Amy Kalmanofsky

The Monstrous-Feminine in the Book of Jeremiah

....

Zusammenfassung:
In diesem Beitrag wendet die Autorin Horror-Theorien auf die Darstellung des monströsen Weiblichen im Buch Jeremia an. Sie verfolgt die Hypothese, dass Jeremia ein weibliches Monströses als konstitutiven Teil seiner Rhetorik des Horrors konstruiert, um seine Rezipierenden derart zu erschrecken, dass sie die von ihm geforderten Reformen angehen. Mit Hilfe eines close reading von Jer 13,18-27 diskutiert sie die Eigenart und die rhetorische Wirkung von Jeremias weiblichen Monstern.

....

Your monstrosity! Your heart's arrogance has deceived you. Jeremiah 49:16

Introduction: Horror, Monsters, and the Monstrous-Feminine

In this paper, I examine the monstrous-feminine in the book of Jeremiah.[1] I believe that Jeremiah constructs a female monster as an essential part of his rhetoric of horror designed to terrify his audience into reform.[2] Through a close reading of Jeremiah 13:18-27, I will consider both the construct and purpose of the female monster. What are the characteristics of Jeremiah's monstrous-feminine and why rhetorically does the prophet evoke this figure?

In the dark, dreary night, Victor Frankenstein constructs two monsters. His first has yellow skin, watery white eyes and the desire for love. The second, intended as a female companion to the first, never becomes animate. Imagining a union between these monsters, Frankenstein expresses his fears:

> "They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him…Even if they were to leave Europe, and

> inhabit the deserts of the new world, yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror."[3]

Terrified at this prospect, Frankenstein tears apart the female monster and faces the wrath of her jilted intended.

Though monsters can be male or female, recent horror theory has assumed and focused upon a male monster and his female victim.[4] It is easy to perceive this male monster/female victim relationship portrayed by many horror narratives as encoding the patriarchal nightmare of the sexually aggressive female. The monster, himself a phallic symbol or bearing a phallic weapon penetrates and punishes his sexually active, often promiscuous, female victim. Perhaps the most familiar example is Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) in which Norman Bates stabs Marion, symbolically paying her back for having an affair with a married man. Yet one can also add less sophisticated films like *Halloween* (1978) in which Michael's first victim is his sexually active sister or *Dressed to Kill* (1980) in which a sexually frustrated wife is murdered by her deranged psychiatrist, in the elevator of the apartment where she just had an adulterous tryst.

Horror theorists who apply a valuable gender critique to the genre, not only identify this patriarchal agenda,[5] but demonstrate how that agenda is often subverted by the genre itself. Despite the predictable plots and seemingly stereotypical characters, gender within contemporary horror movies is not as simple as it appears. Monsters, and even their victims, display a variety of gendered characteristics; as Carol Clover observes:

> "Nor is the gender of the principals as straightforward as it first seems. The killer's phallic purpose, as he thrusts his drill or knife into the trembling bodies of young women, is unmistakable. At the same time, however, his masculinity is severely qualified: he ranges from the virginal or sexually inert to the transvestite or transsexual…"[6]

When seen through a gender lens, the phallic wielding yet gender-qualified monster represents a male-lack or sexual difference.[7] Like the vampire who exerts and gains power

by sucking the blood of his victims, male monsters manifest an atypical male potency and sexuality. Dracula procreates through his mouth.[8] Leatherface receives sexual pleasure through his chainsaw.[9] As atypical males within a patriarchal context, male monsters become aligned with their female victims; as Linda Williams writes:

> "Clearly the monster's power is one of sexual difference from the normal male. In this difference he is remarkably like the woman …a biological freak with impossible and threatening appetites that suggest a frightening potency precisely where the normal male would perceive a lack…It may well be, then, that the power and potency of the monster body in many classic horror films…should not be interpreted as an eruption of the normally repressed animal sexuality of the civilized male (the monster as double for the male viewer and characters in the film), but as the feared power and potency of a different kind of sexuality (the monster as double for the women)."[10]

In this analysis, male monster and female victim are aligned as symbolic potencies that threaten patriarchal culture. They are both sexual deviants, who must be killed and who are destined to kill each other.[11] The alignment between male monster and female victim not only makes the woman monstrous and the monster feminine, it also makes both powerful and threatening forces. In this way, the patriarchal constructs of the powerful, male monster and the weak, female victim and the stories they tell of domination and punishment are inverted; as Karen Hollinger writes:

> "If the woman is related to the monster in that they both are seen by patriarchy as representing sexual difference and castration fears, then she is allied not to a representation of weakness but to one of power in sexual difference. For the classic male horror monster, as symbol of the male Other, is not only a castrated victim of male society, but also a powerful, potentially castrating nemesis to the male hero, and he gets his power from the very fact of his dangerous difference from the normal male…"[12]

I propose that there are monsters and victims in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the biblical prophets and specifically in the book of Jeremiah, and that the encounter between them creates a monstrous victim. Monsters make more monsters; as Yvonne Leffler asserts:

> "If…the monster is a werewolf or vampire, the physical attack leads to a union of identities. A werewolf bite turns the victim into a werewolf, whose human identity is periodically replaced by the instinctual nature of a werewolf. A vampire bite enslaves the victim and puts him or her into a state similar to hypnosis, their ego controlled by the vampire. In the end, this can lead to the individual, like a werewolf's victim, being turned into a monster of the same kind as the assailant."[13]

In particular, I believe that the gender dynamic described above, male monster meets female victim thereby making female monstrous victim, is evident in Jeremiah. Angry male God attacks personified female Israel and transforms Israel into a monstrous victim; as Jeremiah 30:12-14 addressed to female Israel illustrates:

> For thus says YHWH:
> Your wound is fatal, your wound incurable.
> No one can try you for your sore,
> No healing skin for you.
> All your lovers have forgotten you,
> They do not pursue you;
> For I have smitten you with the strike of an enemy – cruel chastisement,
> For your many sins, your many wrongs.

As this passage describes, God attacks sinful Israel, leaving *her* wounded, shamed, and repugnant.[14] Similarly in Jeremiah13:18-27, angry God attacks Israel, strips her, and sends her into exile. Although here I suggest that God's attack renders Israel monstrous, I will also suggest in my analysis of this passage that Jeremiah employs the rhetoric of the monstrous-feminine to describe Israel's monstrous nature prior to the attack.

Clearly addressing a genre foreign to the biblical world, contemporary horror theory will provide valuable insight into the nature of Jeremiah's monster. Even though what makes a monster monstrous may be culturally determined,[15] the need for monsters appears to be universal.[16] Monsters have haunted all cultures, including the Bible's.[17] Though reflecting the fears of particular cultures, monsters share common characteristics richly illuminated by horror theory.

Horror theory focusing on gender is particularly relevant to the biblical world and its texts. Describing gothic novels of the eighteenth century, Donna Heiland writes:

> "For gothic novels are all about patriarchies, about how they function, what threatens them, what keeps them going. And what becomes ever clearer as one reads these novels is that patriarchy is not only the subject of gothic novels, but is itself a gothic structure. Patriarchy inevitably celebrates a male creative power that demands the suppression – and sometimes the outright sacrifice – of women."[18]

Likewise, the horror genre, gothic's offspring, with its preoccupation with and manipulation of gender characteristics and roles can be viewed as commentary on patriarchy and its challenges.[19] The Bible is certainly a text that reflects a patriarchy and, at times, may even be viewed as a text that works to maintain patriarchy.[20] The monstrous-feminine is part of a rhetoric that serves the patriarchy. Women's bodies and needs are depicted as monstrous and dangerous and, in the interest of patriarchy, they must be controlled or destroyed.[21] The question remains whether like their counterparts in contemporary horror narratives, the female monsters of the Bible also are powerful figures which work to subvert the patriarchy.

Before addressing the specific characteristics of the female monster, I want to talk briefly, and in general, about monsters. What is a monster? Following Noel Carroll, I identify monsters primarily from the emotional response they provoke.[22] A monster provokes horror which, for Carroll, is the composite emotional response of fear and disgust.[23] By examining the objects that elicit horror, Carroll is able to discern basic common characteristics of monsters.

Naturally considering the emotional response they elicit, monsters must be dangerous and disgusting, but what makes them so? For Carroll, to be dangerous, monsters can be lethal, but they can also threaten accepted norms, laws, and values of society.[24] To be disgusting, monsters are impure creatures that, as Carroll describes, are "interstitial." Their bodies reflect "categorical contradictoriness."[25] As cat women, wolf men, or human flies, they are biologically confused. They are walking corpses and living nightmares.

Applied to female monsters, Carroll's monstrous criteria take on specific characteristics. Female monsters are certainly dangerous. They are as lethal as their male counterparts. And like male monsters, female monsters are also biologically confused, defying the categories and norms of the natural world. Yet, the reasons why female monsters threaten and the ways they physically represent categorical contradictoriness are specific to their gender; as Barbara Creed notes:

> "The reasons why the monstrous-feminine horrifies her audience are quite different from the reasons why the male monster horrifies his audience. A new term is needed to specify these differences. As with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she is defined in terms of her sexuality. The phrase 'monstrous-feminine' emphasizes the importance of gender in the construction of her monstrosity."[26]

For Creed, when a "woman is represented as monstrous it is almost always in relation to her mothering and reproductive functions."[27] Creed's analysis of the monstrous-feminine is highly influenced by Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject. According to Kristeva, the abject is that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[28] The abject stands in opposition to the object and threatens to collapse meaning. As a result, the abject must be rejected to sustain the design and rules of symbolic order. The corpse, the wound and human waste are abject entities. They do not symbolize death. They *are* death and therefore they must be rejected; as Kristeva writes:

> "A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, or decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death – a flat encephalograph, for instance – I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live."[29]

According to Kristeva, women, and in particular the maternal body, are considered abject. The maternal body is associated with nature's cycle and thus is viewed as a hybrid animal/human. It is also associated with the body's substances and waste.[30] For Kristeva, as a child matures and learns to care for and control the physical body, the mother becomes

the abject entity that must be rejected in order to embrace the father and his symbolic laws.[31] Religion, believes Kristeva, and particularly biblical religion, enacts the drama of the rejection of the maternal body for the laws of the father.[32] In a contemporary context, the horror genre plays out this drama; as Creed notes:

> "Virtually all horror texts represent the monstrous-feminine in relation to Kristeva's notion of maternal authority and the mapping of the self's clean and proper body. Images of blood, vomit, pus, shit, etc., are central to our culturally/socially constructed notion of the horrific. They signify a split between two orders: the maternal authority and the law of the father…The modern horror film often 'lays' with its audience, saturating it with scenes of blood and gore, deliberately pointing to the fragility of the symbolic order in the domain of the body where the body never ceases to signal the repressed world of the mother."[33]

1. The Qualities of the Monstrous-Feminine in the book of Jeremiah

Though Frankenstein's bride, lesbian vampires and maternal aliens, may have taken her to new, imaginative heights, I believe the monstrous-feminine haunts the book of Jeremiah as God's horrific female victims – sinful Israel and the defeated foreign nations.[34] Before looking closely at one haunted text, I will identify three distinct ways the monstrous-feminine is manifest in Jeremiah: her association with animals, with the maternal body and with an insatiable sexual appetite.

As Carroll observes, monsters defy natural categories like human and animal and are biologically confused. Often this confusion is manifest in the unnatural mixing of physical characteristics such as a man with horns and a tail. Although Jeremiah does not imagine hybrid creatures,[35] he uses animal imagery to describe sinful Israel and thereby extends the rhetoric of Israel's monstrosity to her nature before the attack. Israel neighs in her lust.[36] She pursues her lovers like a she camel or like a wild ass in heat.[37] Often she behaves like untethered, untamed sheep.[38] Jeremiah's depiction of animal-Israel supports Carroll's notion that monsters embody opposition and present "challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking."[39] It also supports Creed's assertion that women by virtue of their generative power are linked with animals in the horror genre; she writes:

> "Her ability to give birth links her directly to the animal world and to the great cycle of birth, decay and death. Awareness of his links to nature reminds man of his mortality and of the fragility of the symbolic order. The idea that woman in her mothering role is transformed into a human/animal figure is represented very strongly in *The Brood*, and in other horror films…"[40]

Throughout Jeremiah, the maternal body is one of the most frequent images used to describe frightened Israel or the foreign nations.[41] Anticipating an enemy onslaught, frightened Israel writhes like a woman in labor. When the tables turn and Israel's enemies face the divine onslaught, they become like laboring women. Mothers and wombs appear throughout Jeremiah. The prophet was called in his mother's womb.[42] Later he laments that his mother bore him.[43] Mothers are specifically assaulted and left to languish.[44] They remain husbandless and childless.[45] Israel wails like a mother who lost her only child.[46]These frequent references to mothers and the maternal body resonate with Creed's "archaic mother," a pervasive figure in horror narratives, who like a black hole threatens to reabsorb its offspring; as she describes:

> "The archaic mother is present in all horror films as the blackness of extinction – death. The desires and fears invoked by the image of the archaic mother, as a force that threatens to reincorporate what it once gave birth to, are always there in the horror text – all pervasive, all encompassing – because of the constant presence of death."[47]

Perhaps no other biblical text so overtly invokes the archaic mother than Jeremiah 20:14-18 in which Jeremiah curses the day of his birth, the day his mother bore him, and the man who announced his birth. Preferring death to life, the prophet laments that his mother's womb was not his grave.

Lust is another characteristic attributed to the monstrous-feminine in Jeremiah. She leans like a whore on every hill and beneath every lush tree.[48] She pursues her lovers and teaches other women to do the same.[49] She is brazen, insatiable, and lacks proper modesty and shame.[50] In the biblical world, sexual aggression in a woman indicates a lack of shame and threatens the honor of the patriarch and his family; as Gale Yee notes:

> "Since female sexual purity symbolized a family's ability to protect its material resources, a large measure of man's honor rested on the sexual behavior of women, whether his wife's, daughter's, sister's, or mother's. If a woman was sexually shameless in any way, it would be revealed publicly that her husband, father, brother, or son, as the stronger of the two genders, had failed in his responsibility to preserve the family honor by this inability to protect or control her".[51]

In Yee's analysis, sexually aggressive females such as Hosea's Gomer, Ezekiel's Oholah and Oholibah and Proverbs' Strange Woman, are portrayed as evil in the Bible.Similarly, the shameless, sexually aggressive female is a staple of contemporary horror narratives and, like her biblical counterpart, represents a threat to the patriarchy in which she lives. In *Fatal Attraction* (1987), evil Alex, the other woman, is pitted against domestic Beth, the good wife. Throughout the movie, passion and domesticity, evil and good, Alex and Beth battle for the devotion of the patriarch Dan.[52]

2. The Rhetoric of the Monstrous-Feminine in Jeremiah 13:18-27

All three manifestations of the monstrous-feminine – her animal behavior, her maternal body, and her lust – are evident in Jeremiah 13:18-27.[53] The passage begins:

> Speak to the king and to the queen mother:
> "Sit low down, for from your heads has fallen the crown of your glory.
> The cities of the Negev are closed, there is no opening.
> All of Judah is exiled, completely exiled.
> Raise (fem sg) your eyes and see (fem sg) those who come from the north.
> Where is the flock he gave to you (fem sg), the flock of your glory." (18-20)

Though the king and his mother are addressed, by the end of this passage, despite the vocal alteration, the queen appears as its focus. Who is the queen mother? Many scholars identify the king as Jehoiachin and his mother as Nehushta who, according to 2 Kgs 24:12, were sent into exile together. The meaning of this passage, which conveys the humiliating transformation of once-glorious figures, does not depend on their identity. What matters is that the mighty have fallen. This passage provides valuable insight into the power attributed to the queen mother.[54] Like the king, her demise reflects the demise of her people. Yet why

is she singled out? Why does the prophet command her to look at invaders from the north?[55] Why does the prophet ask her what has happened to her flock?[56]

I believe there is an intentional focus on the queen mother as the passage begins to adopt the rhetoric of the monstrous-feminine. The queen mother as a humiliated maternal figure is horrific. Although the response itself is not encoded in the text, mirrored by a character's reaction, I suggest that the prophet evokes this figure to provoke the response of horror from his audience. The juxtaposition of the maternal figure and the invaders from the north exaggerates the horror.[57] She must face the invaders. As a woman, her body is literally and particularly threatened by invasion. Rape was and remains a real threat of military invasion.[58] As a mother evoking the maternal body, like the cities of the Negev, she represents a closed body. Once violated through invasion or the pangs of labor, the closed body will open, exposing and releasing what's inside.[59]

The maternal body is explicitly evoked in the following passage, Jeremiah 13:21-23:

> What will you say when he inflicts upon you?
> You taught them! Chiefs, to be head over you![60]
> Will pangs not seize you like a laboring woman?
> When you say to yourself: "Why are these things happening to me?"
> Because of your great sin, your skirts are uncovered, your heels violated.
> Can a Cushite transform his skin, a leopard his spots?
> Indeed, can you do good who has been taught to do evil? (21-23)

In this passage, Jeremiah shifts his focus from the queen mother to personified female Zion whose terror is compared to a laboring woman. As I mentioned earlier, the image of the laboring woman appears throughout Jeremiah to describe terrified Israel or the foreign nations. Elsewhere I have discussed the rhetorical impact of this image which both conveys characters' horror and provokes horror from the text's audience.[61]In this context, the laboring woman clearly provokes more than conveys horror and works to construct the monstrous-feminine. This passage presents the female body certainly not as an object of beauty or even as an object of sympathy. Rather, the female body pregnant and exposed, is displayed for shame.

As this passage suggests, exposing the female body, and in particular her genitals,[62] not only shames the woman but, more significantly, represents her shame. For Jeremiah, Israel sins through her sexuality – through her insatiable, animal lust. Thus her sexuality and her sexual organs, the site of her sin, represent the sin. In this way, the female body becomes monstrous. At this point, I want to suggest a reason why the prophet evokes the monstrous-feminine. I believe the displaying of the monstrous female body offers two possible explanations. First, as Creed suggests, embodying the abject, the monstrous-feminine invites a desired exorcism.[63] Like God, Jeremiah's audience will reject monstrous female Israel and choose to reform its behavior.

Parallels found in 5th CE post-Ashokan Buddhist literature suggest another related explanation. In this literature, the bodies of disfigured women and decomposing female corpses are described in gruesome detail.According to Elizabeth Wilson, these texts have two rhetorical functions. They demonstrate the "symbolic logic" of corporal punishment; as she writes:

> "The use of earrings and nose-rings and the application of henna and cosmetic pastes to the hands, feet, and breast were conventions used by Indian women of the period to adorn and eroticize the body. Thus the amputation of the ears, nose, hands, feet, and breasts of adulterous women…mortifies the erotic body, punishing and displaying the nature of the crime at the same time".[64]

They also serve as moral reminders and sexual deterrents. The monks who read this literature are inspired to curb their sexual desires; as Wilson notes:

> "Construed as powerful enticements to return to worldly life, women continually threaten the commitment of monks to their vocation. Grotesque figurations of the feminine allow renouncers to remain impervious to the power of seduction women are thought to wield, thus maintaining their identity as chaste members of a renunciant counterculture."[65]

Thus Wilson offers a different explanation than Creed for the evocation of the monstrous-feminine. For Creed, the monstrous female body is presented in order to be rejected. She must be denied and removed. For Wilson, the monstrous female body should not be

exorcised. Instead, the monstrous-feminine is displayed as a symbolic reminder of retributive justice and of sexual restraint.

The passage in Jeremiah also suggests that monstrous Israel cannot change her behavior. Like the Cushite who must accept the color of his skin and the leopard his spots, sinful Israel must accept her evil nature. The mention of the Cushite's and the leopard's skin is particularly interesting in the context of the construction of monsters. According to Judith Halberstam, monstrosity is often marked on and measured by skin; she writes:

> "Skin houses the body and it is figured in Gothic as the ultimate boundary, the material that divides the inside from the outside. The vampire will puncture and mark the skin with his fangs, Mr. Hyde will covet white skin, Dorian Gray will desire his own canvas, Buffalo Bill will covet female skin, Leatherface will wear his victim's skin as a trophy and recycle his flesh as food. Slowly but surely the outside becomes the inside and the hide no longer conceals or contains, it offers itself up as text, as body, as monster."[66]

The enemy invades, violates the borders and penetrates Israel. The cities of the Negev will open. Pregnant Israel will release her insides. Yet in the rhetoric of horror, the monstrous-feminine births death, not life. The final passage, Jeremiah 13:24-27, describes Israel's tragic fate.

> I will disperse you like straw passing in a desert wind.
> This is your lot, your measured portion from me – declares YHWH –
> Because you forgot me and relied on falsehood.
> Indeed I will strip your skirts over your face and reveal your shame.
> Your adulteries, your neighings, the promiscuous scheme(s)!
> On every hill, I have seen your vileness.
> Woe unto you, O Jerusalem, you are not pure – until when?

Her boundaries penetrated, Israel will break apart like straw in the wind. Once again, Israel's monstrous body is displayed not only to shame but to *expose* her shame. The word *qalon* (קלון) means shame,[67] but also serves as another euphemism for female genitals.[68] In this passage, Israel's sexual appetite and promiscuity is clear. She behaves like an animal.

Using similar language to describe Israel as well fed horses neighing after each other's wives, Jeremiah 5:8 also associates lust with animal behavior.

Israel's monstrosity could not be clearer. She is a vile, impure, animal. In Jeremiah 4:1 and 7:30 *shikusim* (שקוצים) refer to idols that must be removed from God's presence.[69] But in Jeremiah 13:27, Israel herself has become the vile object that must be removed. Similarly, Israel's impurity conveys the need for her removal since impure objects cannot remain in God's presence. In the biblical world, women were regularly impure whether from menstruation, sexual intercourse, or childbirth.[70] Kristeva associates impurity with abjection and considers an impure woman (rendered impure particularly through her reproductive cycle) a threat to the patriarchal order which, like all abject entities, must be removed.[71]

Conclusion: The Rhetoric of the Monstrous-Feminine and Its Rationale

Jeremiah 13:18-27 is an excellent example of the rhetoric of the monstrous-feminine adopted by the prophet to horrify his audience. In this passage, female Israel is a lustful animal. Her maternal body and her sexual organs, representing her shame, are monstrous. As I already noted, this passage offers two possible explanations why the prophet adopts the rhetoric of the monstrous-feminine. First, Jeremiah seeks to expose the female monster as evidence and as a reminder of Israel's sin. Second, Jeremiah wants to initiate an exorcism of the female monster. Naturally both explanations are also possible. The prophet exposes the monstrous feminine as a reminder and example of Israel's sin in order to exorcise her. To these explanations, I would add another. The rhetoric of the monstrous-feminine describes Israel's monstrous behavior before the attack as well as her defeated body and thus justifies the attack. As Wilson noted about the women portrayed in the 5th century CE Buddhist literature, retributive justice is evident on their disfigured bodies. So too with monstrous Israel.The woman who lusts like an animal deserves to have her skirts lifted and her sex revealed.

The monstrous-feminine in Jeremiah is a negative figure designed like all monsters to provoke fear and disgust. She embodies Jeremiah's and his culture's perceptions of gender and reflects ancient Israel's fears of the female body and sexuality. But there can be no doubt that she also is a powerful figure. She threatens the norms of patriarchal Israel and

serves as a warning to its men and women to curb their sexual desire, to behave appropriately and to avoid shame.[72]

Yet monstrous Israel's power may derive from more than her power to warn. As I mentioned above, monsters make more monsters. Israel's physical devastation results from her encounter with God. She has drawn too close to her angry God. As a result, she embodies and reflects God's power and becomes a physical representation of God's destructive power, as Jeremiah 30:12-14 quoted above illustrates. God smites Israel.Her wounded body testifies to angry God's monstrous power. In this way, monstrous Israel is a powerful and dreadful revelation.

The question remains when does the prophet evoke the rhetoric of the monstrous feminine? Why does Jeremiah address the king and queen-mother, but focus on the queen-mother? Does the prophet evoke the monstrous-feminine at particular moments to convey a particular message? Are oracles of hope gendered masculine and those of doom feminine?[73]

As my analysis shows, Jeremiah evokes the monstrous-feminine to convey a particular message about the nature of Israel's behavior as well as to elicit a particular response from his audience. The monstrous-feminine in Jeremiah is a lustful animal that must be exposed in order to be removed. Jeremiah carefully constructs his monstrous-feminine. Her body and nature represents sinful Israel and provides valuable insight into the prophet's perception of the wayward people. Like Victor Frankenstein, Jeremiah carefully creates a female monster. And like Frankenstein, he wants to obliterate her. He wants to tear her apart, dispersing the pieces of her body like straw in a desert wind.

---

[1] I draw from the following texts: Jeremiah 2:17-3:13; 15:1-10; 18:13-17; 30:1-24; 48:1-20; 49:1-27; 50:1-21; 51:1-11, 27-44. Although I focus on Israel as God's victim in this paper, as can be seen from these select texts, Israel is not the only monstrous female victim. When Israel repents and the tables turn in the final chapters of Jeremiah, the foreign nations are also depicted as monstrous female victims.

[2] I identify and examine Jeremiah's rhetoric of horror in my book *Terror All Around: Horror, Monsters, and Theology in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York & London: T&T Clark, 2008). There I argue that Jeremiah

employs a rhetoric designed to elicit the response of horror, the composite emotional response of fear and shame, from his audience. To that end, Jeremiah constructs two distinct types of monsters. Direct horror monsters threaten to destroy while indirect horror monsters are the destroyed. Thus, my indirect horror monsters correspond with the monstrous victims described above.

[3] Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2001), pp. 176-177.

[4] Karen Hollinger notes the typical assumption among horror critics of the male monster and the female victim; she writes: "Critics have been slow to investigate the connection between the representation of the horror monster and that of the female image because the horror monster traditionally has been presented as male. From classic monster films like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919) through *Nosferatu* (1922), *Frankenstein* (1931)…to the contemporary psychopath-as-monster films like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) and *Halloween* (1978) or the monstrous creature-as-phallic-symbol films like *Jaws* (1974), the monster is overtly, even excessively, masculine." Karen Hollinger, "The Monster as Woman: Two Generations of Cat People," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (ed. Barry Keith Grant; Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), pp. 296-297.

[5] A movie like *Fatal Attraction* (1987) seems like a morality play, pitting the female domestic ideal against uncontrolled female desire; as James Conlon concludes: "*Fatal Attraction* reaches the exact same conclusion. The attraction that is fatal, it argues, is not primarily that between Alex and Dan but between domesticity and passion. They cannot coexist. One must choose between them. And, because passion is the more dangerous of the two, the correct choice is obvious. Because passion cannot be domesticated, it must be eliminated." James Conlon, "The Place of Passion: Reflections on *Fatal Attraction* in *Dread of Difference*, p. 411.

[6] Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 47.

[7] Linda Williams observes that monsters are either sexually lacking or over-endowed; she writes: "The terms of the argument suggest that the monster's body is perceived as freakish in its possession of too much or too little. Either the monster is symbolically castrated, pathetically lacking…or he is overly endowed and potent." Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," in *Dread of Difference*, p. 20.

[8] Robin Wood identifies five elements that attribute to Dracula's sexual otherness and potency: irresitable power and physical strength, non-procreative sexuality, promiscuity, abnormal sexuality (blood-sucking), and bisexuality. Robin Wood, "Burying the Undead: The Use and Obsolescence of Count Dracula," in *Dread of Difference*, p. 370.

[9] Clover describes this scene from *Texas Chain Saw II* (1986): "At the crucial moment, however, power fails Leatherface's chain saw. As Stretch cowers before him, he presses the now-still blade up along her thigh and

against her crotch, where he holds it unsteadily as he jerks and shudders in what we understand to be orgasm." Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, pp. 25-26.

[10] Linda Williams, "When the Woman Looks," p. 20.

[11] When killing the killer, the Final Girl, Clover's term for the last woman standing, displays her masculine qualities; she writes: "But the 'certain link' that puts killer and Final Girl on terms, at least briefly, is more than 'sexual repression.' It is also a shared masculinity, materialized in 'all those phallic symbols'…The Final Girl has not just manned herself; she specifically unmans an oppressor whose masculinity was in question to begin with…Consider again the paradigmatic ending of *Texas Chain Saw II*. From the underground labyrinth, murky and bloody, in which she faced saw, knife, and hammer, Stretch escapes through a culvert into the open air…When her last assailant comes at her, she slashes open his lower abdomen – the sexual symbolism is all too clear – and flings him off the cliff. Again, the final scene shows her in extreme long shot, standing on the ledge of a pinnacle, drenched in sunlight, buzzing chain saw held overhead." Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, p. 49.

[12] Hollinger, "The Monster as Woman," p. 299.

[13] Yvonne Leffler, *Horror as Pleasure: The Aestheitics of Horror Fiction* (trans. Sara Death; Stockholm: Almquvist & Wiksell International, 2000), p. 153.

[14] Israel's repugnance is evident in Jeremiah 15:5-6.

[15] Fear of AIDS results in vampire movies and fear of terrorism results in villains like Jigsaw from the *Saw* (*SawI* 2004) movies. Commenting on the culture's impact on perceptions of monstrosity, Jeffrey Cohen writes: "The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary), giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture." Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 4. Similarly, Judith Halberstam writes: "The body that scares and appalls changes over time, as do the individual characteristics that add up to monstrosity, as do the preferred interpretations of that monstrosity." Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 8.

[16] David Gilmore writes: "The mind needs monsters. Monsters embody all that is dangerous and horrible in the human imagination. Since earliest times, people have invented fantasy creatures on which their fears could safely settle." David D. Gilmore, *Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 1.

[17] Typically, monsters in the Bible are viewed as chaos figures that must be controlled or battled and defeated by YHWH. See Isaiah 51:9-11; Psalm 74:12-14; Job 40:15-32; 41:1-26.

[18] Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 10-11.

[19] On the horror genre, Barry Grant writes: "(I)ndeed, it may be possible to see the entire genre on one level as about patriarchy and the challenges to it." Barry Keith Grant, *The Dread of Difference*, p. 2.

[20] Gale Yee describes ancient Israelite society: "The patrilineal kinship ideology practiced in ancient Israel was supported by a number of social practices that privileged the male. The locus of power and authority over a particular family household was the oldest living male. Ownership of goods and resources lay with this paterfamilias, who passed his assets as patrimony on to his eldest son according to customs of primogeniture. Endogamy could mitigate any conflict between one's affines (in-laws or relatives by marriage) and one's own family by subsuming the conjugal bond under the prior and more legitimate kinship bond. This in-group marriage was thought to preserve and strengthen a lineage, guaranteeing the greatest number of males available for conflict situations." Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 37. Yee identifies an ideological strategy in the Bible that works to maintain ancient Israel's patrilineal kinship system; she writes: "(W)hat appears predominantly in the biblical text is the male world. The biblical text narrates and legitimizes male ideologies of lineage, descent, and honor as they are lived out in obedience to the biblical God YHWH." Ibid., p. 57.

[21] Analyzing the symbolization of woman as evil, Yee comes to a similar conclusion: "Holding man in thrall by her irresistible attractions, woman embodies all that is destructive in man's experience, seducing him away from God and a life of good down paths of moral perversity and entrapment. As a foundational text in Western civilization, the Bible has been and continues to be a significant *fons et origo* of religious and social attitudes about gender, race/ethnicity, class, and colonialism…In short, the men writing the Bible used women, particularly those who were socially, culturally, and racially Other, as tropes for evil and destruction." Ibid., pp. 1-3. Similarly, Claudia Camp considers the depiction of the strange woman and the association of women with strangeness in the Bible as reflecting the dangers women pose to patriarchal ancient Israel; she writes: "The woman is depicted as *zarah* because, as an adulteress and prostitute, she acts in ways that are alien to the family structure, a structure that itself is a fundamental defining feature of what is 'our own', not strange…It is, rather, symbolic of the forces deemed destructive of patriarchal control of family, property and society. Because control of women's sexuality is the sine qua non of the patriarchal family, it is no accident that the forces of 'chaos' are embodied in a woman who takes control of her own sexuality." Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), p. 61.

[22] As Carroll notes, the genre of horror is defined by audience reaction. A horror movie must horrify; as Carroll writes: "The genres that are named by the very affect they are designed to provoke suggest a particularly tantalizing strategy through which to pursue their analysis. Like works of suspense, works of

horror are designed to elicit a certain kind of affect…Thus, one can expect to locate the genre of horror, in part, by a specification of art-horror, that is, the emotion works of this type are designed to engender." Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror or Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990), p. 15. Yet how does one gauge audience reaction? According to Carroll, the characters within the horror narratives mirror the intended audience reaction; he writes: "For horror appears to be one of those genres in which the emotive responses of the audience, ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters. Indeed, in works of horror the responses of characters often seem to cue the emotional responses of the audiences." Ibid., p. 17. Monsters are the objects that elicit the emotional response of horror.

[23] Carroll describes a horrified reaction: "Their faces contort; often their noses wrinkle and their upper lip curls as if confronted by something noxious. They freeze in a moment of recoil, transfixed, sometimes paralyzed. They start backwards in a reflex of avoidance. Their hands may be drawn toward their bodies in an act of protection but also of revulsion and disgust. Along with fear of severe physical harm, there is an evident aversion to making physical contact with the monster. Both fear and disgust are etched on the characters' features." Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[24] Ibid., p. 43.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London & New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

[27] Ibid., p. 7.

[28] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

[29] Ibid., 3.

[30] Kristeva writes: "(M)aternal authority is experienced first and above all, after the first essentially oral frustrations, as sphincteral training…Through frustrations and prohibitions, this authority shapes the body into a *territory* having areas, orifices, points and lines, surfaces and hollows, where the archaic power of mastery and neglect. Of the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty, possible and impossible, is impressed and exerted." Ibid., pp. 71-72.

[31] Ibid., p. 72

[32] Kristeva cites as an example of the Bible's effort to *abject*ify the maternal body, the levitical association of the maternal and the leprous bodies; she writes: "Between the theme of food and that of the sick body (Leviticus 13-14), the text will deal with the woman in childbed. Because of her parturition and the blood that goes with it, *she* will be "impure"…To purify herself, the mother must provide a burnt offering and a sin offering. Thus, on *her* part, there is impurity, defilement, blood, and purifying sacrifice." Ibid., p. 99.

Circumcision and sacrifice become the means to negate maternal and to assert paternal authority; as Kristeva notes: "Circumcision would thus separate one from maternal, feminine impurity and defilement; it stands instead of sacrifice, meaning not only that it replaces it but is its equivalent – a sign of the alliance with God." Ibid.

[33] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 13.

[34] Identifying monsters by the emotional response they elicit from characters who observe them (and thereby mirror these responses for the audience), there can be no doubt that God's victims are monsters. As the prophet repeats, those who pass by these victims are filled with horror. See Jeremiah 18:16; 19:8; 49:17; 50:13. For a discussion of the emotional response conveyed by those who pass by, see Kalmanofsky, *Terror All Around*, pp. 35-40.

[35] In contrast, the prophets Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6) do imagine hybrid figures.

[36] Jeremiah 13:27.

[37] Jeremiah 2:23-24.

[38] Jeremiah 13:20-21 and 50:6.

[39] Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, p. 34.

[40] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 47.

[41] See Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 30:5-6; 48:41; 49:22; 50:43. For a discussion on the rhetorical use of this image throughout the prophets, see Amy Kalmanofsky, "Israel's Baby: The Horror of Childbirth in the Biblical Prophets," *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008): 60-82.

[42] Jeremiah 1:5.

[43] Jeremiah 15:10.

[44] Jeremiah 15:8-9.

[45] Jeremiah 18:21.

[46] Jeremiah 6:26.

[47] Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 28.

[48] Jeremiah 2:20.

[49] Jeremiah 2:33.

[50] Jeremiah 3:2-10.

[51] Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve*, p. 46.

[52] James Conlon describes Alex, "I am identifying Alex with the second of Thoreau's instincts – the wild. Her name (Forrest) and the location of her apartment in a wholesale meat district, with open fires and people carrying raw parts of animals through the street, are – perhaps – overdone; but she is unquestionably intriguingly wild! She can react to mild flirtation with a vicious stare, move quickly from sex to dance, stop

the elevator between floors, and turn Dan's cruel heart attack hoax into one of her own. She is a passionate, exciting, dangerous woman." James Conlon, "The Place of Passion: Reflections on *Fatal Attraction*," in *The Dread of Difference*, p. 407.

[53] Many commentators divide Jeremiah 13 into several literary units. See Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20* (Anchor Bible 21A; New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1999), pp. 665-691 and William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 393-417. Since my focus is on the monstrous-feminine, my analysis begins with the mention of the queen mother in verse 18.

[54] Susan Ackerman considers the enormous power attributed to the Queen Mother in *Warrior Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1998), pp. 128-180.

[55] Despite the tradition of what is read, the MT and the LXX preserve feminine singular imperatives. The LXX adds Jerusalem thereby indicating personified female Jerusalem as the addressee.

[56] Even if one was to follow the tradition of what is read and assume the imperatives are masculine plural, the second question is clearly addressed to a single female.

[57] The enemy from the north is a common motif developed in the opening chapters of Jeremiah. I discuss this enemy in *Terror All Around*, pp. 51-67.

[58] The Bible itself recognizes and condones the rape of female captives. See Deuteronomy 21:10-13. In Jeremiah, God threatens to give Israel's women to the invaders. See Jeremiah 6:12 and 8:10.

[59] Kristeva writes: "Evocation of the maternal body and childbirth induces the image of birth as a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides." Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 101.

[60] Admitting that the first half of this verse is impossible, Holladay offers the following translation: "What will you say when ((your lambs)) ((are missing)) – and it was you who trained them! – (your sucklings,) ((as if trained)) by the poor man.)" Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, p. 411. Though Holladay's emendations strike me as creative, but extreme, his translation works well within my focus on the monstrous-feminine. Zion is compared to a mother sheep who has lost her flock of nurslings. Not only does the maternal image continue in the passage, but the comparison of Zion to a sheep, supports both Creed's and Kristeva's association of the maternal with the animal.

[61] Kalmanofsky, "Israel's Baby."

[62] Most commentators recognize "heels" to be a euphemism, like "feet" in Isaiah 6:2, for genitals.

[63] Creed writes: "This, I would argue, is also the central ideological project of the popular horror film – purification of the abject through a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct'. The horror film

attempts to bring about a confrontation with the abject…in order finally to eject the abject and redraw the boundaries between the human and non-human." Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, p. 14.

[64] Elizabeth Wilson, "The Female Body as a Source of Horror and Insight in Post Ashokan Indian Buddhism," in *Religious Reflections on the Human Body* (ed. Jane Marie Law; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 79. In this context, it is interesting to consider the image of Zion dressed in scarlet and adorned with gold as she prepares to die. See Jeremiah 4:30-31.

[65] Ibid. p. 93.

[66] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 7.

[67] Hosea 4:7; Proverbs 3:35.

[68] Nahum 3:5.

[69] See also 1 Kings 11:5.

[70] See Leviticus 12 and 15.

[71] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 77.

[72] The foreign nations observe Israel and consider her devastation a warning in Jeremiah 24:9, 29:18, and 34:17.

[73] Jeremiah offers an oracle of hope to male Israel, God's *eved*, in Jeremiah 30:10-11 and an oracle of doom to wounded female Israel in Jeremiah 30:12-15.

………

Dr. Amy Kalmanofsky is an assistant professor of Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. Her book *Terror All Around: The Rhetoric of Horror in the Book of Jeremiah* was published by T&T Clark/Continuum in 2008.