RELIGION AND RADICALISM

Rape Culture, Gender Violence, & Religion

Biblical Perspectives

EDITED BY CAROLINE BLYTH,
EMILY COLGAN, KATIE B. EDWARDS

Religion and Radicalism

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Preface

Back in 2014, two of us (Emily and Caroline) met up to discuss the possibility of co-editing a single volume that explored the complex and multifaceted relationships between rape culture, gender violence, and religion. After putting out a general call for chapters, we were inundated with responses; these came from academics, practitioners, and graduate students, located throughout the globe, who were working in a disparate range of disciplinary areas, including religious studies, biblical studies, anthropology, philosophy, education, film production, gender studies, sociology, theology, linguistics, and counselling. It quickly became clear that there were simply too many essential voices and perspectives to be contained within a single volume; there was obviously a thirst for scholarly and praxis-led engagement within this area. Most of the potential contributors who contacted us expressed their appreciation that we sought to provide a platform upon which to participate in this conversation. Acutely aware that our scholarly research and practice is carried out in the context of a global rape culture, where gender violence has reached epidemic levels, the overwhelming feedback we received was that such a conversation was well overdue and therefore urgent.

As we began to collate the chapter abstracts we had been sent, we were struck by two realizations. First, these abstracts fell within three main categories, engaging with the subject of gender violence, rape culture, and religion from either biblical, Christian, or interdisciplinary perspectives. This offered us a natural structure for arranging the chapters into not one but three volumes, which we hoped would be published as a stand-alone series. Second, in light of the way this project had expanded beyond our

initial expectations, we decided it was prudent to bring in another co-editor whose expertise in this area would help us manage such an ambitious project. We therefore invited Katie to join the editorial team, and to our delight, she agreed. Working together, we have pooled our editorial skills and experience to produce three volumes that we believe are an immensely timely contribution to an ongoing international dialogue within this field of research.

The three volumes can be read either together or independently of each other; each one provides a rich overview of some of the unique scholarship being carried out in a range of disciplinary areas. Together or apart, the volumes are not exhaustive in their analysis of rape culture, gender violence, and religion; given the massive complexity of these subjects and the infinite ways in which they intersect, even three volumes can only be a drop in the scholarly ocean. Rather, our intention is to offer readers a way to begin or continue conversations about this vital issue. As you read through the chapters in this volume, we hope that you are inspired to create conversations within your own contexts and communities.

Auckland, New Zealand — Caroline Blyth

Auckland, New Zealand — Emily Colgan

Sheffield, UK — Katie B. Edwards

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Ngā mihi aroha.

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Emily Colgan is Lecturer in Theology at Trinity Methodist Theological College in Auckland. Her research focuses on the relationship between the Bible and contemporary social imaginaries, asking about the degree to which the ideologies contained within biblical texts continue to inform communities in the present. She is particularly interested in ecological representations in the Bible, as well as depictions of gender and violence. She has published a number of essays and articles in this area of scholarship.

Katie B. Edwards is Director of the Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies (SIIBS) and Senior Lecturer in the School of English at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on the function, impact, and influence of the Bible in contemporary culture. She is especially concerned with intersections of gender, race, and class in popular cultural

re-appropriations of biblical characters and narratives. She is at present a co-editor of the *Biblical Reception* journal (Bloomsbury) and a project lead in the Shiloh Project, an interdisciplinary research group exploring the intersections between rape culture and religion (http://shiloh-project.group.shef.ac.uk/).

James Harding is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Otago, with research interests including the books of Samuel and Job, issues of gender and sexuality, and the reception history of biblical texts. His significant publications include the monograph *The Love of David and Jonathan: Ideology, Text, Reception* (2013).

Jessica M. Keady is Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. Her current research uses social-scientific methodologies, including Masculinities Studies and Positioning Theory, to re-examine and re-interpret the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 2017, her first monograph was published, *Vulnerability and Valour: A Gendered Analysis of Everyday Life in the Dead Sea Scrolls Communities* (2017) and is co-editing a volume, alongside Dr Todd Klutz and Dr Casey Strine, entitled *Scripture as Social Discourse: Social-Scientific Perspectives on Early Jewish and Christian Writings* (Bloomsbury T&T Clarke, forthcoming).

Julie Kelso is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy and Literature at Bond University, Australia. She is the author of *O Mother Where Art Thou? An Irigarayan Reading of the Book of Chronicles* (2007); she has co-edited three further books, and is the author of numerous essays in feminist philosophy, biblical studies, and literary studies.

Yael Klangwisan is co-head of the School of Social Practice, Laidlaw College, Senior Lecturer in Laidlaw Graduate School, and a doctoral research supervisor at Auckland University of Technology, Auckland. Her research engages French literary and creative readings of the biblical text, incorporating in particular the writings of Hélène Cixous and Jacques Derrida. She is the author of *Jouissance: A Cixousian Encounter with the Song of Songs* (2015).

Emma Nagouse is a PhD student in the Sheffield Institute for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies (SIIBS), researching the phenomenon of rape culture in the Bible and contemporary society. Her research focuses on how biblical and contemporary intersectional gender presentations facilitate rape and disbelief cultures. She previously studied archaeology

and was a Higher Education professional before commencing her doctorate in Biblical Studies. When she is not studying, she involves herself in intersectional feminist activism.

Susanne Scholz is Professor of Old Testament at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas. Her research engages feminist biblical hermeneutics, epistemologies, and sociologies of biblical interpretation. She is the author of *Sacred Witness: Rape in the Hebrew Bible* (2010) and has written and co-edited a number of other works, most recently *La Violencia and the Hebrew Bible: Politics and Histories of Biblical Hermeneutics on the American Continent* (2016) and the three-volume series, *Feminist Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Retrospect* (2013–2016).

Lu Skerratt is an alumna of the University of Leeds and Kings College London with a BA in Theology and Religious Studies and an MA in Biblical Studies respectively. They are focusing on outreach work and queer activism and have since left academic study in the pursuit of working directly with vulnerable LGBTQ+ people, refugees, and women at risk of exploitation or abuse. They now run an LGBTQ+ group for asylum seekers and refugees in Sheffield and work in women's sexual health and HIV-care provision in the West Midlands.

Johanna Stiebert is Associate Professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of Leeds. Her research interests include Hebrew self-conscious emotion terminology, ideological and social-scientific criticism, family relations, gender and sexuality, as well as African-centred approaches. Her most recent books include *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (2013) and *First-Degree Incest and the Hebrew Bible: Sex in the Family* (2016). She is co-lead (with Caroline Blyth and Katie Edwards) of the Shiloh Project, a research group that studies intersections between religion and rape culture (http://shiloh-project.group.shef.ac.uk/).

David Tombs is the Howard Paterson Chair of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago. He has a longstanding interest in contextual and liberation theologies and is the author of *Latin American Liberation Theologies* (2002). His current research focuses on religion and violence, and especially on Christian responses to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and torture. He is originally from the United Kingdom and previously worked at the University of Roehampton in London (1992–2001) and then in Belfast, Northern Ireland, for the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin (2001–2014).

Teguh Wijaya Mulya is a lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology, University of Surabaya, Indonesia. He specializes in research in the areas of sexuality, gender, and religion. His work is inspired by Foucauldian post-structuralist thoughts, feminist theories, and queer theology.

List of Abbreviations

Ab urbe cond.	*Livy, Ab urbe condita*
Ant.	Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*
Ant. rom.	Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*
Ars	Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*
BDB	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The Brown–Driver–Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003.
Descr.	Pausanias, *Description of Greece.*
Fast.	Ovid, *Fasti*
Geogr.	Strabo, *Geography*
Hist.	Herodotus, *Histories*
Jov.	Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*
JPSV	Jewish Publication Society Version
Lyc.	Plutarch, *Lycurgus*
Met.	Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PL	Jerome, *Patrologia Latina*
Resp.	Cicero, *De republica*
Romulus	Plutarch, *Life of Romulus*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards

The Bible is a violent book. Its pages are inscribed with an abundance of traditions that bear witness to the pervasiveness of gendered aggression and abuse within biblical Israel. Its narratives attest to the commonality of wartime rape, forced marriage, and sex slavery; we can read stories of stranger rape, acquaintance rape, and gang rape (both threatened and actualized). Turn to the prophetic literature and we are inundated with metaphorical renditions of spousal abuse and intimate partner violence, perpetrated (or at least sanctioned) by Israel's jealous deity. Its laws uphold the structural violence of patriarchal power, which grants divine mandate to the rigidly prescriptive and proscriptive control of women's (and sometimes vulnerable men's) bodies. In essence, both the poetry and prose of these ancient traditions testify to the subjective violence of multiple gendered abuses and grant a voice to the symbolic violence of misogynistic

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and heteronormative discourses, which marginalize and objectify women (and sometimes men), while normalizing their social, sexual, and religious subjugation.

Bound within the pages of this sacred text, these articulations of gender violence have accrued significant authority and power across space and time; this power remains undiminished today, not only through the religious teachings and traditions of Judaism and Christianity but also by way of contemporary social discourses that (implicitly or explicitly) draw upon the ideologies inherent within biblical texts to justify multiple forms of gender violence. These discourses lie rooted in the foundations of patriarchal culture, constituting part of the framework upon which rape-supportive ideologies and belief systems are built. Such ideologies and belief systems, in turn, create and sustain rape cultures—cultures in which rape and other forms of gender violence are trivialized and normalized, tolerated as acceptable expressions of sexuality (Burnett 2016). In other words, rape cultures create an environment in which gender violence can flourish; and the Bible—with its myriad traditions about gender violence and its endorsement of the patriarchal discourses that sanction such violence—plays an undeniable role in this process. While it would be inaccurate to claim that the origins of rape culture and gender violence lie *exclusively* (or even predominantly) within the biblical traditions, we must nevertheless acknowledge that these texts are by no means blameless. For no literature (particularly sacred literature) is ever value neutral, nor does it leave the reader untouched by the reading process. Rather, all texts invite their audience to embrace certain discourses, values, and belief systems, expressed through their authors' rhetorical strategies. Thus, according to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Stories are never just descriptive but always also prescriptive" (2001, p. 136). In other words, biblical texts may reflect the ideologies of the ancient communities in which they are written, but they also have the potential to validate and sanction the same ideologies within communities in which they are read, even today. And when these ideologies are rape-supportive, or endorse the structural violence of gender inequality and patriarchal hegemony, then their power to impact contemporary readers' lives and worldviews cannot be underestimated. As Patrocinio Schweickart explains, "We cannot afford to ignore the activity of reading, for it is here that literature is realized in *praxis*. Literature acts on the world by acting on its readers" (1993, p. 615; original italics).

In recent decades, feminist biblical scholars have thus begun to recognize the urgent need to investigate the "texts of terror" which appear throughout the Bible, including those that evoke the violence of rape and sexual abuse.[1] Acknowledging the Bible's continued influence upon contemporary social discourses, they contend that by failing to engage with the issue of biblical gender violence—taking an aperspectival stance vis-à-vis the misogynistic and patriarchal ideologies expressed in sacred texts—interpreters simply reinscribe these ideologies, thereby maintaining their power within contemporary contexts and communities. Thus, according to Esther Fuchs:

> By ignoring the ideological problem posed by stories of rape and adultery, by ignoring the patriarchal implications of the way in which the woman in the text is silenced, the modern androcentric critic reinscribes biblical sexual politics. The poeticist reinscription of patriarchal ideology is made possible by combining on the one hand an aperspectival stance and on the other a submissive stance vis-à-vis the text … The choral harmony of the authoritative narrators and the "objective" critics reencodes the silence about women's oppression. (2000, p. 138)[2]

Given the endemic levels of gender violence in innumerable societies around the world today, and the pervasive global presence of rape cultures that sustain such violence, the task of biblical interpreters to challenge rape-supportive biblical discourses and disrupt their inherent symbolic violence is urgent. Indeed, embracing our role as critic and conscience within the academy, the classroom, and the societies in which we live is surely a moral imperative for biblical scholars, given that so many of our everyday experiences are pervaded by rape culture discourses and our communities tainted with scandalously high rates of gender violence. As Susanne Scholz insists, "In the context of a global rape culture, it is crucial to uplift ancient rape legislation and to identify past and present strategies that continue obfuscating the prevalence of rape even today" (2005, p. 2).

Nevertheless, some scholars and readers of the Bible may contend that it is anachronistic to use contemporary definitions of gender violence in order to evaluate the presence or absence of such violence within the biblical texts. To do so, they argue, is to impose conceptualizations of gender and sexuality upon the biblical traditions that bear little or no relevance to those held by their ancient authors. Yet we would contend that, while some of the gender discourses articulated in these traditions may differ to

those we encounter within our own cultural contexts, the gendered violence evoked therein is all too familiar. Our ability to recognize episodes of coercive sexual behaviour, sex slavery, or brutal gang rape in the biblical texts need not be hindered by our acknowledgement that Israelite women appeared to have no cognizable right of consent. The fact that the abduction and rape of female prisoners of war is mandated in the legal codes (Deut. 21:10–14) ought not to stop us from seeing the horrific violence inherent within this law. The gender violence is there, in the text—this is undeniable. By refusing to acknowledge this violence through appeals to epistemological rigour, readers simply become complicit in its erasure, allowing it to remain unchallenged, even accepted. Our task in this volume, then, is to contest this erasure, and to name (and shame) the multiple forms of gender violence present within the biblical traditions, in the hope that by so doing, we can undermine the influence and power that biblical texts of terror continue to have within contemporary rape cultures. For, as writer and poet Adrienne Rich avers, "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (1980, p. 35).

Moreover, while we are pragmatic enough to acknowledge (a little ruefully, perhaps) that the chapters in the volume will not vanquish rape culture or gender violence overnight, each author nevertheless invites critical conversations and reflections on the continued complicity of biblical traditions and their reading communities in the perpetuation of rape-supportive discourses. They do so by engaging critically *and* creatively with the biblical texts, demonstrating the richness of methodological approaches (including historical criticism, literary criticism, and reception history) and hermeneutical lenses (such as feminist, queer, and other critical theories) that can be employed to tackle this subject fruitfully.

Starting us off in Chap. 2, Lucy Skerratt reads the book of Lamentations intertextually alongside Sapphire's 1996 novel *Push* and Lee Daniels's 2009 film adaptation, *Precious.* Particularly, she focuses on the literary metaphor of Daughter Zion, as well as the lamenting voices of the destroyed Jerusalem, to explore human experiences of loss, loneliness, stigma, and gendered violence in the midst of war. Drawing on the theory of intersectionality, Skerratt reads this biblical text in light of the continuing HIV pandemic in the United States, which, as articulated in *Push* and *Precious*, disproportionally affects black and minority ethnic (BME) women. Her intertextual reading brings together the shared experiences of Daughter Zion and Precious Jones, using this dialogical encounter to

explore how the biblical text can give a face and voice to the intersectional oppressions encountered by BME women living with HIV and AIDS. She also suggests, however, that Lamentations and *Push* are ultimately texts of survival, and that by voicing their own pain, Daughter Zion and Precious Jones transform their suffering into a moment of liberation from the inevitable finality and fragility of life.

Continuing this intertextual exploration of gender violence within biblical and popular culture texts, Chap. 3 raises the subject of brother-sister incest, which Johanna Stiebert suggests has become a topic of titillation, both in public discourses around sibling incest and on screen (where such relationships are portrayed with some regularity in film and popular television). Stiebert argues, however, that this trope of the "up-for-it sister" is a myth, a "figment of voyeuristic fantasy," which taps into patriarchal predilections for women's exploitation and objectification. She notes a disturbing tendency within this trope to undermine the sister's ability to consent within her sexual relationships, typically through her vulnerability or compromised mental health. Relating this back to a number of brother-sister relationships in the Hebrew Bible, Stiebert contends that these biblical traditions accentuate this same discourse of exploitation. Considering these biblical texts in depth, she thus suggests that, in both the Hebrew Bible and contemporary popular culture, the brother-sister relationship is eroticized and that this eroticization has overtones of rape and of legitimating rape. By drawing attention to the troubling implications of these portrayals of sexual violence and compromised consent, she therefore attempts to detoxify them.

In Chap. 4, Teguh Wijaya Mulya engages with another familiar trope within both the Bible and wider contemporary culture, which is likewise complicit in the perpetuation of rape culture—the "virgin/whore" binary. Drawing on his previous research among Indonesian Christian youth, he suggests that this binary continues to be used to justify and normalize certain acts of sexual violence. In order to begin his own act of "detoxifying" the binary, he juxtaposes two biblical characters who best represent the virgin and the whore categories—that is, the Virgin Mary (Luke 1) and the Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17). Analysing these biblical traditions alongside each other through a queer reading lens, Wijaya Mulya interrogates the typical placement of Mary and the Whore at opposite ends of the binary, arguing that these two figures may in fact have more commonalities than contradictions. He first considers the sexual violence inherent in both of their engagements with the divine, before asking how

their relationships with their adherents might be considered idolatrous. He then suggests that dichotomized roles of virgin and whore may prove to be far more fluid and unstable within different historical and social contexts. Based on this queer theological reflection, Wijaya Mulya argues that the virgin-whore binary ought to be deconstructed, given its complicity in gender violence discourses that render particular women vulnerable to sexualized aggression.

Both Wijaya Mulya's and Stiebert's desire to dismantle rape-supportive discourses is likewise shared in Chap. 5 by Jessica Keady, who invites us to consider the dangerous rhetoric of purity culture as contributing to gender violence and rape culture. Keady compares biblical conceptions of rape and impurity with more contemporary rape culture and purity culture ideologies, focusing particularly on the construction of literary rape in the biblical text of Genesis 34—the rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah. Through her close reading of the text, Keady argues that this rape narrative offers a means of critiquing ancient ideations of gender violence and purity; it also allows readers to trace the ways that these ideations continue to influence contemporary attitudes towards rape. She demonstrates this by weaving into her discussion of the Genesis text a number of contemporary accounts of gender violence, which evoke dominant discourses of female defilement and shame embedded within today's rape and purity cultures. Through this intertextual engagement, she encourages biblical readers and interpreters to perform acts of "political resistance" to biblical ideologies that sustain these toxic cultures and to evaluate the significance and influence that such ancient ideologies continue to have today.

In Chap. 6, Julie Kelso shifts our focus away from explicit evocations of rape in the Bible to interrogate the very act that lies at the heart of sexual violence: intercourse. Taking an in-depth look at the late Andrea Dworkin's "notorious" book, *Intercourse* (1987), Kelso considers Dworkin's controversial claim that women's secondary status can be attributed to the socially constructed designation of the female body as lacking physical integrity during (hetero)sexual intercourse. Within patriarchal culture, women are recognized as having a body that can be penetrated, occupied, and denied privacy during the act of intercourse; this, asserts Dworkin, "appears to be the key to women's lower human status" (1987, p. 151). Kelso takes readers through Dworkin's materialist analysis of intercourse as an institutional practice, considering the various discourses (literary, philosophical, religious, legal) that she claims have given intercourse its political meaning. She then frames Dworkin's discussions of the role of

biblical texts (particularly the sodomy laws in Leviticus and the story of Adam and Eve in Gen. 2:4b–4:1) within the framework of *Intercourse* as a whole, considering her evaluation of their foundational role in legitimizing the potentially devastating violence of intercourse for women in male supremacist societies.

Continuing this focus on the dangerous political and religious meanings attributed to intercourse by patriarchal authorities, in Chap. 7, Yael Klangwisan offers a thoughtful response to the murder of Midianite woman Cozbi, recounted in Numbers 23. Cozbi's death is, as Klangwisan argues, a clear case of gendered and sexualized violence carried out by Phinehas the priest, whose zealous religious and political intolerance of the "other" led him to murder both Cozbi and her Hebrew lover Zimri. Taking inspiration from Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* and Helene Cixous' *Angst*, Klangwisan gazes unflinchingly upon the blood-spattered scene evoked in Numbers 23. Employing Barthes's photographic categories of *studium* (the wider scene or spectacle) and *punctum* (an element that punctures the scene), she invites readers to join her on a journey through this text, refusing to let them maintain a distance from the horrifically xenophobic and sexualized violence evoked therein. Comparing the biblical tradition with other classical love tragedies, Klangwisan then considers this literary trope in depth, moving towards her own, alternative ending for Cozbi's story, where, in contrast to the biblical text, "love and life are victorious."

There are, alas, no happy endings in Chap. 8, as David Tombs dwells on the tragic events in the popular Netflix series, *13 Reasons Why*. This series, based on the novel of the same name by Jay Asher, traces the events leading up to the rape and subsequent suicide of high school student Hannah Baker. Tombs reads Hannah's rape intertextually alongside the rape of the royal concubines in 2 Samuel 15–20, suggesting that each of these narratives invites readers to contemplate its intertext in fresh lights, despite the obvious historical and geographical distance that lies between both traditions. He argues that both stories can be read as a literary triptych, focusing first on the victims' initial abandonment by those who could perhaps have prevented their rape, then on the rape itself, and finally, their second abandonment in the aftermath of their assault. Tombs argues that this shared sequencing of events creates connections between these two very different texts. Acknowledging the impact of the second abandonment on Hannah Baker allows the reader to see new meaning in the silence surrounding the victims of Absalom's rapes in 2 Samuel; this in

turn may also contribute towards wider conversations about the significant trauma caused by rape survivors' secondary victimization and the harmful impact that this can have on their healing and recovery. Tombs also raises questions regarding David's initial abandonment of his concubines, asking whether this might have been more "intentional" than traditionally assumed. He then suggests that such an interpretation opens new possibilities for considering the complicity of Hannah's friends in her rape through *their* acts of abandoning her in a vulnerable situation. This intertextual exercise thus invites readers to shift back and forth between biblical text and contemporary cultural text, allowing both to inform the other through their shared discourses of rape culture and gender violence.

In Chap. 9, we continue with this intertextual approach, as Emma Nagouse reads Lamentations 3 (the "Man of Sorrows" poem) alongside Diana Gabaldon's *Outlander* novel series and its television adaptation. Within this series, one of the main characters, Scottish soldier Jamie Fraser, is brutally raped and tortured by an enemy officer. Nagouse uses this fictional event as a lens through which to read and interpret the trauma and violence evoked by the Man in Lamentations 3, arguing that his words of suffering may be understood as the testimony of a male rape survivor. By exploring the impact of rape on Jamie's emotional, physical, and sexual well-being, Nagouse considers the trauma of male sexual assault, including the rape myths that sustain the silence surrounding this crime. Focusing on issues of intimacy, retraumatization, victim blame, and cultural constructions of masculinity, she connects Jamie's experiences of violence to those expressed by the lamenting Man, drawing on the texts' shared themes, language, and imagery. She thus reminds readers of the need to critique and challenge rape culture discourses in both contemporary and ancient contexts, and to break the silence that shrouds male rape in contemporary culture and biblical scholarship. Given that this sacred text is read and interpreted within societies where sexual violence against people of *all* genders is so often trivialized or ignored, a failure to consider that the Man may, like Jamie, be a victim of sexual violence is simply to be complicit in this silence.

Moving onto Chap. 10, we stay with the theme of male rape, as James Harding turns to the threatened gang rape of the Levite in Judges 19 and the consequent explosion of gendered violence committed against multiple women within this and subsequent chapters. Harding notes that this narrative is often discussed in connection with biblical attitudes to the homoerotic; as such, it plays a key role in shaping and sustaining the symbolic violence of Jewish and Christian homophobia. Yet to focus on this