

# ○ WHEN A WOMAN IS A DOG

## ANCIENT AND MODERN ETHOLOGY MEET THE SYROPHOENICIAN WOMEN.

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Interpretation of the story of the Syrophenician women (Mk 7:24-30) has focussed on an analysis of “word” – either the word of Jesus or the word of the woman. Absent from this interpretation is a recognition of the use of the bestial, that is the irrational, for abuse, especially in a gendered context. Moreover the dissonance between the description of a woman as a dog and the affirmation that she has spoken *logos* has remained unrecognised. The use of animal comparisons to describe human behaviour has an ancient pedigree and has been revived under the formal research label of “ethology”. This paper explores the key emphases of modern ethology, noting its ancient dependencies and its potential, when critically analysed (especially by feminist theory) for a new interpretation of the story of the Syrophenician women. The survey of ethology highlights the significance attached to the dimorphism of gender, a differentiation that is executed upon the “site” of the child. Particular characteristics and derived responsibilities are held to attach to male and female, related to the survival of the species in terms of reproduction, territorial defence, food provision and protection. The application to the story reveals long overlooked elements of bodily initiative that relativise the position of *logos* and signal the daughter’s wordless role in the final verse as the key to the whole pericope.

### INTRODUCTION

The fundamental problem in the contemporary study of the story of the Syrophenician woman remains the relationship between Jesus and the woman. Jesus’ words ground the encounter in the division between man and beast. The variable classification of the story’s form as pronouncement or miracle, only improvises on the basic focus. A missiological interpretation (in manifold permutations) adds a further pairing, Jew and Gentile, to the basic division between (hu)man and animal. Feminist interpretations have weighted the movement into mission differently, highlighting the ecclesial leadership and theological acumen of women – the word of the woman is highlighted.

Twentieth century preoccupation with a missiological interpretation has obscured the larger question of the use of animal ‘metaphors’, even when arraigned with other pejorative references to dogs in the New Testament (such as Matt 7:6, Phil 3:2, Rev 22:15).<sup>1</sup> Studies of the use of animal metaphors in verbal abuse are absent;<sup>2</sup> certainly, analysis of the story of the Syrophenician woman rarely moves beyond a stock equation of Gentiles and dogs.<sup>3</sup>

### ANIMAL METAPHORS AND ABUSE

Bestial-laced abuse is relatively frequent in the New Testament, emanating from the lips of Jesus and Paul, amongst others: snake (Matt 23:33), viper (Matt 3:7, Lk 3:7, Matt 12:34, 23:33), fox (Lk 13:32) pig (Matt 7:6), wolf (Matt 7:15, Acts 20:29).<sup>4</sup> The frequency of such metaphors given in Jesus’ discourse raises some important questions in regard to the use of ‘dog’ for the woman and her daughter in the Syrophenician’s story.

## THE DISSONANCE OF BEAST AND LOGOS IN THE SAME PERSON

For all the importance of the recovery of emphasis on the word of the woman in twentieth century interpretation, *the dissonance between the description of a woman as a dog and the affirmation that she has spoken logos* has remained unrecognised. Jude's collation of instinct-driven humans with irrational (*aloga*) animals (Jude 10; cf. 2 Pet 2:12)<sup>5</sup> is merely a canonical instance of an almost universally held understanding.<sup>6</sup> Animals are the antithesis of *logos*. They often provided the typologies of various vices (Rusten et al. 1993 p. 17),<sup>7</sup> moral depravity being especially represented in the various examples of lack of restraint (eg. Tit 1:12).<sup>8</sup> Lack of restraint was a clear manifestation of the absence of reason.

### BESTIAL CHARACTERISATION

The description of a human being in animal terms was frequently used to indicate character (*ēthos*). Dog-metaphors, according to Margaret Graver (1995, p. 44), belong 'almost exclusively to character-speech', a Homeric usage that dominated later writing. Characters usually on the receiving end of such abuse were slaves, brothel-keepers and other procurers, prostitutes, foreigners and men who act outside the parameters of convention (for example, a lascivious old man) (Lilja 1965 pp. 11, 69, 84; Laurence 1994 pp. 70-87). K.J. Dover (1974 pp. 32-33) distils the standard foci of abuse, which he suggests holds for both comedy and oratory, noting that they become more prevalent in the so-called lower literature (such as *The Life of Aesop*, the *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* and sundry romance novels). They are designed to *represent* character, not necessarily provide an accurate assessment, by:

- I. impugning the ethnic and/or servile origins of an opponent;
- II. reviling the occupation of the opponent or her/his kin;
- III. censuring an opponent for being a prostitute (or brothel-keeper/procurer) or some other deviation from conventional sexual behaviour.

To this could be added, more specifically,

- IV. denigrating the gender of the opponent, either because she is a woman<sup>9</sup> or because he has behaved 'as a woman'.

Virtually all these are to be found in Jesus' initial response to the Syrophoenician woman's request for deliverance: ethnicity, occupation and sexual proclivity (there is considerable evidence to support Alice Dermience's suggestion that she is portrayed as a courtesan or prostitute) (Dermience 1977 p. 23; also Corley 1993 p.166; Osiek and Balch 1997 p. 136; Love 2002 p. 17), and her all-encompassing, all-confirming gender.

The provision of invigorating metaphors was grounded not in literary inventiveness but in assumptions about invariables of nature. As John Matthews (1989 p. 258) writes (exclusive language deliberate): This is more than stylistic affectation. We must also see it in the context of the Classical view of man's rational faculty as that which preeminently sets him apart from the world of animals.

Ancient studies of animals were not only a demonstration of the supremacy of reason. Through extensive taxonomies, they provided the assurance that bestial associations and implications

were completely valid (*contra* Lloyd-Jones 1975 p. 29). The validity ranged from medical to rhetorical usage, though a systematic, dedicated study of interconnections between the animal and human is lacking.<sup>10</sup> The foundational deduction from the comparison of animal and human in the classical world was the separation of the sexes. All other comparisons, as well as logical and socio-political systems, flow from this supposedly authoritative testimony of nature (Davis 1993 pp. 73-96). Hence, when Jesus calls the Syrophoenician women ‘dogs’ or more aggressively still, tweaks the comparison with an infantilising pejorative, ‘little dogs’, the abuse and character definition is grounded in gender not in race. Race is merely corroborative of the assessment.

### THE HUMAN AS ANIMAL: MODERN ETHOLOGY

The formal study of animals and their behaviour, with an interest in deductions for human life, is generally asserted to be a recent development (Lorenz 1981 p. 1). This discipline betrays an ancient origin, however, even in its name: ‘ethology’ (‘character’).<sup>11</sup> One of its foremost proponents, Edward O. Wilson, extended the formal implications of the comparative discipline into a grand schema for human knowledge in his millennial release: *Consilience*.<sup>12</sup> Religion, ethics, anthropology and culture are all related to socio-biology; socio-biology, he claims, is the *sine qua non* for such knowledge (Wilson 1998 p. 142). The dependence of the discipline upon evolution and ontogeny builds a sense of the determinacy of the observations (Sperling 1996 p. 379).<sup>13</sup>

Accordingly, ethology may provide a theoretical *comparative* base for the present study, not as an anachronistic imposition on ancient materials, but as a means to expose some of their dynamics. Modern ethology’s claimed objective observations about women, *along with* the contemporary problematisation of such rational results by feminist scholarship, reformulate the same triangulation as already propounded. That is, ethology and the critical assessment of its claims by feminist scholarship (especially) are configured around the interplay of nature/animal, gender and rational enquiry/speech. These elements, albeit framed in contemporary language, are integral to an analysis of the story of the Syrophoenician woman.

### A CRITICAL EXCURSION INTO ETHOLOGY

Ethology is that field of research where comparisons for human beings are made on the basis of and in conjunction with animal research. Certain ‘homologies’ or evolutionary biological similarities provide the warrant for such comparisons, though analogies also have their role indicating ‘laws dependent on functions’ (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975 p. 533). Though Oskar Heinroth, Konrad Lorenz and Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt are key figures in the development of the discipline, the far-reaching implications of ethology were signalled in the massive tome *Sociobiology* (Wilson 1975). Here lie the seeds of his later grand schema. Wilson argued that all-important social behaviours were reducible to genetics. Even altruism and Wilson’s own sympathy for socio-political change were but variations of the adaptation of the species seeking to maximise its own future (Wilson 1998 p. 258; Hamilton 1964; Trivers 1971; Sperling and Beyene 1997 p. 138; Dawkins 1976).

## ETHOLOGY AND GENDER

Highly significant for this study is the attention given to gendered behaviours, that is, behavioural observations and conclusions that are riveted in differences between male and female – the ‘dimorphism’ of gender. One example from Wilson will suffice:

It pays males to be aggressive, hasty, fickle and indiscriminating. In theory it is more profitable for females to be coy, to hold back until they can identify the male with the best genes. Human beings obey this biological principle faithfully (Wilson 1978 p. 125, *cf* 1998 p. 170).

The stereotypical modes of expression used here reflect socio-cultural attitudes about women and men. They are uncritically transferred to the animal world reflexively to recover them under a guise of objective, scientific observation. The antiquity of this practice is frequently overlooked. John Winkler described a similar ancient interest as the ‘projection of a patriarchal image onto the screen of the animal world’ (Winkler 1990 p. 23).<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary sociobiologists have surrendered the nineteenth-century political battle against women’s education, which sought scientific justification via biological differentiation for the mounting of barriers to access. The positing of intellectual differences from biological data as the basis for political decision-making was rendered overwhelmingly tenuous not merely by the growing numbers of women successfully completing tertiary level studies but also by matching male graduates in their results (Gadesden 1901 p. 87).

Other aspects have not been so easily dismissed. The interrelationship of scientific argument and social responsibility is patent in the appeal to what might be called ethical evolutionary principles. Here the assumption of the biologically-necessary, reproductive functions of the female demands, as a value, that the female sacrifice the possibility of rational equality (or even superiority) for the sake of the fulfilment of maternity, requisite for the posterity and health of future generations.

Whilst these arguments were plentiful in the nineteenth century (Sayers 1982 pp. 7-42), they have also been repeated through the twentieth. Indeed, Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1975) held that a biological stemma for ethics must be the preferred position to the highly threatening alternative of cultural relativism (pp. 501, 534).<sup>15</sup> Wilson opined that the price of setting social arrangements against the biological domain in order to garner sexual equality may well be too great (Wilson 1978 p. 148). Hence, nature was not only something to which women *do* conform but was something to which they *must* conform – for their own well-being and that of society.

## ETHOLOGY AND CHILDREN

Consequently, a measure of culpability is attached to women where societal cohesion and especially paediatric development are disrupted. Women become responsible not only for having children but also for refraining from such activities as might compromise the wellbeing of their offspring (Trivers 1972 p. 174). This is directly paralleled in the ancient world where a woman was responsible for her child’s colour, health, foundational training, and, significantly for Mk 7:25, protection from supernatural intrusion.

Moreover, the evaluation of responsibility reverts to the naturally invested dimorphism of gender. ‘The bodies of... infants serve as sites where biological and cultural notions of gender

clash.’ (Laslett et al 1996 p. 13). The infant becomes the criterion whereby the (adult) female is judged (by adult male!), as well as locating in itself the perpetuation of gendered differentiation. The infant is thus the battlefield where the dimorphic hierarchies are reinforced.<sup>16</sup> In the story of the Syrophoenician, there are more references to children per square centimetre of text than anywhere else in the Greek Scriptures: Petr Pokorny calls the Syrophoenician’s daughter ‘the absent and passive actant who still caused all the actions and statements’ (Pokorny 1995 p. 337). The child becomes critical to the interpretation of the adult(s) and the story.

### **SURVIVAL AS DEPENDENT ON UNIVERSAL, HIERARCHICAL DUALISM**

Some adjustment to the politicising reductionism of sociobiology has followed critique. Sociobiology has been reformulated on a gene-culture co-evolution where each has significant impact upon the other. This is not taken to compromise the survival quest. In fact, it intensifies it, or, as Wilson would have it, it has liberated ‘deep pools of talent’. For Wilson, this merely fortifies the claim that universals or near-universals have emerged in culture (Wilson 1998 pp.149, 216, 217). These ‘universals’ he considers to be shaped substantially along the structuralist lines promoted by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Wilson imagines an extra-terrestrial visitor observing the parallels between animal and human behaviour, and recognising that dominance-hierarchies are integral to both (p. 259).<sup>17</sup>

Whilst he sees here the infrastructure of religious sensibilities, there are direct correlations with his insistence that dyadic polarisations are not merely cultural but biologically based – he calls this the ‘dyadic instinct’ (Wilson 1998 p. 153).<sup>18</sup> The taboos and rituals that reinforce the boundaries between these dualities are similarly coeval with universal biology. All these have their fundamental expression in the male-female dichotomy. There have been various feminist responses to a binary epistemology (Herdt 1996; Plumwood 1993 p. 43; Schüssler Fiorenza 1992 p. 105-109; Schüssler Fiorenza 1993 p. 362; Monro 1994 pp. 32-43).

### **THE CONTROL OF SPACE**

For Wilson and Lorenz, the innate aggressiveness and physical strength of the male spawns and sustains this hierarchy (Wilson 1998 p. 170; Lorenz 1969 p. 44),<sup>19</sup> (as also others, such as kin/tribe – Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975 p. 367) just as in the ancient world the polarity of strong/weak was predicated on male/female differentiation in nature. This had direct correlations in the territorial sphere; space was to be controlled, guarded and its fertility preserved against encroachment (Wilson 1975 pp. 274-285). In his section ‘Special Properties of Dominance Orders’, Wilson repeatedly draws parallels between animal (especially primate) and human behaviours. The ‘Xenophobia Principle’, ‘The Peace of Strong Leadership’, ‘The Will to Power’, ‘Social Inertia’ and ‘Nested Hierarchies’ all have their human expressions, such that he can conclude:

to dominate is to possess priority of access to the necessities of life and reproduction. This is not a circular definition: it is a statement of a strong correlation observed in nature... this power actually raises the genetic fitness of the animals possessing it (Wilson 1975 pp. 286-287).

Wilson does not operate at mere description. There are political (and, he would argue, ecological) implications authorising resistance to certain practices or proposals. He argues for the ‘absence

of any species that shows reversal of the sex roles, wherein females court the males, and then leave them to care for the young' (Wilson 1975 p. 456). Feminist sociobiologists question the sweeping claim providing the basic premise (Sperling 1996 pp. 364-390; McDonald Pavelka 1995 pp. 17-36), but the assumption of a universal and irrefutable *transtemporal* reality unmistakably lurks here. It has been called the 'naturalist' fallacy. Patriarchy therefore becomes the inevitable consequence of 'natural' proclivities. This has economic, spatial as well as social implications – the ancient male preserve of the hunt (whether human or animal)<sup>20</sup> becomes transformed into wage-earning capacity: 'the women and children remain in the residential area while the men forage for game or its symbolic equivalent in the form of barter or money' (Wilson 1975 pp. 553).

The concern about bread, who gets fed if at all, the hierarchy of feeding (a better rendition of 'Let the children *first* be fed') and the sententious pronouncement that erects barriers against certain pilfering pariahs that have no place within an ordered territory, these are all manifestations of a privileged rational universe. That there is an ancient inheritance of Jewish antagonism to dogs merely confirms, for Jesus at least, the antiquity (and therefore the universal validity) of his denigrating dismissal. That it can be expressed in a proverb which ostensibly has no origin and asserts the unchallengeable, not only is a fit word for the situation but demonstrates the honorific standing of the male of the species.

### THE MALE AND CONTROL OF/BY *LOGOS*

Wilson seeks to reclaim the realm of the *logos* as belonging inextricably to the same realm as that of the aggressive male. In his claim that 'No barrier stands between the material world of science and the sensibilities of the hunter and the poet' (Wilson 1998 p. 237), he privileges the control of the animal *and of the literary* as belonging together – just as in the ancient world.<sup>21</sup>

Thus he can even assert that metaphor becomes a crucial player in the continued survival and adaptability of the species precisely because metaphor opens up multiple possibilities and referents in its usage (Wilson 1998 pp. 218-219)! On this understanding, metaphor (serving whatever purpose) becomes tied to male dominance as a guarantee of the future. The connection between nature and language thus becomes forged, in this instance deliberately (Lorenz 1981 p. 11; Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975 p. 127).

### LANGUAGE, CONTROL AND ETHOLOGICAL CONFIRMATION

The connection had already been anticipated through the incorporation of literary devices into scientific presentations, fudging boundaries whilst claiming unity and objectivity. Konrad Lorenz appropriated the proverb as reinforcing scientific observations about the mule: 'the mule is *proverbially* surefooted because it has inherited some of the donkey's capabilities' (Lorenz 1981 p. 321, my emphasis). In this turn of phrase, literary inheritances and animal homologies 'naturally' bolster and 'prove' the other (Harding 1986 pp. 233-239). When stereotypes become written at the level of the essentials of nature, masquerading as science, the possibility of alteration is precluded (Martin 1996 p. 338). This is precisely the connection made by Paolo Mantegazza, the nineteenth century physiognomist, who finds in proverbs 'the first germs of the embryonic substance which later yield materials for a new science' (Mantegazza 1890 p. 2). He was doing no more than echoing Aristotle, who deemed proverbs as the treasured legacies of an ancient

philosophy that survived an equally ancient cataclysm (Russo 1997 p. 52 citing Aristotle *On Philosophy* fr.).

Eibl-Eibesfeldt sees language as conferring the basis for objective communication (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975 p. 532), thereby buttressing such claims. One of the ironies of the discipline of ethology occurs right at this point. At the very heart of the discipline are weighty tomes, mountains of words defending the connections between human beings and animals. Even though the huge syntactical gap between the two is explicable in terms of the accelerant which language delivered to the evolutionary process (Lorenz 1981 p. 343), the word remains the medium of control – ‘the record of the action of the spirit on matter, the record of the power of voice on matter’ (Scarry 1985 p. 196) – a fundamental confusion between linguistics and phenomenism – that is between the *statement* that it is so and that *it is so*.<sup>22</sup>

### EXPOSING THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN ETHOLOGY

Language therefore must be cited as a primary mechanism of control. It is no coincidence that one ancient analogy of the hierarchical relationship between male and female was, respectively, the imprinting stylus and the *tabula rasa* (duBois 1988 pp. 130-166). The chain that accompanies the dog in one work of art and the absence of it in another *both* depend on the prior analysis which has been made. This language is not merely or even primarily the language of biological scientific enquiry. In fact, it is more likely that this enquiry is *subsequent* to another language, governed by it in its driving concerns and values, and shaped thereby in its conclusions (O’Rand 1989 p. 118).

Literary forms which carefully, aesthetically, and popularly inscribe such understandings, act as key mechanisms for the reinforcement of a passive acceptance of the inevitability of the description – forms such as metaphor and proverbs. They benefit from the exchange with nature in that nature-as-immutable is seen as reinforcing the literary form of which it is an allusive part.

As Peter Berger points out, the ancient literary forms and stories – myths, legends, proverbs and maxims – are a key means of legitimation of a socially (and one might add here, biologically) constructed world. Moreover, where necessary, they provide a key mechanism for the restoration of that world when disruption occurs (Berger 1973 pp. 13-14, 39-41; Berger and Luckmann 1966 pp. 112-113; also Kee 1989 pp. 52-53). The inclusion, within such forms, of elements from the natural world adduces the ‘naturalness’ and therefore the ‘rightness’ of both the resource and the agency of the form. Thus, from the earliest period claims the Roman Stoic, Seneca, ‘we give children proverbs – what the Greeks call *chriai* – to learn off by heart, since a childish mind which cannot yet comprehend anything more can nevertheless grasp such proverbs.’ (Sen *Ep* 33.7).

### COMMUNICATION BESIDES LANGUAGE

The force of comparison of animal and human behavioural patterns has expanded the ancient questioning as to what if any intelligence lay in animals. Studies of the production of language have traced the evolutionary significance of language, seeking its progenitors in the broader animal world. Language’s hold on communication has been relativised by careful mapping of gestures, expressions, movements and non-syntactical vocalisations. Functional analogies between humans and animals have been deduced, frequently privileged with universalist claims (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975 pp. 159, 455).

The focus on such behavioural patterns has enabled a recognition of the importance of non-verbal activities for communication. Whilst the contemporary level of analysis may be more systematic, the recognition of the connection between non-verbal and verbal realms *was* well-known in antiquity.<sup>23</sup> Rhetoric included more than the manipulation of verbal constructions, according to the handbooks,<sup>24</sup> and there appears to have been considerable exchange between actors and orators about gestures and expressiveness.<sup>25</sup> Even non-verbal vocalisations were noted as having an immense power to communicate.<sup>26</sup> This becomes critical to the undermining of the dominance of *logos* in the Syrophoenician's story, both for Jesus' affirmation (v.29) and in the dominical legacy of this affirmation on form- and feminist-critical scholarship alike. The non-verbal actions, movements and gestures of the woman *and* the child become as important as any verbal exchange – a factor almost forgotten in interpretation.

### **DIMORPHISM AND COMMUNICATION**

Ethology has reinforced the primary dimorphic analysis at the level of communication as well. Females mimic rather than invent (Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1975 p. 487);<sup>27</sup> females have a primary role in relation to the young, but not to the adult (p. 445f). Eibl-Eibesfeldt unwittingly discloses the presumptions governing his detailed analysis. In his reference to the function of the smile in infants, he cites the legend of Cypselus, who became the ruler of Corinth. As a baby, Cypselus thwarted his ten assassins by smiling at them. Eibl-Eibesfeldt immediately follows this story with the comment: 'It is a fact that the smile releases delight in the mother, even those who initially were indifferent, and aids in the establishment of a strong emotional tie' (p. 448). He neglects to add that the legend was about winning over *male* assassins.<sup>28</sup> His appeal to an ancient literary account is designed to illustrate and buttress the subsequent claim, conveniently editing out any difficulties that the story might engender for his larger artifice. Consequently, writing and reading of 'the laws of nature [are] through the lens of social relations' (Schiebinger 1991 p. 123).

### **RESISTANCE OF ETHOLOGICAL ENQUIRY TO CRITIQUE**

This cursory sweep over the field of ethology has shown that the 'naturalness' of the natural order of things argued in ancient times, is reiterated in much contemporary ethological description (Callan 1970; Callan 1984; Haraway 1989; Haraway 1991). 'Nature' becomes a constraint on both analysis and behaviour because it generates the sensibility that material constituents and organic relationships are set. The assumptions driving the research and producing certain 'facts' lie hidden, precisely because any exposure may jeopardise the surety of the results (Harding 1986 pp. 233-239). Contingency and chaos may inhabit nature; they are not permitted to infiltrate the investigation of nature and infect the conclusions drawn from its description.

The derived realities identify the (sexual) given and demarcate significant (gender) difference (McDonald 1993 p. 189). On the one hand, hierarchy and perpetuity are inscribed; on the other, passivity, submission or (at best) prescribed activities are promoted for women as the fit, biologically-determined response. As Sandra Harding writes 'The discipline of biology pays back with interest the support it borrows from the social order' (Harding 1986 p. 128). Current discourse about 'the gene' reveals the same tendency:

The findings of scientific genetics – about human behaviour, disease, personality and intelligence – have become a popular resource precisely because they con-



form to and complement existing beliefs about identity, family, gender and race (Nelkin and Lindee 1995 p. 197).

Cultural arrangements are made part of that ‘continuous feedback process’ whereby nature provides rationale and reinforcement (McDonald 1993 p. 198). The Promethean claims of contemporary ethology over other disciplines signals a significant shift in the configuration of the nature-culture division of thought inherited from the ancient Mediterranean world. However, even as culture has been increasingly represented as subject to evolutionary and ontogenetic laws, nevertheless the chief expository tool of culture – language and communication – has maintained its hegemony. The necessity of culture to articulate and thereby control nature remains, albeit now held to be subject to the same rules which it has imposed. The irony of this position is to posit an even greater immutability to the cultural expressions said to be in harmony with, and even derived from, the natural world.

## **SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS ON METHOD**

The survey of ethology has highlighted the significance attached to the dimorphism of gender, a differentiation that is executed upon the ‘site’ of the child. Particular characteristics and derived responsibilities are held to attach to male and female, related to the survival of the species in terms of reproduction, territorial defence, food provision and protection. Contemporary ethology, at least in the writings of one of the exemplars of the discipline, Edward Wilson, has claimed a biological base for dualistic frameworks, uses of metaphor, proverb and myth, the construction of language and the deployment of reason, a base which is anchored to the dimorphism of gender. These elements, whilst demanding (and receiving) critique, show considerable potential for guiding the analysis of the dynamics of the story of the Syrophoenician women but also for its reconfiguring. There are two particular concentrations that offer considerable potential for the realignment of interpretation: the body generally, and the significance of the child.

### **THE ANIMAL AND THE BODY**

Ethology redresses attention to the importance of the body, or, put more generally, the significance that is to be attached to the non-verbal elements of life and meaning. The significance of the dog(s) in the story may yet yield something positive precisely because in the movement of the story, the material and bodily reality rather than the verbal, becomes privileged. As Bryan Turner writes:

... images of the body as animal flesh, as artistic representation and as a forgotten narrative of religious exchange indicate the proximity of the body to metaphors of sociality (Turner 1996 p. xiv).

More pointedly, Elizabeth Grosz recognises: ‘What is mapped onto the body is not unaffected by the body onto which it is projected’ (Grosz 1990 p. 74).

Contemporary research in many disciplines has begun to valorise the body as crucial for the understanding of identity, relationships, and politics (Scarry 1985; Grosz 1994). This can readily be hijacked to the conventional gendered perspective, and indeed does suffer from a dimorphic reductionism in standard ethological discussion. Nevertheless, with careful negotiation, the po-

tential for a different approach may be offered precisely by the focus on the body as a *subjective* site for the construction of meaning (Birke 1998). But the shift must be from object to agent (McDonald 1993 p. 202). The body of and in itself must ‘speak’ or better ‘act’ (which may include communication). If colonisation is not simply to be replayed by ascribing to the body through external inscription, the body must find its own mechanisms of communication (Brady 1994). Even partial success in material communicative positioning would undermine the hegemony of the word and words.

## THE BODY OF THE CHILD

Secondly, the invitation to construct the site differently is extended by the figure of the daughter/child in the story. Ethology has made the infant a particular concern, even if only from the discipline’s commitment to the exploration of the maximisation of the ‘gene pool’ and its relationship to the evolutionary tenet of species survival. However, the relative ease with which comparisons and analogies can be made with animal behaviour has promoted this aspect of study, even though it *may* stand apart from the usual male/female dimorphism (McDonald 1993 p. 190).

This is no effort to recapture an innocence for the study of a gospel passage through the means of a child.<sup>29</sup> Rather, it counters the mask of naiveté that has been attached to the image of the child, who yet staggers beneath the weight of both logocentric and now biocentric argument. And it delivers a choice about the significance and signification of the child – the daughter in the story. Previously, in conventional and feminist biblical studies alike, she has remained marginalised. Barry Blackburn indeed, was happy to eradicate the final verse as irrelevant (Blackburn 1991 pp. 222-223). For Jeffrey Staley, the daughter does not function as a character at all (Staley 1999 p. 127n36; also Malbon 1983 p. 34; Malbon 1994 pp. 60, 65.) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza allegorises mother and daughter as two parts of one entity: the ‘woman-child’ (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983 p. 138). Rita Nakashima Brock sees the daughter as a cipher for the woman herself (Brock 1988 pp. 82-87).<sup>30</sup> The re-alignment of attention to the child, provoked by ethology, unlocks a destabilisation of the supremacy of the word, three aspects of which can be briefly offered here by way of conclusion.

## PROBLEMATISING THE WORD

The insights from ethology have been passed through a feminist critical grid to expose the cloaking of cultural and linguistic commitments. The combination of ethology and its critique have already suggested a potential to deal with the triangulation of nature, gender and reason, especially given that contemporary ethology has been found to have substantial ancient forebears. This triad has been identified here as crucial to the interpretation of the story of the Syrophenician woman (and daughter) in Mark’s Gospel.

The very effort to reinforce the primacy of the *logos* by reference to nature, exposes a potential fissure. The realm of the body, invaded for raw materials to build the edifice of culture and inscribed to authorise the colonisation, itself stirs a threat and alternative to the supremacy of the mind. Jesus’ use of a natural(ised) metonymy (dog means woman) as a vituperative reminder of place and control signals the threat of resistance, precisely because so much attention is given to the body.

Here, a new justification for a review of Jesus' words in Mk 7:27 is found, namely in the conjunction of a literary artifice with a 'scientifically' based order and in the potential for subversion because of its material focus and embodied delivery. A close examination reveals not merely an ancient proverb but one which relies for its power on a phonemic play on sound, especially its use of the dog-letter *r* and the *l-b* metathesis in *labein* and *balein* and the iambic metre of abuse. As the classicist James Russo writes:

A certain amount of jingle or echo may be used here to contribute to the total effectiveness of parallel structure in highlighting similarities or opposites. An apparent word-magic is at work here, in the non-rational suggestion that sheer phonemic parallels help ensure that the realities named will also proceed along the course indicated... (Russo 1983 p. 124).<sup>31</sup>

The shaping of the saying to emphasise sound-qualities reinforces the linguistic communication of its content (Williams 1980 pp. 39, 44-47). An aggravated denigration emerges, phonemically and rhythmically reinforced. It renders extremely improbable that Jesus is speaking humorously or even didactically for the woman's encouragement or development (the standard apologetic). The caustic rasp of a crushing retort demolishes any claim that the woman advances. This sonorous denial has another menace. The ethological connections between woman and dog were seemingly supported by the similarities of sound between *k* and *g*. *Gynē* readily blurred into *k'ynē* / *kynē* / *hē kyōn*.<sup>32</sup> This type of word-play was a common-place.<sup>33</sup>

This 'Aesthetic Field Framework' (Fine 1984 pp. 64ff) deals with that realm that belongs between the idea and its speaking, namely the realm of combinations of rhythm and phonetic sound. The aural evocation from oral or textual performance elicits 'a broader or more abstract reality' to be brought to bear upon the compact content of a few lines (Kitts 1994). But it operates, as Russo intimated, at a magical or irrational level. Precisely for this reason some rhetoricians in the ancient world were nervous about such language construction and delivery. The irrational element could undermine the rational dominance which seeks to demarcate territory, preserve boundaries, protect food, and maintain hierarchies of relationship in strict linguistic terms.

## HEALING BY EUPHONIC SOUND

This very irrationality becomes sung to a remarkable degree in the woman's reply (v.28). Its brilliance lies not merely at the level of content, but moreso in the structure that makes use of multiple metrical types to generate a euphonic, calming, rhythmical response. The acknowledgement that Jesus gives is highly significant, not only for the effort to reinscribe word as the dominant category of interpretation of what the woman has done – 'for this word' (v.29) – but also in the acknowledgement that one who has been described as a dog has herself achieved the deliverance of her daughter (note the perfect tense of *exerchomai* in Mk 7:29, 30 – an exceptional use in the gospel). The healing word of the woman exposes a removal of the hegemony of the word and its male privilege, *because she has already intimated this by her bodily movements*.

## THE MATERIAL ASSERTION OF THE DAUGHTER

And finally, the integrity and subjectivity of *two* women's bodies is established by the daughter in a non-verbal action. Instead of the standard translation 'lying/thrown on the bed' in the final

verse, the central clause of the verse, can be translated as ‘reclining on the couch / reclining at table’. On this understanding of the participle *beblēmenon* as a middle rather than a passive (both are possible), the child has *extended* the liberation begun by her mother. She has refused a below-table position and placed herself *at* the table. Without any reference to a male, the primacy of the relationship between two women – an example within Adrienne Rich’s ‘lesbian continuum’ (Rich 1980) – becomes the space where liberation is secured. The universalist ‘lunge’ of the word is thwarted precisely by that materiality which it sought to inscribe and contain. The body of movement, discovery and positioning, demands a situated perspective having its own expression (Nicholson 1990 pp. 8-9). This understanding of the body stands against its reduction to a site for encryption by *logos* fantasies and logocentric controls (such as motherhood and childhood). Ethology thus becomes relativised by the very focus of its enquiry: the animal and the body and its asserted primary dimorphism evaporate before an older and younger woman, neither dogs nor surrogate males.<sup>34</sup>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The appropriateness of the conjunction of animal metaphors with human beings *from the point of view of animals* is not dealt with here, even though it is an issue consequent on the argument presented. See Linzey 1998 pp. xvi-xvii.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert Grant 1999 (p. 14) makes a brief foray into the metaphorical application of ‘wolf’ and ‘fox’.
- <sup>3</sup> Bruce Malina 1992 (p. 74) is one of the few to have noted the connection made between animals and human character but this is not explored at any length nor does he include dogs in his survey – the most prolific term of abuse in the ancient world. The study is somewhat more advanced in classical disciplines (Lilja 1976).
- <sup>4</sup> Such a list raises questions about the appearance of such terms where the referents are less obvious *eg.* Lk 10:19, Jn 10:12. This may be an example of ‘insider language’ where the audience knows (or thinks it can identify) the intended recipients. These of course are not the only uses of animal metaphors in the New Testament – see, for example, Matt 10:16, 23:37. A detailed study of such uses of language in the New Testament must await another opportunity.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Bauckham (1983 p. 63) considers the clause to parallel ‘defile the flesh’ in v.8, suggestive of sexual indulgence. Whilst he is probably too prepared to tie the polemical rhetoric to specific groups (Thurén) the connection of the animal world with sexual license is noteworthy – an aspect I have explored elsewhere (Cadwallader 2003: chapter 6) forthcoming in ATF Publications.
- <sup>6</sup> Xen *Cyro.* 2.3.9, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 2.19.29, Var *Latin* 6.56, Sen *Anger* 1.3.3-8, Philo *Creation* 73, Jos *CA* 2.213, *Ant* 10. 262, Wis 11:15, 4 Macc 14:14, 19, Ps-Phocylides 188, JMart *Apol* 1.43.8. The word *aloga* could be used as a substantive – meaning ‘brutes’: Plato *Prot* 321b, Democritus fr. 164, Xen *Hiero* 7.3, *TZeb* 5.1, Philo *Creation* 148, *Virtues* 133. Philo extrapolates from animal irrationality to the justification of (hu)man dominion over creation, as reason ruling over that which does not possess reason (Borgen 1993 pp. 371-379). Elsewhere, the same principle undergirds Philo’s understanding of relations between men and women: *Migr. Abraham* 7-8, *Creation* 151, 165. And this included the minutiae covered by the ordering of *logos* – from proverbs to accounts as well as the cosmos! This is far more than simply the semantic range of the term.
- <sup>7</sup> For an example, see Timaios of Locri *On the Nature of the World and the Soul* 86; compare the ‘animal apocalypse’ in 1 Enoch chapters 85-90.
- <sup>8</sup> Human lawlessness was equated with animal behaviour: Xen *Anab* 5.7.32, Sen *Ep* 60.4; *cf.* the Christian appropriation of these associations: Iren *AdHaer* 5.8.2-3, Epiph *Pan* 4.5.2.

- 9 See, for example, Antiph *Miso*159k, Men *Dysk* 259ff, 384f.
- 10 D.M. Balme (1975 p. 183) reckons Aristotle's *Survey of Animals* comes closest to a descriptive collection of data but, whilst 'wide and perceptive', is 'surprisingly disorderly'. The comparisons between animals and humans in Aristotle are piecemeal and need to be assembled from various writings: *Physiognomics*, *Prior Analytics*, *On the Soul*, and *The Parts of Animals* (Tytler 1982 pp. 35-36 cf. Dean-Jones 1991 pp. 113-114). It ought be noted however that the *Physiognomics* is considered pseudepigraphal and an unsophisticated attempt to provide a systematic collation.
- 11 Paolo Mantegazza (1890 pp. 5-7) at the turn of the twentieth century, had recognised the ancients' comparison of man and animals and traced the practice from Plato through to the 'golden age' of physiognomy in the seventeenth century. This is not to confuse ancient and modern ethology but it does note the importance of animal comparisons to both character definition on the one hand and human behavioural patterns on the other.
- 12 Note, however, that the roots of such totalising visions were established by the nineteenth century social evolutionists, Schiller and Spencer. Karl Groos (1898) draws correlations between animal behaviour and human culture, such as dance and the arts generally (p. 293). The nineteenth century foundations of modern ethology are surveyed by Thorpe (1979).
- 13 Ontogeny is the study of the course of physiological development of an individual member of a species.
- 14 Winkler's insight explains Christopher Matthews' puzzle that the extolling of reason in animals could yet be paired with the extreme brutality and blood sports of the Romans (Matthews 1999 p. 219n46) – animal reason was merely a fictional postulate which must not obstruct (hu)man rational dominance. Indeed, the debates over reasoning animals were only jousts, gladiatorial games made the more interesting because of the difficult terms of the contest. Dominance was the industry to which reason was harnessed as the rationale (Brown 1992).
- 15 Hence a value judgement is revealed as the basis for reputed scientific objectivity.
- 16 See Sayers' criticism of the deposition of biological universalism on particularist human relations (Sayers 1982 p. 60).
- 17 Unfortunately, Wilson's ET cannot respond to confirm or deny the observations, though it is noteworthy how the consciousness of the impact of the observer on the methods and results of observation does not seem to have disturbed Wilson's willingness to postulate the ET's agreement with his own views – it would seem that evolutionary universals are more cosmically true than might have been thought!
- 18 By contrast, the sociologist Bryan Turner (1996) credits bipolar thought to Christianity and industrialisation, and whether right or wrong, relativises the claims made for such structural patterns (p. 51); compare Bernstein (1983) who mounts a thorough critique of dichotomous thinking in scientific method).
- 19 Alison Wylie (1997) points out how this actually had implications for the academic sphere that provided these results; there is, she claims, a 'masculinist view of science' that affects the decisions as to what is studied, who studies and how – with direct implications for how women are characterised, who are in or wish to enter the field (pp. 29-51).
- 20 Instances from the animal world where the female of the species is the primary hunter are held to be inconsequential to the general homology (Sayers 1982 pp. 78-79).
- 21 See the discussion of 'the Man of Reason' as a 'gendered' not 'generic' phrase by Susan Hekman – again with the recognition that the contemporary dualistic divisions have ancient roots (Hekman 1990 pp. 33-39).
- 22 Paul de Man (1986) calls this confusion 'ideology' and, because it is cast in literary terms, requires as one instrument of refutation, a literary counter (p. 11). However, given the prevalence of photo-

graphs and diagrams in textbooks of ethology, pictorial counters must also be sought. Lynda Birke (1991) places both within the larger enterprise of changing 'the power of science itself – its assumptions, practices and relationship to the world' (p. 528).

Plut *Mor* (*Cleverness of Animals*) 975a-b; G. Ps-Matt 36.

Cic *Orat* 59.220, Quintilian *Inst Or* 1.11.15-19.

Quintilian *Inst Or* 1.11.1-14, 2.13.9-13, 2.15.7-9, 11.3.91; cf. Ar *Poet* 17.3 (1455a).

Cic *Orat* 53.227, Lucretius *Universe* 5.1041-1090, Athen *Deip* 3c; cf. Longinus *Sublime* 39.1-3.

This is a striking parallel to Xenophon's Isomachus who tells Socrates how he trained his wife in the management of his estate (*Oec* 6.17-10.13).

Herod *Hist* 5.92.4,5; Polyaeus *Strat* 5.31t.

Such trading in innocence has a distinct Herodian stench about it: see Mk 6:21-28.

She does recognise that the parent-child fusion operates to secure the independence of the parent and the continued dependence (and loss of identity) of the child. Compare R. Feldmeier, who frames the woman's response in terms of the defiance of children (Feldmeier 1994 p. 223).

Quintilian gives a telling exposé of this psychagogic influence over an audience: *Inst Or* 8.3.1-6. The threat however is the loss of the rational, a 'fault' which Quintilian aligns with women (10.7.12). Herein lies a fissure in the reign of *logos*.

The use of the *gyna* (the Doric form of *gynē*) in epigram 5.433 in the *Greek Anthology* is tied to the name *Lakaina*, deliberately evoking the famous Laconian hound of the *Odyssey*. The further connection with *lukos*, 'wolf', accentuates the proximity of the wild (Lilja 1976 p. 114).

So, for example, Menander, makes similar play of an 'old woman' and 'dog' – *graun* and *kyna* – in a proverb 'It's far worse to stir up a hag than a dog' (my translation.). Menander fr. 258 (Meineke) *apud* Stobaeus *Florilegia* 73.46.

For a detailed analysis of the irrationality of the sayings, and the material, subversive communication by the daughter, and Mark's overall design strategy, see Cadwallader (2003 chapters 6-10).

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