocryphal writings (Susanna, Judith, *Joseph and Aseneth*, Tobit) and biblical texts (Genesis 24, 29; 1 Samuel 19; Esther; Isaiah; Proverbs 31; Song of Songs). However in these instances the theme that comes to the fore is that beauty is most desirable when accompanied by a virtuous character. Thus the implication is once again that beauty is a threat when it challenges male power, however it is a positive trait when

appropriately viewed within the confines of patriarchal society. I also analyse the Song of Songs as counter-text.

Having compared the beauty motifs of the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings in chapters 2-5 through these four predominant themes (beauty as a threat, beauty as vanity, beauty as vulnerability and beauty as a virtue), in chapter six I consider what conclusions can be drawn from the preceding textual analysis.

This summative comparison comes in three parts. Firstly, I compare the 'beauty texts' of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature with one another. Secondly, I consider how the 'beauty texts' within the Hebrew Bible correlate to one another, in order to determine what perspectives, if any, can be identified as characteristic of the beauty tradition of the Hebrew Bible. Thirdly, drawing on these findings, I compare the beauty themes of the biblical and extra-biblical materials with one another, both by drawing out *similarities* and highlighting the points of *divergence*.

I then offer an explanation for *why* there is a distinction between the presentation of female beauty in the literature of the Hebrew Bible and what follows after. I engage with Archer's account of the development of attitudes towards female sexuality in the Second Temple era. However I go beyond Archer in arguing that it is not enough to ascribe the evolution of these attitudes towards female sexuality – and beauty in particular – primarily to earlier Hebrew thought, but that perhaps we ought to look to the influence of Hellenism to explain the shift in perspective.

While there is much knowledge to be gained from a comprehensive study of male attitudes towards physical beauty in Hebrew literature, within this thesis I make three arguments that I consider to be of primary importance for scholarship surrounding gender roles and sexuality in the Hebrew Bible.

Firstly, although a certain amount of diversity is to be rightly anticipated in a collection of books comprised of texts originating from vastly different sources and dates, nevertheless there are particular aspects of the beauty motif that emerge with remarkable frequency across the varying biblical genres, and conversely others which are notably sparse.

As for the comparison between the Hebrew Bible and the writings of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish literature, I argue that the difference between these collections of literature is one of *degree* rather than outright *polarisation*. However, I also argue that the degree to which they differ is *significant*, and that in general the authors of the Hebrew Bible display a more even-handed attitude toward female beauty than their Jewish successors, whose invective against female beauty is markedly negative. Therefore, while I acknowledge that *similarities and differences* can be drawn out between the biblical and extra-biblical Jewish texts, I propose that there are far more of the *latter* than the *former*.

Finally, I conclude by briefly offering an explanatory account of why such a notable divergence emerges between the earlier and later attitudes towards female beauty found in Hebrew literature. Moving forwards, I suggest that there is room for additional scholarship to be done on the influence of Hellenistic thought on Jewish attitudes towards female beauty from 200BCE onwards, as I consider it likely that

certain Greek attitudes may have influenced these Jewish authors' perceptions of female beauty more than those of their Hebrew predecessors.

Whatever the case, it is the contention of this thesis that the disparity between the attitudes towards female beauty displayed by the Jewish writers of apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, and those of their Hebrew predecessors, is significant in several regards, and as such it has bearing on broader academic discussions concerning the development of women's social roles and status throughout the Hebrew Bible and beyond.

Introduction

1.1. Framing the Question

The topic of beauty in the Hebrew Bible could be approached in a variety of ways. There are, for example, important liturgical questions about the significance of the 'beauty of the Lord' in Israelite cultic worship, doctrinal questions about what it means for humankind to be made in God's image, and philosophical questions about whether beauty in creation confirms the existence of God.

This thesis takes the form of a literary analysis. It focuses on the depiction of human physical beauty in general, and female beauty in particular, in an effort to identify the sources of condemnatory attitudes towards female beauty in the literature of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

Gender stereotyping is by no means a modern phenomenon. Rather, it has been practised throughout human history across a wide range of cultures, as people have become accustomed to viewing those who are 'other' in fixed patterns. Consider, for example, the Jewish sage Yeshua Ben Sira writing in the second century BCE:

Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter, or she may make you a laughingstock to your enemies, a byword in the city ... See that there is no lattice in her room, no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house. Do not let her parade her beauty before any man, or spend her time among married women; for from garments comes the moth, and from a woman comes woman's wickedness. Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good ... (Ben Sira 42:11-14)

This text is one example among several of Ben Sira's notable disparagement of women in general, and female beauty in particular. Nor is Ben Sira alone amongst Jewish writers in perceiving a woman's beauty to be a danger to male autonomy. Rather, this is a view that appears to have been widely accepted in many of the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings from the second century BCE to the end of the first century CE.⁹ Amongst these texts, the topic of female beauty is featured with surprising frequency. Furthermore, the prevalent attitude of the authors of these works toward female appearance can be described as a wariness that repeatedly descends into outright condemnation.

In light of these hostile depictions of beautiful women, one question that arises from the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts is this: where do the attitudes of these Jewish authors concerning female beauty originate from? More specifically, I am interested in the question of to what extent these Jewish writers from the second century BCE to the first century CE are promoting a perspective on female beauty that is particular to their specific cultural contexts, and to what extent they are perpetuating pre-existing and long-established views inherited from their forebears.

It is worth noting from the start that any effort to resolve such a question is immediately met by a barrage of historical and sociological difficulties. Any historian would acknowledge the challenge of attempting to identify the origins of

⁹ Apocryphal and pseudepigraphical are terms I use to refer to two specific, non-canonical groups of Jewish texts chiefly belonging to the Graeco-Roman era and loosely dated to between 200BCE–100CE. For more on these terms, see pages 42–44. I italicise all pseudepigraphical works (e.g. *Joseph and Aseneth*, the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*); however, I do not italicise the books of the Apocrypha (e.g. Ben Sira, Tobit etc.).

an idea or belief by pulling apart present beliefs from those of the past as if they were two separable pieces.

Consequently, any conclusions reached within this thesis will by necessity be a matter of *degree*, rather than a case of *absolutes*. The question is not whether these Jewish authors were influenced by their historic predecessors, but *to what extent* their ideas are a matter of emulation, and *to what extent* new ideas are emerging during this era.

Addressing this question requires an investigation of the possible sources and influences from which the authors of these particular apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts may have derived their ideas about female appearance. However, this question is complicated by the fact that during the three centuries between 200BCE and 100CE, Palestine was a melting pot of varied cultural influences and foreign ideas. The diverse impact of foreign powers in the region—which was under Persian authority from 538–332BCE, Hellenistic rule from 332–64BCE, and the Roman Empire from 64BCE onwards—makes it a challenge to single out individual strands of influence on the Jewish writings of this era.

The complexities of the question are heightened by the fact that although I refer to these texts as ‘Jewish’ apocryphal writings, there was no single, homogenous entity identifiable as ‘Jewish thought’ or ‘Jewish beliefs’. Rather, there are many forms of—and variations on—Judaism during this time frame, as would be expected in the study of a period of history that spans roughly 300 years, and the

study of a diverse array of people who are situated both in Judea and throughout the Diaspora communities of the ancient world.¹⁰

Consequently, any discussion on Jewish attitudes towards, and expectations concerning, female appearance during this era requires that one proceed carefully, recognising the difficulty of attributing certain societal beliefs about beauty to one particular culture's influence over another. It would be a mistake to oversimplify the cultural complexity of a Jewish people, or even peoples, who were often subject to, and shaped by, the whims of greater ancient Near Eastern powers and the might of Hellenistic and Roman society in turn.¹¹

However, despite my intention to be sensitive to the historical richness and complexity of Jewish societies throughout this historical period, the geographical and social diversity of Jewish culture and the lengthy time span of the period under consideration only renders the similarities between these writings from the Second Temple period even more striking, and thus worthy of further investigation.

Given the central importance of Scripture in the formation of Jewish thought and practice generally, the Hebrew Bible is a natural starting point when looking for the sources of the thoughts and practices concerning female beauty represented in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Moreover, these later Jewish texts frequently make explicit or implicit claims—often in their use of biblical narratives—to be

¹⁰ For further reading on the diversity of Jews in ancient Palestine and the Diaspora, as well as the complexities of cultural assimilation and acculturation, see the nuanced discussion put forth in Barclay (1996: 92–124, 320–335).

¹¹ For further reading on the status and perception of women in these surrounding cultures, particularly in regard to Graeco-Roman ideologies, see Pomeroy (1994), Marsman (2003), Cantarella (1987), Blundell (1995), Brule (2003), and Gardner (1990). I consider the dominant cultural perceptions of women in Hellenistic thought and society in some detail in chapter six of the thesis, pages 352–362.

carrying on the traditions of thought and practice established in Hebrew Scripture. This further motivates a focus on the impact of the Hebrew Bible on later Jewish perceptions of beauty.

Consequently, I analyse what the authors of the Hebrew Bible have to say about female beauty across their varied genres of literature, and to what extent the attitudes of these apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writers can be traced to those earlier views. In the concluding chapter I will begin to look beyond the influence of the Hebrew Bible to consider the extent to which Hellenistic culture in particular may have informed the attitudes towards female beauty found within the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts.¹²

There remains scholastic debate concerning when the Hebrew Scriptures were found in their final, canonical form, and in particular whether they can be said to have achieved this status by the time in which some of these apocryphal authors (e.g. Ben Sira) were writing.¹³ The possibility of an overlapping chronology between the biblical and extra-biblical Hebrew writings does not, however, detract from the significance of these Hebrew texts for the Jews of the Second Temple era as they sought to emulate and appropriate the religious teachings found therein.

Indeed, for the purposes of this thesis the closeness in dating between some of these later biblical writings (e.g. Esther, Daniel, the Song of Songs) and the Second Temple apocryphal texts is actually useful for the project, as it helps us to determine

¹² I intend to explore this further in future work.

¹³ For example, most biblical scholars affirm that Daniel 7–12 was written during the Maccabean period, and therefore later than the works of *1 Enoch* and Ben Sira (Collins 2000: 23).

how—and at what point—Hebrew attitudes towards female beauty may have shifted in the Second Temple era.

Thus two central questions frame my inquiry. Firstly, what sort of attitudes towards female beauty are instigated and encouraged by the authors of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha? Secondly, what is the relationship between these biblical beauty motifs and the views found in later apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish literature?

1.2. Background to the Question

One of my primary reasons for addressing this question has been that although it is a subject that various biblical scholars have incidentally commented on in their discourse on other related subjects—particularly in regard to the large body of ongoing research on issues of sexuality and gender within the Bible—at this point, very few have intentionally focused their research on the combined theme of gender and beauty within Hebrew thought in particular. Furthermore, even fewer have considered how Hebrew attitudes towards female beauty develop and shift across the literature of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

Therefore in making this textual comparison, my aim is to contribute to the broader, ongoing scholarly discussion on the social functions and perceptions of women in Israelite and later Jewish society. However I do so through the lens of

Hebrew concepts of human beauty in particular, an area that thus far I believe to be under-explored within biblical scholarship.¹⁴

However although the specific angle of my research might be new, this thesis rests upon long-established foundations in the disciplines of archaeology, sociology and literary interpretation, particularly as they relate to the question of the status and role of women in Israel from ancient times right up until the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem (70CE).

Firstly, in order to engage with Hebrew attitudes towards female appearance as they emerge within the biblical texts, it is crucial to have some grasp of the widespread beauty culture that existed throughout both ancient Israel and the ancient Near East. Various archaeological studies into ancient Israelite habits of dress and ornamentation offer insight into the beautification practices of the ancient world.

What quickly becomes apparent from these findings is that the sheer volume of jewellery, cosmetic remnants, perfume bottles, and preserved steles depicting human dress and ornamentation from all over the ancient Near East and the Levant region, attests to a wide-spread beauty culture that ancient Israel participated in.¹⁵

On the one hand, the purpose of my thesis is not an archaeological or

¹⁴ Géza Xeravits has edited the volume *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environment*, which was published this year (2015). Unfortunately, due to its recent publication I am unable to take account of this work in my thesis. However, the release of this text supports my contention that this is an area of study in which there is still much to be said, and I look forward to discussing the contribution of Xeravits' work at the viva.

¹⁵ For more information on ancient Israelite beauty culture, see Platt (1979), Bonfante and Jaunzems (1988: 1385-1413), Benzinger (1907), and de Vaux (1961: Hartmann 1809/10).

sociological reconstruction of the beauty culture of the ancient Near East. Rather, I am interested in whether it is possible to discern from a study of the Hebrew and Jewish writings any specific commonly held perceptions or cultural biases concerning human beauty.

On the other hand, however, the archaeological research that unearthed evidence for widespread ANE beautification practices is key to interpreting the beauty texts of the Hebrew Bible in the light of their cultural context, particularly when it comes to understanding the biblical texts that specifically critique human efforts to beautify oneself, condemning these very same seemingly widespread methods of self-adornment.

The contribution of scholars like Carol L. Meyers, who interpreted archaeological evidence to form an understanding of the evolution of ancient Israelite society, has been crucial to this project. Sociological reconstructions such as Meyers' *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* provide insight into how attitudes toward women could have developed across the centuries of Israelite history to eventually arrive at the disparaging views of female appearance and sexuality espoused in the later apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts.

Meyers' study combines the disciplines of biblical interpretation, sociology and archaeology in her quest to encounter 'Every-woman Eve' and explain 'what happened to change the myth of male dominance to the reality of male dominance?'¹⁶ Meyers argues that Israelite society moves from a myth of patriarchy—which she contends is little more than a notional ideology belied by a

¹⁶ Meyers 1991: 45.

deep-rooted egalitarianism in practical daily life—to an increasingly oppressive environment for women. Although my intention is not to offer a chronological account of Israelite beauty culture, the difference in pre- and post-exilic narratives does seem to support Meyers' conclusions regarding the rise of female oppression in the later era.

Gerda Lerner's *The Creation of Patriarchy* takes a similar overall approach to Meyers, understanding patriarchy as a cultural phenomenon that develops over time and thereby tracing the earliest forms of it even back to the nomadic stages of human development.¹⁷ However, when focusing on Israelite society in particular, Meyers argues for a slower development within ancient Israel of the gender roles and stereotypes than Lerner advocates, attributing this gradual development of patriarchy to a combination of sociological factors, including the development of early subsistence farming technologies, ecological considerations, financial benefits, urban advances and political developments such as the introduction of the monarchy.¹⁸

While the focus of Meyers' research is on pre-exilic, even pre-monarchic Israel, her overall contention is that the pioneering conditions in early Israelite culture enabled a 'gender parity' between males and females which was lost in part through the emergence of the monarchy, but primarily within the Second Temple era.¹⁹ Such a thesis concerning the development of increasingly restrictive cultural norms for women within Israelite society has significant bearing on my narrower

¹⁷ Lerner 1986.

¹⁸ Meyers 1991: 191. See also Meyes (1991: 47–71, 189–196).

¹⁹ Meyers 1991: 196.

investigation into how attitudes toward female appearance in particular develop throughout Israelite history. Consequently, Meyers' arguments lend credence to my overall contention that attitudes towards female beauty became increasingly negative over time.

In a similar vein, Leonie J. Archer's *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: Jewish Women in Graeco-Roman Palestine* has contributed enormously to this area of background sociological research. While Meyers focuses on the pre-exilic era, Archer is concerned with the position of Jewish women in the Second Temple era in general, and most specifically in the context of Graeco-Roman society. Her thorough sociological study of the institutions and restrictions placed on women during what she refers to as the 'intertestamental' period highlights the stark contrast between this later era and the less restrictive practices of earlier Israelite society.²⁰

Like Meyers, Archer argues that life for Israelite women became increasingly controlled during the Second Temple era, and she makes a compelling argument for her position by drawing on a wide variety of Jewish literary sources, both biblical and post-biblical. However, while I find myself in agreement with Archer's contention that attitudes towards women became increasingly critical, where we differ is in our account of the *origins* of these negative perspectives.

For while Archer makes a case for the natural progression of these condemnatory attitudes towards female sexuality within the context of the Judean tradition,²¹ I see a sharper distinction between the literature of the Hebrew Bible and what follows after. Consequently, in my conclusion to the thesis I argue for an

²⁰ Archer 1987: 1–16; 1990.

²¹ Archer 1987: 1–16; 1990.

alternate explanation for the development of the highly critical views of female beauty in Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature.

Nevertheless, Meyers' and Archer's accounts of an Israelite society in which, over time, an increasing emphasis is placed on controlling sexuality and limiting the freedom of women provide a broader contextual framework within which I situate my more focused exploration of Hebrew attitudes towards female appearance.²²

While Meyers and Archer base their argument primarily on sociological analysis and historical reconstruction, Yee presents a literary analysis of the negative depiction of women more generally within the Hebrew Bible. Yee draws a similar conclusion in *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman As Evil in the Hebrew Bible*, that over time the status of women became progressively worse in Israelite society.²³ Unlike Meyers, Lerner and Archer, there are greater methodological parallels between Yee's approach and my own project, insofar as we both engage primarily with the literary content of the biblical text rather than attempting to reconstruct ancient Israelite cultural practices.

However, whereas I focus my research on the subject of how these male authors depict women on account of their *beauty*, Yee approaches the broader issue of gender and sexuality within the Bible by engaging with both biblical and extra-

²² See also Archer (1990; 1987: 1–16), Emerson (1989: 371–416) and McNutt (1999). While I focus my research on the literature of the intertestamental era, Judith Romney Wegner explores later, rabbinic attitudes towards women in her book *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (1988). She makes the case that rabbinic Judaism is far more oppressive for women than its biblical antecedent.

²³ Yee 2003.

biblical literature in which women are metaphorically personified as 'evil' in one form or another.

Her account has significant import for my own project, because if Yee is correct in her analysis that increasingly throughout the exilic era and beyond women were seen as somehow inherently more 'wicked' than their male counterparts, then her account would go far in accounting for why female beauty becomes an increasingly threatening concept to Jewish men.

However, while I consider her arguments to have significant justificatory power, nevertheless in my conclusion I explain why I find myself unwilling to go as far as either Yee or Archer in their accounts of the development of patriarchal oppression in Israelite culture. Instead, I look to another means of explaining this shift in attitudes towards women in general, and beauty in particular.

While these three scholars in particular—Meyers, Archer and Yee—have had a strong influence on my understanding of the status of women in the literature of Hebrew Bible, feminist biblical interpretation in general has also had a profound impact on the way that I perceive sexuality to be presented and defined in the Hebrew Bible. Many works of feminist biblical scholarship have laid the groundwork for this project through their insightful analyses of texts dealing specifically with sexuality and the interactions of men and women in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, in many of these instances male biblical protagonists are presented as responding to the external appearance of a women, and so this motif of beauty has often been tangentially handled in the context of a broader feminist discussion on sexuality.

In many ways, Phyllis Tribble paved the way with *Texts of Terror*, in which she offers an in-depth biblical exegesis that forces her reader to confront biblical texts that depict shocking sexual violence against female protagonists.²⁴ One of her examples is Tamar (2 Samuel 13), who is targeted for sexual abuse on account of her beauty which apparently renders her irresistible to her half-brother. This is just one example of the way that the motifs of sexuality and female beauty are frequently intertwined in the Hebrew Bible. In both the biblical and non-biblical narratives, a male's recognition that a woman is physically attractive is a well-established narrative device, acting as the anticipated precursor to sexual intimacy. Time and again, the male sees, he wants, and he takes (Genesis 6:1-4; 34; 2 Samuel 11). Hence, any study of female beauty will inevitably touch on issues of sexuality within the Hebrew Bible to a significant degree.

Like Tribble, Mieke Bal's *Lethal Love* deals with narratives that recount the sexualised interactions of male and female biblical characters.²⁵ Bal's purpose, however, is to redeem long-standing patriarchal readings of certain narratives that portray women as sexual predators. She does so by offering alternative textual interpretations, and yet again, for several of these women, such as Bathsheba and Tamar, physical appearance is also a key factor in the seduction scene.²⁶

In a similar vein, both Esther Fuchs' *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* and Gail Corrington Streete's *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* continue this exploration of the dynamics of

²⁴ Tribble 1992.

²⁵ Bal 1987.

²⁶ Bal 1987.

gender power-struggles within the Hebrew Bible, and particularly the recurring biblical motif of female sexuality as a threat to or means of undermining a man's autonomy.²⁷ In particular, *The Strange Woman* deals with many of the texts that my own research engages with, as Corrington Streete assesses the depiction of the seductive powers of the 'other' woman in Hebrew literature. This is a theme that I build on by focusing specifically on the way that beauty, as the primary weapon in a women's arsenal of sexual appeal, is used to gain power over men.

Likewise, there are points of convergence between my thesis and J. Cheryl Exum's *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives*, which explores the link between visual attraction and sexual exploitation.²⁸ Exum offers an important literary analysis of the way that female protagonists are objectified by the gazes of both the male characters in the narrative and also by the male authors of the text. Her recognition of these two levels of objectification are an important reminder to take account of the two different—and often divergent—perspectives of the male author and specific male characters. Indeed, one of the key observations of my thesis is that central to the motif of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible is an ongoing tension between a biblical character's response to beauty in a given situation, and an underlying theological critique that the editor subtly conveys.

In her work *Plotted, Painted, Shot: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women*, Exum alters her methodology to incorporate a reception-historical approach into her examination of the biblical texts. Thus she considers both what the text is saying, and how it has been received through the varied mediums of literary commentaries,

²⁷ Fuchs 2000; Corrington Streete 1997.

²⁸ Exum 1996.

artistic representations and film. By highlighting the common biases in our established readings of certain texts, Exum opens up the possibility of alternate interpretations of the depiction of female sexuality in the Hebrew Bible. This is an opening I make use of in my own readings of certain biblical beauty texts such as Genesis 6:1–4, 12, 34, 39 and 2 Samuel 11–12.²⁹

Although these three writers—Fuchs, Corrington Streete, and Exum—are key examples of feminist scholars engaging with the motifs of female sexuality, oppression and power dynamics within the Hebrew Bible, they are by no means alone in dealing with these challenging biblical issues. In particular, a great deal of attention has been paid to the most extreme cases of biblical sexuality and violence within the Hebrew Bible through feminist discourse on the prophetic ‘marriage metaphors’ of Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, such as in Sharon Moughtin-Mumby’s *Sexual and Marital Metaphors in Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel*³⁰.

The contribution of so many feminist scholars engaging with the motif of female sexuality within the Hebrew Bible means that there is a wealth of secondary academic literature to draw from.³¹ My intention, therefore, is to build on the scholarship of these women by focusing in greater depth on one specific facet of female sexuality in the Hebrew Bible—a woman’s beauty.

²⁹ Another example of a similar approach can be found in Beal (1997). In this instance he engages specifically with the association between female visibility and sexual power in the book of Esther.

³⁰ Moughtin-Mumby 2008.

³¹ For a few other examples of significant feminist secondary literature on the theme of sexuality in the Hebrew Bible, see Bach (1997), Brooke (1992), Brenner (1985), Day (1989), Dennis (1994), Thompson (2001), and Brenner’s edited *Feminist Companion to the Bible* series.

Comparable to the interest in sexuality in the Hebrew Bible, a similar discussion has emerged concerning the presentation of female sexuality in the extra-biblical apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish writings. In his comprehensive work *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Apocalypses, Testaments, Legends, Wisdom, and Related Literature*, William Loader offers a robust account of the depiction of female sexuality and women in these deuterocanonical texts.³² Loader and I differ, however, in our assessment of the accounts of sexuality in these later texts, as he considers the depictions to be positive overall, whereas I disagree.

Despite the extensive body of feminist biblical scholarship on female sexuality in both the Hebrew Bible and the later Jewish texts, there has nevertheless been little direct engagement with the concept of physical beauty in Hebrew culture and thought. The one exception to this has been Matthias Augustin's *Der schöne Mensch im Alten Testament und im hellenistischen Judentum*.³³ Up until recently, Augustin's work was the primary contribution to scholarship on human beauty in Hebrew literature. However, while his insights on the Hebrew motif of kingly beauty are helpful, I am specifically interested in how these Hebrew views of human beauty pertain to gender-related discussions and the perceptions of women in particular.

More recently, the topic of biblical beauty has been approached within the developing field of disability studies in the Hebrew Bible. In his book *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences*, Saul M. Olyan begins by

³² Loader 2011. For other examples, see Stocker (1998), Trenchard (1982), and Ilan (1999).

³³ Augustin 1983.

defining the 'norm' for physical appearance in the Hebrew Bible, identifying what he considers to be a prevalent emphasis on the physical beauty of many of the biblical protagonists, both male and female. He even goes so far as to claim that 'Yhwh's favoring of the beautiful in the dominant stream of the biblical tradition ... serves to bring into relief beauty's privileging'.³⁴ While engaging with Olyan's work, throughout this thesis I disagree with his thesis that the 'dominant stream' of the biblical tradition shows Yahweh to be 'favoring ... the beautiful.' Rather, I contend that not only is this an oversimplification of the beauty motif of the Hebrew Bible, but in many cases Olyan's interpretation goes against the grain of these texts.³⁵

Similarly, Jeremy Schipper's *Disability Studies and the Hebrew Bible: Figuring Mephibosheth in the David Story* contrasts the physical beauty of the Davidic royal family with Mephibosheth's disability in his analysis of the books of 1 and 2 Samuel.³⁶ Once again, however, I suggest that his emphasis on the beauty of David's line overlooks certain textual nuances that offer a subtle, yet scathing, critique of humanity's over-emphasis on physical beauty.

Furthermore, although the biblical motif of beauty has arisen in these two recent discussions on disability and the Hebrew Bible, in neither case is beauty the primary focus of the paper. Instead, in each instance beauty is brought into these theses as a point of contrast. Thus, both of these works offer only a brief, preliminary assessment of beauty rather than a thorough, detailed analysis.³⁷

³⁴ Olyan 2008: 25.

³⁵ My concerns regarding Olyan's approach to biblical beauty are discussed in greater detail in chapter three, pages 122–123.

³⁶ Schipper 2006.

³⁷ Augustin 1983.

Consequently, what is currently absent from biblical scholarship is a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the motif of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible. So far, a study has not been undertaken to consider how the attitudes of the authors of the Hebrew Bible towards female beauty vary across different biblical genres and books, nor how this motif might come to influence later Jewish literature. Furthermore, in accounting for why during the Second Temple era attitudes towards women become progressively worse, I disagree with Archer and Yee's emphasis on a strong cohesion between the Hebrew Bible and the following apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings.

This is not to say that I cannot see commonalities between the two sets of literature under analysis, but rather that I disagree with *the extent to* which the later texts are perceived to be inheritors of an earlier tradition.

Thus I hope to contribute to the broader sphere of scholarship on biblical sexuality and the objectification of women by offering a comprehensive analysis of the motif of female beauty as it runs throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal texts. In doing so, I hope to bring to light certain attitudes towards human beauty that have previously been under-explored in biblical scholarship. Furthermore, while engaging significantly with the work of Archer, I also challenge her argument that these later authors should be *primarily* understood to be inheritors of the biblical tradition, arguing instead that in their attitude towards female beauty, there is a greater sense of divergence than continuation between the perspective presented in the later Jewish writings, and their biblical antecedents.

1.3. Methodology: A Literary Analysis

1.3.1. Identifying the 'Plain Sense' of the Text

This thesis is first and foremost a work of literary analysis. What I mean by this is that, rather than aiming to reconstruct the world *behind* the text, or to place feministic concerns *before or over* the text, as far as possible I want to focus on understanding the *content* of the text as it is presented to us by the male authors/redactors of these writings. This literary analysis requires understanding—as far as is possible—the semantic meaning of these beauty-texts. In this sense, my methodological aim is to discover what John Barton refers to as the 'plain sense' meaning of a text.³⁸

As such, this approach is neither exclusively diachronic or synchronic. I do not adopt a purely historical-critical approach to these texts, as my intention is not primarily to peel back the editorial layers of text. There would be advantages to such an approach as this if one were able to accurately formulate a chronology of the various depictions of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible. This would certainly provide a solution to Niditch's questions:

What can we hope to learn about women in the Hebrew Scriptures? Can we place individual portraits on a historical time line or are all the portrayals archetypal and timeless?³⁹

However, although attempts can be—and have been—made to identify each of these layers throughout the Hebrew Bible, any conclusions would be disputed on

³⁸ Barton 2007: 70.

³⁹ Niditch 1998: 27.

account of disagreements amongst biblical scholars over the editorial processes behind the formation of each biblical text.

Nevertheless, nor do I focus solely on the 'final form' of the text without recourse to the historical context of these passages. For, as Barton notes, searching for the 'plain sense' meaning of the text is a semantic and literary operation 'first and foremost', and therefore an element of historical criticism is essential for determining semantic meaning. As Barton explains:

Words have meaning only in a particular context: a word does not have a timeless meaning that is independent of the historical setting in which it is uttered. To that extent and in that sense biblical criticism is inevitably a historical discipline.⁴⁰

Therefore, while it may be difficult to definitively state whether Genesis 12, 20 or 26 is the earliest version of the wife-sister saga,⁴¹ or whether the so-called 'Succession Narrative' in the book of 2 Samuel precedes or succeeds the marriage metaphor in Jeremiah 4, we can have confidence, for example, that all of those aforementioned texts significantly pre-date the books of Esther and Daniel.⁴² In recognising that 'all pieces of Scripture were given final form by someone', Niditch claims that we can therefore speak of 'composers or authors who belong to particular periods'. Likewise, she notes how through textual exegesis 'certain contrasting values and

⁴⁰ Barton 2007: 102.

⁴¹ Gunkel makes a strong case for Genesis 12 being the earliest version. For the discussion on the dating of Genesis 12, see chapter four, pages 179–180.

⁴² For more reading on whether it is possible to identify any biblical texts as 'pre-exilic', see Day (2004). See also my discussion on the dating of the Genesis beauty-texts in chapter two, pages 88–90, and the dating of the Deuteronomistic literature in chapter three, pages 119–121.

attitudes emerge in the ways in which women are presented; in these are found a history of worldviews and ethos, if not simple reliable fact.⁴³

Consequently, certain conclusions can be drawn regarding the broader trajectory and evolution of the beauty motif in Hebrew thought. Wherever such chronological markers can be identified within the text, these will be particularly important for this project considering that some of the biblical texts pre-date the apocryphal writings by several hundred years, while others may have been written much closer to one another.

As a consequence, one might expect to see more affinities between the later texts than they share with the earlier ones. For example, Esther may well have more in common with Judith and Susanna than with the other narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Intertextuality is also a factor in this regard, as I consider not only how the texts compare with one another, but also the ways that they may have informed one another.

On the other hand, however, even as I partially adopt this diachronic approach, I also have to hold my historical conclusions lightly, recognising the limits of my ability to identify the 'original meaning' of a text. For example, I am cognisant of the fact that whether the 'Succession Narrative' in 2 Samuel was originally written during the reign of King Solomon as political apologetic for his reign, or whether it was written by Deuteronomistic redactors during the sixth-century BCE exile as an invective against the monarchy,⁴⁴ will profoundly influence how the 'beauty-texts' within this narrative should be read. Knowing this historical

⁴³ Niditch 1998: 27.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed discussion on this issue, see chapter four, pages 119–121.

background would in large part help to determine whether, as Olyan and Schipper argue, these texts are a celebration of the physical beauty of the royal household and a symbol of divine blessing, or whether they are a subversive critique of external beauty and internal corruption. However, I have to acknowledge that I cannot definitively state which of those readings is the 'right' one.

Consequently, there is also value in holding onto a synchronic approach to the text alongside the diachronic, because even if I cannot isolate the 'original meaning' exactly, I can still assess how the semantic meaning of these words are presented in their narrative context. This is also why literary genre is so important. For as Barton observes, 'until we know what kind of text we are dealing with, we cannot complete the semantic operation of understanding its meaning.'⁴⁵

Thus whether a text is written as a prophecy, a historical document or a poem will help to determine what its 'plain sense' really is. One of the significant components of this thesis, therefore, is to not only consider which beauty themes emerge across the various biblical books of the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings, but also to examine how those themes might vary across biblical genres; for example, how do prophetic biblical beauty motifs differ from those found in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible?

My intention, therefore, is neither to focus on the 'final form' of the text without regard for the importance of historical context, nor to make historical reconstruction the primary goal without recognising the significance of the text's literary features and setting within the Hebrew Bible. As Moberly comments, there

⁴⁵ Barton 2007: 109.

is no reason 'why one should not opt for "both-and" rather than "either-or"'.⁴⁶ Indeed, it is precisely in the adoption of this 'both-and' approach that the 'plain sense' meaning is found.

1.3.2. A Gender-Critical Approach

Given that this thesis originated out of a desire to account for the negative attitudes of Jewish male writers towards female appearance in the intertestamental era, the questions that I ask are by nature gender-specific questions. Indeed, considering that the majority of these beauty-texts are written by men, for men, about women, the issue of how the narrators have constructed gender within the text is central to the thesis.

However, I also contend that in order to make sense of the way that women are being depicted, one also has to understand how men are presented. This is particularly true when considering the theme of beauty, as in Hebrew literature physical beauty is always contextually framed within a narrative—or poetic/prophetic allegory—that presents an interaction between a woman and a man.

Therefore, the characterisation of women within the text relies heavily upon the characterisation of men, as the latter is usually what defines and determines the characterisation of the former. Commenting on the tendency within feminist biblical interpretation to focus exclusively on biblical depictions of women, Sawyer suggests

⁴⁶ Moberly 1995: 11.

that this is a significant oversight for our understanding of gender within the Bible.

As she argues:

The gender games apparent in biblical literature apply as much to constructed masculinity as to femininity. However, through focusing primarily on female characters in biblical literature feminist critique has often overlooked the implications of constructed masculinity.⁴⁷

For this reason, although I engage primarily with texts written about women—as the majority of Hebrew beauty-texts happen to be—there are also points at which I analyse in detail the physical descriptions of men that feature in the biblical narrative, most significantly in the narratives of 1 and 2 Samuel.

I do so not to digress from my central thesis, but rather because I am sympathetic to Sawyer's gender-critical approach on the basis that 'to understand the concepts of power and patriarchy in the Bible more profoundly, a wider lens is needed.'⁴⁸ Through comparing presentations of male and female beauty alongside one another, I find that these literary characterisations not only shed light on the Hebrew authors' attitudes towards human beauty in general, but these depictions of Israelite men also provide an important standard and foil according to which attitudes towards female beauty can more accurately be gauged and evaluated.

⁴⁷ Sawyer 2007: 8.

⁴⁸ Sawyer 2007: 5.

1.3.3. Structuring the Thesis

Whilst my aim is to analyse the 'plain sense' meaning of these texts, my reason for doing so is to compare and contrast how the meaning of these presentations of female appearance change or remain the same across the various literary genres and books of both the Hebrew Bible, and the later Jewish texts.

In order to bring this comparative element to the fore, I resist dealing with the two groups of texts independently. Instead, in each chapter I juxtapose biblical material with the later Jewish writings. I do so by first examining the relevant apocryphal and pseudepigraphical beauty-texts, and then I assess the comparable biblical texts while making points of connection with the extra-biblical writings.

In order to glean the most from this comparison, instead of attempting to arrange the material chronologically or grouping the texts according to book, I instead organise the material into four chapters. Each chapter examines one of the more prominent aspects of the beauty motif as it appears in the Hebrew Bible and apocryphal texts:

Chapter Two: Beauty as a Threat.

Chapter Three: Beauty as Vanity.

Chapter Four: Beauty as Vulnerability.

Chapter Five: Beauty and Virtue.

I chose these four themes because as I analysed the material, to one degree or another every beauty text within the Hebrew Bible and the later Jewish literature

revealed features that conformed to a certain degree with one or more of these four categories. From an overarching perspective, the first three categories all present different ways in which beauty can be seen as a negative trait, and it is only the final category in chapter five that offers a more positive depiction of beauty. I present the 'negative' texts first because I consider these texts to demonstrate most clearly the extent of the divergence between the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

In chapter two, I focus on the biblical and extra-biblical texts that present women as intentionally using their beauty as a tool to gain power over men. In chapter three, I consider the texts whereby both women and men turn their beauty into a form of vanity, worshipping themselves rather than their creator. In chapter four, I engage with the texts where women are presented as the abused and vulnerable victims of physical attraction. In these cases, it is the men who take advantage of women on account of their beauty.

Consequently, in one form or another, chapters two, three and four all deal with texts that either explicitly or implicitly act as 'cautionary tales', warning against the inherent dangers of beauty in one form or another.

Chapter five presents the more positive perceptions of female beauty found in the apocryphal, pseudepigraphical and biblical texts as they are associated with moral virtue.

The strength of structuring the project in this fashion is that the similarities and differences between the literature of the Jewish apocryphal writings and the Hebrew Bible are clearly presented. Even by observing the uneven distribution of

material across these chapters in the table of contents, it is immediately apparent where the emphasis of each collection of literature lies. This structure also lends itself to providing intertextual comparisons within the Hebrew Bible, as themes also begin to emerge across the books and genres of biblical literature (e.g. narratives, prophecy, poetry).

One challenge in shaping the thesis in this way is that there are certain texts that are more ambiguous and do not clearly align with one perspective over another. For example, in the case of Rachel in Genesis 29, it is not entirely apparent if this should be read as a narrative celebrating beauty, or acting as a cautionary tale.

The difficulty of placing these texts serves to highlight the complexity of the depiction of beauty in Hebrew culture, and as a reminder that a carefully nuanced approach is necessary when dealing with the motif of female beauty because it resists easy categorisation.

An additional difficulty that emerges from this particular organisation of the material is that texts from the same biblical books are separated by theme and therefore presented in different chapters. So, for example, certain texts from the books of 1 and 2 Samuel can be found in chapter three, others are placed in chapter four, and one is in chapter five.

However, I address this concern in chapter six by offering three different levels of comparison. Firstly, I summarise the depiction of female beauty in the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Secondly, I assess the presentation of female beauty across the varying genres of the Hebrew Bible (poetry, prophecy and

narrative). Only then do I go on to compare the biblical beauty texts with the accounts from later Jewish literature.

1.4. Establishing the Parameters of the Study

1.4.1. Defining 'Beauty-Texts'

In approaching a question of this magnitude, two challenges that immediately present themselves are the number of texts that have a bearing on this discussion, and the lengthy expanse of time over which these texts were composed, edited and compiled. On the one hand, a detailed analysis of these writings is necessary in order to gain a thorough understanding of what each text has to say about female beauty. However, I am also wary of limiting the scope of this study, as part of the uniqueness of this thesis is its ambition to present a comprehensive picture of the varying attitudes toward female beauty found in the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

Therefore, I analyse each passage where the physical beauty of a woman functions as an important motif in the text. There are some key biblical women whom I do not discuss,⁴⁹ simply because no mention is made of their appearance in the text. However, there are also a few women for whom the lack of reference to their physical appearance is exceptional given their role within the narrative of the Hebrew Bible. In these instances, I consider what the reason for this absence could be.

⁴⁹ Such as Deborah, Rahab, Tamar (the daughter-in-law of Judah) and Miriam.

In referring to biblical 'beauty texts', my intention is not to analyse all forms of Hebrew beauty. Rather, my primary interest is in the way that the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal texts depict physical beauty as it applies to the human person. There are two words in particular which are used in Hebrew to refer to this kind of physical, human beauty, and in the majority of cases it is the presence of one or both of these two words that has largely determined whether or not I count a text among the beauty-texts of the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁰ The first is יפה ('to be fair, beautiful', BDB)⁵¹, which in the hithpael can also refer to the act of beautifying oneself. The verb יפה is not used exclusively in reference to human beauty. For example, it can also apply to animals: שבע הפרות יפת המראה ('the seven cows were beautiful in appearance', Genesis 41:4). יפה is also used to describe cities (Ezekiel 27:3) and the natural world (Ezekiel 31:3, 'beautiful branch'), in each instance referring to the external attractiveness of a physical object.

יפה is an expression that does not solely refer to physical or visible beauty, as this word is also used to describe the sound of a beautiful voice (Ezekiel 33:32), and even the beauty of wisdom (Ezekiel 28:7). For the purposes of this thesis, however, my primary concern is focused on the use of יפה as it refers specifically to human beauty. It is worth noting that this is a gender-neutral word that is applied to male

⁵⁰ There are a few other terms used to denote female beauty (e.g. חן, 'charm' (Proverbs 31:30)) that I refer to on the rare occasions where they occur; however, my primary focus is on the two most common Hebrew words for beauty that are used throughout the texts of the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal writings.

⁵¹ I use BDB as an abbreviation for *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Brown *et al* 2001).

as well as female beauty throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g. **יפה** is used to describe both Rachel (Genesis 29:17) and her son Joseph (Genesis 39:6)). When applied to persons, this verb is frequently qualified by an aspect of a person's appearance, e.g. **יפת מראה** ('beautiful appearance' Genesis 29:17), **יפת־תאר** ('beautiful in figure', Genesis 29:17) or **יפה עינים** ('beautiful eyes', 1 Samuel 16:12), in order to emphasise that this is an *external*, bodily kind of beauty.

While **יפה** tends to refer to physical forms of beauty in particular, the other Hebrew word that is frequently used to describe human beauty, **טוב**, has a much wider range of semantic meaning. In its verbal form, BDB defines **טוב** as 'to be pleasing, good'; however, as an adjective it is usually translated as 'pleasant, good, agreeable'. The word has a fairly generic usage and is used in a wide variety of contexts. To list just a few examples, it can be used to describe places (Genesis 49:15; Exodus 3:8); people (Genesis 18:23); times (Genesis 41:35); senses (Genesis 2:9; Song of Songs 1:3); activities (Genesis 35:2, 47:6; Exodus 4:14).

Amongst this wide array of usages, **טוב** can also denote physical beauty or attractiveness. In some instances, the writer's emphasis on physical beauty in particular is highlighted by other clarifying nouns, such as the description of Vashti as **טובת מראה** ('good in appearance', Esther 1:11). However, in other cases, it becomes a matter of textual interpretation as to whether **טוב** refers to external beauty or 'goodness' as a value characteristic (e.g. Genesis 1:4, 3:5–6, 6:2). In some of these cases it might even mean both.

A similar ambiguity also occurs in the Greek. While the Hebrew Bible makes use of two primary words for beauty, יפה and טוב, in the Septuagint both words tend to be translated into the same Greek word, καλός ('beautiful').⁵² Like טוב, καλός can refer to both goodness as a virtue and beauty as a physical description, and therefore there are instances where contextual analysis is required to determine which meaning of the word is intended (e.g. Susanna 1:2, TH)⁵³.

Having identified these as the primary and most common descriptive words in Hebrew for physical beauty, throughout the thesis I continue to assess precisely how the biblical and the apocryphal authors are using these words, in order to gain a greater understanding of what the concept of 'beauty' meant within Hebrew thought.

In doing so, I am particularly concerned with the question of whether there is a strong correlation in Hebrew literature between an individual's physical beauty and their perceived status, moral character, ethnicity, or theological significance.

1.4.2. Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical Sources

As well as limiting the thesis to an investigation of human beauty, I also set parameters on how far the thesis extends in regard to extra-biblical material. In order to narrow the question, I compare the Hebrew Bible with specific Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts which discuss the subject of female beauty,

⁵² *Analytical Lexicon to the Septuagint* (ALS)(Taylor 2009: 299).

⁵³ There are two extant versions of the book of Susanna: the Old Greek (OG) and the Theodotion (TH). This verse is taken from the TH.

and that were written at around the time when the last texts of the Hebrew Bible were being edited into their final form,⁵⁴ up until the beginnings of Rabbinic Judaism. Thus, I look at an array of literature that was written by Jews both throughout the Diaspora and in Judah between roughly 200BCE to 100CE.⁵⁵

Many of these texts under consideration can be categorised as apocryphal literature, such as Ben Sira, Tobit, 1–4 Maccabees, the Additions to Esther, Susanna, Judith and 1 Esdras. In identifying these texts as apocryphal (meaning ‘hidden things’ in Greek) I refer to the collection of Jewish works that were included within the Septuagint but considered non-canonical by those who determined the limits of the Hebrew Tanakh within the Palestinian Jewish community.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ I recognise that there are ambiguities in the issue of dating and the final process of canonisation. For example, as noted earlier, scholars generally believe Daniel 7–12 to be a product of the Hasmonean era, which means that it post-dates Ben Sira (circa 180BCE).

⁵⁵ Given the historical period under investigation, at points within the thesis I occasionally follow Leonie Archer’s example (Archer 1987: 1–16; 1990) of referring to the Jewish texts that originated from this era as ‘intertestamental literature.’ In doing so, I am sensitive to the critique that such a designation could be read as inferring that the Hebrew Bible is not a ‘sacred canon’ in its own right but rather as the first part of two testaments. I am also aware that such a designation could imply a canonical bias, as if suggesting that because this literature falls between the two testaments, it is somehow of a lower status. Therefore I wish to affirm that on the rare occasion in which I do use this terminology as a designation for the extra-biblical Jewish literature, I do not mean to support either of those two presumptions, but simply do so as a short-hand way of referring to the collective works of literature that I am comparing with the Hebrew Bible. For similar reasons, I largely avoid the expression ‘deutero-canonical’ to describe these writings, as the phrase has implications in regard to status that are unhelpful, particularly in regard to the canonical debates between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

⁵⁶ For a brief overview of the ‘stories of biblical and early post-biblical times,’ see Nickelsburg (1984: 33–71). In referring to these texts as apocryphal, I recognise that ‘apocryphal’ does not connote a homogeneous genre of writings, but rather a variety of texts written over a long time period by a range of different authors in different contexts and places (e.g. Jerusalem, Alexandria).

However, the texts I consider are not limited exclusively to the Apocrypha, as some other extant Jewish works from this era that can be classified as pseudepigraphical writings, such as *Joseph and Aseneth* or the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, also deal directly with the subject of female beauty. Thus in general throughout the thesis, I refer to these extra-biblical texts that are my source of comparison and contrast with the beauty texts of the Hebrew Bible as the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts.⁵⁷

1.5. Summary of the Argument

In offering this comparative analysis of the motif of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, I make the following arguments.

Firstly, although a certain amount of variance is to be rightly anticipated in a collection that is comprised of texts originating from vastly different sources and dates, nevertheless the Hebrew Bible displays a surprising level of consistency in its attitude towards female beauty. For instance, in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, the threat of a powerful man desiring a beautiful woman at risk is a theme that emerges time and again. Likewise, several prophetic texts proclaim a repeated invective against those who trust in their own beauty instead of depending on Yahweh. As another example, the threat of the beguiling foreign woman is a

⁵⁷ I also occasionally reference the work of Philo, an Alexandrian Jew from the first century CE, as a point of comparison.

cautionary tale that appears in all three distinct genres of the Old Testament: in the narrative, prophetic and poetic literature.

Furthermore, and contrary to Olyan's suggestion that Yahweh favours the beautiful,⁵⁸ it is my contention that an underlying critique of an improper over-emphasis on beauty runs through several of these biblical beauty texts. In some instances this motif is obvious (Isaiah 3:16–24). However, more often than not, the critique is made by more subtle means, as the biblical writers deliberately present a finely balanced tension between humanity's emphasis on physical attractiveness on the one hand, and Yahweh's greater interest in a person's character on the other.

As for the comparison between the Hebrew Bible and the writings of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, I argue that the difference between these collections of literature is one of degree rather than outright divergence. However, I also argue that the extent to which they differ is quite *significant*, and that in general the authors of the Hebrew Bible display a more even-handed attitude toward female beauty than their Jewish successors.

This argument requires a certain level of nuance, because I do not wish to overlook notable affinities, such as an emphasis on the delight of having a wife who possesses both beauty and good character. Likewise, both groups also strongly caution against pursuing another on the basis of physical desirability alone.

On the other hand, however, it is quite clear that the two groups strongly diverge when it comes to the assignation of blame. Thus, for the intertestamental authors, female beauty is first and foremost a threat. It is repeatedly perceived as a

⁵⁸ Olyan 2008: 25.

weapon wielded against men by the opposite gender for the explicit purpose of leading men astray and subverting male power. In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, there are far fewer instances of female culpability. In fact, even more significantly, there are numerous cases in the biblical narratives where men are explicitly blamed for the abuse of a beautiful woman, whereas with the exception of Susanna, this motif is notably absent from any of the apocryphal texts.

Moreover, the invective itself is heightened within the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical material, as women are condemned on account of their beauty in a way that is absent from the Hebrew Bible—so much so that in these later texts, beauty is no longer a neutral trait, but a danger in and of itself. Therefore, while I acknowledge that both similarities and differences can be drawn out between the biblical and extra-biblical Jewish texts, I propose that there is far more of the latter than the former.

The starkness of the contrast between the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal texts raises the question of why female beauty has such negative connotations for the apocryphal authors, and how we ought to account for the disparity between these later writings and those belonging to an earlier Israelite society.

Here I make use of Archer's account of the development of attitudes towards women during the Second Temple era in general, although I hone her argument to focus specifically on the subject of female physical beauty. However, I find myself dissatisfied with Archer's explanation of how the apocryphal texts are the natural development of the attitudes towards women found in the Hebrew Bible. Instead, I conclude the thesis by briefly proffering an alternative solution as to why such a

striking divergence emerges between the attitudes towards female beauty found in the literature of the Hebrew Bible, and what develops afterwards in later Jewish literature.

Part One: Negative Depictions of Beauty

Chapter Two: Beauty as a Threat

2.1. Introduction

Within Hebrew literature, the presentation of female beauty cannot be categorised as exclusively negative or positive. Rather, these texts frequently highlight the inherently paradoxical nature of beauty, such that its very *desirability* can be precisely what makes it so *undesirable*. In Part Two of the thesis, I consider what form these more ‘positive’ depictions of beauty take in the Hebrew worldview.

In Part One, however, I focus on the critical depictions of physical beauty—and female beauty in particular—within the biblical and extra-biblical texts, because I consider this to be the dominant strain within Hebrew thought. Many of these authors approach female beauty with an attitude of wariness that, at least in the case of the later Jewish writers, frequently descends into outright hostility.

This hostility is not always directed at the women themselves—as chapters three and four demonstrate. In this chapter, however, I examine a particular strand of the Hebrew beauty motif that is uniquely critical in the way that the writers blame beautiful women for a man’s loss of control.

2.2. Beauty as a Threat in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

In order to assess this material, I first address the works of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, so that in the latter half of the chapter I can more thoroughly

consider the extent to which later authors diverged from their earlier Hebrew predecessors in their attitudes towards female beauty.

2.2.1. Beauty as a Threat in Wisdom

2.2.1.a. *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*

Amongst the Jewish authors writing from around 200BCE–100CE, Ben Sira offers a unique insight into the subject of female beauty. This is partly because the author is identified as a scribe writing in Jerusalem between 195–170BCE,⁵⁹ making the *Wisdom of Ben Sira* (Ben Sira) one of the earliest apocryphal texts to address the topic of female beauty.

A full edition of the Greek text, *Sirach*, can be derived from several early manuscripts;⁶⁰ however, we only have various—albeit large—fragments of the Hebrew text.⁶¹ Wherever possible, I follow the *New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (NRSV) in basing my textual analysis on the Hebrew text, reverting to the Greek where there are no Hebrew parallels.

Ben Sira approaches the topic of physical beauty from within the sapiential tradition by deliberately modelling much of his content and style upon the book of

⁵⁹ The reference to the death of the High Priest Simon likely refers to Simon ben Johanan whose duties ended in 199BCE. The lack of reference to Antiochus' persecution in 168BCE suggests a date somewhere between 195–170BCE. This time-frame is supported by Ben Sira's grandson, who compiled the Greek edition in Egypt circa 130BCE. See Ellis (2013: 2), Trenchard (1982: 3), deSilva (2002: 158), and Balla (2011: 362).

⁶⁰ I use the term 'Sirach' when referring specifically to the Greek edition.

⁶¹ As Ellis comments, the writings of Ben Sira are 'a haphazard mixture of genres that now exist in irreconcilable and/or incomplete versions in several languages' (2013: 2). See also Balla (2011: 362–363) and Trenchard (1982: 4–5).

Proverbs, although his work also exhibits the influence of Hellenistic thought.⁶² This confluence of ideas within his writing offers a unique glimpse into Jewish life in second-century BCE Palestine under Hellenistic rule.⁶³

Considering Ben Sira's approach to women generally, Archer asserts that he presents the reader with a

veritable catalogue of evil women who are to be avoided at all cost. These include the jealous wife, the married and unmarried woman, the virgin, the strange woman, female singer, harlot, street woman, and the beautiful woman - all of whom are to be shunned like the plague.⁶⁴

Thus not only does Ben Sira warn against 'loose women' ('or you will fall into her snares' (9:3)) and 'singing girls' (lest one be 'caught by her tricks' (9:4)), but from his perspective even virgins are a threat: 'do not look intently at a virgin, or you may stumble and incur penalties for her' (9:5).

Initially, there seems to be no indication that Ben Sira considers the beautiful virgin to blame, as the instruction implies it is the man's responsibility not to look. However, the notion that even *looking* with intent can lead to ruin reveals that to Ben Sira, the power of beauty can easily weaken a man's self-control.⁶⁵ Moreover the expression פִּן־תִּקַּשׁ, which is translated 'or you may stumble' (9:5) by the NRSA,⁶⁶ more accurately reads as 'lest you be snared', from the root word יִקַּשׁ ('snare', 'trap',

⁶² See Balla (2011: 363) and Ellis (2013: 99–102).

⁶³ Camp 1991: 1.

⁶⁴ Archer 1987: 11.

⁶⁵ See also Job 31:1.

⁶⁶ This is an abbreviation for the *New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha*. Throughout the thesis, unless I am using my own translation, all English translations of the Apocrypha are NRSA.

BDB).⁶⁷ Whereas ‘to stumble’ sounds like an accident, the warning that one might be ‘snared’ carries a greater connotation of danger as well as an implicit suggestion of intent, as a snare must be deliberately set to catch prey.

Concerning fines, the Hebrew Bible dictates that if a man has sexual relations with an unbetrothed girl then he must pay a monetary sum to her father.⁶⁸ Throughout Ben Sira’s didactic sayings, the themes of women and wealth are intertwined, as if what one stands to lose or gain in one of these areas is inextricably bound up with the other.⁶⁹ Camp accounts for this juxtaposition by arguing that Ben Sira’s worldview reflects that of a Mediterranean honour and shame culture. So concerned is Ben Sira with this cultural notion of ‘shame’ that variant Hebrew and Greek expressions for this concept emerge fifty-two times in Sirach: αἰσχύνω (בוש, ‘to shame’, 23x), ἀτιμάζω (כלם, ‘to dishonour/disgrace’, 16x), ἐντρέπομαι (בת, ‘to be put to shame’, 3x), κατααἰσχύνω (אול, ‘to put to shame, humiliate’, 7x), ἀσχημοσύνη (כנע, ‘shame/indecency’, 3x).⁷⁰ Reflecting on this, Sanders comments that ‘shame is the key ethical sanction in Ben Sira.’⁷¹

In a context where honour is a man’s greatest asset, Camp notes that he is most vulnerable to shame in ‘all those arenas of a man’s life where he stands to lose control, whether of wealth, speech, wives, sons, or daughters.’⁷² As Ben Sira 9:2 states, ‘Do not give yourself to a woman and let her trample down your strength’.

⁶⁷ *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (BDB) (1991).

⁶⁸ Deuteronomy 22:28–29.

⁶⁹ E.g. ‘Do not give yourself to prostitutes, or you may lose your inheritance’ (9:6).

⁷⁰ These expressions are catalogued in Camp 1991: 4.

⁷¹ Sanders 1979: 73–106; Camp 1991: 4, 37.

⁷² Camp 1991: 37.

Camp summarises that ‘male “honor” ... is determined essentially by the control men exercise over women’s “shame”, that is their sexuality.’⁷³ Consequently, the public loss of face occasioned by associating with a sexually immoral woman brings not only embarrassment, but also financial ruin. Furthermore, if women can endanger a man’s honour, then the primary means by which they do so is through their beauty.

Ben Sira’s worry is encapsulated in this fervent prayer:

O Lord, Father and God of my life, do not give me haughty eyes
and remove evil desire from me. Let neither gluttony nor lust
overcome me, and do not give me over to shameless passion.
(23:4–6)

Ben Sira connects loss of honour with female beauty by claiming that the origin of ‘shameless passion’ and ‘evil desire’ derives from visual stimulation through the means of ‘haughty eyes’ (μετεωρισμὸν ὀφθαλμῶν).⁷⁴ Ben Sira does not deny that female beauty is desirable, admitting that from a man’s perspective ‘there is nothing he desires more’ (36:27). However it is that very desirability that makes beauty a threat because it becomes irresistible to a man, and the ‘desires’ that it leads to are ‘evil’ desires (23:5).

⁷³ Camp 1991: 2.

⁷⁴ See also Ben Sira 9:5, Proverbs 6:17, 16:18, and Isaiah 3:16. Camp comments, ‘Rarely if ever in Hebrew Scripture does one find such intense concern for men’s personal sexual control’ (1991: 20).

Hence Ben Sira cautions his reader, 'do not be ensnared by a woman's beauty' (25:21). The warning **אל תפול** ('do not fall') is suggestive of powerlessness, as if 'beauty' is a pit that one can sink 'into' (**ביפי**) without hope of getting back out.⁷⁵

According to Ben Sira, beauty is most threatening when it belongs to a married woman:

Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman, and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another; many have been seduced by a woman's beauty, and by it passion is kindled like a fire ... and in blood you may be plunged into destruction. (9:8–9)

Ben Sira uses three different Hebrew terms to describe the beauty of the woman in 9:8. Firstly, he refers to her **גן**, a word that the NRSV interprets as 'shapely' in this context (**γυναικὸς εὐμόρφου** (LXX), 'a shapely woman'), although elsewhere the NRSV translates **גן** as 'charm' (Proverbs 31:30). Secondly, he uses the noun **יפי** (**κάλλος** (LXX), 'beauty/good'), the standard Hebrew expression for a woman's beauty,⁷⁶ referring to her aesthetic appeal. Thirdly, he uses **תאר** in reference to her 'form', (**ἐν κάλλει γυναικὸς** (LXX), 'in a woman's beauty') emphasising that he is speaking of her physical beauty as opposed to an internal characteristic.⁷⁷ By describing three different facets of her beauty, Ben Sira heightens the potential danger by inferring that temptation comes in several forms, and all three can plunge a man into destruction.

⁷⁵ Trenchard: 'The beauty of a woman is pictured as a trap into which the unsuspecting man may fall and thus suffer the consequences of sin' (1982: 78).

⁷⁶ E.g. Esther 1:11; Psalm 45:11; Isaiah 3:24.

⁷⁷ For other examples, see Genesis 29:17, Deuteronomy 21:11, 1 Samuel 25:3, and Esther 2:7.

In this instance Ben Sira does not make it clear whether the woman herself is active or passive in this seduction. For it is her beauty, rather than any specified action on her part, that has 'seduced' many and 'kindled passion'. In this way, it is as if beauty has the intrinsic power to ensnare a man, and therefore whether or not the woman in question desires that male attention is irrelevant.

However, in Ben Sira it becomes apparent that beneath a woman's beautiful exterior, Ben Sira perceives an inherent wickedness:

For from garments comes the moth, and from a woman comes woman's wickedness. Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good. (42:13–14)⁷⁸

It seems that for Ben Sira the question of whether women are *actively choosing* to employ their beauty as a tool for seduction is not given serious consideration. For a woman is perceived to be so wicked that her sin is greater than any that a man could commit, and her most moral actions cannot match up to the worst of male behaviour (42:13–14). It is on the basis of teaching such as this that Trenchard argues Ben Sira exhibits a 'personal, negative bias against women' that was notably bleak even for his context.⁷⁹

In contrast to Trenchard however, while allowing that these sentiments are 'extreme enough to explain the label misogynist that is applied to the author,'⁸⁰ Ellis argues that Ben Sira's attitude is not as critical as one might expect given his cultural context. As an example of this, Ellis argues that contrary to popular Hellenistic

⁷⁸ See also Ben Sira 25:19.

⁷⁹ Trenchard 1982: 173.

⁸⁰ Ellis 2013: 22.

philosophy, Ben Sira offers a taxonomy of gender that does not associate women with an 'ontologically secondary status' in the way that Greek thinkers like Plato or Hesiod do.⁸¹ While Ellis' observation is astute, however, it does not undermine the fact that Ben Sira embraces a gender stereotype that presents women as not only *physically* weaker by nature, but also *morally* weaker.

One aspect of this perceived moral failing in women was that they were believed to more easily succumb to sexual temptation, and as a consequence were considered more likely to deliberately lead a man astray.⁸² As Romney Wegner comments, 'the sages' androcentric perspective blames the dangers of private encounters between the sexes on women's moral laxity rather than on men's greater susceptibility to arousal.'⁸³

Part of Ben Sira's intuition in this regard rests on his Hebrew heritage, and specifically his interpretation of Genesis 3. As Ben Sira complains, 'from a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die' (25:24). Although Ben Sira may have Genesis 3 in mind, he goes far beyond the original text to become, as deSilva notes, 'the first known author to lay the blame for the fall at Eve's feet.'⁸⁴

⁸¹ Ellis 2013: 22.

⁸² Such a view is implicit in later Judaic legislation, where the Mishnah dictates that 'a man may not remain alone with two women, but a woman may remain alone with two men' (Mishna Qiddushin 4:12; translated by Romney Wegner (1988: 160)). The underlying assumption is that while two men will behave appropriately in the company of one another, the presence of another woman will not be enough to deter a woman from seduction (Romney Wegner 1988: 160). See also Eron: '[His] writings betray a clear distrust and dislike of women. This centers on his perception that women have uncontrollable sexual urges' (1991: 48).

⁸³ Romney Wegner 1988: 160.

⁸⁴ DeSilva 2002: 182.

The combination of Ben Sira's beliefs concerning female *internal* moral weakness with his wariness towards female *external* beauty leads to his repressive instructions for raising a beautiful daughter.⁸⁵ Thus Ben Sira writes that 'the birth of a daughter is a loss' (22:3), a 'secret anxiety to her father' (42:9), and that those with daughters should 'be concerned for their chastity, and do not show yourself too indulgent with them' (7:24).⁸⁶ Given the potential of a daughter to bring 'shame' on her father, Ben Sira exhorts his reader to

Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter, or she may make you a laughingstock ... a byword in the city ... See that there is no lattice in her room ... Do not let her parade her beauty before any man, or spend her time among married women. (42:11–12)

The assumption behind Ben Sira's advice is that if a daughter is given even the slightest opportunity, she will flaunt her beauty. Revealingly, Ben Sira's words resemble those of Pseudo-Phocylides, an Alexandrian Jew who lived between 170BCE–50CE, who writes in his *Ποίημα νοουθητικόν* that 'the beauty of children is hard for their parents to guard' (1.217).⁸⁷ This parallel implies that these views are not, as Trenchard suggests, indicative of a uniquely negative bias against women. Instead, Ben Sira is both engaging with and influenced by a wider cultural perspective on the subject of women and beauty. As deSilva comments, 'Ben Sira is

⁸⁵ Archer 1990: 21.

⁸⁶ Eron: 'Ben Sira considers daughters almost exclusively as sexual objects, of value only when they are married ... to him the universal characteristic of women is their sexuality' (1991: 51).

⁸⁷ Translated by Van der Horst (1978: 101).

in many ways merely a spokesperson for widely held social mores concerning women ... He is a mirror of the values he has observed'⁸⁸.

Trenchard suggests that the 'beauty' (יָפִי) Ben Sira refers to (42:12) could imply the beauty of her naked body: 'For a daughter to expose her beauty deliberately would amount to seduction. If she did so accidentally, it could lead to rape.'⁸⁹

While both options are possible, it is clear that Ben Sira is not worried about preserving the chastity of his daughter for her own sake, but rather to limit the damage that a flirtatious daughter could do to her father's reputation. Once again, Ben Sira's concern is to maintain male honour by suppressing female 'shame'.⁹⁰ So disparaging is Ben Sira's view of a daughter's capacity for self-control that in 26:12 he states with graphically sexual imagery that 'like a thirsty traveler opens his mouth and drinks from any water near him, so she will sit in front of every tent peg and open her quiver to the arrow.'

Ben Sira's advice to segregate the sexes until marriage in order to conceal a daughter's beauty is echoed much later in the *Testament of Reuben*,⁹¹ which commands the reader to 'guard yourself against sexual promiscuity, and if you want to remain pure in your mind, protect your senses from women. And tell them not to consort with men' (6:1–2).⁹²

⁸⁸ DeSilva 2002: 182.

⁸⁹ Trenchard 1982: 156.

⁹⁰ Camp 1991: 73.

⁹¹ For more on the dating of *T. Reuben*, see page 75.

⁹² Unless stated otherwise, I use H.C. Kee's English translation of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (Charlesworth 1983: 775–828).

Other Jewish texts from 200BCE–100CE likewise attest to this same practice of segregating unmarried daughters for the sake of preserving their purity. For example, in 2 Maccabees 3:19–20, social disorder is depicted through the description of young women leaving their confinement: ‘some of the young women who were kept indoors ran together to the gates, and some to the walls, while others peered out of the windows.’ Similarly, in 3 Maccabees 1:18–19, extreme grief is recounted in these terms: ‘young women who had been secluded in their chambers rushed out with their mothers, sprinkled their hair with dust, and filled the streets with groans and lamentations.’ Additionally, in 4 Maccabees 18:7–8, a righteous mother describes her upbringing in this way:

I was a pure virgin and did not go outside my father's house ...
No seducer corrupted me on a desert plain, nor did the
destroyer, the deceitful serpent, defile the purity of my
virginity.

The way that all three texts take the seclusion of virgins for granted suggests that the segregation of unmarried women was an encouraged practice among those living in Jerusalem under Hellenistic rule. Such evidence provides further reason to agree with Ellis, deSilva, Balla and Camp rather than Trenchard in interpreting Ben Sira as in many ways a spokesman for his culture in his attitudes towards female beauty, rather than imposing restrictions upon women that were uniquely biased.⁹³

⁹³ See also Philo: ‘taking care of the house and remaining at home are the proper duties of women’ (*The Special Laws*, III, XXXI. 169 (trans. Yonge 1993: 611)). For further discussion on the segregation of women in the Second Temple era, see Archer (1990: 113–122).

Indeed, so widespread became the belief in the licentious behaviour of beautiful women that even married women were encouraged to interact with men as little as possible so that no one might be endangered by their beauty. For example, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher Philo (20BCE–50CE) exhorts women to ‘cultivate solitude’, and to only go to the temple at quieter hours, so that they will not ‘be seen to be going about like a woman who walks the streets in the sight of other men.’⁹⁴

This social emphasis upon the segregation of Jewish men and women even came to influence ideals of female beauty. For example, in the *Genesis Apocryphon*, recovered from Qumran and likely dating from the first century CE,⁹⁵ Sarah’s is praised thus: ‘How beautiful is all her whiteness ... there are no virgins or brides who enter a bride chamber more beautiful than she’ (*Genesis Apocryphon* 20.4,6). The primary attribute praised here is Sarah’s ‘whiteness’, implying that she has remained indoors away from the sun. In this way, paleness comes to act as a physical symbol of virginity, and thus the most attractive brides are considered to be those whose fair skin is an outward sign of their inner purity.

Consequently, Archer appears to be correct in her assessment of the social segregation within the cities of Jerusalem and the surrounding Diaspora when she notes that ‘as men were deemed helpless in the face of such sexual allurements and women were considered incapable of controlling their lust for pleasure, any innocent social contact between the sexes came to be regarded with suspicion.’⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Philo, *The Special Laws*, III, XXXI. 171 (Yonge 1993: 611).

⁹⁵ Kutscher 1957: 288–292; Loader 2011: 171.

⁹⁶ Archer 1990: 106.

Therefore, Ben Sira's primary concern is that his male audience retain control of every area of life, to guard honour and prevent shame. It is for this reason that he takes a highly critical attitude towards female beauty as the chief weapon with which a woman might cause a man to lose control, leading him into sexual temptation, financial ruin and even death. As Eron comments, 'a woman's sexuality is threatening for it is one way in which she can control a man.'⁹⁷ Furthermore, the dangers of beauty are heightened because Ben Sira assumes that in most circumstances, women will take full advantage of their beauty to seduce a man due to their natural inclination towards sexual immorality. So great are the dangers, that according to Ben Sira the best solution is to segregate the sexes so that, as far as possible, the beauty of women is hidden from men.

2.2.2. Beauty as a Threat in Narrative

During the Second Temple era, one form of Jewish writing that gained prominence was the Jewish 'novella' or 'romance', a style of narrative that scholars liken to the ancient Greek novel.⁹⁸ Commenting on these Jewish 'romances', Cooper emphasises their didactic nature, as typically the narrative entails 'a harnessing of desire—the hero's desire and the reader's desire—to a moral.'⁹⁹ However, Johnson convincingly cautions against classifying all Jewish novels as a 'single genre' on account of their manifold differences, claiming that any attempt to do so is 'self-defeating and must

⁹⁷ Eron 1991: 55.

⁹⁸ See Pervo *et al* (2012: 146) and Johnson (2004: 4–5).

⁹⁹ Cooper 1996: 24.

be abandoned.’¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, she allows that the one aspect they do share is their attempt to ‘manipulate and reshape traditions about the Jewish past in order to articulate a particular view of Jewish identity in the contemporary Hellenistic world.’¹⁰¹

2.2.2.a. 1 Esdras 3:1–5:6

Despite their differing genres, there are strong thematic parallels between the presentations of beauty found in Ben Sira and in the contest of the three bodyguards (1 Esdras 3:1–5:6). While the overall narrative of 1 Esdras 3–5 centres on the climactic assertion that truth transcends every material power, within this broader framework the narrator presents a humorous yet critical commentary on the subtle battle of the sexes for dominance. Commenting on this gender power-struggle, Eron notes that

[m]an’s ability to exercise his right to rule, over himself more than over others, depended on his ability to remain autonomous, free of enslaving passions.¹⁰²

The provenance of this text is difficult to determine due to its retelling of the events of 2 Chronicles 35–36, Ezra and Nehemiah. DeSilva argues that the vocabulary parallels that of other second-century BCE Jewish texts,¹⁰³ while Brown proposes

¹⁰⁰ Johnson 2004: 5.

¹⁰¹ Johnson 2004: 6.

¹⁰² Eron 1991: 46.

¹⁰³ DeSilva 2002: 284.

dating the text to around 100BCE.¹⁰⁴ Harrington, however, suggests that this specific excerpt, 1 Esdras 3.1–5.6, was adapted from a pre-existent Hebrew or Aramaic text which could have been based on ‘a Persian original’ reflecting ‘pagan court wisdom.’¹⁰⁵ Given the fact that 1 Esdras 3.1–5.6 is the only portion of the book containing material not found in the Hebrew Bible, Harrington’s contention is plausible. Whatever the case, it seems that 1 Esdras was largely written to incorporate the additional material, highlighting the degree to which Jewish attitudes towards female beauty were considered a relevant, if comedic, topic for discussion during the Second Temple era.

In 1 Esdras 3:1–5:6, the author narrates a debate between three guardsmen of King Darius—one of whom is Zerubbabel—on the question of what is the strongest thing in the world. The first man suggests wine, the second the King, while Zerubbabel wins by claiming that women are the strongest, but truth triumphs above all else.

In order to emphasise the beauty of women, Zerubbabel refers to other valuable objects, such as ‘gold or silver or any other beautiful thing’ (1 Esdras: 4:18, 19), before stating that none of these can compare to the beauty of a woman. While this might be considered a flattering comparison, in placing the woman at the end of a list of objects it is as if she herself were an ornament. This verse highlights that the

¹⁰⁴Brown 1968: 542. The use of 1 Esdras by Josephus as a source for his *Jewish Antiquities* means that it must have been written by the mid-first century CE at the latest.

¹⁰⁵ Harrington 1999: 153–154. See also Talshir (1999: 42–46) and deSilva (2002: 293).

restraints ancient culture placed on women often left them with little power, and therefore reliant upon their beauty as their only means of gaining attention.

On the other hand, however, this text also playfully suggests that it is women who diminish male power through their captivating beauty. As Zerubbabel claims in 1 Esdras 4:18:

If men ... see a woman lovely in appearance and beauty, they let all those things go, and gape at her, and with open mouths stare at her, and all prefer her to gold or silver or any other beautiful thing.

Like men caught in the gaze of Medusa, this author claims that a man's capacity to function is immobilized by the sight of a beautiful woman. Her desirability is emphasised through the repetition that what they see is γυναῖκα μίαν καλήν τῷ εἶδει καὶ τῷ κάλλει ('a woman beautiful in appearance and in beauty'). Unlike Ben Sira, the intention of this narrative is to entertain as well as to teach. As Eron comments, 'Zerubbabel neither discusses how men are to behave with women, nor does he identify the source of a woman's power. He does, however, remark that men will stare at a pretty face and a good figure.'¹⁰⁶

So influential is a woman's beauty that Zerubbabel suggests a man will abandon his father and country for the sake of his wife (4:20).¹⁰⁷ Despite the recognition given to women in their roles as mothers (4:14–16) and wives (4:25), the observation that a husband behaves 'with no thought to his father' implies that the author considers these actions negligent rather than commendable. In this way,

¹⁰⁶ Eron 1991: 48.

¹⁰⁷ Compare with Genesis 2:24.

Loader notes that the author ‘twists the original into something negative, contrary to the Genesis text, and brings it into conflict with values about honouring parents.’¹⁰⁸

Nor does female beauty only temporarily incapacitate the viewer, but, similarly to Ben Sira’s sayings, 1 Esdras 4 emphasises the control beautiful women have over a man’s finances, as a man will ‘labour and toil’, and ‘steal and rob and plunder’, and then ‘bring it back to the woman he loves’ (1 Esdras 4:22–24).

In fact, so great is the threat of a beautiful woman that Zerubbabel contends that men become enslaved to them: ‘Many men have lost their minds because of women, and have become slaves because of them. Many have perished, or stumbled, or sinned because of women’ (4:26–27).¹⁰⁹ Although the tone is facetious, the actual claims are extreme, as the author categorically lists madness, enslavement, death, injury and sin, and all of this is διὰ τὰς γυναῖκας (‘because of women’). There is a notable parallel here with Philo’s *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, in which he writes that every one of the ‘greatest public or private quarrels that have arisen among men and among cities [have been] caused either by the beauty of a woman, or by a love of money, or, in short, by some desire for the excessive indulgence of the body[.]’¹¹⁰

For this author, however, a beautiful woman’s power is heightened on account of its subtlety, because men do not even realise that they are being

¹⁰⁸ Loader 2011: 145.

¹⁰⁹ DeSilva: ‘[T]he author attributes to women not only men’s positive achievements but also their sins and destruction’ (2002: 294).

¹¹⁰ Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain and his Exile* XXXIV. 117 (Yonge 1993: 143). See also Ben Sira 25:24.

manipulated by their desire.¹¹¹ Thus even the king, according to Zerubbabel, is completely subject to the whims of his concubine, Apame (4:29–31). In the face of such influential power, Zerubbabel exclaims, ‘therefore you must know that women rule over you!’¹¹² The expression ἐντεῦθεν δεῖ ὑμᾶς γινῶναι (‘therefore you must know’) is emphatic, as if Zerubbabel is persuading men to see a truth that should be self-evident. Likewise, the statement κυριεύουσιν ὑμῶν (‘they rule over you’) is a strong claim, suggesting that these women ‘lord it over you’ in a dictatorial fashion.¹¹³

Despite the hyperbolic style, the underlying content nevertheless reveals the same fears that Ben Sira warns against more severely. Once again, female beauty is feared to have the power to emasculate men and usurp their authority, although in this case it occurs in such a subtle fashion that men do not even realize that they are being stripped of their power.

There is also no suggestion that a woman might steal a man’s power through her wisdom or strength of character. Rather it is her beauty, like an object of gold or silver, that catches a man’s eye and leads him to take leave of his senses.

Despite this illusion of power, however, Zerubbabel’s statement, ‘therefore you must know that women rule over you!’, only has such force because the idea of a woman in authority is understood to be absurd. Indeed, the entire irony of the speech rests on the presupposition that women are not actually strong, but weak. As Talshir comments, despite the playful inference that women are powerful, the text

¹¹¹ Eron: ‘The threat which women pose to men through their sexuality lies just below the surface’ (1991: 48).

¹¹² 1 Esdras 4:22.

¹¹³ This is my own suggested translation.

‘presents a very low opinion of women’ as subordinate, manipulative, and objects of beauty rather than persons.¹¹⁴ Thus any woman who through her beauty ‘rules’ over a man is a threat to the natural order.¹¹⁵

2.2.2.b. Tobit

The novella *Tobit* can be loosely categorised as a ‘romance’,¹¹⁶ although in this case the narrator draws specifically upon the history of the seventh-century BCE Assyrian conquest to depict exilic life in the eastern Diaspora.¹¹⁷ Like *1 Esdras*, this makes *Tobit* difficult to date, although the text’s overlapping concerns with *Ben Sira* and *Judith* may suggest a late third-century or early second-century date preceding the Maccabean revolt.¹¹⁸ Unlike these other texts, however, *Tobit* is unusual in so far as it offers the earliest Jewish account of a demon who plagues the beautiful, virginal Sarah.

The presentation of beauty itself is also ambiguous. Paralleling *Genesis 24* and *29*, *Tobias* seeks an Israelite wife,¹¹⁹ and this courtship scene parallels similar

¹¹⁴ Talshir 2001: 194; Loader 2011: 145.

¹¹⁵ DeSilva 2002: 294.

¹¹⁶ Moore 1996: 18–19; deSilva 2002: 70.

¹¹⁷ Johnson 2004: 6. Although the narrative presents life in exile, it is unclear if the text’s provenance is Palestine (Pfeiffer 1949: 273–275) or the eastern Diaspora (Moore 1996: 43). For further reading on the provenance of *Tobit*, see deSilva (2002: 69) and Loader (2011: 147).

¹¹⁸ Like *Ben Sira* and *Judith*, *Tobit* focuses on second-century BCE concerns such as dietary laws, burial, endogamy and piety (deSilva 2002: 69). For further reading on a late third-/early second-century BCE date, see Rabenau (1994: 8–26), Otzen (2002: 57–59), deSilva (2002: 69–70), and Loader (2011: 147). Fragments of chapters 13–14 found at Qumran date the work prior to 100BCE. Although reliant on a Semitic original, the extant texts are in Greek.

¹¹⁹ DeSilva 2002: 73.

encounters within the Hebrew Bible that Augustin argues are usually the setting for a favourable depiction of beauty.¹²⁰ Similarly, Sarah is cast as the ideal Hebrew bride who exhibits both beauty and character:

Καὶ τὸ κοράσιον καλὸν καὶ φρόνιμόν ἐστι·
(‘And the girl is beautiful and sensible.’¹²¹ Tobit 6:12)

In addition, the narrative states that despite marrying seven times, Sarah’s virginity is preserved (3:14). This emphasis on purity is typical of later Jewish writings, reflecting what deSilva refers to as ‘the predominant cultural elevation of sexual exclusiveness as the area of a woman’s honor, part of a double standard ... to keep women hidden, secret, and private.’¹²² Furthermore, Sarah is presented as the victim of the demon (3:11–15) rather than the cause of her husbands’ deaths (3:10–12). All of these facts—beauty, character, virginity and innocence—emphasise Sarah’s ideal qualifications for an Israelite heroine.

On the other hand, however, the fact that it is at the moment of sexual intercourse that every one of Sarah’s seven husbands are killed by Asmodeus juxtaposes Sarah’s sexual desirability with death in an extreme fashion. Given the text’s emphasis on endogamy, it could be argued that Sarah’s husbands die because they are not kin like Tobias, and are therefore unsuitable for an Israelite bride.¹²³ However there is no indication of this reading within the text itself. Rather, the demon is an enemy to be overcome.

¹²⁰ Augustin 1983: 69–78.

¹²¹ My translation. In the NRSV, this sentence reads: ‘Moreover, the girl is sensible, brave, and very beautiful[.]’

¹²² DeSilva 2002: 81.

¹²³ Loader 2011: 153; deSilva 2002: 76.

The narrative explains Asmodeus' possessiveness of Sarah thus: ὅτι δαιμόνιον φιλεῖ αὐτήν ('because the demon loves her', 6:15). The same characteristics that make Sarah a desirable wife—beauty and character—also make her a target for demonic desire. There are parallels between the demon's love for Sarah and the supernatural sons of God who desire the beautiful daughters of man (Genesis 6:1–2). This narrative also recalls the myth of the Watchers in *1 Enoch* 6–8, in which supernatural beings fall in love with women on account of their beauty and produce destructive demonic offspring.¹²⁴

In this sense, despite Sarah's innocent status, she is nevertheless a threat to any man who finds her attractive, because that desire quite literally leads to death. This tale dramatises the hyperbolic claims of *1 Esdras* and *Ben Sira* that a beautiful woman can cause a man's death. DeSilva suggests that the narrative draws on folktales like the 'Poison Maiden' or the 'Dangerous Bride,' in which 'a man attains a beautiful woman as his wife only by defeating some curse or supernatural lover.'¹²⁵

In contrast with the demon, however, Tobias loves Sarah before he even sees her. Consequently, instead of his desire being based on beauty, it appears to be because she is Israelite kin (6:17). Moreover, the text emphasises that Tobias' decision is in no way motivated by physical beauty or lust when he states that he takes his kinswoman (τὴν ἀδελφὴν μου ταύτην, 'this my sister', 8:7) not out of lust (πορνεία) but in sincerity (ἀληθεία).

¹²⁴ Loader 2011: 183.

¹²⁵ DeSilva 2002: 70. See also Glasson (1959: 276–77) and Otzen (2002: 23).

Loader distinguishes between sexual desire ‘wrongly directed’ and ‘rightly directed’, suggesting that while the author critiques misplaced sexual desire (πορνεία), Tobit does not intend a negative approach towards sexual passion in general.¹²⁶ Unlike Loader, however, I suggest that the author disassociates Tobias’ feelings towards Sarah from sexual desire or lust. Hence his love is unmotivated by her appearance, and his desire for her is framed in the context of her as ‘sister’ first and foremost.¹²⁷ By contrasting Tobias’ purity with lustful desire, the author creates a subtle distinction between the right kind of marriage, based on religious commitment and endogamy, and the wrong kind of marriage, in which sexual desire and death are strikingly juxtaposed. Moreover, by ensuring that the reader knows that Tobias loves and chooses to marry Sarah before seeing her, the author also subtly places beauty on the other side of the divide.

The implication is that although desirable, a woman’s beauty is secondary to considerations such as kinship and faith. More than that, beauty is treated with suspicion. For although it is powerful enough to inspire even a demon to love, ultimately beauty is equated with impure desire and death.

2.2.2.c. Judith

More than any other apocryphal narrative, Judith is the prime example of the destructive power of female beauty. Like Esther, Judith (meaning ‘Jewess’) saves the

¹²⁶ Loader 2011: 178.

¹²⁷ Although ‘sister’ can be a term of endearment for a lover (e.g. Song of Songs 4:9–12), the context of this passage suggests that the primary connotation intended is that of kinship.

Israelites by destroying the threat of the invading Assyrian army,¹²⁸ and the weapon that enables her to do so is the force of her beauty.

The stylisation of Judith in the form of novella, combined with an emphasis on piety, the law and religious zeal,¹²⁹ have led many scholars to posit a mid- to late-second century date for the book.¹³⁰ In particular, Otzen highlights the ‘counterpoise of eroticism and chastity’ that runs throughout Judith, which is ‘typical’ of second-century literature.¹³¹

As a wealthy widow, Judith has greater autonomy than the archetypal Jewish heroine, and she is lauded for trespassing societal boundaries in a manner that other authors, such as Ben Sira, would have considered scandalous. Despite her status as a national heroine, however, in many ways the depiction of Judith still perpetuates the majority view of these apocryphal Jewish authors that, ultimately, female beauty is a danger to the male sex.¹³² In fact, one might argue that this novella goes beyond *perpetuating* this commonly held conception of female beauty to actually *heightening* that belief.

Judith’s beauty parallels the Septuagint’s description of Rachel:¹³³

Καὶ ἦν καλὴ τῶ εἶδει καὶ ὠραία τῆ ὄψει σφόδρα

¹²⁸ Although as Otzen notes, ‘Esther is a more passive figure than Judith’ (2002: 77).

¹²⁹ All of which are prominent themes in the Maccabean era.

¹³⁰ An implied reference in the text to Antiochus Epiphanes supports a mid-second century BCE date of composition, while the earliest reference found to the novella is made at the end of the first century CE by Clement of Alexandria. See Di Lella (1995: 132) and Loader (2011: 186).

¹³¹ Otzen 2002: 80.

¹³² I discuss Judith’s positive characterisation as a beautiful heroine in chapter five of the thesis, pages 250–254.

¹³³ Loader 2011: 193.

(‘She was beautiful in appearance, and was very lovely to behold.’ Judith 8:7)

Καλὴ τῶ εἶδει καὶ ὠραία τῇ ὄψει
(‘beautiful in appearance, and lovely to behold.’ Genesis
29:17, LXX)

Although Judith may initially be presented to the reader as a natural, Hebrew beauty, her transformation from widow to warrior places her in a different category of heroine. Through a ritual of beautification, she is presented as a soldier girding her loins and arming herself for battle. In this fight, however, Judith’s primary weapon is her beauty:

She removed the sackcloth ... bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment ... She put sandals on her feet, and put on her anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings ... Thus she made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her. (Judith 10:3–4)

Amongst the catalogue of Judith’s adornments are several decorations identical to the jewellery worn by the daughters of Zion in the LXX version of Isaiah 3:20–21: τοὺς χλιδῶνας (‘the bracelets’), τὰ ψέλλια (‘the chains’), τοὺς δακτυλίους (‘the rings’), and τὰ ἐνώτια (‘the earrings’). This textual parallel—listed in identical order—both implies the dependence of Judith on the earlier text, and suggests that these are the traditional trinkets of wealthy Israelite women.

Each additional item builds up the impression of decadence until Judith has ‘made herself beautiful’ (ἐκαλλωτίσατο, 10:4). In this sense, Judith’s natural beauty is exchanged for a self-made beauty, with every weapon at her disposal put to use.

Whereas the daughters of Zion are condemned for their extravagance, however, in this instance Judith's motives are considered pure. As Moore comments, 'Just as a soldier facing battle takes much care preparing himself and his arms, so our Female Warrior dressed herself with much deliberateness.'¹³⁴

Although her motives may have been devout, her intention is to 'entice the eyes of all the men who might see her' (10:4). The Greek word ἀπατάω translates as 'to cheat, trick, outwit, beguile, deceit'.¹³⁵ Therefore, although in this instance Judith's motives might be justifiable, by presenting her thus, the text still affirms the pervasive cultural belief that female beauty and deceit are inherently linked.

The influence Judith's beauty exerts is undeniable. The Israelite men cannot tear their eyes from her (10:10), and the Assyrians are enthralled. Yet again in a Jewish novella, hyperbole is employed, as the Assyrians exclaim: 'who can despise these people, who have women like this among them? It is not wise to leave one of their men alive, for if we let them go they will be able to beguile the whole world!'¹³⁶

However the greatest threat comes not just from her appearance, but from Judith's craftiness in utilising her beauty as a weapon. Summing up the deadly power of her beauty in poetic fashion, Judith 16:9 proclaims: 'Her sandal ravished his eyes, her beauty captivated his mind, and the sword severed his neck!' As in 1 Esdras, a woman's beauty has the power to make a man lose control over his mind. The Assyrians have been ravishing the land, and Holofernes' intent is to ravish Judith. Yet in this case Judith has become the sexual aggressor, and it is her sandal

¹³⁴ Moore 2008: 181.

¹³⁵ ALS 2009: 54.

¹³⁶ Judith 10:19.

that ravished (ἀρπάζω, 'to seize/ravish') his eyes.¹³⁷ Otzen observes that the culmination of the narrative is 'the bedroom scene ... charged with the piquant mixture of sexuality and death (13:1–11.)'¹³⁸ Thus in Judith, female beauty is a deadly weapon: a man's sight is violated, his mind is ensnared, and he literally loses his head over her.¹³⁹

In one sense, this narrative is unique amongst apocryphal literature in that Judith is celebrated for the destruction of a man through beauty. There are, however, undeniable parallels between Judith and Jael, as the latter also manipulates the leader of a foreign army, kills him by wounding him in the head inside a tent, and delivers Israel in the process (Judges 4:22). In the case of Judith, however, the beauty motif is prominently emphasised in a way that is lacking in Judges.¹⁴⁰ Deborah can boast that Sisera is defeated by the *hand* of a woman; however, Judith proudly boasts in Holofernes' defeat by the *face* of a woman:

ἠπάτησεν αὐτὸν τὸ πρόσωπόν μου εἰς ἀπώλειαν αὐτοῦ
(‘It was my face that seduced him to his destruction.’ 13:16)

¹³⁷ Noting the subversion of masculine imagery, Levine designates Judith a 'phallic woman' (1992: 24).

¹³⁸ Otzen 2002: 109.

¹³⁹ Compare with Philo, who uses similar military imagery to describe the way that 'a man beholding beauty is wounded by the darts of love, which is a terrible passion' (*That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*, XXVI. 99 (Yonge 1993: 123)).

¹⁴⁰ Otzen (2002: 110) notes how in the Hellenistic retelling of the Jael and Sisera narrative by Pseudo-Philo, the beauty motif is intentionally heightened such that Jael is described as so beautiful and finely attired that Sisera determines to make her his wife (Pseudo-Philo: *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 31:3). Pseudo-Philo is a Latin work composed between the mid-first century CE (Harrington 1985: 8) to the mid-second century CE (Jacobson 1996: 201).

The depiction of Judith makes for a compelling comparison with Philo's *On the Virtues*.¹⁴¹ Philo recounts the tale of the Madienaeans who attempt to undermine the Hebrew faith by encouraging their women to seduce Israelite males.¹⁴² Having sent for beautiful women, the King of the Madienaeans says, 'You are very beautiful, and beauty is by nature a seductive thing'.¹⁴³ Such a comment supports the view held by these later Jewish authors that beauty is inherently alluring and dangerous. When the Madienaeans consent, however, Philo describes them as doing so without 'the slightest regard to their character for purity of life', stating that 'they had put on a hypocritical appearance of modesty, and so now ... they devoted all their attention to enhancing their natural beauty.'¹⁴⁴

Consequently, according to the Jewish author, Judith can use her beauty to lead Holofernes astray and still be considered a Jewish woman of modest character. However Philo claims that as soon as these foreign women use their beauty for deceitful purposes, they reveal their underlying moral corruption as women who are impure and immodest. The irony in these varied depictions is that in each case, the women are not serving their own agendas, but rather acting out of a loyalty to their nation. As Schmitz observes, 'In the camp of the Assyrians [Judith] is the "Strange woman". The beautiful female stranger is dangerous.'¹⁴⁵

Whether Philo himself was aware of Judith is unclear. However it is interesting to note the double standard that cultural bias creates. For this reason, I

¹⁴¹ Philo's narrative is based on Numbers 25.

¹⁴² See also Philo, *On the Virtues*, VII. 34–VIII. 50 (Yonge 1993: 643–644).

¹⁴³ Philo, *On the Virtues*, VII. 36 (Yonge 1993: 643).

¹⁴⁴ Philo, *On the Virtues* VII. 39 (Yonge 1993: 643).

¹⁴⁵ Schmitz 2009: 90.

argue that although in some ways Judith is an empowered heroine, at a fundamental level it remains deeply problematic that her beauty is predominantly associated with manipulation and death. Indeed, more so than in any other intertestamental text, the exaggerated depictions of Judith's appearance emphasise the destructive force of beauty in an unprecedented fashion.

2.2.2.d. *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* are the most difficult of these literary sources to date, with scholarly suggestions ranging from 200BCE–200CE.¹⁴⁶ There is likewise no consensus as to whether the text is primarily a work of Christian authorship dating to around 200CE,¹⁴⁷ or whether, as VanderKam contends, it is 'likely that the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is a Jewish work with some Christian additions.'¹⁴⁸

What is evident is Rosen-Zvi's observation that

the testaments of the twelve patriarchs espouse some of the most sweepingly misogynous rhetoric in ancient Jewish literature ... [including] vitriolic warnings against the evil sexual threat that women represent and ... how to avoid succumbing to their dangerous power.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ McNamara 1983: 105.

¹⁴⁷ Rost 1976: 144–145.

¹⁴⁸ VanderKam 2001: 100–101. In support of this suggestion, fragments of the *Testament of Levi* and a *Testament of Naphtali* (4Q215) at Qumran bear resemblance to the Greek versions. See Kee (1983: 777–778) for an argument for dating the text to the second century BCE.

¹⁴⁹ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 65.

Of all the *Testaments*, *Testament of Judah* (*T. Judah*) is the one that through narrative engages the most with the threat to male autonomy posed by beautiful women, as they are able to overcome Judah in a way that no other force or situation has previously.¹⁵⁰ *T. Judah* cautions the reader that, no matter how strong one's self-control, one should not underestimate the danger that a beautiful woman represents. As the narrator comments,

Since I had boasted that during a war not even a beautifully formed woman's face would entice me ... the spirit of envy and promiscuity plotted against me until I lay with Anan, the Canaanite woman, and with Tamar (*T. Judah* 13:3).

The text emphasises that Judah was caught out because of self-righteousness, leaving him unprepared for the onslaught of female beauty. There is a sharp contradiction between Judah's previous successes in 'wars' and his ultimate defeat caused by a beautiful face. This juxtaposition accentuates the power of female beauty,¹⁵¹ which can overpower a man when warfare cannot. The inference of this narrative is, as Rosen-Zvi comments, that 'the true war is thus located not on an external battlefield but rather within man's soul.'¹⁵²

Judah also claims that he was overcome by τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ζήλου καὶ τῆς πορνείας ('the spirit of envy and promiscuity', 13:3). Note how Judah falls prey to the same lust (πορνεία) that Tobias withstood (Tobit 8:7). However, rather than admitting failure, Judah attempts to justify himself. He claims that it is as if the

¹⁵⁰ As Eron comments: 'Judah's testament deals most directly with the issues of hierarchy, control and domination arising out of the sexual interactions between the sexes' (1991: 59).

¹⁵¹ See also Judith 13:16.

¹⁵² Rosen-Zvi 2006: 81.

emotions of jealousy and lust are strategising against him, acting as external forces upon him. Unable to attribute the loss of control to his own weakness, he has to find an external source—whether women or spirits, or both—to blame.

Likewise, in the case of Anan the Canaanite, Judah claims that he was set up by his father-in-law, who lured him into an alliance through the triple threat of money, wine, and a beautiful woman:

He showed me a measureless mass of gold ... He decked her in gold and pearls, and made her pour out wine for us ... The wine perverted my eyesight; pleasure darkened my heart. I longed for her and lay with her (13:4–7).

Anan is displayed at her best, arrayed in precious adornments as she serves Judah at the feast. As a result of these tactics, Judah is dazed. The fact that his faculties are completely overwhelmed is emphasised by the fact that he loses sight doubly: his eyes are turned aside, and his heart is equally blinded by pleasure (ἤμαύρωσε).

The potent threat of wine and women runs throughout the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts. Thus in 1 Esdras 4, the only thing in the world stronger than wine is women, while Ben Sira claims that ‘wine and women lead intelligent men astray’ (Ben Sira 19:2). If Judah’s perception was not skewed by alcohol, he implies he might have been able to avoid the temptation.

This is a mistake he repeats in 12:3–4, explaining that in the case of Tamar, ‘being drunk with wine, I did not recognize her; and her beauty deceived me, through the fashion of her adorning.’ Once again, despite Judah’s drunken state, he apportions blame to Tamar, whose ‘beauty’ deceived him. Apparently this is the case

even though she is in disguise, a fact Judah accounts for by emphasizing that her adorning was fashioned to tempt a man.

Unlike in the Hebrew Bible, *T. Judah* presents Tamar in an ambiguous fashion, casting aspersions on her character by questioning whether she truly received Judah's pledge, or whether it was given to her by another woman (12:7–8) to cover up promiscuity. By blaming the women in these encounters and explaining away Judah's poor choices on the basis of wine and deceptive beauty, this narrative diverges significantly from the biblical account of Judah and Tamar's behaviour. Rosen-Zvi observes that

T. Judah presents [Anan and Tamar] as but different manifestations of one and the same figure – the temptress ... They both entice Judah with the irresistible combination of wine, female adornment, and charm.¹⁵³

T. Judah concludes with two admonitions to its reader. Firstly, 'do not be drunk on wine, because wine perverts the mind from the truth, arouses the impulses of desire, and leads the eye into the path of error' (14:1–3). Secondly, the author exhorts the reader 'not to love money, nor to gaze on the beauty of women. Because it was on account of money and attractive appearance that I was led astray' (17:1–2). Once again, Judah will not take responsibility for his actions: rather than going astray, he 'was led astray.'

As in Ben Sira, *T. Judah* states therefore that the best way to avoid sexual temptation is to avoid looking at female beauty entirely. Eron summarises the teaching in this way:

¹⁵³ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 79–80.

The wise man, therefore, would avoid those things which could enslave him: wine, the source of drunkenness; gold, the source of greed; and women, the source of sexual impulses and passion.¹⁵⁴

Identical motifs arise in the *Testament of Reuben* (*T. Reuben*), in which Reuben finds himself undone by wine and beauty. Notable affinities between the account of Reuben and Bilhah in *Jubilees* 33:1–9 and *T. Reuben* 3:10–4.1 suggest either that the author of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* relied on the *Jubilees* account, or that they shared a literary source. For instance, in both texts Reuben finds Bilhah resting in a sheltered place, and she remains sleeping while he perpetrates the sexual act. On the basis of Bilhah's slumbering state, Kugel concludes that 'T. Reuben seems to have arranged everything so as to argue Bilhah's innocence.'¹⁵⁵

However, I agree with Rosen-Zvi that Kugel's interpretation is an erroneous one. Rosen-Zvi counters that Kugel is in danger of overlooking 'the way that the motifs of drunkenness and nakedness function generally in the Testaments and especially their strong connection to sexual immorality.'¹⁵⁶

Most telling is the way that this account diverges from *Jubilees*, in which Bilhah is portrayed as an innocent. For example, in *Jubilees* 33:5, Bilhah wakes and protests Reuben's sexual violation, an event that does not occur in *T. Reuben*. However the real indicator, as Rosen-Zvi highlights, is that in *T. Reuben* Bilhah is not

¹⁵⁴ Eron 1991: 45.

¹⁵⁵ Kugel 2006: 543. Quoted by Rosen-Zvi (2006: 69).

¹⁵⁶ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 69.

only asleep, but drunk and naked, setting up the scene as an 'open invitation to iniquity.'¹⁵⁷

Bilhah's nakedness is referred to four times in 3:11–14, beginning with her exposure during the act of bathing, a distinct reminder of Susanna and Bathsheba. It is this visual temptation that proves too much for Reuben, hence his advice in 4:1: 'Do not devote your attention to the beauty of women (κάλλος γυναικῶν) ... nor occupy your minds with their activities.' The fact that Reuben is overcome by Bilhah's nakedness is highlighted by the fact that, unlike in *Jubilees*, there is no pre-planned ambush. Instead, Reuben reacts instantly and instinctively to 'the lure of female temptation.'¹⁵⁸ In both testaments, therefore, the traditions of the Hebrew Bible are re-interpreted to assign blame to the women.

Having made the case more implicitly, the author then explicitly states:

For women are evil ... Lacking authority or power over man, they scheme treacherously how they might entice him to themselves by means of their looks ... An angel of the Lord instructed me that women are more easily overcome by the spirit of promiscuity than are men. They contrive in their hearts against men, then by decking themselves out they lead men's minds astray, by a look they implant their poison, and finally in the act itself they take them captive. (5:1-3)

This assertion that the female gender is evil stands apart as the bleakest assessment of women among the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings. Even Ben Sira, who claims that 'sin began with a woman' (Ben Sira 25:24), nevertheless teaches that a good wife can be a blessing (Ben Sira 26:3). For the author of *T. Reuben*,

¹⁵⁷ Rozen-Zvi 2006: 70. Compare with Noah's behaviour in Genesis 9:18-23.

¹⁵⁸ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 71.

however, women are not just inclined towards evil, but condemned outright as evil in their entirety.

Archaeological excavations throughout the Levant reveal that jewellery and cosmetics were used abundantly by wealthy women throughout the ancient Near East (ANE). However in this text, women are portrayed as intentionally seducing men by using their beauty as a weapon. As a result, any of the tools that women used to sharpen that weapon—cosmetics, jewellery, perfume, fashionable hairstyles—are reviled. It is for this reason that the author of *T. Reuben* scathingly states that if women cannot beguile a man by ‘outward attractions’ or natural beauty (*T. Reuben* 5:1), they rely on ‘craft’ to overcome a man (5:2).

In a similar diatribe against superficial female adornment, Philo personifies ‘Pleasure’ as a woman who

[looks] about with a mixture of boldness and impudence ...
having the hair of her head dressed with most superfluous
elaborateness, having her eyes pencilled ... painted with a
fictitious colour, exquisitely dressed with costly garments ...
adorned with armlets, and bracelets, and necklaces[.]¹⁵⁹

Like Judith, Philo’s words mirror Isaiah 3:16–23, both in the choice of ornaments and the boldness with which the woman looks about. The heaping of one gaudy decoration upon another accentuates the distaste with which Philo views such a garish display.

Although written over two hundred years earlier, *1 Enoch* takes a similarly

¹⁵⁹ Philo, *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain*, V. 21 (Yonge 1993: 96).

negative approach to Philo on the subject of female practices of beautification.¹⁶⁰ Thus the 'Book of the Watchers' attributes the creation of jewellery and cosmetics to a fallen angel from Genesis 6:1–4, who is referred to as Azazel. According to *1 Enoch* 8:1–2,

Azazel ... taught the people ... he showed to their chosen ones bracelets, decorations, (shadowing of the eye) with antimony, ornamentation, the beautifying of the eyelids ... all colouring tinctures ... and there were many wicked ones and they committed adultery and erred, and all their conduct became corrupt.¹⁶¹

From this writer's perspective, it was the practice of self-beautification that corrupted humanity and led them into sexual immorality in the first place. As Archer observes, 'the use of cosmetics and jewellery was ... regarded with suspicion ... as beautifying agents which had no other purpose but to arouse the passions of men.'¹⁶² For this reason, *T. Reuben* 5:5 instructs the reader,

Order your wives and your daughters not to adorn their heads and their appearances so as to deceive men's sound minds. For everyone who schemes in these ways is destined for eternal punishment.

As far as *T. Reuben* is concerned, any form of adornment serves one purpose only: to 'deceive the mind', creating a false impression that a woman is more beautiful than

¹⁶⁰ The oldest portions of *1 Enoch*, including the 'Book of the Watchers' which is referenced here, likely dates as early as 200BCE, as several copies have been found in Qumran cave 4 (4Q201–202, 204–206), the oldest of which dates between 200–150BCE. See VanderKam (2001: 91) and McNamara (1983: 55).

¹⁶¹ Unless stated otherwise, I use E. Isaac's English translation of *1 Enoch* (Charlesworth 1983: 5–89).

¹⁶² Archer 1990: 247. See also *T. Judah* 9:4–6; 12:1–4; 13:4–7.

she really is. The physical feature that is singled out for particular criticism in several of these texts is a woman's eyes. Thus *T. Reuben* explains that it is 'by the glance of the eye' that poison is instilled, while *1 Enoch* 8:2 specifically mentions the 'beautifying of the eyelids.' In a similar vein, Ben Sira 26:9 states that 'the haughty stare betrays an unchaste wife; her eyelids give her away,' while the Qumran scroll 4Q184 describes the characteristics of a seductress as one who 'will never rest from whoring, her eyes glancing hither and thither. She lifts up her eyelids naughtily, to stare at a virtuous one.'¹⁶³

One reason why the eyes in particular receive so much attention is because most ancient Near Eastern cosmetics were primarily applied there. Kohl was drawn around the eyelashes to make the eye appear larger, while vivid colours ('colouring tinctures', *1 Enoch* 8:2) such as green or yellow—the residues of which have been found by archaeologists in ANE make-up palettes—were used to make a woman's eyes appear more striking.¹⁶⁴

Eyes were also perceived to be dangerous as they were the primary means of silent communication between the sexes. In a culture where female modesty was extolled and women were frequently kept separate from men, the most intimate interaction a man might have with a woman was a fleeting look across a public setting. In such circumstances, for a woman to directly hold a man's gaze rather than

¹⁶³ Reflecting on the abundance of warnings, Trenchard notes that 'the woman's eyes are taken to be her chief seductive weapons' (1983: 117).

¹⁶⁴ Examples of these ANE cosmetics can be found at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, including shell eye-cosmetics containers with traces of yellow and green colouring from the royal cemetery at Ur (Circa 2500–2400BCE; AN1930.223); a kohl stick and tweezers (AN1913.598) and a cosmetics palette (AN1913.725), both from Deve Hüyük (480–380BCE).

glancing away could be viewed as a provocative act laden with meaning. In this sense, one glance can 'instil poison', enabling a 'whore' to be identified by the 'lifting up of her eyelashes', which may have been interpreted as a clear sexual invitation. Thus a woman's eyes are doubly dangerous, both because they were decorated to allure a man, but also because eyes can convey a powerful message.

In contrast to these exaggerated efforts, Philo depicts the personification of 'Virtue' as a woman with 'a very gentle look, the native colour of modesty and nature without any alloy or disguise, ... a disposition adverse to pretense, ... a moderate style of dress, and the ornaments of prudence and virtue.'¹⁶⁵ As far as Philo is concerned, natural beauty and modesty are infinitely preferable to eye-catching adornments. This same attitude extends to the later authors of the Babylonian Talmud, which records a wedding celebration at which 'the bride in the West' is extolled for her beauty, because she wears 'no powder and no paint and no waving [of the hair] and still a graceful gazelle' (*Kethuboth* 17a).¹⁶⁶

In condemning female ornamentation, the writer of *T. Reuben* brings to the fore the image of warfare, accusing women of harbouring a premeditated plan to bring about the downfall of men. In the words of Rosen-Zvi: 'T. Reuben presents women not just as a danger or temptation but as the enemy in a constant war between the sexes.'¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Philo, *On the Birth of Abel and the Sacrifices Offered by Him and by His Brother Cain*, V. 26 (Yonge 1993: 97).

¹⁶⁶ Translated by Archer (1995: 196).

¹⁶⁷ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 87.

In their plotting, the intention of these women is not so much to sate their sexual desire as it is to manipulate men in a power struggle, so that 'through the accomplished act they take them captive' (5:3).

On the other hand, however, the view that women are solely to blame for leading men astray is partially undermined by the statement that 'the angel of the Lord told me ... that women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men' (5:1). It may be that 'the spirit of fornication' (τῷ πνεύματι τῆς πορνείας) refers to a real demonic influence. This statement suggests that just like the men, women are susceptible to the influence of a power beyond themselves that leads to sin. Rosen-Zvi highlights how remarkable this declaration in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is, as in every other instance, 'the Testaments present women as victimisers, not victims.'¹⁶⁸

However, while this may be a unique depiction, it remains a bleak picture for women. For not only are they presented as deliberately plotting to manipulate men with their beauty, but they are also far more vulnerable than men to sexual temptation. For this reason, women become the primary vessels through which Beliar leads humanity astray. Thus *T. Reuben* ultimately condemns women as 'evil' (πονηραί), because they 'represent Beliar's earthly manifestation. After all, it is they who cause man's struggle for purity of heart to fail.'¹⁶⁹

2.2.3. Summary

¹⁶⁸ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 88.

¹⁶⁹ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 88.

There exists an unresolved tension in the teachings of these various writers who claim that a man has only to look at a beautiful woman to lose control, and yet who nevertheless hold to the belief that it is women—rather than men—who succumb more easily to sexual temptation. These two perspectives may seem in tension to the modern reader, but they are a prominent—if paradoxical—feature of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings.

It is not possible to determine the extent to which the views expressed by these writers were shared by the wider population of Palestine and the Jewish Diaspora. However, the fact that a variety of texts, from different literary genres, written in diverse locations across a span of roughly 300 years, nevertheless align so succinctly—and condemningly—in their attitude to female beauty does suggest that these texts convey a widely held and deep-rooted cultural belief. The notable affinities also imply that these writers not only share a literary heritage, but that they may well have been influenced by one another.

There are counter-texts within the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha that challenge this notably critical attitude towards female beauty.¹⁷⁰ However, I maintain that the reason these alternative texts stand out to such a degree amongst the later Jewish literature is precisely because they are cutting against the grain of what is clearly a dominant cultural perspective on female beauty.

2.3. Beauty as a Threat in the Hebrew Bible

¹⁷⁰ I consider these perspectives in chapter five, pages 237–254.

The motif of female beauty as a threat to male control is prominent within the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts. The question remains, however, as to whether this wariness towards beauty is inherited from earlier biblical tradition, or whether we encounter something different in the beauty-texts of the Hebrew Bible.

2.3.1. Beauty as a Threat in Narrative

2.3.1.a. *Genesis*

Numbered amongst the protagonists of the book of Genesis are several beautiful women.¹⁷¹ Such a clustering of stories featuring beauty is notable given that references to physical attractiveness are almost entirely absent from the remainder of the Pentateuch.¹⁷² However, this thread seems fitting for a book that explains Israel's origins partly through genealogy, but primarily through narratives depicting the first Hebrew patriarchs and matriarchs. Commenting on the narrative content of Genesis, Blenkinsopp observes that 'one indication of the distinctive character of Genesis is its more normal profile as narrative in that only about 14 percent of the book consists in summary.'¹⁷³

In both agenda and style, the narratives featuring physical beauty do not conform to the pattern of what is normally designated as Priestly material, suggesting that they originated elsewhere. The question, however, is whether the

¹⁷¹ Genesis 6:1–4; 12:11–20; 20:1–17; 24:10–67; 26:7–11; 29:1–35; 34:1–31.

¹⁷² The exception is Exodus 2:2, in which Moses' mother sees that he is טוב ('good/fine').

¹⁷³ Blenkinsopp 1992: 34.

narratives are similar *enough* in form and purpose to one another to suggest a single creative author of the narrative material,¹⁷⁴ or whether the consistency between them ought to be credited to an exilic redactor weaving together a variety of independent, earlier traditions into one cohesive whole.¹⁷⁵ An answer to this question would help to determine whether the majority of these texts are best categorised as ‘so-called’ J material or simply as ‘non-P’ material, on account of their disparate origins.¹⁷⁶

There is a degree of thematic unity within the beauty-texts of Genesis, particularly when it comes to the depiction of ‘beauty as vulnerability’.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, however, there is diversity within the beauty-texts, which are not as cohesive in Genesis as they are in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, for example. Consequently, the stylistic and thematic similarities in these narratives are not

¹⁷⁴ An argument for the single authorship of several of these narratives was proposed by Wellhausen, who identified four sources—‘J’, ‘E’, ‘D’, and ‘P’—behind the Pentateuch. According to his documentary hypothesis, much of the narrative content of Genesis can be ascribed to ‘the Yahwist’, whom Wellhausen considered to be the author of the earliest of the four sources (‘J’) (Wellhausen 1886). Single authorship was also supported by von Rad (1966: 166–204), who dated ‘the Yahwist’ of Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis to Solomon’s era. Gunkel, on the other hand, argued for several J narrators who worked with pre-existing oral tradition (Gunkel 1997). For further reading on the question of the documentary hypothesis, see also Blenkinsopp (1992: 10–16), Rendtorff (1996: 15–18), and Moberly (1992: 57–73).

¹⁷⁵ Blenkinsopp argues that while the evidence for P and D are strong, beyond that we ‘enter a very gray area indeed’ (1996: 121).

¹⁷⁶ For arguments against ‘so-called’ J, see Schmid and Dozeman (2006) and Blenkinsopp (1992: 23). Note also that not all of these beauty narratives are traditionally ascribed to J. For example, Genesis 20:1–17 was considered ‘E’ material on account of the use of Elohim rather than Yahweh, as well as on the basis of theological content (Moberly 1992: 68). In addition, the Joseph-story cycle is considered by many scholars to be an independent narrative incorporated in Genesis at a later date (Gunkel 1977: 380–387).

¹⁷⁷ For more on this see chapter four, page 162.

decisive enough to determine whether these texts point toward an earlier single author or a later redactor as the primary shaper of the material.

In regard to dating, there are certain features of these specific narratives that reflect the practices and concerns of a pre-monarchic culture. For example, the wife-sister sagas of Genesis (12:11–20, 20:1–18, 26:7–11) speak to the underlying insecurities of a people group who do not feel established in the land, but are under threat from powerful local rulers.¹⁷⁸ Likewise, the relative freedom with which the female protagonists venture out unchaperoned is more typical of an early agricultural society than an exilic or post-exilic urbanised context.¹⁷⁹

On the other hand, however, it is questionable how helpful these sorts of features are for discerning a date of authorship, because as Blenkinsopp rightly observes,

One cannot argue for an early date on the basis of a nomadic ... setting, as if a later author could not ... compose such a setting for his characters.¹⁸⁰

Consequently, both the authorship and the dating of these beauty-texts are fairly obscure, and the question of whether this material is primarily shaped by a pre-exilic theologian (J) or crafted by a redactor based in an exilic/post-exilic

¹⁷⁸ This situation could also correspond to an exilic setting under foreign rule.

¹⁷⁹ For further discussion on the influence of urbanisation, see Archer (1990: 113–118) and Meyers (1991: 187.)

¹⁸⁰ Blenkinsopp 1996: 125. For more on the possible pre-exilic dating of 'J' see von Rad (1966: 50–53, 74–78). For arguments in support of dating 'J' to the exilic era, see Levin (1993: 51–79). For post-exilic dating, see Baden (2009: 305–313) and Blenkinsopp (1992: 10–16).

community cannot be stated with confidence.¹⁸¹ For the purposes of this thesis, although such a determination would be helpful, it is not essential. What is significant, however, is that at some point these specific narratives—which were themselves likely based on earlier traditions re-told in Israelite communities—are intentionally shaped in such a way that, amongst other things, they offer a coherent perspective on issues pertaining to human beauty.¹⁸²

There are only two of the Genesis beauty-texts that I consider to be even loosely comparable to the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in their depiction of beautiful women as sexual aggressors. Furthermore, these parallels are in some ways so strained that they too could be considered negligible.

Genesis 6:1–4 is one narrative that may share affinities with the beauty motif in later Jewish literature. As Genesis 6:2 states:

ויראו בני־האלהים את־בנות האדם כי טובת
הנה ויקחו להם נשים מכל אשר בחרו:
(‘And the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were fair;
and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose.’)

Although most commonly translated as ‘good’, טוב is a word with an array of possible meanings. For example, טוב can also be read as ‘beautiful’ or ‘attractive’, referring to one’s outward appearance. In most cases, the meaning of טוב is made clear by the context, such as by stating that a woman is טובת מראה (‘good/attractive in appearance’, Genesis 24:16).

¹⁸¹ See Blenkinsopp (1996: 98) and Moberly (1992: 57).

¹⁸² Niditch 1998: 26–27.

In this instance, however, it is unclear whether טוב ought to be translated as 'beautiful', or if the sons of God desired the daughters of man because they were 'good'.

The latter interpretation is the default meaning; however, there is evidence of טוב signifying beauty elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible without additional specification.¹⁸³ The context also provides reason to interpret טוב as beautiful, because it is an oft-repeated pattern in the Hebrew Bible that upon finding a woman physically attractive, a man takes her to be his wife.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, given that the outcome of this narrative is divine judgement brought to bear upon humanity for transgressing natural boundaries with the sons of God, it seems unlikely that 'moral goodness' is the right interpretation.

It could be that the author is deliberately echoing Genesis 3:4, which states that 'when the woman saw that the tree was good for food ... she took of its fruit and ate.' In both cases, the same succession of words, ראה ('saw'), טוב ('good'), and לקח ('took'), occur. Wenham observes that 'when the woman saw and took, she transgressed a boundary set by the Lord.'¹⁸⁵ In using identical language to describe this later transgression, the author highlights a pattern of repetitive sin, as another boundary is broken out of desire for the forbidden.

¹⁸³ E.g. 1 Samuel 9:2.

¹⁸⁴ Genesis 24:65–67; 29:16–18; 1 Samuel 25:3, 39; 2 Samuel 11:1–27.

¹⁸⁵ Wenham 1987: 141.

Consequently, it seems that the best interpretation of טוב in Genesis 6:2 is one that emphasises the desirability of these women in the eyes of the sons of God, in the same way that the forbidden fruit appeals to Eve.

By adapting what scholars consider to have been an earlier polytheistic myth about the sexual congress between humans and gods,¹⁸⁶ the author is uninhibited in declaring that it was on account of the beauty of women—as opposed to any other defining characteristic—that these barriers were breached. What is less clear, however, is *who* is to blame for the violation of God’s boundaries—the sons of God or the daughters of men?

The ambiguity of the biblical text is revealed by comparison with the intertestamental Jewish writers who re-interpret this narrative. For example, *1 Enoch* 8:1–2 is based on Genesis 6:1–4, narrating the story of the fallen angel Azazel who teaches women the making of jewellery and the application of cosmetics.¹⁸⁷ The result of this self-beautification is that, as *1 Enoch* 8:3 states, ‘there arose much godlessness, and they committed fornication, and they were led astray.’ According to *1 Enoch*, therefore, while Azazel is culpable for teaching these skills, women are also to blame for enhancing their beauty to become an irresistible temptation to men.

T. Reuben adapts these narratives even further in order to condemn the daughters of men. Instead of presenting the Watchers as responsible, *T. Reuben* re-

¹⁸⁶ Traditionally ‘sons of God’ is understood as a designation for angels or as a reference to the heavenly court of other deities. For further discussion, see Brueggemann (1982: 72), Wenham (1987: 137–9), von Rad (1972: 110), and Gunkel (1997: 57).

¹⁸⁷ See the earlier discussion on pages 81–83.

orders the account so that the daughters of men already have these ornaments of beauty. With a 'harlot's manner' (5:4), these women adorn 'their heads and faces to deceive the mind' (5:5), and in this way 'they allured the Watchers who were before the flood' (5:6). As Rosen-Zvi comments, 'this is the only known version which presents the events as a result of the women's own initiative.'¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, *T. Reuben* states that the same 'lust' (5:6) of these Watchers that is stirred up by the women is also reciprocated by them, because they are guilty of 'lusting in their minds after their forms' (5:7).

These are two examples of an earlier anecdote from the Hebrew Bible being elaborated on by later authors to the detriment of the female protagonists. As Rosen-Zvi states, 'In contrast to the biblical narrative, the Testaments tend to expand the female characters' responsibility for causing the forbidden acts.'¹⁸⁹

However, the language of 'seduction' is not unique to these Jewish receptions. For example, von Rad perhaps implies that the fault lies partially with the women whose beauty proved too 'enticing' for the sons of God to withstand:

These angelic beings let themselves be enticed by the beauty of human women to grievous sin; they fall from their ranks and mix with them in wild licentiousness.¹⁹⁰

Within the original text itself, however, there is no sense in which women are portrayed as intentionally using their beauty for seduction. Indeed, we are told nothing about the motivations of these women.

¹⁸⁸ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 76.

¹⁸⁹ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 67.

¹⁹⁰ Von Rad 1972: 114.

The imbalance of power between angelic beings and human women also has a bearing on the issue of culpability, as women are the passive partners in these interactions. It is the sons of God who see and take, and they do so *מכל אשר בחרו* ('out of all which they chose', Genesis 6:2). This interpretation is strengthened by the parallel with Genesis 3:6, in which the women are likened to the desirable fruit that is taken, rather than the active participant who takes.

This narrative fits with other biblical accounts of influential men taking beautiful women that they have no right to. Compared with the narratives of Genesis 12:10–20 and 2 Samuel 11–12, one might argue that the language of 'seeing and taking' was a known expression for rape or adultery.¹⁹¹ Wenham disagrees however, arguing that unlike in Genesis 12 or 2 Samuel 11–12, there is no additional evidence that rape or adultery occurred.¹⁹² He also rightly observes that the language of Genesis 6:1–2 is not suggestive of force, as elsewhere 'taking' (*לקח*) a wife is the expression used for a consenting marriage (Genesis 24:67).

The wickedness of humankind (Genesis 6:5) must also refer at least in part to the willingness of these women to sin. Otherwise, Genesis 6:1–4 loses its justificatory power for the consequent flood: for if humankind does not share culpability with the sons of God, then it is illogical to punish them. Given the cultural practices of the day, Wenham comments that the fathers of these daughters also share responsibility for the scandal, because not only is their consent required, but marriage was typically arranged between a father and a prospective groom. As

¹⁹¹ Wenham 1987: 137.

¹⁹² Wenham 1987: 141.

Wenham concludes, 'the obvious avoidance of any terms suggesting lack of consent makes the girls and their parents culpable.'¹⁹³

Thus I suggest that although culpability is weighted towards the more dominant sons of God, this does not nullify the fact that humanity too bears some of the blame. For this reason, it could be argued that this text serves as a cautionary tale for those who desire female beauty too much, emphasising the dire consequences for all. There are clear parallels with the warnings of Ben Sira who exhorts his readers to avoid looking on female beauty precisely so that situations like this can be avoided.

Where this narrative differs from the writings of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature, however, is in its lack of vitriol towards the female sex. Contrasting with the adaptation found in *T. Reuben*, there is no suggestion that women deliberately use their beauty to beguile. Instead, it is the sons of God who are the initiators—seeing, choosing and taking as they wish. Despite their implied consent, therefore, the daughters of Genesis 6:1–2 are not the aggressors.

The other Genesis beauty-text that could foreshadow the later, extra-biblical writings is Genesis 39:4–20. On account of its distinctive style and uninterrupted narrative, the Joseph story is thought to be an independent novella incorporated into the book of Genesis at a relatively late date.¹⁹⁴ Yet although possibly a late addition, the final redactors manage to keep this Joseph tradition largely consistent with the other Genesis narratives.

¹⁹³ Wenham 1987: 141.

¹⁹⁴ Blenkinsopp 1996: 107, 124; Gunkel 1979: 381–387; Schmid 2006: 76–78.

Genesis 39 offers an unexpected twist in the established pattern of beautiful women and captivated men. For in this case, it is the beautiful patriarch Joseph who is at the mercy of a powerful, foreign female. In this chapter, however, I am more concerned with the presentation of Potiphar's wife.¹⁹⁵ The narrative is transparent in its depiction of the woman as the sexual aggressor (39:7):

ותשא אשת-אדניו את-עיניה אל-יוסף ותאמר שכבה עמי:
('the wife of his master raised her eyes to Joseph and said, "lie with me."')

Speiser notes that an 'identical idiom' to the expression 'raised her eyes' is used in Akkadian to describe Ishtar's attraction to and attempted seduction of Gilgamesh.¹⁹⁶ The description of fixing her eyes 'towards' Joseph (אל-יוסף) connotes a sense of forwardness, an image that is like Ben Sira's caution against 'haughty eyes' (Ben Sira 23:4) that gaze on the forbidden. However in this case, she is unafraid to boldly pursue Joseph. As Brenner observes, 'her two chief weapons are her sexual charms and rhetorical skills.'¹⁹⁷

While this text seems exceptional in its depiction of a woman in authority over a man, the narrator makes clear that the mistress's power derives from her husband. Her lack of autonomy is emphasised by the fact that we never learn her name. Rather, she is a nameless threat, identified only as אשת-אדניו ('the wife of his master'). Fuchs highlights the biased gender roles by commenting that if Potiphar had seduced one of his maids, this would be considered acceptable behaviour for

¹⁹⁵ I examine the presentation of Joseph as a 'beautiful Israelite' in chapter four, pages 197–203.

¹⁹⁶ Speiser 1985: 303.

¹⁹⁷ Brenner 1985: 112.

the master of a household.¹⁹⁸ In contrast to this, however,

Potiphar's wife ... must not have sexual access to any man other than her husband. A married woman who seeks sexual escapades with other men must be portrayed as treacherous, dangerous, lethal.¹⁹⁹

Through her pursuit of Joseph, similarities emerge in the depiction of Potiphar's wife and the temptresses of the extra-biblical literature: morally weak and sexually irrepressible, she is determined to exert her power over Joseph.

However, in another sense, Potiphar's wife does not fit the stereotype at all, because she is never depicted as beautiful. Rather, the gender roles are swapped so that Joseph is the physically beautiful but culturally powerless figure, while Potiphar's wife has societal status without aesthetic appeal.

The absence of the beauty motif is accentuated by contrasting Genesis 39 with the retelling of the narrative in the *Testament of Joseph (T. Joseph)*. It is as if the author of *T. Joseph* offers his narrative as a corrective by emphasising what Rosen-Zvi refers to as the 'Phaedra-like figure' of Potiphar's wife.²⁰⁰ Thus *T. Joseph* claims that she 'would bare her arms and thighs so that I might lie with her. For she was wholly beautiful and splendidly decked out to entice me, but the Lord protected me from her manipulations.' (9:5). In this version of the story, Potiphar's wife plays tricks similar to the other temptresses in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*: she exposes herself, she adorns herself, and she uses her beauty to beguile Joseph.

¹⁹⁸ Fuchs 1993: 146. See also Corrington Streete 1997: 53.

¹⁹⁹ Fuchs 1993: 146.

²⁰⁰ Rosen-Zvi 2006: 77.

In the presentation of her sexual aggression, therefore, Potiphar's wife represents a threat similar to that of the 'dangerous' women of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. As Corrington Streete notes, 'Potiphar's wife ... is a stock character in a cautionary tale, the classic foreign woman who can be counted on for obeying no law or rule, nothing other than her own sexual rapacity.'²⁰¹ On the other hand, however, the omission of any reference to her physical desirability is noteworthy, as it prevents this text from centring on the seductive power of beauty. In fact, if anything, the fitting parallel would be to present Joseph's beauty as a tool of sexual enticement, as it is his beauty that proves irresistible to another.

Considered this way, the narrative offers an interesting contrast to the cautionary tales of the Pseudepigrapha. For in *T. Judah*, the author casts aspersions on Tamar's innocence despite the fact that in the Hebrew Bible she is portrayed as a victim of injustice.²⁰² Likewise, in *T. Reuben*, Bilhah's innocence is subtly undermined and the daughters of men are blamed for seducing the Watchers.²⁰³ And yet, when the narrative of Joseph is retold, rather than presenting Joseph as a sexual aggressor on account of his 'beauty', his purity is only heightened. However 'beauty' is bestowed on Potiphar's wife by the author of *T. Judah*, seemingly just so that she can be accused of using her looks to beguile Joseph. This gender-biased treatment of these biblical texts sharply illustrates the misogyny of the author of the *Testaments*, as he consistently re-interprets biblical narratives to simultaneously blame the beauty of women and preserve the honour of men.

²⁰¹ Corrington Streete 1997: 53.

²⁰² *T. Judah* 12:3-4.

²⁰³ *T. Reuben* 3:10-4.1; 5:6-7.

2.3.1.b. Judges 14–16

Another infamous foreign temptress of the Hebrew Bible, Delilah, appears in Judges 16. Although Noth argues that in many ways Judges is stylistically consistent with the other texts of the Deuteronomistic History, the narratives also exhibit features of an earlier pre-monarchic era.²⁰⁴ In addition, certain motifs distinguish Judges from the surrounding histories, such as the noteworthy presence throughout the book of several foreign woman, whom Brenner designates the ‘Outsiders’.²⁰⁵

Hence Delilah’s entry is anticipated both by Jael—another foreign woman who brings death²⁰⁶—and by the two preceding chapters (Judges 14–16) in which Samson displays a consistent weakness for foreign women. As Gray notes, ‘Samson is ... a tragic example of the abuse of a high calling.’²⁰⁷ In this sense, Joseph and Samson are opposites: the former withstands the temptation of a foreign woman while the latter embodies the apocryphal depiction of a man overcome by the beauty of a woman.²⁰⁸ Bal explains that

the story of Samson and Delilah is the paradigmatic case of woman’s wickedness ... However strong a man is ... he will always be helpless against woman’s strategies of enchantment. Once seduced, he will be betrayed.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Noth 1957: 47–61. See also (Römer 2007: 6–7), Boling (1975: 29–38), and Mayes (1985: 10–12).

²⁰⁵ Brenner 1993c: 14.

²⁰⁶ Niditch identifies Jael with the ‘universal archetype of the seductress-exterminator’ (1998: 33).

²⁰⁷ Gray 1986: 219.

²⁰⁸ Corrington Streete 1997: 54–56.

²⁰⁹ Bal 1987: 43.

Unlike its intertestamental counterparts, however, the Hebrew text is clear that the flaw lies as much with Samson in refusing to marry an Israelite woman as with the women who tempt him. Notably, Samson’s Philistine wife is not explicitly described as beautiful, although her good looks are implied by the fact that on the basis of sight alone he decides to marry her (14:1). Moreover, Samson demands of his parents: קח-לי כיהיא ישרה בעיני ('Get her for me, because she is pleasant/fitting in my eyes.').²¹⁰ Rather than this being a comment on her character, the text emphasises that Samson considers her to be ‘agreeable to his eyes’,²¹¹ implying he finds her aesthetically suitable. It is ironic that Samson’s greatest weakness is that he makes decisions based on his ‘eyes’, and at the end of the narrative it is those same eyes that are put out. Only then, once his sight—symbolising his ‘weakness’ for female beauty—has gone, does he have the strength to fulfil his purpose.²¹²

The other inference that Samson’s wife was attractive is in the question, הלא אחתה הקטנה טובה ממנה ('is not her younger sister more attractive' than she?' (15:2)). Although טובה ('good') could refer to the sister’s character, it more likely refers to her beauty, given that it was the older sister’s appearance that drew Samson to her in the first instance. The fact that the father thinks he can trade one sister for another, and that Samson will not mind because the latter is more

²¹⁰ My translation. NRSV: ‘She pleases me’.

²¹¹ LXX: ἀὐτῆ εὐθεία ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς μου ('She was right in my eyes').

²¹² Soggin: ‘a rabbinic source tells us that it was at Gaza that he “followed the desire of his eyes”, and so it was there that they were gouged out (*bab. Sotah* 9b)’ (1981: 258).

attractive, demonstrates how little these women were valued for anything other than beauty.

However, Samson's first wife is not only desirable, but also eloquent. So in 14:15, פתה ('entice', in the causative form of the verb) is the word used to describe her manipulation of Samson.²¹³ This same word, פתה, is also used to describe Delilah's beguiling of Samson in 16:5. However, in the latter case he falls in love with Delilah (16:4), a detail which emphasises the extent of her power over him, as there is no indication that the emotions are reciprocated.

Once again, however, like Potiphar's wife, there is no specific reference to Delilah's physical appearance. Soggin has suggested that the absence of physical description is intended as a sign that 'this time our hero is truly in love, and not just attracted by the physical beauty of the woman.'²¹⁴ This is possible; however, I consider it more likely that the author is reluctant to attribute beauty, a feature often associated with Israelite heroines, to a foreigner who betrays Samson.

While Delilah may not be called beautiful, she does bear a striking resemblance to later Jewish seductresses in the way that she asks Samson for the source of his strength and how he can be 'subdued' (16:6). Bal notes that 'her question is surprisingly outspoken. She wants to know how he can be mastered.'²¹⁵

Bal observes that the Hebrew verb for 'master', ענה, is the verb used for 'rape'.²¹⁶

Delilah does not need to rely on her beauty to entice Samson, because she already

²¹³ פתה can mean to 'make a fool of', or to 'circumvent a man's wisdom' (1 Kings 22:20) or 'to seduce' a woman (Exodus 22:16). See Gray (1986: 331).

²¹⁴ Soggin 1981: 256.

²¹⁵ Bal 1987: 52.

²¹⁶ Bal 1987: 52. An example is the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13).

has his love. Instead, she manipulates him with emotions, demanding that he prove his love by making himself vulnerable to her.²¹⁷

Whereas Judith is depicted as a heroine for her destruction of Holofernes, when Delilah treats Samson similarly for the sake of her people, she is classed a traitor. Unlike Judith, however, Delilah's seduction and betrayal of a man who loves her are presented not as an act of patriotic loyalty, but rather as financially motivated (16:5).

This text has provoked various condemnatory responses towards women, such as Naastepad who observes that 'the text of this chapter does not aim at teaching us how deceitful the sly seductions of woman can be. For that we know already by other sources, if direct experience has not taught us it yet.'²¹⁸

In some ways, Delilah is the embodiment of everything the later Jewish authors despise about a female sexuality that can strip a man of his honour, his power and his very life. As Gunn notes, 'the stereotypical message associated with Delilah is that the woman who allures brings death.'²¹⁹ In the Hebrew Bible, she is cast as the foreign villain. Yet the motif of beauty is more notable for its absence than its presence in this narrative.

2.3.1.c. 2 Kings 9:30

²¹⁷ Brenner: '[Delilah] utilize[s] sexual persuasion and verbal skills for the purpose of extracting from Samson ... the source of his unique strength' (1985: 112).

²¹⁸ Naastepad 1965: 64. Quoted by Bal 1987: 51.

²¹⁹ Gunn 2005: 220.

The absence of beauty in the description of Delilah seems even more noteworthy, however, when compared to the third foreign temptress of the Hebrew Bible: Jezebel.²²⁰ In 2 Kings 9:30, Jezebel prepares for Jehu's arrival thus:

וּתְשֵׁם בַּפֶּעַךְ עֵינֶיהָ וְתִיטֵב אֶת־רֹאשָׁהּ וְתִשְׁקֶף בְּעַד הַחֲלוֹן
(‘She painted her eyes, and adorned her head and looked out of
the window.’)

Gray notes that פֶּעַךְ is a black powder that would have been mixed with oil to form eye make-up.²²¹ The literal phrasing, ‘she put her eyes in kohl’, is such a striking image that Gray translates it ‘she blackened her eyes in kohl.’²²²

The adorning of her head could refer either to an elaborate braiding of her hair, or the wearing of an ornamental headdress. The text bears a strong resemblance to the personification of Judah in Jeremiah 4:30:

O desolate one, what do you mean that you ...
deck yourself with ornaments of gold,
that you enlarge your eyes with paint?
In vain you beautify yourself.
Your lovers despise you; they seek your life.²²³

²²⁰ Following the pattern of 1 and 2 Samuel, a common scholarly consensus is that an earlier form of the text of 2 Kings was composed during Josiah's reign (648–604BCE), and then revised by a Deuteronomistic historian during the exilic era. These two stages of redaction could help account for the presence within 1 and 2 Kings of both positive and negative attitudes towards the monarchy. 1 Kings also identifies some sources, such as the Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:41; 15:7), the Annals of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:19; 15:31), and the Annals of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 14:29). See Cogan and Tadmor (1988: 4), Hens-Piazza (2006: 2–5), and Hobbs (1985: xxiii–xvi).

²²¹ Gray 1971: 550.

²²² Gray 1971: 550. Compare 2 Kings 9:30 with the Egyptian tale of ‘Horus and Seth’, in which a female lover is so excited to see her lover that ‘I cannot apply paint to my eyes; I cannot anoint myself at all!’ *Papyrus Chester Beatty I* (1.51) C1 1–C5, 2: number 34, fourth stanza (13–12th century BCE)(Gardiner 1931: 129).

So marked is the similarity between these two descriptions of women seeking salvation from enemies by enhancing their beauty that it is likely that one text draws on the other. Likewise, Jezebel's reliance on ornamentation to bolster her power has strong similarities with the antagonism of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writers towards female adornment and cosmetics.²²⁴

Jezebel's presence at the window could be representative of the segregation of men and women in ancient Near Eastern society, in which women looked out on a public world that they could never fully participate in.²²⁵ Despite the influence that Jezebel has wielded, ultimately she remains apart, and her decision to appear at the window signifies a final dramatic gesture. As Gray notes,

In view of the privacy in which oriental women were kept ... though he saw the lady at an open window, [Jehu] might never actually have seen her face before. Her toilette suggests that she meant now to be seen.²²⁶

It may be that Jezebel beautifies herself to save her own skin through feminine wiles. Archer observes that this narrative shows how 'women, in wartime, came to meet the enemy, provocatively dressed'.²²⁷ In addressing Jehu as 'murderer', however, Jezebel does not appear as one seeking reconciliation or pleading for her life.

²²³ See also Ezekiel 23:40.

²²⁴ See *T. Reuben* 5:1–5; *Ben Sira* 26:9 in chapter two of my thesis, pages 80–85.

²²⁵ Commenting on Michal in 2 Samuel 6:16, Exum notes that 'the woman at the window is a well-known ancient Near Eastern motif' (1993: 37).

²²⁶ Gray 1971: 550.

²²⁷ Archer 1990: 151.

A more plausible interpretation, therefore, could be that she knows the moment of her death approaches with the arrival of Jehu, and so—like Judith—she girds herself for her final battle in the only way available to a woman of the ancient world: through the application of cosmetics.²²⁸

Although courageous, ultimately these actions signify her pride right to the end of her life, as she arms herself with vanity and taunts her enemy. *T. Reuben's* indictment that women who adorn themselves will experience eternal punishment parallels the harsh nature of Jezebel's demise (2 Kings 9:33–37), perhaps indicating that the author of *T. Reuben* had this incident in mind.

There are clear resonances between this text and that of the later Jewish authors' attitude towards female beautification practices. Once again, however, like the other foreign seductresses—Potiphar's wife and Delilah—although Jezebel seeks to beautify herself, she is never specifically described as beautiful.

Consequently, an unusual picture emerges. For Potiphar's wife, Delilah and Jezebel are three foreign women in the Hebrew Bible who most closely resemble the critical presentation of women in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature. However, while the later writers present female beauty as a woman's chief seductive tool to gain power over a man, none of these women are called beautiful.

What are we to make of this absence? One possible interpretation is that, in earlier Hebrew literature, beauty is more than just an aesthetic quality. Rather, it is associated with a woman's desirability in other ways as well, such as with regard to her moral character. This interpretation would fit with the semantic range of the

²²⁸ Hobbs: 'Jezebel's preparations ... indicated that she wished to depart this life in style' (1985: 118).

word טוב in signifying both aesthetic attractiveness and moral virtue. Olyan in particular emphasises the connection between the 'good' and the 'beautiful', and the 'bad' and the 'ugly', in the Hebrew language:

The semantic range of these technical terms serves to underscore the positive casting of beauty in the biblical text ... Beauty, like all things 'good', is desirable and to be welcomed.²²⁹

If there is a connection between beauty and goodness in the literature of the Hebrew Bible then this would contrast starkly with the condemnatory approach to beauty found in the post-biblical Jewish writings. My concern with this interpretation, however, is that there are plenty of instances elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, such as in Proverbs or in the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), where this correlation between beauty and goodness does not hold true. This could even be argued to be the case in certain narratives like Genesis 29–30, which presents Rachel as beautiful, yet resentful; or 2 Samuel 14:25–26, in which Absalom is handsome but vain.

There is, however, one other feature all of these women have in common aside from their moral corruption, and that is their status as a *foreigner*, as a 'strange' or 'other' woman. Even Samson's Philistine wife, although beautiful by implication, is never directly referred to in this way.²³⁰ In fact, in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, *nearly every* woman who is described as beautiful is also an

²²⁹ Olyan 2008: 22.

²³⁰ While Samson finds her 'pleasing' to his eyes, it could be argued that his doing so says more about his propensity to be attracted to the wrong women rather than an affirmation of her good looks.

Israelite.²³¹ A reluctance to attribute beauty to foreign women would also account for the fact that even though the majority of biblical heroines are referred to as beautiful, there are a few notable exceptions. Among these are Rahab (Joshua 2), Tamar (Genesis 38), Jael (Judges 4),²³² and most significantly Ruth. Despite their prominent roles within the narratives, none of these non-Israelite women are called beautiful.

Consequently, one major difference between the prevalent attitude towards beauty in the extra-biblical Jewish literature and that of the Hebrew Bible might be that while the former applies the term 'beautiful' far more liberally, the latter differentiates more sharply between those who are God's chosen people, and those who are not, and only the former category tend to qualify as 'beautiful'.²³³ This is not to imply that beauty is an indicator of 'goodness', as many of these characters display moral corruption. However it does appear to be a quality associated exclusively with Israelite men and women. This is not to imply that these foreigners are depicted as ugly; rather, their appearance is typically not mentioned at all.

2.3.2. Beauty as a Threat in Wisdom

2.3.2.a. Proverbs

²³¹ The only exception is Vashti, which could be accounted for by the post-exilic dating of Esther at a time when the description of 'beautiful' was ascribed more loosely. Alternatively, she may be presented in this fashion as a foil to Esther, who is also chosen on account of her beauty and therefore lives under the same threat.

²³² Corrington Streete 1997: 60.

²³³ Contrast this with Ben Sira, who perceives the beauty of all women to be a threat, rather than specifically those of Jewish origin. This is also different to the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, within which Tamar and Anan are both described as beautiful.

Just as the preceding narratives correspond to the Jewish novellas of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, so the sapiential teaching of Proverbs on beauty had a profound influence on the didactic sayings of Ben Sira. Given that fact, it is perhaps unsurprising that the closest biblical parallel to the negative depictions of female beauty in the extra-biblical writings can be found in the 'strange woman' of Proverbs.²³⁴

Both the portions of Proverbs where 'folly' is personified (Proverbs 1–9), and the depiction of the 'noble wife' (Proverbs 31), are particularly challenging to date given their lack of reference to historical events or theological themes. Ben Sira's use of the text provides an end date, as he refers to these texts circa 195–170BCE. Many scholars tend to date these segments to the Persian period, 538–333BCE.²³⁵ Yoder supports an early sixth to late third century BCE date for Proverbs 1–9 on the basis of linguistics, observing how this text contains both late biblical Hebrew and aramaisms without including any Greek features that might have indicated a later Hellenistic date.²³⁶

While Potiphar's wife, Delilah and Jezebel in some form all represent the 'other women', Yee argues that in Proverbs 1-9 we find the archetypal 'other woman':

She is the Other Woman in an illicit affair... She is Other because of her racial/ethnic foreignness. She is Other simply because 'she is not our kind'.²³⁷

²³⁴ Ellis: 'Strange woman personifies, at a super-human level, the linked categories of female and evil' (2013: 99).

²³⁵ Yee 2003: 136.

²³⁶ Yoder 2001; 15–38. See also Yee (2003: 143).

²³⁷ Yee 2003: 136.

Yee argues that the motif of condemning the 'other woman' in Proverbs 1–9 is so strong because it was written during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, serving as a critique of intermarriage with those outside of the community of the returned Jerusalem elite.²³⁸

The author contrasts a *right* desire for the beauty of one's own wife (אֵילַת אַהֲבִים וַיַּעֲלֶת־חֶן) 'a lovely deer, a graceful doe' (Proverbs 5:19)) with a *wrong* desire for another woman. The juxtaposition of the wife's breasts (דְּדֵיָהּ) (Proverbs 5:19)) with the adulteress' bosom (חֶק) (Proverbs 5:20)) highlights the physicality of the woman's appeal, as does the repetition of שָׁגָה in the qal imperfect (תִּשְׁגָה), which the NRSV translates as 'be intoxicated' (Proverbs 5:19–20). This evocative image of drinking from a woman's breast until one is drunk on desire further emphasises the power of a woman's erotic beauty. The difficulty for the male reader, however, is that while the sexualised beauty of both women is overwhelming, one is encouraged while the other is prohibited. Therefore, as Corrington Streete notes,

beauty is what makes both Wisdom and the Strange Woman desirable ... and the wise youth is the one who can discern in what direction his attraction will lead.²³⁹

For those who do not choose wisely, however, the author outlines the grave risks of pursuing the adulteress in 6:25:

אַל־תַּחְמוּד יִפִּיה בִּלְבַבְךָ וְאַל־תִּקְחֶךָ בַּעֲפַעֲפִיָּה

²³⁸ Yee 2003: 143.

²³⁹ Corrington Streete 1997: 118.

כי בעד-אשה זונה עד-ככר לחם ואשת איש נפש
יקרה תצוד

(‘Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for a prostitute's fee is only a loaf of bread, but the wife of another stalks a man's very life.’)

The admonition not to desire the beauty of a married woman in your *heart* emphasises just how deep-rooted lust for physical beauty can become. There are striking parallels between Proverbs 6:25 and Ben Sira's comments concerning the dangers of both looking at a beauty belonging to another (Ben Sira 9:8–9), and the threat of her capturing a man's gaze with her eyelashes (Ben Sira 26:9). Here the reference to being captured specifically ‘in her eyelashes’ (בעפעפיה) creates the impression that her eyes are themselves a trap a man could be ensnared in.

The presentation of this ‘other woman’ of Proverbs parallels the ancient Egyptian *Instruction of Any* (1.46) from the 18th Dynasty. In these Egyptian didactic sayings, the reader is warned:

Beware of a woman who is a stranger. One not known in her town; Don't stare at her when she goes by, do not know her carnally. A deep water whose course is unknown, such is a woman away from her husband. “I am pretty”, she tells you daily, when she has no witnesses; she is ready to ensnare you ... (3.10)²⁴⁰

As in Proverbs, the reader is cautioned not to stare at a married woman, even if she is ‘pretty’, and to watch out for her ability to ‘ensnare’ through carnal knowledge. Similarly, in Proverbs 7, the ‘other woman’ is presented as incredibly forward:

²⁴⁰*The Instruction of Any* 1.46, Papyrus Boulaq 4 of the Cairo Museum (21st or 22nd dynasty). Translated by Miriam Lichtheim (Hallo and Lawson Younger 2003: 111).

והנה אשה לקראתו שית זונה ונצרת לב

(‘Then a woman comes toward him, decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart.’ (7:10))

והחזיקה בו ונשקה־לו העזה פניה ותאמר לו

(‘She seizes him and kisses him, and with impudent face she says to him.’ (7:13))

The ‘other woman’ here is the stereotypical sexual aggressor. She is unafraid to approach, she physically initiates contact with him and kisses him, and then she invites him to her bed. The reference to her feet not remaining at home (7:11) implies that she does not behave in a manner befitting a wife, but as Yee comments it could also be a ‘carnal euphemism for being “on the prowl”, seeking sexual quarry.’²⁴¹ Yee compares this image with that of Ezekiel 16:25, in which Jerusalem, the unfaithful bride, spreads her ‘feet’ to all who pass by.²⁴²

She is also steeped in alluring adornments, both on her person as she is ‘decked out like a prostitute’, and in her bed (7:16–17).²⁴³ As Waltke observes, ‘her outward dress, which seems to promise her victim her body, conceals her secret intention to use him to gratify her own lusts ... in sum, she rapes dull men by clever deceit.’²⁴⁴

It is notable that, as the *archetypal* temptress rather than an *actual* character within the biblical narrative, the foreign woman in Proverbs can be referred to as beautiful in a way that the other biblical temptresses—Potiphar’s wife, Delilah and

²⁴¹ Yee 2003: 155.

²⁴² Yee 2003: 155.

²⁴³ Compare with Ezekiel 23:40.

²⁴⁴ Waltke 2004: 374.

Jezebel—are not. However, it is not just her physical seduction that leads men astray, but also her verbal manipulation that captivates her male audience. As Brenner explains,

Her strength lies not so much in her external appearance but – in all the passages – in her eloquence: she is persuasive, her tone is beguiling. This type of woman offers intellectual as well as sexual pleasures.²⁴⁵

In this sense, Proverbs differs from Ben Sira by focusing on the woman's beguiling speech as if it were even more dangerous than her beauty.²⁴⁶ One explanation for the later shift in emphasis may be that in Ben Sira's context, social segregation meant that verbal interactions between the sexes became uncommon, and therefore it is the beauty of a strange woman that seems the greater threat to Ben Sira.

In certain ways, the portrayal of the 'other woman' in Proverbs parodies the confidence of the female lover of the Song of Songs, who says: 'I have come out to meet you; to seek your face, and I have found you.' (Song 7:15). However, unlike in the Song, Yee states that in Proverbs 'we see a caricature of this authentic love and sexual intimacy. Here economics, sexuality, and death intersect as the 'other woman' hastens toward her seduction/destruction of the young man.'²⁴⁷ Given the serious devastation that the 'other woman' causes, it is no wonder that the book of Proverbs ends with the reminder that:

²⁴⁵ Brenner 1985: 43.

²⁴⁶ E.g. Proverbs 7: 21–22: 'With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. Right away he follows her, and goes like an ox to the slaughter.'

²⁴⁷ Yee 2003: 160.

שקר החן והבל היפי אשה יראת־יהוה היא תתהלל
(‘Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the
Lord is to be praised.’ (31:30))

The purpose of this verse is to exhort the male reader to seek a wife not on the basis of charm (חן), which can be misleading, or beauty (יפי), which is fleeting, but on the basis of her obedience to God, the one foundation that will last when superficial attractions fade.

This is a sentiment that Ben Sira echoes in his writings, extolling the virtues of a modest wife while critiquing the false promises which charm and beauty offer that only end in ruin. A substantial difference between the two texts, however, is that while Ben Sira considers it shameful for a man to be financially supported by his wife,²⁴⁸ Proverbs 31 praises a woman of worth who brings socioeconomic advantages to her household (31:11).

Moreover, while Ben Sira adopts the image of the ‘other woman’, he extends the warning further than the book of Proverbs takes it. For in Proverbs, there is no negative depiction of a real human woman to balance the praise of the wife of noble character (Proverbs 31).²⁴⁹ Eron comments that ‘in Proverbs the danger is not sexual desire in general but adultery ... This is not, however, the view of sexual desire and women that appeared in the Book of Ben Sira.’²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Ben Sira 25:22: ‘When a man is supported by his wife, there is sure to be anger, arrogance, and humiliation.’

²⁴⁹ Ellis 2013: 101.

²⁵⁰ Eron 1991: 48.

In the book of Proverbs, the 'other woman' is a constructed archetype, a foreigner, and a married woman leading men astray. In Ben Sira, on the other hand, the same danger offered by the 'other woman' of Proverbs is present in *every* woman Ben Sira encounters, with the sole exception of his own wife. Thus rather than having one representative 'other' figure, every beautiful woman is a source of potential shame and sexual stumbling to Ben Sira.

2.4. Summary

The same comparison between Proverbs and Ben Sira can be extended to account for the primary difference between the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings in their treatment of female beauty as a threat to male control. For in the later texts, beauty is perceived to be a dangerous weapon wielded by all kinds of women who are both more sexually *tempted* and consequently more sexually *aggressive* than the men around them. Yee comments that if these figures are based on real women, then it should be noted that

[b]randishing weapons of the weak, women could indeed be sexually manipulative ... In analysing the rhetorical encoding of these weapons in the biblical text, however, one must recognise the power imbalance in gender relations during each of these periods, which compelled women to resort to such behavior to obtain their ends.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Yee 2003: 160–161.

Reading these later texts, one is left with the impression that in every interaction with women, men are one step away from losing control. In the writings of this later era, therefore, every beautiful woman becomes ‘other.’

In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, although there are instances of sexually aggressive women, with the exception of the personification of folly as the ‘other woman’ of Proverbs,²⁵² female beauty and sexual aggression tend not to be associated with one another. Rather, within the biblical narratives, beauty is the prerogative of Israelite women. It is true that each of the ‘other’ women—Potiphar’s wife, Delilah and Jezebel—exhibit the manipulative tendencies of beautiful women in the post-biblical writings; however, none of them rely on beauty as a tool to achieve their ends.

Furthermore, while these examples of ‘threatening’ women in the Hebrew Bible do exist, they are the exception rather than the norm, and in each of these cases—including Proverbs—the women are foreigners. What we do not find, therefore, is evidence in the biblical narratives of Israelite women deliberately wielding their beauty as a means to overpower or ‘rule over’ an Israelite man. In general, the motif of ‘beauty is a threat’ is underemphasised within the Hebrew Bible. In fact, quite to the contrary, I argue in chapter four that in the Hebrew Bible beautiful women are usually cast not as aggressors, but rather as the victims of men who look to ‘master’ or ‘rule over’ them.

²⁵² For a discussion on beauty and sexual aggression in the prophets, see chapter three, pages 150–158.

Chapter Three: Beauty as Vanity

3.1. Introduction

As in the previous chapter, in chapter three I also engage with texts that caution the reader against the inherent dangers of beauty. In this case, however, rather than focusing on the impact of female beauty on the male viewer, in this chapter I examine the motif of *self*-destructive beauty within Hebrew thought: beauty as the root of vanity. By focusing on this aspect of the beauty motif, the divergence between the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts is immediately apparent. In the later writings, the motif is barely present; in the Hebrew Bible it is a prominent theme.

This facet of the biblical beauty motif features prominently in two different portions of the Hebrew Bible: in the Former Prophets (namely, 1 & 2 Samuel) and in the Latter Prophets (specifically Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). Although these are two distinct literary genres (narrative and prophecy), underlying their varied depictions of physical beauty is a shared concern for the human tendency to *over-emphasise* the importance of one's own appearance.

In the course of examining this specific aspect of the beauty motif, a tension emerges between the biblical writers' presentation of beauty as a God-given good gift, and their condemnation of the misuse of that gift. This tension leads to a disparity between humanity's perception of beauty on the one hand and the divine perspective on the other.

3.2. Beauty as Vanity in the Hebrew Bible

3.2.1. The Former Prophets: 1 Samuel 9–1 Kings 1

Nowhere is McCarter's observation that 'the attribution of good looks is a traditional part of the biblical presentation of an Israelite hero or heroine' more clearly demonstrable than in the books of Samuel,²⁵³ in which Saul, Eliab, David, Absalom, Adonijah, Abigail, Abishag, Bathsheba and both Tamars are all described as physically desirable. In chapter four, I argue that beauty and destruction are repeatedly associated with one another in the books of Samuel through to 1 Kings 2. It is noteworthy, however, that the motif of beauty and *self*-destruction—beauty as vanity—is a uniquely *male* problem in the books of Samuel.

Although my thesis focuses on *male* attitudes towards *female* beauty, nevertheless in this chapter detailed consideration is given to the biblical depictions of the beauty of Saul, David, and David's male descendants.²⁵⁴ I do this for three reasons. First, the inclusion of these male-oriented beauty texts in Scripture provides insight into a Hebrew worldview that does not consider attractiveness an exclusively female attribute. Secondly, the prominence of this male beauty motif accentuates the disparity between the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts in their construction of gender, as in the later texts depictions of male beauty do not feature. Thirdly, the attitudes of biblical writers concerning *female* beauty can be better understood by comparing those texts to the depictions of *male* beauty found in 1 and 2 Samuel.

²⁵³ McCarter 1995: 173.

²⁵⁴ I consider the depiction of the beautiful women in David's household as *vulnerable*, rather than *vain*, in chapter four, pages 210–234.

The association of male beauty with vanity is presented in a very specific portion of the former prophets (1 Samuel 9–1 Kings 2) and nowhere else in the biblical records of Israel's history. Such a clustering of male beauty-texts can be partially explained by the fact that this motif occurs in documents that specifically recount the establishment of Israel's monarchy. In his book *Der schöne Mensch im Alten Testament und im hellenistischen Judentum*, Augustin makes a strong case for an Israelite notion of kingly beauty.²⁵⁵ Hence he argues that although it is possible that each royal individual was attractive, the intention of the narrator was to highlight that as Yahweh's chosen representative, the king must meet 'ein Prädikat'—an accepted standard of royal attractiveness.²⁵⁶

Augustin traces the theme of kingly beauty throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Psalm 45; Ezekiel 28:1–19, 31), arguing that the concept extends from the king to his royal sons (2 Samuel 14:25–26, 1 Kings 1:6), and even courtiers (Genesis 39:6, Exodus 2:2; Daniel 1:4). As Augustin observes of the handsome Israelite male:

Die schöne Gestalt ist über Jahrhunderte und sich wandelnde
Kulturen hinweg gleichbleibend wichtiger Bestandteil des
höfischen Vollkommenheitsideals.²⁵⁷

Significantly, there is not a single instance in the Hebrew Bible in which a man is depicted as physically attractive when he is not also in some way associated with a royal household or court.

²⁵⁵ Augustin 1983: 122–182.

²⁵⁶ Augustin 1983: 124.

²⁵⁷ Augustin 1983: 172.

But although a biblical motif of royal beauty might explain why this is such a prominent theme in 1 Samuel 9–1 Kings 1, it does not account for why these descriptions are found nowhere else in the biblical accounts of the monarchy.²⁵⁸ Moreover, although the books of 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings were at times treated as a single collection,²⁵⁹ the texts themselves do not suggest single authorship.²⁶⁰ Rost's argument for the existence of substantial and internally coherent narrative cycles—like the Joseph story-cycle—that provided the 'building-blocks' for later redactors is therefore a compelling one.²⁶¹ The possibility of independent traditions behind the narratives of Saul's and David's households could account for the unique presentation of male beauty.²⁶² These beauty-texts are primarily situated in what Rost identifies as the two largest narrative cycles: 'The History of David's Rise' ('HDR'), 1 Samuel 16–2 Samuel 5, and 'The Succession Narrative' ('SN'), 2 Samuel 9–1 Kings 2.

The HDR is primarily concerned with the downfall of Saul's household and the rise of David. It is this comparative element that justifies the subversive narrative thread underlying the juxtaposition of Saul's archetypal beauty with

²⁵⁸ The only other references to beauty in the Former Prophets occur in Judges 14–16 and 2 Kings 9: 30.

²⁵⁹ Referred to as 1–4 Kingdoms in the LXX.

²⁶⁰ Römer calls them the 'least unified and the least homogeneous [texts] within the Former Prophets' (2007: 92).

²⁶¹ Rost 1982: 67, 74, 105, 109, 113–114. See also Van Seters (1976: 22–23, 28–29) and Flanagan (1972: 172–181).

²⁶² On the basis of ideology and literary style, the books of Samuel are commonly considered part of a broader 'Deuteronomistic History'. Noth (1957: 91–110) argued for unified Deuteronomistic authorship, positing a sixth-century "Deuteronomist" who compiled the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. For further discussion on the question of Deuteronomistic authorship, see Smend (2000: 95–110), Dietrich (1994: 153–175), Römer (2007: 29–30), McCarter (1980: 15), Cross (1973: 274–289), and Lohfink (1987: 459–75).

David's unimpressive physique. Although Rost argues that the HDR was composed during David's reign as an apologetic for his kingship,²⁶³ Römer contends that these are fictional narratives adapted by the seventh-century BCE scribes of Josiah's court to present Josiah as the rightful successor to David.²⁶⁴

Regarding the SN, the account shifts away from David's successes and towards the decline of his authority. Although scholars largely agree with Rost's identification of a 'Succession Narrative', there is contention over the origins and purpose of the SN.²⁶⁵ For example, some—like Blenkinsopp, Flanagan and McCarter—have identified at least two layers of text,²⁶⁶ suggesting that the narrative began as a courtly history of David's reign and was later adapted into a defence of Solomon's succession.²⁶⁷ There is also disagreement over the purpose of the SN, from those claiming that the SN served as a defence of the monarchy and Solomon's reign,²⁶⁸ to the proposal that later Deuteronomistic authors were writing to condemn the inherent weaknesses of the monarchy.²⁶⁹ Regardless of their origins and intentions, any independent narratives behind the biblical text have been so

²⁶³ See also McCarter (1980: 29, 489–504) and Klein (1983: xxxi).

²⁶⁴ Römer 2007: 43. See also Van Seters (2000: 70–93).

²⁶⁵ Keys 1996: 14–41.

²⁶⁶ Flanagan 1972: 172–181; McCarter 1984: 29.

²⁶⁷ Flanagan 1972: 173. By contrast, Van Seters suggests the texts are a post-exilic literary work of court fiction (1976: 22–29). For an in-depth account of the various possibilities, see Gunn (1991: 9–88).

²⁶⁸ Rost 1982: 68, 74, 109; Whybray 1984: 54; McCarter 1984: 29.

²⁶⁹ Römer 2007: 94. For others who take a similar view, see Van Seters (1983: 28–29) and McKenzie (2000: 123–135).

cohesively woven together by editors that it is difficult to delineate precisely where one ends and the other begins.²⁷⁰

In the same vein, it is difficult to assess whether the beauty motif was part of that original tradition or an addition from a later editor. Augustin suggests that there was a particular period in Israelite history during which ‘das Interesse an der menschlichen Schönheit und damit dessen literarischer Niederschlag besonders groß und umfangreich [war].’²⁷¹ Wolff argues that a heightened interest in human beauty occurred during the Solomonic era, although his argument relies on this tradition originating in the court of Solomon.²⁷²

My own contention is that while the dating may be ambiguous, the theme of beauty is so integral to the plot of 1 and 2 Samuel that it likely featured in the earliest versions of these narratives. For example, the description of an individual’s beauty not only consistently prefaces their ensuing downfall, but it is often depicted as the cause of it. As a consequence, the theme of physical beauty is therefore intimately linked with the decay of the royal line.²⁷³ From this perspective, Whybray’s identification of wisdom rhetoric within the SN seems quite apt, as outer

²⁷⁰ For example, Anderson suggests the Succession Narrative could begin as early as 2 Samuel 1.2, rather than at 2 Samuel 9 (Anderson 1989: xxxii). Due to the issue of unknown authorship, I refer to the ‘compilers’ or ‘editors’ rather than ‘authors’. This is not to assume a late date of composition, but to acknowledge that the process of the formation of these books remains largely inaccessible to us.

²⁷¹ Augustin 1983: 24.

²⁷² Wolff 1976: 19; Anderson 1989: xxxii.

²⁷³ The exception to this depiction of beauty is Abigail, whom I discuss in chapter five, pages 260–264.

beauty and inner morality become a strong theme in the accounts of David's household.²⁷⁴

Given the apparent correlation between royal status and physical beauty, the notion that the beauty of a king is a sign of divine favour is well-supported by several scholars. Thus McCarter argues that beauty in the Hebrew Bible ought to be interpreted as a 'physical symptom of special divine favour.'²⁷⁵ Olyan agrees with this sentiment, claiming that the election of 'handsome young men' like Saul and David gives 'to the text's notions of beauty an additional dimension of divine approbation and even favor.'²⁷⁶

Olyan uses Psalm 45:3 to bolster his argument, in which the king is described as 'more beautiful than the sons of man' (יְפִיפִית מִבְּנֵי אָדָם),²⁷⁷ and therefore Yahweh promises to bless him forever. Olyan claims that according to the Hebrew Bible, 'when Yhwh makes choices among humans, texts such as these suggest that he has a preference for the beautiful.'²⁷⁸ Likewise, Schipper observes,

While no one member of David's house fits the royal ideal completely, this build up in 'beauty' imagery suggests that the house of David collectively emerges as increasingly fit to rule.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ Whybray 1984.

²⁷⁵ McCarter 1995: 173.

²⁷⁶ Olyan 2008: 23.

²⁷⁷ My translation. The NRSV reads 'the most handsome of men' (Psalm 45:2). יְפִיפִית takes the rare pealal perfect form ('you are beautiful') of the qal יִפְּהוּ ('become beautiful').

²⁷⁸ Olyan 2008: 23.

²⁷⁹ Schipper 2006: 90.

On some level, therefore, the descriptions of beauty in 1 and 2 Samuel are indicative of broader cultural expectations concerning beauty as an outward sign of divine favour.

But in contrast to Augustin, McCarter, Olyan, and to an extent Schipper as well, I argue that straightforwardly equating physical beauty with divine favour is a misapprehension of these beauty-texts. For if beauty were a reliable indicator of Yahweh's favour, then why is it that those singled out as handsome in the books of 1 and 2 Samuel so swiftly fall from favour? On the contrary, Schipper's declaration that the 'build up in beauty imagery' is a sign that David's household 'collectively emerges as increasingly fit to rule'²⁸⁰ is at odds with the SN's depiction of a royal household shown to be increasingly *unfit* to rule.

I suggest that the editors deliberately establish a subtle tension between human expectations for beauty on the one hand, and divine perception on the other. I agree with Olyan that 'humans, too, prefer the beautiful according to some biblical texts';²⁸¹ however, it is my contention that *Yahweh* does not. The prevalent royal beauty motif may temporarily endorse the human expectation that kings ought to be physically impressive; however, ultimately the constant repetition of this theme only makes the compilers' final critique even more potent, as the text continually exposes external beauty as a flawed ideal. Thus the compilers set up a dichotomy between humanity's tendency to over-estimate beauty and Yahweh's subversive way of seeing and valuing.

²⁸⁰ Schipper 2006: 90.

²⁸¹ Olyan 2008: 23.

3.2.1.a. 1 Samuel 9–10

If 1 Samuel 9:1–2 were an independent text—which it may once have been—one might conclude that an impressive physical stature is a divine blessing. For Saul is introduced as

בְּחֹר וְטוֹב וְאִין אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ מִשְׁכֻּמוֹ וּמַעְלָה גְּבוּהַ
מִכָּל־הָעָם

(‘an attractive young man. There was not a man from the sons of Israel more attractive than he; from his shoulders and upwards he was taller than all the people.’ 1 Samuel 9:2)²⁸²

As with Genesis 6:2, **טוֹב** could be translated ‘good’ or ‘attractive/ handsome’. However, this description is expanded upon by noting that no man was more ‘good/attractive’ than Saul, or able to compete with his height, therefore suggesting that in this instance the Israelites recognise Saul as leader more for his physical stature rather than his goodness.

Much is made of Saul’s striking physique. The use of the directional heh in **וּמַעְלָה** (‘and upwards’) creates the impression that he literally towers above others, leading McCarter to observe that ‘Saul’s kingly stature is unmistakable, and like his good looks it was a mark of divine favor.’²⁸³ His sizeable presence is further emphasised by the double comparison of Saul as standing out both ‘from the sons of Israel’ (**מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**) and ‘from all the people’ (**מִכָּל־הָעָם**), highlighting his

²⁸² My translation.

²⁸³ McCarter 1995: 193.

superiority over everyone else. The same sentiment is repeated in 1 Samuel 10:23–24.²⁸⁴ Therefore Hertzberg comments,

Saul ... [is] imposing and handsome, a man who makes an impression on everyone ... He is designed as one chosen beforehand and destined for a special career.²⁸⁵

Schipper draws parallels between the introduction of Saul as Yahweh's appointed King and the depiction of those fit to rule in other ancient Near Eastern literature. For example, he references Athtar's attempt to sit on the throne of Baal (*Baal Cycle*), only to discover his legs are too short for the footstool and his head for the top of the throne. Lacking the necessary physical stature, Athtar concedes, 'I cannot be king on the summit of Sapan.'²⁸⁶

Similarly, the Akkadian hero Gilgamesh, ruler of Uruk, is depicted in these lofty terms:

Who could be his like for kingly virtue? ... The Lady of Birth drew his body's image, The God of Wisdom brought his stature to perfection ... His foot was a triple cubit, his leg six times twelve ... He was perfection in height, ideally handsome.²⁸⁷

The mythology of the surrounding ancient Near East (ANE) placed value on heroes with the sort of physique that enabled them to undertake the deeds of strength and

²⁸⁴ McCarter notes that the emphasis on Saul's physique may be indicative of an earlier folktale embedded within the narrative, in which 'the handsome young man ... seeking lost asses, finds a kingdom' (McCarter 1995: 193). Others like Mettinger and Phillips Long, however, make a compelling counter-argument for the unity of the tradition (Mettinger 1976: 179–182; Phillips Long 1989: 211–215).

²⁸⁵ Hertzberg 1964: 80.

²⁸⁶ *The Baal Cycle*, tablet VI, col.1, lines 56–62 (Smith 1994: 154).

²⁸⁷ *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Foster 2001: 4–5). See also Schipper (2006: 76).

daring that were an integral part of their heroic behaviour. At first glance it seems that the author of 1 Samuel 9–10 is writing within that same heroic tradition, setting Saul up to be the Israelite equivalent of the archetypal ANE King. As Augustin observes of Saul,

Der hohe Körperwuchs ist als ein Zeichen der Königswürde in
den Augen des Volkes physisch wahrnehmbar.²⁸⁸

On the other hand, however, although from a human perspective Saul's stature is taken as an outward affirmation of election, already within the narrative itself Humphreys identifies a 'discordant subtone.'²⁸⁹ For not only is Saul's initial presentation in chapter 9 ambiguous,²⁹⁰ but Humphreys notes that unlike David and Joseph, no other complimentary characteristics of Saul are identified. There is a notable absence of the divine endorsement 'Yahweh was with him', whereas David (1 Samuel 16:18) and Joseph (Genesis 39:2, 3) are both presented in this way.²⁹¹ Consequently, despite his physical suitability for the role on the basis of established ANE standards, the compiler's omission of other identifiable markers of divine blessing create a degree of ambiguity as to whether Saul truly has Yahweh's blessing.

3.2.1.b. 1 Samuel 16:5–13

There are both parallels and divergences between Saul's election in 1 Samuel 9–10 and David's anointing in the HDR (1 Samuel 16:5–13). On the one hand, there are

²⁸⁸ Augustin 1983: 139.

²⁸⁹ Humphreys 1982: 20.

²⁹⁰ For a full analysis, see Phillips Long (1989: 199–211).

²⁹¹ Humphreys 1982: 20; Phillips Long 1989: 200, n. 21.

those who argue that in the cases of both Saul and David, their respective election narratives emphasise the significance of physical beauty as a sign of divine favour.

The evidence for this argument is found in 1 Samuel 16:12:

וְהוּא אֲדָמוּנִי עִינָיָהּ עֵינָיִם וְטוֹב רֵאִי

(‘And behold he was ruddy with beautiful eyes and attractive in appearance.’)

David may not be physically imposing, but he is pleasing to look upon (וְטוֹב רֵאִי). As Anderson comments, ‘His kingship depended solely on Yahweh’s sovereign choice. Nevertheless, his fine appearance offered an external sign of his internal merit.’²⁹²

Moreover, just as there are parallels between Saul’s height and the stature of the idealised ancient Near Eastern king, so too can we find references to a beautiful countenance in the literature of the ANE. For example, in the Babylonian letter to a Cassite king (ca. 1421–1396), the writer proclaims that ‘whosoever may see the gracious face of my “Lord” and whosoever be of “good words” may listen to my “Lord!”’²⁹³

A similar theme emerges in various addresses to the Egyptian Pharaohs, such as the Great Abydos inscription of Rameses II (19th Dynasty), which refers to the act of ‘bringing the tribute before thy beautiful face.’²⁹⁴ Situating the description of David alongside these ancient portrayals of a king of beautiful features, Augustin interprets 1 Samuel 16:12 as another example of the stereotypical handsome

²⁹² Anderson 1989: 161.

²⁹³ *Letters to Cassite Kings from the Temple Archives of Nippur*. N. 38 (Radau 1908: 140.).

²⁹⁴ *The Great Abydos Rameses II Inscription* (Breasted 1962: 271). See Augustin (1983: 130).

ancient Israelite king. While he may not conform to the body-type of a military leader, according to Augustin, David's physique is important:

Wie schon bei Saul ist es auch hier die körperliche Schönheit ...
Die Schönheitsaussagen über David haben sich ebenfalls als
Königsprädikat erweisen.²⁹⁵

On the other hand, however, perceiving 1 Samuel 16:7 to be the interpretive key, I suggest that the editors of the HDR present a more subversive message: one that centres on the contrast between *human* and *divine perception*.

The Hebrew word רָאָה (qal: 'to see') appears five times in 1 Samuel 16:6–13, as Yahweh exhorts Samuel the 'see-er' (הִרְאָה)²⁹⁶ to see as Yahweh sees, not as humankind sees. This repetition highlights the significance of the topic of visible beauty in this passage because, unlike Yahweh, this is the only kind of beauty that humans are physically able to 'see'. However, in the Hebrew רָאָה also carries connotations of 'to choose' or 'to provide', a fitting interpretation given Samuel's choice of the future king.²⁹⁷

Initially, Samuel approaches the selection of Yahweh's chosen one as he did with Saul, starting with the most physically impressive son of Jesse, Eliab. However Yahweh contradicts Samuel's choice, stating in 1 Samuel 16:7:

אֶל-תִּבְטַח אֶל-מְרֹאֵהוּ וְאֶל-גְּבוּהַ קוֹמָתוֹ
(‘Do not look to his appearance or to the greatness of his
stature.’)²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Augustin 1983: 142, 148.

²⁹⁶ 1 Samuel 9:9.

²⁹⁷ Johnson 2015: 24; Klein 1983: 160.

²⁹⁸ My translation.

The rejection of Eliab intentionally contrasts with the manner of Saul's own election.²⁹⁹ As Mettinger observes, 'Eliab is something of a "new Saul", so that in his rejection Saul is denounced in effigy.'³⁰⁰ The deliberate contrast presents a striking indictment against an election based on physical stature. The text makes the contrast even more explicit by claiming in verse 7b:

כי לא אשר יראה האדם כי האדם יראה לעינים ויהוה יראה
ללבב

'For it is not what humankind sees, because humankind looks to the eyes and the Lord looks to the heart.'³⁰¹

I have attempted to show how awkwardly the first part of this phrase, 'it is not what humankind sees', reads in the Masoretic text (MT). In the Septuagint, this part of the verse reads, 'for not as man will see, will God see' (ὅτι οὐχ ὡς ἐμβλέψεται ἄνθρωπος ὄψεται ὁ θεός), which scholars suggest may have been an original reading lost from the MT.³⁰² The LXX translation explicitly highlights the divergence between divine and human perception. Klein understands the text of 1 Samuel 16:7 (MT) to be a 'subtle criticism' of arguments favouring Saul's household,³⁰³ noting how 'Yahweh urges Samuel not to look at a candidate's appearance or his stature, the very things which had made Saul stand out!'³⁰⁴

²⁹⁹ McCarter 1995: 277.

³⁰⁰ Mettinger 1976: 175.

³⁰¹ My translation.

³⁰² Johnson 2015: 33; McCarter 1995: 274.

³⁰³ Klein 1983: 99.

³⁰⁴ Klein 1983: 161.

Although it is unclear whether *האדם יראה לעינים* should be translated ‘humankind looks *to* the eyes’ or ‘humankind looks *with* the eyes’, Johnson suggests a deliberate poetic parallel with Yahweh looking ‘*to* the heart’ (*ללבב*), which may lean toward the former translation.³⁰⁵ This would fit with the idea that it is to a person’s eyes that we first look to establish a connection.³⁰⁶ As Landy comments, ‘the beauty of the eyes is especially interesting, for they can only unite without touching, at a psychic distance; their objective separateness is the condition for their fusion.’³⁰⁷ This would also fit with the Hebrew sensibility that the eyes are the most beautiful physical feature of the body, and thus the place we first look to perceive beauty. This contrast between overt beauty and concealed beauty—visible only to God—provides the framework for the entrance of David, implying that he too will be the *unexpected* choice. This is also demonstrated by his initial introduction:

עוד שאר הקטן (‘there remains the youngest’, 1 Samuel 16:11).

While *קטן* implies youth, it is also used to refer to a physically small stature, such that this text carries the double meaning ‘there remains the little one’.³⁰⁸ Unlike the physically impressive Eliab, David stands as the least of his brothers. McCarter comments that on the basis of this text, ‘some scholars have discerned in this a veiled attack on the theme of Saul’s beauty and great height.’³⁰⁹ I suggest that little discernment is necessary, as in many ways this is an unveiled attack. For a

³⁰⁵ Johnson 2015: 35 n. 64.

³⁰⁶ For more on ‘eyes’ as a symbol of Hebrew beauty, see pages 78–79.

³⁰⁷ Landy 1980: 82.

³⁰⁸ Klein suggests ‘smallest’, as an intentional contrast with Saul’s height (1982: 161).

³⁰⁹ McCarter 1995: 277.

deliberate contrast is established between Saul, who stands head and shoulders over *every* man in the nation, and David, who is the smallest member of his household of seven brothers, let alone the rest of Israel.

Moreover, just in case the redactor's comparison of Saul's and David's height is unclear, in the following chapter the size differential is further accentuated. For just as Athtar is too small for Baal's throne, so David is unable to fill Saul's armour (1 Samuel 17:39). By presenting David as attempting to wear the king's clothes, the contrast in stature between the two men could not have been rendered more obvious. David even enters into combat with the *giant* Goliath (1 Samuel 17:23–24, 41–51), re-emphasising just how unfit for kingship David is according to human standards.

Considering David's height, Olyan suggests that 'his short or average stature is apparently viewed as neither an attractive nor an unattractive characteristic.'³¹⁰ I suggest, however, that Olyan is underestimating the force of this narrative. In light of the cultural expectations surrounding the size of Israelite and ANE kings, it seems much more plausible that the author exaggerates the contrast between David on the one hand, and Eliab, Saul and Goliath on the other, precisely *because* David's short stature is considered such a disappointment in his cultural context.

By subverting societal ideals of male beauty, the author demonstrates that although according to human standards David makes for an unimpressive king, Yahweh has a different set of standards. Similarly, in highlighting David's lack of

³¹⁰ Olyan 2008: 21.

military prowess, the narrator makes the theological point that victory does not rely on human power but depends on Yahweh.³¹¹

Given these factors, it would be surprising for the author to shift from presenting David as a king who does not conform to societal expectations to suddenly depicting him as the fulfilment of ANE stereotypes of a beautiful ruler. Contrary to Augustin, therefore, I suggest that the editor places such emphasis on Yahweh's decision to look at the heart rather than the outward appearance that it seems incongruous to lavishly praise David for his beauty.

A similar concern that the text of 1 Samuel 16 offers a contradictory message may be what motivated the authors of the Septuagint to amend **וְטוֹב רֵאיוֹ** ('and of good appearance'), to read *καὶ ἀγαθὸς ὁράσει κυρίῳ* ('and good of appearance *to the Lord*'), implying that David's beauty is not so much a form of aesthetic attractiveness as a beauty of character.

A closer look at the MT, however, could serve to smooth out the initial apparent contradictions, as, in the words of Schipper, 'it remains unclear ... whether or not [1 Samuel 16:12] is in fact a positive evaluation of his physical standing.'³¹²

The ambiguity lies in the fact that David is presented as bearing a unique form of beauty. Although an exact interpretation of the expression **אֲדָמוּנִי** ('ruddy') is unclear, it seems to imply that David is red-faced, like the red of the soil (**אֲדָמָה**) or the blush of a cheek flushed with blood (**רָם**). Such an image evokes the vision of a fresh-faced blushing youth, cohering with the two other occasions where this word

³¹¹ McCarter 1995: 297.

³¹² Schipper 2006: 89.

appears in the Hebrew Bible. In the Song of Songs (5:10), the young male lover is described as 'gleaming and ruddy', while Esau is described as 'ruddy' at the moment of his birth (Genesis 25:25), indicating an association between ruddiness and youthful vitality. Thus Greenspahn suggests that rather than signifying virility, אַדְמוּנִי indicates that David was 'pink and pretty'.³¹³ This imagery is complimentary, but also subversive, as it undermines David's manliness to emphasise his youth.³¹⁴

Likewise, the fact that David is blessed with יְפֵה עֵינָיִם ('beautiful eyes') is not a particularly masculine description. יְפֵה is a gender-neutral word used to describe both male and female beauty in the Hebrew Bible.³¹⁵

However, although eyes are frequently the focal point of physical beauty, this is the *only* instance in the Hebrew Bible where a *man's* eyes are beautiful. In certain contexts beautiful eyes can symbolise a particular tenderness or vulnerability, such as in the Song of Songs (4:1) where the female's eyes are associated with the image of a dove behind a woman's veil.³¹⁶ Elsewhere, women are depicted as accentuating their eyes to increase their desirability before men (2 Kings 9:30; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40). Consequently, beautiful eyes are perceived to be a distinguishing feature of female beauty, and the primary means by which a woman might captivate a man. Perhaps, therefore, David's beauty is described in such feminine terms in order to emphasise his 'boyish', youthful appearance not only in regard to his stature but also by emphasising an effeminate kind of facial beauty.

³¹³ Greenspahn 1994: 88.

³¹⁴ For further discussion on this subject, see Johnson (2015: 40–42).

³¹⁵ e.g. Rachel, Abishag, Tamar, Esther, Joseph, Absalom and David.

³¹⁶ See Song of Songs 1:15; 4:1,9; 6:5.

The fact that Goliath scorns David both on account of his stature and his beautiful, ruddy complexion (1 Samuel 17:42) further supports the theory that David's brand of beauty is a particularly soft and youthful one.

Consequently, although attractive, I argue that the physical beauty David possesses does not conform to the expectations of his culture for their ruler. As Schipper observes, 'the David Story employs something more subtle and complex than strict adherence to a typical royal ideology of the king's body.'³¹⁷

In the context of the HDR, the contrast between Saul's kingly stature and David's boyish appearance serves the agenda of the editors by emphasising that David is appointed king on account of divine, rather than human, reasons. Although set against the backdrop of Saul's initial election, Klein explains that 'over against this human story, however, is the observation stated right at the start: David became king because God chose him to be king.'³¹⁸

Thus the HDR presents a subversive form of the beauty motif in which cultural expectations are overturned and character is shown to be of greater worth than physical beauty in Yahweh's eyes. The narrative of Saul's election (1 Samuel 9–10) may suggest that at an earlier time physical appearance was understood to represent divine favour.

If so, however, then the editors intentionally took hold of that pericope and inverted it to undergird their point that Yahweh does not see as the society of Ancient Israel sees. This is not to imply that Yahweh chose David because he was

³¹⁷ Schipper 2006: 89. See also Johnson, who comments that 'we are to think of this last son as small and pretty, perhaps in a boyish or womanly way. This is not an obvious candidate for king' (Johnson 2015: 44).

³¹⁸ Klein 1983: 159.

unattractive, as if God had a bias against beauty. On the contrary, although he fails to conform to the 'kingly' type of beauty, David is depicted as unconventionally attractive.

What this narrative shows, therefore, is that God neither favours nor discards people on account of their outer appearance. Rather, it is as if he is indifferent to beauty, at least of the external kind, because his gaze is focused elsewhere.

3.2.1.c. 2 Samuel 14: 25–27; 18: 9–33; 1 Kings 1:1

Nor does the motif of beauty within the royal household end with comparisons between Saul and David. Rather, this theme continues beyond the HDR into what Rost identified as the 'Succession Narrative' (2 Samuel 9–20). The pervasiveness of this motif across two narrative cycles is noteworthy, particularly given the shift in attitude towards the monarchy.³¹⁹ As Whybray observes,

We only have to compare the stories about David in the earlier parts of the Books of Samuel with the Succession Narrative to see how far the stature of David as a hero has been reduced in the latter.³²⁰

In portraying the decline of the royal household, I suggest that the compilers make use of the beauty motif toward that same end by substituting an implicit critique of human vanity for traditional ANE notions of royalty and beauty. This shift

³¹⁹ Despite the increasingly negative depiction of the Davidic household (2 Samuel 9ff), McCarter contends that this material does not envision a future without kings, and therefore the SN is a pre-Deuteronomistic creation (McCarter 1984: 6). However Van Seters argues for a post-exilic narrative written as court fiction rather than history (Van Seters 1976: 22–29).

³²⁰ Whybray 1968: 48.

in trajectory takes place in the transition from the HDR to the SN. Initially, David is set up against Saul. Now, however, the corruption of beauty becomes a part of David's own legacy. There is a notable parallel between the lofty terms used to describe Saul, who loses the throne, and Absalom, who temporarily usurps his father's throne:

וכאבשלום לא-היה איש-יפה בכל-ישראל להלל מאד
(‘Now in all of Israel there was no man to be praised so much
for his beauty than Absalom.’ 2 Samuel 14:25)

While Saul is a man of stature, Absalom is a man of beauty (איש-יפה). Just as Saul's stature is head and shoulders above the men of Israel, Absalom's incomparable beauty is praised throughout Israel.³²¹ So perfect is his appearance that every inch of him, from the 'sole of his foot to the crown of his head', was without blemish (מום). Even Absalom's hair grows in abundance.³²² Like Daniel (Daniel 1:4), he is an Israelite male with flawless beauty. However, whereas the modesty of Daniel and his companions is emphasised by their fast (Daniel 1:8–14), underlying the exaggerated descriptions of Absalom's perfection is a sharp critique of his character. As McCarter observes, 'he is handsome and winning, but he is also vindictive and rancorous'.³²³

If a correlation exists between external beauty and divine blessing, one would expect Absalom to be highly favoured by Yahweh. On this basis, Augustin suggests that this outstanding beauty is a symbol of divine blessing which was originally given to Absalom, but which he loses on account of his rebellion and

³²¹ Compare with Judges 16:15–17.

³²² 2 Samuel 14:26.

³²³ McCarter 1984: 327.

pride.³²⁴ However, although Absalom's beauty was greatly praised by the people, I would question whether Augustin is right to argue that the compilers are also claiming that Yahweh himself shows his favouritism through the bestowal of physical beauty. I say this because the exaggerated depiction of his appearance, coupled with Absalom's vain behaviour, serves to make Absalom appear ridiculous from the first impression.

The evidence for his extensive vanity is revealed in the anecdote of Absalom publically weighing his own hair (2 Samuel 14:26), and the sheer quantity of hair alerts the reader to the fact that the description is intentionally inflated.³²⁵ As Hertzberg notes, 'Absalom's appearance is depicted in bright colours.'³²⁶

Just as he stands at the city gate to divert the loyalty of his people away from the king, so is the weighing of his hair an act that symbolises his attention-seeking behaviour. Therein lies his downfall. As McCarter comments, 'this notice may be intended to prepare the audience for the strange manner of his demise ... after being caught by his head in a tree.'³²⁷

For it is that same head (שֵׂרָ) of hair that causes Absalom's death, entrapping him in the branches of an oak tree so that he is unable to escape his pursuers (2 Samuel 18:9). While this text itself does not specifically mention hair, the fact that the narrator makes so much of Absalom's pride in his extensive locks, combined with the practical reality that hair can get caught in branches, indicates

³²⁴ Augustin 1983: 166.

³²⁵ Four pounds of hair, or two pounds in the LXX account.

³²⁶ Hertzberg 1964: 335.

³²⁷ McCarter 1984: 349.

that it is this specific feature that literally ensnares him and leads to his destruction.³²⁸

It is with a morbid sense of irony that the editors of 2 Samuel emphasise that pride in one's beauty comes before a fall. Although the most desirable man in the nation, Absalom's vanity in his external appearance is symptomatic of his internal failings—an over-inflated sense of self-importance that leads to his destruction.

This theme continues with the introduction of another of David's sons, Adonijah (1 Kings 1:5–6), who is described as וְגַם־הוּא טוֹב־תֹּאֵר מְאֹד ('and he was also exceedingly handsome of form', 1 Kings 1:6). The mention of Adonijah's beauty is instantly followed by the statement that he 'was born next after Absalom,' immediately forewarning the reader that the younger brother will take after the elder not only in looks but also in behaviour. In this instance, his vanity is manifest in the public attention he draws to himself by riding a chariot with fifty men running ahead. As with Absalom, his pride festers into an ambition for the throne that results in his death.

Once again, for all Adonijah's good looks, Yahweh was not on his side. By contrast, the election of Solomon is distinctive, as unlike his older brothers this king is characterised by wisdom rather than beauty.³²⁹ Considering the sapiential construct of the 'ideal king' in Proverbs (25:1–7; 31:1–9), Whybray argues that in many ways—including David's death-bed instruction to Solomon to show 'wisdom'—both men show themselves to live up to this proverbial 'type.' Even

³²⁸ This is how Josephus also interprets this text (*Antiquities* 7.239).

³²⁹ 1 Kings 3:9.

though neither David nor Solomon are presented as conforming to the royal ideals of ancient beauty, it is on account of their wisdom that Whybray considers them to have favour with Yahweh as opposed to their handsome rivals.³³⁰

Considered together, the abundance of physical beauty within the households of Saul and David contrasts starkly with the grievous character flaws of these same individuals. Noting this repeated motif throughout the SN, Whybray observes how ‘the series of tragedies in David’s family is made more poignant by the constant references to the physical beauty of its members.’³³¹ Whybray suggests that in this fashion the compilers of this narrative ‘clearly intended to recall David’s own physical beauty (1 Samuel 16.12)’.³³²

While I agree with Whybray that David is depicted as an attractive youth, I maintain that David is set apart as one chosen not on account of his short stature and boyish good looks, but because of his heart. In this sense, one might argue that David’s good looks or lack thereof are inconsequential, because they are not the criteria by which Yahweh makes choice. On this basis, Solomon is presented as the fitting successor: as with David, his appearance is irrelevant to his election. Instead it is wisdom, rather than beauty, that characterises Solomon.³³³

Throughout these narratives a pattern emerges that undercuts the more straightforward hypothesis that Yahweh favours the beautiful. Instead, a contrast is established between those who worship God and those who worship their own beauty. As Schipper notes:

³³⁰ Whybray 1968: 89–92.

³³¹ Whybray 1968: 25.

³³² Whybray 1968: 25.

³³³ 1 Kings 3:9.

The fact that those who ... meet the physical exceptions for kingship either never become king, briefly usurp the throne, or suffer God's rejection suggests that the David story employs the rhetoric of royal ideology ... but also complicates this rhetoric.³³⁴

The development of the beauty theme throughout these narratives is clear and sustained enough that it is apparent that the compilers wrote with the aim of subverting traditional beauty themes.

Considering the nature of the HDR and SN traditions as some kind of courtly documents, it is not difficult to posit reasons for why the combined themes of male beauty and human vanity feature so prominently within these books. In chapter two I noted that the primary difficulty that *women* were depicted as facing was their position of powerlessness in ancient society. Consequently, their greatest temptation would be to overcome that powerlessness by using one of the only tools they have to hand—their beauty—as a means of securing power over men.³³⁵

By contrast, in the courtly narratives of the HDR and SN, the royal males face the opposite temptation of having too much power. In this situation, it is easy for ambition to hold sway, and for self-promotion to overcome submission to Yahweh. Thus the editors of these texts use the motif of beauty as a means of portraying this conflict and power-struggle. This is an effective narrative device precisely *because* beauty was culturally understood to represent divine favour and hence—as Augustin notes—was frequently associated with those in power within the court. Such cultural expectations make the editor's perversion of beauty into a form of

³³⁴ Schipper 2006: 90.

³³⁵ Yee 2003: 160.

idolatry even more potent, as *external* beauty jars so starkly with *internal* moral decay. Countering society's overly simplistic association between beauty and divine blessing, the narrative presents the greatest biblical kings as those who do *not* conform to stereotypical ideas of kingly beauty, while at the same time dramatically undermining those who fitted the archetypal image of royal beauty.

In this way, those who crafted the final form of the text ensured that these narratives conclusively highlight the degree to which God's perceptions are not humanity's perceptions, and that while the latter may give preference to outer beauty, Yahweh seeks something much more significant: the beauty of the human heart.

3.2.2. The Latter Prophets: Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel

3.2.2.a. Ezekiel 28 and 31

While the critique of male pride and beauty found in 1 Samuel 9–1 Kings 1 is unique amongst the Former Prophets, this same motif re-appears in the prophetic literature of Ezekiel (28; 31). Despite the shift in genre, these are texts that deal specifically with the presentation of foreign rulers. Therefore, given Augustin's recognition of a specific Israelite understanding of kingly/courtly beauty,³³⁶ it is perhaps unsurprising that this theme might emerge across various forms of Hebrew writings.

While there is disagreement regarding the literary unity of Ezekiel and to what extent the text originates chiefly with the prophet,³³⁷ or to what extent it was

³³⁶ Augustin 1983: 122–182.

³³⁷ Block 1997: 20–23.

edited and extended by a school of redactors within the same tradition,³³⁸ nevertheless many scholars do consider much of the text to have been completed by the end of the sixth century BCE.³³⁹ Moreover, although some date the origin of 1 and 2 Samuel to the post-exilic era,³⁴⁰ I consider it likely that the traditions of Saul and David's kingship already existed in some form by the time of the exile. Therefore, it is possible that the compilers of Ezekiel were aware of this kingly beauty motif before writing the indictments against the king of Tyre (Ezekiel 28) and the Pharaoh of Egypt (Ezekiel 31).

Alternatively, they may have all been composed during the exile. If so, their overlapping interest in this motif could be attributed to the influence of Babylonian culture, as the Hebrew writers began to engage with ANE concepts of kingly beauty. If that is the case, however, then the writings of Ezekiel are certainly the more reactionary of the two in their polemic against the beauty of ANE foreign rulers. While the courtly narratives are subtle in their critique of Israel's own royal household, Ezekiel's confrontational oracles are full of a divine condemnation that is only heightened by their poetic rhetoric.

In Ezekiel 28, the prophet rails against the King of Tyre, whom Zimmerli compellingly argues is an existing king rather than a metaphorical figure.³⁴¹ Ezekiel accuses the king as having once been in such intimate standing with God that 'you were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering...' (Ezekiel 28:13). This is the nearest textual parallel to Genesis 2–3 found in the Hebrew Bible,

³³⁸ Zimmerli 1979: 68–74; Joyce 2007: 7–16; McKeating 1993: 59–61.

³³⁹ Joyce 2007: 16.

³⁴⁰ E.g. Van Seters 1979: 22–29.

³⁴¹ Zimmerli 1979: 680; Augustin 1983: 176.

heightening the sense of prior closeness between the king and Yahweh while at the same time anticipating a separation to parallel that of Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden.

A notable distinction between the accounts in 1 and 2 Samuel and the accounts in Ezekiel 28 and 31 is that whereas the former narratives present Yahweh as focusing on 'the heart' and therefore ambivalent towards physical beauty, in Ezekiel external beauty is depicted as a God-given adornment. Considering the hoards of jewels that the king is decked in as a symbol of divine favour, Augustin observes,

Wohl nirgends sonst im Alten Testament tritt der Edelsteinschmuck in äußerer Pracht als Zeichen der Schönheit so gehäuft auf wie hier.³⁴²

While both beauty and wisdom are at times lauded in the Hebrew Bible,³⁴³ Ezekiel 28:17 accuses the king of abusing the gifts bestowed by Yahweh:

גבה לבך ביפוך שחת חכמתך על-יפעתך ('Your heart became proud on account of your beauty and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour'). Although God is the one who made the king beautiful, the king has forgotten to whom the beauty originally belonged. Instead, he has taken possession of it, such that it has become ביפוך ('[in] *your* beauty') and יפעתך ('*your* splendour'). In this text, therefore, beauty is the precursor to pride. As Block observes, 'the king's beauty has produced hubris in his heart, and the brilliance of his visage has corrupted his

³⁴² Augustin 1983: 176.

³⁴³ See chapter five, page 234–236.

rational powers.³⁴⁴ Perverting a divinely given gift of beauty into a source of vanity, the king raises himself up to be like God. Yahweh's retribution is swift, promising to hurl the king—who has risen too high—down to the ground like a shattered idol.³⁴⁵

A similar oracle is also given in chapter 31:9, in which Yahweh bestows beauty on Pharaoh:

יִפְּהָ עֲשִׂיתִיו בְּרַב דְּלִיּוֹתָיו וּיִקְנֵאֵהוּ כָּל־עֲצֵי־עֵדֶן אֲשֶׁר בְּנֵן הָאֱלֹהִים
(‘I made it beautiful with its mass of branches, the envy of all the trees of Eden that were in the garden of God.’)

In this instance, the Pharaoh's beauty is not conveyed by glittering jewels but rather through stature as he is likened to a cedar of Lebanon. Just as Saul and Absalom were incomparable amongst all the people, this tree is presented as the envy of all others. The image of height also evokes the memory of Saul, forewarning what is to come as once again vanity brings ruin: וְרָם לִבּוֹ בַּגְּבוּהָ (‘and its heart became proud because of its height’ (Ezekiel 31:10)). In both Ezekiel 28 and 31, it is in the heart (לֵב) that pride is found. This makes for an interesting parallel with 1 Samuel 16:7, which claims that irrespective of external beauty, it is specifically the heart that God is interested in.

A marked similarity exists, therefore, between Ezekiel 28 and 31 and the beauty motif of the court narratives. Ezekiel's invective may be sharper on account of his attack on *foreign* rulers; however, underlying each of these texts is the theme of misused beauty leading to a prideful heart and self-idolatry.

³⁴⁴ Block 1998: 117.

³⁴⁵ Block 1998: 117.

However, there is also a divergence in theme, in that Ezekiel is far more explicit regarding the bestowal of beauty as a divine gift in the first place. Furthermore, while the association between beauty and vanity is restricted to the male line in 1 and 2 Samuel, the same cannot be said of the Hebrew Bible's prophetic tradition.

3.2.2.b. Hosea 1:13; Isaiah 57:8; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 16, 23:40

With the exception of Ezekiel 28 and 31, one could argue that the *primary* form that the biblical beauty motif takes in the Latter Prophets is the depiction of beauty as the root of female vanity. Rather than depicting individual women, however, the prophets repeatedly refer to a metaphorical representation of Yahweh's bride.³⁴⁶

In chapter two I considered the depiction of the 'other woman' as a metaphorical representation of 'folly', but here the image of an unfaithful wife is extended to the whole of God's people. This metaphor spans the writings of the earliest of these latter prophets, the eighth-century BCE prophet Hosea, and continues up until Ezekiel who lived during the sixth-century BCE Babylonian exile.

Yee comments that through this metaphor Israel becomes 'a woman at her most nightmarish for an ancient Near Eastern society and priesthood: a wildly unfaithful, sexually amoral one.'³⁴⁷ Due to the distasteful nature of this prophetic imagery, feminist scholarship has extensively addressed this topic of the marriage

³⁴⁶ I discuss the one exception to this, Isaiah 3:16-24, on pages 154-158.

³⁴⁷ Yee 2003: 121.

metaphor and sexual violence in the Hebrew Bible.³⁴⁸ In contrast to their wider conversation, however, I am looking at this prophetic metaphor primarily from the perspective of what bearing it has on the presentation of female *beauty* in the Hebrew Bible.

Consequently, although feminists frequently focus on the horrors of some of these texts, it is important to note that a beautiful woman is not initially presented as inherently evil as she is later on in the pseudepigraphal writings (e.g. *T. Reuben* 5:1–5). Instead, as in Ezekiel 28 and 31, much is made of beauty being a gift given by Yahweh to his people just as a groom adorns his bride.

This bridal imagery is particularly prevalent in second Isaiah.³⁴⁹ For example, in Isaiah 49:18, the Lord pledges to Zion that her sons will return to her and that she will ‘wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride.’ Similarly, in Isaiah 61:10, God’s people rejoice that God has clothed them in garments of salvation, just as ‘a bride adorns herself with her jewels.’³⁵⁰ Once again, in Isaiah 62:3 the prophet promises God’s people that they will be ‘a crown (עטרה) of splendour in the Lord’s hand, a royal diadem (צניף) in the hand of your God.’ Here the people are not only garbed in bridal beauty from God, but they become the ornaments themselves that God wears. Koole explains that עטרה can mean either a

³⁴⁸ For further reading on this subject, see Moughtin-Mumby (2008), Yee (2003: 111–134), and Sherwood (1995: 101–125).

³⁴⁹ This portion of the book is likely a product of the sixth-century BCE Babylonian exile. A sixth-century BCE composition might account for the more positive imagery if those in exile no longer feared the coming judgment, but instead began to hope for a future restoration of the land. See Blenkinsopp (2002: 46–54).

³⁵⁰ See also Jeremiah 2:32: ‘Does a maiden forget her jewellery, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.’ In this instance, God himself is the adornment that his people should wear.

wreath of flowers (Isaiah 28:1) or a crown of metal (Zechariah 6:11, 14) while the **צַנִּיף**, rendered 'diadem', was worn by women (Isaiah 3:5), priests (Zechariah 3:5) and kings (Ezekiel 21:31). However, given that God promises in Isaiah 62:5, 'as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you', the best interpretation of the diadem is as a bridal crown worn within the context of a marriage ceremony.³⁵¹ Koole comments on how 'God himself delights in the observation of his splendid crown Zion, which he holds before him in his hand.'³⁵² Consequently, in Isaiah 62 we see a blurring of metaphors, where the people become both the wedding ornaments worn by God and the bride herself.

But the best example of God's people—in this instance, Jerusalem specifically—as a beautifully adorned bride is found in Ezekiel 16. Here, Yahweh finds Jerusalem as a helpless baby and watches over her until she becomes a woman: 'You grew up and became tall and arrived at full womanhood ... you were at the age for love' (Ezekiel 16:7). At this point, Yahweh enters into a covenant with her and pledges himself to her (Ezekiel 16:8), and 'then I bathed you with water and washed off the blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with embroidered cloth and with sandals of fine leather' (Ezekiel 16:9–10).³⁵³

Corrington Streete sees this depiction of the young bride very negatively, emphasizing that 'she was totally "his" possession, a mute, beautiful, and sexually

³⁵¹ Blenkinsopp comments that according to rabbinic testimony, 'the bride and bridegroom wore crowns during the wedding ceremony. The bride was addressed as the queen and the bridegroom as the king' (2007: 236).

³⁵² Koole 2001: 306–7.

³⁵³ Compare with Ruth 3:3, who similarly prepares herself to meet Boaz.

submissive bride, the plastic object of his desires (16:4).³⁵⁴ Block, on the other hand, perceiving the washing and anointing as part of the wedding ritual, interprets these actions as ‘a tender expression of love and devotion.’³⁵⁵ I agree with Block that God is depicted in a remarkably intimate setting as a care-giver who personally bathes, anoints and clothes her, all of which are the actions of a servant or lover rather than an oppressor.

Yahweh is also presented as the one who beautifies his bride, adorning her with jewellery as a symbol of her worth to him. Such a gesture was anticipated as part of an ANE wedding ritual in the form of the bride’s dowry and the groom’s ‘bridal gifts’.³⁵⁶ For example, the West Semitic ‘Document of Wifehood’ from 449 BCE enumerates that the wife is bringing to her marriage ‘another garment of wool, finely woven ... one mirror of bronze ... one pair of sandals; one half handful of balsam oil; six handfuls of castor oil.’³⁵⁷ Yahweh offers the same kinds of items—sandals, oil, and garments—as traditional wedding presents. However, there is nothing common about Yahweh’s gifts. Rather, he adorns her so that she is ‘fit to be a queen’ on account of her incredible ‘beauty’ (יָפָה, Ezekiel 16:13), a fact that is emphasised by the tiara symbolising her royal status.

Block notes the sacramental language employed here, as Yahweh dresses his bride in רִקְמָה (‘embroidered cloth’), and שָׁשׁ (‘fine linen’), expressions that arise

³⁵⁴ Corrington Streete 1997: 92.

³⁵⁵ Block 1997: 485.

³⁵⁶ See Genesis 24:22.

³⁵⁷ ‘Marriage Contract from the Ananiah Archive: Document of Wifehood’ (Porten 1996: 208–211).

most often in descriptions of the tabernacle.³⁵⁸ Likewise, the ‘fine flour’ and ‘oil’ that she is given feature in temple offerings.³⁵⁹ In this way, Ezekiel presents us with a vision of Zion in an idealised form, such that ‘the splendour I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the sovereign Lord’ (Ezekiel 16:14). The beauty given by God here is so stunning that it is כָּלִיל (‘perfect’), a priestly word used in the Hebrew Bible to denote a pure sacrifice without blemish.³⁶⁰

This depiction of beauty as an attribute bestowed by God on his people aligns with the evidence from chapter two, in which I noted that in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible beauty is specifically associated with the Israelites rather than with foreign women. Moreover, in choosing this marriage metaphor to recount God’s love, Ezekiel portrays the beautifying of a bride and the delight of her husband in her appearance as an extremely positive image. He also indirectly endorses the cultural practices of ancient Israel, in which making a bride beautiful for her wedding day is seen to be a worthy activity, rather than an act of vanity or immodesty.

Therefore, although in feminist scholarship the marriage metaphor is heavily critiqued, one aspect that remains positive is that the beauty of Yahweh’s bride is not condemned for its own sake. If anything, the opposite is true, as that beauty is presented as divine in origin—God’s own splendour (Ezekiel 16:14) that he has willingly shared with his beloved bride.

³⁵⁸ E.g. Exodus 26:1, 31; Leviticus 16:4; 1 Chronicles 15:27. See Block (1997, 486).

³⁵⁹ E.g. 1 Chronicles 9:29.

³⁶⁰ Block: ‘[T]o Yahweh Jerusalem is the absolute perfection of beauty, Yahweh’s delight’ (1997: 486).

On the other hand, however, while beauty in and of itself may be a positive characteristic, the Latter Prophets are highly critical of the way that Yahweh's bride misuses her beauty. As Hosea 2:13 states: "she decked herself with rings and jewellery, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot", declares the Lord.³⁶¹

In chapter two I noted that, unlike in the apocryphal texts, in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible only foreign women are depicted as dangerous seductresses. In *these* prophetic texts, however, Israel herself is personified as the adulteress. If this behaviour is generally associated with foreigners, then it makes the prophetic critique of Israel even more shocking, as the prophets imply that an Israelite bride has become like the shameless 'other woman'.

Unlike the 'other woman' in Proverbs, however, in these prophetic texts the authors are less concerned with how the bride uses her beauty to lure men astray, and more focused on the consequences she brings on *herself* because of her vanity. It is for this reason that I classify this literature 'beauty as vanity' rather than 'beauty as a threat'. From the authors' perspective, such a shift in concern makes sense, because the woman no longer stands for an external threat from outside. Instead, male readers find themselves in the disconcerting position of being included within the metaphor as those who are no longer the victims of a woman's wiles but have themselves been metaphorically branded as the perpetrator.

This time, the wronged party is Yahweh himself. Thus the prophet speaks in the language of an enraged and wounded husband, reeling at the discovery of sexual betrayal. As Isaiah 57:8 claims,

³⁶¹ The verse reference is 2:15 in the Masoretic Text (MT).

Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed, you climbed into it and opened it wide; you made a pact with those whose beds you love, and you looked on their nakedness. You went to Molech with olive oil and increased your perfumes ...

The very same beautifying gifts that a husband might bestow on his bride, oils and perfumes, are now being used to seduce other gods like Molech into bed. Similar actions are described in both Jeremiah 4:30 and Ezekiel 23:40—passages that I have already noted bear striking resemblance to 2 Kings 9:30—as Yahweh’s unfaithful bride uses cosmetics to entice her foreign lovers:

And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in crimson, that you deck yourself with ornaments of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life. (Jeremiah 4:30)

They even sent messengers for men ... and when they arrived you bathed yourself for them, painted your eyes and put on your jewellery. (Ezekiel 23:40)

The substance used to darken the eyes, פוֹךְ (Jeremiah 4:30), is likely lead sulphide.

The action used to describe this application of make-up, תִּקְרַעִי (qal imperfect of קָרַע), means to ‘tear’ or ‘rend’ the eyes,³⁶² indicating a violent action that emphasises her self-destructive activity. As McKane notes, ‘Jerusalem is like a prostitute keeping up appearances, to the end, with her fine clothes, jewellery and cosmetic aids, but she is unaware that death is round the corner.’³⁶³ Like the kings of Ezekiel 28 and 31, or the royal household of David, the bride Israel is revelling in her

³⁶² Bright suggests the translation ‘smearing your eyes’ (1965: 33).

³⁶³ McKane 2004: 112.

own beauty without recognising how ugly she makes herself. These texts serve as the female equivalent of Absalom weighing his own hair, neither realising how vain their hope is in trusting in anything other than Yahweh.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel ridicule these beautifying activities, not only on behalf of Yahweh, but also because even her lovers, the objects of her lust, despise her. Unlike in chapter two, there is no sense here that her beauty has somehow made her powerful or given her control over her male lovers. Rather, here she is an object of scorn, as they enjoy her favours even as they mock her desperation.

The implication is that while the bride thinks she has made herself powerful through her beauty, all she has done is debase herself to become an object without worth. Once again, the primary focus in these texts is not on the danger that she is to another man, but on the harm that she is causing herself and the way that she has squandered every gift Yahweh has given her all for her misplaced pride.

Nowhere is this danger of vanity more evident than in the graphically violent sexual imagery of the marriage metaphor in Ezekiel 16, in which Yahweh's bride turns from him and takes other lovers. In one sense, by depicting the entirety of the people's sins through the imagery of an individual woman, Ezekiel's prophecies reflect poorly on his attitude towards women. As Yee writes:

Avoiding blame by ducking behind a woman's body, Ezekiel thereby absolves simultaneously his own institutional complicity in sins of the nation and that of the male elite class to which he belongs. Blame falls metaphorically on the bodies of women, where male conflicts between victor and vanquished are played out.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ Yee 2003: 122.

On the other hand, by using this sort of marriage metaphor, Ezekiel also humbles the male hearer by forcing him to identify with the unfaithful wife. As Ezekiel 16:15-17 states:

But you trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your fame ... You took some of your garments, and made for yourself colorful shrines, and on them played the whore ... You also took your beautiful jewels of my gold and my silver that I had given you, and made for yourself male images, and with them played the whore.

Yet again, a woman is presented as using her beauty to gain lovers. However, unlike the apocryphal writings or the book of Proverbs, the focus of this text is not the danger to the male lovers, but on what the bride herself has become, as the woman falls from the position of queen (מלוכה) to whore (זנה).

The reason for her fallen status is levelled at her in the accusation:

ותבטחי ביפיד (‘but you trusted in your beauty’ (Ezekiel 16:15)). The verb בטח, taken with the preposition ב, is an expression frequently used to describe the trust of God’s people in Yahweh, indicating a high level of commitment to something outside of oneself. Now, however, she has turned inward. Thus like the king of Tyre, she is condemned for worshipping her own beauty rather than the one who beautified her.

The outcome of this betrayal is severe, as God gives her over to the consequences of her desires, only for her to discover that it is not what she wants:

Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will tear down your mounds ... They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewellery and leave you naked and bare. (Ezekiel 16:39)

There is a terrible irony here, as the same act that felt empowering for the bride when she exposed herself to her lovers suddenly becomes an act of horror and violation when they expose her and tear her down. By trusting in her own beauty, the bride discovers that it becomes irrevocably diminished, violently destroyed (הרס) and left bare, for her beauty is entirely dependent upon her relationship with Yahweh whom she has willingly abandoned.

Consequently, the beauty of the men and women presented in these condemnatory texts is best described as 'borrowed beauty'. On the one hand, it is a positive portrayal, as the beauty in and of itself is perceived to be a positive characteristic. On the other hand, however, it is a hollow beauty, because this beauty does not belong to God's people at all, but instead the people are borrowing it from God. Thus as soon as they turn from him and claim it for themselves, they lose it. From the perspective of the prophets, beauty is good because beauty belongs to God. Without God, however, it is nothing but vanity, and grasped in vain.

3.2.2.c. Isaiah 3:16–24

Unlike the bridal metaphors of second Isaiah, the book of Isaiah begins with a judgment brought specifically against a group of wealthy women in Jerusalem.³⁶⁵ In

³⁶⁵ Kissane ascribes this oracle to the eighth-century BCE prophet himself (1960: 40–41).

Isaiah 3:16–24, the prophet exaggeratedly describes the pride that the daughters of Zion are taking in their physical beauty. As Isaiah 3:16–22 states:

The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes ... The Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and sashes, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and capes and cloaks[.]

In this text we encounter an extensive catalogue of the kind of jewellery found throughout the ANE. Watts comments that the diversity and luxurious nature of many items on the list 'suggests that by this time Jerusalem was well aware of fashion in the world's capitals and was able to avail itself of its expensive luxuries.'³⁶⁶ Daiches observes that this ornamental collection has strong parallels with the Assyrian account of Ishtar's descent into the underworld, suggesting that perhaps the author of Isaiah 3 even drew upon the following description:³⁶⁷

He ... took away the great crown on her head ... the rings in her ears ... the beads around her neck ... the toggle-pins at her breast ... the girdle of birth-stones around her waist ... the bangles on her wrists and ankles ... the proud garment of her body.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Watts 1985: 46.

³⁶⁷ Referenced in Wildberger 1965: 148.

³⁶⁸ *The descent of Ishtar to the underworld*, 1.108. Translated by Stephanie Dalley (Hallo and Younger 2003: 382).

Considering this list, Wildberger concludes that although this claim is hard to substantiate linguistically, 'it is certainly plausible that pieces of jewelry belonging to goddesses were similar to those owned by prominent women.'³⁶⁹

Although it is unlikely that an individual would wear all of these items at once, the way that they are heaped together creates the impression of women smothered in jewellery from head to toe. As Oswalt comments, 'the piling up of the details only adds weight to the figure ... expressing the depth of the prophet's anger ... at the pretensions of human pride which these trappings symbolise.'³⁷⁰

There is no doubt that these women are intent upon making an impression upon their viewers. This is implied by the phrase *ומשקררת עינים* ('and flirting with eyes'). *שקר* is one of several hapax legomena in this passage, which BDB interprets as 'ogling'.

However, although seduction may have been part of their intent, the prophet seems less concerned with the response of the male viewer and more concerned about the abhorrence that God feels towards them on account of their self-conceit. As Wildberger summarises, when it comes to this passage, 'the actual theme is that of human pride'.³⁷¹ Thus the daughters of Zion are introduced to the reader as *כי גבהו בנות ציון* ('because the daughters of Zion are proud'), making it clear that Isaiah's diatribe is levelled at them on account of the haughtiness displayed through their disproportionate emphasis upon physical appearance. *גבה* most commonly

³⁶⁹ Wildberger 1965: 148. See also Judith 10:4.

³⁷⁰ Oswalt 1986: 151.

³⁷¹ Wildberger 1991: 148.

means 'to be high', giving the impression that these women consider themselves superior.³⁷² This idea is further emphasized by the description of them walking with נטויות גרון ('outstretched necks'), raising their heads to look down upon others, or as Kaiser refers to them, with 'their necks stuck out like giraffes.'³⁷³

Wildberger observes how 'for the author, luxury in jewellery and toiletry articles is on the same level as idol worship.'³⁷⁴ Even more than this, Wildberger and Watts argue that many of these items originated 'in cult and in magic rituals' of other non-Israelite religions.³⁷⁵ Thus Wildberger argues that the word שבימים, usually translated 'headbands' (3:18), has strong parallels with the Ugaritic word for 'sun' (שמש in Hebrew), and therefore ought to be read as 'little suns'.³⁷⁶ Wildberger argues that this interpretation makes particular sense given that this item is at once followed by a reference to 'little moons' (שהרונים).³⁷⁷ Therefore he argues that Isaiah's invective is motivated not only by the self-worship these women demonstrate, but because their beauty depends on the idolatrous worship of other gods instead of Yahweh.³⁷⁸

³⁷² See also Amos 4:1. The closest parallel from the apocryphal texts is Ben Sira's description of 'the haughty stare betrays an unchaste wife; her eyelids give her away' (26:9). However, while there may be an element of vanity in the actions of the unfaithful wife, Ben Sira's primary concern is not about the impact of self-destructive behaviour on the female. Rather, the woman is depicted as a threat to other men.

³⁷³ Kaiser 1983: 47.

³⁷⁴ Wildberger 1965: 152.

³⁷⁵ Watts 1985: 46.

³⁷⁶ Wildberger 1965: 152. Oswalt suggests 'sunbands' (1986: 142).

³⁷⁷ See also Judges 8:21, 26 for further reference to these crescent ornaments. See Benzinger for an illustration of these items (1907: n.101).

³⁷⁸ Wildberger 1965: 152.

Given that elsewhere in the book of Isaiah God himself bestows beauty and jewellery (Isaiah 61:10; 62:3), this list should not be taken as evidence that the Hebrew Bible condemns all forms of ornamentation as vanity. Rather, Isaiah's frustration is fuelled by what the actions of these women signify about the deeper motivations of their hearts.³⁷⁹ As Wildberger comments,

The style of life shown by the 'daughters' of Zion is a symptom of the drive to be important ... that lifestyle reveals a haughtiness in which one is so wrapped up in human affairs that there is no time left to bow down before God.³⁸⁰

3.3. Summary

On the basis of these two genres of biblical literature, one might be justified in thinking that there is an incongruity between the prophet's vision of beauty and that of the compiler of 1 and 2 Samuel. For while the latter presents Yahweh's attitude towards human beauty as indifferent at best, the prophets emphasise God as the source of beauty, and his decision to gift his people with his own beauty.

On closer reflection, however, I suggest that actually the two motifs cohere surprisingly well. For in the case of the prophets, the gift of beauty is metaphorically given to God's people as a whole community, without preferential treatment or the exclusion of anyone. From the prophets' perspective, beauty belongs to God. On this basis, it is quite logical to think that all those who belong to God can share in that beauty.

³⁷⁹ Kaiser: 'It must be noted that the prophet is not attacking female beauty culture as such, but the pride of those who practice it' (1983: 47).

³⁸⁰ Wildberger 1965: 156.

However, for that same reason God cannot distinguish between individuals on the basis of their beauty. This is in part because, according to the prophets, he has already bestowed his beauty on everybody, so no single individual would look better than another from his perspective. Secondly, the idea of God discriminating on the basis of beauty is nonsensical from a prophetic perspective, because any beauty that anyone has is a gift from him anyway. Of far more concern, therefore, is the state of the human heart, because that is where vanity ferments. Despite the differences, therefore, these two genres of literature convey the same underlying warning against allowing one's own beauty to become a distraction from the creator.

This motif emerges prominently within texts that deal specifically with the privileged minority—either the king's court, Israel as Yahweh's queen, or the wealthy daughters of Zion—and I do not find it surprising that it does not appear anywhere else. I say this because vanity is predominantly a weakness for the rich, as the majority of Israelites were too busy surviving to take the time to weigh their hair or spend money on expensive, beautiful adornments as status symbols.

Another distinctive feature of this motif in both the Former and Latter Prophets is the degree to which 'beauty as vanity' is presented as a male concern. The fact that this theme emerges out of courtly narratives and oracles against foreign kings certainly helps to account for that male-oriented focus. For in ancient Israel it is men who typically hold positions of authority, and therefore it is they who predominantly struggle with a temptation towards pride on account of that power.

Even when this motif is applied to women in the prophetic literature, there is only one instance in which Israelite women are directly critiqued (Isaiah 3:16-24).

The rest of the time, the prophetic vitriol is addressed to the personified Israel rather than a real woman.

Nevertheless, one might argue that this metaphor is based on certain stereotypes that the prophets hold regarding the vanity of women; otherwise, why else would the metaphor prove so popular that four major prophets—Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel—all make use of the same increasingly negative imagery over two centuries? On the other hand, however, the fact remains that the metaphorical woman in these texts represents not only Israelite women but Israelite men too as vain and unfaithful. In this sense, it is a sweeping indictment against the entire nation.

Although this is a prominent motif within certain portions of the Hebrew Bible, it is notable that the same theme is absent in the later apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature. One might explain the lack of later texts addressing the theme of male and female vanity as a consequence of the end of the monarchy, meaning that the authors of these later texts no longer had reason to write narratives concerning the royal court. The difficulty with this argument, however, is that these later writers frequently situated their narratives in earlier Jewish history and wrote tales concerning activities at court (e.g. 1 Esdras 4, Additions to Esther, *Joseph and Aseneth*, *T. Joseph* etc.).

A more reasonable explanation, therefore, is that the writings of these later authors reflect the social concerns of their era: for example, the difficulties of living as a people under foreign rule, or sustaining honour and preventing shame through appropriate social conduct. Any engagement with the beauty motif is likewise

determined by these cultural concerns. And in that heavily patriarchal culture, it so happens that these concerns manifest as a focus on the dangers that female beauty poses to male autonomy, rather than taking the form of an encouragement from these Jewish writers for their male readers to reflect on their own vulnerability to pride and the universal human temptation towards vanity.

Chapter Four: Beauty as Vulnerability

4.1. Introduction

In chapter two, I examined the destructive power of beauty as a weapon wielded by women *against* men. In chapter three, I assessed the way that beauty can lead to *self*-destruction in both men and women, when the admiration of one's own beauty turns to vanity.

In this chapter, I consider a third way in which beauty is depicted as a harmful characteristic within the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts. In this instance, however, rather than focusing on how beauty endangers the beholder, I engage with another strand of the biblical beauty motif: beauty as a form of *vulnerability*. This perspective on human beauty stands in contrast with the perception put forth most strongly in the apocryphal literature, that to be beautiful is to be *powerful*. In this thread of the tradition, we see the contrary view put forward. What emerges is the impression that not only can beauty place women in a position of weakness but that in many cases it leads directly to a man gaining power over a woman, rather than a woman subverting a man's control.

4.2. Beauty as Vulnerability in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

In chapter two, I noted two key strands of the beauty motif in the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha: the blaming of a woman's beauty for the loss of male control,

and the assumption that women succumb to sexual temptation more than men. As the 'weaker' sex, one might expect women to be presented with a degree of vulnerability in these later Jewish texts. However, despite the fact that women are presumed more impressionable when it comes to sexual temptation than men,³⁸¹ what is missing from these texts is the possibility that her beauty can place a woman in a position of vulnerability. Rather, women are presented as the initiators and sexual aggressors, and female beauty is their means of seduction. Paradoxically, it is precisely their supposed *vulnerability* to sexual temptation that leads to their status as *powerful* sexual predators, which is why these apocryphal authors do not hesitate in assigning blame to the female sex.

An example of this apocryphal association between a woman's 'weakness' to temptation and her seductive power is found in Ben Sira 42:11–12.³⁸² This warning to fathers to guard their daughters could create the impression that Ben Sira is concerned that his daughter might become the victim of a predatory male enamoured by her beauty. However this initial impression is quickly dispelled as Ben Sira warns against her 'headstrong' nature and her innate 'wickedness' (42:13). Thus it is not the vulnerability of the daughter that is of primary concern here, but rather that of the father, whose control—and consequently his public status—is endangered by her beauty.

Ben Sira's approach typifies that of the apocryphal writers, for whom beauty remains a weapon rather than a weakness. In this sense, these writings serve a clear

³⁸¹*T. Reuben* 5:1: 'Women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men.' For the full discussion, see chapter two, pages 80–85.

³⁸² For more on this, see chapter two, pages 56–60.

patriarchal agenda. For the writers' concerns are not presented as if they are worried about the consequences for the women that they describe; rather, their focus always remains on how female behaviour and female beauty may impact the *male* reader. Having said that, there is one striking exception to this rule, and it is the book of Susanna.

4.2.1. Susanna

The extant work of Susanna appears in the form of an addition to the book of Daniel, and is known to us in two Greek versions. These are the Septuagint Old Greek (OG) and the Theodotion (TH),³⁸³ the latter of which may be partly dependent on the former,³⁸⁴ although it is possible that both could be translations of an earlier Semitic tradition.³⁸⁵ The story of Susanna probably originated during the Hasmonean dynasty (circa 140–63 BCE) within the region under Hasmonean rule, although as Loader observes, it is a challenge to offer a more specific account of authorship and date 'without engaging in speculation.'³⁸⁶

Alongside Judith and the Greek additions to Esther, Susanna stands apart from Jewish apocryphal literature as another novella that depicts female beauty in a more positive light. A case could be made that both Judith and the Greek additions to Esther also present their female protagonists in positions of vulnerability. But as I

³⁸³ The NRSV translation of Susanna is based on the text of TH, which is also the longer of the two versions.

³⁸⁴ Loader 2011: 214; Collins 2003: 426.

³⁸⁵ Loader 2011: 214; McLay 1996: 15; deSilva 2002: 233.

³⁸⁶ Loader 2011: 215. For more on the provenance of Susanna, see Clanton Jr (2003: 121–140), deSilva (2002: 233), Gruen (2002: 324), Ilan (1999: 127–153), and Mittmann-Richert (2000: 118–137).

discuss in chapter five, rather than rendering them vulnerable, the situations in which they find themselves in danger only ultimately serve to enhance the power of their beauty as they overcome all such obstacles. The same, however, cannot be said for Susanna.

In the OG, Susanna's appearance is first presented to the reader from the perspective of the two elders, who see a woman *ἀστειαν τῶ ἐΐδει* ('elegant in appearance', 1:7, OG).³⁸⁷ However, this description is immediately followed by the statement that Susanna is the 'wife of their brother' (1:7, OG), emphasizing that, although she may be beautiful, Susanna is unavailable to her voyeurs.

In TH, on the other hand, the heroine is presented as the wife of Joachim before the elders are introduced. Susanna is described as *καλὴ σφόδρα* (Susanna 1:2, TH), which can mean either 'exceedingly good' or 'exceedingly beautiful'. Given that the narrative centres on the elders' desire to 'see' her (1:12, TH) and their developing 'lust' (1:8, TH, OG) for her, as well as the fact that she is later described as *καλὴ τῶ ἐΐδει*, 'beautiful in appearance' (1:31, TH), I suggest that the translation 'exceedingly beautiful' is more appropriate in this context. Nevertheless, from the outset of the narrative there is no doubt that TH highlights Susanna's moral integrity, describing her as a woman who 'feared the Lord' (1:2, TH). In this way, although both texts present Susanna's beauty as a desirable and admirable quality, TH offers a more detailed description of the virtuous character of Susanna than the OG.

³⁸⁷ Unless specified, I use the English translation of the OG and TH from *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS) (Pietersma and Wright 2007: 987–990).

Since this perspective on female beauty is atypical in apocryphal writings, it is unsurprising that some have looked within this story for hints that Susanna is not as blameless as she appears. Gruen, for example, argues that Susanna intentionally draws the elders' attention by walking in the garden (1:7, 13, OG; 1:7, 15, TH), and by applying oils to beautify herself (1:17, TH).³⁸⁸ Gruen suggests that this is why she seems unsurprised when her beauty excites the interest of the elders.³⁸⁹ Such an interpretation of the bathing scene in TH would align with those that consider Bathsheba to have likewise deliberately aroused David's interest by bathing outdoors in his line of sight (2 Samuel 11). In a similar vein, Sered and Cooper perceive the story of Susanna to be just as negative in its depiction of female beauty as many of the other apocryphal texts:

The significance of Susanna's beauty is quite simply to 'seduce' the reader into thinking that rape is a consequence of male sexual arousal precipitated by female beauty, rather than a product of culturally condoned patriarchal control of female autonomy.³⁹⁰

Sered and Cooper consider the narrative to be consistent with other apocryphal texts in laying the blame for the elders' lust on the beauty of the woman rather than the faults of the men. There are two expressions in the book of Susanna that could lend credence to their position.

The first are the near identical descriptions found in both versions of Susanna (1:10):

³⁸⁸ The bathing of Susanna (1:15–18, TH) is absent from the OG.

³⁸⁹ Loader (2011: 233) referring to Gruen (2002: 171–72, 324).

³⁹⁰ Sered and Cooper 1996: 50.

καὶ ἦσαν ἀμφότεροι κατανευγμένοι περὶ αὐτῆς (TH)

καὶ ἀμφότεροι ἦσαν κατανευγμένοι περὶ αὐτῆς (OG)

This has commonly been translated, ‘and they both were wounded with her love’.³⁹¹ Such a translation bears strong parallels with other apocryphal texts that speak of the desire that women invoke in men as if it were a wound or an act of violence.³⁹² Given that these men have only seen her from afar, the implication is that her beauty alone has the power to injure a man. However, part of the difficulty lies in the translation of *κατανευγμένοι*, an expression unique to the book of Susanna. This undefined word takes the passive form, indicating that something is *done to* the elders. The above translation interprets *περὶ αὐτῆς* as ‘with her’. However, the expression could also read ‘concerning her, about her’.

A way forward in interpreting this is offered by Zimmermann,³⁹³ who observes that the LXX translates the Hebrew expression *חולת אהבה אני* (‘I am sick with love’, Song of Songs 2:5; 5:8) as *τετρωμένη ἀγάπης ἐγώ*, which Zimmerman

³⁹¹ E.g. WEB, KJV, and Zimmerman (1957: 236–241). In NETS the sentence reads, ‘and both were transfixed/bedazzled by her.’

³⁹² For example: ‘You will fall into her snares’ (Ben Sira 9:3); ‘... caught by her tricks’ (Ben Sira 9:4); ‘... plunged into destruction’ (Ben Sira 9:9); ‘Do not be ensnared by a woman’s beauty’ (Ben Sira 25:21); ‘Many have perished, or stumbled, or sinned because of women’ (1 Esdras 4:26-27); ‘... entice the eyes of all the men who might see her’ (Judith 10:4); ‘Her sandal ravished his eyes, her beauty captivated his mind’ (Judith 16:9); ‘... her beauty deceived me’ (*Testament of Judah* 12:3); ‘... by the glance of the eye [they] instil the poison and the through the accomplished act they take them captive.’ (*Testament of Reuben* 5:3).

³⁹³ Zimmerman 1957: 240.

translates as 'I am wounded by love.'³⁹⁴ Zimmerman argues that a similar Greek mistranslation of an earlier Semitic text occurs in Susanna. According to Zimmermann, an original version presented the elders as 'love-sick' rather than wounded,³⁹⁵ which is a more Hebrew concept than the Hellenistic idea of being 'wounded by love'.³⁹⁶ If Zimmermann is correct, then this expression does not convey the same weight of blame as the reading 'wounded by her love' carries. It is this kind of interpretation that is given in the NRSV translation of Susanna 1:10, 'both were overwhelmed with passion for her.' The NRSV captures the passive sense of these men being overcome, while nevertheless emphasizing that these emotions are directed toward Susanna (*for her*), rather than caused *by* her.

The second line that could be read in support of Sered and Cooper's conclusion that the purpose of Susanna's beauty is to 'seduce' can be found in verse 56,³⁹⁷ where Daniel states to the elders, τὸ κάλλος σε ἠπάτησεν ('beauty has deceived you', OG) or τὸ κάλλος ἐξηπάτησέ σε ('beauty has beguiled you', TH).³⁹⁸ Rather than beauty being a property of Susanna, it is presented as quite detached from her. Daniel does not even refer to it as 'her beauty', but simply 'beauty' as an abstract concept that has forcefully impacted the elders. It is here that the book of Susanna comes closest to the more commonly held apocryphal attitudes towards

³⁹⁴ Zimmerman's interpretation is based on the argument that τετραωμένη derives from the Greek verb τιτρώσκω ('wound').

³⁹⁵ Zimmermann 1957: 240.

³⁹⁶ Such as Philo's reference to man being 'wounded by the darts of love, which is a terrible passion' (Philo, *That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better*, XXVI. 99 (Yonge 1993: 123)). Compare with 2 Samuel 13:2 and Song of Songs 2:5; 5:8.

³⁹⁷ Sered and Cooper 1996: 50.

³⁹⁸ Compare with *Psalms of Solomon*: 'And let not the beauty of a woman who acts lawlessly beguile me' (16:7-8).

female beauty as a danger in and of itself. Remarking on Susanna 1:56, Glancy notes that the belief in beauty as a seductive power 'is often used to excuse men from responsibility for their actions since women's beauty is considered the cause of men's lust.'³⁹⁹

Scholars have commented on the parallels between the book of Susanna and the account of Genesis 2–3, suggesting that Susanna is a foil to Eve.⁴⁰⁰ There are marked commonalities, not least, as Loader observes, the reference to a garden, two trees, walking, death, temptation, deceit, hiding, nakedness, and judgment.⁴⁰¹ Pearce suggests that Susanna 1:56 is a deliberate reference to Genesis 3:13, noting that the OG version even makes use of the same rare verb 'to deceive' that is used by Eve when she states, 'the serpent deceived (ἠπάτησέν, LXX) me'.⁴⁰² Therefore, Pearce argues that the author of the OG intends to imply 'a reversal of what is described in Genesis 3: there the snake beguiled the first woman; here the elders have been beguiled by the beauty they sought to beguile.'⁴⁰³ According to Pearce's reading, the beauty of Susanna is as dangerous as the serpent that first tempts Eve into sin, implying that female beauty carries a serious threat indeed.⁴⁰⁴

It is significant, however, that while the implication of Daniel's speech is that these men have been led astray by beauty, there is no sense in Susanna 1:56 in which Susanna herself is blamed or associated with the motive of seduction. Rather,

³⁹⁹ Glancy 1995: 288–302, 293–94.

⁴⁰⁰ Loader 2011: 231–233; Brooke 1992: 92–111; Pearce 1996: 10–31.

⁴⁰¹ Loader 2011: 231.

⁴⁰² Pearce 1996: 24.

⁴⁰³ Pearce 1996: 25.

⁴⁰⁴ Pearce 1996: 25.

it is as if beauty is a separate entity from her, with its own allure that is detached from Susanna's intentions.⁴⁰⁵

Moreover, despite these two expressions, I nevertheless argue—in contrast with Gruen, and Sered and Cooper— that both Susanna's innocence and the elders' guilt are firmly established throughout the two accounts. For example, the authors' emphasis on Susanna's innocence is clearly demonstrated through the measures that she takes to conceal herself by only walking in the garden either *after* her husband's guests leave the house (1:7, TH), or at dawn before they arrive (1:12, OG).⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, although in TH Susanna does choose to bathe in the garden, she specifically asks her maids to 'shut the garden doors' (1:17). Furthermore, her purity is so uncompromising that in both versions, when the elders approach her, she would rather risk death than be coerced into adultery (1:22–23, TH and OG). Pearce once again draws parallels between the account of Eve in Genesis 2–3 and Susanna. For whereas Eve gives in to temptation and brings death into the world (Genesis 3:19, 22), Susanna would rather die on account of the elders' accusations than risk sinning (Susanna 1: 22–23).

If Pearce is correct in her analysis that the author intentionally subverts Genesis 2–3,⁴⁰⁷ then this is in stark contrast with the critique of Ben Sira that 'from a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die' (Ben Sira 25:24). Rather, Susanna is comparable with the faithful mother of 4 Maccabees 18:8, who makes an

⁴⁰⁵ See Loader (2011: 224).

⁴⁰⁶ Pearce draws further parallels between Genesis 1-3 and the book of Susanna in noting that in both texts the protagonists walk in the garden at evening time (OG) (1996: 23).

⁴⁰⁷ Pearce 1996: 28.

association between the serpent of Genesis 3 and sexual temptation when she boasts that ‘no seducer corrupted me on a desert plain, nor did the destroyer, the deceitful serpent, defile the purity of my virginity.’ As Brooke comments, ‘it is possible to see that part of the purpose of the story is to portray the possibility of Paradise regained and in Susanna herself a Second Eve.’⁴⁰⁸

In highlighting the piety of Susanna, a contrast is drawn between her specific purity as a θυγάτηρ Ἰούδα (‘daughter of Judah’, 1:57, TH and OG) and the generalisation θυγατράσιν Ἰσραὴλ (‘daughters of Israel’, 1:57, TH and OG).⁴⁰⁹ As Daniel admonishes, ‘Thus you used to treat the daughters of Israel, and they, being afraid, would have intercourse with you, but a daughter of [Judah] did not tolerate your lawlessness.’ (1:57, TH). Loader suggests that as one who knows the law and acts blamelessly, Susanna stands apart even amongst other Israelite women as the archetype of female faith and piety, a model for ἡ Ἰουδαία (‘the Judean woman’, 1:22, TH).⁴¹⁰ By drawing a contrast between Susanna’s behaviour and that of other women, there is an implicit critique of womankind within both versions of Susanna. For although Susanna is a model of virtue, she is nevertheless presented as atypical.

Even so, I disagree with Sered and Cooper’s analysis that the statement ‘beguiled/deceived by beauty’ (Susanna 1:56) is offered as an excuse for the behaviour of the elders.⁴¹¹ This can be demonstrated by the fact that Daniel delivers

⁴⁰⁸ Brooke 1992: 109.

⁴⁰⁹ Elsewhere Susanna is referred to directly as a ‘daughter of Israel’, implying that these are not mutually exclusive categories (1:48, TH and OG).

⁴¹⁰ See Pearce (1996: 19) for a comparison of the uncommon expression ‘the Judean woman’ with the more common usage of the phrase ‘sons of Israel’.

⁴¹¹ Sered and Cooper 1996: 50.

these words not in defence of the elders' behaviour, but rather as words of condemnation that the elders allowed themselves to be tempted in the first place.

Bach observes that although the elders 'are condemned for bearing false witness against her[,] nothing is said of their lascivious designs on her,'⁴¹² implying that perhaps Susanna's status as a victim is underemphasized, as is the elders' guilt. However, Bach's observation overlooks verse 57, in which Daniel explicitly reviles the second elder not only for bearing false witness but also on account of his rapacious treatment of the daughters of Israel.⁴¹³ The outrage at this behaviour is emphasized by the OG, which diverges from TH in not only referring to τὴν ἀνομίαν ὑμῶν ('your lawlessness', 1:57 TH), but using the expression τὸ νόσημα ὑμῶν ἐν ἀνομίᾳ ('your sickness in lawlessness', 1:57 OG), as if the elders' corruption is so serious as to be diagnosed as a moral illness.

Both versions make clear that the elders remain culpable for their actions, because on account of their sexual attraction to Susanna (καὶ ἐπιθυμήσαντες αὐτῆς ('and since they lusted after her'), 1:8, OG; καὶ ἐγένοντο ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ αὐτῆς ('and they were in lust with her'), 1:8, TH), they diverted their minds from looking to 'heaven' to focus on her (1:9-10, OG and TH). Furthermore, although 1:56 reads ἡ ἐπιθυμία διέστρεψεν τὴν καρδίαν σου ('lust has twisted your heart', TH), in 1:9 the texts make clear that rather than ἡ ἐπιθυμία ('lust') being the subject of the verb, the elders themselves διέστρεψαν τὸν νοῦν αὐτῶν ('diverted their mind', OG) or διέστρεψαν τὸν ἑαυτῶν νοῦν ('diverted their own mind', TH).

⁴¹² Bach 1997: 71.

⁴¹³ Loader 2011: 222.

Consequently, as Loader notes, ‘the assumption is not that they cannot help themselves.’⁴¹⁴

The order from the elders to uncover Susanna at her trial (1:32, OG and TH)—emphasised by the author of TH who observes that she was veiled (1:32, TH)—may refer to the practice of uncovering a woman’s head if she is accused of adultery (Numbers 5:18). However this act also unveils the extent of the elders’ sexual predation, as we are told that their motivation for uncovering Susanna is ἵνα ἐμπλησθῶσι κάλλους ἐπιθυμίας αὐτῆς (‘in order that they could be sated with lust for her beauty’, 1:32, OG).⁴¹⁵

Both authors sum up the events of the narrative with the statement, ‘Thus innocent blood was spared that day’ (1:62, OG and TH), emphasizing Susanna’s status as a victim in this affair. Summarising the narrative, Ilan observes how ‘instead of concentrating on the negative aspects of women’s sexuality and temptation for men, it chose to highlight the danger of men’s sexuality for women.’⁴¹⁶

Consequently, both the OG and the TH accounts of Susanna stand apart from other apocryphal beauty texts in their attitude towards female beauty. For although beauty in and of itself is recognized as holding an innate appeal, Susanna herself is placed in a position of extreme vulnerability on account of her physical attractiveness. Nor is her beauty presented as ultimately culpable for the events of the narrative. For although her good looks draw the unwanted attention of the

⁴¹⁴ Loader 2011: 225.

⁴¹⁵ The TH makes no reference to ‘lust’ here, but simply states, ‘so that they could be sated with her beauty’ (1:32).

⁴¹⁶ Ilan 1999: 149. See also Corrington Streete (1997: 118).

elders against her will (1:56, OG and TH), it is clearly the elders who allow themselves to be overcome by intentionally turning their eyes from heaven and towards lust (1:9, OG and TH). Thus, in both versions, the events of the narrative and the results of the trial ultimately reveal that neither Susanna nor her beauty are to blame, but that the wrong emphatically lies with the actions of the elders. Therefore, rather than beauty serving as a weapon against men, in this narrative it is more like a target for the elders' lust, ultimately rendering Susanna vulnerable rather than powerful.

The marked divergence between this text and the other apocryphal writings under consideration raises the question: why should Susanna be so unique?

Part of the answer to this question lies in the genre of these texts as a novella. For unlike in the other apocryphal texts where female beauty is at most a subplot or one theme amongst many, in the three novellas of Judith, Susanna and the Greek additions to Esther, the plots hang on the premise that the heroine is a physically attractive woman. With its greater level of detail in describing both Susanna's character and the actions she takes to preserve her modesty, as well as in the addition of a dramatic bathing scene, TH in particular exhibits the classic features of a Greek novella.⁴¹⁷

Stylistic considerations aside, however, it is also clear that Susanna is intentionally subversive in its message. This is made apparent by the fact that not only are *Jewish* men critiqued, but these are Jewish *elders*. As such, their status is so high that as soon as these two witnesses have spoken, Susanna is judged guilty. The

⁴¹⁷ See Pervo (1991: 146).

two versions even specify that the people believe them more on account of *who* they are than *what* they have said. As 1:41 (TH) states, 'As they were elders of the people and judges, the assembly believed them, and they condemned her to death.'⁴¹⁸ By specifically referencing the sentencing of Susanna to death on account of the elders' testimony, TH heightens the sense of drama. This unquestioning acceptance of the elders' authority is sharply rebuked by Daniel: 'Are you such fools, O sons of Israel? Without examining nor learning the plain truth, do you condemn a daughter of Israel?' (1:48, TH).⁴¹⁹

This critique could be seen to strike directly at the prevalent attitudes towards gender and beauty exemplified throughout the culture and literature of the Hasmonean era and beyond. For sweeping generalizations regarding the dangers of a woman's appearance are made frequently, usually condemning her without prior examination.

The explanation for this subversion within the book of Susanna depends on the version of the text. In the OG, for example, the narrative overturns the established societal structures of authority by controversially concluding, 'For this reason youths are beloved by [J]acob, because of their simplicity' (1:62, OG). The implication is that youths are less susceptible to corruption than their elders. In fact, right from the beginning, when Susanna is introduced to the reader through the lustful gaze of the elders (1:7, OG), the focus of the OG has been on the moral corruption of the elders. Thus, the author of the OG exhorts the readers in the final

⁴¹⁸ See also 1:41 in the OG: 'And as they were elders and judges of the people, the whole assembly believed them.'

⁴¹⁹ Daniel asks the same question in the OG (1:48), except instead of 'condemn', the OG reads 'kill'.

line to look instead to ‘young able sons’, because ‘a spirit of knowledge and understanding shall be with them forever and ever’ (1:62, OG).

In TH, by contrast, the final emphasis is placed not on the young in general, but on one specific youth: ‘Daniel became great in the presence of the people from that day onward’ (1:64, TH). What both of these versions reveal is that, while Susanna may be the eponymous character, it is Daniel or ‘young men’ who are the ultimate heroes. Even in TH, where Susanna’s active role in the story is emphasised far more than in the OG (for example, by depicting Susanna as bathing privately to protect her modesty (1:17, TH) and as crying out loudly at the trial to defend her innocence (1:42–43, TH)), the story ends not with a heroine, but with a hero.

Thus, as Loader notes, while the book is subversive in nature and presents a challenge to traditional leadership, ‘this is a case, however, for new male leadership, not a case for female leadership.’⁴²⁰ Susanna’s piety may be praised, but she is powerless to save herself. Only male intervention can restore her fortunes and return her once more to the shelter—and constraints—of her hidden life behind her husband’s walls. Susanna’s helplessness in this regard highlights the total vulnerability of her position—a vulnerability heightened by a beauty that places her in a precarious situation.

In conclusion, I have argued that the unorthodox treatment of female beauty in Susanna can be explained both on account of the book’s literary genre and its intentionally subversive attitude towards traditional forms of leadership within the Jewish community. The authorial use of this ‘vulnerable beauty’ motif as a means of

⁴²⁰ Loader 2011: 236.

framing this power struggle, however, should probably be understood in the light of inherited biblical tradition. For although the presentation of beauty as a source of vulnerability is rare in the apocryphal literature, this motif emerges with far greater frequency in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible.

4.3. Beauty as Vulnerability in the Hebrew Bible

4.3.1. The Book of Genesis

In chapter two, I remarked on the substantial number of references to human beauty in the book of Genesis,⁴²¹ noting that these descriptions of physical beauty were characteristic of the narrative style found in the book with its particular focus on social interactions.⁴²²

Within the book of Genesis, the beauty motif takes various forms. Some texts, like those considered in chapter two (Genesis 6:1–4; Genesis 39:6–20) could be interpreted as highlighting the potential threat of beauty, while others seem to celebrate female beauty (Genesis 24:10–67).⁴²³ Given the likelihood that the narrative content of Genesis originates from diverse ancient sources of unknown provenance that were later compiled by a skilled redactor, it is no surprise that

⁴²¹ Genesis 6:1–4; 12:11–20; 20:1–17; 24:10–67; 26:7–11; 29:1–35; 34:1–31; 39:6–20.

⁴²² Blenkinsopp 1992: 34.

⁴²³ I discuss this text in chapter five, page 254–260.

varied presentations of the female beauty motif can be found within this particular book.⁴²⁴

Nevertheless, there is one thread concerning female beauty that does emerge more prominently than any other within the book of Genesis: the perception that to be physically beautiful is to be vulnerable. This repeated association between beauty and vulnerability may be indicative of a wider cultural concern within the ancient Israelite community, as time and again they found themselves to be under threat by external forces that they were powerless to stand against.

4.3.1.a. Genesis 12:11–20, 20:1–18, 26:7–11

This specific concern for the preservation of the Israelite household and lineage in the face of external threats is presented most clearly through the ‘wife-sister’ sagas of Genesis 12:11–20, 20:1–18 and 26:7–11.

The editor’s emphasis on the importance of appropriate marriage has already been highlighted by the discussion of Genesis 6:1–4 in chapter two. There I argued that although the daughters of men bear a certain degree of culpability, even in that instance the women experience a degree of vulnerability when it comes to their interactions with the more powerful sons of God.

This notion that beauty might render a woman vulnerable is heightened considerably in the following texts. Genesis 12:11–20, 20:1–18 and 26:7–11 are all narratives in which a beautiful biblical matriarch—Sarah in the first two instances,

⁴²⁴ For more of the formation of the Genesis material and specifically the presence of the beauty texts in the ‘non-P’ literature, see my introduction to Genesis in chapter two, pages 87–90.

and Rebekah in the latter—is endangered, although in these three narratives the threat comes from rich, foreign rulers rather than supernatural beings. Nevertheless, there is a notable parallel between these texts’ depictions of the threat of a powerful stranger to a beautiful woman, whether that stranger is one of the sons of God or a foreign king. In either case, the male is perceived as ‘other’ to the Israelites.

The striking similarities between these three ‘wife-sister’ narratives—where in each case the patriarch (Abraham or Isaac) persuades his wife to pretend to be his sister to save himself—have led scholars to conclude that they are variants on the same tradition. The existence of three divergent traditions of the same narrative by the time the book of Genesis was compiled supports the likelihood that this story originated in pre-exilic oral tradition.⁴²⁵

The presence of all three versions in Genesis may seem surprising; however, it can perhaps be explained by the compiler’s intention to highlight the ongoing failure of the patriarchs to trust in Yahweh, and therefore repeating the same mistakes time and again. The extension of this danger to the next generation with Isaac and Rebekah in chapter 26 emphasises that at every stage of the family history, the continuation of Yahweh’s chosen people is endangered. The threefold repetition of this scenario also attests to the popularity of the motif of a beautiful woman threatened by a powerful male, suggesting that it was a danger that many in ancient Israel and amongst the exilic Israelite community were familiar with.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ For more on the formation of the wife-sister narratives, see Westermann (1985: 162), Gunkel (1997: 223–225) and Moberly (1995: 68).

⁴²⁶ The book of Esther, although a much later text, deals with a parallel situation.

Indeed, the presence of a similar motif within the book of Susanna reveals that no matter what the cultural context, this is a concern that never goes away. Commenting on the frequent recurrence of this motif throughout the Hebrew Bible, Westermann observes that ‘this experience must have made a deep impression on early Israel.’⁴²⁷

Most scholars have accepted Gunkel’s postulation that Genesis 12 is the earliest extant form of the narrative and Genesis 26 the latest.⁴²⁸ Gunkel suggests this possibility primarily because Genesis 12 retains the most shocking aspects of the story, whereas in the following narratives some of the scandalous features have been removed. For example, in Genesis 12:19 Pharaoh states, ‘and I took her to be my wife’ (וַיֹּאקֶחַ אֶתָּהּ לִי לְאִשָּׁה). This statement to ‘take (לָקַח) to wife’ is an expression used throughout the Hebrew Bible to denote a full marital relationship,⁴²⁹ suggesting that sexual intercourse occurs in this account between Sarai and Pharaoh. In Genesis 20, on the other hand, it is clearly stated that although Abimelech ‘took’ (לָקַח) Sarah (20:2), he does not take her to be a ‘wife’, as God prevented Abimelech from touching her. In Genesis 26:8, the threat is lessened even further as Abimelech sees Isaac in the garden with Rebekah before he is even tempted to take her, thereby removing the danger entirely.

⁴²⁷ Westermann 1985: 164.

⁴²⁸ It is commonly suggested that on the basis of language and theological content, Genesis 12:11–20 and 26:7–11 fit best within the ‘J’ tradition, whereas Genesis 20:1–18 is more likely to have been shaped by the Elohist author (‘E’) of Wellhausen’s documentary hypothesis (Moberly 1995: 68–69).

⁴²⁹ E.g. Genesis 6:2, 24:67; Judges 21:23.

It is also only in Genesis 12 and Genesis 26 that we are told why Abraham and Isaac consider themselves to be in danger, which is because of their wives' beauty. In Genesis 20, on the other hand, there is no mention of Sarah's attractiveness. This omission could be accounted for by the fact that the reader has already encountered the narrative in Genesis 12, and therefore can assume Abimelech's motives to be the same as Pharaoh's. However this is also further reason to consider Genesis 20 a less detailed, secondary account of Genesis 12. Arguing for the priority of Genesis 12 on the basis of its grittier account, Gunkel notes that 'the fact that later times were more refined in such moral matters is also evident in other legends.'⁴³⁰

It is worth noting that in all three of these episodes the vulnerability of the ancestress's position in society is already established from the outset of the narrative, irrespective of her beauty. For example in Genesis 12, the Pharaoh has no qualms about taking the 'unmarried' Sarai for his wife, a decision that she herself has no say in.⁴³¹ The only protection that Sarah and Rebekah have is their husbands. However, both Abraham and Isaac are more concerned with their own safety than with safeguarding their wives.⁴³²

Furthermore, as Exum points out, 'by claiming that the beautiful woman is his (unmarried) sister, the patriarch guarantees that his wife *will* be taken.'⁴³³ The indignation displayed by the foreign rulers may even be the narrator's way of

⁴³⁰ Gunkel 1997: 223.

⁴³¹ See (Jacobs 2007: 80) and Exum (1993: 151).

⁴³² Gunn and Fewell 1993: 91.

⁴³³ Exum 1993: 156. For other biblical examples of men sacrificing the women under their protection, see Genesis 19:8 and Judges 19:22–27.

implying that if Abraham or Isaac had been honest, the women would not have been taken (Genesis 12: 18–19; 20:6–10; 26:10). Ironically, therefore, each foreign ruler ultimately acts with honour, suggesting that the danger which Abraham and Isaac fear is brought about by their own behaviour. In this way, the editors take a well-known trope—the threat of the foreign ruler to the beautiful young woman—and intentionally subvert it to demonstrate the unfaithfulness of Israel’s patriarchs to Yahweh’s command.

The vulnerability of the ancestress is further highlighted by her silence throughout each of the narratives. This silence contrasts starkly with Susanna’s protestations. The fact that Susanna is given a voice within the narrative not only allows the author to assure the reader of her piety, but also serves to heighten the sense of drama within the novella, as we are given an insight into both Susanna’s faith and her fears.

In Genesis, on the other hand, although the texts are narrative in style, they do not convey the same sense of melodrama as the later Greek-style novella. Instead the accounts are sparse, leaving the reader to wonder at the characters’ thoughts and motivations. Wenham suggests that ‘Sarai’s silence indicates her consent to her husband’s scheme.’⁴³⁴ This is quite an assumption to draw consent from her silence, particularly when her husband is risking her violation to save himself.

Rather than interpreting silence as consent, Fuchs takes the opposing view that ‘the wife’s silence indicates that she has neither power nor authority vis-à-vis

⁴³⁴ Wenham 1987: 288.

the men who contend for her ownership.’⁴³⁵ On this reading, Sarah’s silence symbolises her vulnerability and dependence on male protection, a protection that fails her. Ultimately, what the textual silence does reveal to us is that, unlike in Susanna, the editor’s concern is not to elucidate Sarah’s motives to the reader, but rather to focus on Abraham and the way his actions endanger Yahweh’s plans.

It could be argued that the reference in Susanna to the daughters of Israel who are intimate with men other than their husbands ‘through fear’ (1:57) might be aptly applied to the matriarch Sarah in this context. However, suggesting that Susanna’s purity is a foil to Sarah’s complicity is an unreasonable comparison, as their scenarios are incommensurate. For while Susanna may be willing to risk her own life, in these Genesis narratives it is the patriarch’s life that is supposedly at stake. Thus it could be argued that Sarah and Rebekah show courage by sacrificing their safety to protect their husbands.

In regard to the women’s physical appearance, these Genesis narratives take it for granted that in the pre-exilic culture of ancient Israel, women were visible to men outside of their immediate family circle. Unlike her apocryphal counterpart Susanna, who kept out of sight,⁴³⁶ in Genesis 12 Abraham anticipates the Egyptians having the opportunity to see Sarah and desire her.⁴³⁷ Otherwise, the logical solution would have been to disguise Sarah’s beauty through concealment.

⁴³⁵ Fuchs 2000: 133.

⁴³⁶ For more on Susanna’s modesty, see chapter five, page 245–247.

⁴³⁷ This is not to presume that Sarah goes unveiled, as there are numerous references to veil-wearing in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 24:65, 29:23–25, 38:14–15; Song of Songs 4:1,3; 5:7, 6:7; Isaiah 3:19, 47:2). Two examples of veil-wearing being used to cover one’s face can be found in Genesis 29:23–25 and 38:14–15, although in those instances the women are dressed either in wedding garments or in the

Considering the role of beauty in this narrative, Westermann states,

It is characteristic of this narrative that it speaks of the beauty of a woman as a link in a chain of events. The beauty is not the object of the story, but functional in its consequences for human relations.⁴³⁸

Westermann is correct in his observation that it is unusual for beauty to be the central theme of a narrative in the Hebrew Bible. It is, however, a significant contributing factor to the key events in the biblical narrative, often offered as the justification for—or catalyst to—human actions that have crucial bearing on the narrative history.

Thus Abraham's primary concern for his safety stems from his fear that the Egyptians will kill him on account of Sarah's beauty.⁴³⁹ As he says to her:

יִדְעֵתִי כִּי אִשָּׁה יִפְת־מְרָאָה אֶת

('I know that you are a woman who is beautiful in appearance.'
Genesis 12:11)

Nowell claims that Sarah's beauty is not just physical but also a beauty of character, 'since almost no one is described as beautiful in the Bible who is not also holy.'⁴⁴⁰ However, not only is this a questionable statement, but there is no indication within the text that anything other than Sarah's external beauty is referenced. Indeed, the

guise of a prostitute, and both with the intention to disguise themselves. However, in other biblical texts it seems that facial features are visible behind a veil (Song of Songs 4:1,3, 6:7), or perhaps that it was primarily a means of covering a woman's hair rather than her face (1 Corinthians 11:5–9).

⁴³⁸ Westermann 1985: 164.

⁴³⁹ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 91.

⁴⁴⁰ Nowell 1997: 79.

fact that Abraham specifically refers to her physical features is highlighted by the qualification that this is beauty of the appearance (מראה), a noun deriving from the verbal root ראה ('to see') and thus emphasising the visual nature of her beauty. Sarah's outstanding beauty is further drawn attention to in Genesis 12:14 as a characteristic that is 'seen': 'and the Egyptians saw that the woman was exceedingly beautiful' (ויראו המצרים את־האשה כי־יפה הוא מאד). In fact, so remarkable is Sarah's beauty that even though she is 65 years old, as Jacobs observes,

Her beauty is the operative element rather than her age ... One cannot escape the irony of the Egyptians clamouring after a woman of sixty-five years.⁴⁴¹

Similarly, Rebekah is described as טובת מראה ('good of appearance',⁴⁴² Genesis 26:7), another indication that outer beauty is the object of praise in these circumstances. The response of the Egyptians and Abimelech in Genesis 12 and 20 attests to the high value placed upon a woman's beauty in the ANE.

There is no doubt that being a woman in this context was a vulnerable position to be in regardless of one's appearance. However, given the attention that both Sarah and Rebekah receive on account of their beauty, one could argue that their physical appearance should be seen as a tool to gain social advancement, as it leaves them more likely to gain the attention of a powerful—and therefore prosperous—male. Assessing the response to Sarah, Jacobs claims that her beauty is a source of power:

⁴⁴¹ Jacobs 2007: 78.

⁴⁴² My translation.

Her power [is] inherent in her beauty and gender. Here is an instance where a woman's power is related to her physical appearance. She says and does nothing to draw them in, but simply by virtue of her beauty she has the power to compel them to act to secure her.⁴⁴³

The power Jacobs refers to is not the power to initiate or act independently, as Sarah and Rebekah are presented as voiceless, passive and socially vulnerable. Nevertheless, Jacobs maintains that while Sarah may not have the power to act, hers is the power 'of being desired', because her beauty 'compels action ... her presence is the catalyst for other persons' actions and plans.'⁴⁴⁴ If Jacobs is correct, then Sarah and Rebekah are comparable to the apocryphal women whose beauty is considered dangerous because of its power to compel a response from male viewers.

However, while there is an element of truth in Jacobs' observation, ultimately I consider the matriarchs' situation to be comparable to that of Susanna. As in the later book, there is no indication that either Sarah or Rebekah desire to 'compel' any kind of response. If the responses that their beauty invokes are neither desired nor controlled by these women, then it is hard to see in what sense their beauty can be considered to be a source of power.

On the contrary, it seems that beauty is a danger rather than a benefit to Sarah or Rebekah, as it draws the male gaze whether they desire it or not, leaving them vulnerable to the unwanted attention of a predatory male. Jacobs acknowledges the inherent paradox of a woman's beauty having the potential to be both a source of power and vulnerability when she affirms that 'these aspects of

⁴⁴³ Jacobs 2007: 78–79.

⁴⁴⁴ Jacobs 2007: 80.

[Sarah's] power are also her horror. She as woman and wife is in essence prostituted by her own husband for his benefit.⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, rather than advantaging a woman, in these accounts beauty is not only a danger to the women, but even makes their husbands fear for their lives.⁴⁴⁶

Unlike Genesis 6, however, in all three of these wife-sister narratives the women are relieved of any culpability. There is no sense in which they set out to seduce the foreign rulers; rather, they are the victims of a scenario orchestrated by Abraham and Isaac who fail to trust Yahweh (Genesis 12:18; 20: 9–10; 26:10).

On account of Yahweh's intervention, it might be argued that he alone perceives these women to be more than disposable possessions. Noting the emphasis of the narrator on the significance of Israelite lineage, Exum suggests that Yahweh is motivated not by concern for the women, but because they are the means to bring about the continuation of the genealogical line.⁴⁴⁷

However, there is a marked contrast between Abraham's willingness to give up his wife—suggesting that he views himself as the sole inheritor of God's promise to be a great nation—and Yahweh's perspective that Sarah is indispensable. Whether on the basis of their childbearing capacity or their inherent value as Hebrew women, or both, Yahweh considers these specific women irreplaceable, going to great lengths to ensure their protection even when their husbands have

⁴⁴⁵ Jacobs 2007: 80.

⁴⁴⁶ Westermann 1985: 164.

⁴⁴⁷ Exum 1993: 113.

failed to do so.⁴⁴⁸ As Gunn and Fewell argue, 'in God's point of view, Sarai is not expendable.'⁴⁴⁹

By including these narratives in Genesis, the texts shed light on an ancient Near Eastern worldview in which a woman was perceived as an object to possess, rather than a person worthy of consideration.⁴⁵⁰ From this perspective, the more beautiful she is, the more valuable a commodity she is, and therefore the more she is likely to be taken. Thus the wife-sister narratives highlight the paradoxical nature of beauty: that the feature which makes a woman most desirable in the eyes of a man is the same feature that renders her vulnerable to those in power over her.

In emphasising female beauty as a serious vulnerability both for the women and for their husbands, the redactor may be drawing on the early traditions of both a pre-exilic nomadic community under threat of extinction from outsiders, and a later exilic community living under the shadow of more powerful foreign rulers who threatened their social structures by taking Israelite women for themselves with ease. Note also, however, that although this appears to be the underlying trope, in each of these three narratives the husband's behaviour proves to be a greater threat to his wife than the foreign rulers are. In this way, the editor highlights both the unfaithfulness of Israel's patriarchs and, by contrast, Yahweh's continuing faithfulness to them.

However, in doing so, the editor also suggests that in believing a woman's beauty to be danger to himself, a husband's paranoia can inadvertently cause more

⁴⁴⁸ Genesis 12:17–18 and 20:3–7.

⁴⁴⁹ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 92.

⁴⁵⁰ Jacobs 2007: 79.

danger to the woman in question than she ever brought to him. Ironically, his fear of the dangerous power of her beauty is the catalyst for her endangerment. In this sense, these wife-sister sagas actually subtly undercut the prevalent perspective found within the later apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings, as they appear to caution against the same overly zealous attitude towards beauty that the later writers commend.

4.3.1.b. Genesis 34:1–31

In a continuation of the precedent established by the other Genesis beauty-texts, in Genesis 34 a woman is yet again endangered by the desire of a powerful, foreign male, in this instance Shechem son of Hamor, a regional prince (Genesis 34:2). But while a dramatic act of divine intervention ultimately preserves Sarah and Rebekah's status as matriarchs in the Israelite line, the same cannot be said of Dinah.

Gunn and Fewell highlight the importance of the introductory identification of biblical characters in the Hebrew Bible for imparting crucial narrative information. So they argue that by initially presenting Dinah as 'the daughter of Leah' (Genesis 34:1), the narrator 'establishes at the very beginning of her story that she belongs to the less favoured of Jacob's families, that she is daughter to the unloved wife.'⁴⁵¹ Gunn and Fewell suggest that such an introduction should be understood as an ominous beginning to the narrative, warning the reader that like the fate of her mother, Dinah's story will be an unhappy one.

⁴⁵¹ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 58.

While no specific description is given of Dinah's physical appearance, the immediacy of Shechem's response to her—on the basis of sight alone and without any other interaction between the two—strongly implies that he is drawn to her on account of her physical attractiveness: וירא אתה ... ויקח אתה וישכב אתה ('and he saw her ... and he took her and he lay with her', Genesis 34:2). Like the Pharaohs and Abimelech, the same sequence of seeing (ראה) and taking (לקח) occurs, although in this instance the more graphic description of lying with her (שכב) is also used. The swiftness of his actions and their intensity are emphasised by the terseness of the succession of verbs in Hebrew, suggesting that Shechem was instantly overwhelmed by the sight of Dinah.

The difficulty in interpreting this text is that there is a significant degree of ambiguity in the presentation of Dinah, to the extent that scholars are divided as to whether Dinah is the innocent victim of a rape or a willing participant alongside Shechem. If the former is the case, then this text continues the trend of presenting female beauty as a source of vulnerability in the book of Genesis. However, if the latter interpretation is correct, then this passage would belong with Genesis 6:1–4 and the warnings of the apocryphal writings as a potential example of a woman using her beauty to win over a more powerful man.

Part of the challenge in determining between these two interpretations is that the narrative is sparse in its description of Dinah. Dinah's silence could be understood as a narrative tool to signify more poignantly than words could just how vulnerable Dinah is. For even if she cries out, then there is no one to hear her.

On the other hand, however, her silence could be taken as evidence of her culpability, as unlike the legal example given in Deuteronomy 22:27 of the rape of a female in the open country, there is no indication that Dinah cried out in protest. There is certainly a stark contrast between the portrayal of Dinah and the vocal outcry of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, whose vigorous protestations emphasise her status as a victim. Trying to analyse Dinah's silence is a futile exercise in speculation.⁴⁵²

More concretely, those who argue for Dinah's culpability focus on her decision to 'go out' (וַתֵּצֵא 'and she went out' (Genesis 34:1)) from the shelter of her family's protection, suggesting she brought the consequences on herself. Drawing parallels with her mother Leah, who 'goes out' to entice Jacob (וַתֵּצֵא (Genesis 30:16)), Wenham suggests Dinah is copying her example:

The terms used may suggest Dinah's imprudence, if not impropriety ... Dinah was at least sailing close to the wind!⁴⁵³

In similar language, von Rad claims that Dinah 'loosened the stone that became a landslide.'⁴⁵⁴ Both commentators imply that Dinah is to blame for deliberately placing herself in a vulnerable position. Graetz draws parallels between Dinah's behaviour and the indictment of Ben Sira against his daughter, noting that if he had 'presumed to give advice' to Dinah's father, he would have prescribed

⁴⁵² Fuchs 1993: 38.

⁴⁵³ Wenham 1994: 317. See also Deen, who claims that 'Dinah went out as unprotected as a common harlot' (1960: 38).

⁴⁵⁴ Von Rad 1972: 331.

confinement on the basis that ‘a daughter who deliberately exposes her beauty is guilty of seductive behavior.’⁴⁵⁵

More compelling, however, is Bechtel’s contention that in opening with this bold statement, the author presents Dinah as ‘both a figure who “goes forth” and crosses her group boundaries and a marginal figure who engages in sexual activity outside the group.’⁴⁵⁶ Bechtel argues that Dinah’s behaviour is a precursor to further acts of violating the honour and shame culture of her society.

Bechtel makes a strong case that the action *ויענה* should not be translated ‘and he raped/forced her’. Rather, Bechtel argues that in the *qal* *ענה* means ‘to humble’ or ‘put down’, and in the *piel* ‘to humiliate intensely.’⁴⁵⁷ Comparing the usage of the *piel* form of the verb in other rape accounts in the Hebrew Bible, Bechtel makes a case for the fact that in each of these other instances ‘humiliate’ is a better translation than ‘rape’, with the exception of 2 Samuel 13:14 where the sequence of events indicate that in this instance *ענה* refers to a physical ‘pressing down’ of Tamar by Amnon before he rapes her. Most convincingly, Bechtel points out that in Deuteronomy 22 when the female is consenting, the verb *ענה* is used to imply that she has nevertheless been humiliated by crossing societal boundaries. However in the one instance where it is an unambiguous act of rape (Deuteronomy 22:25–27), *ענה* is not used.⁴⁵⁸ Van Wolde draws a similar conclusion, asserting on the basis of a comprehensive biblical analysis of the term that ‘*innâ* is an evaluative

⁴⁵⁵ Graetz 1997: 311.

⁴⁵⁶ Bechtel 1994: 32.

⁴⁵⁷ Bechtel 1994: 24.

⁴⁵⁸ Bechtel 1994: 25–28.

term used in a judicial context which marks a debasement of the social status of a woman',⁴⁵⁹ but it does not denote rape.

On Bechtel and van Wolde's interpretations, ויקח אתה וישכב אתה ויענה is best translated 'and he took her and he lay with her and he humiliated/debased her' (Genesis 34:2). Bechtel argues that such a reading corresponds better with the statement that Shechem loved Dinah (34:3). As she explains, 'sociological studies reveal that rapists feel hostility and hatred toward their victims, not love.'⁴⁶⁰

While these arguments are compelling, I nevertheless consider it more likely that this narrative presents Dinah as a victim than as a willing participant in an affair with Shechem. For Dinah's actions of going out parallel other Genesis texts, demonstrating that it was not uncommon for biblical heroines not only to be visible to strangers in public,⁴⁶¹ but even to converse with them without a male guardian present.⁴⁶² Nor do Dinah's family condemn her behaviour, or at any point suggest that she has acted like a 'common harlot' by going out to meet the women of the land.

Rather, this text reveals the relatively unrestricted freedom of movement for these early Israelite women compared to their later apocryphal counterparts like Susanna. Moreover, it is clearly stated that Dinah was going out to visit women (Genesis 34:1) rather than to make an assignation with a foreign man.

⁴⁵⁹ Van Wolde 2002: 537; Wyatt 1990: 433–458; Jacobs 2007: 31.

⁴⁶⁰ Bechtel 1994: 29.

⁴⁶¹ E.g. Genesis 12:11–20, 20:1–18, 26:7–11.

⁴⁶² Genesis 24:11; Genesis 29:9–11.

As for the account of Dinah's interaction with Shechem, I agree with Bechtel and van Wolde's interpretation of ויענה ('and he humiliated her'). Nonetheless, when taken as a whole, the narrator still initially presents Shechem as an aggressor rather than a lover.

For example, the quick succession of active verbs without pause instantly creates the impression of speed and aggression: ויקח אתה וישכב אתה ויענה (Genesis 34:2). Scholz identifies this type of combination of verbs as 'a characteristic feature of Semitic languages,' a feature which in this passage 'describes the rapid-fire action of the rape.'⁴⁶³ Shechem is the subject of these actions with Dinah as the object, a reality that is emphasised by the repetition of אתה placed between each verb to accentuate the fact that Dinah is a passive recipient. Rather than involving her willing participation, these actions are done 'to her'.

It is true that the verb לקח ('to take') does not necessarily imply violence, as it is often used to describe the taking of a wife without any hint of force.⁴⁶⁴ Most significant, however, is the fact that instead of שכב taking its usual form, וישכב עמה ('and he lay with her', e.g. 2 Samuel 11:4), in this case the Hebrew שכב takes the form of a transitive verb without the qualification עמה ('with her'), and therefore reads וישכב אתה ('and he laid her', Genesis 34:2).

This grammatical shift makes Dinah the direct object of the verb, leading Sternberg to conclude that the narrator 'reduces the victim to a mere object',

⁴⁶³ Scholz 1993: 165.

⁴⁶⁴ Compare with Genesis 24:67.

explicitly revealing that this was not a consensual act on Dinah's part. Scholz concurs with this assessment, asserting that 'the marker indicates that Shechem acted without regard for Dinah. ... Dinah does not consent. No doubt, "Shechem laid her".'⁴⁶⁵ In a similar vein, Sternberg suggests the translation 'he abused her' to replace 'and he laid with her', which could give the impression that Dinah consented.⁴⁶⁶

According to this interpretation, ויקח אתה וישכב אתה ויענה (Genesis 34:2) should read: 'and he took her and he abused her and he debased her'. Sternberg argues that the following sentence, 'and his soul was drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob; he loved the girl, and spoke tenderly to her' (Genesis 34:3) is deliberately positioned to show up Shechem's latter actions as hollow in light of his prior acts of violence toward Dinah. Sternberg suggests that if the author wanted to present Shechem's act as one of tenderness, he could easily have re-ordered the verbs such that Shechem saw Dinah's beauty, fell in love with her, and then lay with her.⁴⁶⁷

As for the response of Dinah's family, it is difficult to determine from their behaviour whether Dinah was raped or not. On the one hand, Jacob's willingness to negotiate a marriage contract may imply that his daughter was not violated. On the other hand, Jacob's behaviour here may foreshadow that of David, who fails to provide justice for his daughter Tamar by punishing her rapist, his son Amnon (2 Samuel 13). The result of Jacob's failure to act would explain Dinah's brothers' violent response to avenge her dishonour. In an attempt to justify the massacre that

⁴⁶⁵ Scholz 1993: 166.

⁴⁶⁶ Sternberg 1985: 446.

⁴⁶⁷ Sternberg 1985: 447.

they commit, the brothers ask, 'Should our sister be treated like a whore?' (Genesis 34:31). Wenham suggests that such a question is an implicit criticism not only of Shechem but of their father. As Wenham explains, "To do nothing about the rape and then to be willing to accept gifts after the event is to act like a pimp."⁴⁶⁸

Therefore although a degree of ambiguity remains, in weighing up the two divergent interpretations I consider it more likely that Dinah is a victim rather than a culprit, as this interpretation better accounts for the presentation of Shechem's actions in Genesis 34:2-3 as well as the subsequent events of the narrative in response to her abuse.

If I am correct, then the narrator has placed Genesis 34 firmly within the dominant beauty tradition of the book of Genesis, presenting Dinah as another female whose good looks draw unwanted male attention and result in danger for the female protagonist. The narrator also heightens the threat of foreign powers within the book, as in this case Dinah does not escape unscathed like her female ancestors.

In this way, the narrator yet again demonstrates the vulnerable position of a beautiful Hebrew women. Like the matriarchs before her, Dinah's vulnerability is further heightened by the fact that she has no recourse to gain justice for herself, but is dependent upon the action of her male relatives.

4.3.1.c. Genesis 39:4-20

⁴⁶⁸ Wenham 1994: 317. There is a strong parallel with the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13).

Like the accounts of David's household,⁴⁶⁹ the narrative of the beautiful Joseph under threat offers a valuable comparison with the other Genesis beauty-texts both in its points of convergence and difference. Consistent with Augustin's argument that all male beauty in the Hebrew Bible occurs in a courtly context, Joseph becomes a prominent member of Pharaoh's court, subject only to the ruler himself.

Moreover, like the men of David's household, we see a similar pattern in that once again a Hebrew male is humbled on account of his pride. In the case of Joseph, his humbling results in slavery. Unlike in 1 and 2 Samuel, however, Joseph's downfall is not permanent. There is also a marked difference in the presentation of Joseph from that of David's household. For not only is Joseph's beauty introduced to the reader after he has been humbled, rather than before, but ultimately Joseph's beauty places him in a position of greater vulnerability rather than in a position of power.

Joseph's beauty is described in the same terms as his mother Rachel: יִהְיֶה יוֹסֵף יָפֶה וְיִהְיֶה מְרֻאָה (Genesis 39:6, 'and it happened that Joseph was beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance'). The repetition of יָפֶה to describe both Joseph's figure and his appearance emphasises just how attractive he is considered to be. Only Rachel is described in the same elevated terms (cf. Genesis 29:17), so that Joseph is shown to have inherited his mother's beauty. In light of the scholarly contention that the Joseph story-cycle existed as its own independent tradition, a redactor has woven the sources together to present an account that not only

⁴⁶⁹ 1 Samuel 16:7–13; 2 Samuel 14: 25–26; 1 Kings 1:5–6.

complements the other beauty-texts of Genesis, but one that directly links Joseph to Rachel through identical descriptions of their good looks.⁴⁷⁰

Ironically, despite the clear textual parallel between Joseph and Rachel's beauty, the second-century CE *T. Joseph* re-interprets Genesis 39 to claim that Joseph takes after his father Jacob:

And [God] also gave me mature beauty, more than those of mature beauty in Israel; he preserved me until old age with strength and beauty. In every way I was like Jacob ... (*T. Joseph* 18:4)⁴⁷¹

Such an interpretation may imply that as a male hero, Joseph's beauty exceeds that of his mother, whose own depiction within the biblical narrative is more ambiguous. Therefore, the author of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* may have sought to deliberately distance Joseph from Rachel's legacy by emphasising his similarity to Jacob.

The author of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* also draws a direct link between Joseph's appearance and his virtuous character: 'Because nothing evil resided in Joseph, he was attractive in appearance and handsome to behold, for the face evidences any troubling of the spirit' (*The Testament of Simeon*, 5:1). In chapter two I demonstrated how the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* associate a woman's beauty with seduction and wickedness. The author's negative attitude towards women is only emphasized, therefore, by his contrasting depiction of Joseph as both beautiful and good. Thus it appears that the pseudepigraphal writer

⁴⁷⁰ For more on the independent Joseph tradition, see chapter two, page 95.

⁴⁷¹ Unless stated otherwise, I use C. Burchard's English translation of *Joseph and Aseneth* (Charlesworth 1985: 177-247).

makes a distinction between male beauty and female beauty, such that while a man's beauty is representative of his pure character, the opposite holds true for women.⁴⁷²

Commenting on Genesis 39:6, Westermann observes that physical descriptions of biblical protagonists occur frequently in the Hebrew Bible because 'the beauty of a person in the Old Testament was regarded primarily as something of significance in interpersonal living.'⁴⁷³ Westermann's statement is demonstrably true, given the number of instances in which an individual is pursued on account of their beauty.

As I noted in chapter two, it is also clear that Joseph's beauty is what captures the interest of Potiphar's wife's (Genesis 39:7). Building on her infatuation with Joseph, in the first-century BCE Jewish novella *Joseph and Aseneth* the reputation of Joseph's beauty is so extraordinary that not only Potiphar's wife but 'many of the wives and daughters of the Egyptians suffered much, after seeing Joseph, because he was so handsome; and they would send emissaries to him with gold and silver and valuable gifts.'⁴⁷⁴

Among the biblical and apocryphal accounts, the Joseph story is unique in presenting a man as a victim on account of his beauty. The closest parallel is found in the account of Samson and Delilah in Judges 16, where Samson is seduced on account of his strength.⁴⁷⁵ However, the key difference between the plight of beautiful vulnerable women on the one hand, and Joseph on the other, is that a

⁴⁷² *T. Reuben* 5:1–6.

⁴⁷³ Westermann 1987: 64.

⁴⁷⁴ *Joseph and Aseneth* 7:4.

⁴⁷⁵ See chapter two, 98–102.

woman—on account of her naturally inferior physical strength—cannot ‘force’ a man. It is true that the deception of Potiphar’s wife leads to Joseph’s unjust imprisonment, but he cannot be, and he is not, physically violated in the same way that biblical women (e.g. Dinah) are in comparable situations.⁴⁷⁶

It is also striking that while the beautiful women of Genesis are voiceless, Joseph’s protestations are recounted at great length, presenting his piety in stark contrast to his mistress’s lascivious intent. In this way, Joseph bears a far greater resemblance to Tamar in 2 Samuel 13, who likewise loudly protests against her rape. In this way, the Genesis editors leave no room for accusation over Joseph’s part in the seduction. It may simply be the case that, as a later composition in the form of a novella, a greater level of personal description is ascribed to Joseph than is typically found in the sparser narratives of Genesis.

However, it does seem noteworthy that when a foreign female seductress attempts to force an Israelite male to sexual intercourse, his piety is staunchly defended. As a result, no commentators suggest that Joseph deliberately dressed provocatively, or sought to make himself attractive in order to gain the eye of Potiphar’s wife, or put himself in her path— all of which are accusations that are frequently levelled at other female biblical protagonists (e.g. the daughters of men, Dinah, Bathsheba).

Bach observes how, as the Joseph narrative is received and re-interpreted in Jewish apocryphal literature and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*,

⁴⁷⁶ E.g. Genesis 12:19; 34:2–3; Judges 19:25; 2 Samuel 13. The exception to this is Genesis 19:30–36, where Lot’s daughters seduce Lot. However, this is not an act they accomplish through physical coercion, but by incapacitating Lot with alcohol.

increasingly it is Joseph's pious resistance to sexual temptation that becomes the primary focus of the narrative. As Bach states,

A second aspect of Joseph's character that became important during the postbiblical period ... was his God-assisted ability to hold the line against sexual temptation. In each retelling of Joseph's encounter with a woman the key issue is adultery, the moral struggle between the good (male) and the wicked (female), between the self (Jewish hero) and the other (foreign/Gentile woman).⁴⁷⁷

In this way, Joseph becomes the model of Jewish male resilience in the face of female temptation. The similarities between the Joseph account and the book of Susanna are sufficient to suggest that the author of Susanna was influenced by Genesis 39. For example, not only do both characters face sexual harassment, but in their response they each refuse to sin against God:

ἀμαρτεῖν ἐνώπιον κυρίου
(‘to sin before the Lord’, Susanna 1:23, TH and OG)

πῶς ποιήσω τὸ ῥῆμα τὸ πονηρὸν τοῦτο καὶ ἀμαρτήσομαι ἐναντίον
τοῦ θεοῦ
(‘How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against
God?’, Genesis 39:9, LXX)

Likewise, both protagonists are lusted after each day (Genesis 39:10; Susanna 1:12, TH), although only Joseph has to resist his admirer on a daily basis, as Susanna is unaware that she is being watched. Joseph and Susanna each endure false allegations, and both Joseph (Genesis 39:18) and the imaginary young man in the elders' testimony flee away (Susanna 1:39). They each also suffer for their refusal, Susanna

⁴⁷⁷ Bach 1993: 324; Kugel 1990: 22.

by enduring a public trial and the risk of death, and Joseph through years of incarceration and the possibility of death. Considering these similarities, Loader suggests that the author of Susanna deliberately drew on the Joseph narrative, because 'the parallels serve to enhance Susanna's status by association with the famed Joseph.'⁴⁷⁸

In one sense, the account of Joseph and Potiphar's wife follows the thread of the other Genesis beauty-texts, as well as Susanna, by once again highlighting the way that beauty is a quality that can seriously endanger those who possess it.

Comparing this narrative with the others, however, also reveals that possessing beauty victimises women to a far greater degree than it can be said to render men vulnerable. Part of this is due to the fact that while the events of Genesis 39 are highly irregular, the threefold repetition of the 'endangering the ancestress' narrative signifies that the danger of a powerful foreign male to a beautiful female was perceived to be a far more common threat. Genesis 39 also highlights how a man can 'see and take' a woman in a way that a woman cannot 'take' a man. Potiphar's wife attempts to seduce Joseph, but as a male, Joseph has a level of control over what is done to his body in a way that a female does not.

Examining Joseph's story also brings to a light a notable parallel with the motif that emerged in chapter three: the threat of the foreign seductress, as evidenced here in Genesis 39. In chapter three I observed how, with the exception of Vashti, foreign women are never referred to as beautiful in the Hebrew Bible, even in the case of Ruth. Continuing in that vein, it is fascinating that while seductive

⁴⁷⁸ Loader 2011: 231.

female foreigners are seen as the greatest danger to Israelite men, seductive male foreigners are presented as the biggest threat to beautiful Israelite women.

In every one of these examples in Genesis, the danger to an attractive woman comes not from an Israelite male but a foreign one. The picture that the redactor allows to emerge, therefore, is of a group of people living in an extremely uncertain times, during which annihilation or assimilation by a foreign power was a perpetual threat. These fears overflow into the beauty-texts of Genesis.

This observation makes the contrast between these Genesis texts and the book of Susanna seem quite stark, highlighting just how scandalous it is that the danger in that apocryphal text to the pure Israelite bride comes not from a foreign ruler, but from the leaders of her own people.

4.3.1.d. Genesis 29:9–35

In many ways, the account of Jacob, Rachel and Leah does not fit with the other beauty-texts of Genesis which present beauty as the cause of vulnerability. This is partly because the text depicts the relationship between a husband and his wives, rather than the endangering of a beautiful matriarch or patriarch at the hands of a foreign power.

On the other hand, however, in Genesis 29 the motif of beauty and vulnerability comes to the fore, albeit in a unique way. For in this example, the narrator reveals how one woman can be made vulnerable by the beauty of another woman. One could perhaps make a case that this is also an example of 'beauty as a

threat'. However in this instance the narrator's concern is not for the loss of male autonomy, but rather the harm that two rival women can cause one another.

Although the details of the narrative are sparse, three reasons are given to account for Jacob's preference of Rachel over Leah. Firstly, Jacob meets Rachel before Leah. Just as Jacob's mother Rebekah is introduced at a well (Genesis 24), so too Jacob meets Rachel at a well, revealing to the reader the potential significance of this encounter. Yet again, note that Rachel waters the sheep at a public well rather than remaining within her family compound, an observation that highlights the freedom of movement the editor considered women to have had in agricultural, pre-exilic Israelite culture.

Secondly, the reader is informed that Rachel is the younger (קטנה) can refer to her smaller stature as well as her age, Genesis 29:21) daughter. It is on account of Leah's status as the older sister that Laban justifies his deception in marrying her to Jacob first (Genesis 29:20). However, the fact that Laban resorts to such deceit may suggest that he is having trouble arranging a suitable match for Leah, perhaps because she is getting past the ideal age for marrying. We know that youth was seen to be an advantage in a wife, as other texts describe a desirable prospective spouse as being beautiful, a virgin, and a young woman.⁴⁷⁹

The fact that Laban marries two daughters to the same man highlights the extremely vulnerable position of Rachel and Leah in their ANE social context. Leah is vulnerable without a husband; however, she also becomes vulnerable in her husband's home. The narrative makes clear that neither would have chosen to share

⁴⁷⁹ For example, see Genesis 24:16 and Esther 2:2–3.

Jacob as a spouse, and consequently their enforced marriage causes a bitter rivalry. However, neither one of them is given any choice; rather, their lives are dictated by the whim of their father.

Thirdly, the primary reason that accounts for Jacob's love of Rachel rather than Leah is that the younger sister is the more beautiful of the two. Genesis 29:17 states that

ועיני לאה רכות ורחל היתה יפת־תאר ויפת מראה:
(‘And Leah’s eyes were weak but Rachel was beautiful in form
and beautiful in appearance.’)

There has been some debate over whether רכות (feminine form of the adjective רך) should be interpreted as a compliment or a criticism. The NRSV, for example, translates רך as ‘lovely’. However, it seems more probable that the narrative is referring to her eyes as delicate or tender in some way, implying that she has a visual impairment of some sort.

I suggest this primarily because the text sets up a contrast between Leah and Rachel in order to account for Jacob's preference of the latter. In this context, therefore, it would make more sense to emphasise the attributes of one sister and the detriments of the other, rather than praising both.

Furthermore, if a compliment were intended, why use a non-standard, ambiguous description, rather than simply calling her eyes beautiful as is the case in other texts?⁴⁸⁰ I noted elsewhere that in Hebrew literature, compliments regarding a woman's beauty often centre on her eyes, and cosmetics were worn to draw

⁴⁸⁰ 1 Samuel 16:12.

attention to the eyes.⁴⁸¹ For example, on all three occasions in the Hebrew Bible where the application of cosmetics is described, reference is made to a woman painting her eyes with kohl.⁴⁸² As Gunkel observes, 'the ancient Hebrew loves maidens with especially bright eyes. Dull eyes are a severe beauty blemish.'⁴⁸³ Therefore, to highlight the weakness in Leah's eyes would be a clear way of stating that she was not conventionally beautiful in the way Israelite men found desirable.

Nowhere in the Hebrew Bible is anyone referred to as ugly, only ever as beautiful.⁴⁸⁴ So if a critique of Leah is intended here, this would be the closest the text comes to suggesting that someone is unattractive. In this instance, it is likely on account of a visual impairment of some sort.⁴⁸⁵ As Augustin notes, 'Die Schönheitsaussage Rahels ist allgemein gehalten, sie wird aber mit den matten Augen Leas kontrastiert.'⁴⁸⁶

Unlike Leah, much is made of Rachel's notable good looks. She is described as beautiful (יפה) twice, once in reference to her form or figure (תאר), and once in regard to her general appearance (מראה).⁴⁸⁷ In emphasising her beauty from a variety of perspectives, Wenham notes that 'Leah was outshone by her sister in various ways.'⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸¹ Compare with Song of Songs 1:15, 6:5; 2 Kings 9:30; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40.

⁴⁸² 2 Kings 9:30; Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 23:40 See also Trenchard (1982: 117).

⁴⁸³ Gunkel 1997: 320.

⁴⁸⁴ For more on this subject, see Olyan (2008: 19–20).

⁴⁸⁵ Olyan 2008: 17.

⁴⁸⁶ Augustin 1983: 73.

⁴⁸⁷ Joseph is described in identical terms.

⁴⁸⁸ Wenham 1994: 235.

This direct contrast between Leah and Rachel in age and beauty serves as the primary explanation for why Jacob falls in love with Rachel instead of Leah. If there were other reasons, we are not privy to them. Considering the lack of emphasis on Rachel's character, Genesis 29 could be understood to affirm the importance of beauty in a prospective wife regardless of her other attributes. It could even be regarded as a celebration of beauty as a positive trait and as a perfectly legitimate reason for loving one woman instead of another. It certainly gives Rachel the advantage over Leah. The text makes it clear that Jacob's feelings for Rachel are not flighty. Indeed, he loves her strongly enough that spending seven years working for her hand in marriage feels like but a few days of labour (Genesis 29:20). As a result, Leah is placed in a very vulnerable position, as she becomes a neglected wife who cannot compete with Rachel's beauty to gain her husband's affection.

By highlighting Leah's vulnerability, the text evidences a subtle critique of Jacob's favouring of Rachel on account of her beauty. For while the text may show the advantage that one woman's beauty gives her over another, it also depicts the frustration and pain that such favouritism causes the woman who is overlooked. As Brenner notes of Rachel and Leah: 'neither one is satisfied with her lot ... the two sisters are forever locked in combat.'⁴⁸⁹

This story stands alone in the Hebrew Bible for the way that it shows how the beauty of one woman can lead to the oversight and victimisation of another. As Genesis 29:30 notes, 'Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.' In this way, the narrative looks beyond the male protagonist's response to female beauty and offers us an

⁴⁸⁹ Brenner 1985: 93–94.

insight into the hidden domestic world of women, where one woman's physical advantage can be another's disadvantage.

However, this text also reveals something more significant, which is that God judges this matter differently from Jacob. For although Jacob prefers the younger, second wife over the elder, first wife, God balances the scales by giving Leah children while Rachel initially experiences barrenness. As Genesis 29:31 notes, 'when the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.'⁴⁹⁰

The events of this narrative stand in opposition to McCarter's claim that good looks are 'to be interpreted as a physical symptom of special divine favour'.⁴⁹¹ On the contrary, in this text the overriding implication is that while female beauty may win a woman favour in a man's eyes, God does not prefer those who are physically attractive. Instead, he acts to make sure that the wife disregarded by her husband is honoured.

The story acts as a cautionary tale on a number of levels. It demonstrates to the reader the frustrations of polygamous marriage in general and the marrying of two sisters in particular.⁴⁹² The narrative also offers a unique insight into the way that female beauty not only makes a woman herself vulnerable, but can also render another woman vulnerable. And most importantly, while men may distinguish between women on the basis of their external appearance, this account parallels the

⁴⁹⁰ NRSV.

⁴⁹¹ McCarter 1995: 173.

⁴⁹² This was prohibited in Israelite law (Leviticus 18:18).

narratives and prophetic writings of chapter three by emphasising that God sees and values women from a different perspective.

4.3.1.e. Summary

Considered as a whole, the overriding beauty motif that emerges in the book of Genesis is one that acts as a cautionary tale concerning humanity's warped perceptions when it comes to physical beauty. Over the course of the book, the theme of beauty develops from a man and a woman standing before one another naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25), into a power play where beautiful women become commodities, and powerful men are intent on possessing them. Thus, as was demonstrated in the preceding chapter, what was given as a gift ultimately becomes more of a curse.

However, unlike the literature of the later era, the author does not recommend locking up daughters or wives and keeping them in seclusion as the solution to men's over-eagerness to take possession of women for their beauty. Rather, the author appears to have taken for granted that women could be allowed a significant freedom of movement, and yet still be trusted to maintain their purity. Contrasting the practices of the two divergent eras, Leonie Archer comments, 'Young women in the Old Testament seem to have moved about freely and still were able to declare that they "had not known man".'⁴⁹³

The relative freedom granted to women in these narratives is a testament to the fact that in the book of Genesis condemnation is not heaped on the female

⁴⁹³ Archer 1990: 113.

protagonists. In contrast to the frequent finger-pointing found in the literature of the intertestamental era, there is no sense in which women are blamed for deliberately leading men astray or wielding their beauty like a weapon.

On the contrary, it is largely the foreign male protagonists who are depicted as grasping after beauty which is forbidden to them, and the women who are presented as the passive party, often as victims let down by the very men who should have protected them.

In contrast to the apocryphal literature, therefore, I agree with Westermann that 'Genesis is remarkably even-handed in describing the failings and the virtues of both sexes.'⁴⁹⁴ Throughout the narrative, the editor of the Genesis beauty-texts does not set out to lay the blame for male shortcomings on women, but rather to emphasise the repeated failures of Yahweh's patriarchs in particular, and to highlight the sinfulness of humanity in general.

4.3.2. The Book of 2 Samuel

Although there is a strong coherence in the beauty motif of Genesis, there is even greater thematic unity across the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. In chapter three, I argued that the notable development of a consistent and substantial beauty motif throughout the Saul and Davidic narratives points towards an intentional cultivation of this theme by those who crafted the tradition into its final form.

The primary motif that emerges from a study of beauty amongst the *men* of David's household is a caution against vanity coupled with the subversive theme

⁴⁹⁴ Westermann 1987: 378.

that while humanity judges by appearance, God judges by the heart. This male-beauty motif serves as a useful comparison to the depiction of female beauty in David's household. At first glance, these themes might seem divergent, given that the male beauty texts focus on vanity while the female beauty narratives emphasise the vulnerability of beautiful women. It is certainly noteworthy that two such varied beauty motifs run parallel within the same material, and more importantly, that they are divided along gender lines.

However in another sense, these two motifs actually cohere succinctly. For just as the text cautions the male reader against placing too much emphasis on his own beauty, here it also warns the male reader against placing too much emphasis on a woman's beauty. In either case, therefore, the text demonstrates how an overemphasis on human beauty—whether in oneself or in another—can lead to disastrous consequences.

What is unique about 2 Samuel is that in this instance, the danger to a beautiful woman comes not from outside of the community but rather from *within* the Israelite community itself. Even more insidious than that, these beautiful women find themselves taken advantage of and exploited by the very men who ought to safeguard them, because the threat comes from within the royal household of David (2 Samuel 11–12), and even from within their own family (2 Samuel 13).

There are five women in David's household who are noted for their beauty—Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar, Tamar and Abishag. I consider Abigail in chapter five, as she is presented in a distinctive fashion as compared with these other four. The difference between these women can be accounted for by the fact that David

encounters Abigail during his rise to power (HDR), whereas the latter four women are considered to be part of an extended 'Succession Narrative' (SN) that presents David later in life and in a less positive light than earlier accounts. In this instance, however, it is the beauty of the women of the household that I consider.

One of the chief arguments for the unity of the SN is the way in which continuous themes run throughout this court history (2 Samuel 9–1 Kings 2).⁴⁹⁵ Arguing for a strong wisdom element within this text, Whybray identifies the primary unifying motif as the 'psychological stuff of the family history of David', by which he means

this theme of a man forced throughout his remaining years to witness in his own family the effects of that same violence and lust of which he himself has been guilty[.]⁴⁹⁶

The didactic aspect of the text is quite apparent, as David reaps the results of his behaviour in a way designed to show that immoral living will have negative consequences.

Along similar lines, Bailey contends that the motif of 'sex' is the 'major organising, or unifying, theme of the work.'⁴⁹⁷ Likewise, Blenkinsopp considers sexual sin resulting in death as the primary motif of 2 Samuel 9–20, focusing specifically on the 'woman who brings death.'⁴⁹⁸ Fokkelman observes a similar

⁴⁹⁵ For more discussion on delineating the beginning and end of the SN, see Anderson (1989: xxxii).

⁴⁹⁶ Whybray 1968: 24.

⁴⁹⁷ Bailey 1990: 17.

⁴⁹⁸ Blenkinsopp 1966: 48.

pattern, noting the way that 'David four times loses a son through a violent death following and elicited by the unjustified sexual possession of a woman'.⁴⁹⁹

Bound up within this broader motif of sex and destruction is the concept of female beauty. Blenkinsopp's designation of the 'woman who brings death' is a highly critical depiction of the women in 2 Samuel. Moreover if this interpretation is correct, then it significantly undermines my own argument. For if this is the primary motif of 2 Samuel, then it is one that presents beautiful women as a destructive force against male power, rather than as victims of that power.

The question is, therefore, whether this position is a fair characterisation of the narrative. Are these women presented as harbingers of death? My own contention is that in the SN the opposite proves true, and that by their misuse of power and their misguided desire to possess a woman's beauty, it is actually the men who bring death to her.⁵⁰⁰

David's granddaughter Tamar is only mentioned once in 2 Samuel 14:27, where she is introduced as Absalom's 'daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a beautiful woman.' Although Tamar barely features in the narrative, her brief appearance in this context is hardly reassuring. Returning to Gunn and Fewell's observation about the significance of introductions within the Hebrew Bible, three impressions stand out about Tamar.

Firstly, she is Absalom's daughter, which does not bode well for her given his subsequent fate. Secondly, she is named after her aunt Tamar, who in the preceding

⁴⁹⁹ Fokkeman 1981: 413. Also see Bailey (1990: 18).

⁵⁰⁰ Van Seters suggests that a better classification of the narrative would be 'love or passion for a woman resulting in death' (Van Seters 1987: 122).

chapter suffers a violent rape on account of her beauty. Thirdly, the younger Tamar is presented as *אשה יפת מראה* ('a woman of beautiful appearance', 2 Samuel 14:27). While this reference to her beauty might seem flattering, in the context of 2 Samuel where every beautiful woman suffers for her beauty, the description reads more like a warning. In the words of Gunn and Fewell,

The comment that she was a beautiful woman (like her desolate namesake aunt) sets an ominous tone in a family where women are 'taken' for their beauty.⁵⁰¹

Like Tamar, Abishag plays a minor role in the narrative (1 Kings 1:3–4). Abishag shares the three qualities of the archetypal Hebrew bride: she is youthful (*נערה* 'a young woman'), a virgin (*בתולה*), and exceedingly beautiful (*מאד יפה*). It is likely that deliberate parallels were drawn between the post-exilic book of Esther and this earlier narrative concerning Abishag, because like her better-known counterpart, Abishag is brought to a king's palace as the result of a national search for a beautiful woman. The fact that Abishag's beauty gains her status is a reminder of 1 Esdras 4:29 and the supposed power of Apame, the king's concubine, over her sovereign. In contrast to Esther, however, Abishag is never given the opportunity to play a substantial role in the biblical narrative. Instead, she finds herself in the precarious position of a political pawn between Solomon and Adonijah. This is not because she herself has any power to wield, but rather that Adonijah believes if he possesses her, he will symbolically be a step closer to gaining possession of his father's throne.

⁵⁰¹ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 57.

In the context of the SN, these events help account for why Solomon alone qualified for the throne. Most significantly, here we encounter another of David's sons who does not learn from either his father or his brothers' failed ambitions, and thus meets his end by attempting to take advantage of a beautiful woman in order to further his ambitions.

4.3.2.a. 2 Samuel 11–12

The most problematic text within the SN on the subject of female beauty is 2 Samuel 11–12. Although these events are the catalyst for the consequences that follow after, many scholars depart from Rost in considering 2 Samuel chapters 10–12 as separate from the original succession narrative on the basis of style and the author's remarkably condemnatory presentation of David.⁵⁰² Regardless of its origins, however, this account now stands as the crux of the narrative, which McCarter describes as 'the contribution of a writer who interpreted the disastrous events of chap 13–20 in reference to David's behaviour towards Bathsheba and Uriah.'⁵⁰³

There is an irony in the fact that although—as I argued in chapter three—David himself was chosen on the basis of Yahweh's perceptions rather than the ideological beauty values of his culture, he himself fails to see as the Lord sees.

Unlike his son Absalom, however, vanity is not David's problem. Rather, it is his fixation on another woman's beauty. Referring to the way in which certain biblical characters are described as beautiful, Gunn and Fewell suggest that 'as far as

⁵⁰² McCarter 1984: 298; Anderson 1989: 166; Gressmann 1991: 26; Bailey 1990: 10–31.

⁵⁰³ McCarter 1984: 298.

Rebekah, Rachel, Joseph, Bathsheba, and David's daughter Tamar are concerned, the information usually communicates their sexual desirability in stories of courtship, seduction, or rape.⁵⁰⁴ The question in this instance is which of these three most accurately describes the interactions between David and Bathsheba: courtship, seduction or rape?

The challenge of interpreting the account of David and Bathsheba is that, as Klein observes, 'the text is ambiguous about Bathsheba's role: in commentary, she is generally polarized as either a temptress ... or as an innocent victim of David's lust.'⁵⁰⁵

On the one hand, whether through the medium of art, film or biblical scholarship, various interpreters of the text have shifted the blame at least partially off David's shoulders by implicating Bathsheba. Thus Hertzberg states that 'we must, however, ask whether Bathsheba did not count on this possibility' of being seen bathing on the roof.⁵⁰⁶ Hertzberg even goes so far as to suggest that 'her consciousness of the danger into which adultery was leading her must have been outweighed by her realization of the honour of having attracted the king.'⁵⁰⁷

Remarkably, in the same sentence Hertzberg both observes that we cannot know Bathsheba's feelings and then contradicts himself by asserting that she must have felt honoured. Moreover, to suggest that a narrative which may be a thinly-veiled account of sexual coercion be interpreted as an honour for the victim in

⁵⁰⁴ Gunn and Fewell 199: 56.

⁵⁰⁵ Klein 2000: 48.

⁵⁰⁶ Hertzberg 1964: 309.

⁵⁰⁷ Hertzberg 1964: 309.

question is a disturbing example of the sort of reception 2 Samuel 11 has often received in biblical scholarship. Likewise, George Nicol has argued,

It cannot be doubted that Bathsheba's action in bathing so close to the king's residence was provocative, nor can the possibility that the provocation was deliberate be discounted ... Bathsheba's bathing ... can hardly indicate less than a contributory negligence on her part.⁵⁰⁸

Like Hertzberg, the underlying sentiment of Nicol's statement is that on some level, Bathsheba was responsible for what took place: she was asking for it.

Bailey in particular makes a comprehensive case that Bathsheba is a willing participant in the tryst with David. Unsatisfied with what he perceives to be various 'psychologised' readings of 2 Samuel 11, Bailey argues that the thrust of the narrative is not a tale of 'lust gone awry', but rather a political power play of mutual consent between David and Bathsheba. Bailey argues that Bathsheba represents a significant political alliance because she comes from a 'politically influential family',⁵⁰⁹ which the narrator signifies by introducing her first as the daughter of Eliam. On this basis, Bailey argues that David is not motivated by lust, but rather by the fact that Bathsheba, like Michal and Abigail before her, can win David political allies through marriage.

Moreover, Bailey argues that Bathsheba is herself involved in the political manoeuvring, which is why her actions in verse 4 are in the *qal* rather than the

⁵⁰⁸ Nicol 1988: 360. It is worth noting the double standards of ancient Israelite culture, whereby David can freely dance naked through the streets, yet when his wife Michal rebukes him for it, she is cast aside (2 Samuel 6:14ff). On the other hand, we do not even know if Bathsheba is bathing outdoors or aware that she is visible, and yet in the reception of this text she is condemned for flaunting herself.

⁵⁰⁹ Bailey 1990: 87.

hiph'il form, because she voluntarily comes (בוא) and returns (שוב) rather than being 'caused to act'.⁵¹⁰ Bailey also argues for the consenting nature of the act, because unlike in Genesis 34, there is no implication of rape. Instead, the statement 'he lay with her' (שכב) implies that Bathsheba is an 'equal partner to the events which transpire.'⁵¹¹

Accounting for David's dealings with Uriah, Bailey even argues that David was not trying to get Uriah to have intercourse with his wife, but rather to trap Uriah into breaking his soldier's oath so that he could have him condemned and executed, thereby removing his rival and gaining a politically useful wife and heir.

Klein takes a similar approach to Bailey by acknowledging that Bathsheba is not utterly passive because she 'comes' to David. As Klein observes:

The use of 'come', with its connotations of sexuality, insinuates Bathsheba's complicity in the sexual adventure.⁵¹²

Nevertheless, rather than presenting Bathsheba as if her beauty were a power enabling her to rule over men, Klein sees the balance of power as remaining firmly with David as the one who 'sends' (שלח) for her and 'takes' her (לקח, 2 Samuel 11:4).⁵¹³

However, if some are keen to ascribe motive to Bathsheba, others are equally ardent in their defence of her. One weakness in Bailey's argument is that the text sets the scene in such a way that, from a narrative perspective, David is presented as

⁵¹⁰ Bailey 1990: 88.

⁵¹¹ Bailey 1990: 88.

⁵¹² Klein 2000: 49. For more on Bathsheba's motives, see Klein 2000: 53.

⁵¹³ Klein 2000: 51.

responding to Bathsheba with instantaneous desire on the basis of seeing her. Thus Bach argues that 'through the eyes of the focalizer David we see beautiful Bathsheba bathing ... Bathsheba, a casualty of David's sexual imperialism, has no part in David's death-dealing plan.'⁵¹⁴

Part of the difficulty of interpreting this narrative lies in the silence that the author ascribes to Bathsheba. In 1 Kings 1–2, Bathsheba has the opportunity to speak both on behalf of and to her son. However, at the point when we most want to hear what she has to say, we are told nothing.⁵¹⁵ Unlike Susanna, Joseph and even Tamar, who are given the opportunity to defend themselves, Bathsheba is voiceless.⁵¹⁶

As for her behaviour, the text states that Bathsheba was bathing to purify herself after her time of menstruation, she was visible to the king on his roof, and that it was at the time of evening (2 Samuel 11:2). While we cannot guess at her intentions, it does strike one immediately that she is not bathing in broad daylight but rather לעת הערב ('at dusk'). Given that dusk is when the light fades, a reasonable interpretation is that Bathsheba was hoping to bathe under the cover of darkness.

Although this text is often read as if Bathsheba herself were bathing on the roof (על הגג), note that the text actually reads 'from upon the roof' (מועל הגג) and refers to David's position rather than hers. Most persuasive, however, is the fact that

⁵¹⁴ Bach 1994: 121–122.

⁵¹⁵ McCarter 1984: 288.

⁵¹⁶ Fuchs 2000: 133. For more on the parallels between Susanna and Bathsheba, see chapter four, pages 19–21, 24.

the text gives no indication that Bathsheba bathed with the intention of catching the king's eye.

There are certain similarities between the account of Bathsheba bathing and David's own grandmother Ruth, who is instructed by her mother-in-law to 'wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes (שמלה)', Ruth 3:3) before approaching Boaz at the threshing floor. While Ruth is never explicitly described as beautiful—perhaps on account of her foreign origins—nevertheless it appears that she is bathing and dressing in order to make herself attractive to Boaz.⁵¹⁷

There is a direct parallel between Ruth 3:3 and 2 Samuel 12:20, in which after mourning for the loss of his and Bathsheba's child, David 'washed himself and put on perfumed oil and changed his garment.' The exact same Hebrew words, רחץ ('to wash'), סוך ('to anoint;'), שמלה ('garment/cloak'), are used in both these passages in identical order.⁵¹⁸ Thus it would seem that Ruth is not garbing herself as a temptress, but rather undertaking a ritual washing to symbolise the end of her mourning and a new season of her life. Moreover just as Ruth purifies herself from mourning, so Bathsheba purifies herself from menstruation (2 Samuel 11:4).

However, whereas Ruth's intention is to find a husband, Bathsheba's own motivations are obscured by ambiguity. The point is, we do not know whether Bathsheba is watching David. However, what we do know is that the text states that

⁵¹⁷ Linafelt and Beal 1999: 48.

⁵¹⁸ Another passage which suggests that when in mourning one refrained from washing or anointing oneself with oil is 2 Samuel 14:2.

David is watching Bathsheba: 'And he sees her' (וִירָא), looking long enough to be captivated by her 'very attractive appearance' (טוֹבַת מְרֵאָה מְאֹד, 2 Samuel 11:2).

In this regard, the parallels between Susanna and Bathsheba may be stronger than those between Ruth and Bathsheba. For like Bathsheba, despite being married Susanna becomes an object of voyeurism while bathing, even though in her case she is concealed in the privacy of her home. Similarly, for both women the threat to their marriage comes from an unexpected source of authority, whether that is a Jewish elder or the king of Israel himself. Highlighting the particular disquieting intimacy of watching a ritual of purification, Exum comments,

A woman is touching herself and a man is watching. The viewing is one-sided, giving him the advantage and the position of power: he sees her but she does not see him.⁵¹⁹

Having ascertained that she is indeed the wife of one of his men who is fighting on his behalf in a war, he sends for her regardless. Bach comments that 'David is a biblical hero much attracted to women ... Unlike Joseph, David prefers women who belong to other men.'⁵²⁰

As to whether Bathsheba consents to intercourse with David, once again the text lacks clarity on this subject. We are offered only the barest facts about the seduction scene. In the words of Exum, if she had not fallen pregnant, 'the scene is

⁵¹⁹ Exum 1996: 26.

⁵²⁰ Bach 1993: 323.

the biblical equivalent of “wham bam, thank you, ma’am”: he sent, he took, she came, he lay, she returned.’⁵²¹

In contrast to Bailey, there is no indication within the text that David desires to keep Bathsheba. As McCarter observes, ‘the most egregious behaviour possible on the part of a king is attributed to David without a word of mitigation.’⁵²² His behaviour bears certain similarities to the actions of the sons of God in Genesis 6:2, who saw beautiful women and took them as they chose. But while David is the initiator, perhaps even the aggressor, the language of rape is not utilised. While Bathsheba may not have resisted with violence, however, it is debatable whether she would have had any choice in the matter.

The scene is even more ominous when one considers that it is set against a background of violence, as 2 Samuel 11 opens with the statement that it is the spring-time, when kings go to war. On the one hand, this comment may be nothing more than an implicit condemnation of David’s behaviour, as he remains in the palace instead of leading the men. However, it could also hint at a darker reality, that the real war David wages is against a vulnerable beautiful woman and her unsuspecting husband.

Thus while the text does not explicitly state that Bathsheba was physically forced, it does indicate that there is an imbalance in power. The text also makes it clear that this is not a love affair, as he sends her home immediately afterwards. In this way, Bathsheba is presented as little more than a beautiful toy rather than an autonomous human being. As Fuchs comments,

⁵²¹ Exum 1993: 175.

⁵²² McCarter 1984: 289.

What does matter in the presentation of the wife in the adultery type-scene is her status as prized object. She is beautiful and submissive, as is the bride in the betrothal type-scene, and like the latter she is shown to be transferable from one male to another.⁵²³

With no elaboration of how she might be feeling, Bathsheba is given only two words in this entire narrative, but they are two words that irrevocably change everything: הרה אנכי ('I am pregnant', 2 Samuel 11:5).

Compounding his wrongdoing, David attempts to pass off the child as Uriah's own. David's command that Uriah go home 'and wash your feet' (וּרְחַץ רַגְלֶיךָ) is likely a euphemism for sex, once again revealing strong links to the book of Ruth, where she uncovers Boaz' 'feet'.⁵²⁴ As his final act of wrongdoing, David has Uriah killed to conceal his own sin. Contrasting with David's violence toward Uriah, Bathsheba's response is to offer lamentations for her husband (2 Samuel 11:26), before she is brought into the palace.

Thus far I have argued that while rape cannot be inferred from the text, nevertheless David is presented as the instigator of his affair with Bathsheba, as well as the one who holds the power. David is also revealed by Nathan's oracle to be the one under God's judgment, suggesting that he is the one who deserves blame.

According to this oracle, Bathsheba is not portrayed as a participant in the wrongdoing, but as a fragile lamb stolen by a greedy thief (2 Samuel 12:4). Depicting her as a vulnerable creature slaughtered at the hands of the thief strongly attests to

⁵²³ Fuchs 2000: 138.

⁵²⁴ Compare with Ruth 3:4, 8.

the powerlessness of Bathsheba's position, as well as her implied innocence. For the sake of his argument that Bathsheba is complicit in the adultery, Bailey argues that the oracle did not originally belong with the narrative of 2 Samuel 11 because according to Nathan's interpretation of events, Bathsheba is presented as innocent:

There is a sense of sympathy for the ewe-lamb in the parable. This becomes incongruous since the ewe-lamb is taken to be symbolic of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, who at the very least cooperated with David in the adultery.⁵²⁵

I would argue that it is possible, however, that Bailey is underestimating the disparity between David as king and Bathsheba as a female subject under his authority. According to this oracle, at least, Nathan's focus is on David's culpability, rather than Bathsheba's.

Once again, the parallels with the book of Susanna are striking, because Susanna also finds herself in a trial scene. Just as Bathsheba is presented as an innocent lamb while David stands accused by a prophet of God, Susanna's innocence is likewise established while the elders are placed on trial by another prophet of God, Daniel.

This judgment oracle holds a significant place within the context of the SN, as the death of David and Bathsheba's child paves the way for the eventual birth of Solomon who succeeds David. The real crime, however, is presented as that of David against Uriah. This is indicated by the oracle in which David's sin is couched in terms of the theft of a man's property rather than the violation of a woman.

⁵²⁵ Bailey 1990: 106.

This response emphasises the lowly status of women in ancient Israel, who are sometimes presented as objects to be taken possession of. Bathsheba is further endangered on account of beauty. True, one might argue that her beauty helps her gain status in the royal household, but unlike Bailey, I do not believe there is any indication that this was something she desired. Nor has her beauty earned her any affection from David, who never intended to keep her.

The final signifier of David's guilt is Nathan's warning that the sins David has committed in secret will be performed in front of all Israel as retribution. Two of the brutal consequences resulting from David's affair with Bathsheba are the violation of his concubines (2 Samuel 16:22) and the rape of his daughter by his own son, Amnon (2 Samuel 13). Thus we see how the sins of the father are perpetuated by his sons, and the suffering wrought by those sins will be laid upon the women of David's household and thus indirectly upon David himself.

The extent to which David's treatment of Bathsheba was an act of coercion cannot be resolved: but whatever he did, from Yahweh's perspective, it was perceived to be an act as brutal as rape, hence the seriousness of the consequences. Commenting on the way these consequences evolve over the remainder of the SN, McCarter states,

The succession narrative is neither neutral nor impersonal. It shows clearly ... the working out of David's guilt and it flows over a strong theological undercurrent. The undercurrent is not obtrusive, rising to the surface in only three key passages (II Sam 11:27; 12:24, and 17:14), which nevertheless suffice to convey the writer's perspective.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁶ McCarter 1984: 10.

It is striking that David's punishment is brought about through the suffering of the women in his life—whether that be Bathsheba who loses her son, or his daughter and concubines who are raped. In light of Blenkinsopp's contention that a woman 'brings death', the text presents the women as victims rather than perpetrators.

If Bathsheba is clearly presented as a victim of the male gaze on account of her beauty, then this text also serves as a cautionary tale to men, warning them not to lust after beauty that is not theirs. Just as the editors warn against vanity and a pride in one's own appearance, so too we see the influence of the wisdom tradition in these texts cautioning against an infatuation with another's appearance or one's own. David may have perceived his actions to be of little consequence and part of his royal prerogative as king, but Yahweh sees differently. The severity of the consequences of David's sin throughout the remainder of the SN reveals a sharp criticism of David's actions in the wrongful taking of a beautiful but unavailable woman and the subsequent murder of her husband. Failing to recognise the importance of seeing the way Yahweh sees, David has to learn the hard way through the rebellion of his son Absalom.

4.3.2.b. 2 Samuel 13

One of the dire consequences of David's misdeeds is brought about by his son Amnon, who perpetuates the weakness of his father by lusting after and raping his beautiful half-sister Tamar. As Hertzberg points out,

The reader sees that the son is dominated by the same sensuality as his father, a sensuality which takes no notice of men's lives, and will notice divine retribution in the fact that David has to experience this in his own flesh and blood.⁵²⁷

Focusing on the initial presentation of the characters, Gunn and Fewell note how the horror of incestuous rape is emphasised by the extensive use of familial language to remind the reader of the extent to which Amnon's behaviour crosses the boundaries of appropriate sibling relations. As Gunn and Fewell state, 'this harrowing story of incest, rape, and fratricide introduces its characters in terms of familial relationships – son, sister, and, by implication, brother. As the tale unfolds, the narrator loads it with these reminders of family connection.'⁵²⁸ McCarter refers to these narrative details as the text's 'extraordinary preponderance of sibling references', concluding that 'surely, then, the sacrilege in the present passage is incest.'⁵²⁹

Once again, the basis for Amnon's desire for Tamar is based on the fact that she is יפה ('beautiful', 2 Samuel 13:1). Unlike David's base lust for Bathsheba, Amnon's emotions toward Tamar are more complex. He is described as being in love with Tamar (ויאהבה) ('and he loved her', 2 Samuel 13:1)); however, this is a twisted love bordering on obsession, so much so that he makes himself sick on account of his feelings (להתחללות).

At the beginning of the chapter, I noted Zimmerman's theory that the description of the elders in Susanna as wounded by love is a mistranslation of an

⁵²⁷ Hertzberg 1964: 322.

⁵²⁸ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 149.

⁵²⁹ McCarter 1995: 324.

earlier Semitic description of the elders as 'love-sick', so warped by lust that they are physically ill. It seems that Amnon experiences a similar intensity of feelings.

Egyptian love poetry makes similar use of this sickness metaphor:

“Seven (days) to yesterday I have not seen the sister,
And a sickness has invaded me.
My body has become heavy,
Forgetful of my own self.
... to say to me: “here she is!” is what will revive me;
Her name is what will lift me up...”⁵³⁰

Overcome by this sickness, Amnon's desire for her becomes so perverse and overwhelming that he contrives to have her visit him, and, despite her protestations,

וַיַּחֲזֶק מִמֶּנָּה וַיַּעֲנֶה וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ ('and being stronger than she, he pressed her down and he lay with her', 2 Samuel 13:14). Here, I follow Bechtel in translating the piel of the verb ענה as the physical act of Amnon pressing Tamar down rather than as a purely metaphorical 'lowering/humbling'.⁵³¹ Although there may be semantic similarities with Genesis 34:2–3, the actual response of the two male aggressors could not be more different. For while Shechem falls in love with Dinah, Amnon's emotions swiftly shift from love to hate.⁵³²

McCarter emphasises Amnon's ulterior motive not only to seduce Tamar on account of her beauty but because of his rivalry with Absalom for the throne. As McCarter says, 'although Amnon was attracted by Tamar's beauty he hoped, even more so, both to gratify his sexual desires and to humiliate Absalom through Tamar,

⁵³⁰ This 13th to 12th century BCE Egyptian love poem is recorded in 'Papyrus Beatty I', Verse C. iv 6 v 2 (Pritchard 1950: 468–469). Compare with the Song of Songs 5:8.

⁵³¹ See chapter four, pages 192–196.

⁵³² Graetz 1997: 309.

at the same time.⁵³³ He adds further insult by refusing to marry Tamar,⁵³⁴ thereby ensuring that she will remain unmarried and alone for the rest of her life. Ironically, in abusing Tamar as part of a ploy to undermine Absalom and gain the throne, Amnon seals his own fate when Absalom seeks revenge.

Throughout this horrific scene, Tamar's purity of character is demonstrated by the way she not only cares for her 'sick' brother, but through her attempts to find a peaceful solution without giving in to his violation. She even seeks a resolution between them in an effort to salvage her reputation (2 Samuel 13:10, 12-13, 16).

In many ways Tamar and Susanna are comparable characters. Both are pious women who refuse to give in to the unwelcome sexual advances of individuals who ought to know better. However, although Susanna risks death, she ultimately survives the threat without violation. The same, however, cannot be said of Tamar, despite her impassioned pleas.

As a narrative, 2 Samuel 13 is notably lacking in editorial commentary. However, this does not mean that the narrator endorses the events of this chapter. Rather, the editor writes such a condemnatory and effective critique of Amnon's actions through the outcry of Tamar that no further editorial words are necessary. As Gressmann observes, 'what the narrator thinks of Amnon's behavior is revealed in the words he places on Tamar's lips.'⁵³⁵ Noting the absence of any editorial commentary, Anderson comments that 'the pleading of Tamar is a more effective

⁵³³ McCarter 1995: 172.

⁵³⁴ According to Deuteronomy 22:28-29, Amnon would have been expected to pay the bridal price and marry Tamar because he is guilty of raping an unmarried virgin.

⁵³⁵ Gressmann 1991: 32.

judgment on Amnon's actions than any editorial remarks or moralizing could have been.⁵³⁶

Due to her brother's lust, Tamar's status as a beautiful virgin daughter of the king is utterly destroyed. This is a position that can never be restored, a fact Tamar desperately laments through the ritual of mourning (2 Samuel 13:19–20). Tamar's tragedy is summarised by the statement, 'So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's household' (2 Samuel 13:20). This text highlights the injustice of a culture where a woman may be raped against her will, yet she is ultimately the one who suffers the long-term consequences.

The injustice of this narrative is heightened by the fact that although David supposedly 'became very angry towards him' (וַיִּחַר לוֹ מְאֹד (2 Samuel 13:21)) he refuses to punish Amnon out of love.⁵³⁷ Consequently, not only is Tamar denied justice, but David's reluctance to punish Amnon for his violation of his sister is the catalyst for the resentment that breeds in Absalom's heart against David, eventually resulting not only in the murder of Amnon but the usurpation of David's throne.

By highlighting David's failure to protect his daughter and the disastrous consequences that follow on from his weakness as a father, this narrative offers a clear critique of fathers who do not care for their daughters well, or safeguard them on account of their beauty. However unlike Ben Sira's exhortation that a beautiful daughter needs to be kept under a strict watch to prevent her from sexual misbehaviour (Ben Sira 42:11), the purity and noble character of Tamar is clearly

⁵³⁶ Anderson 1989: 177.

⁵³⁷ Genesis 34 depicts Jacob's comparable failure to demand justice for his daughter Dinah, an act that also results in more severe consequences in the long run.

illuminated. There is no misplaced implication that all young women are inherently lascivious and deceitful.

If one understands the purpose of the SN to be an apologetic for Solomon's reign, then the presence of these events in the SN in particular begins to make sense. For by including these narratives, the author can thoroughly demonstrate the extent to which the sons Absalom, Amnon and Adonijah are 'unworthy sons of David', pointing out 'how these men disqualified themselves from the high offices of kingship.'⁵³⁸ In doing so, the author at the same time helps to present Solomon as a more suitable choice by comparison.

Alternatively, if one considers the SN to be the production or adaptation of an exilic or post-exilic community writing to critique the institution of kingship, then the swift unravelling of David's household in this narrative also serves that purpose well.⁵³⁹

Either way, the household of David is presented as corrupt and divided. Although the sons of the royal line are handsome, their vanity is destructive. Moreover, each one of these good-looking men has a warped perspective not only on their own appearance but in their attitude towards women. Thus Absalom rapes his father's concubines, Amnon rapes his beautiful sister, and Adonijah's misplaced desire for Abishag leads to his destruction. Most startling of all, David himself allows his lust over a beautiful woman to result in murder and the temporary loss of his throne. On every level, the narrator shows the royal house of Israel—and specifically the men—to be corrupt.

⁵³⁸ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 177.

⁵³⁹ Van Seters 1976: 22–29.

This is where the distinction is drawn between Genesis and the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. In both of these collections of literature, I demonstrate how beauty is shown to be a source of real vulnerability rather than an empowering weapon. However, each editor presents beauty in this fashion for different reasons. In the former, the Genesis redactors are concerned to depict the threat of foreign powers to the structures of Israelite society whilst highlighting God's sovereign ability to safeguard his people. Thus the editors use the motif of beauty as the vehicle to convey those concerns. In doing so, they reveal the extent to which women in ancient Israel were perceived as possessions to trade rather than family members worthy of protection, and just how insecure the position of a beautiful woman really was.

In 1 and 2 Samuel, on the other hand, the narrator is not concerned with the threat outside of Israel, but primarily with the corruption within. As Gunn and Fewell summarise:

Tamar's protest that 'such a thing is not done in Israel' becomes hauntingly ironic. Such a thing is done in Israel. It is done in David's own household. It fractures the family and eventually fractures the nation.⁵⁴⁰

⁵⁴⁰ Gunn and Fewell 1993: 151. Given the negativity towards David's household presented by the narrator, one might suspect that the author has an agenda against the royal lineage. However I am compelled by Van Seters and McCarters' arguments, discussed in chapter three, that there is more to it. They argue for two separate redactions of the tradition. The first, a courtly history, would serve as an apologetic to account for certain negative events towards the end of David's reign. A second layer of redaction may have converted this narrative into a defence of Solomon's reign, as the editor critiques all of Solomon's potential competition for the throne to account for his succession. Such a theory could plausibly account for the ambiguity in a text that at times appears both highly critical and supportive of the monarchy (Van Seters 2000: 70–93).

4.4. Summary

Regardless of the historical purposes of the editors in compiling these books, however, what is most clear is that in both the narratives of Genesis, and 1 and 2 Samuel, beauty seems to have been considered first and foremost as a threat not to the male viewer, but to the beautiful woman who finds herself vulnerable before a powerful male.

This is a marked difference between the majority of the apocryphal writings on beauty and the views presented in the Hebrew Bible. For in the latter, I argue that it is not, as Blenkinsopp or Gunn argue, the women who are blamed for bringing ‘death’, but rather the men who cannot control their desires and thus bring destruction to the woman who is vulnerable on account of her desirability.

Furthermore, although the beauty motif does take on a variety of forms in the Hebrew Bible, I would argue that the repeated motif of the threat of a man to a beautiful woman is more prominent than any other facet of the beauty motif. I further this argument in the next chapter, in which I consider the book of Esther as another example in which beauty is paradoxically both celebrated, yet at the same time a source of vulnerability for the characters of both Vashti and Esther.

Given the prominence of the theme ‘Beauty as Vulnerability’ in the Hebrew Bible, the discrepancy between the two literatures is noteworthy. And yet, although I argue that a sharp divergence is emerging between the literature of the Hebrew Bible and the later Jewish writings from 200BCE–100CE, at the same time I suggest that there is a sense in which these two very different facets of beauty—and their

impact upon gender relations—are intrinsically linked to one another. A woman's beauty makes her desirable to a man, and therefore can be a means of exerting power over him. And yet, it is a woman's very desirability that frequently spurs a man to take possession of her, leading to her loss of power, and upon occasion to sexual abuse. Thus the very same characteristic of beauty has the capacity to both *empower* and *weaken* a beautiful woman.

The difference is, however, that while the writers of the apocryphal texts are more concerned about the negative influences of female beauty on male honour and control, the biblical authors have a variety of agendas, and appear less concerned to justify the weakness of men at the expense of a woman's character.

This divergence between the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature could make sense in light of their differing genres. For although the latter are primarily formed of didactic material for social behaviour, when it comes to the historical narratives of the Hebrew Bible, the realities of ANE culture are displayed in all their inequalities and with all their violence.⁵⁴¹ It is in that context, where men hold the majority of the power, that the true vulnerability of women is revealed. In this brutal culture, it would seem that any man can be a threat, be he a foreign ruler, a religious leader or a family member. For this reason, beauty can be a dangerous commodity to possess.

However, despite these dangers, and the very real vulnerabilities, the presentation of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible is not entirely bleak for the woman. In fact, far from it, as we see in the next chapter.

⁵⁴¹ I consider further reasons for the disparity between the texts in great detail in chapter six.

Part Two: Positive Depictions of Beauty

Chapter Five: Beauty and Virtue

5.1. Introduction

In Part One, I made the case that beauty is frequently depicted in a negative way in the literature of the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings, both because of the harm that can result to others on account of beauty (chapters two and four), and the harm one can do to oneself (chapter three). For this reason, in chapter three I suggested that individual beauty is not a sign of divine favour, as Yahweh looks for *internal* rather than *external* beauty (1 Samuel 16:7). Consequently, when encountering the description of a physically attractive character, the reader might feel justified interpreting it as a sign of impending trouble for one or other of the protagonists. However, to conclude on the basis of the examples so far that beauty in the Hebrew Bible and the post-biblical Jewish literature always serves a cautionary purpose would be to misrepresent both sets of texts.

For in the first instance, an underlying positive association between what is 'good' and what is 'beautiful' can be supported linguistically,⁵⁴² on the basis of the fact that the Hebrew word **טוֹב** can be used for both. As Olyan observes,

The semantic range of these technical terms serves to underscore the positive casting of beauty in the biblical text ...

⁵⁴² See chapter one, pages 41–42.

Beauty, like all things “good”, is desirable and to be welcomed
...⁵⁴³

I am not willing to go so far as Olyan in arguing that within the Hebrew Bible physical beauty is typically presented in a positive light. Nevertheless, in Part Two I argue that within both ancient Israelite and later Jewish thought, there is a strongly-held belief that, regardless of the problems associated with human beauty, physical beauty can still be a trait worthy of commendation.

Ironically, one might contend that it is precisely *because* beauty is perceived to be *such* a good, and therefore desirable, that problems arise out of people wanting it too much. On account of the strong desire that beauty invokes in the viewer, the Hebrew writers feel the need to place conditions upon it in order to manage that desire and avoid loss of control. The question, therefore, is not *whether* beauty can be a positive characteristic, but rather under *what* conditions do these Hebrew writers consider it so?

I suggest that the most prominent of these conditions is the coupling of beauty with a virtuous character, whereby the former is largely dependent upon the latter. From this perspective, whether a woman’s beauty is praised or not depends less on how good she looks, and far more on the way she behaves. However a distinction also emerges between earlier and later writings, in that the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts appear to place greater restrictions upon the *context* within which female beauty can be appropriately viewed. In the Hebrew Bible, on

⁵⁴³ Olyan 2008: 22.

the other hand, the texts appear comfortable presenting women with a greater degree of freedom.

5.2. Beauty and Virtue in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

5.2.1. Beauty and Virtue in Jewish Wisdom

5.2.1.a. *Ben Sira*

In chapter two, I address what Trenchard refers to as Ben Sira's 'personal, negative bias against women.'⁵⁴⁴ Ellis, on the other hand, contends that despite Ben Sira's critical attitude towards women, given his cultural context he is not actually as harsh as he could be. For example, Ellis argues that despite the considerable influence of Hellenistic culture on Ben Sira, in his writing he offers a taxonomy of gender that does not present men and women as binary opposites, nor associate women with misfortune or an 'ontologically secondary-status' in the way that ancient Greeks such as Plato or Hesiod do.⁵⁴⁵

Rather, Ellis suggests that Ben Sira follows the form of the Greek encomium established by Aristotle, a rhetorical pattern by which one offers both praise and blame.⁵⁴⁶ However, unlike the Hellenistic practice of offering women only blame,

⁵⁴⁴ Trenchard 1982: 173. See also Camp (2013: 37).

⁵⁴⁵ Ellis 2013: 22.

⁵⁴⁶ Ellis 2013: 76.

Ben Sira does not stop at cursing the category of the 'foolish wife', but balances his criticism with some of his greatest praise for the 'intelligent wife'.⁵⁴⁷

The explanation that Ben Sira offers a more balanced perspective on gender than his Hellenistic counterparts does not nullify his bias against women.⁵⁴⁸ However, it is fair to say in accord with Ellis that '*[a]ppropriate marriage* is a major theme in the discourse of *gender* in the Book of Ben Sira' (author's italics).⁵⁴⁹ It is within the framework of what Ellis terms *appropriate marriage* that Ben Sira views beauty with admiration rather than disdain. Ellis coins this phrase because marriage *per se* is not enough, as according to Ben Sira one can be encumbered with a highly unsuitable wife: 'a woman will accept any man as a husband, but one girl is preferable to another' (Ben Sira 36:26). He then says that 'a woman's beauty lights up a man's face, and there is nothing he desires more' (Ben Sira 36:27).

Ben Sira's words contrast starkly with the sentiments expressed in Proverbs 31:29, which claim that 'charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.' Elsewhere in Proverbs, the reader is encouraged to delight in his wife's erotic beauty (5:18-19); however, in chapter 31 the writer emphasizes that beauty fades in comparison to the importance of a wife's character and piety. From Ben Sira's perspective the latter is true; however, nor are charm and beauty always despised. He cautions his reader to 'avert your eyes from a graceful woman, and do not regard beauty that is not yours' (Sirach 9:8). However, the

⁵⁴⁷ In this matter, Ben Sira follows the pattern established in the book of Proverbs, which not only presents a dichotomy between personified female Wisdom and Foolishness, but also polarises the good wife with the foolish wife.

⁵⁴⁸ Trenchard 1982: 173.

⁵⁴⁹ Ellis 2013: 78.

implication here is that it would be appropriate to ‘regard’ beauty that is ‘yours’; the beauty of one’s own wife. As is always the case with Ben Sira, the admiration of beauty ought to be restricted to admiration for one’s spouse. Trenchard comments that ‘the focus is on a beautiful wife, but only in terms of the pleasure she brings to her husband. He is the one who is benefitted by her pleasing characteristics.’⁵⁵⁰ Rather than claiming the beautiful *wife* as ‘yours’, Ben Sira refers directly to *beauty* itself as belonging to the man. This inference that a husband might directly possess or own another woman’s beauty is disturbing, because it effaces her as the subject or possessor of her own beauty, and in turn renders her an ornament.

Although Ben Sira writes in 36:27 that ‘there is nothing a man desires more’ than beauty in one’s wife, I argue that the bulk of his writings belie that statement. For it becomes apparent that actually he puts far more emphasis upon a wife of good character and sense than on a wife who is aesthetically desirable.⁵⁵¹

For example, rather than contrasting a ‘bad’ wife with a ‘beautiful wife’ as the archetypal woman, he instead refers to the ‘intelligent wife’ (אשה מושבלת) as the highest and most admirable categorisation of womankind (Ben Sira 7:19; 25:8; 26:13; 40:23). In this, it seems likely that he was influenced by the writer of Proverbs 11:22, who claims, ‘Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman without good sense.’

Ben Sira writes that although ‘the eye desires grace (חן) and beauty (יפה)’, better than both are ‘green shoots of grain’ (Ben Sira 40:22). The implication is that

⁵⁵⁰ Trenchard 1982: 21.

⁵⁵¹ Compare with Balla (2012: 377).

Ben Sira is more interested in the natural beauty of God's creation than in feminine beauty. He then revealingly goes on to say that so valuable is an 'intelligent woman' that she is to be held in greater esteem than a friend or companion (Ben Sira 40:23). Further highlighting Ben Sira's distinctiveness from his inherited Hellenistic culture, Ellis observes that valuing the company of a wife as 'equal to, or better than' that of his male companions is a concept that in classical Greek literature would have been 'unthinkable.'⁵⁵² In this instance, Ben Sira stands closer to traditional proverbial teaching, as his esteem for an intelligent wife echoes the sentiment of Proverbs 31:28–29 in which a husband praises his own clever wife saying, 'Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.'

Alongside this intelligence, however, Ben Sira highly prizes a wife of modest character. This is most clearly demonstrated in 26:15–17, when he claims that:

A modest wife adds charm to charm,
and no scales can weigh the value of her chastity.
Like the sun rising in the heights of the Lord,
so is the beauty of a good wife in her well-ordered home.
Like the shining lamp on the holy lampstand,
so is a beautiful face on a stately figure.

In a collection of Ben Sira's sayings that are renowned for their critical portrayal of women, the value he places on a beautiful wife here is noteworthy. However it is also restrictive, as her beauty and abundant charm are displayed in one setting only, and that is in the context of her 'well-ordered home.'⁵⁵³ In this way, it is clear that for Ben Sira the appropriate context for viewing the beauty of a woman is in the

⁵⁵² Ellis 2013: 106.

⁵⁵³ 'As a woman, she may be beautiful, but she is worthy of praise for such beauty only as she appears in the domestic environment of her home' (Trenchard 1982: 17).

confines of a marriage to a 'good' woman, and quite literally inside a house where no other male may gaze upon her.

While his words may be intended to be complimentary, there is a distinct difference between Ben Sira's commendation of a spouse as if she were a sacred ornament, and the unconventional depiction in Proverbs 31 of a woman who is praised because she is not only runs the household (Proverbs 31:27), but plays a public and commercial role too (31:14–16). For example, she sells clothes (31:24), she goes out to buy a field (31:16), and she is even publically honoured at the city gate (31:31). Therefore, there is a striking contrast between the depiction of the noble wife as innovative, daring and unrestrained, and the passive, statue-like presentation of the modest wife who is constrained within her home. While the noble wife works independently in order to keep her lamp burning (Proverbs 31:18), the modest wife is likened to a lamp stand: a beautiful but inanimate object.

Beauty and modesty are thus presented as two sides of the same coin. In claiming that no scale can weigh 'the value of her chastity' (26:15), Ben Sira speaks of her worth in the language of the market place. From Ben Sira's perspective, it is this modesty that exponentially increases her $\eta\pi$ (26:15) ($\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma$ in the Greek edition), and which ultimately makes her valuable.

Throughout his writings Ben Sira equates women with wealth, as if what one stands to lose or gain in one of these areas is inextricably bound up in the other. This is because, in a culture where a man's honour is his greatest asset, the public loss of face occasioned by an immodest wife could bring not only embarrassment but

financial ruin. It is for this reason that Ben Sira only considers physical loveliness to be a desirable trait in a wife if her good looks are tempered by modesty.⁵⁵⁴

While Ben Sira may expect modesty from his wife in regard to her interactions with other men, one cannot overlook the erotic subtext in his writings. For example, the hiphil form of **טוב** in 26:13 (**מטוב**), translated as ‘delights’ in the NRSV, has connotations of ‘sexually pleasing’ her husband.⁵⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Hebrew text states that the wife has a **צְרוּרַת פֶּה** (‘closed/tight mouth’, 26:15). This could refer to her verbal discretion, but **פה** (26:15) is also a euphemism for ‘vagina’ in Hebrew.⁵⁵⁶ Ellis also suggests that ‘lamp’ (26:17) may have a double meaning, quoting Hasan-Rokem who claims that ‘the candle often figures as a symbolical representation of female sexuality.’⁵⁵⁷

Consequently, these words of Ben Sira both emphasise the chastity of a desirable wife because she is faithful to her spouse, while at the same time celebrating her beauty as a significant aspect of her sexual desirability. Here we see another parallel with Proverbs, in this instance with 5:18-19, where the reader is exhorted to sexually ‘rejoice in the wife of your youth’.

It is also notable that the sacred and the erotic are not separate in Ben Sira’s view of marriage, as he describes a wife’s beauty as like a sacred lamp or the sun rising in ‘the heights of the Lord’ (Ben Sira 26:16). In preceding verses, beauty has been presented as a sure means to a man’s downfall, and women even as the

⁵⁵⁴ For more on Ben Sira’s view of the ‘good wife’, see 7:19; 36:26–29.

⁵⁵⁵ Ellis 2013: 176.

⁵⁵⁶ Ellis suggests the reading ‘tight vagina’ in reference to physical pleasure (2013, 176).

⁵⁵⁷ Hasan-Rokem 2003: 67; Ellis 2013: 176.

beginning of 'wickedness' (Ben Sira 25:24); yet here we are offered the counter-perspective, in which admiring the beauty of one's wife is likened to a spiritual act of worship. In this way, Ben Sira stands firmly in the tradition of the Hebrew Bible, for in the words of Chanal and Ariel Bloch, 'sex is no sin in the Old Testament.'⁵⁵⁸

Consequently, it is clear that Ben Sira has a sharply divided attitude towards female beauty. He is condemnatory of beauty when it belongs to any woman other than his own wife, and yet he has a high view of beauty in one's own intelligent and modest wife.

However, although his devotion to the beauty of his own spouse may offer an alternative perspective on Ben Sira's attitude towards female appearance, his view remains an extremely restrictive one. For example, even a beautiful daughter is still so great a threat that to Ben Sira she is perceived to be more of a curse and a burden than a woman to take pride in (Ben Sira 42:11–12).

Ben Sira's attitude towards beautiful daughters contrasts radically with another biblical Wisdom text, Job 42:15. Job 42: 15 states that 'in all the land there were no women so beautiful as Job's daughters', and they are given to Job by Yahweh as blessing after all that he has suffered. Thus rather than perceiving a daughter to be a 'loss' (Ben Sira 22:3), Job displays his delight in them by giving them an inheritance alongside their brothers. The two approaches could not be more distinct: while Ben Sira suggests locking up a beautiful daughter (Ben Sira 42:11), Job bestows financial independence on them (Job 42:15). In this way, there

⁵⁵⁸ Bloch and Bloch 1998: 11.

is a sharp polarisation between Ben Sira and Job's approach to parenting their beautiful daughters.

Considering Ben Sira's attitude towards women as a whole, I believe Archer is justified in her observation that this text continues to serve for women as a 'dire warning to stay in their designated role of secluded modesty. Presentations of the acceptable face of womankind, i.e. the archetypal good woman, also [serve] the same end.'⁵⁵⁹

5.2.2. Beauty and Virtue in the Jewish Novella

Although within the apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts there is a tendency to emphasise the destructive power of female beauty for a patriarchal society, at first glance the Jewish novellas—*Susanna*, *Tobit*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, the Greek Additions to *Esther*, and *Judith*—appear to present a counter-perspective in their fervent praise of the external beauty of their female heroines.⁵⁶⁰

Pervo notes how well the narratives of *Susanna* and *Judith* fit with the standard model of Greek romantic novels from the Imperial period,⁵⁶¹ in which as a general rule the 'young women are so stunningly beautiful that their parousias usually have the characteristics of an epiphany. Men are drawn to them as if by

⁵⁵⁹ Archer 1987: 11.

⁵⁶⁰ Jordaan even suggests that *Judith*, the Additions to *Esther*, and *Susanna* were 'written as a reaction against the negative view on women by Jesus Ben Sira ...' (2009: 3).

⁵⁶¹ By the 'Imperial Period', Pervo means the Roman Empire from the first century BCE (44BCE) to the third century CE.

magnets.⁵⁶² On closer inspection, however, the authors of these texts are not as effusive in their depiction of female beauty as they first appear, particularly as they frame their appreciation of beauty within the confines of very specific societal strictures.

5.2.2.a Susanna

From the very beginning of the TH version of Susanna,⁵⁶³ her beauty is paralleled by her modesty. As I observed in chapter four, the depiction of Susanna as καλή σφόδρα (Susanna 1:2, TH) can mean both ‘exceedingly good’ or ‘exceedingly beautiful’. In fact, it may be that καλή σφόδρα is left ambiguous in order to connote both Susanna’s beauty and her goodness, thereby inextricably linking her beauty with her pious character. In both TH and the OG, Susanna’s modesty is such that she makes a concerted effort to hide her beauty from everyone. Thus, in the TH version, she walks in the garden each day only after her husband’s guests have left the house (1:7, TH), whilst in the OG she walks before they arrive, at dawn (1:12, OG). Susanna’s commitment to modesty is such that in order to gain even a glimpse of her, the elders must spy on her.

Moreover, when she does choose to bathe in the garden in the TH account, she specifically asks her maids to ‘shut the garden doors’ (1:17, TH). Unlike the bathing of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, TH leaves no room for ambiguity or the accusation that Susanna bathed outside in the hope of drawing the gaze of onlookers.

⁵⁶² Pervo 1991: 146.

⁵⁶³ Susanna was written as a Greek appendage to the book of Daniel. For information on the background of the book, see chapter four, page 164.

Indeed, in both versions, her purity is so uncompromising that when the elders attempt to 'force her' (1:19, OG) or blackmail her (1:19–21, TH), Susanna would rather risk death than be coerced into adultery (1:22–23, OG and TH).

Furthermore, at her trial Susanna attempts to remain covered up (1:32, OG and TH), and TH even specifies that she wears a veil (1:32, TH), which is a clear statement that she is a married woman under her husband's authority. Archer explains that this symbol of authority came to be perceived as

the chief token of the woman's 'modesty', that is, her unavailability to others- a fact which highlights, in this context at least, the real character and function of so-called modesty and moral behaviour.⁵⁶⁴

Therefore, when the elders demand that she be uncovered (1:32, OG and TH), they are not only stripping her of her modesty, but also of the public symbol of her marriage.⁵⁶⁵

While we know from a variety of sources in Jewish intertestamental literature that married women were expected to wear a head-covering in public, their veils probably did not typically obscure their faces.⁵⁶⁶ Therefore, the fact that the covering Susanna wears prevents the elders from being 'sated' with her beauty (1:32, TH and OG) could be the authors' way of emphasising to the reader that Susanna goes above and beyond even societal expectations for modesty by covering not just her hair but her entire face. Likewise, the reaction of those around her who

⁵⁶⁴ Archer 1990: 247–248.

⁵⁶⁵ Compare with Numbers 5:18, the trial for adultery. For another first-century CE example, see Philo, *The Special Laws*, III, VIII. 56 (Yonge 1993: 599).

⁵⁶⁶ For further discussion on the wearing of veils to cover the head but not the face, see Archer (1990: 247–249).

weep once her veil is removed indicates not only their grief at the accusations levelled against her (1:34, OG and TH), but also their horror that beauty which was never meant to be exposed could be unveiled in such a public fashion.⁵⁶⁷

Thus the two versions of Susanna both hang on the themes of modesty and exposure, hiddenness and voyeurism. This is the story of a woman's battle to preserve her beauty for the viewing pleasure of her husband alone. Consequently, although Susanna's beauty is presented as a desirable characteristic, it is overshadowed by the thorough account of modesty as her chief virtue.

Built into the structure of each account, therefore, is the presupposition that the rightful place for a woman's beauty to be displayed is in the context of her home, and in the gaze of one man only: her husband. Thus, while beauty may be presented as desirable within this narrative, it is considered desirable precisely because it in no way undermines the patriarchal order, but is constrained by it.

5.2.2.b. Joseph and Aseneth

In a similar, if heightened, fashion, the apocryphal novella *Joseph and Aseneth*, likely written close to the time of Susanna, both emphasises the extreme beauty of the heroine, and depicts her exaggerated efforts towards maintaining her modesty. Bach notes that this development of the original Genesis 39–42 narrative is typical of the Hellenistic era in which popular writings 'continued to rely upon stereotyped plots and stock characters.'⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁷ See also Loader (2011: 221).

⁵⁶⁸ Bach 1997: 73.

In order to present a spouse worthy of Joseph, the author disassociates Aseneth from her Egyptian heritage and likens her beauty to that of an Israelite heroine:

And she was quite unlike the daughters of the Egyptians, but in every respect like the daughters of the Hebrews. And she was as tall as Sarah, and as beautiful as Rebecca, and as fair as Rachel; and this virgin's name was Aseneth. And the fame of her beauty spread through all that land, even to its remotest corners[.]⁵⁶⁹

This apocryphal novella draws on the three beautiful heroines of the Genesis narratives to re-make Joseph's bride Aseneth in the image of an Israelite bride in order to counter her dubious status as a foreign woman. Such a description supports my earlier observation in chapter two that beauty is a characteristic that is rarely ascribed to foreign women within Hebrew thought, and thus Aseneth is only considered acceptable because she conforms to the model of Israelite beauty. Loader suggests that these concerns reflect the cultural context of an author who was influenced by the upheaval of the Maccabean revolt and therefore extremely wary of pagan influence.⁵⁷⁰

Aseneth is also described as 'very tall and handsome and beautiful to look at beyond all virgins of the earth' (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 1:4), this exaggeration giving the narrative a somewhat 'fairy tale quality.'⁵⁷¹ There is a marked parallel in the description of virginal Aseneth's famous beauty, and the direction in Esther 2:1-3 that the most beautiful virgins throughout the kingdom be identified. It is partly on

⁵⁶⁹ *Joseph and Aseneth* 1:7-9.

⁵⁷⁰ Loader 2011: 300-302; 309-310.

⁵⁷¹ Loader 2011: 303.

this basis that Aseneth is found to be a fitting partner for Joseph, whose own beauty is so heightened that according to the writer he is ‘the sun from heaven [that] has come to us on its chariot.’ The writer continues, ‘Joseph is a son of God. For who among men on earth will generate such beauty, and what womb of a woman will give birth to such light?’ (*Joseph and Aseneth* 6.2–4).⁵⁷²

Unlike the archetypal Israelite heroine, however, initially Aseneth’s character is less than desirable, as she is ἀλαζών και ὑπερήφανος (‘boastful and arrogant’). Like Jezebel (2 Kings 9:30), Aseneth stands at the window observing her Israelite hero approaching on a chariot. However, it is in this precise moment, when the similarities between her and Jezebel as another undesirable foreign women are strongest, that Aseneth experiences a shift in character: ‘And Aseneth saw Joseph ... and was strongly cut (to the heart), and her soul was crushed, and her knees were paralyzed, and her entire body trembled ...’⁵⁷³ The length and detail of the author’s account of Aseneth’s seven-day repentance is so detailed as to appear comical, as she is transformed to such a degree that Joseph does not even recognise her. The inference here is that although she was already beautiful, the alteration of her character makes her exponentially more so.

Moreover, not only does Aseneth’s character alter to match her beauty, but her chastity is preserved so that there is not a hint of impropriety in her sexual conduct. Aseneth is confined to a tower of ten chambers, emphasising her segregation, and her virginity is so fervently guarded that not even her virgin

⁵⁷² This is a rare description of male beauty found within the later Jewish writings, in this case explained by the author’s reliance on the earlier biblical tradition of Joseph’s beauty.

⁵⁷³ *Joseph and Aseneth* 6:1.

attendants are allowed to sit on her bed (2:9). From this perspective, Aseneth embodies Ben Sira's ideal of the honourable daughter kept apart from prying eyes.⁵⁷⁴

Just as in the case of Susanna, therefore, the extravagant praise of Aseneth's beauty serves the very same patriarchal concerns that dominate the warnings against uncontrolled female beauty discussed in Part One. In this way, these concerns are perpetuated by these Jewish writers through what Kraemer refers to as 'constructions of gender that were fairly conventional in Greco-Roman antiquity ... Women, at least proper women, are subordinate (and subservient) to men.'⁵⁷⁵

5.2.2.c. *Judith*

While *Susanna*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and *Tobit* follow a specific pattern, there is greater ambiguity in the presentation of *Judith*. Having considered in chapter two of this thesis the way that her beauty is presented as a weapon, it is no surprise that at first glance *Judith* appears to be a foil to *Susanna*. For while the latter conceals her beauty to the extent that she is willing to die to preserve her modesty, *Judith* willingly exposes herself to the gaze of an army of foreign men in order to prevent death.

Her forward behaviour renders *Judith* in some ways the very antithesis of Ben Sira's archetypal Jewish woman, and yet her own name 'Judith', meaning

⁵⁷⁴ Ben Sira 42:11–14.

⁵⁷⁵ Kraemer 1998(a): 212. The same can also be said of *Tobit*, as Sarah's chastity is preserved and she is intentionally kept apart from the men while they dine for modesty's sake.

'Jewess', reveals that Judith as heroine stands for all Israelite women.⁵⁷⁶ The description of Judith's beauty in both face and figure (8:7) parallels the description of Rachel in Genesis 29:17:

Καὶ ἦν καλὴ τῶ εἶδει καὶ ὠραία τῆ ὄψει σφόδρα
(Judith 8:7)

Καλὴ τῶ εἶδει καὶ ὠραία τῆ ὄψει
(Genesis 29:17)

Furthermore, like her Israelite ancestresses, Judith finds herself in a comparably dangerous situation to Sarah and Rebekah. As Williams observes, 'Judith's beauty leads to a situation known from the wife-sister typic scene: the foreign ruler desires to take the beautiful Israelite woman as his own.'⁵⁷⁷

While Sarah's and Rebekah's voices and actions are undocumented, however, Judith's behaviour is not only described in detail, but she is even praised for her courage and her forthright manner.⁵⁷⁸ In this sense, the presentation of Judith diverges quite radically from the more passive and restricted depictions of other Jewish novella heroines.⁵⁷⁹

Although she is undoubtedly distinctive, however, Judith is still very much constrained by the social mores of her culture even though she temporarily transgresses them. Indeed, the very implication that Judith's behaviour is extraordinary rather than normative indicates just how little autonomy Judith

⁵⁷⁶ Loader 2011: 191.

⁵⁷⁷ Williams 1982: 76.

⁵⁷⁸ Bach 1997: 31.

⁵⁷⁹ Levine 1995: 209.

typically has beyond this specific national emergency. As Van Henten acknowledges, 'the basic frame of reference is androcentric.'⁵⁸⁰

Nor is Judith presented as a woman who uses her beauty without restraint. Judith's virtue is partly displayed through her wisdom, as like 'wise-woman' Abigail, her intelligence is a match for her physical appearance: 'No other woman from one end of the earth to the other looks so beautiful or speaks so wisely! ... You are not only beautiful in appearance, but wise in speech' (Judith 11:21-23).⁵⁸¹

Bach observes how just like the other 'superloyal pious women' of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, Judith's primary virtues are her modesty and piety.⁵⁸² Her devotion is emphasised in that Judith has mourned her husband for over three years, she fasts five days a week, and she dresses herself not only in widow's clothing but in sackcloth (Judith 8). Consequently, if Susanna is the epitome of an ideal Jewish wife, then Judith takes it one step further by exceeding the requirements placed on widows and remaining in perpetual mourning for her first spouse rather than remarrying according to the customs of levirate law.

Moreover, while Judith may expose herself to the male gaze, she is presented as doing so as a response of religious obedience, undertaken after prostrating herself in sackcloth with ashes on her head and crying out to the Lord. So Judith 'removed the sackcloth she had been wearing, took off her widow's garments, bathed her body with water ... and made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her' (Judith 10:3). Consequently, even her act of societal

⁵⁸⁰ Van Henten 1995: 245.

⁵⁸¹ Compare with Judith 8:29.

⁵⁸² Bach 1997: 107.

defiance is justified as the only means to save that same patriarchal society from destruction. Judith is therefore depicted as extremely devout, so much so that Otzen suggests that because 'the Hebrew version of the book of Esther has a conspicuously non-religious character ... one could think that the book of Judith was written to neutralize the Hebrew book of Esther.'⁵⁸³

After the battle is won, Judith takes on a public role of leading the worship for the entire community (15:13). In doing so, she follows the precedent of Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Deborah (Judges 5), who also led the Israelite women in celebratory songs of victory. However, these bold actions only serve to further emphasise the removal of Judith from public life at the end of the narrative, as Judith retires to her role as a grieving widow and, despite many offers of marriage, she 'gave herself to no man' (16:22) but remained faithful to the memory of her husband until her death.

In all these ways, the author presents Judith's actions as an exception to the rule, rather than an endorsement of unrestrained beauty. In fact, it is precisely the contrast between Judith's extraordinary actions to save her people and her own preference to remain modestly concealed that enables her to take on the role of the paradigmatic Jewish heroine.

Consequently, even in their positive presentations of female beauty, these apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish texts nevertheless support the consensus view that attractive females ought to be censured. Two strictures in particular are established. Firstly, there is the overarching expectation that, unless in the most

⁵⁸³ Otzen 2002: 77.

devastating of circumstances, a woman's beauty ought to be restricted to close family members only. Secondly, there is the prevailing belief that beauty is defined and tempered by character (especially modesty), without which it is perceived to be a gaudy and treacherous attribute.

5.3. Beauty and Virtue in the Hebrew Bible

5.3.1. Beauty and Virtue in Biblical Narrative

5.3.1.a. Genesis 24:10–67

A similar combined motif of character and beauty emerges across the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Speaking of this pattern, Olyan concedes that 'other passages ... [insist] that beauty be coupled with wisdom or piety in order to be of worth.'⁵⁸⁴

I argued in chapter four that although the 'non-P' material of the book of Genesis is diverse in origin and content, nevertheless the overarching beauty theme that emerges from the editing of these texts presents physically desirable women as victims far more than they are perceived to be sexual aggressors.⁵⁸⁵

However, alongside the prominent motif of the rich foreign ruler taking the Israelite female, another facet of the beauty motif emerges in the context of Israelite courtship, as the Israelite heroine encounters her future spouse. In several of these 'courtship' narratives, the woman's physical beauty is a key component of her desirability. It is noteworthy that although Rebekah's appearance places her in

⁵⁸⁴ Olyan 2008: 25.

⁵⁸⁵ For more on the compilation and dating of the Genesis beauty-texts, see chapter two, pages 87–90.

danger in Genesis 26, in Genesis 24 her beauty is an asset, revealing how much of the male critique of female beauty depends on context.

The manservant's first favourable observation of Rebekah is described in these terms in Genesis 24:16:

והנער טבת מראה מאד בתולה ואיש לא ידעה
(‘And the youth was very attractive in appearance, a virgin,
and a man had not known her.’)

There are three key features that gain Rebekah favour in the eyes of the manservant. Firstly, she is young. **הנער** is in a shortened form and lacking the final **ה** to specify that the text refers to a young woman rather than a young man; however, the feminine ending to **טבת** (‘attractive’), as well as the context of the sentence, make it clear that the subject is indeed female. Youthfulness was a desirable quality in a wife, as it increased the chances of successful childbearing.

Secondly, she is ‘very attractive in appearance’ (**טבת מראה מאד**). **טבת** evidently refers to her external beauty rather than her moral virtue, as it accompanies the noun **מראה** (‘appearance’).

Thirdly, she is a virgin, which the text emphasises twice by referring to her both as **בתולה** and explaining that she has not been ‘known’ by a man. The presence of this tautology heightens the impression of Rebekah's unsullied status.⁵⁸⁶ It is unclear how the manservant identifies her virginal status. Wenham speculates that

⁵⁸⁶ Compare with Archer and Wenham, who argue that **בתולה** signifies her youthful status, or her marriageable age, rather than her virginity (Wenham 1994: 340; Archer 1987: 5).

perhaps it was 'obvious from her dress, but it could be that the reader is again being vouchsafed information that was not so immediately obvious to the servant (cf. v15).'⁵⁸⁷ Highlighting her virginity is both a way of emphasising Rebekah's purity, and of guaranteeing that any child she bears is the progeny of Isaac alone.

It is notable that any sense of wariness or caution about Rebekah's beauty is absent from this text. On the contrary, the servant prays for God to provide a suitable wife for Isaac, and immediately the beautiful Rebekah appears, supporting McCarter's conjecture that beauty can be not only a desirable attribute but a sign of divine favour.⁵⁸⁸ These three features—virginity, youth and beauty—coupled with her family lineage, give her all the credentials that she needs, and result in her being heavily endowed with gifts from the impressed manservant.⁵⁸⁹ As Fuchs comments,

Rebekah's good looks, intact hymen and good manners are rewarded by the precious gifts bestowed on her and her family by Abraham's servant.⁵⁹⁰

Rather than condemning the practice of female adornments,⁵⁹¹ the actions of this passage rest on the cultural assumption that it is commonplace, and even expected, throughout the ancient Near East that a woman would seek to enhance her beauty through the wearing of jewellery.

⁵⁸⁷ Wenham 1994: 144.

⁵⁸⁸ McCarter Jr 1995: 173.

⁵⁸⁹ Gifts were traditionally given from the bridegroom to the bride's family (Benzinger 1894: 106). Gunkel and Wenham both suggest that this giving of gifts developed from the earlier practice of 'bride purchase' (Gunkel 1997: 254; Wenham 1994: 150).

⁵⁹⁰ Fuchs 2000: 113. See also Augustin (1983: 72).

⁵⁹¹ An attitude I examined at some length in chapter two in reference to texts such as Isaiah 3.16–23.

However, it is important to observe that Rebekah is not chosen on good looks alone. So the test the manservant sets her has nothing to do with appearance, relying instead on her demonstration of both compassion and generosity. It is a test of character, which Rebekah surpasses by watering not only the servant but the camels also. Although good looks are a contributing factor, it is her character that ultimately makes her worthy to marry Isaac. As Gunkel comments, 'the servant did not take her beauty, but her charm as a sign. Her beauty is an added gift of God's kindness'.⁵⁹² Writing of Rebekah, Philo speaks of her as a very beautiful maiden, precisely on account of the fact that in her,

the nature of virtue is unmixed and free from guile, and unpolluted, and the only thing in all creation which is both beautiful and good; from which arose the Stoic doctrine, that the only thing that was beautiful was the good.⁵⁹³

On the other hand, unlike in the apocryphal writings, while her virginity is important, Rebekah's modesty is not the primary concern. On the contrary, it appears to be her *boldness* that wins over the manservant. Like Sarah (Genesis 12:10-19) and Dinah (Genesis 34:1) before her, Rebekah is uninhibited about displaying her beauty in a public setting. Nor does the manservant appear to expect any differently from her; he certainly does not perceive it as an inappropriate breach of modesty. She is in a public place, which is both *מחוץ לעיר* ('outside the city', Genesis 24:11) and at a communal well. The fact that this is a location that

⁵⁹² Gunkel 1997: 252.

⁵⁹³ Philo, *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*, XXXIX. 133 (Yonge 2003: 145).

could be frequented by any stranger is clearly demonstrated by the events that take place, as this is precisely what happens.

Furthermore, it is in the context of boldly interacting with a complete stranger that Rebekah displays her kindness. In fact, the very test that the manservant sets for her actually *requires* her to engage in conversation with an unknown male. The freedom that Rebekah's family grants her, and the public engagement that is anticipated of her, is a far cry from Ben Sira's prescription that a daughter be 'locked' up (42:9–14) to preserve her chastity.⁵⁹⁴

In contrast to the restrictive social practices of a later era, Westermann suggests that 'it is significant for the understanding of beauty in the Old Testament that it be perceived and noted in the ordinary chores of everyday life',⁵⁹⁵ such as fetching water from a well. Like the female lover in the Song of Songs (1:5), Rebekah's is not the beauty of a sequestered female kept out of the sun and pampered, but the natural beauty of a woman at work out of doors.

Furthermore, Rebekah is not only in a public and exposed setting, but she is also out late (לעת ערב) 'towards the time of evening', Genesis 24:11), unaccompanied by a male guardian, and yet still willing to interact with a stranger.⁵⁹⁶ It is also notable that, unlike Susanna who is veiled to all but her husband, Rebekah remains highly visible by travelling to Beersheba with her head uncovered, only veiling herself upon arrival.

⁵⁹⁴ See also 2 Maccabees 3:19–20, 3 Maccabees 1:18–19, 4 Maccabees 18:7–8, and Philo, *The Special Laws*, III, XXXI. 169–174 (Yonge 2003: 611).

⁵⁹⁵ Westermann 1985: 387.

⁵⁹⁶ Genesis 24:10–27.

As soon as she sees Isaac, however, she veils herself (Genesis 24:63–67):
את־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרָא אֶת־יִצְחָק
וַתִּשָּׂא רֵבֶקָה אֶת־עֵינֶיהָ וַתֵּרָא אֶת־יִצְחָק
(‘and Rebekah lifted up her eyes and saw
Isaac’, Genesis 24:64), וַתִּקַּח הַצֵּעִיף
(‘and she took a veil’, Genesis 24:65) and תִּתְכַס
(‘she covered herself’, 24:65). While the NRSV translates תִּתְכַס, the hithpael form of
כָּסָה, as ‘cover’, it could also be read as ‘she concealed herself,’ indicating that
Rebekah masks her appearance from her betrothed.

This initially seems to be the reversal of what takes place in the later Jewish literature. To explain Rebekah’s behaviour, the most popular consensus among scholars is that she is complying with Israelite wedding customs, as a bride would characteristically approach her bridegroom veiled.⁵⁹⁷ The likelihood that Rebekah veils herself as a bride is increased by the fact that the scene is set in the context of marriage, as Isaac brings her into his mother’s tent where ‘he took Rebekah and she became his wife.’⁵⁹⁸

This text supports the impression given by the book of Genesis as a whole that, in general, women were highly visible in ancient Israelite culture. Nor, unlike the literature of a later era, do the editors prescribe locking women up and keeping them in seclusion as the solution to the problem of male temptation in the face of female beauty. It is important that she is a virgin. However, she is not expected to hide herself.

⁵⁹⁷ Rebekah also seems to follow a culturally recognised code of conduct in the way she dismounts from her camel. This gesture is referenced elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible as a known symbol of deference (1 Samuel 25:23; Joshua 15:18). See Westermann (1985: 391).

⁵⁹⁸ Genesis 24:67.

Rather, the author takes for granted that women could be allowed significant freedom of movement, and yet still be trusted to maintain their purity. Contrasting the practices of the two divergent eras, Leonie Archer comments that ‘young women in the Old Testament seem to have moved about freely and still were able to declare that they ‘had not known man’.⁵⁹⁹

Indeed, it is precisely Rebekah’s lack of modesty that enables her to gain favour in the first place. Consequently, if any virtue is celebrated, it is her *boldness* in approaching a stranger rather than her *restraint*. Like the contrast between Ben Sira 25 and Proverbs 31, therefore, this narrative suggests that while beauty and virtue may be interwoven in Hebrew thought, the virtues that the editors of these texts commend shift from the Hebrew Bible to the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts.

5.3.1.b. 1 Samuel 25:1–44

If Rebekah is set up as the ideal Israelite wife in the Genesis beauty-texts, then Abigail is assigned that role in the book of 1 Samuel. In this sense, she is distinctive from every other woman in 1 and 2 Samuel, as she is not presented as a passive victim but rather as an initiator. While beauty and virtue are attributed to both Rebekah and Abigail, the latter is also presented as intelligent: *והאשה טובת-שכל* (‘and the wife was of good sense and beautiful of form’)⁶⁰⁰, a feature that is heightened in contrast to her foolish husband.

⁵⁹⁹ Archer 1990: 113.

⁶⁰⁰ 1 Samuel 25:3.

The contrast between foolishness and wisdom suggests that this narrative stands within the wisdom tradition. Whybray highlights how wisdom emerges as an important motif in the books of Samuel, as time and again moral and immoral behaviour are held up against one another, with severe consequences for those who go astray. Reflecting on the material, he concludes,

The Succession Narrative stands firmly in the line of development of the Israelite narrative tradition. Nevertheless ... especially in its casting of proverbial literature into narrative form[,] it is unique in the Hebrew Bible.⁶⁰¹

We can see clearly how proverbial literature is brought into narrative form in 1 Samuel 25, which shares commonalities with the polarisation of the good and wicked woman in Proverbs 1–7, as well as Ben Sira's emphasis upon the value of intelligence as the most sought-after characteristic in a wife. What is unique about the characterisation in 1 Samuel 25, however, is that in this case it is not a woman who is personified as Folly, but Nabal who plays the fool as a foil to his brilliant wife Abigail.

In the books of Samuel and Kings, wisdom is a quality that both the biblical protagonists Abigail and later Solomon become renowned for. In both cases, intelligence seems to be their defining characteristic, even more than wealth or beauty. There is a certain imbalance, however, in that while Solomon is considered a worthy successor to David primarily on account of his wisdom, in the case of the female protagonist, Abigail must be both wise and beautiful to attract the future king.

⁶⁰¹ Whybray 1968: 115.

In this sense, there are stronger parallels between Abigail and the young Israelite men who are set apart for Babylonian courtly duties in Daniel 1:4, who also possess both physical beauty and intelligence. As Olyan observes, they show their worthiness because they are found to be ‘without [defect], attractive in appearance, proficient in every type of wisdom, and knowledgeable.’⁶⁰²

Like Rebekah, when Abigail first encounters David, she dismounts from her donkey, suggesting this was a recognised cultural act of submission.⁶⁰³ In this case, however, she takes it one step further, prostrating herself upon the ground in the position of a supplicant. As Hertzberg comments, ‘her almost exaggerated courtesy is meant to stand in intentional contrast to the boorishness of her husband.’⁶⁰⁴

This is one of the few instances in the Hebrew Bible where an author gives a female protagonist a lengthy speech, and the first time this occurs in the case of two future spouses meeting.⁶⁰⁵ Abigail is cast in an extremely positive light. While Nabal is presented as a fool and David as hot-headed, Abigail reasons with clarity and wisdom to such a degree that David recognises her prophetic voice, praising Yahweh for sending her to him (1 Samuel 25:32). He also praises Abigail on account of ‘your discernment’ (טעמך), an affirmation that stands in sharp contrast with Proverbs 11:22 where a beautiful woman without discernment is likened to a gold ring in a pig’s snout. Brenner comments,

⁶⁰² Olyan 2008: 22.

⁶⁰³ 1 Samuel 25:23; Genesis 24:25.

⁶⁰⁴ Hertzberg 1964: 3.

⁶⁰⁵ Compare with the silence of Eve, Rebekah and Rachel when they first meet their spouses.

An important component of Abigail's intelligence is her eloquence. The speech she delivers to David ... is a beautifully constructed piece of manipulation, carefully designed to further her own ends.⁶⁰⁶

Once again, however, while Abigail is praised for her intelligence, modesty is one virtue that does not feature. For although Abigail finds favour with David, her actions are subversive toward her own husband. She has left the house without her husband's knowledge and is displaying her beauty before her husband's enemy in a manner that clearly captures his attention. One might argue that she does so out of necessity in order to save her household. In this regard, she bears some similarity to Judith, who is also forced out of her sphere of comfort in order to save the Jewish people.

However, even if her motives are justifiable, her devotion to her husband appears questionable as her description of Nabal is unreservedly harsh. As she states, 'his name means Fool, and folly goes with him' (1 Samuel 25:25). Bach goes so far as to comment:

When Abigail, the consummate good wife, left her house and spoke eloquent, prophetic words to the outlaw David, she ceased to be a good wife to Nabal. Instead she offered herself as well as her husband's larder to the other man.⁶⁰⁷

Thus there is a certain degree of moral ambiguity in the presentation of Abigail that is not present in the depiction of the heroines of the later Jewish novellas, whose actions are unquestionably proper. In contrast to women who inhabit the sphere of

⁶⁰⁶ Brenner 1985: 40.

⁶⁰⁷ Bach 1997: 29.

Ben Sira, Abigail, like Rebekah or the wife of noble character (Proverbs 31), is not a woman who can be easily contained. As Brenner observes, 'Abigail can take the initiative without her husband's consent. Her control of household affairs, and her servant's loyalty to her, are such that Nabal does not even know of her activities'.⁶⁰⁸

Ultimately, the sight of a beautiful and wise woman kneeling before him and speaking with such eloquence is too much for David to resist, and as soon as he hears of the demise of Nabal, David sends for her to become his wife. Yet again, however, it is not just beauty, but character that have rendered Abigail a suitable candidate for the king. Like the other biblical heroines, she displays a boldness that is lacking in all but Judith when it comes to the post-biblical narratives.

5.3.1.c. Esther

Despite Esther's inclusion within the biblical canon, this late narrative of the Hebrew Bible has more in common with the Jewish novellas of the Second Temple era both in regard to genre and in the stylistic presentation of the beautiful female protagonist. There are notable affinities between the book of Esther and that of Susanna and particularly Judith. Larkin notes how in style Esther bears some resemblance to Hellenistic novellas on account of the book's interest in

luxury, its satiric quality, its erotic concern with the Persian king's love-life and its portrayal of the heroine as a young, attractive victim, somewhat alone and at the mercy of controlling forces.⁶⁰⁹

⁶⁰⁸ Brenner 1985: 39.

⁶⁰⁹ Larkin 1996: 93. See also Pervo (2012: 146).

Although the book is a post-exilic composition, it is difficult to offer a specific date. Certain historical details accord with what we know of life in the Persian period, leading some to postulate a fourth-century BCE date. However, linguistic considerations and the absence of any mention of Esther in either Ben Sira or the Christian era have led others to propose a Hellenistic date of authorship some time in the mid-second century BCE.

If the latter interpretation is correct, then the book of Esther would be a near-contemporary with some of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish writings, and one would expect a high level of comparison.⁶¹⁰ On the other hand, the inclusion of Esther in the canon, as well as the presence of Greek additions to Esther that reflect later Jewish concerns with piety and intermarriage, indicate that although Esther is one of the latest books of the Hebrew Bible to be written, it likely pre-dated the second and first centuries BCE when these issues of intermarriage and female purity were heightened concerns.

The book of Esther stands out not only on the basis of date and style, but because in Esther several of the biblical beauty motifs come together in one narrative. The power of female beauty is demonstrated by Esther's ability to gain favour with Ahasuerus, the vulnerability brought about by beauty is highlighted by the removal of Vashti and Esther's own insecure position within the court, and the

⁶¹⁰ Larkin notes how the Hebrew of the text is as late as any found in the Hebrew Bible, as well as containing vocabulary found nowhere else except in Mishnaic and Rabbinic writings (Larkin 1996: 78). Given that the Vaticanus Greek version of Esther was supposedly brought to Egypt during the fourth year of the reign of either Ptolemy IX Lathryos (114/113 BCE) or Ptolemy XI Auletes (78/77 BCE), Day suggests that the latest possible date would be 78/77 BCE (Day 2005: 14).

positive characterisation of beauty is revealed through Esther's ability to save her people on the basis of a status won by beauty.

In this way, this narrative demonstrates how interwoven these various themes can be as different facets of the biblical beauty motif. The text also highlights the paradoxical nature of beauty in that it can be both dangerous and empowering at the same time. I argue that of these three facets of the beauty motif, the depiction of female beauty as a means to gain power over men is the thread that is dispelled the most swiftly in the book of Esther on account of her vulnerability.

The instability of Esther's position is emphasised from the beginning of this narrative, as her predecessor Queen Vashti is exiled for refusing to pander to the whims of her husband who desires men to gaze on her beauty. Bal observes that 'Vashti's refusal to be an object of display is in a sense a refusal to be objectivised, hence to be robbed of her subjectivity.'⁶¹¹

Vashti's vulnerability is emphasised by the fact that she is stripped of her status on account of her defiance, demonstrating that in reality, as queen she never had any real power, and so the same will be true of Esther. Vashti's actions also bring to light the institutionalised sexism of the court that Esther is about to enter. As Butting comments, 'Esther's plan would not be conceivable without Vashti's refusal. The prevailing sexist balance of power has been made public by Vashti's resistance'.⁶¹²

It is true that in some sense, Esther's beauty gains her access and favour that she could never have had otherwise. Butting makes a strong case for the

⁶¹¹ Bal 1999: 233; Loader 2012: 237.

⁶¹² Butting 1999: 240.

dependence of the book of Esther on the story of Joseph in Genesis 39. She observes how both the protagonists' beauty is described in almost identical language, such that Joseph is *יפה-תאר ויפה מראה* ('beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance', Genesis 39:6), while Esther is *יפה-תאר וטובת מראה* ('beautiful in form and attractive in appearance', Esther 2:7). Furthermore, Butting points out how they are both 'endangered' on account of their good looks, taken into a form of captivity, and ultimately overcome their adversity to gain positions of power in a foreign court.⁶¹³ In this sense, Laniak is right that 'Esther had one quality, however, which unlocked the doors of opportunity: her beauty.'⁶¹⁴

Unlike Joseph's rise to power, it is unclear just how much authority Esther ever truly has. This leads to Brenner's observation that 'in reality Esther has the title of "queen" ... but has no official rights ... She resorts to feminine and sexual charms ... for, apparently, no other means of persuasion is available to her.'⁶¹⁵ Indeed, the description of Esther's selection to be queen on the basis of being found 'good/attractive to the eyes' (2:9) of the king shows where the power truly lies. As Laniak notes, 'it is the king's eyes, so to speak, which matter. His viewpoint, his valuation ... his expectations must be met in the court.'⁶¹⁶

Initially, Esther has no control over her circumstances but is instead taken into the palace. Even once she is queen, Esther does not have the right to approach or petition the king, and does so at the risk of her own life (Esther 4:11–16; 5:1–2).

⁶¹³ Butting 1999: 240.

⁶¹⁴ Laniak 1998: 59.

⁶¹⁵ Brenner 1985: 31.

⁶¹⁶ Laniak 1998: 63.

Yet again, Esther's beauty is her means of gaining access, as she dresses up in her royal robes to approach the king in a similar fashion to the way that Judith beautifies herself in preparation for her own battle with Holofernes (Esther 5:1).

However, if Judith's preparations are lengthy, they are overshadowed by the extensive treatment Esther faces, as she endures 'six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women' (Esther 2:12).⁶¹⁷ Moreover, while Judith is able to preserve her modesty, Esther is given no choice but to surrender her virginity to a non-Israelite ruler. In both cases, however, the two women do so in order to save their people from the threat of destruction at the hands of a foreign nation.

Commenting on Esther's use of beauty to achieve the survival of both herself and her people, Butting observes that 'she puts on her royal robes, remembering that the king wanted to "decorate himself" with a beautiful royal woman (1.11); and she stays alive.'⁶¹⁸ This strategy to gain favour on account of her appearance succeeds, as the text states that Esther won favour (חן) in his sight, or more specifically בעיניו ('in his eyes' (Esther 5:2)), highlighting that Ahasuerus was particularly pleased by what he *saw*.

⁶¹⁷ For a parallel ancient Near Eastern example of this type of oil-based cosmetic treatment, see the Egyptian account of 'Sinuhe' (1.38): 'I was put in the house of a prince. In it were luxuries: a bathroom and mirrors. In it were riches from the treasury; clothes of royal linen, myrrh, and the choice perfume of the king and of his favourite courtiers were in every room ... I was clothed in fine linen, I was anointed with fine oil' (P. Berlin 3022, 12th dynasty. Translated by Lichtheim (Hallo and Younger 2003: 82)).

⁶¹⁸ Butting 1999: 242.

For this reason, despite her vulnerability, the overarching message of Esther is an account of salvation of God's people through the beauty of one woman. Therefore the book resists a solely negative interpretation of beauty, at least in the case of Esther. Rather, it is ultimately a cause of triumph. For while Vashti is ultimately trapped by her beauty, Esther finds the means to use her beauty to her advantage. Bal highlights the similarities as she notes that in approaching the king, Esther presents us with

the positive version of Vashti's negative act; Esther appears not for show but for action, not as a mere possession but as a self-possessed subject; finally, to drive this continuity between Esther and Vashti home, it is Esther who then makes the King appear at her banquet.⁶¹⁹

Like Rebekah and Abigail before her, Esther fits the criterion of a 'beautiful young virgin'.⁶²⁰ Note however, that although this is her primary characteristic, Esther's influence is not limited to her beauty. She also exhibits winsomeness, like Ruth, to gain favour (חסד, 'kindness') from those in authority over her (Esther 2:9), from all who saw her חן ('favour, grace', Esther 2:15), and even the אהב ('love'), חן ('favour, grace') and חסד ('kindness') of King Ahasuerus himself.

While her beauty plays a part in this, the extent of Esther's popularity, emphasised through the repetition of just how 'favoured' she is, suggests that she was attractive not only aesthetically but also in character. Moreover, the strength of

⁶¹⁹ Bal 1999: 233.

⁶²⁰ Compare with 1 Kings 1:1-4. There are striking similarities between Esther and Abishag, who is also brought to a king's palace as the result of a national search for a beautiful woman. In contrast to Esther, however, she is never given the opportunity to find her own voice or develop into her own woman in the biblical narrative.

Esther's character and courage is shown in her decision to risk her life to save her people. Brenner is right that Esther must '[resort] to feminine and sexual charms';⁶²¹ however, she also demonstrates the intelligence to speak with humility and eloquence, and to know exactly how to press her suit and gain the favour of her king such that he would willingly offer her half of his kingdom (Esther 5:3).

However, while charm and courage might be attributes of Esther, yet again one virtue that is characteristic of the later Jewish novella but absent from the book of Esther is the virtue of modesty. There is no place for modesty in a novella where Esther's position as queen is won by her physical and sexual exposure before the king. Moreover, like Judith, Esther's ability to save her people depends on her decision to set aside modest conduct and etiquette by approaching the king. Beal emphasises the significance of 'hiding' in the book of Esther.⁶²² However, when it matters, Esther has the fortitude to place herself on very public display. As Fuchs notes, 'she insists on being a subject in the same way that Vashti had refused to be an object.'⁶²³

Consequently, unlike her later Jewish successors such as Susanna, Sarah or Aseneth, Esther not only resists societal proprieties but she is specifically praised for actively overcoming them. Her beauty is both a weapon and a weakness, and her status on account of her beauty is both an opportunity and a danger to Esther. In this sense, Fuchs is correct in her observation that 'the book of Esther is riddled with ... ambivalences, and ambiguities' to the degree that 'one must ask whether the

⁶²¹ Brenner 1989: 31.

⁶²² Beal 1997: 2.

⁶²³ Fuchs 2000: 76.

book of Esther is less about the definition and fixation of identity and more about its problematizations.’⁶²⁴

The level of ambiguity within Esther highlights the distinction between the books of the Hebrew Bible and those of later Jewish authorship, because this kind of ambiguity in regard to women and social roles is one that the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical authors seem unhappy with. Even Judith, who in many ways is exceptional, is still framed by patriarchal expectations in such a way that her religious loyalty and her purity are preserved. The same cannot be said of Esther. In fact, the later Greek additions to the book of Esther reveal clear differences between the vagaries of the original text and the concerns of the later Jewish editors.

These amendments to Esther offer a unique opportunity to analyse how literary and cultural expectations towards women shifted throughout the Hellenistic era, as the additions made by the author of the Greek version of Esther reveal which areas the later author considered to be inadequate in the original edition.

The first notable change is that the drama of the story—the suspense, the emotions, the action—is heightened in the Greek additions due to the increased levels of descriptive detail, the addition of various petitionary prayers (Addition C, Esther 13, 14), and Esther’s initially cool reception from Ahasuerus (Addition D 15). All of these elements move the story ‘towards these Greek norms’ that are found in a Hellenistic novella.⁶²⁵

⁶²⁴ Fuchs 2000: 48.

⁶²⁵ Larkin 1996: 93.

Esther is also presented as less composed and more ‘stereotypically feminine’ in the Greek additions.⁶²⁶ For example, instead of approaching the king in a composed fashion, in the Greek Addition D 15.7, Esther ‘faltered, and turned pale and faint, and collapsed’. Likewise, rather than simply being notified that Esther fasted (Esther 4:16), in the Greek Addition C 14 we are told that she is ‘seized with a dreadful anxiety’ and ‘fled to the Lord’, at which point she

took off her splendid apparel and put on the garments of distress and mourning, and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she utterly humbled her body; every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair.⁶²⁷

Her transformation from an object of beauty to a state of extreme distress and mourning highlights the extent of her devastation. This narrative also serves to draw greater attention to both her beauty—a typical feature of a Greek novella—and also her humility, as she is presented as far more concerned with prostrating herself before God than with her own appearance.

Here she is shown to be in a state of utter weakness and desperation, with nothing to fall back on except her faith. There are striking parallels here to Judith 9:1, in which we are told that Judith

put ashes on her head, opened her robe to reveal the sackcloth she was wearing under her clothes, and bowed down with her face to the floor.

⁶²⁶ Larkin 1996: 86.

⁶²⁷ Greek Esther, Addition C 14.1–2.

These parallels continue as Esther's beauty is once again overemphasised in the Greek Addition D 15:1-4, in which Esther

arrayed herself in splendid attire. Then, majestically adorned, after invoking the aid of the all-seeing God and Savior, she took two maids with her ... She was radiant with perfect beauty...

Rather than stating that Esther simply puts on 'royal robes' (Esther 5:1), this passage once again parallels Judith, whose preparation to meet Holofernes is recounted in even greater detail. In both cases, these two women are shown to use ornamentation and clothing as a way of fortifying themselves for an approaching conflict, and bolstering their defences by employing their beauty as a weapon.

On the other hand, however, in this Greek addition Esther is notably weaker than both her biblical counterpart, and the indomitable Judith. By presenting Esther as fainting before the king (Addition D 15:7), the editor shifts the emphasis away from her act of courage, instead emphasizing that the outcome is entirely dependent upon the action of God.

This heightened sense of piety is created not only by the addition of two extensive prayers from Mordecai and Esther, but also by the fact that once Esther faints away, it is God who 'changed the spirit of the king to gentleness' (Greek Addition D 15. 8).

Lastly, as well as placing a greater emphasis on both the beauty of Esther and her piety, these Greek additions demonstrate the author's concern to present Esther as far more modest.

This is done not only by her humbling herself through fasting as a sign that she is unconcerned with her own vanity, but through the words of Esther's prayer, as she says 'you know that I hate the splendour of the wicked and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised and of any alien' (Greek Addition D 14.15). Essentially, the author claims that contrary to how it could be interpreted in the Hebrew edition, Esther cannot stand the splendour that she lives in ('I abhor the sign of my proud position', D 14.16), because she is naturally modest.

In addition, the author ensures that the reader is informed that Esther does not enjoy her marriage bed with a non-Israelite male, but it is a sacrifice of her chastity that she has been forced to make for the sake of her people. This critique of intermarriage could be indicative of a second-century BCE dating of the additions to Esther, as this increasingly became a concern during the Hasmonean dynasty.⁶²⁸

In this way, the Greek additions to Esther show us which concerns were foremost in the mind of the Jewish editor of the text as he sought to present her as a more fitting heroine to a later audience. It is noteworthy that, in addition to heightening the sense of drama, the editor is keen to increase the reader's appreciation for Esther's beauty, while at the same time downplaying her role in the rescue of her people in order to emphasise her spiritual dependence on God (who is not directly mentioned in the original version.)

The editor likewise appears concerned that Esther's boldness might imply that she was not adequately modest, and he therefore offers us an insight into her appropriately 'feminine' sensibilities, so that the reader can be assured that Esther

⁶²⁸ Loader 2011: 243.

does fit the mould of the archetypal woman of the latter part of the Second Temple era.

In conclusion, these Greek amendments highlight the divergences between the original text and what the later editor believed it *should* have said. The original author of the Hebrew text is more concerned to present Esther as beautiful, winsome, eloquent and brave than excessively concerned with modesty, perhaps because her modesty had to be sacrificed the moment she entered the harem of the king. Moreover, while Esther is shown to be pious in her act of fasting, we are not given any insight into the dynamics of her faith.

In conclusion, while there are clear parallels in genre and content between Esther and the apocryphal Jewish novellas, the Greek additions to Esther also clearly highlight the different set of expectations for later Jewish heroines.

Having compared the narratives of the Hebrew Bible with the first- and second-century BCE Jewish novellas, it is clear that within Hebrew thought there exists a strong correlation between the admiration of physical beauty and good character, as the latter greatly enhances the appreciation of the former.

However, while wisdom is a trait that is admired in both the earlier and later texts, there is a notable difference in the extent to which modesty is valued as virtue. In the post-biblical Jewish novels, it is fitting to say that modesty is the primary virtue of the Jewish heroine, a notion that frames even Judith's activity, as her modesty is clearly established at both the beginning and end of her story.

In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, not only does modesty appear to be under-emphasised, but in nearly every instance we have considered—Rebekah, Abigail, Rachel, Esther— it is a woman’s boldness in taking an initiative beyond what her cultural norms might anticipate of her that wins her favour for her marriage.⁶²⁹ In this sense, modesty is not only overlooked by the editors, but at times seems to be subtly overlooked in favour of courage.

Given the evident concern of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical authors when considering the potential of female beauty to undermine patriarchal control, it makes sense that these authors would also be careful to praise beauty when it is constrained within strict societal parameters. In this sense, the positive depictions of beauty found within the later Jewish literature do not contradict the negative cautions, but instead both serve to perpetuate the power-dynamics of a tightly-controlled patriarchal society.

In contrast to this, through the freer interactions between beautiful Israelite women and men (e.g. Rebekah and Abraham’s manservant, Rachel and Jacob, Abigail and David, Esther and the king), one is left with the impression that from the perspective of the authors of the Hebrew Bible, it is the boldness of these women that is affirmed. This is not to say that cultural and sexual boundaries are not important, but rather that there is a degree of laxity allowed in the narratives of male and female interactions in the Hebrew Bible that is no longer considered appropriate in the later post-biblical era.

⁶²⁹ For additional examples of women who are celebrated on account of their boldness in the Hebrew Bible, see Jael (Judges 4:21), Ruth (Ruth 3:7–8), and Tamar (Genesis 38: 13–19, 25–26).

5.3.2. Beauty and Virtue in Hebrew Poetry

5.3.2.a. *Psalm 45*

In chapter three, I argued that Augustin made a compelling case for the motif of courtly beauty in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, I noted that there are several instances in the prophetic literature of the Hebrew Bible in which Israel is depicted as a beautiful bride decked out for her wedding day.⁶³⁰ Positive praise of an attractive woman is linked almost exclusively to either one's wife or prospective spouse in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature. It is unsurprising, therefore, that within the Hebrew Bible we not only find narratives extolling the physical desirability of a potential wife, but we also encounter poetry celebrating the beauty of a bride.

On the one hand, this kind of imagery aligns with Ben Sira's own perspective, as he too lauds the beauty of a good wife. On the specific occasion of a wedding, however, these prophetic and poetic Hebrew texts differ from Ben Sira in that rather than being exhorted to remain modest and conceal her beauty, the bride is expected to dazzle her viewers as all are gathered to celebrate her marriage. For this reason, these beauty-texts are some of the most positive in their characterisation of men and women in the Hebrew Bible, because the beauty of the bride and groom is praised without rebuke or caution.

The most famous lyrics extolling the beauty of a bride—and groom—are found in Psalm 45. Although this psalm could have been intended as a popular love

⁶³⁰ Isaiah 62:1–6; Ezekiel 16:1–8. See chapter three, pages 146–149.

song or as a postexilic allegory of Yahweh's marriage to Israel, Gerstenberger contends that the plain meaning is also the most likely; that this was a song written for a royal wedding.⁶³¹ As such, this psalm belongs with an assortment of 'royal' psalms that run throughout the Psalter, highlighting the centrality of the state cult within Israelite worship.⁶³² Gerstenberger notes how unusual it is for a religious hymn to be directed to an individual in the Hebrew Bible—although it is more common in the surrounding ANE cultures.⁶³³ However, from the very beginning of the psalm, the audience is forewarned that they are about to hear something different, as the psalm is introduced as שִׁיר יְרִידָת (45:1, MT) ('a song of love', 45:0, NRSV).⁶³⁴ The directive that it is עַל-שִׁשְׁנִים (45:1, MT) ('according to the lilies', 45:0, NRSV) also emphasises the nature of this love song, as in Hebrew poetry lilies are associated with eroticism (e.g. Song of Songs 2:1–4, 16.)

The king is presented as the most beautiful (יָפֵה) of all the sons of men (Psalm 45:3, MT), while the bride's beauty (יָפִי) is desired by her husband (45:12, MT). It is notable that the primary verb for 'to be beautiful' in Hebrew (יָפֵה) is not gender-specific, but both the bride and her groom are equally designated as beautiful.

⁶³¹ Gerstenberger 1988: 189.

⁶³² Gerstenberger 1988: 19.

⁶³³ That said, Gerstenberger does note the parallels between this praise of kingly beauty and the depictions of Saul (1 Samuel 9–10) and the household of David (1 Samuel 16; 2 Samuel 14, 1 Kings 1) (1988, 187).

⁶³⁴ The English versification of Psalm 45 is different to that of the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT).

However, while the language might be interchangeable, in every other aspect the beauty of the male and female takes a divergent form in this psalm.

The king's beauty is that of a warrior, who rides out (45:5, MT), shoots arrows (45:6, MT) and wears a sword as ornamentation (45:4, MT), symbolising both his הוד ('splendour' 45:4, MT) and his הדר ('majesty', 45:4, MT). This is a deliberate play by the psalmist on two similar-sounding and interrelated words to accentuate the strong and regal appearance of the king.⁶³⁵

Once again, beauty is heightened by virtue, as the nobility of the king is part of what makes him so attractive. Thus he speaks as if grace (חן) were poured out on his lips (45:3, MT), because in his words he tells the truth (אמת, 45:5, MT), and in his deeds he loves righteousness (צדק, 45:8, MT). The text states that it is on account of his righteousness that God anoints the king not only with fragrant oils such as myrrh and aloes (45:9, MT),⁶³⁶ but also with שמן ששון ('the oil of gladness', 45:8, MT).⁶³⁷ In this way, a cosmetic metaphor is attributed to the divine blessing of God on his chosen king.

In chapter two I noted the way that the application of cosmetics for vain pursuits leads to condemnation;⁶³⁸ however, this does not mean that the biblical writers criticised the use of cosmetics or beautification rituals in every circumstance. The critique seems to be directed at the motivations behind the use of cosmetics,

⁶³⁵ Weiser: 'the poet briefly sketches the overwhelming impression which the splendour surrounding the king makes on the senses' (1959: 364).

⁶³⁶ Myrrh is a fragrance associated with royalty (Esther 2:12).

⁶³⁷ Compare with Ecclesiastes 9:8. This is a similar sentiment to that expressed by Yahweh in 1 Samuel 16:7, in which Yahweh states that he does not see as men see.

⁶³⁸ E.g. Jeremiah 4:30, 2 Kings 9:30.

rather than at the beautification practices themselves.⁶³⁹ Indeed, it is seen as entirely fitting for the king to make use of any human measures available to improve upon his appearance on his wedding day.

However, if the king's beauty is enhanced by his vigour and ability to perform awesome deeds (45:5, MT), then the beauty of the bride is shown in a much more passive fashion. Thus, she is acknowledged to be כְּבוֹדָה ('glorious', 45:14, MT) not on the basis of her activity, but rather within the seclusion of 'her chamber'. This image does not feel far from Ben Sira's exhortation that a wife's beauty is best witnessed in the context of her 'well-ordered home' (Ben Sira 26:16), as the bride's primary purpose in Psalm 45 is to ensure that her beauty is the object of the king's desire (45:12, MT).

This statement stands out for two reasons. First, her desirability seems to depend on her beauty rather than her virtue or intelligence. Secondly, it is intriguing that while the king's beauty is publically regarded as superior to every other man's, the bride's beauty is not given the same public recognition. Rather, it is clear that what matters is not how she is perceived by everyone else, but that her beauty be the desire of her husband, because it is he who is אֲדֹנָיךְ ('your master' 45:12, MT). Thus the same theme that emerges in the writings of Ben Sira surfaces in this psalm, as the text conveys the expectation that the real purpose of her beauty is to satisfy her husband alone.

⁶³⁹ See the discussion on the association between idolatry and jewellery in Isaiah 3:17-24 in chapter three, page 157.

The bride is expected to conform to such a degree that she forgets not only her father but her entire people (45:11, MT) in order to become more fully what her husband desires her to be. There is also a sense in which she is expected to take on a passive role in so far as she is to be looked upon, rather than free to look, and she is to 'bow' to her אֲדֹנָי ('lord', 45:12, MT) rather than approach him as an equal.

On the other hand, however, while her intention is to please her husband, she is nevertheless put on display for all to see. Thus unlike the veiled Susanna or the segregated women of Ben Sira's household, or Vashti in her chamber, this bride's beauty does not remain hidden away, but she will allow herself to be displayed on her wedding day. Indeed, her beauty is heightened by the bridal garments that are symbolic of her new status, particularly the gold of Ophir (45:10, MT), which none other than the queen wears as symbolic of her regal position. Commenting on her gold-woven robes, Craigie suggests,

The gold which adorns her is no doubt decorative but again the poet has taken the visual element of gold and applied it, by implication, to the inner worth of the princess.⁶⁴⁰

There is no doubt that in her golden attire the bride stands out amongst the women. However it is also hard to overlook the fact that while she may shine the brightest, she is nevertheless still one among many 'daughters of kings' who are the 'ladies of honour' (45:10, MT) belonging to her groom, likely referring to a harem. In the words of Weiser,

⁶⁴⁰ Craigie 1983: 340.

All this splendour, however, reaches its climax in the king's bride, who, adorned with choice jewellery of gold, today occupies the place of honour at the right hand of the ruler.⁶⁴¹

It is telling that Weiser refers to her occupying the place of honour 'today', because unlike the king, it is unclear what public role, if any, the queen will be given after this one day of celebration. Given the emphasis on the king's desire for her beauty alone, and the instructions she is given to bow before him, it is possible that this is to be her one day of glory, after which her beauty may once again be best displayed in the sanctuary of her 'chamber' (45:14, MT).

Thus I argue that, while this psalm offers us extravagant praise for the beauty of both the bride and groom, there nevertheless remains an underlying sense of restraint upon the bride who cannot share in the same freedom granted her husband. Furthermore, there is a difference in the portraits of beauty that are presented to us. On the basis of this psalm, masculine beauty emerges as a dynamic, forceful, powerful splendour, whereas female loveliness is portrayed as a statuesque, confined, objectified version of beauty. Unlike in the more ambiguous narratives of the Hebrew Bible, therefore, this psalm presents the bride as visible, but restricted by cultural expectations. Such constraint within the psalm is not surprising, however, given its genre and purpose. For as a royal psalm written specifically for a wedding ceremony, it is to be expected that this text presents an idealised vision of an Israelite royal wedding, in which the king as Yahweh's chosen sovereign quite clearly holds the place of honour.

⁶⁴¹ Weiser 1959: 364.

5.3.2.b. *Song of Songs*

The purpose of this chapter has been to consider what is the 'proper' context within which female beauty can be perceived and admired within the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. So far, the answer that has emerged is that within the later literature, beauty is best admired within the context of marriage and when accompanied by a virtuous character, the most important feature of which is modesty. In the Hebrew Bible, however, a greater degree of freedom is permitted for the Israelite heroine, and while a modest character is important, virtues such as intelligence, kindness and boldness appear to be of even greater value.

When it comes to the Song of Songs, however, all of these prior conclusions regarding a Hebrew perspective on the appropriate way to perceive female beauty are overturned. In this way, the Song of Songs is the ultimate counter-text. Drawing a comparison between the approach of the Song and Proverbs 31:30, Brenner writes that the Song's

emphasis on a female lover's beauty and sex appeal is in stark opposition to another OT voice, which states what is required of a married woman, namely, that loveliness and beauty are of no consequence in a worthy wife.⁶⁴²

The majority of this thesis has been a study in the way that *male* attitudes towards female beauty are formed and portrayed in Hebrew literature up until the end of the first century CE. However, in the Song of Songs we find that this is no longer a one-way perspective, as the female is no longer defined as an *object* under observation,

⁶⁴² Brenner 1989: 54.

but also as a *subject* who observes. As Hausl and Silber comment, 'the songs speak of *seeing* and being *seen*, of beauty and passion, of joy and desire.'⁶⁴³

This female perspective would be heightened if the Song of Songs were taken to have female authorship.⁶⁴⁴ However, although this is a possibility,⁶⁴⁵ Exum points out that the woman in the Song may well be 'the creation of an androcentric narrator',⁶⁴⁶ a position supported by Clines who proposes that a male author 'fantasizes such a woman, he writes his dream, he finds an audience of like-minded men, his poem becomes a best-seller.'⁶⁴⁷ Brenner therefore suggests that 'each lyric be read twice: as if it were the product of male authorship or, conversely, female authorship.'⁶⁴⁸ Similar ambiguity arises when attempting to date the Song, as linguistically it draws upon early Hebrew vocabulary while at the same time containing Aramaisms and other foreign words that stem from late in the Second Temple era.⁶⁴⁹ My own conviction is that fragments of the songs may have originated in pre-exilic Israel, but they likely underwent a long process of oral transmission before taking their final form.

⁶⁴³ Hausl and Silber 2000: 190. The italics are mine.

⁶⁴⁴ Reasons one might be inclined to accept female authorship include the facts that in the Song we glimpse a uniquely feminine world; a greater portion of the Song is sung from the female perspective; the woman is presented with a far greater autonomy than any other woman in the Hebrew Bible; and elsewhere women are recognised in the Hebrew tradition as being writers of poetry and song (Exodus 15:20–21; 1 Samuel 18:6–7; Judges 5:1–31).

⁶⁴⁵ For example, Arbel suggests that the Song is based on the daydreams and inner thought life of a female poet (Arbel 2000: 90–103).

⁶⁴⁶ Exum 2000: 28.

⁶⁴⁷ Clines 1995: 106.

⁶⁴⁸ Brenner 1993a: 29.

⁶⁴⁹ Although it cannot be too late, though, as a fragment of the Song was found at Qumran. For more on this discussion of dating, see Snaith (1993: 8–10) and Brenner (1989: 57–60).

Significantly, Ellis argues that Ben Sira either directly draws on the language of the Song of Songs, or makes use of a 'standardized "vocabulary of love" from which the images in both texts were crafted', as there are linguistic parallels between the texts that cannot be accounted for otherwise.⁶⁵⁰ Therefore she argues that Ben Sira deliberately selects these images to evoke an 'erotic sensibility' that he shares with the Song of Songs.⁶⁵¹

Although it is true that Ben Sira utilises erotic language,⁶⁵² it seems somewhat ironic that he may have intentionally drawn on the language of the Song to express his eroticism, given that in so many ways the Song strains against the confines of the very cultural framework that Ben Sira endorses. It is true that Ben Sira and the author of the Song share a propensity to celebrate the erotic; however, that is where the similarity ends.

For Ben Sira, the only appropriate context within which sexuality ought to be expressed is within the bounds of marriage, whereas in the Song, the female lover is a woman unconcerned with propriety. She is constantly battling the restraints of her culture in order to possess the same autonomy and freedom to love that her beloved experiences.

Nor do the lovers appear to be married, which is contrary to everything that Ben Sira stands for in his attitude towards beauty and sex. Rather, the female has to fight against the authority of her brothers (Song 1:6), and in pursuit of her lover, the female steals out after dark into the city and is beaten by the 'sentinels of the walls'

⁶⁵⁰ Ellis 2013: 185.

⁶⁵¹ Ellis 2013: 182.

⁶⁵² Ben Sira 26:51.

for her breach of propriety (Song 5:7). This incident reveals that beneath the celebratory ambiance of the Song, more oppressive social expectations threaten.⁶⁵³

In significant ways, the female lover bears a resemblance to the 'headstrong daughter' of Ben Sira 42:11, of whom Ben Sira recommends 'making sure there is no lattice in her room' (42:11), in order to prevent any eager lover from 'peering in through the lattice' and viewing her beauty, an action which the male companion in the Song performs (Song 2:9). Commenting on her forward behaviour, Exum states that the woman

does not conform to the social norms we can construct from the rest of the Bible. A woman initiates sexual encounters; a woman roams the streets looking for her lover; a woman speaks openly about her desire; there is no indication ... [they] are married, yet they are clearly lovers[.]⁶⁵⁴

Therefore, while Ben Sira may borrow from the language of the Song, the worldview of the Song and that of Ben Sira are polarised. For Ben Sira, female beauty is best viewed when tightly controlled. For the female lover, beauty is best celebrated without restriction.

The Song of Songs is a text that celebrates beauty with an intensity and joy that is unique within the Hebrew Bible, and largely absent from the literature of the later Jewish era. There is, however, nevertheless a sense in which the objective beauty of the female lover is left as a matter of ambiguity.

⁶⁵³ As Exum suggests, this episode highlights the reality that 'bad things happen to sexually forward women' (1993: 30).

⁶⁵⁴ Exum 1993: 24.

On the one hand, as in Psalm 45, the lovers are celebrated as the most beautiful. For example, in Song 5:9 she is addressed by the daughters of Jerusalem as the 'fairest among women', praised by maidens and queens (Song 6:9), and called upon by their observers to 'Return, that we may look upon you (Song 6:13)!' And yet, there are certain segments of the Song that offer a different perspective. For example, in Song 1:5–6 she says of herself,

I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. 6 Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me.

Snaith observes that the expression שְׁחֹרֵר וְנֹאִיָּה ('black and lovely/fitting') can be interpreted in two ways, as the Hebrew participle וְ can simply mean 'and'; however, it also sometimes has an 'adversative force' which would render the better translation 'black but lovely'.⁶⁵⁵ Given her fear that the daughters will 'gaze' at her on account of her dark skin, it seems that the latter reading is the more accurate one, as she seems to be on the defensive.

The concern here is not a matter of racial prejudice, but rather that the female's skin is darkened from labouring under the sun in the vineyard (1:6). In the *Genesis Apocryphon*, Sarah's beauty is praised particularly in regard to her pale colouring: 'How beautiful is all her whiteness ... there are no virgins or brides who enter a bride chamber more beautiful than she' (*Genesis Apocryphon* 20.4, 6).⁶⁵⁶

⁶⁵⁵ Snaith 1993: 17. Munro also supports this interpretation (1995: 38).

⁶⁵⁶ Cited in Archer (1990: 119).

In a post-biblical Jewish context, white skin signified two things. Firstly, it implied a certain economic security which meant that a woman was not required to work outdoors. Secondly, white skin was taken to be a symbol of purity, implying that a virgin had remained inside her father's household rather than going out into the streets and endangering her chastity.

In the context of the Song, the first of these two options is the more likely concern, as the girl does not seem too concerned about the rules of propriety, and she has been working out of doors. Munro emphasises that she must feel ashamed of her appearance, otherwise why would she bother to explain to the city dwellers how she came by her colouring?⁶⁵⁷ However, Ostriker suggests that while she may be defensive, it is possible she is also 'boasting' in a beauty that is distinct from that of the daughters of Jerusalem.⁶⁵⁸ Exum argues that it need not be one or the other, but both 'a sign of pride and a token of vulnerability'.⁶⁵⁹ The difference between the city girls and the country girl is that 'the beauty of the women of Jerusalem is a civilised beauty; the woman's a natural one.'⁶⁶⁰

There has also been considerable discussion regarding the *wasf* of Song of Songs 7:1–8, as the descriptions of the female's body have been labelled 'playful' or comical by Brenner, while Black contends that she is being ridiculed and presented in a 'grotesque' fashion.⁶⁶¹ Considering the statement, 'Your navel is a rounded bowl

⁶⁵⁷ Munro 1995: 38.

⁶⁵⁸ Ostriker 2000: 48. Compare with Arbel (2000: 93).

⁶⁵⁹ Exum 2005: 103

⁶⁶⁰ Exum 2005: 104.

⁶⁶¹ Black 2000: 115.

that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies'
(Song 7:2), Brenner concludes,

The dancer is, frankly, fat, her belly in dance motion is big and quivering, much like an unstable mound of wheat. She looks comical; her body inspires pithy comments[.]⁶⁶²

I object to Brenner's reading of this text, in part because although it is possible that the male lover does not intend to be complimentary, it would signify a divergence from the remainder of the text where he is lavish in his praise. Therefore given the overarching complimentary tone of the book, when interpreting this specific *wasf* I consider it hermeneutically appropriate to take into serious consideration the surrounding context as a lens through which to interpret the passage.

I also question whether this *wasf* truly portrays the female in a 'grotesque' manner, or whether we are reading contemporary cultural presuppositions about beauty back into a radically different context. For example, Brenner's accusation that the female is 'fat' assumes from the start that roundness in a woman is an aesthetically displeasing feature, whereas in a culture where fertility is so highly valued and weight gain would signify greater economic status, the opposite is likely true.

Furthermore, given that we are working with metaphors, I would question whether Brenner and Black are correct in interpreting her proportions as the subject of ridicule. Writing of metaphors, Exum observes,

⁶⁶² Brenner: 1993a: 247. Compare with Black (2000: 124).

Striking and unusual metaphorical descriptions of the body are not at all uncommon in love poetry, though for some reason they seem to be a stumbling block for literal-minded commentators on the Bible's only love poem[.]⁶⁶³

In light of the challenges of accurately interpreting metaphors written in an ancient cultural context, it is my contention that it is improbable that these verses are intended to satirize the female lover.

However, whether or not the female fits the archetypal image of human beauty as it was conceived of in ancient Israel is in some ways a redundant question. I say this because, regardless of whether she is objectively the 'fairest' or not is of little consequence to her lover. For from his perspective, she is perfect: 'You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you' (Song 4:7).⁶⁶⁴

This is perhaps the most significant contribution of the Song in regard to Hebrew views of human beauty: that ultimately, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. One of the primary motifs of the Song is that it is only through a lover's eyes that beauty can truly be seen and appreciated. And, conversely, it is through the eyes of a lover that the object of their gaze is made beautiful. For example, it is only when looked upon in love that a body becomes more than the sum of its parts, and a *wasf* is transformed from a listing of limbs to a sight that captivates the lover, who sees in them 'the wonderful possibilities and devotion of his beloved.'⁶⁶⁵ It is the eyes of love that transform the woman into a 'lily among brambles' (Song 2:2), and the man into one who is 'distinguished among ten thousand' (Song 5:10).

⁶⁶³ Exum 2005: 17.

⁶⁶⁴ Cf. Song 1:16; 2:2, 14; 6:5,9.

⁶⁶⁵ Munro 1995: 187.

In one sense, this perspective lines up with that of Ben Sira, who has a positive view of sexuality and beauty in the context of a faithful relationship. The difference here seems to be more a matter of where the boundaries should lie than a fundamental disagreement about the nature of love and beauty between two individuals.

However, the boundaries do fall in very different places. For example, while some writers of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha ridicule women for being the weaker sex, the lover here treasures the vulnerability of his lover, which is captured in metaphors where she is referred to as a 'lily' (2:1) or a 'dove' (2:14). Furthermore, unlike many cases in the Hebrew Bible, the male lover here does not take advantage of her beauty or abuse her for it; instead, he is depicted as the one who sustains and shelters her (2:1–5). Therefore, although her beauty can be seen to make her *vulnerable*, she is not *exploited* for it.

Conversely, the female lover's beauty not only renders her vulnerable, but at the same time it makes her immensely powerful in the eyes of her lover. Unlike the gender-stereotyped vision of beauty presented in Psalm 45, here both the man and the woman are presented as sometimes strong and sometimes vulnerable, and frequently described with identical metaphors. In the words of Exum, 'there may not be gender equality, but there is gender bending.'⁶⁶⁶

Not only does he associate her with the wild potency of lions and leopards (2:8), but the woman's beauty so dazzles him that he describes her as 'bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners' (6:10). As Arbel explains,

⁶⁶⁶ Exum 2000: 30.

In contrast to her helpless or fragile image, the woman appears in other scenes as most powerful, forceful and even dangerous.⁶⁶⁷

Moreover, through his love for her he is made vulnerable to her beauty, even to the extent that he is captivated by a single glance (4:9) and overwhelmed simply by catching her eye (6:5). Exum suggests that perhaps he experiences these emotions with some unease, as 'love makes him feel as though he is losing control. He is powerless to resist; his autonomy is challenged.'⁶⁶⁸

However, despite these feelings of unease, the male lover is not presented as one who feels threatened by her beauty. In this regard, his response is radically different to that of the later Jewish authors who perceive female beauty to be such a threat that women need to be segregated to protect men from their dangerous allure. Contrary to this, the lover delights in her power over him, and in their sense of mutual surrender and belonging to one another. This is why the female can state with full confidence, 'I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine' (6:3), because despite both being made vulnerable and powerful in love, neither feels insecure.

Here we have the perfect foil to the problems associated with female beauty in the Hebrew Bible. This text acknowledges both the power and the vulnerability of a beautiful woman, and yet neither protagonist experiences abuse because of it, as their love protects them.

As well as depicting the interplay between vulnerability and power in the dynamics of human relations, the Song also fluctuates between exposure and

⁶⁶⁷ Arbel 2000: 97.

⁶⁶⁸ Exum 2005: 15.

hiddenness when it comes to appreciating beauty. On the one hand, the female lover not only accompanies her beloved to a banquet hall, but she seems quite comfortable publically demonstrating their affection for one another as her lover's 'left hand [is] under [her] head, and his right hand embrace[s her]' (2:6). Furthermore, she seems undaunted by the prospect of dancing before a crowd at the behest of her lover so that she can be looked upon (6.13).

Actions like this make it difficult to associate the female lover with the archetypal modest woman of the Jewish novella or the ideal woman of Ben Sira's writings. However she may have more in common with characters such as Esther, Abigail, Ruth and Rebekah, who are prepared to break societal taboos to achieve their goals. Her daring public display also calls to mind the courage of Judith; however, in this case her actions do not serve a religious cause but are simply the bold expression of a woman in love. It is as if the two figures are so enraptured with one another that they are unconcerned about the disapproval of others—all they care about is bringing pleasure to the other.

However, this brazen affection is tempered at other times, as the female lover modestly covers herself with a veil (1:7; 4:1) hides her face like a shy dove in the cleft in the rocks (2:14), and seems overly concerned about the good opinion of the daughters of Jerusalem (1:5).⁶⁶⁹

Thus the female is presented to us as paradoxical blend of boldness and modesty, both straining for autonomy and adhering to the mores of her social context. Observing her complexity, Arbel writes that rather than 'insisting on

⁶⁶⁹ On the significance of veil-wearing, see Longman III (2001: 144).

playing a fixed role in a linear and consistent development, she truly explores her individual approach to love in light of conscious and unconscious social and cultural constrictions.⁶⁷⁰

There is also a sense in which, as much as they may boast about it to their friends, the love that they share is ultimately private and inaccessible. At its core, their relationship is extremely hidden, locked shut to everyone but the two of them.⁶⁷¹ The primary means through which this privacy is achieved is through the use of an abundance of metaphorical images. As Fox comments,

The images ... combine to form a cohesive picture of a self-contained world ... Since that world comes into being and is unified only through the lovers' perception of each other, the imagery reveals a *new* world- one *created* by love.⁶⁷²

As a spectator to the scene, the reader can never have full access to the lovers' private world: it is self-contained. In order to shield this world, the use of metaphor is key, as it both unveils and simultaneously camouflages the figure of the beloved.

For example, the male lover compliments the female with these words:

Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved (4:1-3).

⁶⁷⁰ Arbel 2000: 101.

⁶⁷¹ Exum states that in the end, 'the song also keeps us out of the garden of eroticism' (Exum 2005: 24).

⁶⁷² Fox 1986: 329–30.

From this description, we get a general sense that the female has symmetrical teeth, hair that flows and possibly gentle eyes, but that does not change the fact that we still have no real sense of what she looks like.⁶⁷³

Thus, although the Song leaves the reader impressed by the sheer richness of the imagery, one never comes away with any perception of what these characters actually look like. The metaphors are deceptive, pulling the reader in while at the same time deflecting their gaze away from the appearance of their lover. We do not even know if the protagonists are 'objectively' beautiful. All we know is that they find one another 'flawless'. As Exum puts it, 'lovers love with their eyes, and often they rely on metaphor to describe what they see.'⁶⁷⁴

Ultimately however, this is precisely the point. The message of the Song is that beauty cannot be recorded or explained, it has to be seen. If it is seen through the eyes of fear or distrust, then the consequences will look very much like what we often encounter in several other instances in the Hebrew Bible, and frequently in the literature of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. Indeed, it appears as if in that later era of Jewish writing, fear and distrust are much more prevalent in the viewing of female beauty than in earlier Hebrew thought. The Song reminds the reader, however, that if one looks with the eyes of love, then beauty is no longer a threat, but a mutual delight.

⁶⁷³ Brenner: 'It is impossible to visualise the figures described so imaginatively. What is finally conveyed to the reader is the poetic speaker's mood and desire rather than the aesthetic appearance of the object of love' (1989: 30). See also Exum (2005: 6).

⁶⁷⁴ Exum 2005: 17.

In their intimacy, the couple of the Song represents a return to Eden before the Fall, when Adam and Eve were naked but unashamed, before their 'eyes were opened' (Genesis 3:7). It is highly significant that the first effect of sin in the world is that men and women begin to see one another differently. They are no longer united as one flesh; instead, they experience one another as 'other', and so they hide their bodies in shame. However, as Phyllis Tribble has argued, what we find in the Song of Songs is a return to that idyllic state, where the lovers have once again become 'one flesh.'⁶⁷⁵ Augustin likewise notes the parallels between the admiration of human beauty at the creation of the first woman, and the rediscovered mutual delight that the couple in the Song of Songs take in one another:

Gen 1. 27-31; 2, 21-24 unterstreicht, daß das Erfahren der Schönheit des Partners mit der Schöpfung gegeben ist und somit zum Menschsein gehört. Wie in den so verschiedenartig erfahrenen Begegnungen des Hohenliedes wird das Schönsein des anderen voller Freude entdeckt und in der Wechselbeziehung von Geben und Nehmen gelobt.⁶⁷⁶

Augustin suggests that the appreciation of beauty is part of what it means to be human, and that in the Song this vision is restored. Thus there is no shame in being seen, nor is a beautiful woman a threat that needs to be subdued or possessed. Rather, as Ostriker comments: 'where the curse of Eve in Genesis declares that a woman's desire shall be toward her husband, and he shall rule over her, the woman in the Song proudly announces 'I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me

⁶⁷⁵ Tribble 1978: 162.

⁶⁷⁶ Augustin 1983: 107.

(7.11).'⁶⁷⁷ As Longmann summarises, 'According to the Song, love is mutual, exclusive, total, and beautiful.'⁶⁷⁸

As poetry, the Song of Songs cannot offer us an historical understanding of how beauty was experienced in ancient Israel, nor does it alter the fact that as a general rule, within the literature of both the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts, beauty is generally perceived with a great deal of wariness. The heroines of the Hebrew Bible may experience a greater degree of freedom than their Jewish descendants; however, the Song of Songs remains unique in the way in which the female lover's beauty is celebrated from every angle: as vulnerable and powerful, hidden and displayed, extraordinary and plain, passive and active, restrained and free.

Given the Song's remarkable depiction of equality and interdependence within a romantic relationship, as well as the boldness of the female in defying cultural boundaries to express herself, it is hardly surprising that these lyrics are sometimes attributed to a female author. This possibility would certainly help to explain certain features of a poem that is so distinct from any other text in the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

However, the Song's unique vision might also be explained by the fact that unlike much of the didactic material in the Hebrew Bible, these lyrics are not written with the intention to instruct, but rather as love poetry. As such, the poet need not conform to societal expectations, as the purpose of poetry is to re-imagine possibilities and go beyond the everyday realities. For example, the depiction of the

⁶⁷⁷ Ostriker 2000: 45.

⁶⁷⁸ Longman III 2001: 62.

lovers as sneaking out into the night is not intended as a suggestion to the reader, but rather serves as a metaphor for the liberation and recklessness that lovers feel. It is also likely that these lyrics were compiled and adapted for Israelite wedding rituals. In that context, poetry is intended to cast a vision of love in its best form: a picture of what *could* be, rather than what usually *is*.

5.4. Summary

While the depiction of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha is not always bleak, the general pattern of these authors is that they use complimentary characterisations of beautiful women or men as a means of positively enforcing societal expectations of gender roles. This is particularly true of the later Jewish texts, which doubly emphasise both the appropriate setting for viewing beauty—in the home—and the necessity of modesty as an accompaniment to a woman's beauty. Even Judith, for all that she is an outstanding example of an unconventional, empowered woman, ultimately conforms to the typical intertestamental pattern. For on the one hand, her beauty is a weapon, and on the other, she is praised precisely because her actions are framed by her piety and her conformity to patriarchal gender-roles.

Considering the Hebrew Bible, in comparison with the later Jewish writings these heroines are presented with a greater degree of freedom. Thus one might argue that boldness and initiative, rather than modesty, characterise the actions of

Rebekah, Abigail and the noble wife (Proverbs 31).⁶⁷⁹ Nevertheless, even if these women are not confined to the home, their beauty is still appropriately framed within the context of marriage. This indicates that while the Hebrew Bible's presentations of female beauty may seem less determined by patriarchal concerns when compared with later Jewish literature, this does not mean that these concerns are not significant. The sole exception to this remains the Song of Songs, which offers us an alternative Hebrew vision that celebrates beauty in all of its facets and forms, and which resists restraint. As Exum summarises,

Because we possess the song of songs, we know that a romantic vision of love was available in ancient Israel ... Romance is more than sexual gratification. Romance transforms the way lovers look at the world around them; suddenly the whole world becomes more beautiful, more vibrant, more wonderful.⁶⁸⁰

⁶⁷⁹ Sawyer cautions against reading too much into biblical depictions of 'female empowerment', as she argues that these texts often present the counter-perspective to the traditional societal norms precisely in order to enhance, rather than undermine, those values. For although men and women may occasionally break the traditional mould, Sawyer argues that Yahweh's masculinity remains supreme (2007: 5).

⁶⁸⁰ Exum 2005: 13.

Chapter Six: Comparison

6.1. Introduction

In Part One and Part Two, I offered a textual analysis of the motif of female beauty in the literature of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

By engaging with the breadth of these texts, it becomes apparent that there is no such thing as an homogenous approach towards female beauty either in the Hebrew Bible or the later apocryphal texts. Instead, on account of the variety of textual genres, dates and writers, male Hebrew attitudes towards female beauty are expressed in divergent ways across the sweep of these texts.

And yet, out of the many variations on this theme, certain attitudes towards beauty emerge time and again—sometimes in a nearly identical form, and at other times from an alternative perspective. The emergence of these particular strands enables us to acknowledge the multi-faceted nature of the Hebrew writers' attitudes towards female beauty, while at the same time identifying prevalent attitudes towards physical appearance that became characteristic of a Hebrew understanding of human beauty.

For the sake of clarity, I organised the texts according to four strands of the beauty motif that feature most prominently in these Hebrew writings: 'Beauty as a Threat', 'Beauty as Vanity', 'Beauty as Vulnerability', and 'Beauty and Virtue'. Having considered them independently, in what follows I draw these threads together in order to determine what conclusions, if any, can be reached concerning attitudes

towards human beauty—and female beauty in particular—within the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature.

In presenting these conclusions, I acknowledge that while these texts offer an insight into specific attitudes towards female beauty as expressed through a literary medium, they cannot be taken as an accurate indicator of attitudes within the Israelite community as a whole, nor of the historical realities of beauty culture within the ancient world.

For although in some instances the authors may be expressing a commonly held belief, in others they may be a lone voice critiquing the popular practices of their contemporary society. In some instances, it is clear which perspective the author is writing from: for example, in Isaiah 3, the prophet is offering a counter-cultural critique of the popular beautification practices of wealthy women in Jerusalem. However, in most cases it is less obvious whether the writer/editor is offering his own perspective, speaking on behalf of his wider community, or standing in opposition to the majority position.

Therefore, in presenting a study focused on the ‘plain sense’ meaning of the literature,⁶⁸¹ I want to reiterate that it is not my intention to reconstruct an accurate sociological representation of what life was like for the ancient Israelite woman or her Jewish descendants, not even in regard to the beauty culture of the ancient world. This reconstruction would be exceptionally problematic for a number of reasons, not least on account of the difficulties of dating the various texts and identifying their geographic and authorial origins. As Meyers emphasises:

⁶⁸¹ Barton 2007: 70.

In theory, one cannot make statements about gender in ancient Israel without specifying time as well as place. But ... while the broad outlines ... are fairly well established, individual passages can be notoriously hard to date. Consequently, their value as clues to conditions in any given period is diminished.⁶⁸²

Furthermore, even if we could determine the provenance of the various texts, this would not negate the 'social distance between the shapers of sacred tradition' and the ancient Israelite woman.⁶⁸³ This social distance is particularly wide because these texts are primarily written by educated, religiously motivated men.⁶⁸⁴ It is for this reason Exum notes that 'the female perspective is muted, if not altogether excluded.'⁶⁸⁵

On the other hand, however, what these texts *do* provide is an insight into *male* attitudes towards female beauty. Thus although the writings may be 'less helpful ... for the understanding of the female figures,' Brenner still identifies them as 'an excellent source for learning about male comprehension of, and conventional emotive attitudes to, the female world,'⁶⁸⁶ and not least female appearance. In this sense, contrary to Meyers, I believe that one *can* make statements about gender in ancient Israel, as long as it is understood that the concept of gender is analysed through the lens of ancient literature, and specifically from the male perspective.

⁶⁸² Meyers 1988: 13–14.

⁶⁸³ Meyers 1988: 12.

⁶⁸⁴ Meyers 1988: 12; Loader 2011: 490. As discussed in the prior chapter, the Song of Songs is a rare instance—along with the book of Ruth—where female authorship is argued for by some scholars.

⁶⁸⁵ Exum 1993: 10.

⁶⁸⁶ Brenner 1985: 89.

In order to glean as full an understanding as possible of Hebrew perspectives on human beauty, I present the outcomes of this thesis at *three* different levels of comparison. Firstly, I consider the predominant attitudes towards beauty across the varied Jewish writings of the intertestamental era (circa 200BCE–100CE). Secondly, I summarise the theme of beauty as it develops across the literature of the Hebrew Bible. Thirdly, I compare these groupings of literature with one another—both in their points of convergence and dissonance—in order to determine to what extent the attitudes found within the apocryphal literature align with those of earlier Hebrew authors, and to what extent they display a markedly different perspective.

In the latter part of this chapter, I then move beyond textual comparison to consider the question of *why* any divergences between these two groups of literature may have occurred and how they might be accounted for. In doing so, I both engage with the explanatory work of other scholars (primarily Archer), and I offer my own perspective on the development of attitudes towards female beauty within the Second Temple era of Jewish history.

6.2. Female Beauty in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Drawing conclusions from the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical Jewish writings means juxtaposing texts of varied genre, produced by Jews both in Judea (e.g. Ben Sira) and from the wider Diaspora region (e.g. *Joseph and Aseneth*, *Tobit*), and with dates of authorship ranging over 300 years, if not more. And yet, despite the heterogeneous nature of these texts in date, provenance and style, I conclude that across these writings there emerges a consistent, stark dichotomy between

laudatory depictions of female beauty on the one hand, and a strongly condemnatory approach to female beauty on the other.

In some ways, these two categories bear a notable resemblance to the juxtaposition of the ideal wife and the 'other woman' of Proverbs. However, I suggest that in the apocryphal writings the two extremes are even more polarized; thus, depictions of the beautiful pious Jewish woman are more heightened in their praise (e.g. Judith, Susanna, Tobit, Additions to Esther etc.), while the beautiful temptress is more reviled (e.g. Ben Sira, 1 Esdras, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* etc.). Writing on the depiction of women more generally in the Second Temple period, Archer observes that 'in the literature, women are presented in terms of two antithetical stereotypes, seen either as archetypal evil figures or archetypal good figures.'⁶⁸⁷

Considering the 'good' woman, in the previous chapter I noted a strong correlation between physical desirability and modesty. Across these writings there is an underlying assumption that beauty should only be admired in the context of marriage; Susanna's beauty is celebrated because she reserves it for her husband (Susanna 1:2, 7, TH); Aseneth's beauty is praised because she guards her virginity in a tall tower (*Joseph and Aseneth* I. 6–8; II. 2); Sarah's beauty is appreciated by Tobias because despite seven marriages she remains a virgin segregated from male visitors (Tobit 3:8; 6:12; 3:17; 7:12); even the beautiful, pious Judith returns to her widowed state at the close of the narrative (Judith 10: 1–2; 16:21–23). Considering Judith amongst others, Corrington-Streete notes how 'in none of these cases does female

⁶⁸⁷ Archer 1987: 2.

sexual behavior threaten to destabilise the community ruled by male interests, but in fact it is subordinated to those interests.’⁶⁸⁸

In all of these examples, the beauty of the Jewish woman is praised precisely because she is never a threat to the faithful Israelite male. As Egger comments of these apocryphal novellas, ‘the typical romantic novel [is] a force for conservatism in that the established order is affirmed.’⁶⁸⁹ As such each of these narratives conform to Ben Sira’s perspective that a wife who is wicked but beautiful is undesirable (Ben Sira 25:21–23), while a wife of charm and modesty is a delight (26:16–17). Summarising the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphal writings’ perspective towards sexuality and beauty, Loader contends,

Most writings we considered see physical attractiveness as something positive, especially the beauty of women, and so thereby at some level affirm sexual response.⁶⁹⁰

However, while Loader is correct in identifying this positive association between beauty and sexual desire in the context of a good marriage, I strongly disagree with his claim that ‘most writings’ of this era portray physical attractiveness in a positive light. For in my view the opposite is true, and the majority of texts are weighted *towards* presenting female beauty with wariness at best, and outright scorn at worst. For example, female beauty is a severe threat to male control (1 Esdras 4:18–20; *T. Reuben* 5.1); beautiful women threaten the virtue of Israelite males (*Joseph and Aseneth* VII. 3–4; *The Testament of Joseph* 9:1–3);

⁶⁸⁸ Corrington Streete 1997: 15.

⁶⁸⁹ Egger 1994: 263.

⁶⁹⁰ Loader 2011: 495.

beauty has the power to beguile (Susanna 1:56); beauty can cause a man's death (Judith 16:9); and sexual attraction can even become the means by which a demon lures men to their demise (Tobit 3:8; 6:14–18). Nor is the threat of beauty isolated to foreign women, but it is an insidious danger associated with all women, Jew or Gentile, from prostitutes to musicians to other men's wives and even one's own wife and daughter (Ben Sira 9:3–9; 26:7–12, 22–25).⁶⁹¹

Furthermore, the dangers of being attracted by a woman's beauty are heightened by the belief propagated by certain Jewish writers during this era that women are inherently more sinful than men, and therefore to be 'ruled' by a woman is to be led astray.⁶⁹² The most striking example of this idea is found in *T. Reuben* 5:3, which warns the male reader that 'women are overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men, and in their heart they plot against men.' The danger is twofold: women are more susceptible to sexual temptation in the first place; and then they use their beauty as a weapon against men to lure them into sexual sin (5:4-5).

At first glance, the fact that these Jewish authors consistently present women in such a polarized fashion—either as the beautiful, modest wife or as the evil seductress, with seemingly no middle ground—might seem a strange dichotomy. Why do some texts present female beauty as such a desirable trait, while others condemn this characteristic in the strongest possible terms? Even more perplexingly, often this juxtaposition of the dangers and delights of beauty are woven together in the same narratives and texts.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹¹ Loader 2011: 502.

⁶⁹² See Loader's comment on Ben Sira (Loader 2011: 497).

⁶⁹³ E.g. Judith; Susanna; Tobit; Ben Sira; *Joseph and Aseneth*; *T. Judah*; *T. Reuben*.

These two extremes align well, however, once they are understood from the perspective of a patriarchal culture. In this context, the primary male fear that appears to be driving the writers of these particular apocryphal texts is the undermining of male autonomy.

Ilan makes the observation that while the Bible has no system of women, within Rabbinic Judaism there is an extremely regimented systematisation of women. Ilan argues that it is during the intertestamental era, therefore, that this later Rabbinic system of women is tested out and refined. Commenting on the literature of this period, Ilan claims that she considers

Second Temple literature the experimental ground on which various theories about women were tested and then discarded or adopted on the way to becoming the formative Judaism of the Mishnah.⁶⁹⁴

Consequently, these literary views are both the product of, and a contribution to, a wider cultural discussion on appropriate social boundaries, and in particular issues concerning authority and power in the dynamics of male and female relationships.

It is for this reason that in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings the authors engage almost exclusively with the motif of female rather than male beauty.⁶⁹⁵ This shortage of texts intentionally focusing on male beauty immediately

⁶⁹⁴ Ilan 2007: 129.

⁶⁹⁵The exceptions to this rule are the various receptions and expansions of the narrative surrounding Joseph. However even in these instances, the description of a hero's physical desirability can be explained as the result of re-working an earlier biblical narrative rather than as an independent decision to engage with the concept of male beauty by the authors of this time period (circa 200BCE–100CE).

highlights to the reader that in the writings of this era, any Jewish discourse on beauty was motivated by gender-related concerns.

Thus the beauty of a modest wife can be enjoyed because it is no threat to a man's power. However female beauty in any other context is a danger because it tests a man's self-control, thereby threatening to undermine his social standing within this ancient Mediterranean honour and shame culture (Ben Sira 47:19–21).

Writing about these 'dangerous' women, Corrington Streete notes,

Such women, in the eyes of the males who wrote and were the primary audience for these texts, are demonic precisely because they upset the desired power balance. The women are portrayed as seductive, where seduction equals destruction, because they have power over men who wish themselves to be in control, both of their own and women's desires.⁶⁹⁶

Consequently, the overarching perspective towards female beauty presented in these apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts is determined by the guiding principle that whether a woman's beauty is to be admired or condemned depends entirely on whether she is a threat to a particular man's control.

This cultural fear of female power is so great that according to the Sibylline Oracles, the apocalypse itself will be ushered in when the world is 'under the dominion of a woman's hands, obeying her every behest' (3:7).

The unfortunate result of this pervasive attitude is that by default, the beauty of every woman becomes both a prize and a liability. In a narrow sense, she is a prize for her husband to admire. However at the same time, she is also a liability to every

⁶⁹⁶ Corrington Streete 1997: 15. See also Loader, who comments that 'to have a woman in control, it is assumed, shames men, because she usurps what is understood as a male role' (Loader 2011: 493).

other man, because whether intentionally or not—and there are texts supporting either possibility—she is a threat to male control.

Even more than that, she also ultimately becomes a liability even to her own husband, because if she draws male attention then she could undermine her husband's honour and social standing. This is true whether she intentionally strays, as Ben Sira cautions against, or whether she unwillingly catches the attention of another, as is the case in Susanna. In this way, every female becomes a source of weakness to her husband or father, because she always has the potential to dishonour him.⁶⁹⁷

Furthermore, if all women are a threat, then a beautiful woman is the greatest threat of all. For the more desirable she is, the more likely she is to gain male attention, and thus the greater her potential for destruction. In words which could be appropriated to sum up the overarching theme of female beauty as it emerges throughout the writings of these apocryphal and pseudepigraphal texts, Ciletti concludes: 'whenever women exert power over men, it is by definition sexual and lethal.'⁶⁹⁸

6.3. Female Beauty in the Hebrew Bible

Considering the differences in dating, as well as the lengthy time-span of the formation of certain biblical texts from origin to final form, it is of no surprise that we find a more diverse range of attitudes towards female beauty within the Hebrew

⁶⁹⁷ In the words of Archer: 'within patriarchy, women must always represent a threat to the existing order' (1987: 12).

⁶⁹⁸ Ciletti 1991: 70.

Scriptures. Although female beauty remains the primary focus of this thesis, I also included depictions of male beauty within the Hebrew Bible for three reasons.⁶⁹⁹ First, the presence of numerous references to male beauty demonstrates that, unlike their later Jewish predecessors, the authors of the Hebrew Bible do not present beauty as a *uniquely female* problem that men have to either contend with or somehow contain. Thus the beauty motif of the Hebrew Bible cannot be as easily categorised as solely part of a discourse concerning patriarchy and male honour. This is not to say that these concerns are not present within the Hebrew Bible, but rather that in these earlier texts, beauty can be abused by anyone, male or female. In this sense, the Hebrew Bible is revealed to be more balanced than the later writings when it comes to issues relating to beauty, gender, and blame.

Secondly, I analyse male beauty because investigating the way that biblical writers present attractive men enables us to gain a broader understanding of Hebrew attitudes towards physical beauty in general.

Thirdly, juxtaposing the depiction of male beauty with the writers' perceptions of female beauty reveals just how differently female and male beauty are treated by the biblical authors, thereby exposing any gender-biases.

Some of these biases work against women, such as the contrast between the forthright defence of Joseph's purity of character as the besieged beautiful male, and the more ambiguous, silent characterisations of those like Sarah, Dinah and Bathsheba who never have the opportunity to defend themselves or their reputation.

⁶⁹⁹ E.g. Genesis 39; 1 Samuel 9, 10, 16; 2 Samuel 13, 14; 1 Kings 1; Song of Songs; Ezekiel 28; Daniel 1.

On the other hand however, other gender biases work for women, such as the fact that more often than not in the Hebrew narratives, it is the men who are blamed for their weakness for female beauty, rather than the women being blamed for intentionally leading them astray. Commenting on this variety, Sawyer summarises,

In terms of gender critique it is possible to identify texts that are in harmony with a hierarchical and patriarchal society, but there are also texts which challenge, subvert and infer the reformation of such a society, and furthermore, there are texts that are anarchic in turning upside down expected patterns of behavior[.]⁷⁰⁰

Like the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, the Hebrew Bible at times presents beauty as a desirable feature, although in general it leans more towards presenting beauty with suspicion. Within each of these categorisations, however, we encounter a greater variety of perspectives on human beauty. This breadth of material resists the sharp categorisations found in the extra-biblical texts, allowing for a greater ambiguity in the presentation of female beauty overall.

In terms of assessing the biblical beauty motif, the challenge of dating these texts makes a chronological assessment of the material unrealistic. The most which can be said, in order of decreasing confidence, is that some of these texts are post-exilic (Esther, Daniel, possibly Proverbs 1–9), some are exilic (Ezekiel, second Isaiah), some are pre-exilic (portions of Isaiah and Jeremiah, Hosea), and many are composite works that may have originated with early pre-exilic sources but were

⁷⁰⁰ Sawyer 2007: 9.

then redacted—often in several stages before and during the Babylonian exile, and possibly beyond (Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, Judges, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs). As a result, it is exceedingly difficult to trace the literary evolution of the biblical beauty motif, or even to determine which beauty texts may have influenced the formation of others. For example, while there are obvious parallels between 2 Kings 9:30, Jeremiah 4:30 and Ezekiel 24:41–2, it is unclear whether the Jeremiah 4:30 account is based on 2 Kings 9:30, or vice versa, or even whether the same Deuteronomistic writers are behind the authorship of both texts.⁷⁰¹

But although the chronological development of the beauty motif cannot be finely traced, it is possible to assess the literary development of this motif across the three distinctive genres of Hebrew Bible: prophetic, poetic, and narrative literature.

6.3.1. Beauty in the Prophets

Certain features of the biblical beauty motif are unique to the prophetic texts. For example, it is within this genre that we encounter the ‘marriage metaphor’ of the Hebrew Bible (Hosea 1–4; Jeremiah 2:1–4; Isaiah 54; 61–62; Ezekiel 16, 23–24). While this metaphor originates with Hosea, the later exilic prophets expanded on it, until in Ezekiel it becomes the prophet’s most scathing judgment metaphor fleshed out in traumatic detail, while in Isaiah the metaphor is developed to incorporate the promise of restoration and a new marriage covenant.

In one sense, the presentation of beauty is familiar in these marriage metaphors as both a positive quality in a bride (Ezekiel 16:1–8; 28:11ff; Isaiah 61:3,

⁷⁰¹ See the discussion on Deuteronomistic dating, chapter three, pages 119–121.

10; 62:1–5), and a negative trait used for the purposes of seduction (Jeremiah 4:30; Ezekiel 16; 24:41–43). However there are certain aspects of this beauty motif that are unique to the prophetic literature.

For example, only amongst the Hebrew prophets is the presentation of beauty heightened to such a degree. According to these prophets, beauty belongs to God. Therefore, as people who belong to God, he metaphorically bestows it on the Israelites like a groom gives his bride jewels (e.g. Isaiah 62; Ezekiel 16; 23).

This use of a figurative female to represent Israel also leads to an unusually harsh depiction of the unfaithful beautiful bride. Typically in the Hebrew Bible, the threat of seduction tends to come from the ‘outsider’, a woman from beyond the Israelite community. However, in the prophetic marriage metaphors it is Israel herself who becomes the seductress, using her beauty for self-serving ends. She has forgotten to whom her beauty belongs. Ironically, while the metaphor draws on the image of a beautiful woman who commits adultery, this woman actually represents Israelite men who are misusing their power for selfish ends. Consequently this is no simple critique of female beauty, but rather a sweeping condemnation of the abuse of autonomy by men and women alike.

Lastly, the motivation behind the unfaithfulness of personified Israel is also unique. For rather than focusing on her beauty as a threat to other *men*, instead the prophets emphasise the way that Yahweh’s bride endangers herself on account of her vanity, because ‘you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame’ (Ezekiel 16:15). Throughout these prophetic texts, the focus is always on

the devastating outcome for the bride, rather than presenting a concern for the enticed male.

Nor is this presented as a uniquely female problem, as the same charge is levelled at the King of Tyre whose 'heart was proud because of your beauty' (Ezekiel 28:17). Thus the primary and distinctive form of the beauty motif in the prophetic literature is the presentation of external beauty is a gift given by God but misused by God's people until it is so warped by human pride as to become self-destructive.

6.3.2. Beauty in Poetry

I use the designation 'poetry' to refer to Proverbs, Psalm 45 and the Song of Songs. It is in Proverbs that we find the closest parallel within the Hebrew Bible to the dichotomy presented within the apocryphal literature of the archetypal good and evil woman. Thus Proverbs 1–9, quite possibly a post-exilic creation and therefore reflecting the concerns of society in the Second Temple era, offers a metaphorical presentation of wisdom and foolishness as two women, one with admirable qualities and one as the 'Other Woman' who seduces men to their deaths. As Yee summarises, she is the 'personified antithesis of the "correct" wife/woman embodied in the figure of Woman Wisdom.'⁷⁰² It is significant to note, however, that although her beauty is referenced briefly (Proverbs 5:18–19; 6:25), the 'strange' woman's primary tool of seduction is her speech (5:3–4; 6:24; 7:14–21; 9:15–18).

Likewise, in opposition to this portrait of the adulterous woman, we find in Proverbs 31 the image of the archetypal wife. However, once again her virtues are

⁷⁰² Yee 2003: 163.

described in terms of her piety and labour rather than any transient form of physical beauty (Proverbs 31:30). Thus although two distinct categories of women feature in Proverbs, in both depictions any reference to beauty is tangential at best.

Beauty features much more prominently in Psalm 45 and the Song of Songs, both of which are intended as a deliberate celebration of male and female beauty. Such a positive depiction is unsurprising, considering that the psalm is written for a royal wedding while portions of the Song were likely included in Israelite wedding rituals.

However, although it may have featured in Jewish marriage traditions, the Song does not neatly fit the later Jewish mould of celebrating female beauty within the confines of patriarchal societal expectations. On the contrary, one could argue that the Song of Songs directly subverts cultural norms by promoting a relationship between two unmarried lovers who continually revel in each other's beauty and sexuality. For this reason, the Song of Songs stands as utterly distinctive from any other Hebrew text on account of its celebration of beauty while simultaneously pushing the boundaries of the imposed restraints of modesty and the established social parameters of marriage. The lovers are faithful to one another (Song of Songs 6:3); however, they are also depicted as intentionally transgressing societal norms in their pursuit of one another (Song 5:1–7).

It is almost as if the behaviour Proverbs 1–9 warns against is encouraged in the literature of the Song. However, perhaps this divergence is to be expected from two texts that may share a poetic style, but nevertheless are radically divergent genres of Hebrew literature. As wisdom rhetoric, Proverbs is intended to instruct

the young Israelite male with advice about how to conduct himself and navigate an array of social scenarios. The tone, therefore, is intentionally cautionary.

The Song of Songs, on the other hand, is Hebrew love poetry. Its metaphors are not intended as guidelines for appropriate social behaviour, but rather as an attempt to convey the heady emotions of infatuation and desire for another person in artistic form. In this sense, these two examples of Hebrew poetry are in some ways at cross-purposes with one another. However between them they represent the two distinct yet paralleling attitudes towards female appearance found in the Hebrew Bible: the danger and the desirability of beauty to the Israelite male.

6.3.3. Beauty in the Narratives

It is to be expected that the broadest range of attitudes towards human beauty are found in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Contained within these narratives we find all four of the themes of chapters two to five: beauty as a weapon, beauty as vanity, beauty as vulnerability, and beauty as a virtue.

However despite the wide-ranging content and purpose of these texts, there are certain aspects of the biblical beauty motif that recur time and again throughout the narratives of the Hebrew Bible.

6.3.3.a. The Femme Fatale in Hebrew Narrative

The first of these is the recurring motif of the femme fatale who lures men to their destruction. Social anthropologist Mark Taylor has argued that communities will often emphasise a specific danger from outside the group as a means of sustaining

their shared identity by rallying around a common enemy to define themselves against.⁷⁰³ Expounding on Taylor's position, Corrington Streete explains that

[t]he construction of an identity of power often entails the creation of a monstrous 'other' and its exaggeration into such a threat that it must be 'slain'.⁷⁰⁴

In the Hebrew Bible, the 'monstrous 'other' becomes the threatening foreign woman, who is doubly dangerous on account of not only being 'other' as a woman who could weaken male control, but, even worse, 'other' as a foreigner who stands as a threat to the Israelite way of life. Corrington Streete explains this double threat on account of the fact that adulterous women are a threat to 'securing the production of Israelite heirs', and thus Israelite men not only have to worry about illegitimate heirs, but also 'non-Israelite'.⁷⁰⁵ For the writers of the Hebrew Bible, this becomes a issue of national concern, because as Corrington Streete notes, the most feared outcome was that 'group identity thus became eroded and eventually lost'.⁷⁰⁶

Commenting on the language of both the prophets' marriage metaphors and the legal codes of Deuteronomy and Leviticus, Corrington Streete argues that so widespread was this perceived threat to both individual males and group identity that 'the adulterous or sexually promiscuous woman had thus already become the symbol of religious and social chaos for biblical writers by the sixth century B.C.E.'⁷⁰⁷

⁷⁰³ Taylor 1994 (55–58).

⁷⁰⁴ Corrington Streete (1997: 5), in reference to Taylor (1994: 55–58).

⁷⁰⁵ Corrington Streete 1997: 6.

⁷⁰⁶ Corrington Streete 1997: 6.

⁷⁰⁷ Corrington Streete 1997: 7.

We encounter this theme in Genesis 39, where Potiphar's wife behaves as the archetypal foreign seductress, a scene that is expounded in the later Jewish literature. It emerges again in Judges 14–16, where three times Samson is attracted to a foreign woman, which in the final case of Delilah leads to his death. The third example is found in 2 Kings 9, in which Jezebel appears to use cosmetics in an attempt to manipulate Jehu and re-gain control over her circumstances. It is this theme that Proverbs 1–9 also seems to draw on in characterising foolishness as a prostitute luring men astray.

Intriguingly, however, although these three infamous seductresses of the Hebrew Bible are sexually forward, none of them are directly referred to as יפה ('beautiful') or טוב ('attractive'). Moreover, they are all presented as non-Israelite women. This notable omission perhaps suggests an unwillingness on the part of the biblical authors to ascribe the characteristic of 'beauty' to non-Israelite women, as if only a member of God's people is worthy of the designation.⁷⁰⁸ Such an argument can be supported by the fact that although she plays a significant role in the Hebrew narrative and finds favour with Boaz, Ruth the Moabite is never described as physically desirable (Ruth 2:13).

Indeed, the only foreigner who is directly referred to as beautiful is Queen Vashti (Esther 1). This description of Vashti's beauty occurs in the latest of the biblical narratives, and in many ways the book of Esther has more in common stylistically with the later apocryphal novellas than the earlier biblical narratives.

⁷⁰⁸ Such a notion would align with the prophetic worldview that beauty is a gift given by God to his people.

Thus perhaps the writer of Esther adopts the attitudes of a later era in which, unlike in the earlier Hebrew narratives, any woman—foreign or domestic—could be referred to as beautiful.

Alternatively it could be that Vashti is presented in this way because she serves as a literary foil to Esther. In this way, the narrator heightens the sense of impending danger to Esther by using Vashti to demonstrate precisely what happens in King Ahasuerus's court to beautiful queens. With Vashti as the only counter-example, however, none of the other foreign women in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible—either the villains (e.g. Potiphar's wife, Delilah, Jezebel) or the heroines (Rahab, Jael, Ruth, Tamar)—are ever explicitly referred to as objectively beautiful or attractive.

Even more remarkably, as well as revealing an observable bias against foreign women, the Hebrew Scriptures also seem reluctant to depict Israelite women in the guise of the beautiful seductress. It is true that there are texts in which the behaviour of the Hebrew or Israelite woman is presented in a rather ambiguous light, for example, in the cases of Genesis 34:1–4 and 2 Samuel 11. However as I have argued in chapters two and four, in neither of these examples are the women depicted as the initiators of seduction.

There are examples of Hebrew seductresses within the biblical text, such as Tamar (Genesis 38:13–19) and Lot's daughters (Genesis 19:30–36). However, in these instances they are not depicted as physically attractive, thereby disassociating their actions from the theme of female beauty. In fact, the only clear examples in which an Israelite female is depicted as intentionally using her beauty to seduce

another for selfish motives are found in the marriage metaphors of Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. However, as I have already noted, these examples are distinctive because this behaviour is a metaphor for the entire community of Israel as a whole—male and female—rather than referring to the specific actions of an individual Israelite woman.

Thus, although there are *beautiful* Israelite heroines, and *seductive* female foreigners, what we do not find in the beauty narratives of the Hebrew Bible is the combination of beauty and seduction—and this is true irrespective of whether the women are Israelites or foreigners. Rather it appears that in the Hebrew Bible, beauty and seduction are mutually exclusive categories.

If I am correct in this overarching pattern, then it has an important bearing on this thesis, as it could imply that inherent in the understanding of beauty within the Hebrew Bible is a tendency on the part of the biblical authors to want to connect beauty exclusively with God's people, and, furthermore, with goodness rather than evil. For even if the biblical writers depict humanity as having a tendency to abuse and ruin what should have been a positive trait, their association of beauty primarily with the Israelite heroine rather than the seductive/destructive foreign woman is quite distinct from the perspectives on beauty encountered in the later apocryphal texts. Such an understanding of beauty would cohere with the Hebrew use of the word טוב to connote both 'goodness' and 'beauty'.

Consequently, what these texts reveal to us are a clear bias towards the Israelite and against the foreigner. Recognising the contrast between the Israelite

temptress and the foreign temptress, Brenner explains the difference between their respective treatments within the literature of the Hebrew Bible in this way:

Sexual politics is indeed used by both types of Temptress, but it is done in different ways, and, most important, for different ends. The main issue is whether the Temptress's action benefits society[.]⁷⁰⁹

The fact that the danger of seduction for the Israelite male is almost exclusively directed towards the threat of a foreign woman—who is never referred to as beautiful—highlights the extent to which these Hebrew writers experienced a deep-seated fear that the Israelites might lose their distinctive identity and faith by assimilating with the surrounding cultures of the ANE.

In a sense, this is another facet of the concern to maintain male control that features so prominently in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts. However, in the Hebrew Bible the writers are worried about the wholesale threat not just to individuals but to Israelite society and religion. Although this might be seen as a particular worry during the time of the Babylonian exile when the Israelites were transplanted directly into a foreign context, there was never a period of Israel's history when this encroachment of foreign cultures and ideas and syncretism within worship was not a concern. Thus in order to combat this threat, foreign women are depicted as a serious danger to the Israelite male in order to serve as a caution against intermarriage. This might also explain why the editors of the Hebrew Bible avoid suggesting that foreign women can be beautiful, so as not to encourage their readers to find such women desirable. As Exum observes,

⁷⁰⁹ Brenner 1985: 112.

The negative image of the foreign woman is a given in the Bible ... to follow such reasoning is to be lured into the ideology of the text, into accepting the proposition that Israelite women behave respectably, while foreign women are disreputable and treacherous.⁷¹⁰

6.3.3.b. Beautiful Victims in Hebrew Narrative

While Israelite women are frequently introduced as beautiful, in many of the narratives of the Hebrew Bible this same beauty is often mentioned as a precursor to danger for the protagonists of the story. In a significant number of these instances, it is no longer the foreign woman who is a threat to the Israelite male; rather, the writers recount the threat of a predatory male to a beautiful Israelite woman. In these texts, circumstances are reversed such that it is not the beautiful woman who is the *threat*, but rather who is *under threat*.

In fact, I contend that the presentation of the vulnerable, beautiful Israelite is actually the most prominent theme of beauty found in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. The prevalence of this motif seriously undermines the suggestion that the beauty motif of the Hebrew Bible is primarily motivated by the authors' desire to ensure male control over the subversive power of beautiful women. It is this theme that features prominently in the wife-sister sagas of Genesis 12, 20 and 26, where the perceived threat from a foreign ruler on account of the matriarch's beauty is so extreme that the patriarch—Abraham or Isaac—fears for his own life. In this regard, the matriarch's beauty is so desirable that it renders not only her vulnerable, but

⁷¹⁰ Exum 1993: 69–70.

also her husband. As Exum suggests,

The story is about fear and desire: desire of the beautiful woman and fear of death because of her ... In all three instances, the matriarch's desirability makes the patriarch afraid for his life, though his fear turns out to be unjustified.⁷¹¹

It is this same desirability that draws the sons of God to cross forbidden boundaries for the beauty of the daughters of men (Genesis 6:1–4), and similarly which leads Shechem to be overcome with desire for Dinah (Genesis 34:1–2). Notably, Joseph is the one example of a man similarly finding himself under threat on account of his beauty, although in this case it is at the hands of a foreign female power rather than a male ruler (Genesis 39).

The striking contrast between Joseph and the other women in these narratives is that while the redactors of Genesis are unambiguous in their depiction of Joseph as a blameless innocent, they are less forthcoming when it comes to the thoughts and actions of vulnerable women. Additionally, while Joseph is able to fight off the advances of Potiphar's wife, Sarai (Genesis 12) and Dinah (Genesis 34) do not have that same advantage. Likewise, although eventually her circumstances improve, Esther is another beautiful Israelite woman whose good looks initially put her at the risk of the attentions of a foreign male ruler.

The prominence of the motif of a powerful foreign ruler preying on a beautiful Israelite female suggests that from the perspective of the male authors there existed a genuine concern that their Israelite households and families could be threatened by the actions of more powerful foreign rulers. As Exum notes, 'more

⁷¹¹ Exum 1993: 157.

often than not biblical female characters reflect male fears and desires rather than historical women. The male narrator wields rhetorical control; he has the power of discourse.⁷¹²

Considering the earlier discussion on the significance of male control within a patriarchal society, it is no surprise that the threat of foreign powers encroaching on the Israelite nation, or foreign males breaking up the Israelite family, was a concern that loomed large in the mindset of the ancient Israelite male. Nor was this an unrealistic concern, given Israel's status as a small nation in a volatile region of world, and therefore constantly endangered by the whims of foreign rulers and empires.⁷¹³

From this perspective, having a beautiful wife or daughter may have seemed like an even greater source of vulnerability, because as her desirability increases, so does the threat that another male might seek to take her for himself, thereby leaving the entire family at risk. Thus in some ways this discussion of beauty once again comes back to a concern about the loss of male control; however, in this instance the threat does not come directly from the female to the Israelite male, but rather indirectly from a third party: the powerful foreign male.

In light of this understandable cultural fear, however, the depictions of Bathsheba and Tamar in 2 Samuel 11–13 are even more startling. For in this narrative the threat to these beautiful women comes not from outside the community, but from the very centre of Israelite society—from the royal household,

⁷¹² Exum 1993: 15.

⁷¹³ Indeed, this is precisely what happened to the nations of both Israel and Judah in the eighth and sixth centuries BCE.

and the king himself. The fact that in these texts the Israelite rulers are acting towards their own women—whom they had the responsibility to protect—in a fashion that is usually attributed to foreign males within Hebrew Scripture serves to highlight just how scandalous this behaviour is. As Tamar protests, ‘such a thing is not done in Israel!’ (2 Samuel 13:12).

As well as demonstrating the vulnerability of these two women who are utterly at the mercy of Israelite men, these texts reveal the way that beauty can become the means through which a man attempts to assert dominance over another male by taking for himself a beautiful woman who belongs to his rival (e.g. the rivalry between Amnon and Absalom over Tamar, or Absalom sleeping with his father’s concubines).

The extent to which the editor of 1 and 2 Samuel makes use of the physical beauty motif to cast David’s household in a negative light is remarkable. For not only are the men of David’s line depicted as easily susceptible to female beauty and quite willing to exploit their power in taking advantage of a beautiful woman, they are even fallible in regard to their own beauty (2 Samuel 14:26; 18:9–10). In this way, like the Hebrew prophets, the editors of these narratives make use of the motif of beauty as vanity, although in this instance it is attributed to the men of the household rather than the women. Therefore each male who is described as beautiful is ultimately brought down on account of his pride and loses his claim for

the throne,⁷¹⁴ while each woman who is described as beautiful is presented as existing in a position of extreme vulnerability.

When it comes to the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, therefore, beautiful women are far more likely to be presented as vulnerable on account of their beauty rather than empowered by it. For the very same feature that attracts men to them conversely also puts them at risk, as they do not have the autonomy to reject unwanted male attention. Importantly, however, these narratives demonstrate that within the Hebrew Bible there is an important thread that distinctly portrays women as blameless and endangered by beauty at the hands of oppressive men, rather than as ambitious manipulators seeking to wield their beauty as a weapon.

6.3.3.c. Beautiful Characters in the Hebrew Narrative

The third prominent beauty thread of the Hebrew narratives occurs in the context of a prospective spouse meeting a potential bride (Genesis 24:5–16; 29:9–28; 1 Samuel 25:3, 42; Esther 2). In every other context, the mention of beauty acts as a narrative device forewarning the reader that a contentious and potentially dangerous situation is evolving in the plot, whereas in these examples, beauty is presented as a desirable characteristic in a potential spouse.

However, as I argued in the previous chapter, these narratives also suggest that more is needed in a wife than external beauty: what matters is her character. This is a perspective that is very much aligned with Proverbs 31. Hence Rebekah

⁷¹⁴ David is an exception to this pattern. For discussion on why David's beauty takes a different form to Saul's, see chapter three, page 128–135.

demonstrates her worthiness as a wife on account of her kindness (Genesis 24:17–19); Abigail proves herself on account of her wisdom and eloquence rather than purely on her beauty (1 Samuel 25:23–31); Esther is shown to be a woman of courage who can find favour with all who she interacts with (Esther 2; 5:1–2). Even Genesis 29 could be interpreted as an implicit critique of choosing a wife on the basis of beauty alone, as in this case the outcome leads to extreme relational difficulties.⁷¹⁵

The recognition that there are valuable character-traits to be found in a wife beyond her beauty could be taken as a counter-example to the frequently levelled charge against the Hebrew Bible that Israelite women are presented as mere possessions rather than autonomous human beings. In fact, this interpretation is supported by the fact that often the characteristics celebrated in the heroines of the Hebrew Bible are only revealed in situations where these women overstep societal boundaries.

Therefore, although surrounded by an array of texts that depict beauty in a less than favourable light, both for the danger that it can pose to the Israelite male and the Israelite female under different circumstances, various contributors to the Hebrew Bible nevertheless recognise a legitimate place for the appreciation of female beauty, which is primarily in the context of marriage.

6.3.4. A Summary of Beauty in the Hebrew Bible

⁷¹⁵ That said, the extenuating circumstance of two sisters married to one man also bears significantly on that difficult situation.

Given the immense variety in the depiction of women across the genres of the Hebrew Bible, one might argue that it is hard to find consistency. In fact, however, these multiple strands reveal some important truths concerning attitudes towards beauty in ancient Israel. I say this because, for all their variety, the majority of texts still approach the subject of human beauty with suspicion, which is why Part One of this thesis ('negative depictions of female beauty') is so much more substantial than Part Two ('positive depictions of female beauty').

Yet, actually, the title of Part One is a slight misnomer. For although beauty is consistently portrayed as problematic in the Hebrew Bible, it is not always *female* beauty *per se*. In the Hebrew Bible, beauty problems are not always female problems. Rather, beauty is the concern of men and women alike, which is why there are examples of beautiful women harming men (chapter one: 'Threat'), beautiful men and women harming themselves (chapter two: 'Vanity'), and men harming beautiful women (chapter three: 'Vulnerability'). In fact, the evidence even suggests that in the biblical narratives, it is more likely to be men than women who misuse beauty—both against themselves ('Vanity'), and in the abuse of women ('Vulnerability'). These findings have strong implications for the driving concern of this thesis, as they show that in the Hebrew Bible, female beauty and blame are not synonymous with one another.

Given the potential for beauty to cause extensive harm, it is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that underlying many of these beauty-texts of the Hebrew Bible is a subversive theological message that Yahweh does not, as Olyan and

McCarter claim, favour the beautiful (e.g. Genesis 29; 1 Samuel 16; 14; 1 Kings 1-2; Proverbs 31; Song of Songs 1:5). Overlooking external beauty, he looks to the heart.

6.4. Comparing the Texts

It is clear, therefore, that both within the Hebrew Bible and the later Jewish writings, certain attitudes towards female beauty gain a place of prominence within the developing worldview of these Hebrew writers. The question that remains, however, is how do the views of the authors of the Hebrew Bible compare to those of the writers of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha when it comes to the topic of female beauty?

6.4.1. Points of Convergence

The existence of parallels between the beauty-texts of the Hebrew Bible and the beauty-texts of later Jewish literature is indisputable. Indeed, one would expect that, as revered scriptures that continued to shape the worldview, culture and religious practices of Jews through the years 200BCE–100CE and beyond, the perspectives on physical beauty found within the Hebrew Bible would have had a profound impact on later Jewish thought. As Collins observes:

The peculiarity of Judaism from the time of the Babylonian exile is that it is both a nationality and a way of life... there was ... an authoritative body of scriptures which provided a frame of reference, especially for the formulation of Jewish identity in literary texts.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁶ Collins 2000: 19.

Furthermore, Collins notes that the prominence of Hebrew Scripture is upheld regardless of whether, as a Jew in the Graeco-Roman world, one is located in the region of Judea or in the Diaspora. Even in Alexandria, Collins observes how the 'earliest literary activity of the Greek-speaking Diaspora' was the translation of the Torah into Greek.⁷¹⁷ Thus for the Jewish communities in both Judea and the Diaspora, the teaching of the Torah remains definitive, and such influence extends to the way that Jewish men continued to interact with women, and the value and meaning that they placed upon female beauty.

One might also expect a strong continuity particularly between the later writings of the Hebrew Bible and the extra-biblical Jewish works, because at least in some instances the time gap between the two is minimal, perhaps even non-existent. For example, many scholars date the book of Daniel to the time of the Maccabean revolt, meaning that Ben Sira was written before the final form of Daniel was assembled.⁷¹⁸ Regardless of their specific dates, the fact that there are significant Greek additions to the books of both Daniel and Esther suggests that they are viewed as texts that are closely related to the literary world of the intertestamental era, and were perhaps even considered to be still under formation rather than 'closed texts'.

In regard to the positive depictions of beauty, it is noteworthy that both in the case of the biblical and apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, the appropriate setting for the admiration of a beautiful woman is either in the context of, or as a

⁷¹⁷ Collins 2000: 19.

⁷¹⁸ Collins 2000: 23.

precursor to, marriage (Genesis 24; 29; 1 Samuel 25; Esther 2; Susanna; Ben Sira 25; *Joseph and Aseneth* VII). Additionally, as I argue in chapter five, there is quite clearly a strong correlation between the biblical and apocryphal texts when it comes to the association of beauty with character. Thus in both collections of literature there is a strong emphasis on the fact that while beauty may be a desirable trait, it is a godly character that proves a woman's worth more than her appearance (Ben Sira 25:13–18). In chapter five, I emphasised the way in which the proverbial sayings of Ben Sira are the natural successor to the book of Proverbs in this regard, as Ben Sira's depiction of the good/sensible wife has strong parallels with Proverbs 31.⁷¹⁹

In a similar vein, the Greek additions to Esther reveal the popularity of a book in which beauty is depicted as a positive tool that can be used to save the Israelites. Building on the original work, these additions further emphasise both Esther's piety and notable beauty, indicating how popular the convergence of these two themes was during the era of the Greek novella, both for entertainment and instruction.

Likewise, the book of Judith draws on multiple biblical sources for inspiration, including Judges 4 and the book of Esther. Paralleling Esther, Judith is forced to act due to circumstance rather than by choice, and uses her beauty to find favour with a foreign ruler in order to save her people.⁷²⁰ Similarly, having played their parts, both Esther and Judith retire to the background of the narrative and take up their 'appropriate' social positions once more. As Loader comments in regard to Judith: 'Her act of leadership was one-off; she returned to her household leadership,

⁷¹⁹ See the discussion in chapter five, pages 238–243.

⁷²⁰ Barclay 1996: 50.

which was also exceptional, but remained within the overall framework of patriarchal society.⁷²¹

The reception of the biblical figure of Joseph in various pseudepigraphical texts (*Joseph and Aseneth*, *Jubilees*, *The Testament of Joseph*) is another example of the affinities between the presentation of beauty in the Hebrew Bible and in these later literary sources, as well as being the sole example of a beautiful male protagonist in the literature of the later era. As Loader observes, for some of these later Jewish writers

some biblical stories are a regular source of reflection on sexual behavior. Joseph is the model of chastity par excellence, not least in *Aseneth* where he is confronted with a whole nation of women wanting to behave like Potiphar's wife.⁷²²

In the case of Joseph, the later authors expand on the original depiction of the good-looking, pious biblical hero who withstands the threat of the foreign woman, thereby once again affirming a shared affinity amongst the writers of these two genres in their presentation of the convergence of beauty and piety.

Similarly, a case can be made for the affinities between the negative depictions of beauty in the Hebrew Bible and those of the later writers, although here the parallels are less extensive. One might wish to argue that there is a resemblance between the foreign seductresses found in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 39; Judges 16) and the provocative behaviour of beautiful women found in the apocryphal writings. Indeed, it is likely that the behaviour of women like Delilah and

⁷²¹ Loader 2011: 492.

⁷²² Loader 2011: 510.

Potiphar's wife influenced the later writers in their presentation of sexually aggressive women.

The major difference, however, is that none of the temptresses in the biblical text are explicitly referred to as beautiful; instead they tend to rely on seductive speech and bold action. A similar reluctance on the part of the author to depict a foreign woman as physically desirable is also discernible in *Joseph and Aseneth*, which recounts the marriage between an Israelite hero and an Egyptian woman. In order to justify Joseph's decision to marry her, it is not enough to simply heighten the extent of Aseneth's beauty. Instead, the text emphasises that Joseph acted solely in response to a divine revelation (XV:9), and even specifies that Aseneth was 'quite unlike the daughters of the Egyptians, but in every respect like the daughters of the Hebrews' (I.7). Such a statement could be taken to imply that her features resembled a Hebrew woman, or that one of the ways that she is 'like the daughters of the Hebrews' is by being astoundingly beautiful. Thus even in these later texts, we encounter evidence of a reluctance to associate a foreign woman with beauty.

Moreover, while the stark condemnation of beautiful temptresses may be absent from the *narratives* of the Hebrew Bible, the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical approaches towards female beauty have more in common with the language used to describe the personified bride of the prophetic marriage metaphors. The closest parallels appear between the fiercest critiques of female appearance found in the prophetic vitriol of Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23 on the one hand, and the strongly condemnatory depictions of beautiful seductresses found in various places in the later material (e.g. Ben Sira 9:26; *T. Reuben* 5:1-5). Some of

these later writers also appear to be inheritors of the critical attitude towards female beautification practices that is revealed in 2 Kings 9:32; Jeremiah 4:29; Ezekiel 23:40; Isaiah 3:17–23; Proverbs 7. This later disapproval of excessive ornamentation is revealed in the adaptations of the account of the sons of God and the daughters of man (Genesis 6:2-4), which is re-worked by both the authors of *1 Enoch* and *T. Reuben* to demonstrate how the origin of evil within humanity can be traced back to the creation of jewellery and ornaments that women might use to beguile men.

Consequently, there are similarities between the two collections of literature both in their depiction of negative beauty traits and in their positive characterisations—although more so in the latter than the former. What Corrington Streete says of biblical texts can therefore be understood to apply both to the Hebrew Bible and these later writings:

The power of female sexual desire in biblical texts has both ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ uses. Female sexual desire is ‘appropriate’ only when it is directed towards the building up of the patriarchal household and ultimately the community, which is likewise dominated by males.⁷²³

As beauty is the primary tool that a woman has at her disposal to manipulate sexual desire in the opposite gender, it is understandable why, the more concerned a culture became with patriarchal values or the more these principles were seen to be under threat, the more that beauty came to be feared.

⁷²³ Corrington Street 1997: 17.

6.4.2. Points of Dissonance

Despite the examples of dependence upon earlier biblical traditions, overall there is a significant disparity between the predominant attitudes towards female beauty as they are presented in the writings of the Hebrew Bible, and those found in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts. Both sets of texts affirm the paradoxical nature of beauty in Hebrew thought, alluding to the positive traits associated with beauty as well as the dangers inherent within it.

However there is a great difference in the *degree* to which these texts emphasise the positives and the negatives of beauty, and in the extent to which the authors of these texts find fault with women in particular. In both these respects, the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts go far beyond the Hebrew Bible both in the restrictions that they place on the archetypal 'good' beautiful woman, and in their sharp critique against the archetypal 'bad' beautiful woman.

The heightened emphasis on associating beauty with virtue in the apocryphal texts is demonstrated by the fact that in the later writings a woman's beauty can only be appreciated if the woman is modest. To preserve that modesty, these women are presented as segregated from the rest of society, such that they remain hidden in their husband's house (Susanna), or in their widow's garments (Judith), or in the women's quarters (Tobit, Ben Sira), or in a high tower (*Joseph and Aseneth*).

These excessive efforts to reserve one's beauty for the sight of one's husband contrast starkly with the presentation of women in the Hebrew Bible. In these earlier texts, women interact with male strangers (Genesis 24; 29; 1 Samuel 25), visit the surrounding countryside (Genesis 24), and appear before foreign courts

(Genesis 12; 20; 26; Esther 5). In this way, the women's beauty was on display, and yet no one questioned their character—in fact, it is often precisely on account of their bold actions that they are praised.

In addition to this, in the later writings there is no place for ambiguity in the depiction of a woman: she is either pious or corrupt. These clear divisions are markedly different from the more ambiguous depictions of beautiful women in the Hebrew Bible such as the daughters of men (Genesis 6:1–4), Dinah (Genesis 34) and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11–12). The fact that there is so much scholarly debate over the proper interpretation of these three texts is in part because the narratives are so sparse in their details of the behaviour and motivation of these women.

In the book of Susanna, on the other hand, which in many ways draws on the narrative of 2 Samuel 11, the narrative is unambiguous in the author's presentation of Susanna as blameless and the elders as corrupt. There is perhaps even an implicit critique of Bathsheba, because while Bathsheba does go to David (2 Samuel 11:4), Susanna resists the elders' advances at risk of her own life (Susanna 1:23, TH and OG).

A similar revision takes place in the apocryphal additions to Esther. The addition of an extended first person prayer from Esther to Yahweh highlights that from the perspective of the Greek editors, Esther is not presented as pious enough (Esther Addition C. 14:1-19).⁷²⁴ Moreover, while the biblical text is unclear as to how Esther feels about her marriage to Ahasuerus, the apocryphal editors emphasise that she endures sexual intercourse with a foreign male out of duty,

⁷²⁴ Stone 1984: 137.

rather than desire, further heightening her piety (Esther Addition C. 14:11). Consequently, re-workings of the biblical text such as these reveal that to the later editors, a greater emphasis should have been placed on the piety of Esther as a balance to her beauty, in order for her to fulfil the archetypal image of the beautiful Jewish woman.

The same kind of editorial work is done by these later Jewish authors on the negative presentations of beauty in the Hebrew Bible. However, in this case, just as some have worked to present the positive depictions of beautiful women in an even more pious light, others expound the biblical material to ensure that it is the women who are presented as beautiful temptresses, excusing male behaviour in the process.

An obvious example of this pattern is the expansion of Genesis 6:1–4 in both the book of *1 Enoch* and *T. Reuben*. In this example, the later editors remove the ambiguity of the biblical text and place the blame for the intermarriage of the sons of God and the daughters of men intentionally and specifically on the beauty of the women rather than the culpability of the men. Another re-working of the biblical text is found in *T. Joseph*, which adds the detail that Potiphar's wife was beautiful, presenting her beauty as a seductive device that she uses to beguile Joseph.

These are two examples where apocryphal writers intentionally re-formulate the biblical text in their narratives in order to critique the beauty of women as a weapon used against men, re-inventing the original narrative into a more misogynistic form. The fact that the authors of several texts found it necessary to re-work particular narratives of the Hebrew Bible is an indicator that from their cultural perspective, the biblical authors did not go far enough in ensuring that the

blame was placed on the beauty of women rather than on the shortcomings of men. Thus the overall tenor of the apocryphal texts reveals a much more critical attitude towards female beauty than what is typically found within the Hebrew Bible.

This critical perspective is heightened by several other distinctly negative features that are unique to the apocryphal writers' portrayal of female beauty. It has been noted that throughout the entirety of both these sets of texts, there is a particular concern for appreciating female beauty within the appropriate context of male control. However, it also seems that the Jewish authors of the Second Temple era considered the preservation of male control a more pressing issue than their predecessors. For example, in the Hebrew Bible, the primary threat to male control comes from foreign women residing outside of the Israelite community.

In the apocryphal texts, however, the threat has become far more insidious, as it is from within the community that beauty is now perceived to be a danger. Thus the seductress is no longer associated with the concept of the 'other', someone unknown or outside of the community. In the later writings, the danger comes rather from the 'insider', from within one's own home. As Ben Sira makes clear, Jewish women within the same community, even one's own daughters and wives, have become a potential source of shame.

This sense of threat is heightened by a second new development within the Jewish literature of the later era: the belief that women are more wicked than men, succumbing more easily to sexual temptation, and, as Ben Sira contends, are even the origin of evil itself (Ben Sira 25:24). In the Hebrew Bible, it is highly distinctive that within the narratives, the only women depicted as intentionally seducing men

out of evil intent are not only foreign, but they are also never identified as 'beautiful'. Even in the case of the wicked woman in Proverbs, she is cast as 'other', rather than as a true Israelite woman.

In the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, however, the idea takes hold that women are inherently more sexually promiscuous than men. As a result, every woman is seen as morally weak, and therefore every woman has the potential to lead a man astray. The inevitable consequence of this belief is that beauty in women can no longer be celebrated as an innocent characteristic unless it is strictly controlled. For if women are naturally more sexually predatory than men, then there is a sense in which they cannot help but make use of their beauty to lead a man into temptation. On account of this, beauty takes on a negative connotation. Beauty is no longer a neutral category that can be seen as good or bad depending on context.

This fixation on the dangers of *female* beauty in particular is quite distinct from the biblical text, which although lavish in its praise of male beauty (Genesis 39; 1 Samuel 9; 10; 16; Song of Songs; Daniel 1), is also uninhibited in its condemnation of male vanity (1 Samuel 16; 2 Samuel 12; 14; Ezekiel 28). Thus as Corrington Streete observes,

Female adultery, rather than male, continued to be portrayed as threatening the social and moral order of the Jews right through the Hellenistic period, from the fourth to first centuries B.C.E.⁷²⁵

⁷²⁵ Corrington Streete 1997: 8.

Consequently, by emphasising the piety of the archetypal ‘good’ beautiful Jewish woman and conversely accentuating the idea of the ‘dangerous’ beautiful woman, the predominant attitude towards female beauty in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature offers a far stronger dichotomy than the more ambiguous, balanced picture of female beauty offered in the Hebrew Bible.

In fact, this divergence of perspectives on beauty, and the varying weight that each of these perspectives carries across the biblical and apocryphal writings, can clearly be identified by looking at the division of material from chapters two to five of this thesis.

In chapter two, for example, while there is a plethora of apocryphal texts that depict female beauty as a weapon of male destruction, the selection of biblical texts on this theme are more limited in number. In chapter three, there is a stark contrast between the Hebrew Bible and the later Jewish writings, as the motif of beauty as vanity—particularly the critique of male beauty—does not feature in the latter texts.

The greatest disparity occurs, however, in chapter four, ‘Beauty as Vulnerability’. Here the book of Susanna stands out as the single apocryphal text presenting a beautiful woman as endangered and vulnerable on account of her beauty, and with her male aggressors at fault.⁷²⁶

This stands in sharp contrast to the Hebrew Bible, where there are numerous examples of women depicted as vulnerable victims on account of their beauty, and at the mercy of predatory males, both foreign and domestic. This is a radical difference between the literature of the Hebrew Bible and the intertestamental era,

⁷²⁶ One might make a case for Judith as well, but ultimately she is depicted more as a victor than a victim.

for in the former, women are frequently presented as *under threat* on account of their beauty, whereas in the latter, they are nearly always themselves the threat.

Here we see the issue of control approached from a distinctive and even subversive perspective. Rather than affirming male control, these texts critique the misuse of male power (Genesis 12; 20; 26; 34; 2 Samuel 11; 12; 14; Esther 1) by emphasising the harm caused when a beautiful woman is treated like a possession.

The fact that such a prominent strand of the beauty motif in the Hebrew Bible—the idea that a beautiful woman might be a victim rather than a sexual aggressor—is almost entirely absent from the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings demonstrates the degree to which perceptions of female beauty have changed by the time Ben Sira began writing. Indeed, not only is this idea nearly completely lacking in the later writings, but in them it has been almost universally reversed; now it is the beauty of women that endangers a man rather than a man's desire that endangers a beautiful woman.

Therefore, while the writings of the intertestamental era have been strongly influenced by the motif of beauty in the Hebrew Bible, the distinctions that emerge between the two sets of texts outweigh their similarities. I noted before that in the Hebrew Bible, beauty problems are not always female problems. The same cannot be said of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, in which beautiful women are almost always to blame.

It is apparent that a cultural shift occurs during the Second Temple and Hellenistic era that profoundly influences Jewish attitudes towards female beauty,

and in a negative direction. Noting the cultural changes that appear to have occurred, Archer comments on the literature of the Second Temple era in this way:

Women are characterised as obedient wives and unsullied virgins or as treacherous and sexually promiscuous creatures.⁷²⁷

6.5. Accounting for Difference

Given that Jewish attitudes toward female beauty become more extreme in the later Jewish literature, one question that arises is what caused such a transformation in beliefs about female beauty? My view is that these emerging differences cannot be fully accounted for by the trajectory of Hebrew ideas displayed in the Hebrew Bible. The shift from presenting women as vulnerable on account of their beauty to depicting them as universally dangerous on account of their beauty requires not only a predictable extension of Jewish thought but a reversal of its previous trajectory.

Researching the social roles and status of Jewish women in general in the Second Temple and Graeco-Roman period, Archer recognises that same shift in perspective, as women become polarised in Jewish literature as either ‘the Virgin’ or ‘the Harlot’.⁷²⁸ Archer’s perspective is that although a shift does occur in male attitudes towards female sexuality, this shift can be accounted for by certain trends and events that occur primarily within Judaism itself. She attributes this altered

⁷²⁷ Archer 1987: 3.

⁷²⁸ Archer 1987: 3.

perspective of Second Temple Judaism towards women to factors that all converged during this unique period of Jewish history.

6.5.1. Purity in the Second Temple Era

The first contributing factor that Archer recognises is that, over the course of Israel's history, the Israelites began to place an increasing emphasis on the need to preserve ritual purity in their worship of Yahweh. Archer identifies the exile as the watershed in this regard.⁷²⁹ The final formation of the priestly laws of Leviticus during this era helps to explain this growing emphasis on Jewish ritual practice, through which distinctive practices such as keeping the Sabbath, dietary codes, and circumcision became 'the hallmarks of Judaism'.⁷³⁰

Noting the utter centrality of the 'Temple state', Mack observes that 'for Jews living in Judea, the temple system was simply and actually the form of their social existence.'⁷³¹ This heightened commitment to ritual observance in order to preserve the purity of the post-exilic Jewish community also led to the cessation of exogamy. Hence Ezekiel's declaration that 'no foreigner ... shall enter my sanctuary' (Ezekiel 44:9), and Ezra's horror in the fifth-century BCE that 'the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the land' (Ezra 9:2).⁷³²

Among these rituals, Archer highlights the emphasis that the legislators placed on the 'blood taboo' and particularly their concerns about the pollution that

⁷²⁹ Archer 1990: 104.

⁷³⁰ Collins 2000: 13.

⁷³¹ Mack 1988: 35.

⁷³² Collins: 'the ideal of holiness by separation from the Gentiles was especially prominent in postexilic Judaism' (2000: 13). See also McNutt (1999: 202).

comes through menstruation. Thus Archer argues that the heightened awareness about purity, coupled with concerns about the pollution originating from women, planted in men the seeds of fear that women are a source of impurity. As she says,

A natural development from this legislation was for women to be regarded as a constant stumbling block to man's improvement. How could he hope to maintain the required standard of personal purity when the world abounded in impurity in the female form?⁷³³

One possible weakness in Archer's argument is that she relies on the presupposition that the Levitical code was introduced into Israelite society at the start of the Second Temple era. Even if this is true of their official introduction as laws, we do not know to what degree these Levitical codes may draw on earlier practices of ritual cleanliness. Consequently it is possible that the rituals surrounding the 'blood taboo' were not a new phenomenon.

While it is true that in these Levitical codes there are aspects of femininity that are uniquely associated with uncleanness, this does not nullify the fact that in various different aspects of life men and women were both considered impure. Thus while there may be an imbalance in the way that men and women are perceived in regard to purity, one might question whether these differences—which are degree differences rather than categorical differences—are substantial enough to explain the dramatic shift in perspective within Second Temple Judaism.

Like Archer, Lerner identifies this as the era in which segregation began to occur between Jewish men and women. However, she ascribes this separation less

⁷³³ Archer 1990: 105.

to a new emphasis on purity laws and more to the introduction of a ‘women’s court’ within the temple which led to the segregation of worship. Lerner contrasts this new social division with a prior era:

[During] the time of the patriarchs men and women tended the flocks together, met at the watering wells, worshipped together in the temple, shared public celebrations ... Segregation in the temple begins only with the second temple.⁷³⁴

Taken together, therefore, Archer and Lerner have both identified trends within the Second Temple Jewish community that would be well explained by an increased cultural emphasis on purity.

6.5.2. Virginity in the Second Temple Era

Alongside the increasing importance of purity, Archer identifies the gradual development of a heightened emphasis placed on female virginity over the course of Israelite history.⁷³⁵ She argues that before the Deuteronomistic reforms (which she dates to the seventh century BCE), virginity was not a particular concern to the ancient Israelites, as it is only mentioned twice before the text of Deuteronomy.⁷³⁶ In support of her argument, she contends that in one of these texts, Genesis 24, the word בתולה (‘virgin’) is qualified by the statement ‘whom no man had known’

⁷³⁴ Lerner 1986: 177; Archer 1987: 5.

⁷³⁵ By the time of the intertestamental era, virginity is valued to the degree that Philo boasts: ‘Therefore, before our lawful marriage we know nothing of any connection with any other woman, ... we approach our virgin brides as pure as themselves’ (*On Joseph*, IX. 43–44 (Yonge 1993: 439)).

⁷³⁶ Genesis 19:8; Genesis 24:16.

(24:16), suggesting that בתולה should be read as a counterpart to נער ('youth'), indicating age rather than virginity.⁷³⁷

This is possible. However there is reason to think this is an intentional tautology, as the text has also already noted Rebekah's youthfulness. If בתולה does mean virgin in this context, then the tautology serves to emphasise the untouched status of Rebekah. This reading would therefore challenge Archer's position by demonstrating just how high a value was placed on virginity.

Additionally, much of Archer's argument regarding the significance of virginity relies on her dating of the texts of the Hebrew Bible. It is possible that there were earlier sources that referred to virginity before the seventh-century BCE redactional work of the Deuteronomist. Likewise, her claim that only two texts before Deuteronomy reference virginity relies on the assumption that the book of 2 Samuel and 1 Kings is a product of a Deuteronomistic school rather than based on an earlier Succession Narrative, as several references are made to virginity within these narratives.

Aside from the issue of textual interpretation and the dating of the texts, I also consider it unlikely that the Israelites were unconcerned with virginity before the exile. For in any culture driven not only by the need to reproduce but also to ensure the preservation of a specific family lineage—which was of primary concern for the Israelite patriarchs—marrying a virgin would have been a crucial method of

⁷³⁷ Wenham comments that בתולה should be interpreted as 'girl of marriageable age', because he writes that 'if *betulah* is translated "virgin", the clause "whom no man had known" is a pointless addition detracting from the thread of the story' (1987: 144).

guaranteeing that any progeny belongs to the patriarch and no other. For these reasons, it seems more plausible to suggest that virginity was always a concern in Israelite culture, even if it became a heightened concern after the exile.

6.5.3. The 'Harlot' Metaphor in Second Temple Judaism

Archer dates the increased importance of preserving female virginity to a time of social reform in the seventh century BCE. Archer also identifies the emergence of the marriage metaphor at around that same time, according to which whenever Israel obeys Yahweh she is depicted as the virgin daughter of Zion, yet whenever she behaves badly she becomes the 'backsliding daughter, unfaithful to God and engaged in all sorts of sexual antics.'⁷³⁸ By the time of the Second Temple era, Lerner suggests that these 'patriarchal sexual metaphors became firmly embedded in religious thought.'⁷³⁹

The influence of these strong invectives from the prophets rebuking unfaithful Israel for behaving like a licentious woman, combined with an increased cultural emphasis on purity and virginity, helps to account for the dichotomy between the 'virgin' and the 'harlot' that came to exist in the Jewish literary world of the intertestamental era.⁷⁴⁰

It does seem strange, however, that the figurative representation of Israel as an adulterous woman should be appropriated to apply exclusively to the behaviour of Israelite *women*, when this marriage metaphor was originally intended to

⁷³⁸ Archer 1990: 108.

⁷³⁹ Lerner 1986: 178.

⁷⁴⁰ Lerner 1986: 177.

symbolise the community as a whole, male and female. In addition, the shift away from seeing foreign women as the primary threat to the belief that all women are a threat to the Israelite male is a dramatic change in perspective.

Furthermore, although the negative influence of the 'marriage metaphor' upon Second Temple Judaism is significant, there are other texts that came into their final form during the Second Temple era, like Esther and the Song of Songs, both of which positively depict women as both beautiful and good. Despite the bleak account that Archer presents, Hebrew Scriptures are far from homogeneous in their characterisation of women. Thus it is curious that it is primarily the *negative* aspects of the biblical beauty motif that are extended into the intertestamental literature and, moreover, extended to such a degree that they go beyond the biblical perspective to present even Jewish women as dangerous and deceitful. Prophetic invectives and a cultural concern about female impurity may partially account for why this critical attitude develops, but I doubt that it is fully sufficient as an explanation.

6.5.4. Urbanisation in the Second Temple Era

One more factor that contributes to polarisation of male attitudes towards women is the issue of female segregation. Archer and Lerner have already mentioned how the increased emphasis upon purity led to greater segregation between the sexes. However, Archer argues that the most significant pressure to segregate men from women came about not through religious change, but rather the social phenomenon of urbanisation.

The dangers inherent in urbanisation are clear. Previously in an agricultural context and surrounded by extended family, the Israelite girl seemed to have had freedom to roam (Genesis 24; 29; 34). However, in a city, one is immediately at risk of the possibility of encountering or interacting with strangers. This threat is only worsened in a Diaspora context, where the Jewish family would be surrounded by not only strangers but gentiles. Thus at the same time that the importance of protecting a girl's virginity increased, so did the difficulty of guarding a virgin from other men, thus presenting 'grave problems as to how exactly the required degree of purity was to be attained.'⁷⁴¹

However, while Archer's argument for the impact of urbanisation upon perceptions of women within the Second Temple era is an appealing one, I do not find it entirely persuasive. I say this primarily on account of the fact that, as Meyers compellingly argues, significant urbanisation had already occurred far earlier in Israelite history, when the monarchy was first established.

Meyers presents a strong argument that the shift to urban life during Iron Age II and the establishment of the monarchy does have an impact upon the status of women in Israelite society, as the 'household is recreated and reshaped.'⁷⁴² Centralised government and bureaucracy take the place of the family household until it no longer functions as a 'self-sufficient economic unit', and as a consequence,

women would have become less essential and would have had fewer potential roles to fulfil, leading ultimately to an increase

⁷⁴¹ Archer 1990: 113.

⁷⁴² Meyers 2000: 187.

in gender differentiation and a corresponding decrease in women's power and status.⁷⁴³

Thus, although urbanisation had affected women's status and role within ancient Israel, it would seem that this process had already occurred long before the return from exile and the Second Temple era. Furthermore, despite the changes that occurred during the shift to more urban settings, several narratives of the Hebrew Bible nevertheless depict women as moving around with relative freedom even during that era (1 Samuel 19; 2 Samuel 12, 2 Samuel 14; Song of Songs 4; 5; 8).

Consequently, while urbanisation likely influenced the status of women in Israelite society, it is unclear both at what point in the history this effect is most felt, and just how widespread the impact of urbanisation was upon the wider culture living outside of the city.

Considering all of these contributing factors, Archer claims,

An easy step from this type of attitude was to regard women as the source of all evil in the world ... By the Hellenistic period belief in the essential evil of woman was a fundamental feature of Jewish religious thought and became a theme to be constantly elaborated upon by the writers of that time.⁷⁴⁴

I have raised some concerns about Archer's conclusions in regard to both her schema of dates, and the extent to which certain cultural anxieties—e.g. the uncleanness of women—became prominent beliefs within the Jewish community. I do so not to negate her explanations, but rather to question whether this substantial

⁷⁴³ McNutt 1997: 171.

⁷⁴⁴ Archer 1990: 105.

shift in the depiction of women in Jewish literature really is an ‘easy step’, or whether further explanation is required.

In particular with respect to the central topic of this thesis, I also question why it is that views on female *beauty* in particular are presented so differently in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. For although within the Hebrew Bible there is precedent for the unfaithful woman in the characterisation of foreign temptresses, these depictions have little bearing upon the subject of beauty. Instead, the Hebrew Bible presents these women as a danger on account of the way they use speech as their chief seductive tool.

During the intertestamental era, however, the Jewish authors’ attitudes towards physical beauty shifts to such a degree that it is no longer a woman’s speech that beguiles, but rather her beauty that becomes the primary weapon. This is a change in perception that Archer’s wider focus does not account for.

I believe that a more robust account of these cultural changes in the perception of women—in particular those concerning the origins of the belief that women are sexually weaker and innately wicked, along with the particular apocryphal association made between wickedness and female beauty—can be found by considering the specific influence of Hellenistic culture and thought on the Jewish writings of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts.

In presenting this case, my intention is not to offer a contradictory account to Archer. Indeed, there are instances in which she herself refers to the possible influences of Hellenism on Jewish thought. For example, when stating that the lack of education for women during the intertestamental era helped contribute to the

male belief in their ‘innate inferiority,’ Archer follows this comment with the parenthetical aside,

A belief which could possibly have been further encouraged by the contact Hellenistic Palestine had with the Greek world.⁷⁴⁵

Note, however, how tentative Archer is in the way that she suggests (only parenthetically) that the Greek world ‘possibly’ encouraged this view. In her almost exclusive focus on searching for explanations within Judaism for the increasingly negative characterisations of women, I suggest that Archer has significantly underemphasised the influence of Greek ideas on Jewish culture.

Rather than seeking to undermine the validity of a number of the partial explanations identified by Archer, it is her omission of the forceful impact of Hellenisation upon Judaism during this era that surprises me. For not only did Hellenism have a heavy influence on all aspects of Jewish culture during that time, it also had a substantial amount to say on the topic of female beauty in particular. Therefore, if there is an ‘easy step’ (as Archer puts it) in the progression to seeing women as a source of evil,⁷⁴⁶ it is most plausibly a step rooted in the influence of Hellenisation.

6.5.5. The Influence of Hellenisation

In making this claim I take a cue from Meyers, who suggests,

⁷⁴⁵ Archer 1990: 210.

⁷⁴⁶ Archer 1990: 105.

Perhaps one must look for the causes of the changes in Eve's fortunes even beyond the monarchy, to the next radical transition in the history of Israel: the superimposition of Greco-Roman thought and cultural forms on the biblical world [.]⁷⁴⁷

There is good reason to think that Greek culture had a significant impact on Jewish perceptions of women during this era. In particular, I believe that Hellenistic attitudes towards female beauty are likely to be responsible for the distinctive presentation of beauty, rather than beguiling words, as a woman's primary weapon of seduction within the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings.

Any discussion of the influence of Hellenism on Jewish thought during the Graeco-Roman era is complicated by the fact that there is not a homogenous form of 'Hellenism' just as there is not only one kind of Judaism between 200BCE–100CE. Therefore I use the generic term 'Hellenism' very loosely to refer to the influence of Greek culture on the inhabitants of Judea and the Jewish Diaspora communities throughout Northern Africa and Syria.

Part of the reason why I believe Hellenistic influence cannot be left out of this discussion is because it greatly impacted every aspect of Jewish culture from the fourth century BCE onwards, and in particular came to influence Jewish literary forms.⁷⁴⁸ Reflecting on this influence, Mack comments,

⁷⁴⁷ Meyers 2000: 197.

⁷⁴⁸ Stone: 'The impact of Hellenism, and the reactions to that cultural phenomenon, is one of the factors that left their mark on much of the literary activity of the Jewish people, during the period of the Second Temple' (1984: 2). Nor did the Jews of Judea remain apart from this Hellenizing influence, not least because there was a high degree of interaction between those living in the Diaspora and Judea, particularly between Judea and Alexandria (Barclay 1996: 22, 35).

In the diaspora, eager exploration of Hellenic culture was pursued by Jews at all social levels ... In the great centres of Hellenization ... Jewish intellectuals mastered Greek paideia, rhetoric, literature, and philosophy.⁷⁴⁹

For example, even when critiquing the Hellenistic culture of Egypt, the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* ironically uses a Greek form of writing as the conduit for his attack.⁷⁵⁰ The author may be writing polemically against the Greeks, but even while doing so he displays his indebtedness to a Hellenistic education and literary culture.

Throughout the works of the Jewish apocryphal and pseudepigraphical authors we see the influence of Hellenistic literature, whether that be in the 'Greek novella' styles of *Judith*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, and *Tobit*, in the influence of the 'encomium' style on *Ben Sira* and *Wisdom*, or the Greek approach to listing virtues and vices in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.⁷⁵¹ Given the pervasive Hellenistic literary influence upon Jewish society, Jewish education, and Jewish thought, it would be highly improbable that Hellenistic ideas concerning the status of women, the nature of women, and the beauty of women did not also have a significant impact upon Jewish attitudes towards women.

At different times throughout Greek history and in different locations women were perceived in very different ways.⁷⁵² However, one philosophical perspective that became embedded in Greek culture was a dualistic vision of the world. As Meyers explains in regard to the impact of Hellenism on the Semitic world,

⁷⁴⁹ Mack 1998: 46.

⁷⁵⁰ Barclay 1996: 204.

⁷⁵¹ Collins 2005: 178. See also Mack (1988: 80) and Pfeiffer (1949: 104).

⁷⁵² Lerner 1986: 203.

Pairs such as body and soul, evil and good, female and male became aligned. Eve was the victim of this alignment: female was linked with body and evil. Relegated to a position of decreasing power as the household lost its prominence, she then became associated with negative aspects of life.⁷⁵³

The seeds of associating women with temptation and wickedness may already have been found within the Hebrew prophetic tradition (Ezekiel 23; Zechariah 5:8).⁷⁵⁴ However, the level of vitriol found in some of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, and the extreme dichotomy between the 'virgin and the harlot', makes better sense when set against the backdrop of Hellenistic dualism. It is also within this dualistic framework that Aristotle's philosophy of gender, and particularly his belief in the innate inferiority of women, was formed.⁷⁵⁵ This widespread view may well have influenced *T. Reuben's* presentation of women as 'weak' and 'overcome by the spirit of fornication more than men' (*T. Reuben* 5:3).

Furthermore, while I disagree with Archer's explanation that urbanisation *by itself* played the primary role in the segregation of Jewish women from men, there is one component that was absent from her explanation which helps to explain the alteration in attitudes towards female appearance in these later Jewish texts, and that is the influence of *Hellenistic* urbanisation.

I say this partly because in Diaspora cities, the possibility of intermingling with men from outside the Jewish community would have radically affected the freedom of these women to interact with men outside their family sphere. Barclay,

⁷⁵³ Meyers 2003: 196.

⁷⁵⁴ Yee 2003.

⁷⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 1. 82. See Lerner (1986: 10) and Canterella (1987: 2).

for example, takes note of 'the establishment of largely Jewish areas of residence' by the Jewish Alexandrian community, which he contends would have been 'particularly significant for Jewish women ... among the least assimilated Egyptian Jews were Jewish women who lived in wholly or largely Jewish districts.'⁷⁵⁶ Likewise, the cultural impact of Hellenism was also so extensive in Palestine that during the Hellenistic era, more than 30 Greek cities were established there.

Another characteristic of Greek culture that originated out of their dualistic worldview was the concept of the *polis*, the Greek city, which remained the foundation of Hellenistic culture. Central to this way of life was the division of public and private spaces, whereby the man's domain was the public sphere and the woman's was within the *oikos*, the household.⁷⁵⁷

The influence of these Hellenistic practices of social segregation within the city is demonstrated by the writings of those like Pseudo-Phocylides, who advises: 'Guard a virgin in firmly locked rooms, and let her not be seen before the house until her wedding day.'⁷⁵⁸ However, there is no clearer example of the convergence of Hellenistic and Jewish thought and culture than in the writings of Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher. Reflecting upon his own Alexandrian Diaspora community, Philo likewise states that 'women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house' (*De Specialibus Legibus* 3.169).⁷⁵⁹

Considering the impact of this social segregation upon male attitudes towards beauty in particular, it is ironic that the result of diminishing the social

⁷⁵⁶ Barclay 1996: 118.

⁷⁵⁷ Pomeroy 1994: XVIII, 131. See also Canterella (1987: 40) and Lerner (1986: 202).

⁷⁵⁸ *The Sentences of Phocylides* 215 (Van der Horst 1978: 101).

⁷⁵⁹ Archer 1990: 117.

interaction between men and women only serves to enhance the visual allure of the female to the male and vice versa. For in this context, the opposite gender comes to represent the forbidden, and is thereby rendered all the more intriguing.

This segregation also places a greater emphasis on the importance of beauty in the mindset of the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writers. I say this because when social interactions are inhibited, one's impressions of the opposite gender outside of a family context become formed almost entirely on the basis of physical appearance. In this way, the impact of physical beauty is heightened for the male viewer, making it seem more powerful than it would have been if men and women could interact more freely.⁷⁶⁰

Furthermore, in urban contexts where virgins may have been segregated, the only possible interaction with women would be restricted to chance encounters with either a married woman in a social context or on the street, or with a prostitute. This explains Ben Sira's warning against these two kinds of women in particular. The limited nature of encounters such as these also accounts for why the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writings emphasise the danger of a woman's eyes, because eye-contact may have been the sole means of engaging with a member of the opposite gender in that socially divided culture. When the entirety of human interaction between a man and woman is condensed into what could be conveyed through the eyes, these physical features in turn become an intense focal-point of social communication and invitation.

⁷⁶⁰ Pomeroy: 'The segregation between the sexes may have fostered a sort of "voyeurism" in men' (1994: 144).

Therefore, the dual consequence of adopting a Hellenistic approach to an urban lifestyle is on the one hand a strong emphasis on the need to keep women separate from men and their beauty well-hidden, and on the other hand a greater fixation upon and yearning for female beauty precisely because it becomes a rare sight to behold.⁷⁶¹

It is these kinds of concerns that led to Ben Sira's instructions that a daughter remain locked up (Ben Sira 42), as Ben Sira fears the loss of honour and the resulting shame. Moreover, while honour and shame have their place in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Genesis 34), Collins suggests that there is a 'marked increase' in this value system within Ben Sira's writing, which Collins attributes to the fact that these 'were pivotal values in Greek society.'⁷⁶²

Most significantly, however, while the Hellenistic worldview came to shape Jewish culture more generally, Greek literary attitudes towards female beauty had a profound impact upon the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical depictions of beautiful women in particular.

For example, in his infamous seventh-century BCE *Theogony*, the Greek author Hesiod presents a strong association between inherent wickedness and beauty in his depiction of Pandora, the first woman. Beautiful but deceitful, it is she who bears responsibility for bringing evil into the world:

And when Zeus made the lovely curse...
Amazement seized both gods and mortal men
To see the snare, a futile thing for men.
From her has sprung the race of womankind,

⁷⁶¹ Pomeroy 1994: 144.

⁷⁶² Collins 1997: 34.

The deadly race and tribes of womankind...
So women are a curse to mortal men ...
A maiden's form – desirable and fair ...
Persuasion and the Graces draped her flesh ...
Pandora – a pain to hard-toiling men.⁷⁶³

Pandora is presented as the 'lovely curse', both 'desirable and fair' yet 'deadly' to men. Furthermore, Pandora is not depicted just as an individual woman but rather as the archetype for all women. There are notable parallels between the presentation of Eve and Pandora, as both are the first woman and both are in some way responsible for bringing evil into the world. As Pomeroy states,

Pandora is comparable to the temptress Eve, and the box she opened may be a metaphor for carnal knowledge of women, which was a source of evil to men.⁷⁶⁴

And yet, the depiction of Pandora is far more critical than any description of Eve in Genesis 2-3. Archer observes how, although woman is personified as wickedness in the Second Temple literature (Zechariah 5:7-8), nevertheless 'in the religious system of thought of the Second Commonwealth, Eve does not figure as the archetypal evil woman.'⁷⁶⁵

Instead, this is an idea introduced by Ben Sira. Given the startling parallels between Ben Sira's own attitude towards female beauty and Hesiod's presentation of Pandora, I am inclined to hold that Ben Sira was not only familiar with but even based much of his attitude towards the seductive beauty of women on Hesiod's

⁷⁶³ Hesiod's *Theogony*, 585–602. Translated by Judith Peller Hallett (Pomeroy 1994: 3).

⁷⁶⁴ Pomeroy 1994: 4.

⁷⁶⁵ Archer 1987: 2.

Theogony. For example, in 9:3 Ben Sira cautions against falling into a harlot's 'snare', and in 26:23 he warns against the 'deadly' nature of a married woman who seeks love. These are terms that Hesiod has already made use of. Likewise, Ben Sira's critique that 'from a woman sin has its beginning, and because of her we all die' (25:24) strongly echoes Hesiod's complaint that 'from her has sprung the race of womankind, the deadly race and tribes of womankind; so women are a curse to mortal men.'

It is possible that Ben Sira even took the idea of presenting Eve as the ultimate source of sin from his reading of Hesiod's account of Pandora. Collins affirms this interpretation of Ben Sira when he notes that 'there is no precedent in Hebrew tradition for the view that woman is the source of all evil, but there is a clear Greek precedent in the story of Pandora's box.'⁷⁶⁶

If this interpretation is correct then Ben Sira alters the trajectory of the biblical beauty motif by emphasising in a new way a relationship between sin and sexual temptation, with beauty as the means by which a woman achieves her goal and gains mastery over men. In doing so, Ben Sira may have allowed his reading of a Greek myth to influence his interpretation of Genesis 2-3, and consequently his attitude towards women and beauty would be a product of both Hellenistic literature and Hebrew tradition. Reflecting on Ben Sira's depiction of Eve, Meyers notes how once Eve is identified as

the source of sin, the more urgent becomes the need to control, subdue, and dominate her. Eve is seen as representative of her sex, and thus all women are regarded as requiring subjugation

⁷⁶⁶ Collins 1997: 67.

to wiser and superior male figures.⁷⁶⁷

The similarities between Ben Sira and Hesiod do not cease there. Offering advice on choosing a wife, Hesiod comments that ‘a man wins nothing better than a good wife, and, again, nothing worse than a bad one.’⁷⁶⁸ These words once again sound remarkably like Ben Sira’s own directions on the joys of marrying a good wife and the challenges of living with a bad wife (Ben Sira 26:1; 25:13–21).

This additional parallel strengthens the possibility that Ben Sira was indeed influenced by the works of Hesiod, shaping his attitude towards female beauty. Such an explanation would help to account for why Ben Sira in particular, but also other apocryphal and pseudepigraphical writers following on from him (e.g. 1 Esdras 4, Philo, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*), are so intent on blaming the beauty of women in a way that is rarely found in the Hebrew Bible.

Nor is Hesiod’s perspective unique. Examples of both lavish praise and heavily critical attitudes towards female beauty—of the kind that parallel the polarised depictions of the Jewish intertestamental literature—can be found throughout the various genres of Greek literature: in mythology, epic poetry,⁷⁶⁹ theatre,⁷⁷⁰ and philosophy.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁶⁷ Meyers 1988: 76.

⁷⁶⁸ Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 702–703. Translated by Judith Peller Hallett (Pomeroy 1994: 48).

⁷⁶⁹ E.g. Homer’s *Iliad* (seventh century BCE) emphasises the devastating beauty of Helen’s face as the cause of a war: ‘Certainly there is no cause to blame Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans if they endure lengthy hardships for such a woman. In her face she is amazingly like the immortal Goddesses’ *The Iliad*, 3. 156–159 (Pomeroy 1994: 16).

⁷⁷⁰ The playwright Euripides (480–406 BCE) also emphasises the evil of women: ‘Go to hell, I’ll never have my fill of hating

In particular, the suggestions that women are innately inferior to men, that they are inherently lustful by nature, and that in most cases their beauty should be perceived as a dangerous threat, are difficult concepts to justify on the basis of the Hebrew Bible. However all of these features not only fit within a broader Hellenistic worldview, but are even featured within popular forms of Greek literature. It is plausible, therefore, that this Hellenistic way of seeing the world, particularly in regard to gender and beauty, came to influence many educated Jews during that era, both those in the Diaspora and those in Judea.⁷⁷² As Collins summarises,

Hellenistic culture was not optional for the authors of these texts. It was the sea in which they swam and was an integral part of their identity.⁷⁷³

Women, not if I'm said to talk without ceasing.

For women are also unceasingly wicked.'

Hippolytus 616–68. Translated by Judith Peller Hallett (Pomeroy 1994: 107).

⁷⁷¹ The third-century BCE Neopythagoreans also caution against 'women who eat and drink all sorts of extravagant dishes and dress themselves sumptuously, wearing things that women are given to wearing, are decked out for seduction into all manner of vice ... a woman will neither cover herself with gold... nor will she braid her hair with artful device... nor will she put white makeup on her face or rouge her cheeks or darken her brows and lashes ... The beauty that comes from wisdom and not from these things brings pleasure to women who are well born.'⁷⁷¹ 'Advice to Young Ladies', Holger *The Pythagorean Texts of the Hellenistic Period*, 142-145, Stob 4.28.10. Translated by Flora R. Levin (Pomeroy 1994: 135–136).

⁷⁷² McClure observes that by the time of Greek tragedy, 'the invective against women ... is a literary commonplace' in Hellenistic culture (1999: 373–374, 377–378).

⁷⁷³ Collins 2000: 261.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

While the motif of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha overlap in a variety of ways, in both substance and emphasis they diverge starkly. This divergence is not a predictable extension of the ideological trajectory of the Hebrew Bible. There are partial explanations to be found within the development of Second Temple Judaism; however, the explanatory power of Hellenism has been but should not be underestimated.

In the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, the presentations of female beauty attest to the underlying concerns of a culture that is wrestling with gender-related questions. In a patriarchal society that feared the loss of male autonomy and abhorred any public loss of face, female beauty is best regarded within the context of the home and the security of marriage. In this setting, even the more daring authors—who bend the rules to present unconventional beautiful heroines like Judith—still ultimately serve that same conservative agenda. Consequently, any woman who does not conform to the dictates of this society but instead looks to use her beauty to her own advantage is not only a personal temptation but a sexual aggressor who uses her beauty to undermine everything that her culture stands for.

In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, the beauty motif is more varied. This variety is often revealed through genre. According to the prophets, beauty is a gift from God that has been misused by his people in self-idolatry. In the poetry of the Bible, the books of Proverbs and the Song of Songs present opposing visions of

female beauty. In the former, beauty should only be appreciated in 'the wife of one's youth' (Proverbs 5:1), lest it become a threat. In the latter, beauty is lavishly and erotically celebrated with unconventional and counter-cultural freedom. As for the narratives of the Hebrew Bible, we encounter foreign seductresses without beauty, Israelite women who are bold in their beauty, men who are brought down on account of prideful beauty, and women who are persecuted on account of beauty. In this way, the Hebrew Bible offers a paradoxical depiction of human beauty that empowers and weakens, threatens and is under threat, kills and brings life, and raises up and tears down.

There are evident similarities between the motif of female beauty in the Hebrew Bible and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, particularly in the instances where the later authors have re-worked biblical material into their own narratives, and in their shared overarching suspicion of beauty. Overall, however, there are greater divergences than parallels between the attitudes of the biblical writers and the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical authors towards female beauty.

In many cases, these differences are a matter of *degree* rather than outright *disagreement*, as the later writers are both more enthusiastic in their praise of beauty and more harsh in their condemnations of female beauty.

However, the most significant difference is that, although both sets of texts primarily view beauty with suspicion, in the Hebrew Bible that suspicion is not exclusively aimed towards women. For although beauty is often problematic in Hebrew Scripture, there is no default assumption that these problems will be caused *by a woman to a man*. Rather, beauty is problematic because through it a woman

may harm a man ('threat'), a man or a woman may harm themselves ('vanity'), or—most likely in the biblical narratives—a man may harm a woman. Given the potential for harm, it is perhaps unsurprising that, in several cases, underlying these depictions is a subversive and counter-cultural message that while humanity may judge according to appearance, Yahweh instead looks at the heart.

In my attempt to account for these differences, I find myself in partial agreement with Archer, who focuses primarily on tracing the shifting attitudes towards women throughout the literature of the Hebrew Bible and within the Judaic tradition. I support her assessment that the influence of increased purity rituals, a greater emphasis on virginity, and the impact of urbanisation all likely contributed to a shift in perspective within the Jewish male psyche towards female beauty.

However, I go further than Archer in arguing that these cultural changes alone are not sufficient to account for the degree of negativity towards female beauty displayed in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, most specifically, the belief that women are inherently wicked and their beauty is a weapon they will use under any circumstances to manipulate the opposite sex. These two views in particular do not correlate well with the biblical depiction of beauty as a characteristic that more often than not leaves the woman in a position of vulnerability rather than power.

Therefore, I have begun to sketch a case for the possibility that these later Jewish authors were also heavily influenced by Hellenistic literature and culture, to the extent that their attitudes towards female beauty are significantly shaped by Greek ideas. The immersion of Jews within the *polis* social structure and their

adoption of segregation practices appears to have deeply informed their views on the way in which female beauty should be displayed, and how it ought to be controlled.

Likewise, it is possible to trace the influence of Greek literature, such as Hesiod's *Theogony*, on the attitude towards female beauty that Ben Sira and others like him appear to have adopted. There is scope for further research in this area, focusing particularly on the ways in which and the extent to which Greek culture influenced the male attitudes towards women found in the Jewish writings of the Graeco-Roman era.

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