History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures

A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi

edited by
Ian Douglas Wilson and Diana V. Edelman

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Between the Words I Write

Francis Landy
University of Alberta

I write in the folds between words, where they crumple up like a concertina, imagining what it would have been like once upon a time, in a temple or field or stone house, crushing the words and throwing them away, until there is only the word that traces itself and retraces itself, insistently. That is how I want to imagine the Psalms being written or the prophets writing, or the storytellers or the historians. To tell a story, to seduce to the heart of a story, for instance the story of Elijah going into the cave, going through the desert of his despair, and hearing the repeated insistent voice, which is no voice, which drives him on, nowhere, to fire and ashes, to the recurrent memory and promise of the forerunner.

In a bus from an exhausting day, with the shepherds and activists and the euphoria of sky and wind, listening to the pain of my companion, recounting the pain, in his vision, of Elisha, who wants to be a normal prophet, to denounce and announce and call in the name of the Lord for a new society, and instead has to do his ridiculous party tricks, to be the hero of fable and miracle. And I thought this was entirely wrong. I put on my metaphorical as well as real beret and tried to talk about legends of the prophets and writing prophets. I gave up soon enough. Or maybe not soon enough. Because of course I think the legends speak for something, shall we say the paranormal, the sense that our normal lives, habits, and histories can flip over in an instant and for the limits, possibilities, and quirks of humanity.

My friend Ehud has been engaged in the reconstruction of the *imaginaire* and the intellectual history of Yehud for many years, and for him this process is inseparable from social memory as a project as well as the basis of that history.[1] Ancient Yehudites could only think with that which they remembered, and they remembered especially that of which they thought, which suited their interests and addressed their issues (Ben Zvi 2012: 29). So much is commonplace, and it is fair to say that Ehud is a rationalist, for whom the literati of ancient Yehud were

1. It would be a hard task to list all Ehud's publications on the subject, as well as edited volumes. See, for example, Ben Zvi 2012: 17–45; his essays on Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah in Edelman and Ben Zvi 2013: 4–37, 335–63, 365–83; and his many articles on Chronicles.

rationally seeking the answers to their problems through writing, reading, rereading, interpreting, and using the imagined past as a model of and a model for their present and their (utopian) future.

Ehud's is a *constructive* enterprise. He is concerned with how the community constructed itself through its texts and became thereby a community of the text, with all that that meant for its sense of its value and authorization.[2] Mine is a *deconstructive* one. I am less concerned with communities than with writers, insofar as they contribute to and critique their worlds. I want to know something about the experience of being a poet in ancient Yehud. I once even wrote a fictional autobiography of Isaiah, as a way of imagining what it may have been like to be a shamanic poet and intellectual in the eighth century (Landy 2001: 392–413, republished as 2002). In a sense, all my work is like that.

By *deconstruction* I do not mean something very formidable. I do not wrap myself round in arcane sentences. I mean the tendency of writing to fragment previous wholes, that the work of construction, immense as it is, is always accompanied by the equally intense work of exploring the limits of the given world, by the experience of breakdown, when everything is put into question. A serious writer must always probe and risk failure, because the world and history resist our attempts to make sense of them. This is perhaps especially true of the story of Israel and Yehud, which is one of cosmic failure, which ends in the bathetic middle, with the promise of a future always to come; what M. Blanchot (2003: 79) calls "an impossible future." H. Liss (2003: 272) uses Blanchot's text as an epigraph for her conclusion concerning the metalinguistic impossibility of communicating the prophetic message (cf. Landy 2013). The future is impossible because it is discontinuous with our age, but also because it can never happen, because it is not of this world.

Deconstruction as I use it has some affinity with the term popularized by Derrida. It is a catch-all term in Derrida for his project, across many different fields, which went through several different incarnations in his work. *Deconstruction* has two aspects. The first is critique of the western metaphysical tradition, of the system of justice, and so on. The second is creative and responsive: it points to the emergence of a new concept or order, in language that is elusive, playful, and lyrical. *Deconstruction* is characterized by *undecidability* and ambiguity, by the hesitation or aporia between the inherited tradition and the unspoken demand of the other.[3] The concept of *deconstruction* in J. Derrida is inseparable from others, like the *trace* and *différance*, which have likewise their correlation with my work.

2. J. D. W. Watts (2007: 193–215) traces this process with reference to Leviticus, especially in his concluding chapter. See also Camp 2013. C. Nihan (2015: 130) remarks on the "complex intertwining between textualization of the ritual . . . and ritualization of the text. . . ."

3. D. McCance (2009: 2, 19–24) insists that deconstruction is affirmative, in contradistinction from those critics who caricature Derrida as nihilistic, and quotes him that it is "openness to the other." In his panel discussion, "Epoche and Faith," Derrida (2005: 39) says that decon-

By *deconstruction* I mean an openness to time and possibility. The Hebrew Bible, and every artwork, strives to be complete, to say everything that needs to be said. Moreover, it projects a vision of a world that is complete and stable, most obviously in the Priestly and Holiness Codes, but also in Psalms and pervasively in the history books, with their evocation of eras of peace and prosperity, such as that of Solomon. The completeness, however, is always in a tense relationship with what is outside it, what Derrida (1978: 97–315) calls the *supplement*. The book, and the world as a book, has to have a reader and a history of interpretation. The ideal world of P/H, the imaginary utopia of the Temple community who wrote these texts, is subject to and preoccupied with human contingency, culminating in the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26. The history is open to a new event, a metanoia; things do not work out as planned or as the metanarrative would dictate. A bad king may reign untroubled for 55 years, and a good king may die ignominiously, contrary to prophetic prediction. Ehud (2011: 141–43) would see this as the necessary fuzziness required by the Yehud community to deal with contradiction. He sees fuzziness as characteristic of the Persian Empire as a whole and defines it as "a preference for a way of organizing knowledge, memory, and 'the world' into somewhat flexible or fuzzy categories that may allow for overlapping structures, tensions and the like" (2011: 143). I see it more as a thesis calling out to its antithesis, as evidence of a counter-voice within the text, which questions its presuppositions.

Time is the medium of *deferral*, which is one component of Derrida's key concept of *différance*, a portmanteau term combining the two senses of the word *différer*: to "differ" and to "defer" (for a succinct discussion, see McCance 2009: 26–28). The end is never the end, since there is always something more to be said or to waylay one with the unforeseen. The Bible is in love with the "happy ending," for instance in the prophetic books, as well as the secure determined beginning, but it does its best to dispel any surety in those endings or beginnings, as in the two (at least) beginnings of Genesis or the various climaxes of Isaiah.[4]

Deferral also means non-presence.[5] The complete book is one in which everything is simultaneously present, in the mind of the reader or of God. But reading requires time, whether one reads forwards or backwards (see Landy 2010; Boyarin

struction begins with the possibility of an "absolutely secret experience" and describes himself as being Kierkegaardian! Similarly, in his essay on religion, Derrida (1998: 27) says, "Religion is the response," linking it to the history of responsibility in the west. Affinities with E. Levinas are obvious.

4. R. E. Clements (2002) argues that Isaiah 60 would have been a better conclusion. Many scholars have argued that there were multiple editions of the book of Isaiah, and accordingly many different endings. For instance, chaps. 32, 33, 34, and 35 have all been held to have been original conclusions to the book. In my work in progress on Isaiah I suggest that it has multiple beginnings: chaps. 1, 2, and 6. Multiple or uncertain endings are a staple of postmodern fiction.

5. Presence is one of the preferred terms of logocentric discourse that Derrida's deconstruction disrupts. His thought, as often, is close to that of Levinas, for whom the time of the

1993; and Carr 2005 for an exhaustive study of reading practices in the ancient world, emphasizing the importance of rereading and memorization). Every word has its hidden aspects, as one comes to understand it in different combinations with other words, as one creates one's own selective, imaginative versions of a book, in endless permutations. This is what Derrida (1981b: 63, 65) means by describing a text as a web that takes centuries to weave and centuries to undo.

Ehud's work is about the imagination. How did ancient Yehudites imagine their past? How did they dream of their future? For him, the concept of *lieux de mémoire* is very important, because it is through *lieux de mémoire*—stories, places, rituals, texts, etc.—that the mental landscape of Yehud is constructed. *Lieux de mémoire* were, for the originator of the term, P. Nora (1989), dependent on the absence of authentic memory, resulting from a traumatic breach. In the case of Yehud, this breach would be the catastrophe of the destruction of the kingdom and the exile. For Ben Zvi, *lieux de mémoire* are focuses for imaginative re-enactment. Imagination pre-eminently served the ideological program and collective self-representation of the literati and their prospective audience. The Temple, for instance, attracted to itself numerous memories and hopes, both positive and negative, which contributed to and reinforced the metanarrative of the glorious past, transgression, destruction, and reconstitution (Ben Zvi 2012: 26–28).

At this point we can think of my deconstructive reading. The writer both constructs the poetic world, with all the resources at his disposal, and deconstructs it, because that world is unstable, because words mean more than they say, because, no matter how conformist, the writer must always be irreducible to the community. One thinks of collectives, such as the literati of Jerusalem, but in reality, these collectives were constituted by individual writers and thinkers, with their own input and perspectives and subject to the contingencies of the time spent writing, the particular historical-political circumstances, and most of all the inherited material.

Let us look at the most recalcitrant cases. It is easy with overtly poetic and prophetic writings that foreground the individual voice. There can be few more "deconstructive" works than Isaiah, with its constitutive message that "this is a text that is not to be understood," which is designed to mystify. But what about Chronicles or the Priestly Code (P)? Clearly, if there are individual writers, they are subsumed in a collective process of thinking and writing; they speak for a tradition, in the case of P the authoritative voices of Moses and God, in that of Chronicles the impersonal transcript of historical truth.

Deconstruction would be the exposure of weaknesses and tensions in the text and the possibility of supplementation: the details that do not fit into the ideological program and attest to a different, obtrusive fantasy world and the traces of un-

Other can never coincide with that of the self and is, thus, anachronistic. See Levinas's essay, "Time and the Other" (1981) and many subsequent works.

acknowledged emotion and desire. For example, in an article on the *sotah*, in Num 5:11–31, I argue that the text evokes the sexual obsessions and the insecurity of the patriarchy of priest, husband, and God through its redundancies, repetitions, and its simultaneous foregrounding and erasure of the woman's subjectivity (Landy 2015).[6] I argue that throughout, there is a tension between the writer's stance of objective neutrality and his identification with the patriarchal order, the husband, and the male God. But I do not know where the narrator stands, where his sympathies lie. In the story of David's census in 1 Chronicles 21, I wonder why it is such a good story, and in some ways so much better than the parallel account in 2 Samuel 24 (Landy 2014). What made the Chronicler want to tell a good story?

In both these texts something happens that cannot be contained in the grand narrative or tidy sacerdotal order: the animosity of Satan in 1 Chr 21:1 and the spirit of jealousy in Num 5:11–31. Both emanate from an alternative power or a dissociated part of YHWH himself, as the slippage from YHWH to Satan as the active agent between 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chr 21:1 suggests. Nothing leads us to expect this irruption—Satan stands and disappears from the narrative, the woman goes home and is blessed or cursed—and life resumes, as if nothing happened. The text covers over its traces or is perhaps a means of covering over its traces, a way of covering over the horror and shock it signifies. That indeed is one of the interpretations of the *sotah* story or ritual: how to deal with and render communally regulated something that threatens the carefully constructed social fabric and the dwelling of God within it. J. Milgrom (1990: 348–54), for example, suggests that the ritual was designed to protect the woman from her husband. Neither text is necessary; Chronicles is very free with omitting challenging stories. Why do they play with the exception; why do they play with fire?

Perhaps these texts have a constructive role. They establish the limits of the community through imagining that which will most threaten it. 1 Chronicles 21 (and less explicitly 2 Samuel 24) is a foundational narrative of the Temple and thus apotropaic. The altar David builds wards off danger and is emblematic of the expiatory role of the Temple. But they are also about the dangers of the imagination, of human pride, and of the divine-human encounter. The central image for me in 1 Chronicles 21 is the angel stretching from heaven to earth, whose drawn sword hangs over Jerusalem. In response to David's propitiation, YHWH orders the angel to return it to its sheath, but at the end of the narrative David is still too terrified of it to worship YHWH in the sanctuary in Gibeon—a fear rich in significance.

There is much here that is inexplicable, but I want to focus on the possible tension between the imagination and the overt message. Why did people write?

6. There have been a number of deconstructive studies, particularly by B. Britt (2007) and R. S. Briggs (2009: 288–319). See also Bach (1993: 52), who thinks that the text exposes "the potency of male imaginings" and fear of women's sexuality, and B. D. Haberman's (2000) psychoanalytic "counter-reading." Curiously, Derrida has a very confused reference to the text at the end of his "Freud and the Scene of Writing" essay (1978: 231).

Was it to fulfil a program or in response to an obscure necessity? Or, once they started writing, did extraneous material keep coming in? The tension between imagination, pleasure, and truth is pervasive in the western literary and philosophical tradition, ever since Plato. The classical tradition regarded the imagination as subservient to the intellect and potentially subversive, since it could make one imagine false things. "There is no imagination without distrust of imagination" (Hartman 1985: 201).[7]

In the Hebrew Bible, imagination is for the most part in the service of truth. In Psalms, for instance, the beauty of language is offered up to God. P and D could be seen as huge, imaginative and thus utopian enterprises, except that the Bible warns insistently against following after one's eyes and against the illusions offered by other deities, cultures, and women. The desert is opposed to the land of Canaan and to imperial glory. An aniconic deity is especially hard to write about, since the imagination is transgressive (Hartman 1985). To see the face of God is to die, and to imagine the face of God—which is what we do when we read—is to be always on guard against the injunction against seeing; it is to be seeing the unimaginable. The face of God becomes a metaphor, in the Levinasian sense, for that which has no face, which is beyond images and stories. For Levinas (1969: 187–210), the face is precisely not the visible face, which can be controlled, but is the expressive aspect of humanity.

Imagination is accompanied by dissolution of the imagination and pleasure for its own sake. This is what I understand by Barthes' "texts of pleasure" (1975): texts that give pleasure gratuitously, alongside interpretation.[8] That may have been a good answer to my friend on the bus, about Elisha: to note the sheer exorbitance of the stories. Indeed, whole books of the Bible, like Judges, consist of sidetracks. Pleasure is connected to humor and to laughter as the perennial release of tension and the exposure of unacknowledged and frequently subversive feelings and in-

7. For an interesting discussion of the imagination in Islamic and Jewish sources, see Hughes 2004; a counterpart for the Christian world is Bundy 1927. The intellect is concerned with the universal and incorporeal, the imagination with the particular and the sensual (Aquinas 2.67.3). But the limited human mind can only attain the intellect through the imagination. See also Bland 2012, who explores the role of Aesopian fables in Jewish medieval philosophy. Similarly, classical poetic traditions, such as the Augustan one, sought to tame the imagination. In contrast, Romantic traditions, exemplified by W. Blake and S. T. Coleridge, saw a radical disjunction between imagination and intellect, with the imagination as the supreme faculty. Coleridge famously defines the Imagination as the "repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (2009: 267). A classic study of the difference between classical and Romantic poetics is Abrams 1953. R. P. Carroll's two contributions (1995, 1997) on the impact of Isaiah on Blake and on a visionary reading of Isaiah have been formative for me.

8. R. Barthes (1975) distinguishes between two kinds of pleasure: *plaisir*, which refers to the cultural codes wherewith literature sustains itself; and *jouissance*, which is a violent disruption of codes and expectations, and has associations with sexual orgasm. In reality, as Barthes himself says (1975: 4), the two often slide into each other. See further Landy (1991).

sights. In 1 Chronicles 21, for instance, I find the detail of the sons of the Jebusite Arnon hiding among the heaps of wheat comic, like the yokels in Nativity scenes.

In poetry, too, pleasure is communicated through the establishment of mood and the sensuality of language, as much as through the construction of meaning. It may be good to praise YHWH (Ps 92:2), but the Psalmist himself and his audience are beneficiaries. There is something other than devotion to YHWH; both of us enjoy this poem I am making. The narcissistic self-gratification of the poet corresponds to, or is a metaphor for, the gift of language to God, the ultimate source of language and the poem. In Psalm 92, for instance, the mood is set by its heading as a psalm for the Sabbath day, by the persistent alliteration using "l," and by the threefold reference to musical instruments in verse 4. An imaginary world is constructed, that of the Temple in which the righteous flourish like trees, the enemies are defeated, and the psalmist tells of God's *ḥesed* and faithfulness by day and night. At the same time, it is one in which the poet celebrates the cessation of creation, including poetic creation and the dissolution of language into music. The Temple, like the Sabbath, is a zone of tranquility, in which the mind rests, "Annihilating all that's made / To a green thought in a green shade" (Marvell, "The Garden," lines 47–48). Sitting in the Temple courts among the great trees, and analogously the righteous, suggests a metaphorical equivalence between the poet and poetic creation, and the edenic garden, and with it the complex linkages between the Temple at the center of the politico-sacral establishment and the primal harmony between humans and nature. We will return to this "place" in the mind.

In the prophets, the paradoxes of poetic language are intensified. On the one hand, the prophets write at the behest of an Other; they have a split personality. Their writing is a burden and communicates death as well as rebirth. On the other hand, they write for themselves, in language of great virtuosity. Their language thus gives pleasure, and they may well have experienced pleasure at their turn of phrase. The pleasure of the text meets with resistance, by the audience as well as the prophet, incomprehension, and a failure to take the text seriously. The two are not always opposed; I have argued, for instance, that in Isaiah 2 pleasure emanates in part from imagining horror, as in a horror movie (Landy 2012a: 266). Pleasure may also be beside the point or a dangerous distraction. Ezekiel complains that people regard him as entertainment (33:30–32), although strictly speaking it is YHWH who complains thus; other prophets are perceived as mad (e.g., Hos 9:7) or act scandalously (e.g., Isaiah 20). The prophet speaks for ultimate values, for the end of the conventional world, and for a new reality that may be blissful or discommoding. He speaks under compulsion, never knowing quite what he will say. For Levinas (1998: 131–71), the prophet is the prototypical ethical person, attentive to whatever the Other requires of him, without any self-interest; his attitude is one of *hinneni*, sheer readiness (Ajzenstat 2001: 85–137; Landy 2012b).

Of course, the passivity Levinas attributes to the prophets does not match their portraits in the biblical text. But it does point to something important about

poets and poetry: an ear for the unexpected and not quite knowing where the words come from. In the fantasy with which I began this essay, poets crush and discard words so as to find the "right" word, the word that is a gift, which inscribes itself effortlessly on the heart and paper. It may be the word of God, the word that comes from the Other or the ultimate Other, a different part of the self, or perhaps even the real self. For Blanchot (2003: 80), the prophet is someone who relates to the Outside, that which is beyond all human experience, and in this is like all poets. The Outside is the desert, the place of revelation beyond human comforts and topography; the god of the desert is characterized by absence and addresses us in our nudity, in the desert of ourselves. For Blanchot, the desert, God, and death are virtual synonyms.

Here we touch on psychoanalysis, which I talked about in a recent interview with I. D. Wilson (2014). For me, psychoanalysis has primarily to do with the unconscious, with that part of ourselves, like those of ancient writers, which is unknown and mysterious to ourselves. Reading and writing draw in strange fantasies and passions that exceed our conscious intentions and agendas. In particular, they concern our most profound experiences, fear, and desires. A writer will write out of love, of life and language, in order to address an intimate yet absent Other, and in response to an imperative, internal or external. The writer may write on behalf of, and bear witness to, a community and a world across his or her death; his love and craft will be infused with the other loves and crafts that constitute our lives and our most intimate relationships. To read biblical poetry, then, is to be attentive not only to the overt significance of the words but to the resonances, the music, and the mesh of connotations and feelings in which they are entangled. Metaphor, rhythm, sound patterns, as well as disruptions and shifts in the logic of the discourse can guide us and expose underlying tensions and concerns. They are interconnected; syntactic, prosodic, or alliterative figures may have metaphorical force. On the other hand, they may work against each other. The sensuality of language may counteract the effort of interpretation. In that case, the pleasure of the text will be independent of its meaning.

To return to Psalm 92, the restoration of tranquility in the last verses is in part the effect of cumulative parallelisms, which augment each other, assume equivalence, and direct attention to the verbal texture. The greater the degree of redundancy, the more the reader/writer will engage in the play of sounds for their own sake, and in imaginative reconstruction. For instance, in the verse עוד ינובון בשיבה דשנים ורעננים יהיו ("Still they will be fruitful in grey hair; verdant and leafy they will be") (Ps 92:15), one may well imagine what it is like to be a tree, as part of the poem's complex processes of identification. If the Psalm is sung, as suggested by the title מזמור שיר ("a psalm, a song") (v. 1), the diffusion of attention will be magnified; the psalm will be the verbal and musical equivalent of the liturgical and contemplative space of the Temple and the Sabbath.

Thus, construction and deconstruction work together in the reading and writing of the poem; the tendency to fragment will accompany that to unify it. The

poem itself is an attempt to hold death and silence at bay. The righteous will flourish like trees, figures of longevity; the chaotic enemies are vanquished. As long as we—or the righteous—keep speaking, we can maintain the symbolic and enchanted space of the poem. But, of course, we cannot do so forever. Death haunts the biblical imagination, just as it does all of us, in particular because it concerns a world that is doomed to disappear and to be destroyed by the deity who created it. For Freud, erotic and destructive forces are inextricable in our psyches; we love and hate, including ourselves. Writers write about death and suffering; indeed, H. Cixous (1993: 7) argues that "to begin (writing, living) we must have death," that the "first moment of writing is the School of the Dead."

Writers wrest meaning despite death; to quote Blanchot (2003: 85), prophetic speech "makes death vain and nothingness sterile." According to Derrida (1978b: 228, 230; 1995) commenting on Freud, writing is complicit with death drive; it both resists it, promising survival, a trace of our voice and presence after death, and it bears its imprint, like a tombstone, since it can never substitute for the living, for all that has been forgotten, including alternative scripts. Writing, in Derrida's term, is *archiviolithic* (1995: 10), disruptive of every order and every sequence, of the archive it simultaneously makes and undoes. It is also violent, in that it inscribes violence, death drive directed either outwards or inwards. The Bible, in particular, is concerned with radical evil, whether inherent in human beings, as Gen 6:5 and 8:21 say, or in the universe, as Job and Qohelet contend. The good society it posits can never happen and is founded on initiatory violence, whose memory always haunts it with its charge of un-absolvable guilt and indebtedness.

There are many good psychoanalytic readings of the Bible, and the best are creative fictions: what was it like to be Solomon (Weitzman 2011: 16–32), or the witch of Endor (Jobling 1998: 184–89)? S. Lasine's volume of essays on Kings (2001) offers many excellent insights from the discipline of psychoanalysis. Here I would like to focus on one question, or one level of interpretation: what was it like to be a writer or composer, to have words dancing in one's head, to feel *called*? In particular, I want to think about what Derrida (1981a: 14; 2008: 117–58) calls *vouloir dire* ("meaning or wanting to say"), the moment before one actually says anything, the hesitation between meaning and non-meaning, silence and speech. Are we going to trust ourselves to the word, let the word launch us wherever we go?

This brings me back to my first step on this journey: writing in the folds between the words, where they break down, fold over in strata of meaning, where they hide abysses, the terrifying desolation of Isaiah's vision, or those endless delightful stories spinning into the void. But I also want to write about sacred space, the constructed poetic space of the Temple, the space that writes itself between the prophet and God, the fabulous landscape of biblical narrative. The sacred is a contested term and not one, I think, that Ehud concerns himself much about. But to me it is all important. How does one invite the sacred into a disenchanted world? For Derrida (1998: 2, 9, 23), the sacred is the immune, the unscathed. In the Temple, and in the space of the poem, the Psalmist is safe from the vicissitudes

of the world, which are evoked, only to be banished. At the same time, the sacred can only be maintained through constant vigilance, it can always be violated. The story/ritual of the *sotah*, like many other texts in P, is precisely about averting that danger. For that reason, the sacred can always self-destruct; in Derrida's terminology, it is auto-immune. He defines *Auto-immunity* as "a space where all self-protection of the unscathed, of the safe and sound, of the sacred . . . must protect itself against its own protection" (1998: 44). In his later work, auto-immunity was generalized as a phenomenon inherent in all institutions, especially political ones (McCance 2009: 39–40). The sacred is both safe and dangerous. The ambiguity of the sacred may be compared to É. Durkheim's discussion of the pure and impure sacred and their transposability (2008: 409–14). For Durkheim, the sacred is the repository of a society's values and its sense of itself; by the same token, it may generate social critique and change.[9] Durkheim especially emphasized the relationship of the sacred to the imagination, play and fantasy, wherewith a society may invent alternative versions of itself (2008: 380–82).

The sacred is thus an intimate but alien space, in the mind as well as in the social body, in which the self meets God. In the depths of oneself there is another, speaking, questioning, telling stories, nourishing. Psychoanalytically, this other may be a parent, father or mother, initiating or providing a uterine ambiance. For instance, using D. W. Winnicott's theory (1971) of the "play space," I have interpreted the scene in which a little boy leads the peaceful animals in Isa 11:6–9 while an infant plays on a serpent's den as an enactment of a primal scene, a child playing happily under the aegis of a protective father, the new Davidic king, in a maternal realm immune from violence (Landy 2011).

J. J. Kripal (2010, 2011) has examined at length the interconnections between the paranormal, mystical experience, and contemporary science fiction (for critiques, see Urban 2012 and Taves 2013). The Bible is full of stories of encounters with otherworldly beings, miraculous events, and superhuman powers. Poetry, especially oracular poetry, and narrative articulate dream worlds and activate mystical and hyperreal states of consciousness. L. Feldt (2012) argues that the fantastic disrupts habitual modes of thought and enables us to re-envision the world. I would add to this the complication induced, from a psychoanalytic perspective, by the split personalities and double parentage of poets and prophets, who are both humans with human parents and terrestrial allegiances, and who speak for, and are invested by, the divine other.

Derrida (1998: 20–22) proposes that at "the bottom without bottom" of the "crypt"—the secret and safe place of religion—is the *chora*, the maternal container of all things, according to Plato's Timaeus. He sees *chora* as one of the two sources or tracks of "religion," the other being *messianicity.* The *chora* is the possibility of

9. A. T. Riley (2005) brilliantly analyses the influence of Durkheim's idea of the transgressive sacred on later French intellectuals, notably G. Bataille, M. Foucault, Derrida, and J. Baudrillard.

place and is utterly impervious to all construction, to all meaning. It is the blankness on which we build our lives. Derrida calls it "the desert in the desert." Recall Blanchot: God speaks from the desert, from the Outside, to us in our nudity. And Levinas: we have a duty to respond where no one is, where nothing is, before we are.

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