Jonathan Loved David

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Jonathan Loved David

Manly Love in the Bible and the Hermeneutics of Sex

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A friend is someone who knows the song in your heart,
and can sing it back to you
when you have forgotten the words

To, for, and because of David Bell-Montgomerie

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Preface

This book is the product of personal reflections that began in the mid-1990s after conducting undergraduate research into how gay male Christians in the United Kingdom read the Bible. I was surprised to discover many respondents cite the relationship between David and Jonathan as a positive role model for male–male sexual love in the Hebrew Bible. Like many others, I had not considered the 'David and Jonathan narrative' of 1 Sam. 18.1–2 Sam. 1.27 a tale of erotic passion because I accepted the belief in a unified biblical denunciation of all sexual acts between males in the same way that I also accepted the Bible's unequivocal condemnation of, say, overeating (Deut. 21.20-21; Prov. 23.2, 20-21; 28.7; 30.21-22; Mt. 11.19; Lk. 7.34; and Phil. 3.17-19) and divorce (Mt. 5.31-32; 19.3-12; Mk 10.2-12; Lk. 16.18; Rom. 7.2-3; and 1 Cor. 7.10-17). As a result of my initial research project, I was introduced to nontraditional methods of reading the Bible and hermeneutical theory that have reinforced my belief in knowledge as a positive force for social change, something I hold dear to as a gay man who has seen countless lives wrecked by the effects of socio-religious marginalization. Armed with a theology degree and an abundance of youthful chutzpah, I enrolled in a doctoral programme in biblical studies with a charge to *expose* the social, religious and academic prejudices that I believed had concealed the sexual relationship between David and Jonathan from the masses. It was not long, however, before I came to realize that the reason why this so-called sexual affair is little known outside of gay, lesbian and academic circles has little to do with a conscious effort to suppress *the truth* and more to do with the dominant practices of biblical interpretation.

Thankfully, in the same way that social, political and religious views have altered significantly since the 1990s in many European countries and others, such as Canada, so the growing acceptance of nontraditional theories by biblical scholars has shifted attention away from traditional methods of biblical interpretation that focus on a given text's historical location and authorial intention to novel ways of reading the Bible. This book incorporates interdisciplinary thought from recent developments in biblical hermeneutical theory, queer theory, and historical, cultural and sexuality studies into a meta-commentary analysis that shows how interpretations of

the relationship between David and Jonathan reflect less the biblical narrative's historical context and/or author's intentions (despite any claims to the contrary) than they do the interpreter's cultural context and his or her presuppositions about masculinity, sexuality and friendship.

I have written this book with two audiences in mind: lay readers with a keen interest in the field of Bible and sexuality, and students of biblical studies at colleges, universities and seminaries. References to key Hebrew and Greek words have been transliterated into Latin script to allow access to the nonspecialist, while footnotes and the bibliography have been maintained to enable further research for the more advanced reader. One of the most irritating aspects of reading modernist literature in the humanities for me is the tendency of some authors to write such gobbledygook that many capable readers are alienated from the work. In this book I have attempted to keep jargon to a minimum, but where I have used such language I have included definitions in the footnotes and tried to keep my discussions as succinct as possible.

Writing a book is a difficult process that never involves just the author. I could not have written this book had it not been for the help of so many people, for which I am extremely grateful. William (Bill) Campbell and Deryn Guest were the first to encourage me to pursue postgraduate studies in a fringe field of theological studies. My subsequent interactions in the Department of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield with fellow postgraduate students, academic staff and visiting scholars were fundamental to the development of the ideas found in this book. While working as a theological librarian in Chicago I was fortunate enough to enjoy the friendship and professional mentorship of Beth Bidlack, Tom Haverly, Drew Kadel and Christine Wenderoth, among others, as well as the spiritual fellowship of Grace Episcopal Church, Chicago. Special thanks go to Neil Gerdes for his friendship and guidance in difficult times, as well as to the saving grace of Ms McGhee, Si, Jon Rice, Cornelius (RIP), Fred Hammond, Lori Hlaban, David Breeden, Gramps, Meeks, and Anthony Elia. The resources at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library and the LGBTQ Religious Studies Center at Chicago Theological Seminary were instrumental to the completion of this book, and I would like to thank the library staff of both institutions for granting me access. I am particularly appreciative of the various discussions with fellow scholars who share similar academic interests, including Martti Nissinen, Ken Stone, Jorunn Økland, Roland Boer, Markus Zehnder, Ted Jennings, James Harding, David Clines, Diana Edelman, Stephen Moore and Peter-Ben Smith. I would also like to add my gratitude to David Clines at Phoenix Press for his editorial mastery while I prepared the manuscript for publication, and Cheryl Exum for her wisdom and patience as my academic mentor in the

hope that what is read is worthy of her scholarship with the caveat that all errors are my own. I submit this book with a final thank you to my best friend—David Bell-Montgomerie—for just being you.

With Peace,
Anthony Heacock
May 2009
Toronto, Canada

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	David Noel Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992)
AcOr	*Acta Orientalia*
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AJA	*American Journal of Anthropology*
AmerSub	American Subjects
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
APP	Ancient Peoples and Places
ARH	Arnold Readers in History
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
BCE	Before the Common Era
BiBh	*Bible Bhashyam*
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibLim	Biblical Limits
BSac	*Bibliotheca sacra*
BibSem	The Biblical Seminar
BK	*Bibel und Kirche*
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BOSHNP	Berit Olam Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry
BSIH	Brill's Studies in Intellectual History
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
CAH	Clarendon Ancient History
CB	*Classical Bulletin*
CBCNEB	Cambridge Bible Commentary, New English Bible
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CCT	Contemporary College Theology
CE	Common Era
CHSHMC	Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament
Contra	Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences

CSES	Case Studies in Early Societies
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CSMM	Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities
CSSHS	Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society
CSTH	John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Centur*y (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)
Dialog	*Dialog: A Journal of Theology*
DCH	David J.A. Clines (ed.), *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, I (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993)
DSB-OT	Daily Study Bible, Old Testament
EAB	Ethnographic Alternatives Book
ESB	Albert Ellis and Albert Abarbanel (eds.), *The Encyclopaedia of Sexual Behaviour* (London: Corsano, 1961)
EWMF	Essential Works of Michel Foucault
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FemTh	*Feminist Theology*
FRC	Family, Religion, and Culture
FSSRPT	Family, Sexuality and Social Relations in Past Times
GA	*Group Analysis: The International Journal of Group Analytic Psychotherapy*
GCT	Gender, Culture, Theory
G-D	Großstadt-Dokumente
GLQ	*GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*
GMIRS	Gay Men's Issues in Religious Studies
GRLH	Garland Reference Library of the Humanities
GTR	Gender, Theory and Religion
HCBC	*The HarperCollins Bible Commentary*
HGLS	Haworth Gay and Lesbian Studies
HIR	*Humanities in Review*
HR	*History of Religions*
Hypatia	*Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBD	*J.D. Douglas* (ed.), *Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (3 vols.; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980)
IBS	*Irish Biblical Studies*
Int	*Interpretation*
IOVCB	Charles M. Laymon (ed.), *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible: Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocrypha, with General Articles* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971)

ISBE	Geoffrey W. Bromiley (ed.), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (4 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982)
ITC	International Theological Commentary
JBCT	*Journal of Bible and Critical Theory*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JH	*Journal of Homosexuality*
JHSex	*Journal of the History of Sexuality*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JPHS	*Journal of Psychology and Human Sexuality*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRH	*Journal of Religion and Health*
JRS	*Journal of Religion and Society*
JSH	*Journal of Social History*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements
JsZ	*Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*
KTAH	Key Themes in Ancient History
LAPO	Litteratures Anciennes du Proche-Orient
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
MPC	Media and Popular Culture
NAW	New Ancient World
OBS	Oxford Bible
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
OWC	Oxford World Classics
PGBP	Prometheus's Great Books in Philosophy
PRS	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
PSC	*Philosophy and Social Criticism*
QBC	*Queer Bible Commentary*
QR	*Quarterly Review: A Journal of Scholarly Reflection for Ministry*
RB	*Revue biblique*
Readings	Readings: A New Biblical Commentary
RLA	*Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*
RMM	Research on Men and Masculinities
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
SASS	Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences

SBHF	Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy, Clyde E. Martin and Paul H. Gebhard, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953)
SBHM	Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948)
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies
SexRoles	*Sex Roles: A Journal of Sex Research*
SocProb	*Social Problems*
SH	Studies in Homosexuality
SHR	Studies in the History of Religions
SPOT	Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament
SexRoles	*Sex Roles: A Journal of Sex Research*
SSPLP	Studies in Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy
STS	Semitic Texts and Studies
TAPA	*Transactions of the American Philological Association*
TCS	*Theory, Culture and Society*
TCST	Twentieth-Century Social Theory
TDOT	G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (11 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, rev. edn, 1974)
Temenos	*Temenos: Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*
Th21C	Themes for the 21st Century
TheolSex	*Theology and Sexuality*
THS	The History of Sexuality
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
UNCS-GLL	University of North Carolina Studies in the Germanic Languages and Literature
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WD-CSSGC	Worlds of Desire: The Chicago Series on Sexuality, Gender, and Culture
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
Xenia	Xenia. Konstanzer Althistorische Vorträge und Forschungen
Zeph.	Zephaniah

Introduction

The relationship between David and Jonathan, as portrayed in the biblical text 1 Sam. 18.1–2 Sam. 1.27 (what I call the David and Jonathan narrative[1]), appears within the context of Israel's quest to find a king for the fledgling nation. The biblical writer introduces the reader to the elusive David—the youngest son of Jesse, of the Bethlehemite tribe of Judah—in 1 Sam. 16.1-13, where Samuel anoints him as Yahweh's king-elect after Yahweh rejects Saul for disobeying his command to wait for Samuel to offer the sacrifice at Gilgal (1 Sam. 10.8; 13.7-14), and for failing to destroy all the spoil of the battle against the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15.1-33). Although starting as a lowly court helper, David, the ruddy shepherd boy, proves himself to Saul by his ability to play beautiful music on the lyre (1 Sam. 16.14-23) and successfully fight gallant battles (1 Sam. 16.18; 17). Yet, after the initial enthralment, Saul becomes so envious of David's popularity that he devises a scheme that will rid him of the young upstart: Saul promises David the hand of his eldest daughter, Merab, in marriage if David can provide a dowry of one hundred Philistine foreskins (1 Sam. 18.17, 25). Saul then changes his mind and decides to offer David the hand of his other daughter, Michal, in marriage with the same conditions; but, unfortunately for Saul, David succeeds in collecting two hundred foreskins, thereby allowing him to marry into Saul's family (1 Samuel 19–21; 27–28). Shortly after joining Saul's household, David becomes acquainted with Jonathan, Saul's son. We are told that 'the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul' (1 Sam. 18.1). Against the trials and

1. It is for the sake of ease that I refer to the biblical text from 1 Sam. 18.1 to 2 Sam. 1.27 as the 'David and Jonathan narrative'; I believe that the text represents an identifiable literary unit—rather than a distinct and separate source—that is part of the larger story of the Primary History (Genesis to 2 Kings), the story of Israel's relationship with its deity. Similarly, Edelman acknowledges the problem of defining the boundaries of the 'Saulide narrative' of 1 Sam. 8–2 Sam. 1 due to its existence as an 'intentional subunit within a larger account of Israel's relationship to its god Yahweh through time' (Diana Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel* [JSOTSup, 121; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], p. 14).

tribulations of jealousy, conspiracy and treachery, the men's relationship climaxes in David's celebrated eulogy (2 Sam. 1.19-27).

The relationship between the two biblical heroes is a hotly debated topic that has grabbed the attention of interpreters in popular and scholarly literature alike. Many interpreters acknowledge the intensity of the bond between David and Jonathan, as noted by Sakenfeld's comment that the very mentioning of the biblical heroes' names often evokes 'the image of strong friendship between two men, even though the details of the story may be vague to the hearer'.[2] Despite the interest, there is little agreement as to the the nature of this intimate relationship that speaks of a love that 'surpasses the love of a man for a woman' (2 Sam. 1.26). At a time when people are culturally conditioned to be suspicious of a close bond between two men, many interpreters are confused about how best to read this biblical tale. What makes it all the more bewildering is that this instance of a passionate relationship between two men appears in the same literary tradition that condemns outright male homogenital sexual practices.[3] Thus, how is it that the David and Jonathan narrative can condone an intimate (and, therefore, in the contemporary mind, sexual) relationship over and against the proclaimed biblical proscriptions of Gen. 19.1-11; Lev. 18.22; 20.13; and Judges 19? Or, to paraphrase the question that remains on the tip of virtually every interpreter's tongue today, are David and Jonathan gay?

Given the focus of many contemporary readers on the possibility of a sexual aspect to the relationship between David and Jonathan, I begin Chapter 1 by setting the scene for evaluating claims and counterclaims of an erotic interpretation based on specific reoccurring words and themes that form the 'proof texts' for an alleged gay relationship between the two men. Having established a firm foundation from which to discuss the nature of the alliance between the biblical heroes, Chapter 2 develops my argument further by placing the various readings of the narrative within a framework of three distinct interpretative approaches. The first, the political-theologi-

2. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love: The Language of Human Interconnections in the Hebrew Bible', in M.P. O'Connor and D.N. Freedman (eds.), *Backgrounds for the Bible* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 215-29 (220).

3. I use 'homogenital' after the nineteenth-century English radical Edward Carpenter's self-coined term 'homogenic love' in his discussions of what is commonly called homosexuality; see Edward Carpenter, 'Homogenic Love', in Brian Reade (ed.), *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1970), pp. 324-47. However, while Carpenter's focus is on love, my use of 'homogenital' purposely draws attention to the sexual act between people of the same gender, thus bracketing out the more complex notions of sexual orientation. Daniel Helminiak is one of the first biblical scholars to use the terms 'homogenital' and 'homogenitality' in their work; see Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (San Francisco: Alamo Square Press, 1994), p. 33.

cal reading of the relationship, adopted by the majority of interpreters, is a nonsexual reading that accentuates the political and theological motivations of the heroes' bond; thus, Jonathan's befriending of David is understood to signify his acceptance of Yahweh's will that David should rule over Israel. Against the dominant interpretative approach, a number of gay, bisexual and queer religious folk and their allies have found affirmation by reading the biblical narrative as an example of an ancient tale of sexual passion. For these homoerotic interpreters, the profound relationship between David and Jonathan exists in a historical milieu that celebrates sexual relationships between men.[4] The final interpretative stance, the homosocial reading, utilizes various critical theories to find a balance between the conflicting views of the traditional political-theological reading and the more radical homoerotic reading.[5] Homosocial interpreters acknowledge the validity of both a political-theological dimension to the friendship and the seeming erotic undertones of the text, but they ultimately reject the other two reading

4. Because people often use the same word to describe different, and even conflicting, ideas, I want to make it clear what I mean by 'homoerotic'; homoerotic describes the erotic bonding of men with men (as well as women with women) that manifests itself in various sexual acts. Although the essence of my definition is distinctly sexual, it differs from the contemporary notion of homosexuality insofar as the latter presumes an inherent disposition towards members of the same gender, identifiable by a person's constituent being-ness known as a homosexual or bisexual orientation. Thus, my use of 'homoeroticism' does not interpret sexual acts between people of the same gender as signifying a type of person who belongs to a sub-culture distinct from the majority. This definition of homoeroticism is also advocated by Martti Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (trans. Kirsti Stjerna; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 17, and Paul D. Hardman, *Homoaffectionalism: Male Bonding from Gilgamesh to the Present* (San Francisco: GLB Publishers, 1993), p. v. Hardman distinguishes between (lustful) homoerotic sexual relations and (affectionate) homoaffectionate sexual relations among people of the same gender, but I believe that such a distinction is unnecessary.

5. I understand and use 'homosocial' to mean the predominantly nonsexual bonding of men with men (as well as women with women), which manifests itself in various social institutions, ranging from friendships and social circles to the military and other single-sex institutions. David Morgan's definition typically emphasizes the social aspect of men's relationships with one another: 'a collective name for an important set of relationships, referring not simply to the preference of men for each other's company, but the location of these relationships in public or semipublic regions … and for the particular set of exchanges and interdependencies that grow between men' (David Morgan, *Discovering Men* [CSMM, 3; London: Routledge, 1992], p. 67). I say predominantly nonsexual bonding because I agree with Nissinen that homosocial relationships are fluid insofar as they can, though need not, refer to sexual relations between members of the same gender—although, unlike in a homoerotic relationship, the sexual aspect plays a much smaller part and lolls somewhere in the background; see Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*.

stances in favour of a nuanced interpretation that highlights the interplay of complex dynamics of gender in the biblical narrative.

Having identified the three interpretative approaches to the David and Jonathan narrative in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 investigates the veracity of historical claims made by the majority of homoerotic interpreters that David and Jonathan lived at a time respectful of their homosexual love. By putting these claims in the context of extant evidence from ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures (specifically classical Greek, Mesopotamian and Israelite), however, I show that most contemporary discussions of male–male eroticism of the past are indebted to post-nineteenth-century notions of (homo)sexuality, which are far removed from the hierarchical organization of the sexual in the ancient world. Furthermore, despite sharing a common concern for a male–female dichotomy and a hierarchy of phallic domination with its neighbours, whereby a man is seen as the active agent of penetration and a female as the passive recipient of penetration, ancient Israelite culture stands alone in its condemnation of *all* sexual acts of penetration between males. As much as it would personally please me to undermine those who use biblical texts to justify homophobic abuse by citing an example of a biblical passage that affirms a sexual relationship between two men, the few biblical references to male homogenital sexual acts clearly state that the God of Israel condemns them, and there is no evidence, historical or otherwise, to suggest the David and Jonathan narrative would deliberately contradict this.

Continuing with questions raised in Chapter 3, the historical analyses of Chapter 4 investigate the belief among some homoerotic interpreters that the level of intimacy between David and Jonathan suggests a sexual dimension to their relationship. I show that such a conviction is founded on post-nineteenth-century developments in masculinity, namely a heteronormative binary that associates male–male closeness with homosexuality. By using the examples of the erotic relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the *Gilgamesh Epic* and the nonerotic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad*, I show that expressions of intimacy and tenderness among male friends in ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures were considered normal, manly virtues. To assume that the biblical narrative depicts David and Jonathan as lovers on the basis of ambiguity, suggestiveness or a reader's intuition not only ignores biblical proscriptions against male homogenital sexual acts but also misconstrues the significant differences between the way men relate to one another in the ancient world and male friendship as we know it in a 'post-homosexual' era.

By scrutinizing the text of the David and Jonathan narrative, the different interpretative approaches to reading it, and the two main arguments that are said to support a homoerotic interpretation (that is, ancient Israelite culture celebrated a sexual bond between David and Jonathan and that the

closeness between the two men implies a sexual relationship), I show that the historical setting of the biblical narrative plays only a small part in the construction of meaning during the interpretative process. What appears most influential in determining how one reads the biblical narrative are the concerns and life experiences interpreters bring to the text vis-à-vis notions of masculinity, friendship and (homo)sexuality. Thus, Chapter 5 shifts attention away from conventional theories of interpretation that view the biblical text as the locus of meaning to other theories of interpretation that acknowledge a dynamic, complex relationship between the text and the reader—opening up the possibility of many, perhaps even endless, readings of the biblical narrative.

The culmination of the book is my own particular reading of the David and Jonathan narrative in Chapter 6, which highlights the inescapability of a reader's cultural context on questions about the nature of the relationship between the two men. By abandoning claims to historical-textual context, I read the biblical narrative through the lens of contemporary gay male friendships to show how a queer reading that celebrates manly love in all its forms undermines the distinctions between masculine and feminine, the erotic and the nonerotic, public and private, and friendship and family ties that are inherent in the majority of interpretations of the friendship between David and Jonathan. My celebration of male–male love, however, does not idealize the heroes' bond; on the contrary, I read the biblical narrative as a tale of the tragedy of two different kinds of men struggling to 'do' friendship in a culture of heteronormative masculine ideals that fear the act of one man loving another.

1

Setting the Scene and Outlining the 'Proof Texts'

In a society that respects intellectual freedom and human rights, it is neither inappropriate nor distasteful to question whether David and Jonathan are sexual partners. I believe that the most effective way to answer the question with the seriousness it deserves is not to mock or patronize by, for example, seeing who can shout the loudest in defence of one's own position or hurl the best insults to triumph one's own interpretation over another but to investigate fully the bases of the arguments that lead some readers to adopt a sexual interpretation of the relationship between the two biblical heroes. After having read scholarly and devotional publications about the alleged sexual union between David and Jonathan, I have identified certain words and themes from a well-worn list of passages within the narrative of 1 Sam. 18.1 to 2 Sam. 1.27 that are often cited to 'prove' an erotic basis to the relationship:

1. 1 Sam. 16.12: 'Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome'.
2. 1 Sam. 18.1-4: 'When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.'
3. 1 Sam. 19.1: 'Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David.'
4. 1 Sam. 20.17: 'Jonathan made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own life'.
5. 1 Sam. 20.30: 'Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not

know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"'

6. 1 Sam. 20.41-42: 'As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more.'
7. 1 Sam. 23.18: 'Then the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home'.
8. 2 Sam. 1.26 (within 1.19-27): 'I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women'.

From the above list, I consider three irrelevant to the debate: 1 Sam. 16.12; 19.1; and 20.41. First, I shall ignore the reference to David's beauty in 1 Sam. 16.12 because to assume that a close relationship between two men is erotic on the basis that one of them is good-looking is simply ridiculous; gays and lesbians are drawn to others of the same gender, like straight people, by many different attributes, not just a person's physical looks. Moreover, to assume that a straight man (e.g. Jonathan) can be swayed to homosexual desire solely by the physical beauty of another man (e.g. David) demonstrates a fundamentally flawed misunderstanding of human sexual attraction. Furthermore, other biblical males are described as beautiful, including Joseph (Gen. 39.6), Adonijah (1 Kgs 1.6), Saul (1 Sam. 9.2), the child Moses (Exod. 2.2), and Absalom (2 Sam. 14.25), but few interpreters find it necessary to read sexual motives into these characters' relationships with other males. Secondly, I shall ignore the reference to Jonathan 'delighting in' David in 1 Sam. 19.1 because I think this takes the word out of context; of the 121 occurrences of the verb *ḥāpēṣ* ('delight in'), it has an erotic aspect only six times—Gen. 34.19; Deut. 21.14; Est. 2.14; Song 2.7; 3.5; and 8.4. More importantly, the political connotations of 1 Sam. 19.1 are clear when it is compared with 1 Sam. 18.22, where Saul is said to 'delight in' David, and 2 Sam. 20.11, where one of Joab's men says, 'whoever "delights in" Joab … let him follow Joab'. Lastly, I shall ignore the reference to the couple kissing in 1 Sam. 20.41 because the mere occurrence of a kiss, or indeed any other sign of physical affection, need not necessarily imply eroticism.[1] The nonsexual nature of the kiss between David and Jonathan becomes apparent when readers consider that the author, knowing that this is their penultimate meeting, wants to portray the farewell as a fitting crescendo to an intense and passionate relationship.

1. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action: Loyalty in Biblical Perspective* (OBT, 16; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 35 n. 4, and Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 226.

What follows in this chapter is a discussion of the credible 'proof-texts' of the sexual reading in light of dominant interpretations. The first concerns the word *ḥesed,* often translated as 'loyalty', 'duty', 'steadfast love', 'love', 'kindness', 'grace', 'mercy', 'faithfulness' or 'devotion', but which has no direct equivalent in English.[2] The second concerns the word *'āhēb* (and its cognate *'ahābâ*), almost universally translated as 'love', but which can have unexpected connotations for the modern English reader. The third and fourth words, often used together, are *b^{e}rît* ('covenant'), also translated as 'agreement', 'pact' or 'treaty', and *š^{e}bû'â* ('oath'), but which possess political and theological connotations, as well as social obligations. The fifth is the theme of shame as anti-honour, as demonstrated by Saul's lambasting of Jonathan in 1 Sam. 20.30. The final piece of evidence we will consider in support of the sexual interpretation is David's lament at the death of Jonathan (and Saul) in 2 Sam. 1.19-27.

Loyalty

In an important study of *ḥesed* Glueck contends that the noun refers to an act of mutuality or reciprocal conduct (*gemeinschaftgemässe Verhaltungsweise*).[3] Based on a plethora of unwritten laws and binding customs, *ḥesed* can be categorized as falling within two distinct categories of relationship: a relationship of affection or a relationship of obligation. In an affectionate relationship, a person requests an act of *ḥesed* on the basis of emotional ties shared. Biblical examples of this include husband and wife (Gen. 20.13, where Abraham asks Sarah to tell anyone who asks that they are siblings); friends (2 Sam. 16.17, where Absalom asks if Hushai is showing David respect by not travelling with him); tribal kinsmen (Gen. 24.49, where Abraham's servant asks Laban—son of Bethuel, son of Nahor, who was Abraham's brother—to show Abraham kindness by allowing his sister, Rebecca, to become Isaac's wife); and father and son (Gen. 47.29, where Jacob asks his son Joseph to promise not to bury him in Egypt when he dies). In relationships of obligation, however, a person requests an act of *ḥesed* in return for a favour already completed by the person requesting it. Biblical examples of such requests include Joseph and the cupbearer (Gen. 40.14, where Joseph asks that, in return for interpreting a dream that no one else could interpret, he be remembered to the pharaoh); and spies and a resident of a city (Josh. 2.12-14, where Rahab, a prostitute from Jericho, asks that she and her family be protected for saving the lives of two spies whom

2. G.R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 157; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), p. 267.

3. N. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (trans. A. Gottschalk; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967), p. 39.

Joshua had sent to survey the city; and Judg. 1.24, where a man of Bethel and his family are spared for helping spies from the house of Joseph get into the city). In both obligatory and affectionate use, 'only those who stood in a relationship of rights and duties to one another received and practiced *hesed*':[4] in effect, *ḥesed* was 'the mode of conduct'[5] all parties to the relationship had 'to assume toward the other'.[6] Clark's and Morris' assertions that *ḥesed* is 'rooted in the divine nature'[7] and that 'in men it is the ideal; in God it is the actual'[8] emphasize the high regard in which it was held in ancient Israel.

On the basis of the covenant made between David and Jonathan in 1 Sam. 18.3 and a reversal of Jonathan's twice-made request that David behave loyally towards him and his household (1 Sam. 18.14-15), David requests that Jonathan excuse his absence from Saul's table, discover what Saul intends to do to him, and inform David of Saul's plans (1 Sam. 20.8). Jonathan reassures David of his commitment to the obligation (*ḥesed*) of the covenant they made, and then the two men continue their conversation out in the field. A theological aspect is added to the political dimension of the two men's alliance when Jonathan freely accepts that it is God's will for David to become king: 'May the LORD be with you, as he has been with my father' (1 Sam. 20.13b). Edelman argues that the use in 1 Sam. 20 of the full form of Jonathan's name (*Yonathan*, 'Yahweh gave') 'should be seen as another deliberate move to symbolize Jonathan's acceptance of the divine will and his readiness to serve as a vehicle for its implementation'.[9] In anticipation of his acknowledgment that David will soon become king, Jonathan predicts that Saul's intentions will not be favourable for David, and so he requests that David show him kindness (*ḥesed Yahweh*) as long as he lives (1 Sam. 20.14) and kindness (*ḥesed*) to his descendants, even when David's enemies are no more (1 Sam. 20.15).[10]

4. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, p. 38; see also p. 37.

5. Sakenfeld also notes the practical aspect of *ḥesed,* which is 'an act of loyalty to the other party in the relationship, and it is generally an action or series of actions, not merely an abstract attitude or verbal promise of loyalty' (Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 222).

6. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, p. 49.

7. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 267. Perhaps he bases this assertion on Ps. 62.12, where *ḥesed* is said to belong to Yahweh.

8. L. Morris, *Testaments of Love: A Study of Love in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), p. 81.

9. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel*, p. 155.

10. Although odd in their narrative temporal setting, these two references act as a prophetic omen vis-à-vis the inevitable deaths of Jonathan (20.14: 'as long as I live') and Saul (20.15: 'even when Yahweh has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth'). For Saul as David's enemy, see 1 Sam. 19.17, where Saul asks Michal

The close bond between David and Jonathan requires that they show *ḥesed* to each other, even before their mutual requests of 1 Sam. 20. However, within the context of 1 Sam. 20.8 and 20.14-15 the duties expected of them extend beyond that of the realm of casual or affective friendship as we understand it in contemporary Western culture. Rather, *ḥesed* in 1 Sam. 20—the *ḥesed* that originates from a covenant before God (*bᵉrît Yahweh*) in 1 Sam. 20.8 is identical to the *ḥesed Yahweh* of 1 Sam. 20.14-15[11] demonstrates the obligatory, un-affective nature of David and Jonathan's alliance. Thus, the friendship between the two men appears to be founded more on theologically sanctioned obligations than amity, reflecting 'a bond between man and man which corresponds to the bond which exists between God and Israel'.[12] In this scenario, *ḥesed* stems 'not from friendship alone but also from the sacred covenant in accordance with the obligation incurred by invoking Yahweh's name'.[13]

Love

In biblical literature *'āhēb* refers to the love (that is, attachment and affection) between two or more people, and, like the English usage of the word, has a multitude of meanings. Biblical love can refer to physical urges between the sexes (e.g. Hos. 3.1; 2 Sam. 13), as well as personal but non-sexual (e.g. Gen. 22.2; 37.3) and intrapersonal relations (e.g. Prov. 18.21). It can also refer to God's love for humanity (e.g. Deut. 4.37; 7.6-8; 10.15; Prov. 8.17; Isa. 43.4; 2 Sam. 12.24; Neh. 13.26; Jer. 31.3) or to humanity's love for God (e.g. Deut. 6.5; 10.12; Josh. 22.5; 23.11; Jer. 2.2). Moreover, the love expressed between people ranges from that of married couples, parents and children, siblings, friends to that of slave and master.[14]

Outside of the highly eroticized Song of Songs,[15] the overwhelming emphasis of *'āhēb* is on the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, although three occurrences do describe intimate relations between a man

why she let his enemy (David) escape from him. Walter Brueggemann asserts, 'This part of the chapter looks far ahead in the narrative with great historical and theological intentionality' (Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* [IBC; Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990], p. 148).

11. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, p. 48.

12. Peter R. Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel* (CBCNEB; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 164.

13. Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, p. 49.

14. For a detailed outline of the variations of the use of 'love' in the Hebrew Bible see Gerhard Wallis, 'אָהַב 'āhabh; אַהֲבָה 'ahᵃbhāh; אַהַב 'ahabh; אֹהַב 'ōhabh', in Botterweck and Ringgren (eds.), *TDOT*, I, pp. 101-18; and Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', in Freedman (ed.), *ABD,* IV, pp. 375-81.

15. Song 2.4, 5, 7; 3.5, 10; 5.8; 7.7; 8.4; 8.6; and 8.7 (twice).

and a woman: Gen. 29.20 speaks of Jacob's love for Rachel; 2 Sam. 13.15 speaks of Amnon's love for Tamar; and Prov. 5.19 speaks of men's love for women. Morris demonstrates the breadth of the Hebrew Bible's use of the verb and its noun cognates when he asserts that, of its 208 occurrences, 72 refer to love between people, 27 to the love of people for God, 29 to God's love, 33 to humanity's love for things, 46 to humanity's love for evil, and 1 to love in general.[16] In contrast, but also demonstrating the same degree of variation, Zehnder argues that of the verb's 141 occurrences, 27 refer to relations between God and humans and 54 refer to interhuman relations.[17] Of the 30 references to *'āhēb* with an irrefutable erotic component,[18] none refers to a sexual love between two people of the same gender. Zehnder reasonably concludes that the three different uses of love in the Hebrew Bible—intimate human relations, nonintimate human relations, and relations between Yahweh and Israel—make it difficult to determine the precise nature of the love between David and Jonathan.[19]

While most occurrences of *'āhēb* and its cognates can be understood in much the same way as the English rendering of the word to denote sincere affection between human beings, the anomaly of the way people love David, specifically that some love him without having ever met him (that is, Michal and the people of Israel and Judah), and that this love is always one-sided, is confusing. In the David and Jonathan narrative *'āhēb* occurs nine times: 1 Sam. 16.21 (Saul loves David);[20] 18.1 (Jonathan loves David);

16. Morris, *Testaments of Love*, p. 9 n. 3. See also Clines (ed.), *DCH*, I, p. 69, and Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', p. 376.

17. Markus Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen zu den David–Jonathan-Geschichten', *Biblica* 79 (1998), pp. 153-79 (156).

18. Gen. 24.67; 29.18, 30, 32; 34.3; Deut. 21.15 (twice), 16; Judg. 14.16; 16.4, 15; 1 Sam. 1.5; 18.20, 28; 2 Sam. 13.1, 4, 15; 1 Kgs 11.1; Hos. 3.1 (twice); Eccl. 9.9; Esth. 2.17; 2 Chr. 11.21; Song 2.4, 5, 7; 3.5; 5.8; 8.4; and 8.7.

19. Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', pp. 155-56, and Markus Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality', *WTJ* 69 (2007), pp. 127-74 (144). Sakenfeld also acknowledges the difficulty of determining whether the love described in a biblical text is of a sexual nature: 'Often the balance between abiding attachment, romantic feeling, and sexual attraction cannot be clearly determined from a text; this ambiguity may well reflect the ambiguity of the situation such texts describe' (Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', p. 376).

20. The Hebrew wording of 1 Sam. 16.21 literally says, 'And David came to Saul, and he stood before him, and he loved him greatly, and he became his weapon bearer'. However, the Greek text of the Septuagint and many English translations 'introduce explicit subjects ("Saul … David") into the last two clauses' (P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* [AB, 8; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980], p. 280 n. 21). The ambiguity of the love in 1 Sam. 16.21 is also discussed by Robert B. Lawton, who acknowledges that Saul is 'fond of' (that is, loves) David—why else would Saul privilege the young man with the trusted position of his

18.3 (Jonathan loves David); 18.16 (Israel and Judah love David); 18.20 (Michal loves David); 18.22 (Saul's servants love David); 18.28 (Michal loves David); 20.17 (Jonathan loves David);[21] and 2 Sam. 1.26 (Jonathan loves David). Of these nine references to love, four are between David and Jonathan, and three of these are made in the context of the men cutting a covenant.[22] Contrary to Morris's claim that 'Clearly, David was capable of deeply loving others',[23] David is never said to love anyone; and, of the nine verses, all but two (1 Sam. 16.21 and 1 Sam. 20.17) make David the object of other people's love.[24] This analysis supports the conventional interpretation of Jonathan's feelings for David (arguably, Jonathan does all the loving in this relationship) as political loyalty more than personal love.

Further, some interpreters draw on historical and linguistic parallels between the occurrence of the root word *'āhēb* in the Bible and its semantic equivalents in ancient Near Eastern texts to show that *'āhēb* belongs to the realm of the political and diplomatic,[25] and has a 'specialised and important nuance' with 'connotations of political loyalty'.[26] Although Jonathan's love might initially appear to demonstrate personal affection, its wider context reveals that all feelings in the relationship are subsumed under the diplomatic aspect of an alliance that demonstrates a complex fusion of friendship and politics. Thus, when 1 Sam. 18.3 and 20.17 state that Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loves him 'as he loves himself', a phrase that

armour-bearer?—and David is also 'fond of' (that is, loves) Saul, as proven by his reluctance to kill him after Saul turns against him ('Saul, Jonathan and the "Son of Jesse"', *JSOT* 58 [1993], pp. 35-46).

21. The ambiguous wording of 1 Sam. 20.17 in Hebrew (Jonathan made David swear) is corrected by the Septuagint (Jonathan swore to David), which follows the convention of all the other occurrences of *'āhēb* by depicting David as the object of Jonathan's love, possibly reiterating the statement of Jonathan's love for David as found in 1 Sam. 18.3. Sakenfeld avoids discussion of the wording, except to say that 'there are excellent textual reasons for preferring the Septuagint's version of 20.17 which makes Jonathan the subject and David the object of the verb *'āhēb'* (Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 224).

22. 1 Sam. 18.1,3; 20.17; and 2 Sam. 1.26.

23. Morris, *Testaments of Love*, p. 46.

24. Thus, Zehnder argues that all occurrences of *'āhēb* are one-sided, always done by others for David ('Exegetische Beobachtungen', p. 166). In his 2007 work, Zehnder accepts that 1 Sam. 20.17 is a '(probable) exception' ('Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 139).

25. Thompson argues that 'the verb "love", even though it may appear to denote genuine affection between human beings may nevertheless sometimes carry underlying political implications' (J.A. Thompson, 'Israel's Lovers', *VT* 27 [1977], pp. 475-81 [475]).

26. Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', p. 376.

occurs in extra-biblical treaties to denote political allegiance,[27] the political implications of the pact are clear. Parpola and Watanabe and Moran note that Jonathan's loving David 'as he loves himself' is reminiscent of the Assyrian oath, 'You shall love Assurbanipal [Ashurbanipal], the great crown prince designate, son of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, your lord, like yourselves'.[28] The appearance of love in the treaty between David and Jonathan, like that of similar Near Eastern cultures, signifies a love that has less to do with personal affection and more about formal obligations in accordance with agreements made.[29] That is, the love of the vassal (Jonathan) symbolizes recognition of the authority of the suzerain (David) and obedience towards him, while the suzerain's love is symbolic of his protection of the vassal in return for obedience. Accordingly, weight is given to an interpretation that sees Jonathan's covenants with David more as a strategic political move to ally himself with David than as an alliance based on blind love, adoration, or affection, as some interpreters suggest.

For Sakenfeld, the David and Jonathan narrative is a 'story of the tensions between personal friendship and political realities',[30] and the use of *'āhēb,* like *ḥesed*, is best understood as having a double level of meaning—one personal and the other political.[31] Understood in this light, Jonathan's friendship serves the interests of the transference of kingship from Saul to David. Given that in 1 Sam. 13.22 and 14.21 Jonathan is said to be co-regent with Saul, as holder of the office of the king, Jonathan has the right and authority to transfer it in 1 Sam. 18.4. Thus, throughout the narrative, Jonathan's *'āhēb* expresses 'not only personal affection and deep admiration but also a political statement crucial to David's rise to kingship'.[32] Thompson also believes that the friendship between David and Jonathan is inseparable from the narrative's wider emphasis on David's rise to kingship, with *'āhēb* appearing crucially in 'a series of steps on David's way to the throne'.[33] Indeed, all incidences of *'āhēb* in the David and Jonathan

27. M. Fishbane, 'The Treaty Background of Amos 1:11 and Related Matters', *JBL* 89 (1970), pp. 313-18 (314). See also Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 225.

28. Simo Parpola and Kazuko Watanabe, *Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths* (SAA, 2; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1988), 6.266-268, and also 6.207 (Esarhaddon) and 9.32 (Ashurbanipal). See also W.L. Moran, 'The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy', *CBQ* 25 (1963), pp. 77-87 (82 n. 33).

29. A.R. Ceresko, 'The Encounter of Cultures and the Growth of the Biblical Tradition: Examples from the Books of Wisdom and Sirach', *BiBh* 26 (2000), pp. 271-83 (278).

30. Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action*, p. 9.

31. Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 225.

32. Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 226. See also Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', p. 376.

33. J.A. Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb *Love in the David–Jonathan Narratives in Samuel*', *VT* 24 (1974), pp. 334-38 (334).

narrative[34] are cleverly politicized: 'In the skilful unfolding of this complex political drama the ambiguous verb *'āhēb* is used at several critical points, all of which are pregnant with political significance'.[35] Just as the love of all Israel and Judah stresses their political loyalty to David,[36] so Jonathan's love for David metaphorically symbolizes his political allegiance to him. Specifically, within the context of those who love David, Jonathan's seemingly personal friendship with David is, like all the other seemingly personal relationships of the narrative, part of a story of David's political rise, which necessarily requires that all the people of the biblical narrative love him: first, King Saul loves David (1 Sam. 16.21);[37] then Jonathan, the heir apparent, loves David (1 Sam. 18.1, 3; 20.17; 2 Sam. 1.26); then Michal, King Saul's daughter, loves David (1 Sam. 18.20,[38] [28]); then all of King Saul's court loves David (1 Sam. 18.22); and finally, all the people of Israel and Judah, King Saul's loyal subjects, love David (1 Sam. 18.16, [28]).[39] This political rendering of the friendship between David and Jonathan is most explicit in 1 Sam. 23.17, where Jonathan tells David that he shall be king over Israel: as Zehnder notes, 'In this section, the personal-emotional aspect of the relationship disappears completely'.[40]

The political aspect of the relationship between David and Jonathan in the biblical narrative is also theological. McCarter's construal of Jonathan's love for David exemplifies the underlying presumption of the majority of interpreters who shy away from advocating a sexual reading of the two men's relationship. McCarter asserts that 'Jonathan's deep affection for David is part of the close relationship that has developed between the two young men; also it is surely a sign of the irresistible charm of the man who

34. That is, 1 Sam. 16.21; 18.1, 3, 16, 20, 22, 28; 20.17; and 2 Sam. 1.26.

35. Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb *Love*', p. 338.

36. 'But all Israel and Judah loved David; for it was he who marched out and came in leading them' (1 Sam. 18.16); the phrase about marching out and leading in is normally used for a king who leads Israel in war (as in Josh. 14.11; 1 Kgs 3.7; and 2 Chr. 1.10), thus denoting not just personal affection by Israel and Judah, but also 'the kind of attachment people had to a king who could fight battles for them' (Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb *Love*', p. 337). Moran also believes that the use of the verb 'love' in 1–2 Samuel is politically significant, which explains why all Israel and Judah loved David: 'the people at the point were already giving David a *de facto* recognition and allegiance, which his actual leadership and success in a sense justified' (Moran, 'The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy', p. 81).

37. The majority of interpreters believe that Saul loves David, although there is recognition that the Hebrew could be deliberately ambiguous on this point; see, for example, Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb *Love*', p. 335.

38. The only time a woman is explicitly said to love a man in biblical narrative.

39. The Hebrew text of 1 Sam. 18.28 has Michal loving David, while the Septuagint text has Israel loving David.

40. Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', p. 170.

has Yahweh's favour'.[41] This emphasis on theological motivation—that is, the ascent of David is the result of God's preference for David rather than Saul (1 Sam. 18.12, 14)—automatically rules out a priori the possibility of sexual relations between David and Jonathan. As Zehnder notes, if the relationship between David and Jonathan occurs within the context of Yahweh approving David's rise, so, given the biblical prohibitions against homosexual conduct, it is unlikely that Yahweh would approve of a sexual relationship between the two men.[42]

Nissinen is one of a minority of scholars to critique the underlying presumptions of nonsexual interpretations of the love between David and Jonathan in favour of a sexualized reading. He acknowledges that love can be used in the Hebrew Bible as political and theological language, as is most striking in the Deuteronomistic History, but he simultaneously contends that this does not rule out the possibility of an erotic aspect to the love between the two men.[43] Thus, Nissinen criticizes those like Zehnder for subordinating the affection between David and Jonathan to their role as characters in the plot of David's succession. He concedes that the love between the two biblical heroes is not the main thrust of the narrative, yet Nissinen believes it is still an important part of it.[44] In fact, Nissinen insists that the love expressed between David and Jonathan is a crucial part of the narrative because it reflects a social environment that accepts and celebrates certain same-sex sexual relationships between men.[45] Unlike interpreters who model the relationship between the two champions on the pederastic ideals of ancient Greece, Nissinen frames the mutually loving alliance as a heroic relationship that does not distinguish between active and passive roles and is based on a mutual respect for the other's equality, as found in the *Gilgamesh Epic* and Homer's *Iliad*.[46]

41. P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (AB, 9; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), p. 342.

42. Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', p. 173; and Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 166.

43. Martti Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan als Frage der modernen Exegese', *Biblica* 80 (1999), pp. 250-63 (253).

44. Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', pp. 253-54. Zehnder insists that although he does not advocate a sexual interpretation of the relationship, he maintains that he values the affective aspect of the friendship between David and Jonathan; see Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 139 n. 38.

45. Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', p. 258.

46. Nissinen accepts that Jonathan is always the subject in his dealings with David (that is, he is always the one doing stuff), but Nissinen believes that this is counterbalanced by the fact that David weeps the more at their parting, that they both swear an oath to each other in the name of God, and that David claims that Jonathan is more

The interpretation of the love between David and Jonathan offered by Fewell and Gunn goes further than Nissinen's critique insofar as they claim that those who interpret Jonathan's love 'as a cipher for political commitment, borrowing from ancient treaty language', without any considerations of other factors, do so on the basis of heterosexist prejudice.[47] Fewell and Gunn acknowledge different types of biblical love, but they argue that 'a homosexual reading' is firmly grounded in the biblical text. The main justification for their 'homosexual reading' is that Jonathan shows the most abiding of passions of all those who love David—he gives David his clothes and weapons; he goes against his father's wishes by continuing to see David; and he even abdicates his right to the throne.[48] To highlight the extent to which heterosexist presumptions are embedded in mainstream biblical scholarship, Fewell and Gunn look to the interpretation of *'āhēb* in the David and Jonathan narrative in the *ABD*, a standard, scholarly commentary.[49] They assert that prejudice alone guides the way in which interpreters such as Sakenfeld read the love for David: thus, Michal 'fell in love with David' (1 Sam. 18.20), but Jonathan, whose 'soul was bound to the life of David' (1 Sam. 18.1), is said only to 'love' David (1 Sam. 18.1), in much the same way as all of Israel and Judah do (1 Sam. 18.16).[50] Although the same verb is used to describe both Michal's and Jonathan's feelings, and Jonathan is said to love David like his own life (reiterated in 1 Sam. 18.1, 3; 20.17), Sakenfeld, the author of the *ABD* article, like many other interpreters, reads Michal's love as a sexual love and Jonathan's love as a political love (Jonathan is not 'in love' with David).[51] Despite advocating a sexual reading of the relationship between David and Jonathan, Fewell and Gunn reject the idealized vision of an egalitarian union as espoused by Nissinen. Rather, they believe that while Jonathan is completely and utterly in love with David, the love of the relationship is one-sided—David deviously relates to, and even flirts with, Jonathan only so far as to keep the heir-apparent inflamed with passion and therefore complaisant to David's requests.[52] The 'remarkable asymmetry in the use of affective terms' between the two men, particularly David's silence about what he feels for Jonathan, leads

wonderful to him than women ('Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', p. 259 n. 36). See also Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 53-56.

47. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 149.
48. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 149.
49. Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', pp. 375-81.
50. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 149.
51. Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', p. 376.
52. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, pp. 148-50.

Fewell and Gunn to conclude that Jonathan's love was probably unrequited, if not unconsummated.[53]

Not all interpreters of the love between David and Jonathan, however, see a clear distinction between a political reading and a sexual reading. Damrosch concedes that the language of love in the David and Jonathan narrative is typical of the political rhetoric common to ancient Near Eastern treaties,[54] but adds that 'this relationship has been developed far beyond anything that would have been required simply to assure the audience that David and Jonathan were close friends and that David did not wish to deny the succession to Saul's heir'.[55] Like many contemporary readers who see something more than an impersonal affiliation between a suzerain and his vassal in the love between the two men, Damrosch calls attention to a 'friendship-as-marriage' metaphor inherent in the narrative.[56] Just as there are biblical precedents for covenants founded on love,[57] it is also possible that the political and the personal are so intertwined that an otherwise political alliance might suggest a profound personal friendship. Damrosch argues that this marriage motif is immediately identifiable at David and Jonathan's first meeting (1 Sam. 18.1-5), where we read of a tale of love at first sight.[58] However, despite Jonathan playing the dutiful wife, protecting David from, and aiding him to escape, the mad Saul,[59] Damrosch's acknowledgment of the 'overtones of a relationship of husband and wife'[60] between David (the husband) and Jonathan (the wife) does not lead him to adopt a sexual interpretation of this marriage agreement before God.[61]

53. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 150.

54. David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row San Francisco, 1987), p. 204.

55. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, p. 202.

56. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, pp. 202-206. Joyce Baldwin sees a similar type of relationship when she comments, 'Genuine love, person to person, sealed by a covenant, such as there was between David and Jonathan, provides a most telling model of an unbreakable relationship. It is the basis of a marriage relationship' (Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel* [TOTC; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988], p. 135).

57. Such as Isa. 55.3 ('I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David'); Deut. 7.9 (God 'keeps covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations'); and Exod. 24.1-8, where God enters freely into a covenant with Israel on the grounds of his love for them.

58. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, p. 203.

59. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, p. 206 (also, 'David comes into Saul's household like a bride but then takes on the role of the young husband, metaphorically in relation to Jonathan, literally in relation to Michal', p. 206).

60. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, p. 203.

61. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, pp. 202-206. It should be no surprise that of the five times covenants are discussed between David and Jonathan three explicitly mention Yahweh: 1 Sam. 20.8, 20.42, and 23.18.

For Damrosch, the 'friendship-as-marriage' motif, also apparent in Homer's *Iliad* and the *Gilgamesh Epic*,[62] represents a dual political and erotic kinship covenant between David and Jonathan in much the same way as a marriage is a covenant of kinship between adults.[63] Instead of portraying the couple as enjoying a homoerotic relationship, the biblical narrator uses the relationship of the characters David and Jonathan to mediate 'on the nature and meaning of the divine covenant in human history'[64]—David and Jonathan are metaphorically bound as groom and bride in a covenant of promise and commitment just as Yahweh and Israel are bound in prophetic literature such as Ezek. 16.8 and Isa. 62.5.

Covenant and Oath

Throughout the David and Jonathan narrative, covenant (*b^{e}rît*) and oath (*š^{e}bû'â*) are mentioned numerous times, with the first and last of the three covenants made providing a framework from which to understand their significance:

1. 1 Sam. 18.1-4 explains how Jonathan initiates a covenant with David because 'he loved him as [he loved] himself', although nothing is said of the terms or context of this covenant.
2. 1 Sam. 20.8 confirms that the covenant of 18.3, made on the basis of Jonathan's (political and covenantal) love for David, is a *b^{e}rît Yahweh*.
3. 1 Sam. 20.14-17 shows Jonathan making a covenant with the house of David (20.16), after which David reaffirms his oath to protect Jonathan and his descendants on the basis of a reiteration of Jonathan's love for David as expressed in 18.3 (20.17).
4. 1 Sam. 20.42 is a renewal of the oath "in the name of Yahweh" that David will protect Jonathan's descendants as promised in 20.14-17.
5. 1 Sam. 23.18 is the last time the two men see each other. Jonathan reassures David that he and his father know that David will rule over

62. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, p. 206.

63. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, pp. 203-204.

64. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant*, p. 208. In contrast, Jobling's 'gay reading' uses similar arguments to reach a completely different conclusion; for Jobling there is support in the David and Jonathan narrative for a sexual interpretation because Jonathan acts like David's other women and the covenants the two men make are analogous to a marriage agreement, but he asserts that for 'obvious cultural reasons' the text is not explicit about their sexual relationship (David Jobling, *1 Samuel* [BOSHNP; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998], pp. 161-65).

Israel (20.17), and then they make a final 'covenant before Yahweh' and part ways.[65]

The majority of biblical interpreters believe that the use of *b^{e}rît* and *š^{e}bû'â* in the covenants between David and Jonathan, finally witnessed by Yahweh, represent a divinely supported transfer of political power from Jonathan, the heir-apparent, to David, God's chosen king.[66] From the start, Jonathan's covenant and oath-making are viewed as outward expressions of an inward political desire for David to succeed his father as king of Israel.[67] Thus, John William Wevers argues that the first covenant was made as a pact of clan adoption ('as is evident from the one-sided gift of the prince to David'), with the wealthy and socially superior prince adopting David as his covenant brother and therefore welcoming him into his household.[68]

While it is true some covenants are legalistic, many biblical passages found covenants on a relationship of love,[69] as in 1 Sam. 18.3: 'The first passage records David's meeting with Jonathan shortly after David defeated Goliath, and of Jonathan's love for David which preceded the covenant between them. This covenant is based on and prompted by Jonathan's love for David.'[70] However, though Jonathan makes a covenant on the basis of his love for David, the covenant is interpreted by many as more than a sign of mere affection. Edelman argues that the use of *b^{e}rît* between David and Jonathan has a 'semantic range' beyond that of a covenant based on idealized love and represents political allegiance to David, in stark contrast with his father's reluctance to accept the divine plan.[71] By making pacts with

65. The only time a mutual covenant is made (at all other times Jonathan makes the covenants).

66. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel*, p. 35; J. Morgenstern, 'David and Jonathan', *JBL* 78 (1959), pp. 322-24 (322); Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (trans. J.S. Bowden; OTL; London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 147; David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup, 14; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), p. 80; David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament (1 Samuel 13–31, Numbers 11–12, 1 Kings 17–18)* (JSOTSup, 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), pp. 19-20; Robert P. Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1986), p. 159; Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 224.

67. Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action*, p. 12.

68. John William Wevers, 'The First Book of Samuel', in Laymon (ed.), *IOVCB,* pp. 155-69 (165).

69. Examples include Isa. 55.3 ('I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David') and Deut. 7.9 (God 'keeps covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations'). However, the covenant of love *par excellence* is Exod. 24.1-8, where God enters freely into a covenant with Israel on the grounds of his love (see also Isa. 54.10).

70. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 125.

71. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel*, p. 35.

David throughout the narrative, Jonathan not only acknowledges David's future position as king, but he has also 'secured his personal safety and that of his immediate family against the typical blood-baths that accompanied changes of dynasty'.[72] Noll follows a similar line of argument, insisting that Jonathan seeks David out in 1 Sam. 23 on the command of his father to agree to a truce between David and Saul, which ends in the making of a nonaggression treaty to secure the safety of the house of Saul.[73] Whether by instinct or by coercion from his father, Jonathan creates a formal, long-lasting bond that can be called upon in times of hardship and trouble, as is demonstrated by David's favourable treatment of Jonathan's son (Mephibosheth) in 2 Samuel 9.[74] Thus, in this light, the covenantal relationship between the two men is not a friendship of impulse or sentiment, but a prescribed, political relationship based on long-lasting obligations (*ḥesed*).[75]

Wilson adds a twist to the political slant of interpretations of covenants when she argues that David, despite probably being 'the most clearly bisexual figure in the whole of the Bible',[76] turned to Jonathan (who was 'more truly gay' than David)[77] for help in securing the kingship of Israel.[78] Although she accepts, albeit reluctantly, that Jonathan's covenants with David are politically significant, she insists that Jonathan's undressing before his friend in 1 Sam. 18.4 signifies a sexual relationship with David.[79] Accordingly, the smitten Jonathan jeopardizes his family's honour by sexually and politically submitting himself to David: 'Jonathan was playing the more *passive* role in this romance, even to the point of giving up his crown for David'.[80]

72. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel*, p. 158. Others also believe that Jonathan sides with David as a means of strategically protecting his family from annihilation by the new monarchy, a common practice to resolve threats to the throne in the ancient Near East (for example, 1 Sam. 24.22; 1 Kgs 15.29, 16.11; and 2 Kgs 10.6, 11.1); see Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 166.

73. K.L. Noll, *The Faces of David* (JSOTSup, 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 92-96.

74. Åke Viberg, *Symbols of Law: A Contextual Analysis of Legal Symbolic Acts in the Old Testament* (ConBOT, 34; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1992), p. 130.

75. David Frank Payne, *I and II Samuel* (DSB-OT; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), p. 105. Jobling also recognizes the fact that David and Jonathan's covenants are not synonymous with affection, as demonstrated in 1 Sam. 20.8-9, when David petitions to the quasi-legal covenant made between the two men rather than Jonathan's fidelity alone (*1 Samuel*, p. 163).

76. Nancy Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus, and the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p. 149.

77. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 151.

78. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 151.

79. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 150.

80. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 150.

In contrast to Wilson, others believe that Jonathan's stripping of his coat, armament, sword, bow and belt carries a deeper significance than the sexual interpretation suggests. For the majority of interpreters, Jonathan's stripping, although not expressed in words, is a 'proleptic recognition of David's eventual kingship, which Jonathan implies in 1 Sam. 20.13 and states explicitly in 1 Sam. 23.17'.[81] By giving David his *me'îl* ('robe'), an essential part of his princely attire, Jonathan makes a formal gesture of the legal transfer of his position as the heir apparent.[82] The political symbolism of clothing is further demonstrated in 1 Sam. 15.27, where Saul's tearing of Samuel's robe is said to represent Yahweh's tearing the kingdom of Israel from Saul, and 1 Sam. 24.4-5, where David's tearing of Saul's robe perhaps foretells David's coming kingship. Furthermore, the political symbolism of weaponry is demonstrated in 2 Kgs 11.10, where the priest Jehoiada delivers David's spears and shields to the captains of the Carites. Any doubts about the symbolism of Jonathan's actions are resolved by 1 Sam. 17.38-39, where Saul offers to clothe David in his armour as a mark of his acceptance of David's fighting the Philistine on his behalf (a precursor to Saul's acceptance of David into the royal household).[83]

Comstock is unique in his belief that a strategic alliance between David and Jonathan is made on the basis of friendship alone as the two men have nothing to gain from each other.[84] Step-by-step, Comstock refutes the commonly held belief that Jonathan waives his claim to kingship for David, unconvincingly rebutting the prevalent interpretations of Jonathan's

81. Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 224. Similarly, Gunn argues that 'The robe thus becomes a symbol of (royal) status so that when now we find Jonathan stripping off his robe (*me'îl*) and giving it to David it is hard to avoid the conclusion that we are already witnessing, in anticipation as it were, the transference to David of Jonathan's status as heir apparent' (Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, p. 80). See also Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel*, p. 136; Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb *Love*', pp. 336, 337, 338; Roland Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture* (BibLim; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 27; Viberg, *Symbols of Law*, p. 133; Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', p. 171; J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 74, 76; Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, p. 20; Ackroyd, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 147; Marti J. Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power* (SPOT; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 41.

82. Tryggve N.D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (ConBOT, 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1976), p. 39.

83. Thompson, 'The Significance of the Verb *Love*', p. 335.

84. Gary David Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition among Men in Hebrew Scripture: Jonathan as Unconventional Nurturer', in Michael L. Stemmeler and José Cabezón (eds.), *Religion, Homosexuality and Literature* (GMIRS, 3; Las Colinas, TX: Monument Press, 1992), pp. 9-29 (19-20).

covenant and his offer of his robe and weaponry in 1 Sam. 18.4;[85] Jonathan's request that David not sever links with Jonathan's house if he dies, in 1 Sam. 20.15; Saul's tirade against Jonathan for having a relationship with a man who will prevent the continuation of the Saulide dynasty in 1 Sam. 20.31; and David's obeisance before Jonathan in 1 Sam. 20.41, among others.[86]

In a stance similar to Wilson's, Comstock wonders why biblical interpreters do not consider the possibility that a political context of a covenant might be used 'to express, perhaps covertly, a deep and possibly prohibited or unconventional interpersonal love'.[87] Comstock believes that the biblical narrator frames the relationship between David and Jonathan within the political matrix of a covenant, but Comstock points to Joseph Cady's analysis of nineteenth-century English gay writers to demonstrate how some writers deliberately develop strategies to safeguard themselves against retribution in a society hostile to the promotion of male homogenital relations.[88] While Nissinen believes that the biblical author writes from a culture that accepts and celebrates homogenital relations between men, Comstock argues that the biblical author uses otherwise neutral language about male friendship and soldier-comradeship to convey hidden messages to initiated readers in an otherwise unsympathetic environment.[89] Thus, if ancient Israelite society is as hostile to male homogenital relations as the (late) Holiness Code depicts, then the biblical author writes of a sexual relationship between two men in coded language that pleases two very different audiences:

> The conventional and socially acceptable language and form of covenant, friendship, politics, elegy, and soldiering may have been used to tell a love story which needed both to remain within what was socially acceptable as well as to break with convention, that is, to tell a story that would appeal to and be heard differently by two different groups.[90]

Comstock notes two linguistic anomalies in the covenant of 1 Sam. 18.1-4 that for him justify a sexual interpretation of the friendship between David and Jonathan. First, Comstock suggests that the combined use of 'as himself' and *'āhēb* in both 1 Sam. 18.1 and 18.3 alters a conventional

85. A comparison of 1 Sam. 15.27-28 with 24.11 demonstrates the irrefutable political symbolism of the robe in 1 Samuel.

86. Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', pp. 9, 12-15.

87. Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', p. 16.

88. Joseph Cady, '"Drum-Taps" and Nineteenth-Century Male Homosexual Literature', in Joann P. Krieg (ed.), *Walt Whitman: Here and Now* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 49-59.

89. Comstock maintains that 'a gay writer or writers may have used an available framework that would be read by other gay men as a gay story, but not as such by non-gay people' (Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', p. 23).

90. Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', p. 23.

formula from one of a friend ('your friend who is as yourself', as in Deut. 13.7) to an unconventional formula for a lover ('and Jonathan loved him as himself' in 1 Sam. 18.1 and 'because he loved him as himself' in 1 Sam. 18.3).[91] In addition to changing the formula of platonic friendship to eroticized friendship, Comstock believes that 1 Sam. 18.1-4 differs from Deuteronomy in terms of the way covenants are made; rather than depicting a covenant between a senior and junior, Comstock asserts that the agreement between David and Jonathan is between two (lovers) of equal status. Thus, while in Deut. 13.5 Yahweh orders the Israelites to 'hold fast' to his commandments, 1 Sam. 18.1 uses *qāšar* (to "bind")—'and the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David'—which Comstock argues has a 'more participatory, interacting, sharing, and conspiring sense of bonding, as might be required by covenant-making between equals'.[92]

Although Comstock is correct to note the use of *qāšar* in their covenant making as demonstrating a participatory bonding between the two men, others believe he is wrong to eroticize the friendship. Exum argues that Jonathan becomes *qāšar* to David, replacing Michal as David's love object, not because the two heroes are sexual lovers but because they share similar masculine qualities insofar as they are both successful warriors and popular heroes. Thus, the closeness described in the narrative describes not a sexual relationship but male bonding.[93] Coleman accepts that the magnitude of affection between the two men goes beyond normal political associations, but believes that, despite Jonathan's 'being attracted to the warrior in an intense and personal way … there is no hint of pederasty or erotic behaviour' between the two men.[94] Rather, the covenant of 1 Sam. 18.1-4 demonstrates the possible existence of an ancient (and nongenital) Hebrew custom, 'a formal bond of friendship and loyalty for which there is no modern equivalent'.[95]

Contrary to Comstock, Boer's transgressive interpretation of the covenants made between David and Jonathan highlight an inequality of the relationship that is very similar to those between master and slave in con-

91. Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', p. 16.

92. Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', pp. 16-17. Comstock cites Peter R. Ackroyd's 'The Verb Love—'AHĒB in the David–Jonathan Narratives—A Footnote' to justify his emphasis on the 'conspiring sense of bonding' of *qashah* (Peter R. Ackroyd, 'The Verb Love—'AHĒB in the David–Jonathan Narratives—A Footnote', *VT* 25 [1975], pp. 213-14).

93. J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOTSup, 163; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 52-53.

94. Peter Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality* (London: SPCK, 1980), p. 44.

95. Coleman, *Christian Attitudes to Homosexuality*, p. 44.

temporary 'S/M agreements'.[96] Boer's (mis)reading turns attention to the covenant in 1 Sam. 18.1-4, where Jonathan is said to be 'bound to the soul of David', noting that the usual root of *qāšar* is replaced with a passive root that means 'to be joined together'.[97] Thus, rather than depict a relationship of equality, Boer argues that the covenants in 1 Samuel 18–20, with their emphasis on the subtext of sexual signifiers and the active–passive dichotomy, depict a queer relationship between the much-loved, macho hero David and his besotted sidekick Jonathan.[98] Furthermore, Jonathan's undressing in 1 Sam. 18.4, the only occurrence of the reflexive stem of *pāšaṭ*, which would normally mean to 'strip oneself', but here can also mean 'spread out', 'stretch' (such as one's cheeks) or 'extend' (such as with an erection), hints at highly eroticized language.[99] Putting the suggestive verses together Boer argues that the 'delectable suggestion of bondage' and 'plumbing', with Jonathan taking the initiative in joining together with David, stretching out his erection and connecting with his lover, implies a highly eroticized relationship that involves covenants beyond most traditional readings of the narrative.[100] In partial agreement with Brueggemann's view that David is the 'passive recipient' of Jonathan's devotion,[101] and against the majority of interpreters who see David as the instigator of a political and/or sexual strategy, Boer argues that throughout 1 Samuel 18–20 David is the one who has everything done for him, whether loving or covenants: 'David is overwhelmingly a passive receptor, a role that, according to all schemas of sexual relations, indicates subordinate status, a secondary role, a disinterested partner. He is fucked, it seems.'[102]

Shame

One of the most hotly debated passages in discussions about eroticism between David and Jonathan is Saul's severe public reprimand to 'shame' (*bošet*)[103] his son in 1 Sam. 20.30: 'Then Saul's anger was kindled against

96. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, p. 29.
97. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, p. 30.
98. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, pp. 22, 25, 27.
99. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, p. 30.
100. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, p. 30.
101. Walter Brueggemann, 'Narrative Coherence and Theological Intentionality in 1 Samuel 18', *CBQ* 55 (1993), pp. 225-43 (232).
102. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, p. 31. Boer believes that his eroticized reading of the relationship between David and Jonathan is reinforced by Saul's outburst in 1 Sam. 20.30; see pp. 32-33.
103. Shame arises from the disapproval of significant others and results in disgrace at being judged as falling short of publicly sanctioned ideals and standards; see Johanna Stiebert, 'Shame and Prophecy: Approaches Past and Present', *BibInt* 8 (2000), pp. 255-

Jonathan. He said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"' The majority of interpreters explain the 'electrifying violence'[104] of Saul's anger towards Jonathan as the result of utter frustration at his son's fateful recklessness—intentional or otherwise—in befriending a menace to the family's dynastic hopes.[105] Ralph David Gehrke summarizes the gist of the insult:

> Saul breaks out in anger, practically disowning Jonathan as an illegitimate bastard who is unworthy of his high birth, claiming that it is rebellion for Jonathan to prefer any covenant bond with David over his undivided duty toward his family, the royal family.[106]

Saul's fury reveals the pain of a father whose two children express more love and loyalty to a political rival—Jonathan's love for his friend leads him to protect David from Saul (1 Sam. 19.1-7; 20.1-4), just as Michal's love for David (1 Sam. 18.20) leads her to protect him from her father (1 Sam. 19.11-17)—than to kin.[107] Saul is outraged at Jonathan's apparent eagerness to reject all that his father can offer him when he transfers the *ḥesed* that rightfully belongs to Saul to David in an act of gross filial disloyalty that culminates in his secret abdication: 'Do not be afraid; for the hand of my father Saul shall not find you; you shall be king over Israel, and I shall be second to you; my father Saul also knows that this is so' (1 Sam. 23.17).[108]

Other interpreters acknowledge that Saul's rage in 1 Sam. 20.30 could signify simultaneous anger at Jonathan's betrayal of his family and disgust or jealousy at 'the effrontery of this homosexual love'.[109] Thus, Nissinen

75 (256-57); and Saul M. Olyan, 'Honor, Shame, and Covenant Relations in Ancient Israel and its Environment', *JBL* 115 (1996), pp. 201-18 (204).

104. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 151.

105. In contrast with Saul's view of the situation, Brueggemann believes that the reader is led to another conclusion about Jonathan's actions: 'He [Jonathan] makes a daring and costly choice. He has chosen David. He violates the command to honor his father, for he does not honor Saul. In retrospect this is an act of stunning loyalty on Jonathan's part … The text invites us to reflect on the cost of loyalty and the terrible ambiguities within which loyalty must be practiced' (Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 153).

106. Ralph David Gehrke, *1 and 2 Samuel* (Concordia Commentary; London: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), p. 171.

107. See Exod. 20.12; Deut. 5.16; and Ezek. 22.7 for the importance of honouring one's mother and father.

108. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, p. 81. Although Saul also informs David that he shall be king over Israel: 'Now I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand' (1 Sam. 24.20).

109. Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan—The Story of a Triangle? A Contribution to the Issue of Homosexuality in the First Testament',

concedes that Saul's outburst is partly an attack on the political fallout of David and Jonathan's alliance, but insists that the magnitude of its ferocity demonstrates his concern that their relationship goes far beyond the political realm to an intense jealousy of the intimacy and affection the two friends share; Nissinen notes that it is no coincidence that when Saul speaks of bringing shame to Jonathan's mother's nakedness, there is a deliberate reference to the euphemism for sexual intercourse in Lev. 18.6-23 and 20.1-14.[110] Similarly, Jobling believes that the 'modern experience of irrational homophobia' explains the extent of Saul's anger, and that by claiming that Jonathan brings shame to his mother's genitalia, Saul transfers the blame of Jonathan's perverse actions from himself: 'the father tries to destroy the possibility that there is anything of *himself* that could have made the boy turn out like this'.[111]

By siding with David at the expense of his father, Jonathan not only shames himself but also the woman who bore him; thus, the difficult phrase 'son of a perverse, rebellious woman' (NRSV) uses 'son of' to mean 'member of the class of', and therefore refers to 'people who forsake those to whom they properly owe allegiance.'[112] For Jobling and Schroer and Staubli, Saul's insult is best understood as an ancient equivalent of today's 'son of a bitch', whereby a sexist slur is directed at the man in question without any knowledge of the mother.[113] Whether sexual or otherwise, Jonathan's transgression shames Jonathan to his masculine core; Nicholson acknowledges that the attack on Jonathan is a parallel to Saul's anger towards Michal in 1 Sam. 19.17, but believes that there is more to it than that—'there is an implicit attack on Jonathan's masculinity in Saul's outburst. Jonathan has

in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Samuel and Kings* (FCB, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 22-36 (30). See also Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 150.

110. Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', pp. 255-56. Alter also argues that 'uncovering the nakedness of' refers to taboo sexual intercourse, and so 'has virtually the force of "your mother's cunt," though the language is not obscene' (Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* [London: W.W. Norton, 1999], p. 128 n. 30).

111. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 161. Similarly, Michael Mason's short fictional anthology of Saul suggests that it is Saul's sexual frustration and fear of his own sexual longings for David that are responsible for his alternating feelings of love and hate ('Saul', in Stephen Wright [ed.], *Different, An Anthology of Homosexual Short Stories: From Guy Maupassant to Christopher Isherwood and Beyond* [New York: Bantam Books, 1974], pp. 219-24).

112. McCarter, *I Samuel*, p. 343 n. 30.

113. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 178; and Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', pp. 29-30. Amusingly, Gordon warns that this phrase, 'while strong language, does not call for the dysphemisms of some of the more carefree modern versions' (*1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 168).

chosen David just as Michal had chosen David, but Saul seems to consider it an inappropriate choice for a man, especially for a man whose duty is to succeed his father.'[114] Saul, by accusing Jonathan of having all the characteristics of a woman, is insulting his son in the harshest possible way in patriarchal ancient Israel by saying he *is* a woman:

> He identifies Jonathan with perversity and women. The idiom 'son of' signifies essence: Jonathan is quintessentially perverse and rebellious. But as the outburst goes on to make clear, Saul is also talking about Jonathan's mother: in the misogynist mythology of patriarchy, woman as Other is always potentially the perverse and rebellious. Jonathan, perverse and rebellious, is truly the offspring of a woman. Jonathan *is* a woman. Indeed, the son who is a woman shames the very (female) genitals from which he has come forth. Saul, on this reading, speaks from a heterosexist, patriarchal position. Jonathan, too, is trapped in the same social system, so that he falls back in anger but also, says the narrator, in shame (vs. 34), 'because he hurt ['atsab] for David and because his father had humiliated him'.[115]

Horner believes that Saul's two-part insult ('son of a perverse woman' and 'your mother's nakedness') shows that Saul 'knows perfectly well what kind of relationship existed between his son and his son-in-law', although Saul cannot bring himself to name it.[116] Horner accepts the conventional view that the first part of Saul's insult criticizes Jonathan for not prioritizing his own family's political concerns, but disagrees that the second part is a reiteration of the first. Instead, he insists that Saul's charge that Jonathan has shamed his mother's nakedness is a statement of disgust that alludes to Lev. 18.1-9 and Gen. 9.20-25, in which uncovering nakedness is euphemistic for sexual relations.[117] Helminiak follows Horner in arguing that Saul criticizes Jonathan for his alliance with David, but, more than this, his excessive outburst mocks Jonathan's masculinity, which 'in contemporary terms' would be to call Jonathan a 'faggot'.[118] Helminiak's justification is twofold. First, whereas the Hebrew text of Saul's insult is ambiguous, the Septuagint could

114. Sarah Nicholson, *Three Faces of Saul: An Intertextual Approach to Biblical Theology* (JSOTSup, 339; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), p. 67.

115. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 150.

116. Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 32.

117. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 32.

118. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, pp. 103-104. Helminiak does not discuss this further, but Lucian's revision of the Septuagint, which labels Jonathan as *gunaikotraphē* (Greek for 'women-nourished' or 'effeminate'), might give some credence to the argument; see S.R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1913), p. 171 n. 1.

be rendered, 'Do I not know that you are an intimate companion to the son of Jesse?'[119] Secondly, like Horner, Nissinen and Alter, Helminiak reminds us that 'shame' and 'nakedness' are used throughout the Bible as sexual innuendoes.[120] It appears that Helminiak bases his argument on Horner's earlier comment that the Septuagint translates *bōḥēr* ('chosen') as a corruption of *ḥābēr* ('associate' or 'companion'), *metachos* in Greek.[121] Thus, in light of the Septuagint, Horner interprets 1 Sam. 20.30 as, 'For, do I not know that you are an intimate companion to the son of Jesse'.[122] Support for his assertion rests on Driver's renowned *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*, which argues for accepting the Greek Septuagint over the Hebrew Masoretic text.[123] However, both Horner's and Helminiak's interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan do not follow Driver fully as Driver translates the Septuagint's *metachos* as 'companion' rather than the suggestive 'intimate companion'.[124]

David's Strategic Heartfelt Lament

The lament of 2 Sam. 1.19-27, 'one of the finest pieces of literature of all time',[125] is a keystone of the erotic interpretation of the relationship between David and Jonathan. Here in this suggestive biblical text we find a public declaration of a 'peculiar and precious bonding'[126] that 'explicitly displaces women as the object of male affection'.[127] For the modern reader, who is not used to exhibitions of men loving without restraint or shame, this particular text is very confusing. For Helminiak there is no confusion; the poetic words of love used by David not only 'demonstrate an intense sorrow' that verifies a sexual relationship but also confirm that the biblical narrator portrays their relationship in a positive light.[128] Likewise, Horner argues that those who doubt the occurrence of a sexual and spiritual union between the men need only look at David's lament for confirmation:

> The question here is not which one loved the most but whether the two of them loved each other both *physically* and spiritually. And the answer is:

119. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 103.
120. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 103.
121. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 31.
122. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 32.
123. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text*, p. 171.
124. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text*, p. 171.
125. Gehrke, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 233.
126. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 217.
127. David J.A Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 205; GCT, 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 240.
128. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, pp. 103-104.

> Yes, they did. This is proved by David himself, as much as by anyone else, in the very moving elegy he wrote for Saul and Jonathan after the report of their deaths in battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa.[129]

It is somewhat bizarre that, even though Horner acknowledges that David's lament mourns the demise of both Saul and Jonathan, he, like the majority of advocates of a sexual interpretation, highlights the last sentence of the eulogy—that is, the reference to Jonathan's love being greater than the love of women—as the most important aspect of the tribute. In doing so, they do not give sufficient attention to the wider context of David's grief for the loss of both King Saul and his son Jonathan, whom David says were not divided in life or death (2 Sam. 1.23).

Jobling contends that in opening up for the first time,[130] David makes a lament that is 'virtually the only positive presentation of male homosexuality in the Jewish Bible. Here is a man telling of his love for another man, comparing it with heterosexual love, and saying it is better'.[131] Likewise, Schroer and Staubli believe that the lament, whereby David 'explicitly ranks the love of men he experienced with Jonathan above the love of women', is frank enough to prove the existence of a sexual relationship between the two men.[132] It seems, for Jobling at least, that as David's lover, aide, prophet and sexual partner, Jonathan has indeed surpassed the love of women in his life.[133] In contrast, Sakenfeld, although she acknowledges that David's heartfelt lament suggestively reminds us of the two men's 'tearful embrace and the clandestine rendezvous', insists yet again that all statements of personal affection between the two men, even those of the degree expressed in the dirge, must not be separated from the narrative's overarching political concerns with David's rise to kingship.[134]

Exum maintains that readers of the lament 'should not allow its beautiful cadences and lofty sentiments to obscure its ironies and ambiguities', particularly David's preference for 'male bonding to involvement with women' and his 'less-than-ideal relationships with women'.[135] Because, Exum notes,

129. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 34.

130. 'At least up to David's lament in 2 Samuel 1 virtually all the emotive language in this relationship, and most of the significant action, is on Jonathan's side' (Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 162).

131. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 161.

132. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', p. 22.

133. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 162.

134. Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 226.

135. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 93. Zehnder also acknowledges the misogynistic traits of the gender dynamics inherent in the lament; thus, given that wives did not share the emotional aspects of friendship that men shared with one another, David's lament clearly says that 'on the emotional level his relationship to Jonathan was

'nowhere is it unambiguously stated that David loved Jonathan, whereas it is frequently mentioned that Jonathan loved David',[136] she interprets the lament as a cunning way to speak about the depth of Jonathan's love for David.[137] Unlike the majority of interpreters who read a sexual component to the relationship between David and Jonathan, Fewell and Gunn follow Exum insofar as they do not believe that David's comment in v. 26 redirects the audience's gaze to the loveliness of Jonathan in an altruistic manner. Rather, Fewell and Gunn's not-so-idealistic erotic reading suggests that David's lament, the only time David voices his feelings for Jonathan, highlights abusive tendencies and serves to confirm Saul's suspicions about his son's feminine nature. Accordingly, David's apparent glorification of Jonathan is really an underhanded replication of Saul's tirade in 1 Sam. 20.30. Up until this point in the biblical narrative the focus has always been on David, but in the lament David uses the opportunity to turn the gaze from himself to 'the loveliness of Jonathan' (2 Sam. 1.26). Confirming 'what was no doubt rumored, if not commonly known', David defines his relationship with Jonathan 'in a way that is highly favorable to himself'.[138] By claiming that Jonathan's love was more wonderful to him than the love of women, David's lament reminds us of 'Saul's invective … The explicit tone is different in each case, but the construction of Jonathan's sexuality by Saul and David is the same: Jonathan is a woman, more woman than women are.'[139] Placing Jonathan in the submissive position of a woman enables David to mould his relationship with Jonathan to his favour, ensuring that Jonathan's masculinity is blurred and derided while simultaneously rebutting queries about his own virility:

much more important to him than his relationships with women, though—in accordance with the prevalent standards of behavior in his culture—it would only be the latter that included a sexual aspect' (Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 143).

136. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 93 (and also Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 53-54 n. 22). This is contrary to Gehrke, who argues that 'the climax of the elegy is certainly the touching strophe that expresses David's own tender friendship and love for Jonathan' (Gehrke, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 235).

137. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 71. It is not exactly clear who is the subject of 'love' in 2 Sam. 1.26, but Freedman translates the verse as, 'You were extraordinary. Loving you, for me, was better than loving women' (David Noel Freedman, 'The Refrain in David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan' in C.J. Bleeker, S.G.F. Brandon and M. Simon (eds.), *Ex orbe religionum: Studia Geo Widengren oblata II* (SHR, 21; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), pp. 115-26 [117]).

138. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 151.

139. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 151.

> Jonathan's love comes to rest in the comparison with women; and, in the kind of patriarchal stereotyping we have already spoken about, that makes David the "man" … Thus the words that praise Jonathan at the same time subtly devalue him. And even more so, for as royal prince he should have played the 'man' to the commoner's 'woman'. David has reversed the sexual roles just as he has reversed the political roles. By claiming the sexual relationship, but strictly on his terms, he turns it into a proclamation of his own ascendancy, his inevitable dominion, and of the inevitable end of the house of Saul. Saul's seed is wasted seed.[140]

Payne recoils at interpretations that misconstrue the elegiac aspect of the love between David and Jonathan by reading v. 26 literally, much to the horror of the misrepresented biblical writer![141] In *God Knows,* Heller has David take up this very point, bemoaning, 'most likely it was that line about Jonathan, love, and women near the end of my famous elegy that is more to blame than anything else for the malicious gossip about the two of us that lingers on in smutty repetitions'.[142] In contrast to those who read the affection displayed by David as sexual, Zehnder prefers to view David's seemingly ambiguous statement about Jonathan's love being more marvellous than the "love of women" as more poetic decoration than a literal account of sexual passion.[143] However, a poetic rendering of David's lament for Jonathan need not necessarily exclude homoerotic desire; twelfth-century theologian and philosopher Abelard's *Planctus David super Saul et Ionatha* appears to express homoerotic desire under the safe guise of friendship:

> For you, my Jonathan, above all, I will have to lament;
> between all joy there will be unending tears.
> Alas! why have I yielded to evil design,
> that for you I was not a guard in battle
> or likewise, if wounded I happily would die
> Since, what love would do, it does not have more than this,
> and for me to live after you, would be to die continuously,
> nor is a soul divided [in two] enough for life.[144]

140. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 151.

141. 'In view of the consistent biblical repudiation of homosexual practices, it is quite certain that this biblical writer never meant his words to signify any such thing; indeed, he would have been horrified to see his words misrepresented in such a fashion' (Payne, *I and II Samuel*, p. 161).

142. Joseph Heller, *God Knows* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 26; see also pp. 95-96, 170, 217.

143. Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', pp. 155-56; and Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 140.

144. As cited by John Dominic Spilker, *The Context and Tradition of King David's Lamentations* (trans. Lyndsey Thornton; Florida State University College of Music: Unpublished MMus thesis), p. 13.

Noll also recognizes the difficulty of claiming that David loves anybody, but believes that by putting David's name to the lament the biblical narrator shows that 'David loved Jonathan as he never loved any female character within the story'.[145] Although Noll notes that 'a publicly proclaimed lament of this kind cannot hurt David's reputation with the people over whom he hopes to rule, the former subjects of Saul',[146] he insists that such an interpretation misses the point because the lament is primarily concerned with the memory of Saul and Jonathan 'beyond what is necessary to accomplish David's propagandistic goals'.[147] For Noll, there are five characteristics of the lament that prove David genuinely grieves for the loss of Saul and Jonathan beyond strategic propaganda or self-aggrandizement. First, David reminds the hearers of Saul's successes as king (vv. 22-24), which could easily be used as a justification to usurp him by an heir to the throne.[148] Second, David stresses Saul's status as the anointed one (v. 21), which is no more—despite being anointed himself (1 Samuel 16), David does not capitalize on this.[149] Third, David subverts the famous passage of 1 Sam. 18.7 ('Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands') in order to remind the daughters of Israel that it was Saul who was responsible for their success and happiness.[150] Fourth, the placement of Jonathan at the pinnacle of the poem, particularly its personal tone, underlines the fact that David is not the legitimate heir to the throne.[151] Fifth, David uses hyperbole to describe Saul in superhuman and almost divine terms.[152]

In contrast to the more sympathetic readings of David's lament as a selfless statement of personal grief,[153] other interpreters note a clever, political strategy at work in the biblical text, with David using this period of mourning to justify his new role of leadership over the people who had once been subject to Saul. Indeed, Vanderkam asserts that the lament was placed

145. Noll, *The Faces of David*, pp. 79-80. Adele Berlin's note that David turns to Jonathan, rather than Michal, for help in 1 Samuel 20 also seems to justify this assumption; see Adele Berlin, 'Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives', *JSOT* 23 (1982), pp. 69-85 (70-72). However, given that David is never said to love anybody, it is also possible that he could use this time of grief to demonstrate strategically to Israel and Judah that Jonathan loved David.

146. Noll, *The Faces of David*, p. 108.

147. Noll, *The Faces of David*, p. 108.

148. Noll, *The Faces of David*, pp. 108, 116.

149. Noll, *The Faces of David*, p. 108.

150. Noll, *The Faces of David*, pp. 108-109.

151. Noll, *The Faces of David*, p. 109.

152. Noll, *The Faces of David*, p. 109.

153. For example, Brueggemann believes that the lament's 'directness, passion, and innocence are reflective of a genuine grief not inappropriate to David, who had lived with Saul so long and loved Jonathan so deeply' (Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 213).

in the narrative of David's rise to demonstrate David's allegiance to the house of Saul, and thereby remove any suspicion from himself vis-à-vis the political opportunity the demise of the royal household offers him.[154] Gunn concedes that David's lament 'makes good politics';[155] not only does David emphasize his own restraint in the passages preceding the lament (2 Sam. 1.1-15), but he also uses the lament to distance himself from Saul's death ('David said to him, "Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying 'I have killed the LORD's anointed'"', 2 Sam. 1.16), which ensures 'that we are prepared finally for the decisive action of the closing segment: David consults Yahweh, goes up with his consent to Hebron and is anointed king over Judah'.[156]

Like Gunn, Weitzman is also suspicious of the underlying agenda of the lament in its narrative setting, asserting that David's words are not so much an expression of his personal grief at the loss of the king and his friend as they are a political ploy to prove his own worthiness to rule over Judah.[157] Common to other biblical and to Ugaritic narrative conventions of the ancient world, 1 Sam. 2.19-27 'bears the imprint of a lament type-scene', which is 'constructed from a stock set of motifs, presented in a conventionally predetermined manner, and used repeatedly by authors within a particular literary community to describe common plot developments (betrothals, battles, deaths, etc.)'.[158] Weitzman identifies three components to this lament type-scene, which also occur in 2 Samuel 18 (David's lament at the news of Absalom's death) and Job 1.13-21 (Job's lament at the news of his children's and his servants' deaths): the arrival of a messenger who reports the death; the listener's response according to customs of acts of grief (e.g. tearing of clothes, weeping and fasting); and the mourner's verbal response.[159] Viewed within the context of such conventions, David's lament is nothing more than a staged publicity stunt strategically broadcast to all the people in a bid to gain their approval and get them on-side at a tragic moment in the history of Israel.[160]

154. J. VanderKam, 'Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal', *JBL* 94 (1980), pp. 521-39 (529).

155. David M. Gunn, '2 Samuel', in James Luther Mays (ed.), *HCBC* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, rev. edn, 2000), pp. 262-78 (265).

156. 'The rest of the country (the north) will come inevitably to David' (Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, pp. 111-12).

157. Steven Weitzman, 'David's Lament and the Poetics of Grief in 2 Samuel', *JQR* NS 85 (1995), pp. 341-60.

158. Weitzman, 'David's Lament', p. 345.

159. Weitzman, 'David's Lament', pp. 345-46.

160. The importance of the people's opinion is thus highlighted in the lament type-scene of the death of David's son, Abner (2 Sam. 3.28-34), where David's mourning for his son is approved by the people, who are said to be pleased with it (2 Sam. 3.36) (Weitzman, 'David's Lament', p. 354).

2

What Do the Interpreters Say? Different Interpretations, Common Ground

Having outlined the oft-cited proofs for a sexual interpretation of the relationship between David and Jonathan in Chapter 1, I will now discuss the three predominant ways of reading the biblical narrative that I have identified.[1] Although my initial readings of the many commentaries and books that refer to the relationship between the two men seemed to suggest that interpreters have construed the relationship on a seemingly haphazard basis, among the various readings—devotional, academic and the many hues in-between—I noticed recurring arguments that can be categorized into three distinct interpretative stances, which, for the sake of clarity, while trying to avoid generalizations, I identify as follows:

1. The political-theological reading: friendship as metaphorically legitimating the transfer of kingship from Saul's to David's house.
2. The homoerotic reading: sexual political allegiances and/or sexual friendship.
3. The homosocial reading: ambiguous political allegiances and/or ambiguous friendship.

The distinction among these three stances is not always clear; many interpreters can be identified as situating themselves in one category, but some do flit between two or more. For example, Jobling appears to waver between the political-theological and the homoerotic,[2] while Nissinen also

1. Markus Zehnder's 2007 article, published after the submission of my PhD thesis, from which this book stems, similarly identifies four classifications of interpretation of the relationship between David and Jonathan: the homosexual/homoerotic reading; the homosocial reading; the model of ideal friendship reading; and the queer reading. See Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', pp. 128-30.

2. Jobling's early work rejects any discussion of eroticism between David and Jonathan and argues that the relationship is about Jonathan mediating the transition of

appears to flutter between the homosocial and the homoerotic interpretation.[3] This crossover highlights the fact that the three viewpoints are often distinguishable only once full consideration has been given to the nuance of the specific interpreter's argument. Furthermore, the use of different theoretical frameworks (e.g. philosophical, linguistic, anthropological, historical or literary) muddies the waters, making comparisons among, and even within, the taxonomies sometimes problematic. Despite these difficulties of categorization and comparison, I believe that the three stances provide a useful matrix for appreciating the *whys*, the *hows* and the *whats* of readings of the relationship between David and Jonathan.

The political-theological reading is a traditional interpretation adopted for the most part by scholars who view the men's relationship primarily in terms of an alliance between two potential rivals vying for God's and a people's acceptance. As we saw in Chapter 1, this approach is by far the most popular interpretative stance of the three readings. Accordingly, Jonathan's relationship with David is regarded as a necessary precursor to the legitimization of David's rise as king over all of Israel. If these interpreters acknowledge any emotional or affective aspect to the relationship between David and Jonathan, it is always subsumed under the nonsexual political and theological agendas of the biblical narrative; that is, Jonathan's displays of love are symbolic of his prophetic acceptance of Yahweh's will that David succeed Saul as king over Israel. Clines believes that if these interpreters were asked to offer advice to others regarding the possibility of a sexual component to the relationship between David and Jonathan, they would recommend that readers 'banish from your mind any thought of sex when you read of Jonathan's love: it is essentially political, and though there was also a warm personal "affection", there was absolutely nothing more, honest'.[4]

kingship from Saul to David: 'The transition from Saul to David, otherwise theologically implausible, is by Jonathan made theologically plausible' (Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, p. 6 [see also the wider explanation on pp. 4-25]). However, in his later 1998 commentary on 1 Samuel for the Berit Olam series, Jobling refuses to repudiate either the political–theological or the homoerotic interpretation, arguing instead that Jonathan 'represents the extreme case of character being emptied into plot', and that the sexual reading of David and Jonathan's friendship is 'at least as valid as any other' (compare Jobling, *1 Samuel*, pp. 98 [see also pp. 6-7] with 161).

3. Thus, in his 1998 work Nissinen adopts a nonerotic homosocial interpretation, but a year later he is much more open to the possibility of an erotic aspect to the relationship between David and Jonathan; compare Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 55-56, with Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', pp. 253, 258. Part of the confusion lies in the cross-over between the homoerotic and the homosocial, with the latter sometimes having an erotic aspect that lurks in the background.

4. Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 31.

The homoerotic reading is less popular in its appeal than the political-theological reading among scholarly and, for obvious reasons, devotional interpreters. By arguing that David and Jonathan share a sexual relationship with each other, this reading stance is often—but not always—motivated by a desire of gay and lesbian people of faith to undermine biblically based cultural and spiritual norms of the Bible and sexuality. The homoerotic reading can be split into two types of interpreters; first, there is the majority who accept, to varying degrees, the traditional interpretation of the David and Jonathan narrative as a tale about a political and theological allegiance, but who also maintain that this relationship is erotic in nature.[5] Secondly, there are a smaller number of interpreters who discuss only the sexual dimension of the relationship between the two men, not because they reject the political-theological interpretation outright but because they regard it as unimportant to the discussion.[6] The basis for the majority of homoerotic interpretations is a common ground of claims to historical contextualization; for example, Helminiak claims that his homoerotic reading of the relationship between David and Jonathan relies on the soundness of a historical-critical method, which puts 'the text back into its original historical and cultural context'.[7] Moreover, Helminiak asserts that his interpretation is in stark contrast to the literalist or fundamentalist interpretation, which takes a text to mean 'whatever it means to somebody reading it today'.[8] Such claims are ironic when closer analysis reveals that homoerotic interpreters rely heavily on the 'plain sense meaning' of the biblical narrative as read today insofar as they see intimacy between two men as indicative of homosexual or bisexual relations.

The homosocial reading is the least advocated interpretative stance of the three approaches, overwhelmingly adopted by moderate academics who seek to find an intellectually honest balance between the other two interpretative stances. This approach to the relationship between David and Jonathan, stemming from an appreciation of ancient and modern politics of gender, kinship and sex, acknowledges the validity of a political-theological dimension to the friendship while concurrently appreciating how

5. Even the homoerotic interpreters who do raise the issue of a political and theological aspect to the couple's relationship often make only passing reference to it; see, for example, Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 104; Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 151; Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 28-30; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, pp. 150, 151; and Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', pp. 9-29.

6. For example, Magnus Hirschfeld, II, 'David und der heilige Augustin, zwei Bisexuelle', *JsZ* 2 (1900), pp. 288-94; Raphael Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 1959); and Wilson, *Our Tribe*.

7. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 26.

8. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 25.

contemporary readers might read homoerotic undertones into the narrative. Homosocial interpreters, however, reject the other two approaches to the biblical narrative for being too crude and dogmatic, preferring a more nuanced reading that recognizes the difficulty of speaking about male–male relations of the past.

The Political-theological Reading: Friendship as Metaphorically Legitimating the Transfer of Kingship from Saul's House to David's

As the label suggests, advocates of the political-theological stance argue that David and Jonathan's friendship is firmly rooted in the political and theological domains of kingship in ancient Israel. These interpreters situate Jonathan within a context of rivalry and succession between Saul (Jonathan's father and the present king) and David (Jonathan's friend and the future king) because the rise of the new leader is necessarily linked to the downfall of the old one.[9] Sakenfeld succinctly summarizes the dilemma that Jonathan is faced with: the 'complexity of' David and Jonathan's 'personal dimension is compounded by the issue of royal succession',[10] and it is 'only against this backdrop' of political rivalry and theological succession 'that we can properly appreciate the relationship between David and Jonathan and particularly the situation of Jonathan'.[11]

Political-theological interpreters believe that Jonathan's relationship with David is a literary strategy of the biblical writer(s) to prevent the legitimacy of David's kingship from being challenged: 'the transition from Saul to David, otherwise theologically implausible, is by Jonathan made theologically plausible'.[12] Although Jonathan is bestowed with a name in the narrative, his role, these interpreters note, takes precedence over his subjectivity in the interest of his sole purpose as agent for facilitating David's bid for the throne. Thus, Bakon notes that Jonathan is 'portrayed by the biblical narrator in one of two functions: as mediator between Saul and David and as making successive covenants with David'.[13]

9. Thus, P. Kyle McCarter believes that 'David's legitimation is worked out against a theological background in which David is envisioned as Yahweh's chosen king and Saul as the king abandoned by Yahweh' (McCarter, *I Samuel*, p. 28).

10. Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 220. See also J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament: from its Origins to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon* (London: SCM Press, 3rd edn, 1989), p. 211.

11. Sakenfeld, *Faithfulness in Action*, p. 9.

12. Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, p. 6.

13. Shimon Bakon, 'Jonathan', *JBQ* 23 (1995), pp. 143-50 (145).

Most of these interpreters believe that it is futile to look at the emotional aspect of Jonathan's relationship with David because Jonathan represents the extreme case of character being emptied into plot.[14] According to the political-theological interpreter, Jonathan's closeness with David is inseparable from his primary role as a facilitator of David's rise, and therefore his commitment to David symbolizes his political support for Yahweh's choice of king more than it represents psychical depth:[15]

> The literary context in which the descriptions of the relationship of David and Jonathan are embedded is the story of David's ascent to power. Within this narrative complex, the relationship of David and Jonathan forms one among several other elements that are of importance for David's ascension to the throne. Both the 'love' of Jonathan for David and the 'covenant' between the two are but one element in a wider network of similar factors all integrated within an all-encompassing teleology. The story is told from its telos, David's ascension to the throne; all emotions of attachment and actions of support experienced by David and all the covenants made with him serve the accomplishment of this end. The description of the relationship between David and Jonathan must not be detached from this general movement of the plot; rather, it has to be given its specific place within the narrative line focused on the political aim of the whole story.[16]

In effect, Jonathan is viewed as the biblical narrator's pawn. Accordingly, the heir-apparent's unreserved acceptance of Yahweh's will to anoint David as king—Jonathan's love for David is so great that he is willing to give up his heirdom to David, because 'he would rather play second fiddle to David than be first in the land without him'[17]—is a precedent for the people of Israel to accept it.[18] As Hertzberg notes, when Jonathan's task is fulfilled, he 'fades into the background,' like the 'friend of the bridegroom when the hour comes'.[19]

14. Gordon argues that Jonathan is 'an excellent piece of symbolism' in the narrative (Gordon, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 68).

15. Jonathan 'knows and recognizes that David's rise is the will of God and that his father's successor stands before him' (J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel: A Full Interpretation Based on Stylistic and Structural Analyses*. II. *The Crossing Fates [I Sam. 13–31 and II Sam. 1]* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986], p. 312).

16. Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 161.

17. M.A. Beek, *A Journey through the Old Testament* (trans. Arnold J. Pomerans; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1959), p. 111.

18. Edelman, *King Saul in the Historiography of Israel*, pp. 136-37.

19. Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 193. Gunn argues along similar lines, asserting that Jonathan's 'conscious espousal of David's cause' in 1 Sam. 23.18 means that 'Jonathan ceases to have any distinct function in the story and disappears from sight, to reappear only in death alongside not his friend but his father' (Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, p. 89).

The Homoerotic Reading: Friendship as Sexual

The homoerotic interpretation is sometimes referred to as the 'gay reading' because its advocates often claim that the biblical narrative depicts David and Jonathan as having a 'gay relationship' with each other. Horner asserts that despite the obvious textual evidence in support of an erotic interpretation, the sexual reading lacks popularity because of the prejudice of biblical scholars who 'hardly do more than allude to this friendship, let alone risk a homosexual interpretation'.[20] Wilson also suggests that, despite the relationship between the two men being depicted clearly as sexual in the biblical narrative, there is reticence to accept it because, 'David, the greatest king of Israel, the forerunner of the Messiah, could not have been *queer*!'[21] Similarly, Fewell and Gunn note that 'though the suggestion has long been voiced, few commentators afford serious consideration to reading a homosexual dimension in the story of David and Jonathan' because 'most have been writing out of a strongly homophobic tradition.'[22] Despite the patronizing view of Coggins and Houlden that the sexual interpretation 'has been taken up, with doubtful scholarship, by 'gay rights' campaigners',[23] hostility towards advocates of a homoerotic reading by contemporary academics is generally sporadic. Indeed, Jennings, a professor of theology at a progressive school in Chicago (the Chicago Theological Seminary), challenges Fewell and Gunn's assertion, insisting that the publication of many books on the topic of Bible and homosexuality, including his own, is proof positive that biblical interpretation and homophobia are no longer synonymous.[24]

20. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 35.

21. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 151. While perhaps not quite as forceful in his argument as Wilson, Zehnder confirms such suspicions when he asserts, 'In many layers of the HB [Hebrew Bible], David is understood as an ideal type of ruler and the focal point of a messianic expectation that concerns a near or distant future; in the NT [New Testament], David is understood not only as one of the forefathers of Jesus, but also as an exemplary man of God and as a proto-type of the Messiah. Such a high esteem of David would be hard to understand against the background of a narrative tradition that hinted at a homosexual or homoerotic relation with Jonathan' (Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 169).

22. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 148.

23. R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden, 'David', in R.J. Coggins and J.L. Houlden (eds.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM Press, 1990), pp. 164-65 (165). Coggins and Houlden have nothing on Robert Brain's claim that the homoerotic reading is an attempt by 'furtive pederasts' to satisfy their deviant desires (see Robert Brain, *Friends and Lovers* [St Albans: Paladin, 1977], p. 28).

24. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr, *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005), pp. viii, 199.

It seems that the pendulum has swung the other way, for there is now something of a gay renaissance taking place within academia generally and in religious and theological studies specifically, whereby male homosexuality has begun to be 'openly discussed and redefined in biblical scholarship'.[25] Yet, we should not get carried away; while more open-minded attitudes towards homosexuality abound in today's university departments of theology/divinity and religious studies (as well as some seminaries and divinity schools), the lack of widespread discussion of male homogenital sexual relations outside the parameters of prohibition, sin and deviance has a negative effect on the acceptance of the sexual reading within the mainstream. Regardless of what a homoerotic interpreter might argue, many biblical scholars will reject a priori the homoerotic reading stance because it transgresses preconceived notions of the limits of credible biblical scholarship. For example, Fewell and Gunn are right to note that, while biblical commentators acknowledge that 'love' has more than one meaning, many reject a sexual interpretation of Jonathan's love for David on the grounds 'that reading a homosexual relationship is "reading in" what is not there, stretching the bounds of interpretive moderation, or is simply "perverse"'.[26] Wilson despairs at the 'heterosexist bias' of biblical commentators who refuse to deal with the topic of homogenital love in the story of David and Jonathan.[27] She maintains that, without a doubt, 'if this had been an encounter between a man and a woman scholars would not hesitate to write about this most explicit of romantic and sexual relationships'.[28] Thus, many advocates of the homoerotic reading contend that interpreters demonstrate a lack of openness to the idea because they discount the possibility of prominent biblical characters having homogenital relations rather than consider the sexual reading on its own merit.[29] Zehnder's later work, although appearing more conciliatory, typifies the 'it's always been this way' attitude when he claims that 'the burden of proof is more likely to be on those who opt for an erotic or sexual interpretation'.[30]

Against the likes of Brain, who notes that there is not one 'hint' of any 'physical passion' between David and Jonathan ('apart from a bad tempered

25. Athalya Brenner, 'Introduction', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Samuel and Kings* (FCB, 7; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2nd series, 2000), pp. 13-20 (13-14).

26. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 149.

27. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 118.

28. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 152.

29. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 151. Yet again Zehnder confirms Wilson's suspicions when he asserts that part of the reason for rejecting homoerotic interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan is because they 'go against exegetical consent lasting thousands of years' (Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', p. 154).

30. Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 138.

… but scarcely credited imputation made by Saul'),[31] homoerotic interpreters concede that the biblical text is far from explicit regarding evidence of a sexual liaison between David and Jonathan. However, they stress that the lack of a smoking gun should not mean the matter should be dismissed. Rather than overlook the subject, some advocates of the sexual reading have gone to the other extreme, much to the consternation of Coggins and Houlden and others, encouraging what amounts to a brazen, unapologetic biblical hermeneutic. Thus, Wilson insists that it is 'time for shameless, wild speculation about the Bible and about *human* as well as "*homo*" sexuality'.[32] Arguing from gaps, silences and suggestions, Wilson seeks 'to *expand* on a given text. To give voice to those who do not speak; to imagine, in a textually consistent way, what they would have said':[33]

> Biblical scholars have always found a place for speculation and imagination when reading the Bible. Thousands of books and stories have been written that expand or amplify the Bible. These writers do not claim to be infallible, nor do I … The Jewish tradition of *midrash* is very relevant here. Rabbis and other Jewish writers have always claimed the right to *expand* on a given text. To give voice to those who do not speak; to imagine, in a textually consistent way, what they would have said. Allowing the silences to speak is one of the powerful methods of a feminist hermeneutic of the Bible.[34]

One of the earliest and most brazen sexual interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan in the modern era predates Wilson by nearly one hundred years, although it is neither comprehensive nor necessarily the most convincing argument. Writing in the avant-garde *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, Hirschfield claims that there can be no doubt about the fact that 'David, the warrior of God, the hagiograph and prophet, the biblical hero, was a lover of his own sex', and 'the same is true of Jonathan, his friend'.[35] Hirschfield does not explain or justify his interpretation of the two men's relationship, but is confident enough to speculate that the biblical narrative points 'in all clarity to their homosexual vein'.[36]

Another early homoerotic interpretation is given by Patai, a self-designated 'sexual–biblical historian', who argues that 'the love story between Jonathan, the son of King Saul, and David the beautiful hero, must have been duplicated many times in royal courts in all parts of the Middle East

31. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, pp. 65, 75.
32. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 112. Her italics.
33. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 113.
34. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 113.
35. Hirschfeld, 'David und der heilige Augustin', p. 288.
36. Hirschfeld, 'David und der heilige Augustin', p. 288.

in all periods'.[37] (Patai, however, is somewhat more apologetic for his homoerotic interpretation than Wilson or Hirschfield.[38]) Typical of so many homoerotic interpreters, Patai claims to place David and Jonathan firmly in their historical context; acknowledging the Levitical prohibitions against homogenital acts, he argues that a 'distinction must be made between the legal position and folk mores', the latter being much more relaxed than the former.[39] Despite the biblical injunctions against male–male coitus, Patai asserts that although it 'may not have been as general as it was in ancient Greece … in actual practice male homosexuality was *rampant* in Biblical times,' and was not regarded 'with any measure of disapproval'.[40] Rather than shy away from the issue, Patai celebrates the sexual nature of the friendship between David and Jonathan, arguing that the biblical account of the relationship should be 'interpreted as a Hebrew counterpart of the Greek *paiderastia* (pederasty)':

> The love between the two young men is described in exactly the same terms and phrases which are used in connection with the love of man and woman … The high praise accorded in the Davidic lament to love between two men as against heterosexual love, reminds us, of course, of the spirit that pervades Plato's *Symposium*.[41]

Believing that a sexual reading besmirches the biblical text, Bakon laments that it is 'unfortunate that some contemporary views throw suspicion and aspersion upon Jonathan and his friendship with David'.[42] Although he does not explain exactly what he finds regrettable, or even why, it would not be unreasonable to infer that the antithesis of his non-preference for a nonsexual interpretation is a corrupt and defiling (homo) eroticism. Indeed, Wilson is cognizant of arguments that a sexual aspect to the alliance 'would make it bad, dirty, and not about friendship. As if homosexual lovers are not friends.'[43] C.S. Lewis makes such a clear distinction, insisting that those who make a comparison between erotic and

37. Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, p. 170.

38. In the preface to his book Patai is keen to stress that he hopes that it 'does not contain anything that could be offensive to the religious-minded reader' (Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, p. 5).

39. Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, p. 170. Similarly, Henry James argues that, especially when looking at the topic of homosexuality, one has to be aware of 'a traditional difference between that which people know and that which they agree to admit that they know, that which they see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be part of life and that which they allow to enter literature' (Henry James, *Partial Portraits* [repr., New York: Haskell House, 1968], p. 405).

40. Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, p. 171. My italics.

41. Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, pp. 171-72.

42. Bakon, 'Jonathan', p. 143 n. 1.

43. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 152.

platonic love 'betray the fact that they have never had a friend'.[44] For Lewis, the highest form of love—nonsexual friendship—is 'the sort of love one can imagine between angels',[45] 'a purely mental, intellectual phenomenon, untainted by the body'.[46]

Brain is much more forthcoming than Bakon in his criticism of homoerotic interpretations of the love between David and Jonathan. He accepts that the two men have the capacity to love passionately but asserts that the object of David's love was Michal, not Jonathan: 'David was passionately in love with Jonathan's sister Michal and when he was sent into exile without her he was distraught at the thought of her being in the arms of another'.[47] For Brain, an erotic interpretation cheapens the couple's friendship, saying more about the interpreter than it does the biblical text; thus, he asserts that 'the relationship has been invested with a specially sentimental aura and a false homosexuality has been attributed to it by furtive pederasts who have taken the two biblical friends to their own lonely hearts'.[48] Brain pays particular attention to D.H. Lawrence's eroticized treatment of male–male friendships in *David: A Play*,[49] whereby Lawrence 'takes mateship, spiritualizes it, glorifies it, and'—incorrectly—'sexualizes it'.[50] Following in C.S. Lewis's footsteps, Brain insists emphatically that comradeship should not be confused with sex: 'the prime bond of friendship is a moral, even spiritual one and whatever the element of subconscious sexuality in

44. C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 93, 96. It is not just traditionalist-minded people who distinguish between friendship and sex; Halperin insists that 'sexual love' is not part of 'friendship', although on different grounds—friendship is egalitarian while sexual love is about penetration, hierarchy, status (David M. Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', *GLQ* 6 [2000], pp. 87-123).

45. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 72.

46. Steven Grimwood, 'Beyond the Four Loves', *TheolSex* 9 (2002), pp. 87-109 (88).

47. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 65. Brain's interpretation is in stark contrast to Berlin's view that David wants Michal—his property—returned to him for reasons of pride and honour; see Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (BLS, 9; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), p. 24.

48. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, pp. 28, 30. Likewise, Gagnon—associate professor of New Testament at Princeton Theological Seminary and founder of a particularly vicious, unrelenting and dehumanizing Web site with an ostensible mission to prove the evils of homosexuality (www.robgagnon.net)—asserts that the homoerotic interpretation is the result of 'specious connections made by people desperate to find the slightest shred of support for homosexual practice in the Bible' (R.A.J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001], p. 154).

49. D.H. Lawrence, *David: A Play* (London: Martin Secker, 1926).

50. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 71.

the relations between David and Jonathan … their love is not expressed physically'.[51] Disparaging slights aside, the comments of Bakon, Lewis and Brain demonstrate two of the main criticisms of the homoerotic interpretation: there is no explicit reference to any sexual act between David and Jonathan in the biblical narrative, and those who conflate the asexuality of intimate male–male friendship with the physicality of sexual expression are mistaken.

Horner's 1978 book *Jonathan Loved David*, one of the first comprehensive discussions of a sexual relationship between Jonathan and David, maintains that there is little doubt, 'except on the part of those who absolutely refuse to believe it, that there existed a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan'.[52] Horner accepts the possibility of two men being close friends without their being lovers, but believes that historical and textual evidence gives us 'every reason to believe that a homosexual relationship existed'[53] between the two biblical heroes. He argues that, typical of their historical context, Jonathan loves David because the two men are of aristocratic status—'a usual requirement for participation in this form of love'—and because, after all, 'everyone loves a hero'.[54] Horner's historical-cultural reading (that is, approaching the text with the same cultural presumptions as the people who lived in those times[55]) offers a number of proofs to substantiate a sexual relationship between David and Jonathan, including: they lived under the shadow of Philistine culture, which celebrated homoeroticism;[56] they found themselves 'in a social context that was thoroughly military in the Eastern sense';[57] they openly made a lifetime pact together;[58] they secretly met and shed an abundance of tears;[59] and David's public euology that his love for Jonathan surpassed his love for women.[60] Given the influence of the sexual mores of Israel's neighbouring countries on biblical texts such as Genesis, Horner wonders whether 'the sexual mores of the Bible' could 'not have been influenced—tremendously

51. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 222.
52. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 20.
53. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 27-28.
54. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 26.
55. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 35-36.
56. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 24, 27-28.
57. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 28. Whereas many interpreters would acknowledge the increased incidence of homogenital sexual relations between men when access to women is limited, Horner goes one step further, arguing that some ancient Near Eastern armies celebrated male homogenital relations as a positive choice for the outlet of physical needs rather than a last resort.
58. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 28.
59. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 28.
60. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 28, 34.

influenced—by the sexual mores of the peoples and nations in whose midst that same Bible was produced.'[61]

Although Wilson's interpretation of the two men's relationship is guided by an unapologetic predisposed motive, she also claims historical credibility for her sexual reading of the two men's relationship, insisting that it is '*consistent with what historians and anthropologists know about sexuality in ancient times*'.[62] David's being married does not prevent Wilson from arguing that he would feel no shame in sharing sexual experiences with Jonathan, since, she claims, such behaviour was common practice in the ancient Near East.[63] Fewell and Gunn also believe that sexual involvement with both sexes was not exceptional in ancient Israel, insisting that contemporary notions of gay lifestyle and gender-exclusive sexual attraction distort the nature of ancient male homogenital practices. If men in ancient times engaged in homogenital sexual acts they would neither fit modern sexual categories (that is, perceive themselves as having a separate and distinct sexual identity on the basis of sexual activities) nor necessarily avoid sexual acts with women. On the contrary, Fewell and Gunn insist that the sexual liaison between Jonathan and David (who also had sexual relations with women) reflects a regular practice 'for men whose primary sexual orientation is homosexual' in ancient patriarchal societies.[64] Indeed, even Brain, one of the staunchest antagonists of the homoerotic interpretation, reluctantly concedes that 'in ancient Israel close relations between warriors and youths' were 'expressed in florid terms', but adds that even those that 'were given a degree of physical expression' did not interfere with 'the *normal uxoriousness* of the two men'.[65]

Schroer and Staubli's argument, in a translation of their earlier German article,[66] 'is an exploration of HB [Hebrew Bible] attitudes to male homosexuality as applied to narratives about the three male figures grouped together in the Samuel texts'.[67] Confidently, they assert that 'David and

61. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 21.

62. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 113. Her italics.

63. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 149.

64. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 150.

65. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 65. My italics. Similarly, Zehnder acknowledges that 'It may also be the case that a male person engaging sporadically in same-sex actions as the active partner in an ancient society would not define himself or be defined by other members of that same culture as a "homosexual" in the sense of the word as it is used today, even if such a word had existed at the that time' (Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 131).

66. Originally published as Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, 'Saul, David, und Jonathan–eine Dreiecksgeschichte? Ein Beitrag zum Thema "Homosexualität im Ersten Testament"', *BK* 51 (1996), pp. 15-22.

67. Brenner, 'Introduction', p. 13.

Jonathan shared a homoerotic and, more than likely, a homosexual relationship', based on the observation that 'the books of Samuel recount the love of the two men with utter frankness'.[68] Like Horner they locate the erotic friendship between the two men in the early period of the Israelite monarchy—at the time of the Aegean Philistines, which 'cultivated relationships among men within the context of Mediterranean homoeroticism'—rather than in the sixth-century environment of Leviticus's prohibitions against coercive sex.[69] Schroer and Staubli assert that during this early period Israelite culture was influenced by a Philistine culture that had dominated the coastal regions of Palestine since the twelfth century and celebrated many different kinds of homogenital relationships between males, including erotic friendships between young men and comrades-in-arms.[70]

Schroer and Staubli's sexual interpretation of this biblical love story draws on the literary motifs of ancient texts such as Homer's *Iliad* and the Mesopotamian tale of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, the *Gilgamesh Epic*.[71] With caution, they argue that the writers of the biblical narrative were probably more aware of the *Gilgamesh Epic*, 'a fragment of which was found in the rubble of Megiddo, than with the epics of Greece which came into their "Homeric" form only in the course of the eighth century BCE'.[72] They note the explicit references in the *Gilgamesh Epic* to sex between the two male heroes, particularly Gilgamesh's dream of making love to Enkidu[73] and their kissing and embracing of each other.[74] Schroer and Staubli also observe the striking similarity between the *Gilgamesh Epic* and the biblical narrative in Gilgamesh's lament at Enkidu's death:

> [My friend, whom I loved so dearly] who went with me through every hardship, Enkidu, whom I loved so dearly and who went with me through every hardship, has succumbed to the fate of humankind.[75]

68. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', p. 22.

69. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', pp. 31, 35.

70. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', pp. 33-34. Peleg believes that Schroer and Staubli's historical claims are fanciful and in stark contrast with the 'distinct differentiation which the Bible consistently seeks to make between the Israelites and the unclean pagan nations of the ancient Near East' (Yaron Peleg, 'Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan and the Biblical Politics of Gender', *JSOT* 30 [2005], pp. 171-89 [175]).

71. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', pp. 34, 36.

72. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', p. 35.

73. A.K. Grayson, 'Akkadian Myths and Epics', in James B. Pritchard (ed.), *ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd edn, 1969), pp. 60-119 (76).

74. Grayson, 'Akkadian Myths and Epics', pp. 79, 81, 82, 85, 86, 98, 99.

75. Their own translation; see Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', p. 35.

Although most homoerotic interpreters believe that they have situated the erotic relationship between David and Jonathan in a historical milieu that accepts homogenital relations between men of the warrior and/or aristocratic classes,[76] the reality is that the main impetus for the sexual reading is to a great extent situated in the contemporary world, as demonstrated by Helminiak's comment that 'modern Westerners' sense that 'something more than simple friendship' is present in the biblical story of David and Jonathan,[77] and Jobling's belief that today's emphasis on human rights and liberation makes 'a consummated gay relationship' between David and Jonathan 'of such importance in our current cultural scene'.[78] Not surprisingly, a number of homoerotic interpreters are indeed gay, lesbian, or bisexual people of faith (though not necessarily activists) who are seeking affirmation of their lifestyles in their scriptural traditions, contrary to so-called traditional Judeao-Christian sexual morality.[79] As Goss notes, 'men attracted to the same sex' have looked to the biblical account of David and Jonathan as 'a means for self-validation of their homoerotic feelings', and in doing so have induced within themselves 'a spirit of resistance to coercive religious norms that solely legitimized opposite-sex relationships'.[80] This is certainly the motive behind lesbian Christian Wilson's 'proactive reading of the Bible',[81] which seeks to *out* from ancient closets positive role models of passionate, committed, and long-lasting sexual relationships

76. One clear exception is Comstock, who argues that ancient Near Eastern cultures had issues with men having sexual relations with one another, and so the biblical narrator secretly writes about the couple's relationship in a covert, gay-friendly code ('Love, Power and Competition', pp. 9-29).

77. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 104. Helminiak, a Roman Catholic priest at the time of writing the book, never goes as far as to side categorically with the homoerotic stance, but his argument and tone imply his support is hindered only by his ecclesiastical connections.

78. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 130.

79. Schroer and Staubli sum up this sentiment with their assertion, 'For many religious homosexual persons who search the Scriptures for their roots, it is natural to see in David and Jonathan their role models, since to this day their story awakens our sympathy. But the exegetes' conclusions create obstacles to gays seeing these two men as a genuinely homosexual couple' (Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', p. 26). Secular homoerotic interpreters read the relationship between David and Jonathan not from a religious stance but from a counter-cultural stance that challenges society's heterosexist values that stem from Judeao-Christian sexual–moral discourses.

80. Robert Goss, 'Jonathan and David', in Timothy Murphy (ed.), *Reader's Guide to Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), pp. 318-19 (319). Likewise, Helminiak's discussion of the relationship between David and Jonathan appears under the sub-chapter heading 'Biblical Endorsements of Homosexual Relationships?' (*What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality*, p. 103).

81. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 112.

between members of the same sex in order to affirm positively the existence of queer characters in the Bible.[82] Wilson claims that such affirmations shift the Bible from its anti-gay heritage as a 'text of terror' to a 'healing tool' for marginalized gay, lesbian, and bisexual Christians.[83] Similarly, Comstock's unique homoerotic interpretation enables contemporary gay Christians—who might have experienced rejection and/or isolation from their family, friends and churches as a result of their sexual orientation—to draw strength from knowing that God fully supports Jonathan's unconventional relationship with David, in spite of Saul's scornful disapproval.[84]

The Homosocial Reading: Ambiguous Friendship

While many political-theological interpreters refute the homoerotic reading of the David and Jonathan narrative on the grounds that the biblical text does not support such an interpretation, the advocates of the sexual interpretation argue that the single-issue focus of the political-theological reading is founded on a misguided, heterosexist hermeneutic that ignores a historical milieu that celebrates male homogenital relations. In short, proponents of each of these two stances question the validity of the other on the grounds that they make erroneous presuppositions. Advocates of the homosocial reading, however, accept, to varying degrees, the influence of politics and religion in the bond between David and Jonathan, as indeed do some homoerotic interpreters. Unlike each of the other two reading styles, which can be batched into groups that tend to follow a similar line of argument, the homosocial reading ought best be understood as an umbrella term to refer to a reading style that utilizes advances in the interdisciplinary fields of literary and cultural criticism to draw attention to the complex processes of gender that shape male–male relations, including intimacy, homogenital sexual behaviour, nonsexual friendship and male bonding. The homosocial interpreters offer a sophisticated reading of the friendship between David and Jonathan that incorporates historical evidence of male–male relations in the ancient world and contrasts it with contemporary notions of masculinity and homosexuality. Accordingly, the politics of gender, kinship and sex all contribute in their own way to produce a complex, multilayered relationship

82. Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 148.

83. Wilson re-appropriates Phyllis Trible's term 'text of terror' to refer to the six oft-cited biblical passages by the 'religious wrong', more commonly known as the religious right (Genesis 19; Lev. 18.22; 20.13; Rom. 1.26-27; 1 Cor. 6.9; 1 Tim. 1.10). For Wilson, these biblical passages have 'formed a powerful wedge, keeping lesbians and gay men from any hope of being able to celebrate and experience the story and poetry of the Bible' (Wilson, *Our Tribe*, pp. 23, 65-66).

84. Comstock, 'Love, Power and Competition', pp. 23-24.

between the two men that cannot simply be compartmentalized within a false dichotomy of the political or the erotic, as though the two are distinct and separate spheres of life.

Weems acknowledges the legitimacy of the claim that it is possible that David and Jonathan have sexual relations with each other ('many have interpreted their intimacy as homosexual love'), maintaining that although it 'is one possible, legitimate reading … it's not the only plausible understanding of their love'.[85] Thus, she rejects a sexual interpretation of the friendship between David and Jonathan on the grounds that 'it is certainly possible for two men to love each other deeply and intimately as friends without making love and becoming lovers … Theirs was a different friendship, one which defied the odds'.[86] Similarly, Harrelson believes that David and Jonathan's friendship 'is described as though it were an unnatural relationship',[87] but, despite identifying a depth of affinity between the two friends, he does not support an ('unnatural') sexual reading. Like Weems, he turns the sexual interpretation on its head by celebrating David's ability to experience a profound, platonic friendship.[88]

Berlin analyses the underlying gender themes of the relationships between David and Michal and David and Jonathan in 1 Samuel 18–20, concluding that in both siblings' relationships with David the biblical narrative inverts their gender-roles so as to depict Michal as masculine and Jonathan as feminine.[89] Consequently, Michal is described as the aggressive and physical sibling in her behaviour towards David,[90] and, unlike many other biblical women, she is never described as beautiful.[91] Berlin believes that Jonathan, unlike Michal, saves David through feminine, nonphysical words, and, unlike his sister, has his love reciprocated.[92] A good point for comparison here is Jobling's (homoerotic) interpretation of Jonathan as 'made to serve David's ends in just the same way that women do, only more so.'[93] Jobling

85. Renita J. Weems, 'Missing Jonathan: In a World of Power, Violence, and Ambition, a Friendship That Lasts', *The Other Side* 33 (1997), pp. 50-55 (52).

86. Weems, 'Missing Jonathan', p. 52.

87. Harrelson asserts that such a claim is given further credence by the fact that 'unnatural relations between men were not uncommon in the ancient world' (W. Harrelson, *Interpreting the Old Testament* [New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964], p. 168).

88. 'David's capacity for love of this sort is only another mark of his greatness' (Harrelson, *Interpreting the Old Testament*, p. 169).

89. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 24.

90. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 24-25.

91. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 25. Also untypical is the fact that Michal does not fulfil her (feminine) role of bearing children (2 Sam. 6.23).

92. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 25.

93. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 9.

agrees with Berlin that the biblical narrator uses the rubric of gender to situate Jonathan firmly in a woman's role as David's lover, helper and the forecaster of his forthcoming kingship, but he assumes that this implies a sexual relationship between the two men:

> Now it seems that the gender dynamic may have been exploited to provide the needed plausibility. If Jonathan can be cast in the image of the women who love and marry David, who serve David and assist his rise to power without expecting anything in return other than being married to him, this will solve the problem of motivation. To be the heir, and thus in a position to abdicate, he must be male. To have the motivation to do so he must (within the text's conceptual resources) be like the women who empty themselves for David. The answer: a gay relationship in which Jonathan takes a female role.[94]

Berlin does not believe that the friendship between David and Jonathan is sexual; rather, she argues that the siblings' actions reflect something about their essence, which 'is not a question of sexual perversion [*sic*]' as much as confirmation that David 'seems to have related to Michal as to a man and to Jonathan as to a woman'.[95] Unfortunately, Berlin's brief but stimulating insights into the two men's relationship are not developed further (and her work then continues with analyses of biblical women characters).

Peleg's recent reading of the David and Jonathan narrative elaborates on Berlin's study with help from the field of queer theory.[96] Peleg argues that the biblical text purposely depicts David and Jonathan as sexual partners, only later to destabilize the illusion and cast Jonathan as the feminized man of the relationship. Peleg rejects the homoerotic interpretation of the narrative as anachronistic and unreasonable because the biblical narrative 'presents the relations between Jonathan and David not as the relations between two male lovers, but as the attraction and love between a "man" and a "woman"'.[97] Considering the clear biblical prohibition against homogenital sexual relations, Peleg, like Zehnder, argues that there is no reason to believe that the Bible would describe a sexual relationship between the two men in a positive light.[98] Rather, by having Jonathan take the role of David's bride, Peleg believes that the biblical narrator justifies the end of Saul's dynasty—an utterly passive and effeminate Jonathan never could stake a legitimate political claim to kingship in Israel.[99] Peleg uses some of the alleged proofs

94. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, p. 164.
95. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, p. 25.
96. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', pp. 171-89.
97. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', p. 172.
98. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', pp. 172-74, 175.
99. Ackerman argues a similar point, insisting that the passive Jonathan is portrayed as wife-like, and this symbolic feminization is used by the narrator to justify—by means

of the homoerotic interpretation to turn the argument on its head and give weight to the homosocial interpretation. One of his strongest arguments is his analysis of the biblical writer's use of *bĕrît* to destabilize the gender dynamics of the narrative and represent the three covenants made as metaphors for a marriage agreement: the good-looking shepherd boy entices the besotted prince to make a covenant in 1 Sam. 18.3-4 ('because he loved him as his own soul'); David takes the initiative to make a covenant in 20.8; and the final covenant of 23.18 is mutual 'before the LORD'.[100] Furthermore, Peleg believes that, after symbolically relinquishing the throne to David in 1 Sam. 18.4, Jonathan renounces his manliness that was once demonstrated on the battlefield for a feminine role as David's protector in the palace while David is out in the (virile) realm of the wilderness trying to flea Saul's wrath.[101] Fully aware of the subtle blending of gender and theopolitics in the biblical narrative, Peleg argues that Saul's verbal assault of Jonathan for betraying his faithfulness to his family in support of his relationship with David (1 Sam. 20.30), whereby Saul seems to call him a 'mama's boy', appears to question his son's manliness.[102] Jonathan's masculinity is further undermined by the actions of Jonathan's sister, Michal, who takes the manly role of actively preventing David from being killed. In this reversal of roles, 'Michal is a substitute for Jonathan … she becomes David's legal spouse, consummating the relationship in a way her brother could not'.[103] Peleg concludes that, while it is understandable that many might want to read the subtle gender dynamics of the relationship between David and Jonathan as sexual, the narrative plays with the feminized gender of Jonathan so as to promote the superiority of the virile David in the theological and political tale of a family's survival and struggle for kingship.

Writing before Peleg, Exum criticizes Berlin's reading of Michal and Jonathan as gender inverts:[104] 'to ascribe to Jonathan feminine characteristics and to Michal masculine ones, as Berlin does, is to look in the wrong direction for the male/female dynamics of the story, as well as to risk reinforcing gender stereotypes'.[105] For Exum, gender and sexual politics do indeed play a part in the siblings' relationships with David, but the root of these

of an 'erotic apologetic'—David's right to the throne of Judah and Israel against claims by the Saulide dynasty (Susan Ackerman, *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* [GTR; New York: Columbia University Press, 2005], pp. 177, 218-22, 224).

100. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', pp. 178-80.

101. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', pp. 180-82, 187.

102. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', p. 184.

103. Peleg, 'Love at First Sight?', p. 187.

104. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 73, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 52.

105. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 52.

ideologies is in male bonding, not gender inversion.[106] Normally, one would expect David to be hostile to Saul's heir (Jonathan) and emotional with his own wife (Michal), but in the David and Jonathan narrative the exact opposite occurs: David and Jonathan become emotionally involved with each other, and David and Michal become emotionally detached. Exum believes that the intimacy of Jonathan and David enables the 'uncomplicated transfer' of Saul's throne,[107] while the continued coldness between David and Michal continues to stoke the fire of male rivalry between the Davidic and Saulide houses.[108] It is not that Jonathan replaces Michal as David's erotic love-object, as Jobling interprets Berlin's thesis, but that Jonathan becomes a close companion of David because it is narratologically necessary for David to receive support for the transfer of kingship from Saul's household. Such transfer is possible only because Jonathan is Saul's son and of a similar masculine stature to David (that is, the two men share similar admirable, virile qualities: both are successful warriors, for which they both become popular heroes).[109] Exum also argues that the process of male bonding between the two men has adverse effects for Jonathan, who, in doing the right thing, loses his identity, which 'becomes submerged into David's'.[110]

For Exum, like Peleg, Jonathan's closeness and the concomitant self-emptying of his identity into David is not an issue of homo- or bisexuality as much as it reflects the politics inherent in the biblical narrative: From start to finish Jonathan's and Michal's dealings with David have a gender-specific purpose. That is, Jonathan's friendship enables the 'uncomplicated transfer' of Saul's throne,[111] while Michal acts as a victimized female pawn in the male rivalry between David and Saul.[112] It seems that the fates of each of Saul's siblings is ultimately determined by the narrator's need for David to succeed Saul as king, but, more than this, that the gender of each sibling affects the ways in which they meet their ends. On the one hand, Jonathan is rewarded for his consistent loyalty to his friend by dying a magnanimous death by the sword in battle, saving him from the ignominy of suffering 'the progressive debasement of his father's house.'[113] On the other hand,

106. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 72-73.
107. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 52.
108. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 73, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 54.
109. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 75, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 52.
110. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 12.
111. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 52.
112. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 73, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 54.
113. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 92, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 57.

Michal's inconsistent attitude to David, initially loving and respecting him but then becoming jealous and resenting him,[114] results in her enduring the pain and humiliation of watching her father's dynasty crumble before her eyes.[115] To add insult to Michal's injury, David overtly laments the death of her brother (and father), which serves to reinforce his public reprimand of her: 'she has disgraced David by criticizing him in public and she cannot be allowed to get away with it'.[116]

Halperin accepts that the intimacy between the shepherd boy David and Prince Jonathan is anomalous in nature, particularly given that such close relationships are usually only held between kin and sexual partners. He does not, however, believe that the biblical narrative should be read as signifying a sexual relationship between the two men; like Exum, Halperin argues that the bond is a part of a comrade-relationship common to tales of 'heroes and their pals' in the ancient world. The terminology of the intimate friendship between the heroes David and Jonathan, as with that of Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad* and Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, 'is parasitic in its conceptualisation on kinship relations and on sexual relations'.[117] That is, 'the creators of' all three 'legends appeal to conjugal relations and to kinship relations in order to define, to make familiar, and to situate (both socially and emotionally) the central friendship they wish to explore' by appealing to 'better established and codified sorts of human relations.'[118] Rather than suggest sexual relations between the heroes, Halperin argues that the narrators of these epics invoke 'kinship and conjugality … only to displace them, to reduce them to mere *images* of friendship'.[119] For Halperin, the biblical storyteller appeals to conjugal relations between the two men, but purposely avoids direct discussion of a sexual relationship because, if one does occur, it would destroy the ambiguous gender dynamics inherent in the text. Despite the feminization of the hero worshipper Jonathan before David, for the narrator to write openly of the hero worshipper acting as a woman sexually would make Jonathan unfit to share his trusted companion's world—a woman's role in the male-dominated ancient Near East is for the bearing of sons, not the sharing of a close, egalitarian friendship.

114. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, pp. 71, 72, 81, and Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 51.

115. 'For her there is no graceful exit in honorable death by the sword, death that exalts male courage. A woman's tragic fortune is to survive, to remain on the scene, watching as others benefit from her family's losses' (Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative*, p. 92). See also Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 57.

116. Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 59.

117. David M. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love* (NAW; London: Routledge, 1990), p. 84.

118. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 85.

119. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 85.

Nissinen's analysis of the relationship between David and Jonathan is unique for homosocial interpreters. Balancing between a sexual and a non-sexual interpretation,[120] Nissinen claims that the biblical writer represents the friendship between the two heroes as an affectionate 'love-relationship',[121] which is why 'modern readers probably see homoeroticism in the story of David and Jonathan more easily than did the ancients'.[122] Unlike Halperin, Nissinen accepts that the bond between the two men could be interpreted rightly as homoerotic, referring to homogenital acts without imposing a sexual orientation onto either man, but he prefers to read their relationship as homosocial because 'nothing indicates that they slept together' and 'neither of the men are described as having problems in their heterosexual sex life'.[123] Instead, Nissinen argues that the love between David and Jonathan is 'an example of ancient homosociablilty', similar to the love between Achilles and Patroclus in Homer's *Iliad* and Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, whereby 'intimate feelings' are expressed, but 'erotic expressions of love are left in the background … only to be imagined'.[124] Thus, the crux for Nissinen is that if there is any sexual activity between David and Jonathan it plays a much smaller part in defining the relationship than it does for the homoerotic interpreters.[125]

120. In *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World* Nissinen examines homogenital relations in the wider biblical world, whereas in 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan' he specifically focuses only on the relationship between David and Jonathan. One of the biggest problems for summarizing Nissinen's perspective is that he argues that the relationship between David and Jonathan is both homoerotic and homosocial, and, to complicate matters somewhat, suggests that the definitional difference between the two terms remains unspecified.

121. Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', pp. 254-55.

122. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 56. He acknowledges that the positive biblical depiction of this 'affectionate friendship' has led some other scholars to interpret it in a homosexual light, for example, Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 26-39; Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, p. 93; and S. Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 169. See also Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', p. 250 n. 2.

123. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 55-56. Such an assumption conflicts with the arguments made by homoerotic interpreters—and even one of the biggest opponents of the homoerotic interpretation (Brain)—who all acknowledge the possibility of homogenital relationships occurring between men who also have otherwise "healthy" sexual relations with women; see Wilson, *Our Tribe*, p. 149; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 150; and Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 65.

124. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 56.

125. Nissinen, 'Die Liebe von David und Jonatan', p. 261.

3

Historicizing Manly Love

We have seen in the last two chapters that interpreters for and against the sexual reading of the David and Jonathan narrative make historical claims about homogenital sex in the ancient world. At one extreme is the reader who believes that 'these kinds of things' would never happen in biblical times, while at the other is the wishful reader who maintains that a homogenital sexual relationship between David and Jonathan reflects a historical culture that tolerates or celebrates sexual relations between men. In between these extremes is the homosocial reader who acknowledges that, while it is possible for the relationship between David and Jonathan to be sexual, the silence of the text that leads readers to perceive ambiguity in the narrative could easily be caused by the reader and not necessarily part of the literary text. Thus, in order to evaluate the strengths of the historical claims made, we need to put some 'meat on the bones' by placing the David and Jonathan narrative in its historical contexts—not just in terms of attitudes towards homogenital sexual relations in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures but also within the wider literary context of the Bible and the narrative's relation to the construction of the sexual in the modern world. Unless we understand the influence our own cultural views of sex have on the way we perceive the past, particularly contemporary notions of psychosexual object choice and sexual orientation, we will never be able to make accurate historical claims about sex in the ancient world.[1]

Throughout history men have had sexual relations with members of the same and the opposite sex. Sometimes the sexual liaison was consensual; at other times it was of a forced nature. Sometimes the sex was an expression of deep-seated emotions; at other times it was a release of pent-up passions.

1. Halperin recommends that historians of sex 'include as an essential part of their proper enterprise the task of demonstrating the historicity, conditions of emergence, modes of construction, and ideological contingencies of the very categories of analysis that undergird their own practice' (David M. Halperin, 'Is There a History of Sexuality?', in Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin [eds.], *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* [London: Routledge, 1993], pp. 416-31 [426]).

Wherever and whenever homogenital activity has occurred it has been as diverse in its manifestations and ascribed meanings as the cultural settings in which it occurred.[2] Despite the varied practices of the sexual at different times through history, 'the idea that men and women have a "natural sexual orientation" is one that is deeply inscribed in modern Western thought'.[3] I believe that historical evidence suggests that such an assumption is misguided; whether Assyrian, Israelite, Greek, Christian or other, each culture has had its own institutions to regulate sexual expression within wider structures so that a physical manifestation of a person's sexual desire reflects the norms of the society in which the sexual behaviour occurs.[4]

Until the late 1970s psychoanalysts were the main authority on sexual history, but their steadfast negative attitude to homosexuality ensured that homogenital relations remained a 'virgin field' of historical studies.[5] Professional historians were reluctant to analyse risqué topics around sexuality, particularly homosexuality, because of personal prejudices or insecurities and a fear of being exiled from their academic communities by having one's work rejected for publication or being refused tenure.[6] Thus, Bullough reminisces about how in 1966 he was introduced at a meeting of the American Historical Association as a 'specialist in whores, pimps, and queers, who occasionally deigned to do real research'.[7] Thankfully, a combination of the widespread popularity of sexual publications such as Kinsey's *SBHM*[8] and *SBHF*[9]in the 1950s, the trickle-down effect of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, and the political movements of feminism and gay rights in the 1970s have all contributed to mass challenges to hitherto accepted notions of sexual authority.

2. Halperin argues that there has never been a singular or unitary history of (homo) sexuality; sexual behaviours and practices have always been historically and culturally specific to particular traditions of discourse; see Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', pp. 87-123.

3. Alan Petersen, *Unmasking the Masculine: 'Men' and 'Identity' in a Sceptical Age* (London: SAGE, 1998), p. 96.

4. 'Sexual relations are so fundamental to human experience that in every society, at any given point in history, systems of rules governing sexual conduct have been developed' (Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order: Homosexuality in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998], p. 17).

5. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality* (Key Ideas; New York: Routledge, 1986), p. 19.

6. Vern L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1976); Boswell, *CSTH*; and Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London: Quartet Books, 1977) are a few of the more notable exceptions.

7. Vern Bullough, 'Sex in History: A Redux', in Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (eds.), *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 3-22 (4).

8. Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, *SBHM*.

9. Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard, *SBHF*.

One radical who embraced a progressive approach is the Oxbridge classicist Kenneth Dover, who, given credence by his academic background and heterosexual predilections, in 1978 wrote *Greek Homosexuality*, a publication that inaugurated academic discussion of ancient homogenital relations beyond the prevalent scholarly approaches of by-passing the topic on the grounds of decency or lambasting the ancients for their decadent perversions.[10] Dover prophetically argued that in order to analyse historical forms of sexual behaviours in ancient societies special attention ought to be given to the unique social structures and the meanings ascribed to them by participants in—and observers of—the acts. In the same manner that sociologists analysing, say, the middle classes look at the influence of the wider, socio-political framework of class structure, so Dover advocated for the need to analyse the wider Greek socio-sexual system in order to understand fully the subtle nuances of ancient sexual relations. For Dover, understanding Hellenic homogenital relations required analysis that went beyond description of the physical acts to an appreciation of their role in the wider pedagogical, aesthetic, and socio-political *Weltbild*.

During the early 1980s a plethora of books about homosexuality, bisexuality, pederasty, prostitution, and other so-called sexual deviations were published, but, unfortunately, the potential of Dover's precocious work remained unexplored. While cultural theorists fervently discussed the social orchestration of homogenital relations in history, many scholars of history continued to avoid the topic, allowing adventurous but less competent (self-professed) historians to produce exaggerated or inaccurate historical accounts of sexual practices. These reconstructions were often unsophisticated, superficial 'who-was' histories, reclaiming the hidden voices of contemporary sexual types from unrepresentative sources of the past.[11] In contrast to Dover's argument that sexual behaviour should be understood in relation to wider socio-sexual structures of a given society, these phantasmic histories presumed a universal gay category for all people, across all cultures, for all time.

The growing influence of French social philosopher and historian Michel Foucault in the humanities aided the development of competent historical analyses by shifting attention to the underlying cultural norms of sexual

10. In the preface to his book Dover notes, 'I know of no other topic in classical studies on which a scholar's normal ability to perceive differences and draw inferences is so easily impaired' (Kenneth J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* [London: Duckworth, 1978], p. vii).

11. Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey (eds.), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: New American Library, 1989), p. 8. Oft-cited examples of famous homosexuals of the past include Socrates, Sappho, Caesar, Michaelangelo and Shakespeare.

behaviour and practices. Like Dover, Foucault argued that the history of sexual relations could be understood fully only when consideration was given to the wider history of the socio-sexual regulation of the body.[12] Foucault asserted that scrutiny of what was considered sexually 'normal', for example, heterosexual desire, revealed that it was nothing more than a historically particular set of social discourses[13] that maintained and perpetuated institutional frameworks of power. More specifically, Foucault argued that the essentialist notion of sexual taxonomies that we so readily take for granted and project back in history were the result of social, medico-scientific discourses of the late Victorian period. That is, rather than claim there are universal types of sexuality across all cultures (such as homosexuality, bisexuality or heterosexuality), Foucault maintained that historically specific junctures produce their own complex discourses of masculinity and male sexuality to regulate the sexualized subject. His two-volume work, the *History of Sexuality*, explores the history of discourses on eroticism in relation to their dependency on ever-changing social, economic and ideological conditions, concluding that 'homosexuality is a product of the differential relations that constitute discourse, so that its signification varies historically and in different cultural contexts, and what is now called homosexuality is a purely modern phenomenon'.[14] Foucault claimed that homosexuality came into being in 1870, with the publication of Westphal's article on 'contrary sexual sensation' (*conträre Sexualempfindung*): 'the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized'.[15] By demonstrating how homosexual subjectivity results from competing social discourses of particular historical

12. William Turner provides an excellent discussion of the way in which Foucault's works differ from other histories of homogenital sex and eroticism; see William B. Turner, *A Genealogy of Queer Theory* (AmerSub; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), particularly Chapter 2, 'I Am the Very Model of the Modern Homosexual: Gay Male Historians and the History of Sexuality', pp. 62-82.

13. G. Turner defines discourses as 'socially produced groups of ideas or ways of thinking that can be tracked in individual texts or groups of texts, but that also demand to be located within wider historical and social structures or relations' (G. Turner, *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction* [MPC, 7; London: Unwin Hyman, 1990], pp. 32-33).

14. Ross Chambers, 'Strategic Constructivism? Sedgwick's Ethics of Inversion', in Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark (eds.), *Regarding Sedgwick: Essays on Queer Culture and Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 165-80 (165).

15. Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge* (trans. Robert Hurley; THS, 1; New York: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 43. However, Westphal's article was originally published in German in 1869, and later translated into French in 1870. Nor is Foucault correct in assuming that Westphal was the first to identify homosexuality; nonetheless, Foucault's assertion that 'homosexuality' is a product of late nineteenth-century thinking remains correct.

epochs (*epistemes*),[16] Foucault provided a powerful critique of the essentialist assumption of those sex historians who asserted that sexual desire (the libido) was an unchanging ahistorical fact of humanity's biological mechanisms.[17]

Instead of squabbling over definitions of sexual categories as though they are things-in-and-of-themselves, having their own ontological status, Foucault concerned himself with the relational formation of parameters of sexual knowledge at specific historical junctures.[18] This sexual knowledge, mediated through discourses, the most basic thing of all cultures, subjects individuals to its particular ways of thinking. Foucault's concentration, however, was not on the history of eroticism, but the influences that the discursive field has on the self as a historical subject—that is, on the way individuals become conduits of institutional power: 'Power has no *in itself*; it is an aggregation of different tactics and strategies, and individuals experience themselves in relation to these tactics and strategies.'[19]

Foucault's location of sexual knowledge as mediated through historical junctures does not provide answers for investigators of the subject—although it is argued that his study of Athenian sexual morality competes with the best of contemporary scholarship on the issue[20]—as much as reflect a seismic epistemological shift in the understanding of homogenital sex in history: 'there is no *essence* of homosexuality whose historical unfolding can be illuminated. There are only changing patterns in the organisation of

16. 'In any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice' (Michel Foucault, *Order of Things—An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [New York: Vintage, 1994], p. 168).

17. For Foucault, sexuality is an '*histoire de la penseé*', a history of thought.

18. 'Sexuality … is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power' (Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, pp. 105-106).

19. P. Barker, *Michel Foucault: Subversions of the Subject* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 80. Foucault claims that his 'objective … has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects' (H.L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* [Brighton: Harvester, 1982], p. 208). Similarly, Barker explains that 'what concerns Foucault is the effect that discourses—and clearly this includes discourses embedded in history—have on the production of the modes of our subjectivity and our experience of ourselves as a subject' (Barker, *Michel Foucault*, p. 43).

20. So claimed by (classicist) Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 63.

desire whose specific configuration can be decoded.'[21] Thus, Foucault provides a critical, philosophical framework from which to articulate sophisticated questions about sex and eroticism among men as historical phenomena rather than the superficial who, what, and where questions of some earlier 'historians of homosexuality'.

Moreover, Foucault's historicizing of sexual desire and eroticism has a purpose that is often ignored by the cerebral masturbators who revel in obscure, postmodernist rhetoric—practical application.[22] Foucault is generally understood to question the possibility of liberating subjects from the mechanisms of disciplinary power insofar as becoming cognizant of power structures does not automatically liberate subjects from it. However, although Foucault claims that we are all inescapably constituted by discursive practices beyond our control, he maintains that by raising awareness of the way in which power relations create (sexualized) subjectivities we can be empowered to undermine the very techniques and mechanism of power that oppress us: 'what made power strong is used to attack it. Power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counterattack in that same body.'[23] In his later works, Foucault argues that power, while maintaining its force over individuals, also runs through subjects, who, by means of strategies such as 'techniques of the self',[24] can resist, and perhaps even revolt against, the dominant discourses of the present power apparatus in order to create alternative subjectivities.[25] This resistance or revolt is not, and never can be, given that subjects are still agents of power, wholeheartedly against power itself, as though subjects can somehow step outside of the power system in which they dwell; but, instead, it comes from within.[26] Subjects are necessarily agents of power, and, even in resistance (for exam-

21. Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 6.

22. 'Foucault was always interested in the ramifications of his writings for people's lives, and so his work goes beyond the "purely academic"' (Mark Vernon, 'Following Foucault: The Strategies of Sexuality and the Struggle to be Different', *TheolSex* 5 [1996], pp. 76-96 [77]).

23. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon, *et al.*; Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 56.

24. Foucault acknowledges his overdependence on 'techniques of domination', and so recommends that the study of power relations also include attention to 'techniques of the self'; see Michel Foucault and Richard Sennett, 'Sexuality and Solitude', *HIR* 1 (1982), pp. 3-21 (3, 5).

25. Power and subjectivity are distinct relations: if the subject becomes totally enveloped in power it is no longer an agency for the furtherance of power—in an ironic way, without freedom there is no subjugation and without power there is no resistance.

26. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 95.

ple, suicide or passive resistance and revolt), work within the system; but this lack of autonomy does not mean that some forms of resistance cannot challenge the present network of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. At the end of the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that 'in a different economy of bodies and pleasures' a different discourse around the sexual body could arise.[27] Foucault likens resistance and transgression to lightning in the night, which produces light that 'lights up the night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of its manifestation'.[28] By the process of illumination, of becoming aware of the power system, sexual visionaries can reflect upon their subjectivities and create change by infiltrating and re-colonizing everyday discourses.[29] Thus, while discursive language might create repressive identities (for example, the homosexual became an identifiable 'type' for psychiatrists to diagnose, study and cure), the reverse is also true insofar as the very subjectivities created can speak out and resist for themselves:

> There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphrodism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse; homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.[30]

Foucault is not without his critics, but many historians, gender specialists, and literary scholars have developed Foucault's historiographical method into techniques for analyzing sex and eroticism within specific historical paradigms, leading most to conclude that the 'study of sexuality, properly understood, must centre on discourses of desire, exploring words, language and symbols: sex is a semantic construct, contingent upon particular economies of representation'.[31] Foucault's influence is clear in Jonathan Katz's assertion that suspending the notion of inherent sexuality enables historians of eroticism to ask

27. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 159.

28. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (trans. David Bouchard and Sherry Simon; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 35.

29. Michel Foucault, 'Two Lectures', in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon, *et al.*; Brighton: Harvester, 1980), pp. 78-108 (86).

30. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 101.

31. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich, 'Introduction', in Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (eds.), *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 1-26 (7).

> useful historical questions about life before the homo/hetero divide: First, what did people then *call* sexual or affectionate relationships between men? Second, how did they *conceive* of such relationships? Third, how did they *judge* such relationships? And, fourth, how did they socially *organize* such relationships? If we view these tales with eyes not blinded by today's homo/hetero arrangement, they begin to provide some answers.[32]

Some of the most impressive insights for the historian of the sexual come from the world of the classics, where, in the mid-eighties to early nineties, classicists such as Zeitlin, Halperin, and Winkler incorporated Dover's work into Foucault's.[33] These American classicists' acknowledgments of Foucault's notion of sexual knowledge as historical discourse, combined with their expertise in the mechanisms of the ancient world, have bridged the gap between ancient history and gay and lesbian studies, thus limiting the misinterpretations of homogenital relations among men in ancient Greece that were common in the 1980s and populist presses.

The more enlightened historian of sex and eroticism recognizes that the psychological processes that are often assumed to guide the sexual body in contemporary society were an unknown typography in the ancient world.[34] Social conventions measured sexual expression in relation to gendered social performance within a wider stratified sexual continuum. As will be shown, ancient homogenital acts are better understood in terms of socio-sexual positioning rather than the contemporary concern (and obsession) with psycho-sexual object-choice.[35] Scholars vary in their modelling of this

32. Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex between Men before Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 10.

33. For a detailed breakdown of these works refer to Halperin's bibliography: Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 213-24. Halperin rejects the Foucauldian label, insisting that his work is influenced more by Dover, the social constructionist Chauncey, New Historicists, and French structuralists; see David M. Halperin, *How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 7-8. Contrary to Halperin's view that Foucault is not a constructionist, Edward Stein argues that the *History of Sexuality* 'has become for many social constructionists, the *locus classicus* of their program' (Edward Stein, 'Introduction', in Edward Stein (ed.), *Forms of Desire: Sexual Orientation and the Social Constructionist Controversy* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3-10 [6]).

34. 'Whether the texts I studied were biblical or Jewish, Assyrian, Greek, or Roman, the term "homosexuality" was absent from them and the concept, alien. When the ancient sources describe or evaluate erotic encounters between people of the same sex, they refer to various acts and practises without attributing them to individual sexual orientations—to say nothing of a "sexuality" that would govern a person's acts and desires' (Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. v-vi).

35. Thus Di Vito notes that 'the OT [Old Testament] locates the self in its social roles and public relations … Without the West's sense of inwardness … one does *not* find a domain or center in the psychology of the Hebrew corresponding to the modern

ancient sexual continuum, but many agree that its fundamental bases are gender polarization, social status, age hierarchies, and an active–passive dichotomy. Discrediting those historians who retroject a compulsive heterosexuality onto the past, advocates of the ancient sexual continuum argue that normal, healthy males would enjoy sexual relations with both females and nonequal males (for example, adolescents, slaves, captives, and effeminate males). Rather than view both parties to homogenital sexual behaviour as unmasculine, for some men, in certain instances, anal penetration signified the ultimate in hypermasculinity and heroic bravado.[36] Generally, social opprobrium arose only when virile men deviated from the norms expected of them; the most vehement criticisms were directed at anally penetrated men whose passivity undermined the patriarchal fabric of society. The image of a male submitting to anal penetration ultimately upset the hygienics of socio-sexual power since such behaviour was tantamount to abdicating one's authoritative position as a man.

Understanding the Present as a Precursor to Understanding the Past: The Modern Matrix of Homogenital Relations

Although ancient sexual activity might appear the same as that of the contemporary Western world vis-à-vis its physiological manifestations, the cultural meanings ascribed to it very much depend on the historical juncture in which such activity occurs. Smart warns historians about 'retraditionalizing'—that is, altering understandings of the past by retrojecting contemporary concepts onto bygone historical events.[37] By reflecting on our own

notion of sexuality' (R.A. Di Vito, 'Questions about the Construction of (Homo)sexuality: Same-Sex Relations in the Hebrew Bible', in P.B. Jung and J.A. Coray (eds.), *Sexual Diversity and Catholicism: Toward the Development of Moral Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), pp. 108-32 [112]).

36. This is particularly true for ancient Near-Eastern soldiers who humiliated and pacified conquered soldiers by submitting them to forced anal sex; in such a scenario, the dominant 'top' maintains his hyper-masculinity and subduing the other man by means of rape only reinforces this.

37. N. Smart, 'Tradition, Retrospective Perception, Nationalism, and Modernism', in P. Heelas (ed.), *Religion, Modernity, and Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 79-87 [79]). Similarly, Freud cautions against following early historians whose history writing is tainted by a need to address the polemics of their time, resulting in the production of analyses that are nothing more than a mirror image of their contemporaneous situation; Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci: A Memory of his Childhood* (London: Ark, 1984), p. 30.

particular context, what Foucault terms a 'history of the present',[38] historians of the sexual will recognize that the majority of modern studies of sex are grounded in post-nineteenth-century scientific notions of inherent and determinate sexual categorization (that is, sexualities), which are inadequate for discussing ancient socio-sexual systems. A conscious awareness of today's matrix of sexual practices that maintain structures and articulations of sex as completely different from those of the ancient world helps historians to produce appropriate vocabularies that prevent them from projecting alien words, terms and concepts onto ancient sexual behaviour.[39] Foucault believes that a 'genealogical analysis', that is, a search for 'instances of discursive production … of the production of power and of the propagation of knowledge', is the only way to produce an adequate 'history of the present'.[40]

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have undergone a massive process of 'sexualization'. Contemporary Western society regards sexuality as the most central feature of each and every human being—the ultimate truth of all human beings' existence. Yet this view that physiology, genital activity, reproduction[41] and psychological desire are elements of the thing we call sexuality reflects a relatively novel, scientific mindset. The modern alliance of physiology (sex) with a fixed sexual preference (sexuality) is embedded in a combination of Judeo-Christian religious notions of gender relations and late-nineteenth-century medico-sexual taxonomies.[42] Weeks goes so far as to argue that the history of late modern sexuality is best understood as having been regulated by two priesthoods: that of the Christian churches and that of science.[43] In fact, Christianity and medico-sexual scientific discourses have loosely organized and governed the boundaries of the West's sexual mores and behaviour over the past two millennia, the former from around the fifth century, and the latter from the late nineteenth century onwards.

38. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan; New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 31.

39. Speaking of the 'interpretative difficulties' that 'arise simply from the enormous gap that separates 20th-century AD ideology from the concepts of Babylonian thought and society', Joan Oates warns that 'the necessity to translate in terms of a modern language ideas and institutions that almost certainly have no modern counterparts is a serious barrier to real understanding' (Joan Oates, *Babylon* [APP, 94; London: Thames & Hudson, rev. edn, 1986], p. 16). See also Zainab Bahrani, *Women of Babylon: Gender and Representation in Mesopotamia* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 4.

40. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 12.

41. At least for heterogenital unions (that is, sexual acts between people of different genders) where effective contraception is not used.

42. Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* (trans. Robert Hurley; THS, 2; New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

43. Weeks, *Sexuality*.

Historically, Christianity has orchestrated sex within the confines of post-Fall theocratic gender relations, rendering any sexual behaviour that blurs clearly delineated gender boundaries abnormal, while *scientia sexualis* (more commonly known as sexology) frames sex within inherent psycho-physiological, asymmetrical halves (masculine, feminine; active, passive; rational, emotional; private, public). In more recent times, the medicalization of sexual desire and the pathologizing of homogenital behaviour as a deviant psycho-sexual condition have ensured its continued stigmatization. Christianity and medical science differ in their respective terminologies, but their epistemological foundations are one and the same—one's gendered body as male or female is the sole determining factor for legitimating sexual expression. Thus, the pseudo-scientific concept of sexual perversion in early sexological theory is no more than disguised moral discourse;[44] whatever their differences, the *scientia moralis* of the Christian churches and *scientia sexualis* of medicine employ similar representational strategies to frame culturally constructed facts as either God-given or biologically natural. Highlighting these hidden dynamics, while contrasting them with ancient cultures that are based on a more complex hierarchical divide, allows historians of the sexual to reject crass and anachronistic discussions of ancient homogenital behaviour.

Christianity's Discourse on Natural, Gendered Sexual Relations

The purpose of this section is not to dismiss Christianity's contribution towards discussions of sex and eroticism—or necessarily to equate formal doctrine with actual practice[45]—but, rather, to give an outline of the important aspects of doctrines that have affected official views of sex from 'the

44. Kinsey argues that scientific definitions of homosexuality as pathological or perverted are theologically motivated (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, *SBHM*, p. 202). Richard Sennett credits the French–Swiss physician Tissot for changing the language of Christian morality to fit within the scientific paradigms of biomedical language and knowledge; see Foucault and Sennett, 'Sexuality and Solitude', pp. 3-21.

45. For example, the Council of London (1102 CE), dedicated to clergy reform in England, decreed that homogenital relations between men were morally wrong, but St Anselm, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, refused to allow the condemnation to be read aloud in church because the sin was so common among the people. For a discussion of the discrepancy between canonical/legal norms and actual practices, see James A. Brundage, 'Playing by the Rules: Sexual Behaviour and Legal Norms in Medieval Europe', in Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (eds.), *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 23-41.

two giants of the Western church' (that is, Augustine and Aquinas).[46] Classical Christianity's attitude towards legitimate sexual behaviour is rooted inescapably in the doctrines of original sin, carnal desire and notions of natural law. Although there has never been one single, unified Christian message about sex in the classical, medieval or modern world,[47] Vasey insists that Christian churches had influence over the West's views of sex from around the fifth century until the early part of the twentieth century.[48]

Christian doctrine has historically viewed sex as a double-edged sword, simultaneously viewing it as depraved (bodily desires) and good (producing offspring).[49] Indeed, Christian churches have a history of leading a very fine balancing act between the procreative and the recreative functions of sexuality.[50] The predominance of neo-Platonism within Christian thought, coming mainly from Augustinian philosophy, has affected the way in which the Christianity has distinguished between the holy, spiritual world and the sinful, physical world. Augustine of Hippo (c. 354–430 CE), perhaps Western Christianity's most significant theologian, has made what could be argued to be the greatest contribution to the development of Christian pessimism about sex and eroticism. While Augustine's views of sex are not necessarily typical of all Christian thinkers throughout the ages, his ambivalence towards human sexuality certainly represents a significant stream of thought in Christian history.[51]

46. James Alison, *The Joy of Being Wrong: Original Sin through Easter Eyes* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), p. 289. For a thorough analysis of Augustine's and Aquinas's arguments in relation to other Christian thinkers, see Pierre J. Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), while Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *The Man–Woman Relation in Christian Thought* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1959) provides a more comprehensive historical account of Christianity's view of sex from 'primitive Christian' times up until today.

47. Despite assertions from some who claim to speak for the entire gamut of Christianity, there has never been one unified Christian message about sex preached to, and practised by, all and sundry. There have only been different messages, preached by various spiritual leaders, and practised by parishioners according to their own particular concerns and environments, although, granted, some of these have sometimes shared commonality.

48. Michael Vasey, *Strangers and Friends: A New Exploration of Homosexuality and the Bible* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 43.

49. Porter and Teich, 'Introduction', p. 3.

50. Similarly, Charles Kindregan contrasts the historical Christian attitude as 'dualistic puritanism which sees sex as something shameful' with more contemporary 'philosophy which sees sex as a plaything, a toy to be used in idle pseudo-sophisticated leisure' (Charles P. Kindregan, *A Theology of Marriage: A Doctrinal, Moral, and Legal Study* [CCT; Milwaukee: Bruce, 1967], pp. 30-31).

51. Peter Brown acknowledges the 'sheer profundity of Augustian tradition that still runs in the bloodstream of the West' (Peter Brown, 'Augustine and Sexuality', in Peter

For Augustine, the present state of human imperfection is the result of the Fall—a time when humankind disobeyed God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge and thereby introduced evil into Paradise. Augustine believes that before the Fall Adam and Eve lived as a sinless couple in full control of their minds and bodies,[52] but this changed at the moment Eve subverted the order of the relationship between God and humanity. The effect of eating from the tree of knowledge was that the will of the human race became weakened and naturally inclined to evil, also known as concupiscence;[53] now separated and distinct from the flawless will of God, humanity struggles to discipline its disorderly desires. According to Augustine, the most powerful and destructive form of concupiscence is *concupiscentia carnis* (carnal concupiscence), which has opened humanity's eyes to our own shameful nakedness, that is, sexual desire.[54] He does not condemn male–female sexual desire per se, but believes that the present, post-Fall state of concupiscence is a distortion of its intended original purity. Augustine believes that Adam, prior to the Fall, would have only experienced an erection when he wanted to beget children, and his sexual union with Eve would not have included the throes of animal ecstasy experienced by men in post-Fall sexual encounters.[55] Tannahill offers his own interpretation of Augustine's view of pre-Fall physical relations between Adam and Eve:

> Sex in the Garden of Eden, if it had ever taken place, would have been cool and rarefied, with no eroticism, no uncontrollable responses, certainly no ecstasy. A matter, simply, of utilizing the mechanical equipment designed by the Creator to fulfil, with deliberation and a kind of grave appreciation, the requirement of the reproductive process.[56]

Like Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Jerome and others, Augustine believes that fallen sexual desire, the most offensive form of concupiscence, passed from generation to generation and, perverted by selfishness and lust, cannot be controlled by reason alone; thus, he recommends strict control of this inherently subversive and disruptive desire to prevent any further anarchy within God's order.[57]

Brown and Mary Ann Donovan [eds.], *Augustine and Sexuality: Protocol of the Forty Sixth Colloquy, 22 May 1983* [CHSHMC, 46; Berkeley, CA: CHSHMC, 1983], pp. 1-13 [13]). See also Boswell, *CSTH*, p. 161.

52. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans* (trans. George E. McCracken; LCL, 411–17; London: William Heinemann, 1957), Book 14, Chapters 17 and 19.
53. Concupiscence is derived from the Latin *concupiscere*, 'to long for'.
54. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, Book 13, Chapter 13.
55. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, Book 14, Chapter 23.
56. Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (London: Cardinal, 1989), p. 141.
57. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, Book 14, Chapters 23–26.

Unlike the heretical Manichaeans, who believe anything of the flesh is abominable, Augustine reluctantly encourages those who cannot resist their unruly sexual desires to have—but not enjoy—natural sexual relations for the purpose of procreation, the only time a person escapes the grip of concupiscence.[58] Thus, for Augustine, 'marriage exists as a haven for the lustful'.[59] Given that the only legitimate sexual behaviour is that between man and wife for the purpose of begetting children, any other form of sex is considered immoral; thus, men who use their bodies for unnatural acts such as homogenital sexual behaviour are morally reprehensible.[60]

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74 CE), the Prince of Scholastics, is another noteworthy theologian of Western Christianity who rejects some of Augustine's pessimism about sexual desire—although Aquinas is in complete agreement with him about concupiscence and original sin—insofar as he adopts a more positive view of sex in his philosophical view of natural law; namely that procreation, along with marriage, is part of God's plan for creation and a human good.[61] Aquinas follows Augustine in arguing that the only legitimate expression of sexual desire is between a man and woman who are married, ordered by the inclination to act reasonably with the intention of procreation.[62] For Aquinas, there are two types of disordered sexual expression: those that follow the rules of nature but are morally wrong, such as rape, incest, seduction and adultery, and those *contra naturam* (against nature), which go against reason, doing what is not fitting for the furtherance of the human species, such as homogenital behaviour (for example, *fornicatio sodomita; sodomiticum peccatum; intra crura*), masturbation, bestiality, and oral sex.[63] In his *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas maintains that

58. Thus, Augustine follows Paul's encouragement of marriage as a legitimate means of averting sinful passions in 1 Cor. 7.8; see Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (trans. John Hammond Taylor; ACW, 41–42; New York: Newman Press, 1982), Chapter 9, line 7; Augustine, 'On Marriage and Concupiscence', in Augustine, *The Anti-Pelagian Works of Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, II, Treatise II, Chapter 1, lines 9 and 16; and Augustine, *De bono coniugali, De sancta virginitate* (ed. and trans. P.G. Walsh; OECT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapters 5 and 6 of '*The Goodness of Marriage*'. See also Augustine, *Confessions* (trans. Henry Chadwick; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book 6, Chapter 12, line 22.

59. Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 17.

60. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 3, Chapter 3, line 15.

61. Aquinas maintains God created humans as male and female, with natural sexual desires, for the very purpose of procreation; see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* (trans. Vernon J. Bourke; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), Book 1, question 98, articles 1–2.

62. Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 3, Chapters 122–29.

63. Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa theologiae: A Concise Translation* (trans. Timothy S. McDermott; London: Methuen, 1991), Book 2, part 2, questions 154, articles 1–12, and

the 'vice of sodomy' ('copulation with an undue sex') is an unnatural vice, contrary to reason.[64]

Since the Reformation, Christian churches have developed a more affirmative view of sex and eroticism, with many contemporary mainstream denominations now encouraging married couples to enjoy the recreational above the procreational aspect of sex, emphasizing sex as an expression of love and natural desires. Officially, today's Roman Catholic Church is governed by Canon Law's teaching that the primary end of marriage is 'the transmission of the life-seed for procreation', and only secondarily for mutual help and the 'remedying of concupiscence'.[65] While a growing number of Christians today believe that homosexuals have a God-given right to express their emotions and desires sexually, Christianity's views of homogenital sexual relations have been dominated historically by discussions of the Fall, concupiscence, the legitimacy of sexual expression in marriage, and procreation.[66]

Medico-sexual Science and Psycho-physiological Essences

Despite the 'official' views of homogenital acts of the churches, analysis of eighteenth-century popular literature in England reveals that sexual behaviour between men, although a violation of church teachings, were often interpreted by the average person as no more than an incidental alternative to vaginal sex. Penetration of a younger man's anus deviated only slightly from the norm of vaginal intercourse; and, as the socio-sexual continuum ordered adult males hierarchically above women, younger males, and children, men who participated in these sexual acts viewed their sexual behaviour as essentially no different from men who did not.[67] The sodomite was

Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Book 3, part 2, Chapters 122 and 125.

64. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Book 2, part 2, question 154, article 11.

65. Benedictus XV, *Codex iuris canonici* (Vatican City: Libreria editrice vaticana, 1917), Canon 1013,1. For a comparison with the Anglican Church's more sex-positive views, see Church of England House of Bishops, *Issues in Human Sexuality: A Statement* (London: Church House Publishing, 1991).

66. There is an obvious inconsistency in logic with contemporary Christians who are able to move away from Christianity's historical views about sexual desire to promote sex between a man and a woman as good and natural, and yet are unable to do the same with same-sex sexual desire.

67. Tim Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (Social History in Perspective; London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 63-65. Trumbach argues that prior to the emergence of the Sodomite identity (for him, around 1700 CE though such dating is not without its critics), 'real men' enjoyed sexual relations with both women and adolescent boys; see Randolph Trumbach, 'Gender and the Homosexual Role in Modern Western Culture: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries Compared', in Dennis Altman, *et al.* (eds.),

certainly not identifiable as belonging to a distinct category of men who engaged solely in male homogenital sexual behaviour in eighteenth-century England; rather, sodomy was viewed in fluid terms as an appellation for people who engaged in immoral behaviour, sexual and otherwise. The identification of the sodomite as a man whose identity is based on his proclivities for male–male sexual relations only emerges in the late nineteenth century, at the time medical theories of a third gender advance.[68] Prior to the late nineteenth century, English nouns existed to describe men with homogenital predilections,[69] but the notion that such sexual acts formed part of a person's inherent nature (that is, a fixed sexual orientation) was alien.[70] At this time, sexual behaviour was viewed as incidental; categorizing a person from their sexual preferences would have been as outlandish as categorizing them according to their tastes in other aesthetic matters such as food, clothing and art. As Katz puts it, 'this was the world before the homosexual–heterosexual hypothesis, the universe before the great sexual divide'.[71]

Christianity's correlation between one's genitals as male or female and natural sexual behaviour (a form of gender essentialism) has directed, principally rather than absolutely, sexual attitudes until around the mid-nineteenth century, when new medico-scientific theories displaced the

Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality? International Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij An Dekker, 1989), pp. 149-69; and Randolph Trumbach, 'The Birth of the Queen: Sodomy and the Emergence of Gender Inequality in Modern Culture, 1600–1750', in Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey (eds.), *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York: New American Library, 1989), pp. 129-40.

68. John Tosh, 'What Should Historians Do with Masculinity?', in Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (eds.), *Gender and History in Western Europe* (ARH; London: Arnold, 1998), pp. 65-85 (74).

69. Many of these still remain in colloquial use around England today, despite the fact that most users are unaware of the words' historical roots. They include 'bugger', 'shirt-lifter', 'pansy," "Mary-Anne', 'sod/sodomite', 'molly', and 'poofter/puff'. The introduction of homosexuality (and heterosexuality) into the English language is often attributed to Charles Gilbert Chaddock, who, in 1892, translated Richard von Krafft-Ebing's classic encyclopaedia the *Psychopathia sexualis*, which catalogued and categorized many forms of 'sexual degeneracy' for the first time. In fact, it is from Chaddock's work that the noun 'homosexual' found its way into the *Oxford English Dictionary.*

70. Caplan observes that just because the word 'homosexual' did not achieve common usage until the 1880s and 1890s, that 'is not to say that there was no homosexual behaviour prior to that: there certainly was, but it did not constitute an identity' (Pat Caplan, 'Introduction', in Pat Caplan (ed.), *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1987), pp. 1-30 [5]).

71. Katz, *Love Stories*, p. x.

moral monopoly enjoyed by Christian churches.[72] During the nineteenth century the sciences—pure, social and medical—flourished as respectable domains of intellectualism, gaining momentum in questioning the primacy of religious thought over rationalism. A shift from the spiritual to the scientific occurred, reducing homogenital sexual acts to indicators of one's ontological 'being-ness'; thus, there was a 'shift in focus from sinful acts against nature that potentially anyone might commit as a result of man's fallen state, to the notion of homosexuality as the basis of an individual's nature'.[73] For all its supposed scientific neutrality—'sexology is the science of sex. It is impartial, empirical, and, in the manner of all science, non-judgmental'[74]—sexology did little more than transform discourses of sex from moral codes into a more palatable scientific language. Fout critiques the commonly held belief that the (neutral and objective) scientific language of sexology superseded Christian values in the nineteenth century. Instead of being dismissed as superstitious silliness, Christian teachings about marriage and procreation, Fout maintains, were morphed into scientific language and proclaimed as a universal norm of sexual behaviour by many early sexologists.[75] Thus, in his 1886 masterpiece, *Psychopathia sexualis*, Krafft-Ebing, the most renowned sexologist before Freud, correlated moral decay with 'effeminacy, lewdness, and luxuriance of the nations'.[76]

Medical science at the turn of the nineteenth century began to conceptualize male and female difference in terms of organic structures rather than degrees of maleness. This two-body model of sexual differentiation, known as somatic dimorphism, categorizes women as a separate human type, which is in contrast to the ancient view of women as inferior versions of men. As a result of this paradigm shift, men who engaged in homogenital activities were believed to suffer from a physio-psychological inversion, hence the famous 1869 Ulrichsian formula: *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*

72. Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 72.

73. Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 4.

74. J. Money, 'Commentary: Current Status of Sex Research', *JPHS* 1 (1988), pp. 5-15 (6).

75. John C. Fout, 'Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Male Gender Crisis, Moral Purity, and Homophobia', in John C. Fout (ed.), *Forbidden History: The State, Society, and the Regulation of Sexuality in Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 259-92 (263).

76. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study* (trans. Franklin S. Klaf; New York: Stein & Day, 1965), pp. 3-4. (Krafft-Ebing later modifies his negative views towards homosexuals.)

(a female soul enclosed in a male body).[77] Likewise, Hirschfeld campaigned from the 1890s onwards for the German government to decriminalize male homosexuality, arguing that homosexuals were born with physical and emotional traits of male and female that render them an 'intermediate type' or 'third sex',[78] and thus they should not be penalized for their inability to determine their own sexual constitution.

Modelling homogenital behaviour on the premise of inverted gender (interior androgyny) or the intermediate/third sex, practitioners of *scientia sexualis* invented a new human species with an inherent sexual predisposition.[79] By further extending somatic dimorphic medical theories, sexologists utilized predominant neuro-centric claims to objectivity of the mind to their own advantage and thus created the psycho-physiological sexual taxonomies of the heterosexual and the homosexual psyche. As Fout notes, Hirschfeld's and others' promotion of the idea that the homosexual was a person for whom 'there was no escape from inevitable sexual desires for individuals of the same sex' actually helped to impose 'a most restricted definition of homosexuality on homosexuals as a whole'.[80] Whereas sexual practices of the eighteenth century were understood as arbitrary and incidental, late nineteenth-century sexual desires were viewed as dependent upon one's psycho-physiological composition. Focusing on the brain as the activating force of sensory perception, renowned sexologists such as Hirschfeld, Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and Ellis formulated various sexual acts and desires in terms of scientific language of types, crystallizing sexuality as an essential feature of every gendered person.[81] Homogenital activities were no longer an incidental blip of carelessness, what someone

77. Ulrichs was a renowned German lawyer and sexologist who believed in the naturalness of homogenital attraction, and advocated for the decriminalization of same-gender sex acts.

78. See Magnus Hirschfeld, *Berlins drittes Geschlecht. Mit einem Anhang: Paul Näcke: Ein Besuch bei den Homosexuellen in Berlin* (G-D, vol. III; 50 vols.; Berlin and Leipzig: Verlag von Herrmann Seemann Nachfolger, 1904), and Magnus Hirschfeld, *Was soll das Volk vom dritten Geschlecht wissen? Eine Aufklärungsschrift herausgegeben vom wissenschaftlich-humanitären Comitee* (Leipzig: Verlag von Max Spohr, 1901).

79. 'The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology … The Sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 43).

80. Fout, 'Sexual Politics in Wilhelmine Germany', p. 269.

81. 'Teams of experts, sexologists and assorted specialists thence stand ready to delve into the secret they have helped to create' (Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992], p. 21).

does, but were now a permanent and specific object-related desire—what someone *is*.[82]

The Ancient Matrix of Homogenital Relations

Having shown that the contemporary Western understanding of sex and sexuality is a relatively recent development, influenced by Christian doctrine and nineteenth-century sexological thinking, I will now focus on the attitudes to homogenital expression from three distinct periods of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern world: classical Greek (particularly Attic), Mesopotamian and biblical.[83] (Despite the confident claims of Schroer and Staubli and Horner that David and Jonathan lived in a Phoenician culture that celebrated homogenital sexual relationships, most of the extra-biblical data of the region comes from the late fourth century BCE onwards. Given that Phoenicia found itself under both Assyrian and Babylonian domination—albeit sporadically—from the ninth to the sixth century BCE, I will consider Phoenician culture in relation to wider Mesopotamian culture.) It is true that classical Greek, Mesopotamian and biblical cultures are geographically, temporally, and linguistically separated from one another, but they also share more elements of a common heritage than contemporary Western societies when it comes to their views of homogenital relations.[84] The comparisons I will make among these ancient societies will not be of a noncontextual 'pick and choose nature'—which has so rightly been criticized by many Assyriologists—but a focused, contextualized comparison

82. Weeks argues that this crystallizing of sexuality as an inherent part of each gendered person has ensured that the biggest legacy of sexology is what we now call sexual essentialism; Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents*, p. 8.

83. Cyrus Gordon believes that Mesopotamia, Israel, and Greece, three of the most notable cultures of the ancient Near East and Mediterranean, share a common heritage; Cyrus H. Gordon, *The World of the Old Testament: an Introduction to Old Testament Times* (London: Phoenix House, rev. edn, 1960), p. 15. See also M.W. Chavalas, 'Assyriology and Biblical Studies', in M.W. Chavalas and K.L. Younger, Jr (eds.), *Mesopotamia and the Bible: Comparative Explorations* (JSOTSup, 341; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 21-67 (22-23); and Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (trans. Margaret E. Pinder and Walter Burkert; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

84. Daniel Boyarin, 'Are There Any Jews in "The History of Sexuality"?', *JHSex* 3 (1995), pp. 333-55 (354). Jerrold Cooper does not discuss the biblical view of sex but maintains that there are similarities between Greek and Assyrian attitudes towards male homogenital sex acts; see Jerrold S. Cooper, 'Buddies in Babylonia: Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and Mesopotamian Homosexuality', in Tzvi Abusch (ed.), *Riches Hidden in Secret Places: Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Memory of Thorkild Jacobsen* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), pp. 73-85 (84-85).

of specific references to homogenital sexual behaviour. Placing ancient Israel's attitudes to homogenital expression within its wider ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultural and literary context highlights a number of similarities and differences that are relevant to claims made by advocates of the sexual reading. Wold also advocates a contextual model for analysing the biblical texts on the grounds that 'Since the Hebrew did not live in a cultural vacuum', comparison of biblical with nonbiblical texts 'might shed some light on the practice of same-gender sexual relations in the larger context of the ancient orient', and thereby provide enough evidence to 'construct a framework for the biblical picture of homosexuality. Some points will become clear by comparison, others by contrast.'[85]

The rate of change in today's technologically advanced societies is much faster than that of the ancient world, and so the cross-cultural comparison of behaviours and norms among these three cultures is not as ludicrous as might first appear.[86] The large time gap, particularly between Mesopotamia and the biblical world,[87] does not prevent Malul and van der Toorn, to name but two historians of antiquity, from considering the distinct cultures as part of the same ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean traditions.[88] Yet, despite the 'common cultural features' of the ancient societies, I am also aware of the need to be cognizant of the significant differences that 'should be constantly kept in mind' when we attempt to 'sketch or synthesise cultural aspects typical of ancient Near Eastern life'.[89]

Scrutiny of ancient sexual codes reveals that gender was an integral and fundamental part of the production, consumption and distribution of sexual knowledge. The genitals of every person were the ultimate signifying referent of representations of sex, and an effective tool for legitimizing sexual behaviour. Silverman maintains that throughout recorded history sexual

85. Wold, *Out of Order*, pp. 7-8. Similarly, Gagnon argues that biblical scholars interested in the biblical depiction of 'same-sex intercourse' need 'to set the stage by examining the ancient Near Eastern background' of the 'Hebrew attitudes toward homosexual practice', and how they 'reflect or differ from the larger cultural horizons' (Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 43).

86. For example, Dover argues that the rate of change of Greek attitudes, practices, and institutions is very slow compared with what we are accustomed to today; Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 8.

87. Sumer goes beyond 3000 BCE.

88. M. Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Legal Studies* (AOAT, 227; Kevelaer: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1990), pp. 93-97; K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), p. 4.

89. W. Boshoff, E. Scheffler and I. Spangenberg, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Context* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2000), pp. 41-42.

discourses—both ancient and modern—have defined appropriate sexual activity in relation to the gendered body as male or female.[90] This age-old association of one's physiology with legitimate and illegitimate sexual expression affirms that ancient sexual desire was principally regulated and controlled by physiological sex differences.

Although gender was the principal factor in determining appropriate sexual behaviour in the ancient world, it was not the sole factor, as is the case with our contemporary society's notion of sexuality. Thus, while in the modern Western world innate, psychological processes are assumed to guide a person spontaneously (naturally) to members of the opposite sex, very much like a dog is instinctively attracted to a bitch in heat, the ancient body was subsumed under a much more complex hierarchy of socio-sexual conventions:

> It seems that many ancients conceived of sexuality in non-sexual terms: what was fundamental to their experience of sex was not anything *we* would regard as essentially sexual; rather, it was something essentially social—namely the modality of power relations that informed and structured the sexual act.[91]

Unlike today, sexual behaviour in the ancient world was not understood as bound to members of the opposite gender,[92] and the notion of a fixed sexuality (that is, an individual's innate biological essence) was a completely unknown typography. Instead of categorizing sexual behaviour in terms of gender polarization, the ancients regulated sexual desire by a person's place in the wider, stratified socio-sexual continuum of male and female.[93] Thus, the boundaries of legitimate sexual expression were established by incorporating gendered performance into a hierarchy of socio-sexual positioning rather than psycho-sexual object-choice; as Halperin notes, the social aspect of sexual behaviour preceded the act.[94] Dover's study of ancient homogenitality details some of the factors other than gender that influenced a sex act's

90. Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 342.

91. David M. Halperin, 'Sex before Sexuality: Pederasty, Politics, and Power in Classical Athens', in J. Corvino (ed.), *Same Sex: Debating the Ethics, Science, and Culture of Homosexuality* (SSPLP; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), pp. 203-19 (218).

92. Examples of literature from ancient Greece describe men discussing the virtues of sleeping with boys over women—thus demonstrating a conscious 'choice that expresses the male subject's values and preferred way of life, rather than as symptoms of an involuntary psychosexual condition' (Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', p. 98).

93. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 25, 30; and Halperin, 'How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', pp. 87-123.

94. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 38.

legitimacy, ranging from one's kinship or social status, age, the courtship ritual, codes of decency, an active–passive dichotomy and levels of emotional attachment, which differed for affection towards boys and women.[95]

Greek Homogenital Relations: Pederasty and the Phallus

Most of the extant information about male homogenital relations in ancient Greece comes from classical Athens, Sparta and Crete, although the majority of it applies to Athens.[96] Classical Greek literature and art (mainly Attic), dating from before the end of the fourth century BCE, demonstrate the ease with which all types of sexual relations were portrayed and discussed. In fact, Dover comments on the 'uninhibited treatment of homosexual subjects in literature and the visual arts' as 'a mass of undisguised phenomena'.[97] The unequivocally frank artefacts include paintings, vase paintings (which Dover likens to today's pin-ups),[98] poetry, comedy, and even philosophical writings. Some of the less blatant vase paintings appear to be nonsexual, but subtly hint at the homoerotic; for example, the apparently unwitting placement of a bed, a cockerel or hare (so-called love gifts), or the existence of a sceptre (which re-enacts the abduction and seduction of the youth Ganymede by Zeus). Whether the vase paintings depict social (such as conversation), erotic (such as the offering of love gifts), or blatantly sexual (such as interfemoral intercourse)[99] settings, they tell us a lot about general attitudes and aesthetics in ancient Greece. For example, we can infer from these artefacts that the idealized human body was that of the pubescent male because depictions of all bodies, whether male or female, have boyish narrow hips and slender buttocks.[100]

The ancient Greeks enjoyed a healthy outlook on sexual relations, seeking harmony of the body and soul (as expressed in the term *kalokagathia*).[101] Sex was seen in both positive and negative terms: it was good and divine (*aphrodisia*), but also tainted with shame (*aischrourgia*).[102] Sexual desire was appreciated and satisfied, but only within the confines of self-mastery

95. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*.

96. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 57.

97. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 1.

98. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 6.

99. That is, the thrusting of an erect penis between the thighs of another person.

100. H.A. Shapiro, 'Courtship Scenes in Attic Vase-Painting', *AJA* 85 (1981), pp. 132-58.

101. Robert Wood, 'Sex Life in Ancient Civilizations', in Albert Ellis and Albert Abarbanel (eds.), *ESB,* I (London: Corsano, 1961), pp. 119-31 (119).

102. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 62.

(*enkrateia*), which ensured the proper use of pleasure (*chrēsis aphrodision*).[103] The measure of the proper use of pleasure was ensuring that one's sexual behaviour did not interfere with home or state duties and affairs. Whereas in the modern, Western world, kinship, intercourse and family are divorced from social, political and economic institutions, the ancient Greeks saw them as inseparable. Males and females lived separate lives; men and boys lived in the public realm of gymnasiums, taverns, the military, and the political arena, while women maintained the household (*oikos*):

> Wives and daughters in Classical Athens were kept in virtual seclusion from everyone but their immediate families and their domestic activities were relegated to certain 'female' parts of the house. As a consequence, boys and young men—partly by their virtue of being *seen*, whether in the gymnasium, in the streets, or at a sacrifice (as in the *Lysis*)—became natural love-objects.[104]

Sexual desire and behaviour could not be considered without reference to the public institutions of the *oikos* or the *polis* (state); what was of paramount importance was that one's desired sexual partner was socially approachable and sexually available.[105] Socially sanctioned, legitimate sexual behaviour for an adult male was with unmarried women and pubescent boys—the abuse of freeborn adult males or married women was proscribed by Athenian law, since the body of the citizen was sacrosanct.

While in the modern Western world there is a preoccupation with gender taxonomies, gender was only one consideration of ancient Greek society's hierarchies of sexual power. Although alien to our contemporary way of thinking, the gender of one's sexual partner in ancient Greece was not a question of ethics as much a question of socio-sexual phallic power.[106] Extant vase paintings reveal a distinct gender and hierarchical basis to homogenital behaviour: plenty of scenes depict women orally copulating men or accommodating their penises in unusual and awkward positions, yet men never orally copulate women. Homogenital scenes never depict

103. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 68-69; and Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 63-77.

104. Eugene O'Connor, 'Introduction', in Plato, *Lysis, Phaedrus, and Symposium: Plato on Homosexuality* (trans. Benjamin Jowett; PGBP; Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), pp. 12-42 (12).

105. Cooper, 'Buddies in Babylonia', p. 84.

106. Jay Quinn argues that 'a ritualized form of homosexual courtship and bonding among men and youths … served a variety of purposes in essentially militaristic, phallocentric, male-orientated societies. They were seen to be a reinforcing part of a society that valued women only as soulless, morally corrupting brood stock, while the status of maleness was considered more than halfway to the attainment of perfection of body and soul' (Jay Quinn, *The Mentor: A Memoir of Friendship and Gay Identity* [HGLS; New York: Haworth Press, 1999], p. 1).

young boys orally copulating men or standing in demeaning positions—that was only the role of the comical and grotesque Satyrs.[107] Despite the ancient Greeks' predilection for sexual relations with both male and female, to label their polyerotic activities as 'bisexual' transplants an alien type onto their culture. Halperin goes beyond the modern object-choice theories of sexuality to unite ancient Greek sexual practices with ancient Greek socio-political hierarchies, describing their sexual fluidity as 'a more generalized ethos of penetration and domination, a socio-sexual discourse structured by the presence or absence of its central term: the phallus'.[108]

Sexual relations between two males did not express a man's fixed predilections as much as his socio-political status; such relationships were viewed primarily in terms of superior-on-inferior rather than male-on-male. Moreover, pederastic relationships involved sexual asymmetricity, with the active, adult male the socially superior figure.[109] A young man began his rite of passage into adulthood as an *erōmenos* ('beloved') of an older man, and, after having developed into a good, manly citizen (the experience of pederastic relations was believed to be character building for the younger male), he then became the *erastēs* ('lover') of a younger male. This rite of passage was subjected to social regulation, and, despite what some prudes espouse, 'the sexuality of classical Greece was apparently not simply an unrestrained free-for-all, with any two or more people doing whatsoever they liked, to whomsoever they liked'.[110] Plato's Pausanias details the codes that governed the legitimacy of the passive role of the boy:

> when erastes and eromenos meet, each observing a rule, the erastes (the rule) that it would be right for him to subordinate himself in any way to an eromenos who has granted him favours, and the eromenos (the rule) that it would be right for him to perform any service for one who improves him in mind and character … then … in these circumstances alone, and in no others, it is credible for an eromenos to grant favours to an erastes.[111]

Indeed, Greek pederasty was 'highly stylized', with the focus on a 'bond which would be formed between a somewhat older and somewhat younger man (ideally, a 25 year-old paired with a 15 year-old)'.[112]

107. Hardman, *Homoaffectionalism*, p. 51.

108. Halperin, 'Is There a History of Sexuality?', p. 421. See also Cooper, 'Buddies in Babylonia', p. 84.

109. Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, p. 215; and Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 60.

110. Michael Ruse, *Homosexuality: A Philosophical Inquiry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 177.

111. Plato, *Symposium* (trans. W.R.M. Lamb; LCL, 166; London: William Heinemann, 1925), 184DE.

112. Ruse, *Homosexuality*, p. 177.

A man's attraction to an adolescent boy was seen as part of "human nature" itself (*phusis*).[113] Mythical archetypal masculine figures such as Zeus, Hercules and Achilles are known for their homogenital sexual antics, but none of them was regarded as effeminate or lacking in masculine virtue.[114] The element of homoeroticism that the ancient Greeks considered *para phusin* ('against nature', unnatural) was not men's sexual desire to have sex with youths, which all normal men were believed to experience, but the desire to give-up—or alternate—one's masculine nature and be penetrated.[115] To surrender one's masculine status and authority by being anally or orally penetrated by a youth was tantamount to feminizing oneself, and was seen as the ultimate rejection of one's socially ascribed phallic power.[116]

Homogenital activity was a natural element of pederastic relations, but the *erōmenos* was not supposed to experience *eros* ('erotic desire') as the *erastēs* did during legitimate sexual relations. The *erōmenos* was permitted to partake in interfemoral intercourse, but was expected only to display passionless *philia* ('nonerotic love') for his sexual partner. Xenophon, a contemporary of Plato, details the ritual: 'the boy does not share in the man's pleasure in intercourse, as a woman does; cold sober, he looks upon the other drunk with sexual desire'.[117] While the *erastēs* is high on *eros*, the *erōmenos* is sought to 'return love' (*antiphilein*) solely in admiration and gratitude.[118] Accordingly, if the *erōmenos* transgresses the strict rules of legitimate *eros*—true *philanthrōpia* ('affection towards human beings')—and submits to anal penetration, or enjoys his passive position, he demonstrates lack of worthiness of respect and opens himself to ridicule:

> An honourable eromonos does not seek or expect sensual pleasure from contact with an erastes, begrudges any contact until the erastes has proved himself worthy of concession, never permits penetration of any orifice of

113. Plutarch, *Moralia 1A–1131A* (trans. Frank Cole Babbitt; LCL, 197; London: William Heinemann, 1961), 748E–771E.

114. Boswell, *CSTH*, p. 25.

115. Halperin, 'Is There a History of Sexuality?', pp. 422-23.

116. Saul M. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman": On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13', in Gary David Comstock and Susan E. Henking (eds.), *Que(e)rying Religion: A Critical Anthology* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1997), pp. 398-414 (404). As Christine Downing notes, 'The assumption is that a man who would willingly make himself available would do *anything!* Only slaves, women, and foreigners would willingly choose to be treated as [sex] objects' (Christine Downing, *Myths and Mysteries of Same-Sex Love* [New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1996], p. 139).

117. Xenophon, *Anabasis* (trans. O.J. Todd; LCL, 90; London: William Heinemann, 1922), 8.21.

118. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 8.16, 8.19; and Plato, *Symposium*, 182C.

> his body and never assimilates himself to a woman by playing a subordinate role in a position of contact.[119]

An *erōmenos* who brought shame upon himself in adolescence was believed to carry unmanly predilections for passivity into adulthood. It should be remembered, however, that there is a significant difference between the philosophical ideal that passion, nakedness, privacy, kisses and alcoholic drinks should not arouse youths during pedagogical sex and the reality of it.[120] Halperin also cautiously warns against confusing theory with practice when he reminds us that 'we should bear in mind that avoidance of anal intercourse in paederastic relations is the normative ideal, not the reality … It is wrong … to imply that Greek men made love to boys with a copy of Plato's *Phaedrus* firmly tucked under one arm for easy consultation.'[121]

Mesopotamian Homogenital Relations: Masculinity, Social Status, Frequency, and Honour and Shame

The vast libraries of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh, dating from the Neo-Assyrian period, as well as those in Uruk and Mari, have revealed many artefacts, mostly of an economic nature, but there are also royal inscriptions, military records, state records, religious texts, liturgies, spells, myths, omens, proverbs and letters.[122] Despite Olyan's claim that material about Mesopotamian homogenital behaviour is scant,[123] Bottéro and Petschow have compiled a dossier of nearly ten pages of evidence relating to the subject matter.[124] However, while there are many figurines, plaques and cylinder seals depicting naked women and sexual scenes of a graphic nature (between a man and a woman) that demonstrate that Mesopotamians were as interested in eroticism as their Greek counterparts,[125] it is true that homogenital sexual

119. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 103.

120. 'The boy was … supposed to find the whole business rather asexual, and to remain unaroused throughout. No doubt there was frequently a gap between the ideal and the actual' (Ruse, *Homosexuality*, p. 178).

121. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 55, 59. Dover also offers evidence of the occurrence of anal penetration in pederastic relations; see Dover, *Greek Homosexuality*, p. 99 n. 100.

122. Oates, *Babylon*, p. 15.

123. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', p. 404.

124. Jean Bottéro and H. Petschow, 'Homosexualität', in Erich Robert Friedrich Ebeling, *et al.* (eds.), *RLA, IV (*12 vols.; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975)*, pp.* 459-68.

125. Karen Rhea Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), p. 137. Indeed, Bahrani notes that there is much more data available about the topic of eroticism from the ancient Near East than there is from all of Greece and Rome; see Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*, p. 2.

acts are not as 'clearly depicted in visual art', with the possible exception of sexual liaisons between a man and a person of ambiguous gender.[126] This limited—rather than scant—evidence pertaining to homogenital behaviour in the ancient Near East is most noticeable in law codes, which has led Bottéro to argue that 'homosexuality held in the lives and especially the preoccupations of the ancient Mesopotamians a secondary place'.[127] Yet, rather than see the limited sources as demonstrating that homogenital behaviour was 'either an unknown or an irrelevant matter' in ancient Mesopotamia,[128] the lack of interest in the topic is equally likely to be due to the insignificance of regulating sexual behaviour that did not interfere with 'the very nucleus of the social body—the family'.[129]

Unlike the study of sex in the classics, the 'study of Mesopotamian sexuality is barely in its infancy', so argues Harris.[130] The predominance of philological studies in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies has meant that scholars of Mesopotamian history and literature have been reluctant to incorporate gender and sexual issues into their linguistic models.[131] Recently, however, a few scholars within ancient Near Eastern studies have begun to widen the basis of accepted methodologies by writing analyses of gender and sexual behaviour that are as enlightening as those in the Classics.[132] Harris and Leick's studies aside, Bahrani's excellent review of female gender and sexuality in ancient Assyro-Babylonia is comparable with the well-known Foucauldian investigations found in the classics.[133]

A major source of knowledge about the ancient Near East comes from the Babylonian Hammurabi Code, the largest and most famous law collection, dating from around 1750 BCE, but based on earlier Sumerian law

126. Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 139.

127. Jean Bottéro, *Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc van de Mieroop; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 192.

128. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 36.

129. Jean Bottéro, 'Love and Sex in Babylon', in Jean Bottéro (ed.), *Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (trans. Antonia Nevill; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 90-111 (92).

130. Rivkah Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia: The Gilgamesh Epic and Other Ancient Literature* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. 142.

131. Susan Pollock notes that this is changing as ideological analyses such as feminist scholarship have entered into the arena of the growing field of archaeological anthropological studies of the region; Susan Pollock, *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden That Never Was* (CSES; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 22.

132. Harris and Gwendolyn Leick both openly acknowledge the influence of specialist studies of gender and sexuality from the field of classics as the basis for their reinterpretations of the ancient Mesopotamian world; see Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, pp. vii-viii; and Gwendolyn Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. x-xi.

133. Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*.

collections. The lengthy composition, dealing with issues such as the treatment of slaves, debts, estates, marriage, assault and sexual offences, is arguably the best-organized example from Mesopotamia.[134] However, the Code's 282 laws are neither comprehensive nor statute law,[135] and probably reflect more of a literary interest rather than concern for the actual deeds of King Hammurabi.[136] None of these laws refers to homogenital behaviour.

The situation of Hittites laws is different from that of the Hammurabi Code; §§187–200 of the Old Hittite laws (OH), dating from around the mid-seventeenth century to the sixteenth century BCE, do deal with sexual offences. Of these two hundred laws in the Code, there is one proscription of male homogenital relations (OH §189), and it specifically refers to the illegitimacy of sexual contact between a father and his son: 'If a man has sexual relations with his son, it is an unpermitted sexual pairing'.[137] That §§187–200 refer to many different sexual offences but do not mention homogenital sexual acts other than incestuous relations has lead several interpreters to conclude that their absence means they were not regarded as improper.[138] The prohibition against the sexual offence mentioned in OH §189 shows that—in this instance, at least—the Hittites were more concerned with kinship boundaries than prohibiting homogenital relations per se.[139]

134. Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (WAW, 6; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2nd edn, 1997), p. 71.

135. 'Nowhere is there a specific adjuration of judges or other officials to abide by its provisions. Whether the text represents a recording of customary law, a series of legal innovations or even a designation of those areas in need of amendment (or a combination of all these) remains uncertain. That the provisions were not Statute Law can be seen from the fact that several abuses explicitly condemned by Hammurapi on pain of death were again "legislated against" in a later edict of King Ammi-saduqa' (Oates, *Babylon*, p. 74).

136. Oates, *Babylon*, p. 75. Likewise, Richardson argues that the Hammurabi's laws are 'a collection of laws rather than a code of law' that seem to have been copied by later scribes 'not primarily for the purposes of the administration of justice but rather to educate scribes in the art of good writing' (M.E.J. Richardson, *Hammurabi's Laws: Text, Translation and Glossary* [BibSem, 73; STS, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], pp. 11, 16).

137. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p. 236. Alternatively, 'if a man violates his son, it is a capital crime' (Albrecht Goetze, 'The Hittite Laws', in James B. Pritchard [ed.], *ANET* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn, 1955], pp. 188-97 [196]).

138. Goetze rightfully observes that a restriction on incestuous homogenital relations would not need to be discussed if homogenital relations were not already socially accepted ('The Hittite Laws', p. 194).

139. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr, 'Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East', in Harry A. Hoffner, Jr (ed.), *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (AOAT, 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener

Perhaps the most revealing evidence about attitudes towards homogenital sexual relations in the ancient Near East is found in the later Middle Assyrian Law tablets (c. 1300–1100 BCE), although fragments from the Neo-Assyrian location of Nineveh, dating from the eighth to the seventh century BCE, also exist. The Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL) contain two specific and definite references to homogenital sex acts:

> 1. MAL A §19:
> If a seignior started a rumor against his neighbor [*tappā'u*] in private, saying, 'People have lain repeatedly with him,' or he said to him in a brawl in the presence of (other) people, 'People have lain repeatedly with you; I will prosecute you,' since he is not able to prosecute (him) (and) did not prosecute (him), they shall flog that seignior fifty (times) with staves (and) he shall do the work of the king for one full month; they shall castrate him[140] and he shall also pay one talent of lead.[141]
>
> 2. MAL A §20:
> If a seignior lay with his neighbor [*tappā'u*], when they have prosecuted him (and) convicted him, they shall lie with him (and) turn him into a eunuch.[142]

As a temporary aside, it is interesting to find that Meek translates the sexual act of MAL A §§ 19, 20 as 'lain', whereas Roth claims that her translation of 'sodomy' is 'obtained from the context, and not from the verb

Verlag, 1973), pp. 81-90 (83). Wold also acknowledges that 'while the Bible sanctions incest, homosexuality, and bestiality, the Hittite code bans only incest and bestiality (except with a horse)' (Wold, *Out of Order*, p. 210).

140. Although the meaning of *gadāmu* is uncertain it is definitely known to be dishonourable; Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 14 n. 27. Roth translates it as 'cut off his hair' (Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p. 159), while Bailey translates it as 'castration'; see Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955), p. 33. The same verb that occurs in §20 is often interpreted as castration.

141. Theophile J. Meek, 'The Middle Assyrian Laws', in James B. Pritchard (ed.), *ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2nd edn, 1955), pp. 180-88 (181). Roth prefers, 'If a man furtively spreads rumors about his comrade, saying, "Everyone *sodomizes* him," or in a quarrel in public says to him, "Everyone *sodomizes* you," and further, "I can prove the charges," but he is unable to prove the charges and does not prove the charges, they shall strike that man 50 blows with rods; he shall perform the king's service for one full month; they shall cut off his hair; moreover, he shall pay 3,600 shekels of lead' (Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p. 159). My italics.

142. Meek, 'The Middle Assyrian Laws', p. 181. Roth prefers, 'If a man *sodomizes* his comrade and they prove the charges against him and find him guilty, they shall *sodomize* him and they shall turn him into a eunuch' (Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p. 160). My italics.

nâku, which refers to fornication'.[143] Roth does not explain what she means by her value-laden use of 'sodomy', but she inconsistently translates the same verb stem of §12, which refers to the abuse of another man's wife by a man, as 'sex'.[144] Roth's interpretation exemplifies how scholars can read into ancient texts a foreign concept; her translation of the verb stem *nâku* as both 'sodomy' and 'sex' presumes, without justification or apparent foundation, that the Assyrians differentiated between the sexual abuse of a man and the sexual abuse of a woman.

While Thorbjørnsrud and Nemet-Nejat believe that MAL A §20 indicates that the Assyrians did not follow their Babylonian cousins' more relaxed attitude to homogenital relations,[145] a number of scholars believe that the prohibitions of the MAL A laws are more about the gender politics of privileged men retaining their status and authority than sodomy or homogenital behaviour per se.[146] As Gagnon notes,

> the laws were interested in applying criminal sanctions only to two specific cases of (male) same-sex intercourse: a man who slandered another man with the charge of being *repeatedly* penetrated by other men; and a man who *coercively* penetrated another man of similar social status and/or belonging to the same clan.[147]

The man who submits to anal penetration with all and sundry in MAL A §19 is publicly humiliated, due to his predilection for surrendering his masculinity,[148] but the wrongful accuser is also shamed by being shaved

143. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p. 192 n. 15.

144. This is in stark contrast to her claim for consistency and neutrality: 'I use the simplest, most neutral English word, in order to avoid imposing my interpretations on the text' (Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, p. 7).

145. 'Male homosexuality was described from the third millennium B.C.E. onward in Mesopotamia. Texts referred to sodomy between men as well as between men and boys. The Babylonians did not condemn this practice' (Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 139). Also: 'Homosexuality between equals was well-regarded in Babylon, and it was only in Assyrian law that it first came to be forbidden' (Berit Thorbjørnsrud, 'What Can the Gilgamesh Myth Tell Us about Religion and the View of Humanity in Mesopotamia?', *Temenos* 19 [1983], pp. 112-37 [120]. See also Thorkild Jacobsen, 'How Did Gilgamesh Oppress Uruk?', *AcOr* 8 [1930], pp. 62-74 [74]).

146. W.G. Lambert, 'Prostitution', in Volkert Haas (ed.), *Außenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients* (Xenia, 32; Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, 1992), pp. 127-57 (147).

147. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 47. His italics.

148. Guillaume Cardascia asserts that the placement of MAL A §§19–20 within the context of laws applying to violations committed against women justifies the view that the passive partner of homogenital relations was seen as the equivalent of a woman (*Les lois assyriennes* [LAPO, 2; Paris: Les editions du Cerf, 1969], p. 41). Likewise, Harris argues that 'mastery was thus seen as a masculine aptitude, dependent on an ideologi-

like a eunuch or castrated (depending on one's interpretation) for casting aspersions on the innocent man's masculinity. Thus, it is not the act of being anally penetrated that is ridiculed in MAL A §19, but that a man would actively forfeit his socio-sexual position of phallic domination—that is, masculine privilege—by continuously submitting to anal penetration (note the use of 'repeatedly' as a qualifier).[149] In MAL A §20 anal penetration of a *tappā'u* is proscribed because it contravenes sanctioned socio-sexual conventions; if a man anally penetrates another man of equal social status it renders the one penetrated inferior, and is therefore tantamount to sexual abuse because, according to the prevalent mindset, no man would ever willingly submit himself sexually to an equal.[150] Given that MAL A §§19–20 forbids repeated submission of one's male anus for penetration and sexual relations with a man of equal social status,[151] it seems that Mesopotamian sexual vocabulary does not conceptualize recurrent, equal and consenting homogenital sexual relations between men—one of the parties must be the dominant, aggressive penetrator, while the other must be the submissive penetratee.[152] In the Middle Assyrian Laws, 'status, coercion, and repeated acts of receptivity … play a part in constructing the boundaries between sanctioned and prohibited behaviors among men'.[153]

cal differentiation between gender roles' (Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, p. 141).

149. The accusation focuses on the wrongful accusation of a man as a 'persistent homosexual' (Lambert, 'Prostitution', p. 146).

150. Thus, the issue is not about men having sexual relations with inferior males (for example, boys, slaves, captured enemies) as much as an issue of power relations—specifically, treating a male of equal status with the utmost disrespect by penetrating him anally.

151. G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, *The Assyrian Laws* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 71. Nissinen notes that the 'the *Laws* do not specify a case of penetrating a male who is not a *tappā'u*, for instance, a defeated enemy or someone of lower status who does not belong to the social circles of the penetrator' (Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 26). This is also the stance adopted by Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', p. 404. Gagnon takes it further, arguing that 'a social inferior (for example, a foreigner or resident alien, a prisoner of war, a slave) might have been expected to put up with the same-sex passions of a superior' (Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 46).

152. 'To become subjected to (anal) intercourse by another man involves shame and suppression; to do the same to another brings superiority and power' (Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 28). Di Vito also believes that homogenital relations in the Middle Assyrian Laws are framed within a hierarchical socio-sexual structure of domination and subjugation; Di Vito, 'Questions about the Construction of (Homo)sexuality', p. 117.

153. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', p. 406.

The most revealing Mesopotamian sources for homogenital relations refer to the Babylonian *assinnū* (cuneiform sign *ur.sal*, dog-woman[154] or feminine man) and the Assyrian *sinnišānu* (woman-like man[155]). The *assinnū* were ambiguously gendered male devotees of Ištar (Inanna)—the Queen of Heaven, the goddess of love and war with both masculine and feminine traits[156]—whose behaviour (cross-dressing, playing musical instruments, performing ecstatic dancing, wearing daggers and carrying the spindle [the ultimate symbol of femininity]) during cultic rituals mimicked that of their deity.[157] Although von Soden notes that, despite the extensive written sources for the temple cult, there is still no comprehensive study of the different roles and functions of the cultic staff of the temples,[158] he believes that there is enough evidence to suggest that 'cultic prostitution' and 'male homosexuals' [*sic*] did indeed play an important role in temple fertility ceremonies.[159] If such an assertion is accurate, the temple personnel's sexual behaviour reflects a gender-delineated sex code for Babylonain society: only the *assinnū* were sanctioned to blur gender by cross-dressing and taking the passive role in male homogenital acts.[160] Paradoxically, the *assinnū* were revered for their divinely aided ability to transcend normal boundaries[161] and simultaneously

154. In ancient Near Eastern societies outside of Israel, the association of *keleb* with cultic prostitution need not have a pejorative etymology; see, for example, D.W. Thomas, 'Kelebh (Dog): Its Origin and Some Usages of It in the Old Testament', *VT* 10 (1960), pp. 424-26.

155. Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, p. 160.

156. Thus, for Harris, Ištar 'is neither here nor there. She is betwixt and between' (Rikvah Harris, 'Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites', *HR* 30 [1990], pp. 261-78 [265]); see also Harris, *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*, p. 160. This is contra to Leick's view that 'the goddess unites gender roles, although she is never bisexual or androgynous' (Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, p. 157).

157. While fertility was central to the rituals, it is a hotly debated topic whether such activities involved so-called sacred prostitution or orgiastic frenzies. The textual (for example, Lady of Largest Hearts, The Exaltation of Inanna, and Inanna's Descent to the Netherworld) and pictorial evidence does, however, seem heavily weighted towards justifying some form of sexual role for the cultic personnel.

158. Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 188, 195 n. 36.

159. Von Soden, *The Ancient Orient*, p. 195. Nissinen furthers the argument by detailing primary texts and secondary literature that connect the *assinnū* with passivity in anal intercourse (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 32-33).

160. The Babylonian omen-collection *Šumma alu* makes references to men having sex with or like an *assinnū*, which seems to support the assertion that homogenital passivity was part of their function; see Lambert, 'Prostitution', p. 145.

161. Stefan M. Maul, '*kurgarrû* und *assinnu* und ihr Stand in der babylonischen Gesellschaft', in Volkert Haas (ed.), *Außenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu einer*

ridiculed because their sexual behaviour was understood to indicate weakness ('real men' could never be passive in any sense).

The available Mesopotamian artefacts are limited in their description of attitudes towards male homogenital behaviour, but they do provide some explanation of the socio-sexual conventions that governed such activities. Appropriate sexual behaviour was dependent not only upon one's gender (the norm being male) but also upon one's social status and frequency of penetration. Despite weaknesses in his interpretation of homogenital conduct in the ancient Near East,[162] Hardman realistically suggests that outside of ancient Israel homogenital relations were of little concern because the authorities

> left personal consensual sex to the individual when the act did not interfere with property rights or the obligations and duties of others. Heterosexual conduct, as related to a man's rights to his own wife and children, were of concern as they related to heirs, inheritance, and conjugal rights. Sexual conduct per se was not a question of morals.[163]

Biblical Homogenital Relations: Divine Order, Masculinity, and Honour and Shame

Neutral studies of sex and eroticism in the field of biblical scholarship are ashamedly bleak: the conservative nature of much biblical scholarship has meant that even the more progressive analyses of sex are often, at best, limited to theological discussions of maintaining legitimate boundaries and tolerant attitudes. It is not surprising that the first comprehensive historical book about the biblical world and homogenitality was published as recently as 1998.[164] (Earlier scholarly works do exist,[165] but, rather than

Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients (Xenia, 32; Konstanz: Konstanzer Universitätsverlag, 1992), pp. 159-72 (166).

162. Hardman seems more content to argue anachronistically a point to its 'logical' conclusion from a Western, twentieth-century pro-gay perspective than consider seriously opposing views from Assyriologists, whom he often too hastily labels as homophobic.

163. Hardman, *Homoaffectionalism*, p. 29. Similarly, 'Male citizens, as well as their wives and daughters, were not to be the object of sexual penetration. There was no free love in Mesopotamia; a free male's sexual opportunities were limited to his wife, his slaves, and prostitutes. As in Ancient Greece, the slaves and prostitutes could be male *or* female; and a "normal" Assyrian may have well frequented both' (Cooper, 'Buddies in Babylonia', pp. 84-85).

164. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*.

165. For example, Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*; Boswell, *CSTH*; William Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex—Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today* (London: SCM Press, 1989); Robin Scroggs,

citing extensive historical evidence for scholarly discussion, they are primarily motivated by theological agendas of one kind or another.) In spite of Nissinen's milestone achievement, however, his work also suffers from attempts to reconcile homosexuality with Christianity, devoting two of the book's seven chapters to theological discussions about sexuality.[166] Yet, the growth of biblical and theological programmes as interdisciplinary subjects within university arts and humanities faculties is lessening the influence of dogmatic thinking about sex, and thereby providing a more open arena for discussions without reference to moral thought or comments about God's will. Thus, the purpose of this section is to interpret biblical texts—pertaining to male homogenital expression—both narrative and law—as cultural artefacts in order to offer some insights into the norms underlying them.

Whereas Mesopotamian law codes unambiguously refer to codes of conduct, regardless of whether or not they were enforced, biblical references to homogenital behaviour are more awkward to categorize because they occur in both biblical narrative and biblical law, with the latter occurring even within narrative sequences; this hodgepodge makes it difficult to extrapolate ascribed codes of behaviour from biblical texts.[167] Furthermore, when biblical laws are imbedded in a narrative context the 'narrative sexual actions' within the plot 'function as semiotic acts *within* the represented story-world' so that they signify something more than the actuality of events.[168]

Of all the biblical allusions to sex, and there are many, Lev. 18.22 and 20.13-14 are the only explicit references to male homogenital acts in the Hebrew Bible, and these alternate between law and narrative. Other narra-

The New Testament and Homosexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); and Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*.

166. For a more detailed discussion of the implications of Nissinen's approach, see Ken Stone, 'Homosexuality and the Bible or Queer Reading?', *TheolSex* 14 (2001), pp. 107-18. Also religiously motivated, but from a very different perspective than Lutheran Nissinen, conservative evangelicals Wold and Gagnon, writing about male homogenital relations in their biblical and ancient Near Eastern contexts, are driven by an ideological desire to prevent homosexuals, their misguided, progressive Christian supporters, and the ever-so-threatening (yet distinctively American concept of) "homosexual/ist lobby" from destroying the proclaimed unity of the Christian view of (homo) sexuality; see Wold, *Out of Order*, and Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*.

167. C.R. Smith, 'The Literary Structure of Leviticus', *JSOT* 70 (1996), pp. 17-32.

168. Ken Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup, 234; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 31. Similarly, both Barr and Biale note that narratives that contain sex do so only secondarily: matters pertaining to sex are rarely of concern; see J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 67, and D. Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 13.

tive texts often cited as referring to male homogenital behaviour are Gen. 18.26–19.29, the Genesis parallel in Judg. 19.1-30, and various allusions to so-called sacred harlots or cultic prostitutes (Deut. 23.17-18; 1 Kgs 14.24; 15.12; and 22.46; 2 Kgs 23.7; Job 36.14). I will discuss the references to male homogenital behaviour in the Hebrew Bible from Leviticus, Genesis and Judges because the link with these passages in what we in contemporary society label homosexuality is credible. I shall not, however, discuss the biblical references to so-called fertility cults and cultic prostitution in Deuteronomy and Kings because such deliberations are beyond the scope of my argument, and they are inevitably influenced by problematic preconceptions about a hotly contested area of biblical scholarship.

I believe that the unambiguous references to homogenital sex acts in the Hebrew Bible unequivocally prohibit and condemn such behaviour between men.[169] Unlike the laws of Israel's neighbours, Israelite laws do not distinguish between the frequency, social status, role (that is, active and passive) or nature (that is, voluntary and involuntary) of the parties to homogenital relations—both men, without exception, are sentenced to the death penalty. Nor, unlike the pederastic relations of ancient Greece, whereby an older man could express his sexual desires with a male youth, do the Israelite prohibitions distinguish between the age of the two parties—all homogenital relations are proscribed, hence the use of *zakar*, a generic Hebrew word for 'male', rather than *na'ar* ('boy,' 'lad' or 'youth'). As Wold so rightly notes, all biblical references to 'same-gender sexual intercourse' are unanimous in their prohibition: 'There are no seams in the biblical view … No concession is made to semantic labels.'[170] However, it is not sufficient to say just that the Bible condemns male homogenital behaviour and that is that; in order to understand the biblical passages fully, sense must be made of the rhetoric used to justify them and their relation to wider biblical thought.[171] Although interpreters acknowledge that biblical depictions of sexual activity are inextricably linked to wars, religion and politics, Stone notes that

169. Homogenital acts between women are not proscribed anywhere in the Hebrew Bible because, apparently, in the ancient Israelite masculinist mindset a woman could neither take the active role in sexual relations nor lose her (manly) honour (Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 43).

170. Wold, *Out of Order*, p. 22.

171. Victor Furnish believes that every biblical reference to homogenital relations presumes that it is wrong without giving any explanation; thus, explanation 'must be inferred from the literary, cultural, and theological contexts of each reference' (Victor Paul Furnish, 'The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context', in Jeffrey S. Siker (ed.), *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), pp. 18-35 [31]). See also Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'Law and Philosophy: The Case of Sex in the Bible', *Semeia* 45 (1989), pp. 89-102 (96-97).

few have made the references to sex the basis of their studies.[172] Thus, in this section I will show how the biblical texts that refer to homogenital sexual acts between men illustrate ancient Israelite notions of legitimate sexual behaviour and share similarities with neighbouring societies insofar as they bring to the fore issues about male–female gender relations, male power, and honour and shame, and yet are also distinctly Israelite insofar as they contain a strong cultic element of religious identity.[173]

Sodom and Gibeah: Genesis 18.26–19.29 and Judges 19.1-30

In the Genesis account two divine messengers are sent to the Canaanite city of Sodom to investigate the residents' great wickedness, although this wickedness is never specified.[174] After Abraham's nephew Lot shows the strangers hospitality, all the young and old townsmen surround the house and demand to 'know' (*yada'*) the two strangers (Gen. 19.4-5). Lot refuses to surrender them, offering instead his two virgin daughters (Gen. 19.4-8).[175] When this offer is rejected the emissaries pull Lot inside and strike all the townsmen blind (Gen. 19.11). The emissaries then urge Lot and his family to flee the city in order to escape its destruction by fire and brimstone (Gen. 19.15-24).

Despite the fact that *yada'* has sexual connotations in only thirteen instances of the 943 times it appears in the Bible,[176] the sexual context of Gen. 19.5 is clear.[177] The Sodomites certainly breached laws concerning

172. Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*, pp. 10-11, 15, 134.

173. 'Other ancient Near Eastern sources display sexual ethics, taboos, and gender roles basically similar to those in the Hebrew Bible, with certain qualifications that serve the ends of the identity struggle' of the postexilic Israelites (Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 42).

174. Genesis 18.20 mentions the severity of Sodom's sins without specifying what they are.

175. While most readers are appalled by Lot's proposal, Ukleja offers his own (conservative evangelical) perspective to the father's actions: 'Lot's offer was motivated by the thought that however wrong rape is, homosexual rape is even worse. Lot›s offer was simply what he thought to be the lesser of two evils' (P. Michael Ukleja, 'Homosexuality and the Old Testament', *BSac* 140 [1983], pp. 259-66 [262]).

176. That is, Gen. 4.1, 4.17, 4.25, 19.8, 24.16, 38.26; Num. 31.17; Judg. 11.39, 19.22, 19.25, 21.11; 1 Sam. 1.19; 1 Kgs 1.4.

177. The Septuagint's use of the Greek word *sungenometha*, which appears elsewhere only in Gen. 39.10, where Potiphar's wife asks Joseph to sleep with her, appears to suggest the sexual nature of Sodom's townsmen. Moreover, deutero-canonical and extra-biblical texts seem to confirm that *sungenometha*, corresponding to the Hebrew *yada'*, refers to sexual relations; see, for example, Jdt. 12.16; Sus. 11, 37; Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 1.2.12; Plato, *The Republic, Books 1–5* (trans. Paul Shorey; LCL, 237;

hospitality,[178] but the fact that Lot offers his two virgin daughters to appease the townsmen (Gen. 19.8) verifies that the interest of Sodom's townsmen is sexual. Lot's offer of his daughters to be used for abating the townsmen's sexual frenzy[179] also demonstrates that the writer of the narrative is not discussing homosexuality as we know it today, because, had he believed in such a predisposition, 'the offer of the two young women would have been pointless'.[180] Rather, the narrative is symbolic of something other than licentious men with unbridled homosexual desires. In the ancient world, it was common to parade one's victory over enemies by treating them with the greatest possible contempt, forcing males into the sexual role of a female by becoming the passive recipients in anal intercourse:

> For much of the history of the world, warfare has tended to make rapists of victorious soldiers. Raping the enemies' women is a way of humiliating them, showing that they lack the power to defend their women and children. But even more demonstrably yet, raping the enemies themselves is a way of showing that they lack the power to defend even their own persons, whether that assault is with the spear or arrow or … the erect phallus of the victor … The penetrator is now master, and the penetrated one a humiliated man forced to serve the will of another.[181]

Studies of male rape suggest that the act of sexual aggression is an act of control and power, or, as Stone puts it with regard the Israelites, 'sexual penetration signifies social submission'.[182] An example of this mentality is demonstrated in a fifth-century wine jar found by the river Eurymedon

London: William Heinemann, 1930), 329C; and Plato, *Laws, Books 7–12* (trans. R.G. Bury; LCL, 192; London: William Heinemann, 1926), 930D; and Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Books 1–2* (trans. A.D. Godley; LCL, 117; London: William Heinemann, 1920), 2.121E. See also James De Young, 'A Critique of Prohomosexual Interpretations of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha', *BSac* 147 (1990), pp. 437-54.

178. Ancient Near-Eastern hospitality to sojourners and travellers was a sacred religious duty for the Israelites (see Lev. 19.33-34) and their neighbours.

179. 'Lot surely is inciting the lust of the would-be rapists in using the same verb of sexual 'knowledge' they had applied to the visitors in order to proffer the virginity of his daughters for their pleasure' (Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* [London: W.W. Norton, 1996], p. 85 n. 8).

180. S.B. Parker, 'The Hebrew Bible and Homosexuality', *QR* 11 (1991), pp. 4-19 (6). Lawrence Turner makes an interesting observation: 'To have offered himself to be homosexually abused in place of his guests would have maintained his role as a righteous host. It would also have been a more logical offer, given the apparent sexual predilections of his lust-crazed neighbours' (Lawrence Turner, *Genesis* [Readings; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000], p. 87).

181. Ronald E. Long, *Men, Homosexuality, and the Gods: An Exploration into the Religious Significance of Male Homosexuality in World Perspective* (HGLS; New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004), p. 76.

182. Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*, p. 76.

(where the Athenians defeated the Persians in 460 BCE). It shows a picture of a semi-clad Greek soldier, his erect penis in his hand, approaching a defeated Persian soldier from behind. The about-to-be-buggered Persian says, 'I am Eurymedon. I stand bent over.' Likewise, by treating Lot's guests with the contemptible threat of male rape (the desire to 'humiliate them by topping them'[183]), the men of Sodom demonstrate their complete lack of regard for any authority Lot's guests claim to possess. The Sodomites are not condemned for their inhospitable sexual demands so much as what this behaviour represents—socio-sexual chaos resulting from godlessness. Whereas the later writings of Josephus and Philo make a correlation between the men of Sodom and homogenital sexual desire, the Hebrew Bible is its own best commentary: Deut. 29.23-26 claims that God's wrath was due to the people of Sodom's apostasy; Isa. 1.4-7 mentions iniquity, corruption and rebellion; Jer. 23.14 mentions wickedness; Ezek. 16.44-52 condemns the Israelites at length for their lewdness, abominations, haughtiness, pride, gluttony and selfishness; Zeph. 2.8-11 warns the Moabites of their pride and apostasy, just like Sodom.

Judges 19 offers an intertextual parallel to the story of Genesis 19 in more ways than one.[184] In the narrative, out-of-town guests are offered hospitality by an older man who lives in, but is not a resident of, the cities. As with the Genesis story, the townsmen surround the house and demand to have sexual relations with the male guests, and the offer of virgin daughters is made to appease the townsmen. However, the situation in which the men demand to 'know' the anonymous Levite from Ephraim (Judg. 19.22) does not end as peacefully as it does for the guests in Sodom. In the Judges account, the Levite seizes his *pilegeš* ('concubine' or 'wife of secondary rank') and throws her out to the men of Gibeah, who gang-rape her until the morning (Judg. 19.25).

In the same way that the threat of the rape of Lot's guests in Genesis represents more than sex, so the rape of the Levite's concubine symbolizes more than just sexual violence;[185] the Levite states that the rapists' intentions

183. Long, *Men, Homosexuality, and the Gods*, p. 77.

184. Alter believes that Judges 19 is the 'heterosexual companion piece' of Genesis 19 (Robert Alter, *Motives for Fiction* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984], p. 132). Similarly, Choon-Leong Seow asks why is it that some interpreters use Judges 19 'as an implicit condemnation of homosexuality, rather than of rape or violence ... when the violence actually committed is heterosexual? Why is it that people should focus on homosexuality in this story of general violence but not condemn heterosexuality in the story of the rape of Dinah by the Shechemites (Genesis 34) or the rape of Tamar by Amnon (2 Samuel 13)?' (Choon-Leong Seow, 'Textual Orientation', in Robert L. Brawley [ed.], *Biblical Ethics and Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996], pp. 17-34 [23]).

185. Bal maintains that it includes turning the Levite's body into 'anybody's property' (Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of*

were not sexual gratification but humiliation and murder (Judg. 20.4-5). Embroiled in the violation-by-proxy of the Levite's masculinity (that is, the threat of male rape and the actual rape of his property) is the message that Bath-sheber—daughter of breaking[186]—got her just desert for *zanah*ing (the verb *zānâ* can mean 'prostitute' or 'fornicate') against her husband.[187] This narrative clearly demonstrates how ancient Israelite culture preferred to transgress boundaries of property violation (by offering the Levite's *pilegeš*) than to transgress boundaries of gender (by offering the Levite's male guests), particularly when the property in question is the cause of the incident in the first place.[188] Although the rape of the Levite's concubine is horrific, the Judges narrative is firmly entangled in issues of masculinity, honour and shame. By sexually abusing the Levite's property (the rape of a wife was considered a crime against the husband in the ancient Near East),[189] the men of Gibeah's sexual transgression flaunts power over the Levite with a violation so great that it questions the core of his masculinity and honour[190]—a grievance so significant that the other tribes of Israel go to war against the Benjaminites.

Judges [CSHJ; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988], pp. 123, 158). Similarly, Gareth Moore argues that the biblical mindset believed 'sexual penetration was a symbolic taking and giving of possession'; see Gareth Moore, *A Question of Truth: Christianity and Homosexuality* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003), p. 290 nn. 29–31.

186. Exum's name for the otherwise anonymous woman (*Fragmented Women*, p. 179).

187. Exum argues that there is a gender-motivated subtext of male fear of female sexuality in the rape of the Levite's wife: 'By leaving her husband the woman makes a gesture of sexual autonomy so threatening to patriarchal ideology that it requires her to be punished sexually in the most extreme form' (Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 181). See also Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 158.

188. Property rights are secondary to the issue of an anally penetrated man being emasculated and thereby losing his (male) honour; see Deborah Sawyer, *God, Gender and the Bible* (BibLim; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 34, and Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 92. Typical of the 'genderization' of subjectivity in the wider ancient Near Eastern world, the rape of a '*proper sexual object*' (that is, woman) is more favourable to the biblical narrator than the rape of a man who is 'properly a *sexual subject*' (Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*, p. 80). See also Chapter 3 ('The Metaphorics of the Body: Nudity, the Goddess, and the Gaze') of Bahrani, *Women of Babylon*, pp. 40-69 for an excellent discussion of representations of gender and the male–female subject–object dichotomy in the ancient Near Eastern world.

189. Raymond Westbrook, 'Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law', *RB* 97 (1990), pp. 542-80.

190. Stone and Guest believe that the rape of the Levite's wife is connected with issues of masculinity/feminization, shame and honour; see Stone, *Sex, Honor, and Power in the Deuteronomistic History*, pp. 70, 74, 78-84; and Deryn Guest, 'Judges', in Deryn Guest, *et al.* (eds.), *QBC* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p. 183.

Abomination: Leviticus 18.22 and 20.13

The first explicit prohibition of male homogenital relations in the Hebrew Bible appears in the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26).[191] Unlike the Mesopotamian laws, the laws of 'Lev. 18.22 and 20.13 ban all male couplings involving anal penetration, seemingly those coerced and those voluntary; those with men of higher status, equal status, or lower status; those with men of one's own community or another community'.[192] The Holiness Code ascribes a moral basis to many types of sexual conduct, with behaviour judged on the basis of legitimate pairings: incest, bigamy, bestiality, intercourse with menstruating women, adultery and male homogenital relations all contravene the divine cosmic order in which everything is created according to its role and function.[193] Yet Watts claims that Israel's laws function more as rhetoric than legislation in the modern sense, attempting to persuade, by means of story and divine sanction (blessings and curses), listeners and readers to conform to certain modes of behaviour.[194] Thus, Ackroyd and Evans argue that the Holiness Code is not legal material in the contemporary sense as much as highly developed theological exposition 'directed towards the demonstration, in relation to legal material, of the theological principles underlying the very existence of Israel conceived as people of God, and exemplifying the kind of behaviour which belongs within that particular theological context'.[195]

Although we do not know how ordinary citizens viewed Israel's laws, the legal texts are the only recorded biblical cultural norms we have available to consider. Wenham, for example, argues that law and actual practices in ancient Israel should be distinguished because ancient Israel, like

191. Even this apparent prohibition is not so straightforward, given that the two Leviticus passages are the only texts that use the ambiguous idiom 'lying down of a woman' in the Bible. However, Olyan provides a convincing argument to support his conviction that these two texts do indeed refer to male homogenital behaviour; see Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', pp. 399-400.

192. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', p. 406.

193. Joseph Blenkinsopp, 'The Family in First Temple Israel', in Leo G. Perdue, Carol L. Meyers and Joseph Blenkinsopp (eds.), *Families in Ancient Israel* (FRC; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), pp. 48-103 (74-75).

194. J.W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (BibSem, 59; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

195. Peter R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Bible: From the Beginnings to Jerome,* I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 95. Nissinen also believes that the laws of the Holiness Code have nothing in common with law as we understand it today, and it would be better understood as a catechism that sought to teach male Israelites their cultic obligations in accordance with their nation's covenant with God (*Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 37).

its neighbours, operated on a double standard that perhaps turned a blind eye to practices that were officially prohibited.[196] This is also the stance adopted by Di Vito, who maintains that 'the legislation of Leviticus is more in the nature of a theoretical case rather than legislation based on Israel's lived experience',[197] and Winkler, who argues that 'ancient texts operate as restricted public transactions that project themselves as universal discourses'.[198] Nevertheless, Wold, despite acknowledging that there is 'no evidence that the death penalty was actually carried out',[199] insists that the Holiness Code had a practical function beyond rhetoric and thus Israel's laws were necessarily enforced, acting as 'a means of structuring and maintaining sociological and theological order in Hebrew society'.[200]

The Holiness Code is directed to all the Israelites (Lev. 17.1), and Lev. 18.24-29 explicitly details how the Israelites will be punished if they do not keep God's statutes and ordinances, and confirms that the code is part of the covenant between Yahweh and his people. Thus, Klawans believes that the message of Leviticus is crystal clear: 'sexual sins defile the sinners and the land upon which their sins have been committed, leading to exile'.[201] Although no explicit justification is given for the postexilic prohibitions of Lev. 18.22 and 20.13, they might be better understood as part of a socio-legalistic polemic against the Israelites' imitating the (idolatrous) practices of the Egyptians and the displaced Canaanites (the verses that prohibit male homogenital relations are preceded by an introduction that justifies them by appealing to the abominations of the Egyptians and Canaanites).[202] Or, as Douglas so simply puts it, the prohibitions of Leviticus 18 and 20 refer 'to sexual irregularities as known in foreign cults'.[203] Nissinen finds the pagan cultic link between Lev. 18.22 and 20.13 and the idolatrous sexual practices

196. G.J. Wenham, 'The Gap between Law and Ethics in the Bible', *JJS* 48 (1997), pp. 17-29 (23). See also Sakenfeld, 'Loyalty and Love', p. 217; and Patai, *Sex and Family in the Bible and the Middle East*, p. 59.

197. Di Vito, 'Questions about the Construction of (Homo)sexuality', p. 111.

198. John J. Winkler, 'Laying Down the Law: The Oversight of Men's Sexual Behavior in Classical Athens', in David M. Halperin, John J. Winkler and Froma I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 171-209 (176).

199. Wold, *Out of Order*, p. 143.

200. Wold, *Out of Order*, p. 143.

201. J. Klawans, 'The Impurity of Immorality in Ancient Judaism', *JJS* 48 (1997), pp. 1-16 (4).

202. See Lester L. Grabbe, *Leviticus* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 79; and Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or Not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 17.

203. Mary Douglas, 'Justice as the Cornerstone: An Interpretation of Leviticus 18–20', *Int* 53 (1999), pp. 341-50 (343).

of the Egyptians and the Canaanites tenuous, insisting that it is 'unrealistic to assume that the Holiness Code would assess other kinds of homoeroticism as more acceptable'.[204] Instead, he advocates an alternative explanation of the Leviticus prohibitions as a combination of an older, pre-exilic socio-sexual taboo (regulating sexual behaviour as part of taboo-protected gender and sex roles) and a postexilic identity crisis or struggle (separating Israel's cultic practices from neighbouring nations' 'pagan' practices).[205] If homogenital erotic conduct was associated in the Hebrew consciousness with idolatry, then the Levitical proscriptions acted as a means of boundary maintenance in the postexilic era:[206]

> The times were tumultuous. Significant portions of the Jewish community had been deported to Babylon in the aftermath of the devastating defeat inflicted on Judah by the Babylonian Empire in 587 BCE. Shaken to the core by the collapse of the Davidic monarchy and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, the Jewish community in Babylon existed precariously in a religiously pluralistic world in which pagan religions exerted a strong pull on many of the people. Mounting a strong counter-challenge to these competing claims was essential for the community. Many exiles feared that if the walls between 'us' and 'them' weren't built very high to avoid any mixing with 'them,' the Jewish community would disappear.[207]

Ancient Israelite society interpreted male homogenital relations in relation to gendered hierarchies of social structure and control (for example, manliness, honour and shame); homogenital acts between men transgressed divinely sanctioned gender boundaries and gender roles, and emasculated the passive recipient's manly honour.[208] Bird notes an explicit male–female

204. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 41.

205. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 41-42.

206. For Hyam Maccoby, 'the essence of holiness is separation' ('Holiness and Purity: The Holy People in Leviticus and Ezra–Nehemiah', in Sawyer [ed.], *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, pp. 153-70 [153]). Despite the Israelites defining themselves in opposition to neighbouring peoples, the prophets of the Hebrew Bible and archaeological excavations have shown that such a distinction was idealistic and did not necessarily reflect reality; see Boshoff, Scheffler and Spangenberg, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Context*, p. 23.

207. Gwen B. Sayler, 'Beyond the Biblical Impasse: Homosexuality Through the Lens of Theological Anthropology', *Dialog* 44 (2005), pp. 81-89 (82).

208. Di Vito wrongly assumes that Nissinen's interpretation of the Israelite construct and regulation of sexual behaviour is structured on only active–passive and domination–subjugation dichotomies ('Questions about the Construction of [Homo]sexuality', pp. 108-32 [116-17]). In fact, Di Vito and Nissinen both agree that divinely sanctioned hierarchical gender roles are the fundamental issue in the Levitical (as well as other biblical) prohibitions against male homogenital behaviour; compare Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, pp. 41-44 with Di Vito, 'Questions about the Construction of (Homo)sexuality', pp. 122-23.

dichotomy in the prohibition of Lev. 18.22, 'You shall not lie with a male (*zākār*) as with a woman (*neqēbah*); it is an abomination,' whereby the narrative contrasts biological male (*zākār*) with the generic term for woman (*'iššah*), rather than the biological term for female (*neqēbah*), in order to emphasize the male as the object of this male-initiated sex act,[209] which serves to reinforce her belief that 'no Israelite male would consent to engage in homoerotic relations—at least not as the passive partner'.[210]

Olyan's philological analysis of the prohibitions of the two Leviticus texts suggests the development of Israelite thought regarding male–male anal penetration, with the first prohibition (18.22) directed at the penetrator and the second prohibition (20.13) directed at both men.[211] Olyan believes that the earlier prohibition (18.22) is specifically directed towards the penetrator, which is demonstrated by the use of the obscure term 'the lying down of a woman'. He believes that this obscure phrase is solely directed towards the active partner in the sex act because the prohibition is in the form of the masculine singular ('you') rather than the masculine plural ('you'), and also because other biblical texts use a similar term to prohibit a man from lying down with a receptive female (e.g. Lev. 15.18, 24, 33; 19.20; 20.11, 12, 18, 20; and Num. 5.19).[212] Olyan notes, however, that the later redacted text of Lev. 20.13 starts off with reference to the masculine singular as in 18.22, but then abruptly shifts the prohibition from the masculine singular to address the two men in the plural. Despite the difficulty of the syntax of Lev. 20.13, Olyan believes that both parties to the sexual act are deemed guilty and thus both are sentenced to execution.[213] Both of these Levitical prohibitions delineate gender relations in ancient Israel, emphasizing that a man can legitimately experience 'the lying down of a woman' only with a woman.[214]

Closer analyses of Leviticus in relation to other biblical texts support a strict gender delineation of sex roles in ancient Israelite society, where men

209. Phyllis A. Bird, 'The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality: Old Testament Contributions', in David L. Balch (ed.), *Homosexuality, Science, and the "Plain Sense" of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 151.

210. Bird, 'The Bible in Christian Ethical Deliberation concerning Homosexuality', p. 148.

211. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', pp. 398-414.

212. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', pp. 401, 518 n. 18.

213. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', p. 401.

214. Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', p. 402. Similarly, Sayler argues that these Levitical prohibitions make it clear that 'Men are penetrating agents. Women are penetrated recipients of male activity' (Sayler, 'Beyond the Biblical Impasse', p. 82).

are the dominant party to a sex act and women are the dominated.[215] In such a mindset of domination and submission, sexual relationships reflect social relationships, and so both the active and the passive parties to homogenital penetration in Leviticus are condemned because each man is guilty of transgressing God-given boundaries of male subjectivity: penetrating another man treats him as a sexual object, the position natural only to women, while allowing oneself to be penetrated is tantamount to self-emasculation.[216] In a male-gendered, theocratic world the laws of Leviticus provide clear distinctions of purity and impurity, subject and object, male and female, all of which are necessary to prevent the divine order underpinning the chosen nation from plummeting into chaos.

Regardless of the basis of the Levitical prohibitions, for which 'no consensus has yet emerged on the unspoken rationale governing' them,[217] ultimately, nothing 'mitigates the priestly censure of such sexual activity'.[218] According to the Priestly writers, any Israelite man who engages in homogenital activity is indulging in practices that conflict with the covenantal bond of his nation with Yahweh. The prohibitions are not about 'how sexual intercourse should be practiced between males, but that it cannot be practiced between males under any circumstances'.[219]

215. The use of the verb *'anah* ('to subject', 'humble', or 'humiliate') is found in biblical references to sexual relations between a man and a woman, for example, Gen. 34.2; Deut. 22.29; and 2 Sam. 13.14. For further discussion, see Moore, *A Question of Truth*, p. 290 n. 30.

216. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 44; and Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 135-36.

217. Di Vito, 'Questions about the Construction of (Homo)sexuality', p. 118.

218. Parker, 'The Hebrew Bible and Homosexuality', p. 16.

219. Wold, *Out of Order*, p. 105. See also Olyan, '"And You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman"', pp. 406, 413.

4

Male–Male Intimacy in Ancient and Modern Friendships

By considering the David and Jonathan narrative in *all* its historical contexts (including the pretextual milieu and the posttextual cultures of modernity), Chapter 3 has shown that homogenital sexual acts in the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds, including those of the biblical world, were construed in ways very different from the way they are today. Whereas in the contemporary world we emphasize psycho-sexual object-choice and talk about a person's sexual orientation, the ancients viewed male homogenital sex acts in terms of a hierarchy of socio-sexual positioning, whereby the social precedes the sexual act, and the behaviour is judged in terms of factors such as age, social status, frequency, an active–passive dichotomy, male power, and honour and shame. Israelite attitudes towards homogenital sex are similar to its ancient neighbours', but then add a distinct emphasis on cultic integrity that forbids all penetrative anal sex acts between men because they disrupt the God-given, natural pairing of a man with a girl or woman. Given these clear prohibitions of male homogenital sexual behaviour in the Bible, I believe that there is no historical evidence to support claims that a biblical author or authors would depict a sexual relationship between David and Jonathan in a positive light.

This chapter further discredits another cornerstone of the homoerotic interpretation by showing that the view that male–male intimacy implies (homo)sexual desire is a relatively modern phenomenon stemming from developments since the 'invention' of homosexuality in the late nineteenth century. Before producing my own queer reading of the relationship between David and Jonathan in Chapter 6, I will discuss two ancient tales of male bonding that speak of an intimate friendship between a couple of men in order to contrast ancient literary constructs of male companionship with norms inherent in male friendships of the modern, Western world. The first, the Babylonian *Gilgamesh Epic* (the friendship between Gilgamesh

and Enkidu),[1] uses the language of masculinity and femininity to portray a sexual love affair between two men that is utterly masculine,[2] while the second, Homer's *Iliad* (the friendship between Achilles and Patroclus), uses similar 'conjugalized' language to portray a nonsexual relationship. These tales of male friendship offer today's readers the opportunity to reflect upon the David and Jonathan narrative and challenge two significant assumptions made about the biblical friendship: (1) that intimacy between two men is always indicative of eroticism; and (2) that platonic love and sexual love are diametrically opposed forms of masculine love.

Male Bonding and the Expression of Intimacy in the Ancient World

Ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean societies depended upon hierarchical roles as a means of social and sexual control. The processes of achieving and maintaining male privilege are manifest in male bonding, which is founded on a strict delineation of gendered power relations. Male bonding is an elaborate social hierarchy of male–male relations organized so as to deepen relations among men, while simultaneously excluding women from male space.[3] Contrary to the limitations of intimacy or emotional support placed upon many men today, the *Gilgamesh Epic* and Homer's *Iliad* show that expressing one's deep-seated emotions with a male friend in the ancient world was as essentially masculine as virtues such as heroism and loyalty. This male–male love is expressed without shame, and the bond is so profound that the love represents the sum of the hero's life—when the friend dies, the hero is devastated and views his life as worthless because his existence is meaningful only if the two men are together. As confusing as it sounds to us today, manly love was the ultimate statement of one's hyper-masculinity insofar as it meant sharing oneself in ways not afforded to those lower down the hierarchy of (male) prestige, such as females or lower-status males.

1. The earlier Sumerian account of the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is not relevant to this discussion because it depicts a master–servant relationship very different from the Babylonian version's tale of a close friendship between friends; see Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), pp. 29-30; and Nancy K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh: An English Version with an Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 31.

2. Jacobsen believes that early Mesopotamian culture probably 'considered bisexualism a token of superior strength' (Jacobsen, 'How Did Gilgamesh Oppress Uruk?', p. 74).

3. Thus, Hardman identifies mutual altruism, support, loyalty and cooperation between men, as well as the subjugation of women, as necessary components of male bonding in the ancient world (*Homoaffectionalism*, pp. v-vi).

The Gilgamesh Epic*: Gilgamesh and Enkidu*

The *Gilgamesh Epic*, argued to be the greatest literary composition of ancient Mesopotamia, is primarily a tale about the unavoidability of human mortality: 'the epic is concerned … with the bitter truth that death is inevitable. All men must die!'[4] However, a subtext of the epic, and the focus here, is the profound friendship between the oversexed Gilgamesh and his wild (uncivilized and hairy) companion, Enkidu, although even this undertone is often interpreted in light of the epic's wider theme of human mortality. Tigay combines the two themes when he acknowledges that much of the heroic epic is dedicated to Gilgamesh's 'obsessive quest for immortality', initiated by the death of his dear friend.[5]

Although the epic is not focused primarily on sex and eroticism,[6] the enigmatic references to Gilgamesh's love for Enkidu, without specification of its precise nature or expression, has led some to assert that the epic is possibly 'the world's first great love story'.[7] As we know, true love never runs smoothly, and Gilgamesh and Enkidu are not always close; according to the narrative, Enkidu is originally sent by the gods to calm Gilgamesh's oppressive tendencies towards the people of Uruk, where it is claimed that no sons or daughters are left untouched by him.[8] Jacobsen believes that Enkidu is created as Gilgamesh's plaything to quell his sexual vigour and stop him from sexually abusing the young male and female residents of Uruk, The gods created Enkidu, 'a being whose sexual vigor is as strong as Gilgameš's so that they when falling in love with each other they may neutralize each other and the inhabitants of Uruk may return to tranquility'.[9] Leick notes the

4. Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2nd edn, 1949), pp. 10-11.

5. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 39.

6. Benjamin Foster, 'Gilgameš, Sex, Love, and the Ascent of Knowledge', in J. Marks and R.M. Good (eds.), *Love and Death in the Ancient Near East: Essays in Honor of Marvin H. Pope* (Guildford: Four Quarters Publishing, 1987), pp. 21-42.

7. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, p. 18.

8. Tablet I, ii, lines 23–28; E.A. Speiser, 'Akkadian Myths and Epics', in James B. Pritchard (ed.), *ANET* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd edn, 1969), pp. 60-119 (74). Held maintains that Enkidu refocuses Gilgamesh's copious vigour to nobler, non-oppressive activities; George F. Held, 'Parallels between *The Gilgamesh Epic* and Plato's *Symposium*', *JNES* 42 (1983), pp. 133-41 (137, 138).

9. Jacobsen, 'How Did Gilgamesh Oppress Uruk?', p. 72. Jacobsen is one of a minority of Assyriologists to scrutinize the text and adopt a homoerotic reading of the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Later, however, he rescinds his assertion that Gilgamesh's demands on the people of Uruk were sexual; see Thorkild Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 196.

possible sexual innuendo of the two men's first meeting, whereby Enkidu takes Gilgamesh on:

> Enkidu challenges Gilgameš to a fight, preventing him from entering the house where the wedding-party was going on. Instead they embrace and wrestle, and the whole populace watches the mighty impact of their struggle, which in itself could be seen as a euphemistic description of a different sort of wrestling. The reference to 'foot' [i.e. penis] and sudden 'weakness' [i.e. orgasm] that gives way to tenderness is quite revealing in that sense, but is still presented in such a way that a 'straight' reading is possible.[10]

Despite not knowing exactly what Gilgamesh did to oppress the people of Uruk, there is no doubt that Gilgamesh's oppression is the cause of Enkidu's arrival. Draffkorn-Kilmer believes that the epic's wordplay on *pukka* and *mekku* (ball and stick) is part of Gilgamesh's abuse of the people, which possibly corresponds with the narrative's later wordplay on meteorite and axe as feminizing and eroticizing Enkidu. For Draffkorn-Kilmer, the oppression of the people of Uruk points to some form of sexual harassment by Gilgamesh.[11] Tigay also acknowledges that the essence of Gilgamesh's oppression 'is one of the most elusive problems of the epic',[12] but he is not convinced that Enkidu is sent to quell Gilgamesh's voracious sexual abuse of the male youth of the city.[13]

Contrary to biblicist Wold's assertion that 'nothing in the language of the epic is suggestive of a homosexual relationship' between Gilgamesh and Enkidu,[14] Tigay acknowledges that elements of the poem could possibly be interpreted as suggesting 'homosexual aspects' [*sic*] to the relationship between the two men.[15] These suggestive aspects of the epic all involve the feminization of Enkidu; the primary justification of a sexual reading is Gilgamesh's dreams about the coming of a meteorite and an axe, a visionary

10. Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, p. 266.

11. Anne Draffkorn-Kilmer, 'A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh', in W.R. Dynes and S. Donaldson (eds.), *Homosexuality in the Ancient World* (SH, 1; London: Garland, 1992), pp. 264-68 (265-66).

12. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 181.

13. Gordon and Heidel interpret the use of *pukka* and *mekku* (ball and stick) in the oppression of the people of Uruk as Gilgamesh forcing the young men of the city to work hard labour, while Nemet-Nejet argues that Gilgamesh tires them out with excessive games of polo; see Gordon, *The World of the Old Testament*, p. 46; Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and the Old Testament Parallels*, p. 5; and Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia*, p. 165.

14. Wold, *Out of Order*, p. 49. However, Foster, an Assyriologist, also insists that Enkidu's 'friendship with Gilgamesh … has no sexual basis at all' (Foster, 'Gilgameš, Sex, Love, and the Ascent of Knowledge', p. 22).

15. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 184 n. 22.

foretelling of Enkidu's arrival.[16] Meteorites and axes symbolize the female and the feminine in ancient Mesopotamia,[17] and could therefore imply that Gilgamesh dreams of meeting a complementary feminine counterpart.[18] Moreover, it is possible that the dreams use wordplay to portray Enkidu not only as a woman but also as a prostitute, a sexual amenity for male pleasure. For example, Gilgamesh informs his mother that in the dream of the meteorite he dreamt of a 'meteorite [*kisru*] from Anu', which could be a wordplay on *kezru* (a male with curled or dressed hair) or *kezertu* (a female devotee of Ištar, a so-called cult prostitute):

> Since the axe of which Gilgamesh dreams belongs to the second part of his dream, the obvious place to seek evidence for any special puns or innuendo is the first part of the dream announcing or portraying the coming of Enkidu (Tab. I v 28). There, the first object to fall from the sky is a *kisru* 'ball' ('circle, knot, cluster' etc., now generally translated and understood as a meteorite for this passage) to which object Gilgamesh makes love, in his dream, as though it were a woman, and as he does subsequently to the 'axe'. It is highly probable, therefore, that the underlying pun is with the word *kezru* 'male with curled (i.e. dressed) hair', the male counterpart as 'prostitute', 'Buhlknabe', etc. of *kezertu* 'female prostitute'. The implication of the double pun is, of course, that the often suspected, much discussed but of late rejected sexual relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is, after all, the correct interpretation.[19]

16. Dream 1: Tablet I, v, lines 25–38; Speiser, 'Akkadian Myths and Epics', p. 76. Jacobsen believes that the dream about the axe 'cannot mean anything but that homosexual intercourse is going to take place between Gilgameš and the newcomer' (Jacobsen, 'How Did Gilgamesh Oppress Uruk?', p. 70). Similarly, Leick asserts that whatever their meaning, it is obvious that 'both dreams emphasize the strong erotic feelings the strange object arouses in the hero' (Leick, *Sex and Eroticism in Mesopotamian Literature*, p. 266).

17. Greenberg draws attention to the fact that the meteorite at Pessinus in Phrygia and the *Ka'ba* in Mecca were both worshipped as a goddess in pre-Islamic times, and that the strange shape of the axe could represent those possessed by goddesses, women, and male votives of the fertility goddesses found in Asia Minor and Minoa; see David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 113.

18. The subtle depiction of Enkidu in the position of a woman appears to be confirmed by Gilgamesh's own words: '[I loved it, and lik]e a wife I caressed it' (Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 85). Jacobsen translates it as follows: 'I loved it and cohabited with it as though it were a woman' (Jacobsen, 'How Did Gilgamesh Oppress Uruk?', p. 70), while Nissinen and Dalley prefer, 'I loved it as a wife, doted (up) on it' (Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 21; and Stephanie D. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* [OWC; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 58).

19. Draffkorn-Kilmer, 'A Note on an Overlooked Word-Play in the Akkadian Gilgamesh', pp. 264-65.

As does Draffkorn-Kilmer and Leick, Dalley believes that it is no coincidence that the three metaphoric words used to describe Enkidu—that is, word of Anu (*zikru*/*sekru*), meteorite of Anu (*kisru*/*kezru*), and axe (*hassinnu*/*assinnū*)—'may be puns on terms for cult personnel of uncertain sexual affinities … associated with Ishtar's cult'.[20] Similarly, although acknowledging that nowhere in the epic is a sexual encounter explicitly recounted, Vanggaard argues that other sections of the epic support a homoerotic interpretation of the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu. For example, Gilgamesh's utter devastation at the loss of his companion, which causes him to mourn for Enkidu for six days and seven nights, as a widower grieves for his wife, and dressing Enkidu's corpse as though it were his bride[21] 'indicate that the friendship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu had an erotic aspect'.[22]

Thorbjørnsrud also believes that Gilgamesh and Enkidu develop a strong friendship that is 'probably homosexual'.[23] She cites other textual evidence in support of her conclusion, including that the two men meet as Gilgamesh is on his way to fulfil his fertility/marriage duties to Ištar (as in *hieros gamos* traditions[24]); the eroticized language between the two men; the exclusive camaraderie, at the expense of family relations; and Siduri's advice to Gilgamesh to accept the female principle of the traditional way of life (that is, having a wife and children), and enjoy his mortality.[25] Thorbjørnsrud argues that the homoerotic friendship motif between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is a gendered rebellion of males working against the important female traditions of marriage and raising children.[26] Thus, rather than accept the

20. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, p. 126 n. 13. However, Tigay notes that the evidence to suggest that *assinnū* refers to male (homosexual) prostitutes is, although a possible reality, not a definitive fact (*The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 172 n. 32).

21. Dressing Enkidu as a bride: Tablet 8, ii, lines 17–22 (Speiser, 'Akkadian Myths and Epics', p. 88). Mourning over Enkidu for six days and seven nights: Tablet 10, iii, lines 20–23 (Speiser, 'Akkadian Myths and Epics', pp. 91-92).

22. Thorkil Vanggaard, *Phallos: A Symbol and its History in the Male World* (New York: International Universities Press, 1972), p. 118.

23. Thorbjørnsrud, 'What Can the Gilgamesh Myth Tell Us about Religion and the View of Humanity in Mesopotamia?', p. 120.

24. *Hieros gamos* (Greek for 'sacred marriage') is a Sumerian ritual, also observed in other Near Eastern and Greek civilizations, that celebrates creation and fertility by re-enacting the marriage and sexual union of the king Dumuzi with the goddess Innana to symbolize the union of heaven and earth, male and female.

25. See Thorbjørnsrud, 'What Can the Gilgamesh Myth Tell Us about Religion and the View of Humanity in Mesopotamia?', pp. 112-37.

26. Thorbjørnsrud, 'What Can the Gilgamesh Myth Tell Us about Religion and the View of Humanity in Mesopotamia?', pp. 113, 119, 120-22. Rather than being about gender relations per se, Thorbjørnsrud believes that the conflict between what she terms the male and female principles in the epic—that is, Gilgamesh and Ištar—is a literary

controlling influence of the female principle, as exercised through marriage or the fertility ritual of *hieros gamos*, which ensures the renewal of life and fertility of the city-king's territory, Gilgamesh's relationship with Enkidu strengthens his resolve for norm-shattering independence from the traditional way of life in ancient Mesopotamia.[27]

Nissinen follows Tigay in asserting that, although 'homoeroticism is certainly not a central theme' in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, 'the text suggests several erotic associations'.[28] Not all, however, are convinced. Bullough considers a homoerotic dimension to the two men's relationship, but notes the narrative's ambiguity and therefore errs on the side of caution, concluding that 'whether the story implies only a powerful friendship between two men or whether it has more overt homosexual connections is a matter of opinion'.[29] In the same way, Lambert, aware of the fact that 'Babylonian texts do not avoid explicit language', believes that an erotic alliance would not be veiled in ambiguity and therefore advocates a nonsexual interpretation, at least until 'further and less ambiguous evidence is forthcoming'.[30]

Walls's approach to the epic is to expose the 'artificial dichotomy between the erotic and platonic forms of desire' that is readily taken for granted in contemporary society.[31] As he notes, ancient Mesopotamian society did not distinguish between the two forms of love, as the verb *râmu* can mean either making love or nonsexual love: 'Thus, we may appreciate the literary portrayal of the intense, homosocial companionship of Gilgamesh and Enkidu—sexually realized or not—without classifying it with contemporary social identities'.[32] Walls believes that the couple's preference for the company of the other over the company of women borrows conjugal imagery to depict a homosocial relationship that blurs the distinction

response to the historical phenomenon of the cult of Ištar losing its position of power in Mesopotamian society.

27. Thorbjørnsrud, 'What Can the Gilgamesh Myth Tell Us about Religion and the View of Humanity in Mesopotamia?', p. 122.

28. Nissinen, *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, p. 23.

29. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History*, p. 57. Likewise, Gagnon argues that certainty about the sexual, or otherwise, nature of the relationship between Gilgamesh and Enkidu is not possible, and very much depends on how much one wants to read between the lines; see Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, pp. 51-52. However, all assertions are, by their very nature, a matter of opinion, and it is the rationale behind an informed opinion that makes it more credible than another.

30. Lambert, 'Prostitution', p. 156 n. 31.

31. Neal Walls, *Desire, Discord, and Death: Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Myth* (ASOR Books, 9; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001), pp. 13, 62.

32. Walls, *Desire, Discord, and Death*, pp. 14-15.

between erotic and nonerotic love without emasculating either of them; in fact, both men are depicted as the archetype of hypermasculinity.[33]

Homer's Iliad*: Achilles and Patroclus*

Homer's *Iliad*, written during Greece's darkest history, recounts the last year of the Trojan War. Although Achilles is one of many characters in the *Iliad*, he is arguably the one on whom the plot rests—ultimately, the narrative centres around the tragedy of Achilles' wrath.[34] The intense relationship between Achilles and his comrade Patroclus is entwined in a wider military/political plot: the quest for the return of the beautiful Helen, who has been abducted by Paris.

While Enkidu has a distinct personality and individuality in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, Patroclus, like Jonathan, functions only in relation to the needs of his friend.[35] He is a shadow of a figure in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, coming alive in Book 9, when Homer recounts his and Achilles' adventures. Patroclus, however, remains the hero's sidekick throughout. His personality-as-function is exemplified in Book 9, where he loyally greets Achilles' guests, builds a fire, prepares a meal, serves the bread and directs the servants to make a bed for Phoenix. During this entire scenario Patroclus never speaks to his comrade; he simply acts as his alter ego.[36] Patroclus's death in Book 16, the cause of great mourning and the motivating force behind Achilles' return to the battle between the Achaians (Greeks) and the Trojans,[37] is the motivating factor behind Achilles' facing up to the necessity of his own death (18.80-124). Throughout the epic, there is much adoration, with Achilles saying that he views Patroclus as his own reflection and, sounding remarkably like the relationship between David and Jonathan, even loves him as he loves himself (18.80-82), surpassing

33. Walls, *Desire, Discord, and Death*, pp. 56-57.

34. Kenneth John Atchity, *Homer's Iliad: The Shield of Memory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982), p. xiii. Beye argues that the sophisticated, psychodramatic plot of the epic is outlined thus: hero falls out with general; hero returns at just the right moment; hero fights and dies a glorious death; and hero is praised; see Charles Rowan Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition* (New York: Gordian Press, 2nd edn, 1976), pp. 113-14.

35. Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, pp. 82-83, 86. Clarke observes that there is nothing other than Achilles for Patroclus in the narrative: Patroclus's first words are addressed to Achilles (11.606, whereby he asks what Achilles requires of him), and in his dying utterances he calls Achilles' name (16.854) ('Achilles and Patroclus in Love', *Hermes* 106 [1978], pp. 381-96 [390]).

36. Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, p. 139.

37. Achilles speaks to his mother of his obligation to his friend, not to the Greeks (18.88–93).

that which a man feels towards his brother or son (24.44-52); that is, greater than men feel towards women.[38]

An often-overlooked aspect of Patroclus's character in the narrative is his feminization before his comrade. Despite being older and wiser than Achilles, Patroclus submits to his friend's authority in a deferential manner common to female dependents in the Homeric world:[39] he serves food to Achilles (19.315-18); distributes bread when entertaining guests (9.216-17; 11.624-41); and dutifully makes or orders a bed made for guests (9.620-21; 9.658–59). Clarke argues that Patroclus's deferential action for Achilles during Phoenix's visit in Book 9 'is an act of domestic overseership that, if it is not unfair to say, a wife might perform'.[40] In fact, Achilles himself compares Patroclus with a female, castigating him for crying like a little girl (16.7-10), which Beye interprets as a perfect summary of the gendered relations between the two men: the (manly) 'strength of Achilles' and the (womanly) 'dependency of Patroklos'.[41] Moreover, others note that Patroclus's name itself is a literary pun that reverses the name of the female character Cleopatra (that is, *patros kleos*), who appears earlier in the *Iliad*.[42]

Homer's silence about any sexual component to the friendship between the two men does not prevent the later Greeks of the classical period from interpreting the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in light of their own social milieu, one that celebrates pederastic relations between men and adolescent boys.[43] In spite of Cantarella's assertion that the ancient Greeks interpret the couple's relationship as a love affair 'for good reason',[44] Brain

38. Indeed, Radice rightly observes that Homer does not say that Achilles and Patroclus were sexual partners but notes that 'their devotion, like that of David and Jonathan, does seem to be "passing the love of women"' (Betty Radice, *Who's Who in the Ancient World: A Handbook to the Survivors of the Greek and Roman Classics* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2nd edn, 1987], p. 107).

39. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 390; and Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 84.

40. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 390.

41. Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, p. 85.

42. See, for example, David Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (KTAH; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 41; and Sheila Murnaghan, 'Introduction', in *Iliad* (trans. Stanley Lombardo; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), pp. xvii-lviii (xxxiii).

43. See, for example, Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists of Athenaeus of Naucratis* (trans. Charles Burton Gulick; LCL, 204; London: William Heinemann, 1937), pp. 601A, 602E; Plutarch, 'The Dialogue on Love', in Plutarch, *Moralia 1A–1131A*, p. 751C; Plato, *Symposium*, 179E–180B; Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* (trans. Nick Fisher; CAH; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.142-50.

44. For example, Eva Cantarella believes that when Thetis, Achilles' mother, tells him that he must get over Patroclus's death and get married (*Odyssey* 3.399–403) she is confirming that 'the reason why the hero had not taken a wife' was because of 'the

argues that 'Plato and his friends, overt homosexuals without a doubt, read a sexual element into Homer's friendships, transferring their own subjective sentiments to a quite different situation'.[45] Attic orator Aeschines speaks for himself when he says that Homer was silent on the matter because he believed 'that the exceptional extent of their affection made things clear to the educated members of his audience'.[46] However, there is disagreement regarding the sexual positioning of the two men among those who do assert that the couple's relationship is pederastic. For example, Aeschines believes Achilles is the *erastēs* and Patroclus the *erōmenos*, much to the consternation of Phaedrus in Plato's *Symposium*: 'Aeschylus [Aeschines] talks nonsense when he says, that Patroclus was beloved by Achilles, who was more beautiful, not only than Patroclus, but than all the other heroes, who was in the freshness of youth, and beardless, and according to Homer, much younger than his friend'.[47] Despite the contention regarding the socio-sexual positioning of each man (that is, who is sexually dominant [*erastēs*] and who is sexually submissive [*erōmenos*]), especially given that Patroclus is older than Achilles (11.787), and yet Achilles is the dominant partner,[48] there is a general consensus among writers in the classical world that the two men form a sexual alliance of one kind or another.

Renata von Scheliha accepts the homoerotic reading as adopted by the classical Greeks, arguing that though Homer does not make explicit the sexual relations between the two heroes, his treatment of close friendship is arguably the beginning of Greek pederasty.[49] Clarke concedes that the anomalistic reversal of age-determined socio-sexual positions between Achilles and Patroclus, with the younger Achilles taking on the dominant role, shows that their relationship does not conform to that of the classical pederastic era. He does not, however, reject a sexual reading of their rela-

amorous nature of their relationship' (Eva Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World* [trans. Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin; London: Yale University Press, 1992], p. 10). Cantarella's acknowledgment that homosexuality is not explicitly part of the *Iliad* and yet it somehow lurks in the background of the narrative is very similar to Nissinen's interpretation of the *Gilgamesh Epic*; see Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, p. 11. Barrett criticizes interpreters who argue that there is something there, but not quite there, for wanting 'two bites at the cherry' (D.S. Barrett, 'The Friendship of Achilles and Patroclus', *CB* 57 [1981], pp. 87-93 [90]).

45. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 65.

46. Aeschines, *Against Timarchus*, 1.142; see also 1.132-33 and 1.141-50.

47. Plato, *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation* (ed. David K. O'Connor; trans. Percy Bysshe Shelley; South Bend, IN: St Augustine's Press, 2002), 180A4–7.

48. For example, Patroclus is weaker than Achilles (16.140-44) and obedient to him (11.648–54).

49. Renata von Scheliha, *Patroklus: Gedanken über Homers Dichtung und Gestalten* (Basel: Benno Schwabe, 1943), p. 315.

tionship on the basis of age-hierarchical specifics because he believes that 'homosexual love wore many masks in antiquity'.[50] Quite the opposite; Clarke dismisses those arguments that 'reject with disgust any inference that the heroes are passionately in love; and instead … talk highmindedly of their chaste and beautiful companionship'.[51]

Critical of anachronistic interpretations of the relationship between the two heroes, both sexual and platonic and putting aside unfounded conjecture on either side of the argument, Clarke argues that there are two parts of the *Iliad* that suggestively depict the men as sexual partners. The first, the only explicit passage in the entire poem, is 24.130, which Clarke translates as, 'It is a good thing to have sexual relations, and I mean with a woman (that is, not now with Patroclus, or with some other youth, who would only remind you of him)'.[52] The second is Achilles' tender handling of Patroclus's body, which Clarke believes goes beyond 'all precedents for companionship set by the *Iliad* itself'.[53] Achilles' mother, Thetis, finds the distraught Achilles lying on the ground pitifully hugging Patroclus's corpse, touching his lover's breast and head, imploring Patroclus to return his embrace (19.4; 23.18, 97, 136). Clarke thus comments:

> The implications of this behaviour have been almost universally ignored by modern scholars. None of the critics, quick to remind us that Homer makes no reference to physical contact between the heroes living, explains the provenance of these sudden embraces and fondlings and cries to cast arms about one another. Yet, if these are no more than conventional *post-mortem* theatrics, wrung out of a man by grief, why is it no other hero embraces the body of a fallen companion? … It is senseless to assume that Achilles would lie in the arms of a dead man whom, living, he had kept a discreet distance appropriate to one who is no more than a companion. Here, more than anywhere else in their story, we are face to face with evidence for a physical relationship between the heroes..[54]

Despite his own observations, however, Clarke is reluctant to advocate for a sexual interpretation of the relationship between the two men. He believes that they are undoubtedly lovers in the sense that they love each other, and even concedes that Achilles' actions after Patroclus's death do suggest some form of physical expression, but anything beyond this is difficult to elaborate because 'no sexual relationship is conclusively proved'.[55] Rather than concentrate on the question of the occurrence of homogenital

50. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 394.
51. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 388.
52. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 387.
53. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 393.
54. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 393.
55. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 393.

relations between the men—although like so many of his time he uses the loaded term 'sodomy'—Clarke insists that the most important question to ask is whether the two men are in love.[56]

Others who ponder the nature of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus and who are in sympathy with the conclusion that the depth and degree of emotional intensity expressed are 'much stronger than simple solidarity between comrades in arms'[57] do not believe that a profound relationship between the two men necessitates a sexual reading of the narrative.[58] Brain, typically without restraint, mourns that when modern 'Anglo-Saxons' are 'confronted' with 'passionate friendships' from the ancient Mediterranean they incorrectly assume 'they have entered a world of wild homosexual licence'.[59] He believes Achilles and Patroclus enjoy a '*normal* friendship',[60] and contends that sexual interpretations are the result of modern Western society's suspicion about ordinary relations between males, which have 'been discouraged in favour of close intimacy between husband and wife'.[61] Barrett, sounding remarkably like one of the high-minded interpreters Clarke criticizes, selectively cites Aristotle's, Cicero's, and C.S. Lewis's philosophical definitions of friendship[62] to distinguish between friendships based on physical pleasure and friendships based on spiritual virtue, presumably to show that Achilles and Patroclus's friendship was an *amicitia perfecta*, a nonsexual love of a chaste and virtuous kind.[63]

Atchity is one of many not fazed by the intense love demonstrated between Achilles and Patroclus, which he sees as 'special, but not extraordinary, not without precedent'.[64] Atchity asserts that Achilles' love for Patroclus, rather than being erotic in nature, is a part of the ancient convention of guest-friendship, whereby comradeship transforms Patroclus the *xenos*

56. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 393.

57. Cantarella, *Bisexuality in the Ancient World*, p. 9.

58. For example, Beye contends that there is a 'deep, mystical, nonsexual emotional bond between them' (Beye, *The Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, p. 85).

59. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 42.

60. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 65. My italics.

61. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, pp. 42-43.

62. Other citations of ancient commentators on friendship usually include the works of Plato, Pythagoras, Seneca, Xenophon, Proclus, Stobaeus and Plutarch.

63. Barrett, 'The Friendship of Achilles and Patroclus', p. 91. Barrett appears to overlook the fact that 'There is no single, unanimously accepted definition of perfect friendship among the ancients', nor do his 'presumptions of utopian altruism', whereby best-friendships 'are purely disinterested … correspond to what the ancients' said about friendship (Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* [BSIH, 50; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994], pp. 2, 5).

64. Atchity, *Homer's Iliad*, p. 194.

('guest' or 'stranger') into Patroclus the *xenos* ('friend') (16.85), fully fused into the familial kinship bonds of Achilles. Thus, the bond between the two men

> represents a new human social development: the synthesis between blood kinship and the individualistic heroic relationship. In the new society, only if there is a *personal* sympathy between them will the host provide his guest indefinitely with a substitute family; only then will the guest love his host in the same way as he loved his alienated parents … The concept of the universal brotherhood of humanity is born.[65]

Thus, Atchity believes that Achilles' references of loving Patroclus with filial and parental terminology are proof that heroic camaraderie in the ancient world was a combination of friendship and family bonds.[66]

In further support of a nonerotic interpretation of the bond between the two men, Levin argues that the concept of male friendship during the Homeric Age is radically different from that of the classical Greeks. He criticizes contemporary scholars, who, like many of their classical Greek counterparts, read the later development of pederasty into an earlier era of nonsexual camaraderie and heroism.[67] Similarly, Halperin is bemused by the attempts of some interpreters of the classical Greek and modern periods who read the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus in light of their own sexual categories (specifically, ancient pederastic love or contemporary homosexuality).[68] For Halperin, the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus is a tale of a comrade-relationship, part of an older folklore of heroes and their pals, and not about a sexual relationship at all. Rebuffing the 'insidious temptation to sexualize the erotics of male friendship', Halperin reminds us of the anomalistic standing of friendship vis-à-vis its existence 'outside', but somewhere in-between, 'the more thoroughly codified social networks formed by kinship and sexual ties'.[69] For Halperin, the ambiguous nature of friendship as an unlabelled social relation creates the confusion of friendship with sex; the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus is 'parasitic in its conceptualisation on kinship relations and on sexual relations. That is, it must borrow terminology and imagery from those spheres of human

65. Atchity, *Homer's Iliad*, p. 194.

66. Atchity, *Homer's Iliad*, p. 195. Similarly, Walter Leaf asserts that the 'bond of comradeship' in the heroic age of the *Iliad* 'is no less strong than the bond of blood' (Walter Leaf, *Homer and History* [Northwestern Harris Lectures 1914–1915; London: Macmillan, 1915], p. 255).

67. S. Levin, 'Love and the Hero of the *Iliad*', *TAPA* 80 (1949), pp. 37-49 (47).

68. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 87.

69. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 75.

relations in order to identify and define itself.'[70] Thus, Homer's use of kinship—particularly conjugal—associations between Achilles and Patroclus is a deliberate attempt by the author to define friendship as a legitimate social institution from an established repertory of social signifiers.[71] Rather than implying homogenital relations between the two heroes, Homer's textual strategy invokes 'kinship and conjugality … only to displace them, to reduce them to mere *images* of friendship'.[72] As with Atchity, Halperin recognizes that the resulting effect of Homer's idealization of male friendship is that the primacy of kinship and conjugality and the distinction between *oikos* or the *polis* are eradicated in favour of the universal primacy of male–male love.[73]

Contemporary Western Male Friendships: The Dangerous Balancing Act between the Homosocial and the Homoerotic

It would not be inaccurate to suggest that hegemonic masculinity,[74] heterosexism and homophobia have limited loving relationships between men in

70. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 84. Thus, Halperin cites Clarke's observation that Patroclus acts as a wife or female dependent before Achilles; see Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 390.

71. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 84-85.

72. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, p. 85. Or, as Hammond and Jablow succinctly put it, 'With hindsight, the narratives of friendship seem to be political propaganda for abrogating familial ties in favor of male solidarity' (Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, 'Gilgamesh and the Sundance Kid: The Myth of Male Friendship', in Harry Brod [ed.], *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* [Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987], pp. 241-58 [246]).

73. Halperin, *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*, pp. 85-86.

74. As I understand it, hegemonic masculinity is a hierarchy of norms expected of men celebrated by a culture that seeks to preserve particular men's privilege and domination above females and other (subordinate) males. Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee coined the term 'hegemonic masculinity' to refer to 'a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relations that generate their dominance' (Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell and John Lee, 'Hard and Heavy: Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity', in Michael Kaufman [ed.], *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1987], pp. 139-92 [179]). See also Robert W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), pp. 77-78, 109. Other theorists use phrases such as 'heteronormative masculinity'; 'heteronormativity'; the 'heterosexual matrix'; and 'compulsory heterosexuality' to describe similar notions; but I believe these terms relate specifically to the cultural regulation of the sexual rather than to the regulation of masculinity per se, although I do recognize there is much interplay between the two.

present-day society. In the preface to his book *Men and Friendship* Miller recounts some of the initial reactions he received from male colleagues and friends when he told them that he was planning to write a book on male friendships. Rather than comment on the remarkable aspects of the legendary friendships between, for example, Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Achilles and Patroclus, or David and Jonathan, Miller was cautiously warned, 'you must be careful … people will think you are writing about homosexuality'.[75] Indeed, Miller notes that everywhere he has gone there has been the same misconception, for which he has felt the 'bizarre necessity to explain' that his 'subject is *not* homosexuality'.[76] Unlike the ancients, the majority of modern Western men view intimacy and emotional support between two males as contrary to the *innocence* of *normal* friendship so that the fear of being stigmatized as homosexual has resulted in 'the physical expression of friendship' between men being 'reduced to a strangely ritualistic feinting'.[77]

Despite the widely held belief that friendship is—and always has been—a voluntary and private relationship between two equals, Hutter recognizes that the phenomenon has always been shaped by the social institutions of a given historical juncture.[78] While the theories of Adam Smith highlight the development of notions of friendship in early modern industrialized society,[79] contemporary theorists in men's studies and the social sciences offer another perspective. Nardi's thesis that there is a strong correlation between historically particular social structures and their articulation of gender and eroticism in terms of friendship[80] leads him to argue that male–male friendships of today are radically different from those of the past insofar as contemporary friendships are surrounded by conflicting tensions over sexuality, which, unlike those of antiquity, 'inevitably introduce—in ways they have never done before—questions about homosexuality'.[81]

Even though expressive and intimate 'romantic friendships' between males before the late nineteenth century were difficult to differentiate from

75. Stuart Miller, *Men and Friendship* (London: Gateway Books, 1983), p. 3.

76. Miller, *Men and Friendship*, p. 3. My italics.

77. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, pp. 9, 72.

78. Horst Hutter, 'The Virute of Solitude and the Vicissitudes of Friendship', in Preston King and Heather Devere (eds.), *The Challenge to Friendship in Modernity* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp. 131-48 (131).

79. Adam Smith, *The Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (Edinburgh, 1759), and Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (4 vols.; London: W. Strahan & T. Cadell, 1776).

80. Peter M. Nardi, 'Seamless Souls: An Introduction to Men's Friendships', in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Men's Friendships* (RMM, 2; London: SAGE, 1992), pp. 1-14 (4).

81. Nardi, 'Seamless Souls', p. 1.

the love of men for women,[82] they remained free of sexual connotation, and were even socially celebrated without reserve: 'An era with no label of "homosexual" or specific sexual identities allowed more latitude for physical expression than later eras would'.[83] Or, as Hansen puts it, 'nineteenth-century culture did not force a mutually exclusive choice between intimate friendship and sociability … [It] allowed for more varied interpretations of manhood than the late twentieth century.'[84] According to Foucault and others, this changed dramatically with the advent of *scientia sexualis*, whereby the medicalization of male homogenital relations and the invention of the 'homosexual species' led to paranoia about male–male intimate friendships.[85] The increase in awareness of homosexuality meant that close friendships between men that had previously attracted no attention were now viewed with suspicion, and thus 'the disappearance of friendship as a social institution, and the declaration of homosexuality as a social/political/medical problem are the same process'.[86] The popularity of psychological and sexological theories meant that male friends had to consciously distance themselves from the possible imputation of being associated with the (effeminate) homosexual: 'the widespread familiarity with the idea of

82. Jochen Hörisch, 'Two Lovers, Three Friends', in Gerhard Richter (ed.), *Literary Paternity, Literary Friendship: Essays in Honor of Stanley Corngold* (UNCS-GLL, 125; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), pp. 159-72 (160). Anthony Rotundo believes that the expression of intimacy and affection in these 'romantic friendships' was often viewed as preparation for the emotional support required of marriage to women; see Anthony E. Rotundo, 'Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1802–1900', *JSH* 23 (1989), pp. 1-25 (14).

83. Stacey J. Oliker, 'The Modernisation of Friendship: Individualism, Intimacy, and Gender in the Nineteenth Century', in Rebecca G. Adams and Graham Allan (eds.), *Placing Friendship in Context* (SASS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 18-42 (30).

84. Karen V. Hansen, '"Our Eyes Behold Each Other": Masculinity and Intimate Friendship', in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Men's Friendships* (RMM, 2; London: SAGE, 1992), pp. 35-58 (54).

85. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 43. Katz makes a similar point: 'The common custom of men casually bedding down together, for example, became uncommon, even suspect, in the consciously eroticized twentieth century after the construction, naming, publicizing, and stringent tabooing of "sexual perversion," "inversion," and "homosexuality"' (Katz, *Love Stories*, p. 6).

86. Craig Owens, 'Outlaws: Gay Men in Feminism', in Alice Jardine and Paul Smith (eds.), *Men in Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 217-32 (230). See also Henning Bech, *When Men Meet: Homosexuality and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 73; Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* (trans. Daniella Dangoor; London: Allison & Busby, 1978), p. 41; and Philippe Aries, 'Thoughts on the History of Homosexuality', in Philippe Aries and Andre Bejin (eds.), *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times* (trans. Anthony Forster; FSSRPT; Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 62-75 (69).

homosexuality brought an end to many spontaneous forms of open affection that had previously seemed normal'.[87]

The example of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) highlights the significant societal shift in views about male intimacy from the late nineteenth century onwards, whereby once socially sanctioned 'romantic friendships' between men progressively came to be viewed with suspicion of perversion. Gustav-Wrathall's detailed analysis of the organization's development around male friendship shows that the YMCA's founding principle of celebrating Christian brotherly love (*agapē*), based on community, physical prowess, and intimate friendships in the 1840s and 1850s—hence the unofficial motto of 'Blest Be the Tie that Binds'—began to change around the 1890s, when medical and popular discourses around homosexuality created anxieties around the potential dangers of intimate male–male friendships. Whereas the Christian organization had initially encouraged close friendships between men on the grounds that they mirrored the God-ordained relationship of Jesus and his disciples, by the 1920s the YMCA had grown 'queasy about same-sex friendship … because of their tendency to view sexuality or the sex drive as the basis for all human passion and community'.[88] Thus, Gustav-Wrathall summarizes the way in which medical discourses about homosexuality had pervaded an institution that originally established itself as a bastion of godly male bonding:

> Throughout the 1920s and 1930s rhetoric celebrating the beauty and goodness of close male friendship continued unabated. But it was accompanied by a counter refrain of cautions against getting too close, and nervous discussions of the appropriate boundaries of true friendship. It was also plagued by warnings against homosexuality and the expression of worries that too exclusive a focus on male friendship might detract from 'normal' relationships with women.[89]

As it was with the YMCA, so it is today. Rather than seeing expressiveness and intimacy with other men as a legitimate means of channelling one's

87. Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), p. 12. Likewise, Steve Garlick notes, 'The figure of "the homosexual" was to place the question of sexuality at the heart of all subsequent relationships among men. Indeed, friendship between men is perhaps *the* most important site where virile heterosexual masculinities are endangered by the specter of homosexuality' (Steve Garlick, 'The Beauty of Friendship: Foucault, Masculinity and the Work of Art', *PSC* 28 [2002], pp. 558-77 [560]).

88. John Donald Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand: Same-Sex Relations and the YMCA* (CSSHS; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 65.

89. Gustav-Wrathall, *Take the Young Stranger by the Hand*, pp. 63-64; see also pp. 1-2, 4-7, 10, 31-33, 35-44, 52-53, 62-69, 91-92.

emotions, contemporary norms of male friendship encourage men to rise above their emotions and exhibit a controlled rationalism that includes keeping one's distance from other men because to do otherwise is viewed as a sign of weakness, characteristic of women and subservient variants of men such as homosexuals.[90] This heteronormative cultural encoding of the male body produces and reinforces unequal power relations between, and within, the sexes, which, in turn, determines conceptions of, and participation in, the lived social world.[91] The modern Western man who asserts his masculinity the most effectively[92] receives the highest reward possible: acceptance as a man of standing within the masculine hierarchy and all the power and privilege associated with such status in a patriarchal society. What is considered the most despicable unmanly act to the vast majority of contemporary men, publicly at least, is the 'intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman' [or gay man].[93] Like Bersani, MacInnes notes the importance of men acting with masculine vigour in his citation from an unpublished novel, whereby a father teaches his son the rules of being a successful man in the world:

> what you must do, son, is become a fucker, and not become a fucked. It's as simple as that. Boys or girls, up the pussy or the arse, whichever you

90. Lynne Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 139; Andrew P. Smiler, 'Introduction to Manifestations of Masculinity', *SexRoles* 55 (2006), pp. 585-87 (585); Victor Seidler, *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 13-22; Victor J. Seidler, 'Rejection, Vulnerability, and Friendship', in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Men's Friendships* (RMM, 2; London: SAGE, 1992), pp. 15-34 (23).

91. I understand heteronormativity to be the cultural system of discourses around sexuality that legitimize, privilege and celebrate the coherent naturalness of male attraction to females, and vice versa, stigmatizing any deviation from this norm as odd, unnatural or a perversion. Within the boundaries of these discourses of compulsive heterosexuality are unwritten rules about the legitimate expression of masculinity, intimacy and male friendship.

92. For Jammie Price this means a man must: '(1) display an ability to control, compete, and produce relative to other men, particularly at work; (2) subordinate women and reject effeminacy; and (3) express heterosexual desire' (Jammie Price, *Navigating Differences: Friendships between Gay and Straight Men* [HGLS; London: Haworth Press, 1999], pp. 12-13). Jackson describes the contemporary idealization of this 'hard case masculinity' as that which 'not only defines itself positively through assertiveness, virility, toughness, independence etc. but also negatively by defining itself in opposition to what it is not—feminine or homosexual' (David Jackson, *Unmasking Masculinity: A Critical Autobiography* [CSMM; London: Unwin Hyman, 1990], p. 124).

93. Leo Bersani, 'Is the Rectum a Grave?', in J. Goldberg (ed.), *Reclaiming Sodom* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 249-64 (251).

> prefer, but you've got to remember there's a cock between your legs and you're a *man*.[94]

The disdain expressed is towards the symbolism of a man opening himself up to the ultimate shame of passivity, whether emotionally, socially or sexually.

Men who do not live up to heteronormative, masculine ideals, such as those who flout the stringently demarcated boundaries of appropriate expression, are immediately identified and denied the cultural privileges 'real men' enjoy, such as male and female adulation, prestige and the right to command.[95] The following negative equation demonstrates the rationale behind this labelling process: male transgression equals showing nonmasculine traits (e.g. intimacy, neediness, lack of stamina) equals effeminacy (e.g. sexually and/or socially passive) equals dangerous. This paradigm not only organizes power relations between the sexes but also establishes a hierarchy of male privilege to resolve potential conflicts within masculinity itself. By honouring those who live up to the paradigm, and shaming and excluding those who do not, this historically variable gender-role identity paradigm ensures that male privilege is achieved and maintained only for deservingly 'real men'.

Given that close bonds with other men are viewed with suspicion, most contemporary men limit expressiveness to participating in 'side-by-side' activities, such as sports, discussing politics and drinking, while they discuss sensitive topics such as sexuality and emotions only in the form of banter.[96] This forced assertion of one's masculinity acts as a defensive mechanism to avoid confronting the perceived unmanly undertones inherent in a man expressing intimacy and tenderness towards one another; it also renders many male–male friendships as little more than superficial bravado, leaving most contemporary men with few friends and no capability for reciprocal, emotional support. Despite having achieved masculine success, without friends and their contribution to our well-being—'friends have a powerful effect on the development of a full, coherent and satisfactory sense of self'[97]—many modern men feel frustration with their impoverished social predicament.

94. Cited in Tony Gould, *Inside Outsider: The Life and Times of Colin MacInnes* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983), p. 89.

95. Winkler, 'Laying Down the Law', p. 178 and Jack W. Sattel, 'The Inexpressive Male: Tragedy or Sexual Politics?', *SocProb* 23 (1976), p. 475.

96. Price, *Navigating Differences*, p. 6.

97. Lillian B. Rubin, *Just Friends: The Role of Friendship in our Lives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 12. Similarly, Ray Pahl argues that 'Friendship is necessary to attain self-sufficiency. It is one of the arts of life' (Ray Pahl, *On Friendship* [Th21C; Cambridge: Polity, 2000], p. 83).

5

The Hermeneutical Shift in Literature, the Humanities and Biblical Studies from Historical Author to Present-day Reader

Despite laying claim to historical and literary evidence that 'proves' the friendship between David and Jonathan is sexual, homoerotic interpreters have, at best, demonstrated that there is something seemingly ambiguous about the relationship between the two men. In the previous chapter, I have shown that this ambiguity stems not from the biblical narrative itself but from relatively recent developments in concepts of masculinity and sexuality, whereby perceived intimacy between two men is often seen as suggestive of homosexuality. Although the three interpretative stances that I identified in Chapter 2 (that is, the political-theological, the homoerotic, and the homosocial) share a common ground,[1] the differences are such that they are at an impasse with how to move forward. I believe that one way to move beyond this hermeneutical deadlock is to acknowledge that what underlies the questions of sex in the interpretation of the David and Jonathan narrative is the presuppositions readers bring to the biblical text; specifically, how the reification of the homosexual in the late nineteenth century has affected the way in which modern interpreters cannot avoid projecting contemporary notions of homosexuality back onto ancient practices of masculinity and sex. Thus, this chapter moves away from a focus on the world of the Bible as physical text, as seen most clearly in traditional, historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation, to take a look at the world of the biblical reader and the reading process in general. By outlining developments in hermeneutical theory, particularly reader response criticism, I will provide a theoretical foundation for my reader-oriented, queer reading in Chapter 6.

1. That is, pleas to by-gone historic epochs, an appreciation of friendship in its many manifestations, and reference to particular words and themes in the Hebrew text of the narrative.

Emerging from the Renaissance and Reformation, the early historical-critical method of biblical interpretation grew out of the resurgence of interest in the great classics and an insistence on reason and self-evident scrutiny. Rather than accept received dogma, early-modern historical-critical biblical scholars, many of whom were deeply religious, began to scrutinize the Bible in the same manner they did other ancient literature to find the message of the author(s). Historicalcritical scholars are not a uniform body of interpreters insofar as they relate to a diverse school of thought, including methods such as the grammatico-historical method, source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism, literary criticism (*Literarkritik*) and canon criticism. Regardless of their differences, however, all maintain that identifying the particular historical idea/ideology of a text—the context in which it was written and the audience for whom it was written—is the only authentic method of fully understanding a text.[2] That is, by locating the biblical writer as the 'intelligent cause … the necessary and sufficient explanation of the text',[3] a reader is supposedly able to ascertain its objective meaning: 'without an immersion into the author's world and the occasion which prompted the text, one could not attain meaning with any acceptable degree of plausibility.'[4] Central to the historical-critical approaches to the biblical text is the belief that awareness of the particular historical context in which the author wrote provides the reader with the opportunity to answer the most important question of all interpretative endeavours: what does the text really mean?

The historical, cultural and ideological gaps between the worlds of the author(s) and the reader(s), particularly with regard the Bible, however, have led some to question whether it is at all possible for a reader to fully comprehend what went on in an author's mind. Although meaning might be simple to extricate during verbal dialogue, reading—with the distance between the two worlds of the silent author and the present reader—facilitates the possibility of a myriad of textual meanings. In this respect, New Critics Wimsatt and Beardsley pioneered the 'intentional fallacy' thesis, contending that, given the temporal, geographic, social, political, economic (…) gaps between the writer and the readers of a text, the author's intention is neither

2. 'Readers examined historical narratives as sources for the historical events they recounted, and the teachings of the various writings were examined in the light of the historical contexts of the writings themselves. Biblical passages were given their full historical weight' (E.V. McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988], pp. 47-48).

3. K.J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the Reader and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), p. 44.

4. W.R. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), p. xvi. And also: 'The assumption is that if an author is the product of his or her world, then the author's literary creation will reflect that world' (Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 175).

possible to determine nor desirable as a means of judging the validity of a given interpretation.[5] For them, as with other New Critics, readers should put any idea about authorial intention aside[6] and concentrate on deciphering the objective meaning from the self-sufficient text by undertaking close readings as an 'autonomous whole … without any reference beyond itself'.[7] Rather than look to the historical author, Wimsatt and Beardsley argue that the meaning of a text can be found only by focusing on its internal components, namely syntax and semantics.

More recently, literary theorists have moved away from both the notion of authorial intention and the New Critic's view of the autonomous text to an emphasis on reader-centred approaches, collectively known as reader response theory in the English-speaking world and reception theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) in German-speaking countries. While scholars of historical-critical approaches and New Criticism assert that textual meaning is fixed, unambiguous and identifiable by following scientific methods of enquiry, advocates of reader-centred approaches to literature note that neither history nor a text is ever finalized to the point of closure.

Wolfgang Iser: Gap Filling and the Role of the Reader in Making Meaning

Iser and Fish, two prominent proponents of reader response criticism, challenge the presumption that textual meaning is 'stable, determinate and decidable'.[8] Iser notes, 'the fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the same "reality" of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written'.[9] On the other hand, Fish refutes the idea that what is written (that is, the text) has any objective meaning; despite the existence of a material book, he believes that reading is a circular activity that allows readers to find whatever they want in a given text.[10] These two advocates of reader response theory agree, to varying

5. William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', in William K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1954) pp. 3-18.

6. Wimsatt and Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', p. 18.

7. M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1958), p. 7.

8. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 26.

9. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 3rd edn, 1983), p. 279.

10. 'The objectivity of the text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing' (Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*

degrees, that the meaning of a text does not exist independently of the act of interpretation, but is, rather, created in the interpretative process of reading. Given that literary meaning depends on the experiences a reader brings to a text, reader response critics argue that the central question of contemporary biblical interpretation ought not be *what* does the text (as an object) mean, but *how* does the text (as an experience) mean.

Iser asserts that the schemata of the text (that is, the prestructured form designed by the author) elicit a response from its readers. Textual meaning is 'text-guided though reader-produced.'[11] For Iser, in order to assess the validity of an interpretation, one needs to appreciate how the text and the reader interact to produce meaning: 'an exclusive concentration on either the author's techniques or the reader's psychology will tell us little about the reading process itself'.[12] He insists that a text is not meaningful and does not become a literary work until a reader responds to it in the dynamic act of '*Konkretisation*' (realization); the text takes a life of its own as a literary work only once a reader has realized the artistic work already accomplished by the author.[13] This realization, the unwritten part of a text, depends upon the way in which individual readers respond to a text's given patterns and fill in the blank textual gaps: 'textual structures translate themselves through ideational acts into the reader's existing stock of experience'.[14] Just as gap-filling is a normal part of the process of verbal communication, so Iser argues that it is so with reading: 'The words of a text are given, the interpretation of the words is determinate, and the gaps between the given elements and/or interpretations are the indeterminacies'.[15] It is the author's *intentionale Satzkorrelate* (intentional sentence correlatives) within a text that guide readers to interpret limitedly beyond that of the (implied) reader:[16]

The Authority of Interpretive Communities [London: Harvard University Press, 1980], p. 43). Fish's arguments are more a means of philosophizing the interpretative process itself than an interpretative methodology for interpreting texts.

11. Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 65.

12. Iser, *Prospecting*, p. 31; and Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 21.

13. Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p. 274. The 'gestalt' of a literary work 'is not given by the text itself; it arises from the meeting between the written text and the individual mind of the reader with its own particular history of experience, its own consciousness, its own outlook' (Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p. 284). And, 'textual repertoires and strategies simply offer a frame within which the reader must construct for himself the aesthetic object' (Iser, *The Act of Reading*, p. 107).

14. Iser, *The Act of Reading*, p. 67.

15. Wolfgang Iser, 'Talk like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish', *Diacritics* 11 (1981), pp. 82-87 (83).

16. Iser's 'implied reader' is a trans-historical ideal that works with the information supplied in the text.

> Thus begins a whole dynamic process: the written text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader's imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might have seemed to possess on its own.[17]

Iser's highlighting of the way in which a physical text, although infinitely meaningful, interacts with a reader's imagination to produce meaning that is traceable back to the structures of the text itself counters the common criticism that reader-centred approaches confuse the effect of the text with the text itself (known as the affective fallacy).

Stuart notes that the implications of the breakdown between text and reader in hermeneutical theory and the influence of interpretative communities have generally been ignored by biblical reader response critics, who prefer to rely on the safety of Iser's belief that a reader realizes the possibilities of a text through gap filling.[18] The standard Iserian reader response approach of biblical scholars is thus summarized by Via:

> What is missing—the gaps in the text—stimulates the reader to fill in the blanks with projections from the imagination. The text then brings the reader to the standpoint from which he or she constructs its meaning. Therefore the text exercises some control, and the reader is not free to have it mean arbitrarily anything he or she wants it to mean. At the same time, the reader's subjectivity—experiences, decisions, and attitudes—comes to expression in the meaning he or she projects. One must expect, then, a multiplicity of possible [limited] meanings.[19]

Stanley Fish: Text as Effect and the Role of the 'Interpretive Community' in Making Meaning

Fish concurs with Iser that meaning is realized by the reader in the dialectical experience of the reading process, but differs insofar as he emphasizes

17. Iser, *The Implied Reader*, p. 276.

18. Elizabeth Stuart, 'Camping around the Canon: Humor as a Hermeneutical Tool in Queer Readings of Biblical Texts', in Robert E. Goss and Mona West (eds.), *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), pp. 23-34 (29-30). McKnight, a vocal critic of traditionalist historical-critical methods, is an example of such a biblical scholar who relies on Iserian theory; see E.V. McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); and McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible*.

19. Dan O. Via, Jr, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel: In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), pp. 4-5.

that the interpretative communities[20] to which the reader belongs, rather than any formal structure of the text, are the source of textual meaning. Fish's radical approach turns hermeneutics on its head by embracing the affective fallacy and declaring the text is the effect, rather than the cause, of reading:

> The relationship between interpretation and text is thus reversed: interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually assumed, arising from them.[21]

While the more moderate approach of Iser finds some interpretations more plausible than others, depending on the competency of the reader to engage with the text, Fish insists that it is the 'reader's mind' and not 'the printed page' from where textual meaning comes.[22] Moreover, interpretation is a game, and all the moves ('description, evaluation, validation and so on'[23]) of the reader are part of the 'only game in town'.[24] Thus, for Fish there is no such thing as a correct, plausible or valid interpretation of a text because all interpreters play/read according to their own conventions, with their own interests and agendas to the fore. Rather than demonstrating the (in)adequacy of an interpretation from deducible facts such as the schemata of the text (Iser), Fish calls for a model of persuasion that judges an interpretation on the basis of its own assumptions, as defined by the normative experiences of various guilds and their consensuses that pre-exist the text or the reader—the 'interpretive community'. In effect, the number of possible readings of a text is limited only by the changing consensus of the interpretative communities that read the text.[25] While Fish himself admits that some reader response approaches immunize themselves from external criticism,[26] he also asserts that the very existence of an interpretative community's shared norms and conventions prevents relativist readings:

20. 'Each of us is a member of not one but innumerable interpretive communities in relation to which different kinds of belief are operating with different weight and force' (Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], p. 30).

21. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 13.

22. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 36. Similarly, 'there is no distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies; he supplies *everything*' (Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, p. 77).

23. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 366.

24. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 355.

25. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 343

26. 'What I finally came to see was that the identification of what was real and normative occurred within interpretive communities and what was normative for the

> If, rather than acting on their own, interpreters act as extensions of an institutional community, solipsism and relativism are removed as fears because they are not possible modes of being. That is to say, the condition required for someone to be a solipsist or relativist, the condition of being independent of institutional assumptions and free to originate one's own purposes and goals, could never be realized, and therefore there is no point in trying to guard against it.[27]

Given that each interpretative community reaches its own consensus regarding the legitimacy of an interpretation, it is not so much that one interpretation is more valid than another but that different interpretations appeal to different communities. That is, the main criterion for judging the legitimacy of an interpretation is how far the reading agrees with the normative values and assumptions held by the interpretative community, and so there is no basis for outsiders to challenge or question an interpretation that stems from the shared norms of a particular interpretative community.

All biblical interpretations are the result of a person or group of people reading a text and explaining what they believe the text says according to their preferred method; differing interpretations are not true or false, better or worse—they are just different. Some might be more credible logically than others, but none are simply wrong. What matters is the justification given for a particular interpretation so that the rhetoric of the reader can be weighed against the writing of the text(s) for validity of merit. As Fish himself claims, the purpose of interpretation is not to determine what is the best way of reading, but 'to establish by political and persuasive means (they are the same thing) the set of interpretive assumptions from the vantage of which the evidence (and the facts and the intentions and everything else) will hereafter be specifiable'.[28] If Fish's observations were not so brilliant, they would have been dismissed a long time ago. While many disagree with his views of what constitutes a text, his philosophy of interpretation has brought to the fore political questions of who has the power to validate any given interpretation.

The Bible Does Not Speak for Itself: The Voice of the Biblical Interpreter

Biblical criticism is struggling to find common ground for its many theorists, even among the more progressive thinkers. Despite acknowledging

members of one community would be seen as strange (if it could be seen at all) by the members of another' (Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, pp. 15-16).

27. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 321; see also p. 7.

28. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, p. 16.

that in a pluralistic society 'competing ideologies struggle for social power'[29] and that finding the 'true meaning' of a biblical text is impossible, Morgan and Barton pine after a stable, determinant meaning: 'the notion of a single correct interpretation, identifiable with the intention of authors who succeed in saying what they mean … remains a useful ideal norm for arguing about, and distinguishing between, valid and invalid interpretations'.[30] For Morgan and Barton, the plethora of right/wrong, valid/invalid, satisfying/unsatisfying interpretations tolerated by modernist interpretative methods is problematic insofar as it 'becomes difficult for rational argument to exclude unacceptable interpretations'.[31] Similarly, while McKnight notes that 'the intention of the author has been used in literature to guard against undue subjectivity in interpretation',[32] I would argue that notions of authorial intention have been used to limit, prevent and reject interpretations that go against the grain of the consensus of the guild of biblical scholars and churches' teachings. So what, or who, determines the validity of an interpretation? According to Lundin, sounding remarkably like Fish, 'traditions' provide a means of verification and validation of a given interpretation—the shared assumptions and experiences of an interpretative group reifies a reading as the only correct understanding.[33] Too often, readings that transgress the assumed rules of acceptability are branded subjective, over-imaginative, uncritical, or products of eisegesis (as opposed to the more respectable exegesis).

Fish has demonstrated how the quest for authorial intention is like chasing rainbows, while Graham asserts that discussions of intention are nothing more than 'paternity tests'; that is, ploys to determine true progeny and discredit illegitimate readings.[34] If interpreters move beyond the hitherto narrow criteria of valid biblical interpretation, as agreed upon by churches and the guild of biblical scholarship, to embrace the primacy of readers as meaning-makers in the interpretative process, we allow for multiple readings of the same biblical text. For Eagleton, such a paradigm of reader response theory marks a third age of biblical criticism—that of the 'readers' liberation movement', whereby marginalized readers are given the oppor-

29. R. Morgan and J. Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (OBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 259.

30. Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 197.

31. Morgan and Barton, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 198.

32. McKnight, *Postmodern Use of the Bible*, p. 248.

33. Roger Lundin, 'Our Hermeneutical Inheritance', in Roger Lundin, Anthony C. Thiselton and Clarence Walhout (eds.), *The Responsibility of Hermeneutics* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1985), pp. 1-29 (28-29).

34. S.L. Graham, 'Silent Voices: Women in the Gospel of Mark', *Semeia* 54 (1991), pp. 145-58 (147).

tunity to challenge the status quo.[35] Reader-centred interpretations resist the history of interpretation of texts that have served dominant ideological interests about gender, race, class and sexuality. If there is no such thing as an innocent or objective reading, then a particular interpretation should not be dismissed solely on the basis of its ideological foundations. Brett argues that 'committed readers', that is, those with an overt dedication to a specific ideology such as feminism, do not pose any threat to the rules of rhetoric and persuasion for evaluating interpretations because ideology 'is only dangerous when it hides itself and denies the possibility of critique from outsiders'.[36]

35. See Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Essays 1975–1985* (London: Verso, 1986). Gillingham and Dockery also recognize the value of reader response theory for marginalized groups, especially given its weight to critique oppressive ideologies of power and respond creatively to them; see S.E. Gillingham, *One Bible Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical Studies* (London: SPCK, 1998), p. 183, and D.S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1992), p. 174.

36. M. Brett, 'The Future of Reader Criticisms?', in F. Watson (ed.), *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies?* (London: SCM Press, 1993), pp. 13-31 (27).

6

Queer Hermeneutics and the David and Jonathan Narrative

Attention to the Bible within secular arts and humanities faculties has created much interest in biblical literature as an interdisciplinary field of research, which has, in turn, lessened the influence of stalwart, traditional biblical scholarship. Contemporary biblical interpreters have shifted their attention away from the conventional model of meaning as authorial intention to a focus on the text as having many possible meanings, according to the different questions, concerns and experiences readers bring to it.[1] With the demise of a sole emphasis on authorial intention, new ways of reading the Bible that allow the reader to associate his or her context with that of the biblical text have continued to grow in popularity. In contrast with the well-worn complaints that we are witnessing an epistemological shift from traditional exegesis (reading the text) to a postmodern eisegesis (reading into the text), from critical, objective historical readings to psychological solipsism, there are many others who maintain that *all* readers—scholars and lay people alike—bring their own questions, experiences and perspectives to a biblical text, and so will inevitably find what they want to find in it.[2] As George Bernard Shaw, master of chiasmus, so characteristically writes, 'No man in these islands ever believes that the Bible means what it says; he is always convinced that it says what he means'.[3] Similarly, Exum notes that our reading of biblical characters is often influenced by more than

1. Mona West lists life experiences that include factors such as: 'race, ethnicity, gender, class, religious affiliation, socioeconomic standing, education and sexual orientation' (Mona West, 'Reading the Bible as Queer Americans: Social Location and the Hebrew Scriptures', *TheolSex* 10 [1999], pp. 28-42 [28]).

2. Sandra Hack Polaski, 'Identifying the Unnamed Disciple: An Exercise in Reader-Response Criticism', *PRS* 26 (1999), p. 194.

3. George Bernard Shaw, comments made in *The Saturday Review* 79 (April 6, 1895), #2058.

the biblical text,[4] and I believe this is seen clearly in the interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan.

The move away from interest in what the historically situated author means or says in the historically situated text to a focus on what the historical text means to contemporary readers here and now is commonly known as the reader response approach to biblical interpretation. As advocates of this method emphasize meaning as created during the process of reading, so the question becomes not *what* does the text mean, but *how* does the text mean—that is, how does the dynamic relationship between the literary work and the reader produce meaning. By interacting with the biblical text in an intimate way, the reader becomes part of a relationship where 'there are at least two active participants, each contributing something to the engagement of mind and body'.[5] Thus, we are reminded of Iser's notion of *Konkretisation* engendering a semination of sort, whereby the body of the text is not left 'to lie fallow', but is 'impregnated'[6] with a new seed of life by the reader in the dynamic act of reading. Whether a reader uses his or her imagination to fill predetermined gaps in the work (Iser) or plays the game of reading according to the normative rules of the interpretative community/communities to which he or she belongs (Fish), the growing popularity of nontraditional biblical exegesis has given voice to the plurality of creative interpretations of biblical texts that were once shunned by the academy and churches.

Despite the revolution in textual meaning and interpretative theory caused by the shift from author-centred to reader-centred reading, there are still many biblical scholars who have yet to come to terms with it; the prominence of the reader has them in a quandary regarding the David and Jonathan narrative because it raises questions that go to the core of the interpretative endeavour itself. That is, if the debate about the nature of the relationship between David and Jonathan is not historically grounded in the ancient biblical period (such as the 'homo-happy' culture of the Philistines or some other historical milieu that accepted same-sex sexual relations[7]), then where is it grounded? I believe that the debate is situated firmly in the world of modern biblical readers and contemporary cultural ideas about masculinity and homosexuality. Rather than echo 'historical events'

4. J. Cheryl Exum, 'Beyond the Biblical Horizon: The Bible and the Arts', *BibInt* 6 (1998), pp. 259-65.

5. Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 24.

6. M.C. Taylor, 'Text as Victim', in Thomas Altizer, *et al.* (eds.), *Deconstruction and Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 58-78 (66).

7. As advocated by, for example, Horner, *Jonathan Loved David*, pp. 24, 27-28; and Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', pp. 31, 35.

or what the biblical authors 'said' and 'meant', contemporary interpretations of the relationship between David and Jonathan are readings of what the text means for *us* today.[8] The false claims to historical veracity detract from the significant influence of present-day discourses of masculinity that affect most interpretations of the biblical narrative, particularly the distinction between platonic friendships ('straight', 'natural' and 'normal') and erotic relationships ('gay' or 'bi', 'perverse' and 'abnormal'). For me, the majority of readings of the friendship between David and Jonathan are concerned, directly or indirectly, with the implicit question of how male friends should relate to one another without crossing the boundaries of sexual propriety;[9] or, as Nardi so succinctly puts it, 'grappling with ways of maintaining the homosociality of male bonding and friendship without the appearance of homosexuality'.[10]

Since I have exposed the claims of biblical interpreters to historical situatedness as subconscious mirror visions of a present-day cultural reality projected onto the ancient past, then what is wrong with affirming a rhetoric that consciously situates biblical characters in the contemporary world of gay men and queer theory? By reading the David and Jonathan narrative through the lens of contemporary gay male friendship,[11] this chapter will highlight heteronormative assumptions that are so often read into biblical texts during the interpretative endeavour. I acknowledge that the manifestation of friendship patterns among men in modernity is very different from that of the ancients, and concede that some might think my approach is a non sequitur, given that my earlier discussion of the anachronistic nature

8. Thus, Martin O'Kane believes that 'when readers begin to explore the personality of David, his story ceases to belong to the biblical narrator and passes into the hands of its interpreters' (Martin O'Kane, 'The Biblical King David and his Artistic and Literary Afterlives', *BibInt* 6 [1998], pp. 314-47 [325]). Similarly, Clines argues that 'the function of commentary on biblical texts has been to familiarize the Bible, to normalize it to our own cultural standards … to press it into the service of a different worldview' (Clines, *Interested Parties*, p. 33).

9. Given contemporary society's obsession with equating male intimacy with homosexuality, silence about any eroticism between David and Jonathan is perhaps as much a statement about the uncomfortableness felt by interpreters as the more vocal contributions to the debate.

10. Peter M. Nardi, *Gay Men's Friendships: Invincible Communities* (WD-CSSGC; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 31. See also Rubin, *Just Friends*, p. 103.

11. For contemporary studies about friendship among women, see Tamsin Wilton, *Sexual (Dis)Orientation: Gender, Sex, Desire and Self-Fashioning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Elizabeth Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Critical Difference* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); Elizabeth Stuart, *Just Good Friends: Towards a Theology of Lesbian and Gay Friendships* (London: Mowbray, 1995); and Mary E. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroad, 1991).

of projecting homosexuality onto the ancient world, but my queer interpretation of the narrative does not advocate a sexual reading.[12] Rather, my reading attempts to reverse the prevailing hermeneutical venture so as to highlight the text as an effect of the contemporary reader and demonstrate how queer theory can reframe the hotly debated discussion.

Apparently unconvinced by reader response theory and its authority to question the epistemological foundations of interpretative theory, Zehnder dismisses the 'so-called queer reading' of the David and Jonathan narrative on the grounds that its proponents 'take their own homosexual self-identification or experiences as the starting point of their reading'.[13] While I maintain that the majority of interpretations of David and Jonathan are really a history of the present, reflecting contemporary ideas about (homo) sexuality more than they do the intentions of the biblical writers,[14] Zehnder, like many other such bastions of the 'old school' of biblical interpretation, frets at the prospect of an interpreter embracing a synchronic approach to reading biblical texts and grasps at straws when he dismisses the queer reading because it uses the biblical text to 'define and advance the agenda of one's own group' instead of getting back to 'what the original author(s) really wanted to convey'[15]—as though other approaches, particularly the historical-critical method he advocates, are able to do this.

Zehnder is correct, however, in noting that a queer reading emphasizes the use of one's life experiences as a starting point for any interpretation. For many queers our life experiences are unapologetically political, requiring us to speak out against injustice and marginalization, necessarily questioning the assumptions of the majority to give credence to alternative, nonheteronormative existence.[16] Judith Butler typifies queer theorists—although she views herself primarily as a feminist[17]—insofar as she believes that the purpose of queer theory is to problematize heterosexuality as *the*

12. Although I do not wish to advocate a homoerotic interpretation in this instance, I do not necessarily deny the validity of a reader-oriented interpreter producing such a reading, or believe that the incidence of eroticism any way cheapens the friendship or devalues the character of the two men.

13. Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 129

14. Contrary to Fish, I do accept the reality of a physical biblical text, but I am hesitant with interpretative theories that clearly separate the 'us' of the present from the 'them' of the past, the historical "'text' from the contemporary "'reader', or the "'object' from the "subject'.

15. Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 130.

16. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Lisa Isherwood, 'Thinking Theology and Queer Theory', *FemTh* 15 (2007), pp. 302-14 (308).

17. Judith Butler, 'Gender as Performance', in Osborne (ed.), *A Critical Sense: Interviews with Intellectuals*, pp. 109-25 (110).

privileged form of the sexual body among other marginalized bodies in the heterosexist matrix of power, thereby allowing us to focus 'on the question of what it might mean to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life'.[18] Following Foucauldian thought, Butler argues that systems of sexuality and gender construct subjectivities through discourses in the complex matrix of reiterative acts (performativity[19]) to such an extent that heterosexuality has become naturalized as fixed, coherent and stable—taking on 'the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being'.[20] With the integration of gays and lesbians into mainstream society, queer theory is now used in literary, cultural and historical studies as a means to critique accepted notions of gender and sexuality as fixed, stable and coherent. By reversing 'the discursive positioning of homosexuality and heterosexuality', heterosexuality is no longer considered a universal subject of discourse but becomes an object of interrogation alongside the much-scrutinized homosexuality.[21] Seidman summarizes well the broad ambitions of queer theory as having moved

> from explaining the modern homosexual to questions of the operation of the hetero/homosexual binary, from an exclusive preoccupation with homosexuality to a focus on heterosexuality as a social and political organizing principle, and from a politics of minority interest to a politics of knowledge and difference'.[22]

Specifically within the field of biblical studies, queer theory challenges normative assumptions (that is, the institutional knowledge of biblical scholarship) around interpretations of sexuality and gender. The queer biblical interpreter shows that there is not one, universal, objective interpretation, but countless variations of possible interpretations, validated

18. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

19. For Butler, performativity – defined by her as 'the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed' (through repetition and recitation of discourses) – is 'the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed (Butler, 'Gender as Performance', p. 112). See also Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 95; and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 140. This view of subjectivity as the truth-effect of performativity is also maintained by Moya Lloyd, who asserts that, 'it is not in a single act of constitution or invention that the subject is brought into being, but through re-citation and repetition' (Moya Lloyd, 'Performativity, Parody, Politics', *TCS* 16 [1999], pp. 195-213 [197]).

20. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 33.

21. David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 114. See also Katherine Watson, 'Queer Theory', *GA* 38 (2005), pp. 67-81 (74).

22. Steven Seidman, 'Introduction', in Seidman (ed.), *Queer Theory/Sociology*, pp. 1-29 (9).

by the presuppositions of the scores of interpretative communities that endorse them (for example, 'black, brown, yellow, red, white; female, male, transgendered, intersexed; straight, gay, lesbian, queer; rich or poor; lay or clergy; mainstream or marginalized; academic or non-specialist'[23]). Although some circles of biblical scholars mock queer readings or try to silence or exclude queer interpreters from the academy by other means, the movement towards a queer/feminist/postcolonial reader-centred hermeneutics has gained ground and 'produced many new voices in the discipline of biblical criticism' that let us speak for ourselves.[24] The queer approach to the Bible, referred to by Punt as a 'hermeneutics of marginalisation',[25] actively confronts those 'traditionalist' interpreters who assume that their interpretation—often a historical-critical reading from a white, straight, middle-class, Euro–American male perspective—is self-evident, unbiased or the only one that matters.[26] By reading against the status quo[27] of biblical scholarship, queer biblical interpretation recentres the voice of gay men from the margins,[28] playing with gaps, conflicts, suggestions, ambiguity and tension within and without biblical literature in a no less credible fashion than that of mainstream biblical interpretation.

Stone is one of a minority of biblical scholars to embrace queer theory as a conceptual tool in much of his work.[29] Stone's approach moves beyond

23. Thomas Bohache, 'Matthew', in Deryn Guest, *et al.* (eds.), *QBC* (London: SCM Press, 2006), pp. 487-516 (487).

24. West, 'Reading the Bible as Queer Americans', p. 28.

25. Such a stance stems from one's life experiences on the outside as 'Other', challenging conventional biblical interpreters by redrawing the boundaries and shifting the centre and periphery (Jeremy Punt, 'Intersections in Queer Theory and Postcolonial Theory, and Hermeneutical Spin-offs', *JBCT* 4 [2008], pp. 24.1-16 [24.6].

26. All interpretations, including the queer interpretation, are inevitably biased and self interested.

27. For Sullivan, the very purpose of queer reading is 'to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up—heteronormative knowledges and institutions' (Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, p. vi).

28. In this instance I use queer and gay interchangeably, although I am cognizant of the difficulty of lumping the two together, particularly as the notion of queer challenges not only received ideas about heterosexuality but also the stability of identity politics vis-à-vis homosexuality.

29. In addition to Stone, other examples of biblical scholars influenced by aspects of queer theory include Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, pp. 22-32; Theodore W. Jennings, Jr, 'YHWH as Erastes', in Ken Stone (ed.), *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001), pp. 36-74; Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*; Dale Martin, 'Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32,' *BibInt* 3 (1995), pp. 332-55; Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006); Stephen Moore, *God's Gym: Divine Male Bodies of the Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996); Stephen Moore, *God's*

discussion of biblical texts and homosexuality because he recognizes that such an endeavour reinforces the heteronormative belief that homosexuality, unlike heterosexuality, is a topic for debate.[30] Rather, Stone's writings shift attention to challenging hegemonic masculinity as the norm within biblical studies, asserting, instead, the power of queer theory to resist the prejudice of assuming straight is normal and gay is 'other'.[31] He argues that the most effective way to 'disturb the heteronormative pretensions' of biblical readings is to reframe the hetero–homo binary that dominates most discussions of the Bible and sex or gender.[32] Although he accepts the validity of historical readings that seek to reconstruct ancient contexts, such as Nissinen's *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*, as one of many valid voices,[33] Stone prefers to move towards a 'queer commentary'—a new way of doing biblical interpretation that constructs 'novel ways of interacting with biblical … texts from a whole range of queer reading locations'.[34] In his latest work Stone continues on his journey, setting the theoretical groundwork for the application of queer theory to biblical interpretation. He adopts Butler's notion of performativity to argue that the act of reading the Bible helps to constitute it as an object in a way similar to Butler's argument that the physical body is a performative effect of gender: 'There is no Bible identity behind the expressions of Bible; that identity is performatively constituted

Beauty Parlor: And Other Queer Spaces in and around the Bible (Contra; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Jeremy Punt, 'Queer Theory Intersecting with Postcolonial Theory in Biblical Interpretation', *CSSR Bulletin* 35 (2006), pp. 30-34; and Punt, 'Intersections in Queer Theory and Postcolonial Theory, and Hermeneutical Spinoffs', pp. 24.1-16. Some interpreters claim to adopt a queer approach to the Bible, but they more often than not produce gay or lesbian rather than queer readings (if 'queer' is understood as a means of undermining, problematizing or otherwise challenging the assumption that heterosexuality is inherently natural).

30. Stone believes that the discussion of what the Bible says about homosexuality 'frequently betrays a tendency to privilege speech *about* and visions *of* homoeroticism, while leaving unproblematized sexual relations between women and men and contributing to the impression that those relations, in contrast to homoerotic relations, have maintained stable forms and meanings' (Stone, 'Homosexuality and the Bible or Queer Reading?' p. 114).

31. Ken Stone, 'Safer Text: Reading Biblical Laments in the Age of AIDS', *TheolSex* 10 (1999), pp. 16-27 (19).

32. Stone, 'Homosexuality and the Bible or Queer Reading?', p. 116. Biblical scholar Jeremy Punt also believes that one of the central tenets of queer theory is to undermine the assumption that heterosexuality is normal and the foundation of modern society ('Queer Theory Intersecting with Postcolonial Theory in Biblical Interpretation', pp. 30-31).

33. Stone, 'Homosexuality and the Bible or Queer Reading?', p. 117.

34. Stone, 'Homosexuality and the Bible or Queer Reading?', p. 118.

by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results'.[35] Stone's queer biblical interpretation follows the path of many other reader-centred interpreters insofar as he asserts that meaning is not found in the literary text, but outside of it, in the dynamic process of reading. For Stone, belief in (the) Bible as stable, with definitive meaning waiting to be extrapolated by readers, is an illusion that serves to strengthen the heteronormative foundations of much biblical scholarship, and is a belief that must be challenged by all queer biblical interpreters.[36]

'Just Good Friends'

Friendship and intimacy between men in biblical narrative is evidently celebrated;[37] if this intimacy resulted in sexual acts, however, we do not know, but we do know that it did not necessitate suspicion of homosexuality as it does so often today.[38] Furthermore, while the relationships between Gilgamesh and Enkidu and Achilles and Patroclus suggest some degree of affection between the men, biblical interpreters note that the David and Jonathan narrative is not so clear, and, at best, is ambiguous in its portrayal of the quality of the relationship of the two biblical characters. A close reading of the David and Jonathan narrative appears to show that the friendship is based on obligations, protocol and hierarchy, with little evidence of spontaneity, intimacy and selflessness (at least not from David).[39] Despite Tull's insistence that Jonathan demonstrates several signs of honesty in his friendship with David,[40] for many interpreters today the David and Jonathan narrative paints a confusing picture. Having seen the absence of some key characteristics of a close friendship between David and Jonathan, these interpreters ponder if the relationship is not so much a friendship as a strategic cover for calculations by one or both parties who seek to gain from their association with the other: David securing valuable support for

35. Ken Stone, 'Bibles That Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity', *BTB* 38 (2008), pp. 14-25 (19).

36. Stone, 'Bibles That Matter', pp. 20-21.

37. Deut. 13.6-9; Job 6.14; 19.19; Pss. 35.14; 41.9; 55.13; Prov. 17.17; 18.24; 27.19.

38. As Rouner so rightly notes, 'Sexuality dominates our talk about intimacy with one another' (Leroy S. Rouner, 'Introduction', in Leroy S. Rouner [ed.], *The Changing Face of Friendship* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994], pp. 1-11 [1]).

39. One could argue that the tears when the men depart from each other in 1 Sam. 20.41 is an occasion of mutual grief, although it is possible that even here David could be wailing the forthcoming difficulties that he knows he must face on his own.

40. 'Jonathan's actions and words are self-consistent in ways that David's are not. Jonathan means what he says and says what he means; he never surprises us with a lie' (Patricia K. Tull, 'Jonathan's Gift of Friendship', *Int* 58 [2004], pp. 130-43 [141]).

his goal of kingship and Jonathan protecting his family line from cessation with the rise of the new ruler.[41]

The confusion as to whether David and Jonathan are friends is compelled further by the imprecise nature of the nine occurrences of *'āhēb* and its cognates in the biblical narrative,[42] which, as Zehnder and Sakenfeld note,[43] is difficult to define because the types of love in the Bible are wide and varied, ranging from feelings between men and women, parents and children, siblings and friends, to humanity's love for God and God's love for humanity. Despite the flexibility of the use of 'love' throughout the Hebrew Bible, the one-sidedness of the way in which people love David, some without even having met him, is pretty much apparent. Moreover, the disparity of love between David and Jonathan seems to be integral to the complicated dynamics of a literary plot that relates the passive David (for whom everything is beyond his control) with the active Jonathan, who is purposely seeking the approval, friendship and support of the monarch to be.[44]

Probing the friendship between David and Jonathan necessarily requires interpreters to ask what it means to speak of David and Jonathan as friends. In contemporary society friendship, whether gay or straight, is unstructured, ambiguous and predominantly free of regulation—what we might call an uninstitutionalized institution. Although there is a lack of generally agreed-upon criteria for what constitutes a valid, meaningful or legitimate friendship, there are two unspoken rules essential to any valid alliance: the equality of the parties to it and the voluntary nature of entering into it. Furthermore, while the ancients blurred the lines between love and sex, the majority of people today believe that the two are distinct and very much unrelated. Nowhere is this expressed more clearly than in C.S. Lewis's definition of friendship, which categorically refutes any link between (spiritual, cerebral) friendships and (earthly, carnal) sexual relations: 'Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; friends, side by side, absorbed

41. Peter Miscall believes that there is a lack of decidability about whether both David and Jonathan's motives are selfish or genuine because the friendship serves the needs of both parties (*The Workings of Old Testament Narrative* [SBLSS; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983], pp. 112, 114-15, 116, 119, 120-21, 124, 126).

42. 1 Sam. 16.21 (Saul loves David, although ambiguous); 18.1 (Jonathan loves David); 18.3 (Jonathan loves David); 18.16 (Israel and Judah love David); 18.20 (Michal loves David); 18.22 (Saul's servants love David); 18.28 (Michal loves David); 20.17 (Jonathan loves David, although ambiguous); and 2 Sam. 1.26 (Jonathan loves David).

43. Zehnder, 'Exegetische Beobachtungen', pp. 155-56; Zehnder, 'Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan', p. 144; and Sakenfeld, 'Love (OT)', p. 376.

44. Jonathan implies in 1 Sam. 20.13, and states explicitly in 1 Sam. 23.17, that David will become king, which suggests that Jonathan's loyalty and devotion to David is part of an apologetic for David's rise to king of Israel.

in some common interest'.[45] In contrast with philosophical exaltations of friendship, Lewis believes that friendship is the least of the four human loves,[46] arguing that 'we can live and breed without Friendship'.[47] Despite his view that friends bring us closer to God,[48] Lewis maintains that the real measure of male friendship is about sharing activities and interests more than it is about expressing any emotion or intimacy.[49] He criticizes contemporary men for abandoning traditional notions of virtuous friendship in favour of pathetic affections and sentiments.[50] Bakon, Brain and Gagnon each follow Lewis's lead to argue that the innocence of the friendship between David and Jonathan has been cheapened by aspersions of a perverse sexual alliance that wrongly conflates the sexual and the nonsexual.[51]

According to Lewis's understanding of friendship, it is sufficient that David and Jonathan share an abiding commitment to God and spend time with each other, without the need for questions of love, commitment or intimacy. Yet this criticism of sentimentality does not extend to Lewis's own interpretation—or, indeed, the majority of populist interpretations—of

45. C.S. Lewis, 'Friendship—The Least Necessary Love', in Neera Kapur Badhwar (ed.), *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 39-47 (41; see also 44). For Walter Hooper, Lewis demolishes the idea of friendship as sublimated homosexuality (*C.S. Lewis: A Complete Guide to his Life and Works* [New York: HarperCollins, 1998], p. 371). Even Halperin, who has written much excellent scholarship about the history of sexuality and male friendship, polarizes friendships as instrumental (side by side) and sexual relationships as expressive (face to face) ('How to Do the History of Male Homosexuality', pp. 87-123). I believe that the presumption that sexual relationships are hierarchical and platonic friendships are egalitarian is founded on hegemonic discourses of masculinity that do not necessarily play out in contemporary gay male relations.

46. The three other types of love identified by Lewis are: *agapē* (nonsexual, selfless love); *storgē* (parental love for child); and *eros* (passionate, sexual love).

47. Lewis, 'Friendship—The Least Necessary Love', p. 40.

48. Friends are 'joint seekers of the same God, the same beauty, the same truth' (Lewis, 'Friendship—The Least Necessary Love', p. 43); see also p. 41.

49. According to Lewis, 'we do not want to know our Friend's affairs' (Lewis, 'Friendship—The Least Necessary Love', p. 44). As Grunebaum notes, 'personal characteristics irrelevant to the shared interests will play no formative part in the friendship. Only their personal characteristics affecting their ability to pursue common interests are relevant to their being friends' (James O. Grunebaum, *Friendship: Liberty, Equality, and Utility* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003], p. 35).

50. Lewis, 'Friendship—The Least Necessary Love', pp. 40, 42, 44.

51. Lewis, 'Friendship—The Least Necessary Love', p. 39; Bakon, 'Jonathan', p. 143 n. 1; Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, pp. 28, 30, 222; and Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, p. 154. Although Lewis is adamant that friendship and homosexuality should not be confused, it is unlikely that Bakon, Brain or Gagnon share Lewis's sympathy for the plight of homosexuals; see Will Vaus, *Mere Theology: A Guide to the Thought of C.S. Lewis* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), pp. 128-29.

the friendship between David and Jonathan, which romanticizes an affair that supposedly 'depended on the complete willingness of each man to give for that which is received, to forgo self-interest, to convert separate identities into togetherness'.[52] This fashionable view of David and Jonathan as a biblical model of a friendship is only half of the story; most agree that Jonathan's unwavering loyalty to David, never going back on his word, even to the detriment of his own family's honour, demonstrates a genuine love and regard for David. On the one hand, in acting with such strength of character, Jonathan loves David without reserve and is evidently not in the relationship for what he can get from David; on the other hand, David lacks commitment to expressing any love for Jonathan.[53] Add to this the benefit David gains from his association with Jonathan, and it is not surprising that some might conclude that the friendship is founded on David's selfish desires. By complimenting Jonathan for his virtues[54]—for example, Jonathan exhibits 'all the characteristics of truest friendship … in their full beauty', including qualities such as 'love (1 S 18:1), faithfulness (20:2ff), disinterestedness (20:42), and self-sacrifice (20:24-34)'[55]—many interpreters overlook the lack of reciprocity between the two men in favour of a reading that views them as sharing a steadfast friendship. Thus, while 'it is as the befriender of David that Jonathan will always be remembered',[56] David's association with Jonathan co-elevates him to the status of the ideal friend and bestows adulations galore for his part in a relationship that paints

52. Brain, *Friends and Lovers*, p. 29. Similarly, 'those heroes of the Old Testament who sought each other's welfare and protected each other's interest, who were faithful to the end' (Raymond E. Gibson, 'Religion and Psychiatry: What Kind of Friendship?', *JRH* 2 [1963], pp. 143-49 [143]).

53. Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History, Part Two, 1 Samuel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 178. Although, as Stephen Greenberg astutely notes, David lacks commitment for loving anyone but God in biblical narrative (*Wrestling with God and Men: Homosexuality in the Jewish Tradition* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005], p. 104).

54. Fokkelman and Gunn prefer to view Jonathan's character as naïve more than anything else; see Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, p. 312; and Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, pp. 84-85.

55. H.H. Rowley, 'Jonathan', in J. Hastings (ed.), *Dictionary of the Bible* (rev. edn by F.C. Grant and H.H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2nd edn, 1963), pp. 525-26. (525).

56. T.H. Weir, 'Jonathan', in Geoffrey Bromiley (ed.), *ISBE,* II (4 vols.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 1117-118 (1118). Likewise, Jones believes that Jonathan is 'a model to those of a more favoured dispensation of loyalty to truth and friendship, as well as that of peacemaking which is the role of the sons of God' (T.H. Jones, 'Jonathan', in Douglas (ed.), *IBD* (3 vols.; Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), pp. 808-809 [808]).

the two men as 'bosom friends',[57] informing us that theirs is 'the most beautiful description of a friendship which the Bible offers us',[58] and that their alliance is 'proverbial, the very model of what a friendship should be'.[59]

Commentary on a Queer Romance: Feigning Intimacy and Fickle Friendship; or, Perverted Jonathan and Manly David

For the most part, gay and straight men look and dress alike, yet distinct differences are apparent in the way each group practises friendship. For the majority of contemporary straight men masculinity is defined in opposition to the antithesis of all things manly—women and homosexuals. Unlike friendships for women, which are usually characterized by ease, intimacy, disclosure and trust, a typical straight man's friendship is limited by 'an essentially negative identity learnt through defining itself against emotionality and connectedness',[60] and characterized by awkwardness, emotional detachment and a distrust of anything that remotely resembles femininity or homosexuality. Thus, straight men are generally not inclined to 'do friendship' very well, whereas the exclusion of gay men from traditional institutions of emotional support such as marriage (and, in some cases, family) has forced us to move beyond biological models of kinship to form families and communities of choice that champion trust and mutuality, as well as cultivate a sense of belonging and values in a safe environment.[61] Unlike for our straight counterparts, intimacy is central to gay men's masculine identities and social networks.

Against the predominance of hegemonic norms of masculinity, gay male friendships challenge the commonly held assumption that intimacy between men is not normal and undermines 'the clear lines often drawn between *agape* and *eros*'.[62] While for most straight men 'the explicitly sexual is

57. F.F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations: From the Exodus to the Fall of the Second Temple* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1963), p. 26.

58. Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p. 154. Or that they 'stand for the highest ideal of Hebrew friendship' (Weir, 'Jonathan', p. 1118).

59. Payne, *I and II Samuel*, p. 161. Or that their love 'has become an example for all time of all true friendship relationships' (Gnana Robinson, *Let Us Be like the Nations: A Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Samuel* [ITC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993], p. 158).

60. Victor Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity: Reason, Language and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 7.

61. Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 31, 45-46.

62. Stuart, *Gay and Lesbian Theologies*, p. 59.

muted, if not fully out of consciousness',[63] gay men's acceptance of homosexuality and rejection of intimacy as taboo means that, in our quest to relate, many gay friends share love in the fullest terms possible. (Not all gay friendships involve an erotic component, but some do: 'Sex is about pleasure with elements of trust, reciprocity, intimacy and caring. So is friendship. What more could one want in a good friendship?')[64] Sexual or otherwise, gay men's relationships are 'antithetical to the kinds of boxes, borders, and oppressive qualities that have constituted the heteronormative model of relating', raising questions about the inevitability of hegemonic masculine norms as the yardstick of male–male friendships.[65] Many recent studies support the view that intimate relationships across the gamut of sexual and platonic types among gay men are founded on a distinctive egalitarianism that is uncommon among straight men's friendships.[66] For all their differences, the varieties of gay friendships challenge the assumption that friendship, intimacy, affection and love between male friends is neither possible nor desirable.

Edward Carpenter, a radical English socialist and sometime Anglican theologian of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (1844–1929), precedes Foucault and other queer theorists by arguing that 'the problem of homosexuality is, in reality, the problem of [male] love and our fear of it'.[67] Carpenter believes that the prospect of men loving one another is problematic for society: 'moralists denounce the fact that men cannot really love each other; what they fear, however, is the possibility that they can'.[68] Writing in the same philosophical style as Plato's *Symposium*, Carpenter shifts attention away from genital activity to the spiritual aspect of what he terms 'homogenic' intimacy that has at its core the union of two people of the same kind.[69] Carpenter accepts that sex can be a healthy element of a friendship

63. Rubin, *Just Friends*, p. 180.

64. Nardi, *Gay Men's Friendships*, p. 99.

65. John P. Elia, 'Queering Relationships: Toward a Paradigmatic Shift', *JH* 45 (2003), pp. 61-86 (77).

66. Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 105.

67. Frank B. Leib, *Men's Ways of Relating: Friendly Competitors, Fierce Companions* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1997), p. 33. Nearly one hundred years later, Foucault raises a similar concern when he asserts, 'To imagine a sexual act that doesn't conform to law or nature is not what disturbs people. But that individuals begin to love one another—there's the problem' (Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', in Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (ed. Paul Rabinow; trans. Robert Hurley; EWMF, 1; New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 135-40 [136-37]).

68. Leib, *Men's Ways of Relating*, p. 28.

69. As Leib notes, Carpenter was arguing that 'In healthy people, sex is an expression of love. If one needs to classify people, then why not start with the heart instead of the genitals?' (Leib, *Men's Ways of Relating*, p. 14).

between two men, but he is fully aware that it need not be; in any case, he stresses that it is more a private matter for the two friends concerned than it is an issue for wider society to meddle in private affairs.[70] Just as marriages between men and women can be based on sexual or purely emotional foundations (or a combination of both), but are still classed as a marriage, so Carpenter ponders why friendships between men should be validated or dismissed on the basis of the existence of sexual contact or lack thereof—if the men involved are still friends, why should it matter what their arrangement is?[71] For Carpenter, as for Clarke,[72] what matters most is that the two men are friends and love each other, not whether they have sex, although he acknowledges that the two are not mutually exclusive.

Similarly, Foucault notes that contemporary discussions of male–male affection and tenderness have been restrained by fear of, if not paranoia about, the taboo topic of homosexuality. The preoccupation of distancing oneself from the perceived danger of unmanly displays of intimacy and tenderness with another man has created a culture of male detachment and isolation. Ultimately, the reification of the homosexual as a type in the late nineteenth century created the anxieties around 'romantic friendships' that have morphed into the commonplace fickle friendships that exist between many men today. Foucault notes that intimacy is not a problem for women's friendships with other women, where the existence (or absence) of a sexual component is irrelevant because they share much more access to each other's bodies than men, particularly around emotional disclosure and physical expression.[73] Foucault suggests that men break free of the restrictive and repressive traditions of hegemonic masculinity that limit and prohibit intimacy, ignoring references to any (homo)sexual component in favour of prioritizing the quality of friendship.[74] Rather than imitating women's friendships, however, he suggests that men look for inspiration to gay men's friendships, which share many of the characteristics of women's friendships, such as intimacy, and yet, beyond that, demonstrate a creativity that

70. 'Love between men probably demands some amount of physical intimacy, but the degree of intimacy is a matter which can only be left to the good sense and feeling of those concerned' (Edward Carpenter, *Ioläus: An Anthology of Friendship* [London: Albert & Charles Boni, 1935], p. 340).

71. Edward Carpenter speaks of friendships so romantic in sentiment that they verge into love, and, likewise, of love so intellectual and spiritual that it can hardly be called passionate (*Love's Coming of Age* [London: Mitchell Kennerley, 1911], p. 122).

72. Clarke, 'Achilles and Patroclus in Love', p. 393.

73. Foucault refers to Lilian Faderman's *Surpassing the Love of Men* (New York: Morrow, 1980), which acknowledges that female friendships cannot be so easily separated into sexual and nonsexual realms; see Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', pp. 138-39.

74. Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', pp. 136-39.

allows them to discover new ways of becoming men in relation.[75] Thus, according to Foucault, gay men's experience of intimacy with other male friends offers wider society the possibility of 'new forms of relationships, new forms of love, [and] new forms of creation'.[76] Instead of striving to be rational, unemotional, aggressive and independent-minded, the reciprocity, equality and trust of gay men's friendships offer a whole new territory of social relations for men to explore. By arguing for the transformative nature of gay men's friendships to challenge—and overcome—the constraints of hegemonic masculinity, Foucault looks to an as-of-yet unachieved social order of masculinities for all men, whereby

> gay culture will be not only a choice of homosexuals for homosexuals—it would create relations that are, at certain points, transferable to heterosexuals … By proposing a new relational right, we will see that non-homosexual people can enrich their lives by changing their own schema of relations.[77]

The ultimate paradox with gay friendships is that some believe they contest the coherence of hegemonic masculinity so much that embracing gay patterns of friendship will eventually lead to the demise of homosexual subjectivity and an eventual return to the pregay era of 'romantic friendship', whereby one would find it difficult to differentiate between male friendships and a relationship between a husband and wife. Foucault hints at this when he acknowledges that, through the process of illumination, the visionaries who practise gay friendship can infiltrate their way into more everyday discourses until they are recolonized as 'normal'.[78] Although social institutions such as medicine and the law have constituted, reinforced and controlled gay identities from the late nineteenth century onwards, gay men of late have destabilized power dynamics and reversed discourses about homosexuality.[79] Most gay men in contemporary industrialized countries

75. Michel Foucault, 'Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity', in Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (ed. Paul Rabinow; trans. Robert Hurley; EWMF, 1; New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 163-73 (164).

76. Foucault, 'Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity', p. 163.

77. Michel Foucault, 'The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will', in Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (ed. Paul Rabinow; trans. Robert Hurley; EWMF, 1; New York: New Press, 1997), pp. 157-62 (160). Garlick also sees the political potential of Foucault's arguments about masculinity and friendship when he asserts that Foucault's theories 'could, perhaps, offer a space of freedom from the normalizing discourses of (hetero)"sex" and gender which continually threaten otherness' (Garlick, 'The Beauty of Friendship', p. 569).

78. Foucault, 'Two Lectures', p. 86.

79. Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, p. 101. Foucault's notion of subjectivity develops chronologically along the lines of his view of power, so that his earlier works assert that subjectivity is the effect of autonomous discourses of power on the docile subject,

are no longer forced to hide in the closet, seeking concessionary gestures of acceptance of our 'alternative lifestyle', but, rather, enjoy healthy friendships that destabilize the very mechanisms of power central to the creation of our identities as gay men. In an ironic turn of events, the growing exposure of gay men in mainstream society offers potential for men to re-cite intimacy as an essentially masculine virtue: 'Gay culture at its best, therefore, creates resources to deepen and extend other relational possibilities'.[80]

Nardi's study of friendships among nearly two hundred gay men further supports the assertion that gay men could provide the opportunity of ground-breaking models for contemporary men to relate to one another.[81] Nardi concurs with Foucault that gay friendships have the potential to subvert the hegemonic order insofar as they provide new spaces for men to celebrate shamelessly the 'feminine' pleasure of overt intimacy with each other.[82] Interestingly, other, recent studies of cross-orientation friendships between gay and straight men also support this assertion.[83] Lisa Tillmann-Healy's research details the processes of how a straight man, then her fiancé (now her husband), tackles the taboo against male intimacy—based on widespread anxieties about homosexuality—in developing close friendships with gay men on the local gay man's softball team.[84] Tillmann-Healy's study concludes that the intimate dimension of gay men's relationships offers straight men novel ways to engage in more profound and meaningful relationships with other men, irrespective of the issue of sexual orientation. Similarly, Price's study of friendships between straight and gay men also

while his later works assert that subjectivity is contested and negotiated within the power system by conscious techniques of the self. Habermas believes that by the time he had written *The History of Sexuality* Foucault had substituted 'the model of domination based on repression (developed in the tradition of enlightenment by Marx and Freud) by a plurality of power struggles [à la Nietzsche]' (Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987], p. 127).

80. Mark Vernon, 'What Are Gay Men For?', *TheolSex* 13 (2000), pp. 63-76 (69).

81. Nardi, *Gay Men's Friendships*; Peter M. Nardi, 'Sex, Friendship, and Gender Roles among Gay Men', in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Men's Friendships* (RMM, 2; London: SAGE, 1992), pp. 173-85; and Peter M. Nardi, 'That's What Friends Are For: Friends as Family in the Gay and Lesbian Community', in Ken Plummer (ed.), *Modern Homosexualities: Fragments of Gay and Lesbian Experience* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 108-20.

82. Nardi, 'That's What Friends Are For', pp. 108-20; and Nardi, *Gay Men's Friendships*, p. 205.

83. Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy, *Between Gay and Straight: Understanding Friendship across Sexual Orientation* (EAB, 8; Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2001); Dwight Fee, '"One of the Guys": Instrumentality and Intimacy in Gay Men's Friendships with Straight Men', in Peter M. Nardi (ed.), *Gay Masculinities* (RMM, 12; London: SAGE, 2000), pp. 44-65; and Price, *Navigating Differences*.

84. Tillmann-Healy, *Between Gay and Straight*, p. 182.

finds that straight men in cross-orientation friendships generally display more emotion towards one another than hegemonic friendships between straight men.[85]

Reading the David and Jonathan narrative (1 Sam. 18.1 to 2 Sam. 1.27) through the lens of contemporary gay friendships exposes a complex relationship that is negotiating a conflict between two very different types of men: a hegemonic straight man (David) and a transgressive gay man (Jonathan). On the one hand, David, the quintessential embodiment of masculine ideals,[86] relates to Jonathan like most straight men relate to their friends—within the safe confines of heteronormative friendship patterns. On the other hand, Jonathan, although far from a 'sissy' or 'girly man' himself,[87] relates to David as a 'deviant'[88] (gay) man insofar as he strives for an intimate and expressive relationship. When I say Jonathan is like a gay man, I not saying that he *is* gay (that is, sexually attracted to David); rather, the point I am making is that Jonathan's dangerous behaviour vis-à-vis his daring commitment to intimacy and connectedness with a friend over family ties smacks of the 'gay way of relating', which is counter-normative to all things traditionally masculine. As we will see, for Jonathan, as for many gay men, friends are not 'just friends' if this is taken to mean the safe confines of companionship bereft of intimacy or commitment and secondary to kinship ties.

From the start to the finish of the biblical narrative, the success of David is dependent upon his conformity to heteronormative masculine ideals; men who live up to these expectations are rewarded with privileges such as prestige and the right to command. David is first introduced as an insignificant, callow shepherd boy whose talents with the lyre soothe King Saul of the evil spirits that consume him (1 Sam. 16.14-23; 17.33), but develops into an idolized national champion who slays Goliath, the Philistine enemy giant whom every Israelite fears (1 Sam. 17.1-11, 20-51). He achieves further fame for his military prowess, including killing tens of thousands of enemy soldiers, which supersedes Saul's killing of thousands (1 Sam. 18.6-9). Although jealous of David's popularity, Saul nonetheless appoints him

85. Price, *Navigating Differences*, pp. 62-65.

86. He is strong, well liked, honourable, loyal, brave, an accomplished warrior, and pensive.

87. Like David, Jonathan is also an accomplished warrior, strong, popular; and, although we do not know his wife's name, according to 2 Sam. 9.1-7 he was married. Indeed, Jennings believes that it is precisely because David is a successful warrior that his role as the 'bottom' (that is, passive/receptive) in his homoerotic relationship with Yahweh does not compromise his masculinity; see Jennings, 'YHWH as Erastes', p. 72 (see also Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, p. 12).

88. I use 'deviance' here in the sense that Jonathan strays from the norms of compulsive heterosexuality.

as commander over one thousand Israelite troops who go on to succeed in battle, which further increases David's fame and glory (1 Sam. 18.13-15). Hoping that David will die in battle, Saul offers David his daughter's hand in marriage—first Merab and then the younger daughter, Michal—if the warrior can beat Israel's enemies; yet David's victorious exploits only amplify the adulation of the people, and therefore increase Saul's jealousy of him (1 Sam. 18.17-30). The final straw for the humiliated Saul is when Jonathan and Michal prevent David from becoming the victim of their father's murderous intent (1 Sam. 19.1-17; 1 Sam. 20); despite fleeing for his life to take refuge in the wilderness as a guerrilla and mercenary (1 Samuel 21–26), David remains a loyal subject of the king, and even desists from killing Saul on two opportune occasions (1 Sam. 24.1-19; 26.1-21).

At the start of the narrative in 1 Samuel 18 the love story begins as soon as Jonathan sets eyes on David, whereupon the heir apparent is so smitten with David's manly beauty that his soul is bound to his friend's soul and he immediately gives up his right to the throne (1 Sam. 18.3-4). Although 'best friends are drawn together in much the same way as lovers',[89] and sexual attraction or behaviour is not necessarily a threat to this queer friendship, Jonathan's attraction to David's physical beauty (1 Sam. 16.12) speaks more about David's masculinity than it does about Jonathan's sexual desire. The mystery of Jonathan's attraction, like that of the Israelites in general, is explained best in terms of viewing David's looks as the embodiment of his manliness and natural leadership skills, ensuring that all the people of Israel are drawn to him: women (and some men) desire to be *with* him, while (other) men strive to *be* him.[90] David is 'the quintessential winner'.[91]

Yet David's successful public performance of hypermasculinity by winning battles against Israel's enemies and marrying Michal does not relieve his inner struggle to reconcile a deep-seated longing for connection with the self-sufficiency and detachment expected of him as a hero. By trying to live up to regulatory discourses around male–male social interactions, David has successfully limited his interaction with deviant men, but he has also limited the potential scope for quality friendships with any man.[92] Luckily,

89. Rubin, *Just Friends*, p. 179.

90. For a more detailed discussion of beauty as a masculine attribute in biblical literature, see Clines, *Interested Parties*, pp. 11-13, 222-23.

91. Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist*, p. 156.

92. As Seidler notes, 'A fear of intimacy has held men in a terrible isolation and loneliness. Often men have very few close personal relationships: we learn to live in a world of acquaintances. We grow up learning to be self-sufficient and independent, we learn to despise our own needs as a sign of weakness' (Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity*, p. 162).

the similar shared life experiences of Prince Jonathan—himself a successful warrior and a fellow (masculine) figure of national pride and honour—give him insight enough to see through the hype and sense the reality of David's inner struggle with loneliness. Drawn by the magnetism of the public persona of David and his intimate knowledge of David's deep-seated sensibilities in the court (including his musical and poetical abilities), Jonathan attempts to cultivate a queer friendship that balances the constraints of Israel's public expectations with David's personal needs for intimacy.

Jonathan's attachment to David intrigues the rising star, but David is unable or unwilling to act outside of the norms that have bestowed upon him his honoured status as an Israelite superstar. David, it seems, is stuck between a rock and a hard place; he feels a desire to get close to the prince who seems worthy of his friendship (more so than David's fellow generals or soldiers), but he is simultaneously conflicted between opting for intimacy and a powerful aversion to appearing homosexual.[93] I agree with Jennings and Boer that David is indeed fucked, but not in the sense of being penetrated anally by Yahweh[94] or Jonathan.[95] In an ironic twist, David's reluctance to act outside of hegemonic norms of masculinity means that he is unable to open himself up to other men. Thus, rather than jeopardize his celebrity, David basks in the glory of his popularity and refrains from getting too close to Jonathan, preferring to initiate a friendship based on the impersonal protocols of covenants that will keep the man with a glimpse of subordinate masculinity at arm's length. David's desire to be seen to do the 'right thing' by keeping a distance from Jonathan is unsuccessful; almost immediately after Jonathan initiates their first covenant, whereby Jonathan declares he loves David as he loves himself (1 Sam. 18.3), the extent of Saul's jealousy of David is such that he tells his son to kill the upstart (1 Sam. 19.1). Jonathan manages to convince his father that David is not a threat, but the peace is short lived as Saul's demons return and the king plans again to kill David (1 Sam. 19.4-11). Disturbed by her father's intentions towards her husband, Michal warns David that Saul plans to kill him and helps him to escape (1 Sam. 19.11-13). Despite David's continued success in the service of Saul's court (1 Sam. 18.2, 5) Saul is determined to kill him. Bewildered by it all, David finds Jonathan out of prying, public eyes and asks him what he has done to the royal household to deserve such animosity from the king. Seemingly oblivious to his father's plots to execute

93. 'Men … are clearly stymied in pursuing intimacy with other males because of fears involving their sexuality, especially culturally inbred homophobia' (Robert A. Strikwerda and Larry May, 'Male Friendship and Intimacy', *Hypatia* 7 [1992], pp. 110-25 [118]).

94. Jennings, 'YHWH as Erastes', pp. 36-74; and Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*.

95. Boer, *Knocking on Heaven's Door*, pp. 22-32.

David (1 Sam. 19.15 and 20.9), Jonathan pledges to ascertain whether Saul really does want David dead and promises to let the hero know the outcome (1 Sam. 20.2-13). Again, on the basis of his openly declared, unflinching love for David, Jonathan makes a second covenant with his friend (1 Sam. 20.14-17).

The following night Saul notices David is absent from the dinner table and so, also oblivious to his earlier plans, inquires of Jonathan as to David's whereabouts (1 Sam. 20.27). In a similar manner to Michal before him (1 Sam. 19.17), Jonathan concocts a story to excuse David (1 Sam. 20.28-29), but the heir apparent's lie enrages Saul, who unleashes a vitriolic attack on his son (1 Sam. 20.30). Having made all his covenants in private, Jonathan's actions have done nothing to undermine his father's authority with the people who, to be like all the nations, asked for a king (1 Sam. 8.4-5);[96] but Saul is furious at his son for his loyalty to David over his duty to his family ties. Utterly appalled, Saul cannot even bring himself to say David's name ('the son of Jesse'); and, in a final bid to secure the future of the Saulide dynasty, Saul attempts to shame Jonathan into ending the transgressive relationship.[97] While perhaps not attacking Jonathan for 'the effrontery of this homosexual love',[98] the vexed king questions Jonathan's masculinity by accusing him of being 'the son of a perverse and rebellious woman' (1 Sam. 20.30). Mentioning Jonathan's mother is a strategy by Saul to remind his son that he is acting in a shameful, womanly manner; having given his heart and soul to his friend, Jonathan is not only the bottom in this relationship, but, given the forcefulness of his actions, Jonathan is the ultimate in unmanliness—the power bottom who revels in his deviant position of subservience. Finally, realizing he cannot win his son over and out of sheer exasperation, Saul throws his spear at the double-crossing son of a bitch.

Following Saul's attack, Jonathan secretly meets with David (1 Sam. 20.35-40), but there is something different about his friend. Hidden from

96. All of Jonathan's covenants with David are made away from public view and in no way interfere or undermine Saul's kingship with the people of Israel. Jonathan makes a covenant with David in the palace before Saul, away from public view (1 Sam. 18.1-4); while in hiding David reminds Jonathan to show kindness on the basis of the covenant Jonathan made in 1 Sam. 18.1-4 (1 Sam. 20.8), after which Jonathan makes a covenant with David (1 Sam. 20.14-17) before the pair renew their oath in the name of Yahweh to the covenant made in 20.14-17 (1 Sam. 20.42). Finally, out of public view in the field, the two men privately make a covenant before Yahweh (1 Sam. 23.18).

97. It seems that Saul is grasping at straws by attacking Jonathan because Samuel told him earlier in the narrative that Yahweh had already rejected him as king over Israel (1 Sam. 15.23, 26).

98. Schroer and Staubli, 'Saul, David and Jonathan', p. 30 (see also Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, pp. 17-18, 27).

the view of others, in a moment of intense emotions, an otherwise restrained David breaks with convention and opens his heart to Jonathan like never before (or ever again). Beyond the gaze of those who conferred upon him his privileged position, David abandons his fears and embraces Jonathan, kissing him passionately and weeping until he exceeds in Jonathan's arms (1 Sam. 20.41). Aware of the inevitability of Saul's demise, Jonathan renews their second covenant (1 Sam. 20.14-17), and David promises to protect Jonathan's descendants (1 Sam. 20.42). David flees, hotly pursued by Saul and his men in a game of cat and mouse, only to meet Jonathan one final time at Horesh (1 Sam. 23.16). Forfeiting all aspirations to his own dynasty, Jonathan tells David not to be afraid as he will soon become king and Jonathan will be his second in command—something even Saul acknowledges (1 Sam. 23.17). In this wilderness setting, the last time the men see each other, David and Jonathan make a final covenant before God—the only time a covenant between the two is mutual—and then each goes his own separate way (1 Sam. 23.18).

After living in exile,[99] David returns to Ziklag as the Philistines go to battle against the Israelites, where Saul and his sons are slaughtered (1 Samuel 29–31). David learns of Saul's and Jonathan's demise a few days later, and composes his heartfelt lament (2 Sam. 1.19-27). As would be expected of a loyal subject, David shows admirable restraint when speaking of his sorrow at the death of the king (even though Saul tried to kill him many times), but, then, in a fleeting moment of clarity, David appears to pour out his anguish at the loss of his cherished friend, Jonathan. According to Garcia-Treto, 'David … opens his heart to expose to the reader a stunning, sudden glimpse into the intimate feelings of his soul. It is fascinating, and oddly embarrassing at the same time, to hear him cast all reserve or restrain aside and wail for the loss of Jonathan.'[100] Second only to the glimpse of vulnerability we see in David's emotional outburst at his private meeting with Jonathan in the field, whereby what he cannot express in words he expresses in actions (1 Sam. 20.41), David seems to reciprocate Jonathan's love with a lament that expresses his heartache. Having shown little emotion towards Jonathan while he was alive, could it be that David has finally broken free from the

99. David flees Saul (1 Sam. 21–24), but in 1 Sam. 24.16-20, after seeing that David has spared his life, Saul is remorseful and, like Jonathan before him, concedes that David will one day become king. As with other occasions, the reprieve is only temporary, and Saul continues to chase David in 1 Sam. 26; but, after discovering that David has spared his life once again, Saul says that David will triumph and become great (1 Sam. 26.21, 25). Understandably, David's experiences make him wary of Saul, and so he lives as a mercenary for the Philistines for sixteen months, in which time Saul finally halts his campaign against David (1 Sam. 27).

100. Francisco Garcia-Treto, 'A Mother's Paean, A Warrior's Dirge: Reflections on the Use of Poetic Inclusions in the Books of Samuel', *Shofar* 11 (1993), pp. 51-64 (63).

shackles of hegemonic masculinity and wants to tell all who will listen of his feelings for his beloved? It seems not! Although David's comment that Jonathan's love was more wonderful than the love of women (1 Sam. 2.26) appears to show David making a wholehearted public declaration of his love for Jonathan, in actuality we will never hear how David really feels about his friend. David is evidently distraught at the death of Jonathan, but he is also constrained by the power of the heterosexual imperative that even in the midst of grief and emotional turmoil he is unable to acknowledge publicly his love for Jonathan for fear that people might question his masculinity. The best David can do is muster an acknowledgment of his appreciation for the love David *received* from Jonathan.

Just as the ambiguous biblical narrative does not offer closure, so my queer interpretation offers an open-ended reading of the friendship between David and Jonathan that challenges the politics of masculinity so deeply entrenched in most interpretations of the biblical narrative. Going beyond questions of sex that stem from the contemporary association of male–male intimacy with homosexuality, I have shown how Jonathan's interactions with David contest the presumed naturalness and coherence of heteronormative masculine ideals of male friendship vis-à-vis the hegemonic distinctions between normal and perverse, gay and straight, friend and lover, and kith and kin. Moreover, Jonathan's integration of intimacy, love and commitment in his friendship with David points to a new, radical practice of male friendship outside the boundaries of the heterosexual matrix: the 'gay way'. That is not to say that reading the David and Jonathan narrative through the lens of gay male friendships reveals a perfect amity. Far from it. I have demonstrated that David and Jonathan, like so many friends in contemporary society, have relational problems in their friendship. David, what we might term the 'fag stag' of the couple, is unwilling to reciprocate Jonathan's revolutionary gestures, rendering the relationship a one-sided affair in favour of David keeping his manhood intact. However, this does not mean that David is cunning and calculating, or that he has no feelings for Jonathan. Rather, David, like many men at the pinnacle of 'male success', is the victim of his own circumstance—in order to enjoy the comfort and benefits he has earned as an Israelite hero, he must adhere to appropriate masculine behaviours or run the risk of scorn, failure and marginalization. David's predicament, having to choose between male success and emotional connectedness, demonstrates that the revolutionary nature of gay men's friendships should not be overestimated. While it is true that the overwhelming majority of male–male friendships lack depth or meaning, and many straight men recognize the value of gay friendship patterns that emphasize intimacy, few men find the 'gay way' of friendship beneficial to their lives. In fact, the 'gaytopist' view of Foucault and others that practices of gay male friendship represent a liberating model for men to love and relate with one another is somewhat

idealistic. Despite the troublesome relationship, David and Jonathan are, I believe, in their own unique way, friends and lovers—conceivably one another's 'other half'. Such an assertion purposely says nothing about sex. For those on a relentless quest to 'prove' their case one way or another, my only advice is we do not know, we never will and, quite frankly, it is none of our business!

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