The Patriarch’s Nuts: Concerning the Testicular Logic of Biblical Hebrew

Roland Boer

This is a study of the testicular logic or worldview (ideology) of the Hebrew Bible, with a specific focus on halatsayim, motnayim and yarekh. While the first two form a curious double pair, being both dual terms and two words for the same sense—testicles—the word yarekh has a far more complex semantic cluster, one that includes thigh, hip, hip joint, side, base and of course balls. In dealing with the first two terms, I seek to uncover the way a gonad linguistic economy stretches out to include courage, strength, fear and trembling, active participation in their own right, and the pressing need for males to bind them up and protect them from harm (usually rendered with the innocent “girding one’s loins”). From there I pass to the subtleties of yarekh, exploring the way this semantic cluster gives voice to the inner workings of a complex spunk economy. In particular, this section deals with the “yarekh shake” (Gen 24:2 and 9; 47:29); the excruciating knee in the nads experienced by Jacob in Genesis 32; the prairie oyster stew of Ez 24:3-4; the globular base of the lamp stand in Ex 25:31; and the vivid and active sense that attends yatsa’ halatsayim (Gen 35:11; 1 Kgs 8:19 and 2 Chr 6:9) and yots’e yerekh (Gen 46:26; Ex 1:5; Judg 8:30), which is really the burst of sperm from the end of a man’s cock as a designator of his offspring. Throughout, a consistent effort has been made to use a term for testicles no more than once.

The intention of every male eater [of testicles] is quite clear: to increase his potency. The best thing of course is to use the testicles of the most potent animal. In Spain these are regarded as the fighting bulls from the bullring, and of these the fiercest fighting bulls from the most renowned bullrings. Consequently, in the famous Florian restaurant in Barcelona you are served a bull’s testicles, accompanied not only by garlic and parsley, but by the name of the bull, its weight, a brief history, the pedigree, the place and time of its death and the name of the matador responsible. (Dekkers, 2000, p. 108)
The Hebrew Bible is full of balls. And given that those of us of Middle Eastern background are among God’s hairier creatures, the Bible is full of some shaggy baubles indeed. It is all very well in the polite circles of (usually religiously driven) academia to speak of the dominant patriarchies of the Bible or of the masculinities that saturate many of its texts, but these are convenient abstractions, a relieved stride towards the euphemisms that enable us to avoid the earthiness of those texts. So I prefer to speak of nuts, onions, oysters, apples, footballs, call them what you will.²

This essay is a simple exercise in linguistic terminology, or rather, it investigates the words used in Hebrew to designate testes. I undertake this assignment with two basic assumptions concerning language. The first is that words never operate in isolation; they are part of semantic clusters that produce both the richness of language and difficulties for translators (at a micro-level). The second is that the mechanisms of language are like architecture, for that machinery provides a direct window onto the zeitgeist (or, as I prefer, the ideologies) and thereby the social formation of its users.

Clusters and Ideologies

Let me say a little more concerning these theoretical points before fondling a few biblical bangers. The idea of semantic clusters works in two directions. A semantic cluster may be described as a clan of meaning, in which a word sharing the same root belongs to the same clan. This is particularly true of Hebrew, where often verb, noun and adjective may share the same consonantal root and thereby belong to the same clan. Secondly, semantic clusters operate in a situation where the same word may be used for a range of (although not always clearly) related meanings. For example, the word *yarekh* may mean genitals, thigh, hip, hip joint, side, base, deepest hollow, or recess. In this case, these various senses are obviously connected, but one applies—or so goes the advice to budding translators—the most appropriate sense depending on the literary context. In what follows I operate with a somewhat different assumption, namely that whenever a word is used it evokes, however implicitly and contextually, the other senses of its semantic cluster. That is, I am interested not in the sparseness of meaning but in its richness and fullness. At least a couple of implications flow from these points: the idea of semantic clusters illuminates the perpetual problem of lack of fit in translations, for what we have so often is a partial overlap between two semantic clusters rather than a tight fit.³

Further, semantic clusters also lead to the delectable uncertainty of translation, the sense that one can never be absolutely sure that this word is the best one for a translation.

My other theoretical point is that the workings of language provide an unwitting insight into ideology. In brief, I take ideology in the classic Marxist sense as unfolding in two related directions: it designates false consciousness, specific beliefs or opinion concerning a vital matter (privilege, wealth etc) that are not only mistaken but support an unjust status quo. But ideology is also—and more neutrally—a way of mediating the complex reality of the world and our places within it (Barrett, 1991, pp. 18-34; Larraín, 1983, 1983; Dupré, 1983, pp. 238-44). If the first type of ideology can be dispensed with, the second is here to stay. And if the first requires critique, the second needs description and understanding. Much more may be said on
ideology, but that is not my task here (see, for example, Žižek, 1994; Eagleton, 1991; Jameson, 2009, pp. 315-63), save to make one further point: the power of ideology increases in a direct ratio to its ability to remain hidden, to seem natural and part of the way things are.

How, then, does language provide a window into ideology? I do not mean the oft-repeated assertion that the way to understand a people and a culture is through their language. Or rather, I take this self-evident truth and give it a twist: it is not the content of the language that counts, the ideas and beliefs it seeks to express directly, but the forms and structures—or what I call the machinery and workings—of language that provide unwitting insights into the deeper patterns of ideology, precisely those that everyone assumes to be natural. This is where the analogy with architecture is illuminating: in the same way that the form—the patterns, lines and fashions—of architecture express most directly the zeitgeist of an age (Jameson, 1991, pp. 97-129; 1998, pp. 162-89), so also does the form of language give voice to the structuring ideological assumptions of those who deploy it.

The same applies to the albondigas of the Bible: three terms appear with significant frequency: yarekh, halatsayim and motnayim. Each in their own way shows the extraordinary pervasiveness of an erectile economy that rivaled any in the ancient world. One or two other words also occur, such as ‘ashek, as in the poor man with the crushed testicle (meroah ‘ashek) in Lev 21:20 who is forbidden, along with anyone else who has a blemish, from approaching the altar for offerings. ‘ashek is but a solitary occurrence, although it does include within its cluster shkhkh, which appears only as the Hiphil participle mashkim in Jeremiah 5:8, where the Jerusalemites are described as “horny [meyuzanim] stallions with massive clangers [mashkim]”, or perhaps “horny, well-hung stallions” (Carroll, 1986, p. 178). In what follows I begin with some brief comments on halatsayim and motnayim, since they are relatively straightforward, after which I move onto the intriguing and many-folded yarekh.

Of Loins, their Binding and So Forth

The two more obvious terms in the lizard logic of the Hebrew Bible are halatsayim and motnayim. Strictly speaking, both terms overlap so much that they are usually translated as “loins,” a wonderful euphemism that is supposed to designate that section of the body between the ribs and the hip bones (halatsayim) or the muscles binding the abdomen to the lower limbs (motnayim)—abs, in other words. Yet there is one curious, usually unexplained feature of both terms, hinted at in the brilliant older translation as “loins”: both words end in the rare dual form. As any student of introductory Hebrew knows, two classes of dual forms remain, one less obvious (waters, heavens, Egypt, and occasionally Jerusalem), the other far more obvious, for they refer to natural pairs relating to the body: eyes, ears, hands, feet, lips, hands (but also shoes, horns and wings). A question springs forth: why are the terms usually rendered loin or abs in the dual form? We are, I would suggest, clearly in the territory of the little boys, of frick and frack—a suggestion that will become clearer as the argument stretches out below. In fact, one wonders whether the Bible is engaged in emphatic overkill, for not only do we have the rare dual form for halatsayim and motnayim, but we also have two terms that mean the same thing—
as the parallelism in Isa 11:5 shows all too well. Is this a case of naming each of the twins with a name that evokes its brother?

With that basic linguistic point established, it is possible and somewhat astonishing to see how extensively the sperm factory has spread itself through the terminology of human emotions, activity and life. These skittles may actually bless someone (Job 31:20), tremble (Is 15:4), have phantom pregnancies (Jer 30:6 (see Carroll, 1986, pp 574-5)), be strapped up with undies or, as it is quaintly put, a loincloth (Job 38:3; 40:7; Is 5:27; see further below), or with the “underwear of faithfulness” (Isa 11:5), or, if one is feeling down, sackcloth (Is 32:11). And these references apply purely to the minority member of this pair—halatsayim.

The term that hangs lower, larger and dominates the scene is motnayim. I wish to stress three features of these tallywags. First, they are the seat of courage and strength (Job 40:16; Nah 2:2; Prov 30:31; 1 QH 2:7; 8:33). Perhaps the greatest assertion of this power is not the sword that may hang over the vital region, but the spermatic spluttering pen. In a rare moment of scribal self-referentiality, we find in Ez 9:2, 3 and 11 the curious phrase weqeseth hasofer bemotnayw, usually rendered as something like “a writing case at his side,” or as the King James Version daringly suggests, “a writer’s inkhorn by his side.” While qeseth is a hapax legomenon that most assume to be a “writing-case” or perhaps “inkpot,” I would suggest a tool of the one to follow, who is none other than the sofer, the scribe, one who writes and numbers; it is the participle of the verb sfr. In other words, what we have here is “the scribal pen(is) upon his potatoes”; qeseth hasofer is nothing less than another term for this uber-scribe’s dong. Or, as Sir George Mansfield Cumming-Smith, the head of the British spy service (1909-26), said when he heard that semen is an excellent invisible ink, “every man his own stylo.”

Despite all this power, they may also be broken (Ezek 21:11 [ET 21:6]), loosed (Is 45:1), crushed (Deut 33:11; Sir 30:12), afflicted (Ps 66:11), filled with anguish (Isa 21:3; Nah 2:11), burn in illness (Ps 38:7), or be struck through (Deut 32:22; Sir 32:22). One may also, with due preparation, peer at God’s whirligigs (Ezek 1:27; 8:2), but you will never quite be the same again (see more below on Jacob’s nuts). More than seeing the world from the end of one’s penis, these bullets are the seat and source of a man’s strength. It is not for nothing that Rehoboam says to the Israelites who demand a relaxing of the onerous conditions of service from Solomon’s rule, “My limp cock is thicker than my father’s cubes” (1 Kgs 12:10; 2 Chr 10:10) (see especially Boer, 1996).

The second item worth emphasizing is that a man’s love apples are not merely the object of a verb, for they may also be the subject, actively setting an agenda of their own. So we find that doohickeys may well be full (Isa 21:3), arise (Deut 33:11), shake (Ps 69:24 [ET 69:23]; Ez 29:7—on emendation), stand up, (Ez 29:7), be a flood marker (Ez 47:4), and even boast (1 QH 10:33), but also—should one forget to observe due hygiene—fester away (Ps 44:20 [ET 44:21]—with emendation). We saw the same situation with halatsayim a little earlier, where a man’s bolivers may take on a mind of their own and bless someone, if not God himself.

At one level, these preliminary conclusions should come as no surprise, for the overlaid and often conflictual patriarchies of the Bible are well known, at least at a general, theoretical level. However, in the nitty-gritty realm of language we can see
how pervasive and entrenched that world of the willie is. The basic sense of halatsayim and motnayim—duals we must remember that refer to a man’s marbles—soon spreads to include courage, strength and weakness, so much so that they take an active role in the world apart from their owner. Their importance is indicated by the fact that they become the place where one hangs all that is vital, along with the vitals that already hang there.

Yet—and thirdly—as with any hegemony, this one of the boobos is not always as swaggering as one might expect. Those squashy, wrinkled pouches also show some vulnerability, susceptible to crushing, trembling and even unwelcome burning feelings and the odd festering. Hence the overwhelming concern with “girding one’s loins” in the Hebrew Bible. As we might expect by now, “girding” is a euphemism for a much more specific act. What a man actually did was strap up or bind (hgr and the noun hagor) his punching bag as part of getting dressed and preparing to head off somewhere (Ex 12:10; 2 Sam 20:8; 1 Kgs 2:5; 20:32; 2 Kgs 4:29; 9:1; Dan 10:5; so also the hapax legomenon of shns in 1 Kgs 28:42), or more strongly capture and imprison them (’sr) as one does enemies (Job 12:18). Even more specifically, a man puts on the close-fitting loincloth (’zr and the noun ’ezur), a term that should really be rendered the “egg bag” (2 Kgs 1:8; Isa 11:5; Jer 1:17; Ez 23:15). Or, in Jeremiah’s words, “the egg bag [ha’ezur] clings to [dhavaq] a man’s eggs” (Jer 13:11). As Eilberg-Schwartz points out (1993, pp. 101-2), albeit without the specific reading of motnayim, this reference comes from Jeremiah’s parable of the “loincloth,” in which the closeness of the cloth to a man’s balls is a somewhat erotic image of the closeness of God to the men of Israel.

Precisely how a man strapped himself up said much about his toughness and/or importance. For instance, to wear a leather cock sack (’ezur ‘or, 2 Kgs 1:8) was obviously a sign of the rugged wilderness and thereby the ruggedness of its wearer—as we find with Elijah (2 Kgs 1:8). On the other hand, if a man had done wrong and feared divine wrath, then rough and scratchy sackcloth would take the place of the loincloth (1 Kgs 20:31-2; Jer 48:37; Am 8:10), which suggests that the biblical mark of repentance was the act of scratching one’s crotch, obsessively. And of course one longed to take it off at the first opportunity (Isa 20:2).

Under normal circumstances a careful strapping of a man’s seeds would be done with a soft cloth so that they didn’t bounce about on a long trot (Jer 13:1-4). But if one happened to be a priest, then one took extra care. The deep importance of wrapping and strapping a man’s soft marshmallows is exhibited no better than in Ex 28:42 (see also Ez 44:18). We are on Mt. Sinai with Moses and Yahweh, with the latter holding forth on the interior decoration of the tabernacle and the priests garments (Exodus 25-31) in what turns out to be the main reason Yahweh called Moses to Sinai in the first place (see Boer, 2001). In the text in question, Yahweh provides Moses with instructions as to the garments the priests are to wear in the future (George, 2009, pp. 5-6), especially the mikhnese-vad, which are to cover everything from motnayim we’adh yerekhayim. Usually one finds the first phrase rendered as “linen breeches,” which misses the soft, silky nature and high quality of what are really underpants—so “best quality linen undies.” And in the phrase motnayim we’adh yerekhayim we have not so much a zone of the body described—from “loins to thighs” as most would have it—but an emphatic usage that stresses the importance of the priests’ nicknacks. Motnayim we have met and yarekh we will
meet shortly, but it is worth noting that yarekh appears here in a rare dual form, yerekhayim. In that light, I would suggest that both words really refer to the same vulnerable sacks—so let me suggest “crystals and diamonds,” to enhance their value of course. In sum, these priests are to have “the finest linen underwear to cover their flesh, especially their vital diamonds.” They must be afraid of something if they need such protection, for no matter how much a man might try to protect them by binding a loincloth around his bijoux de famille, they remain exceedingly fragile.

Yarekh: Shaken, Kneed, Stewed and Luscious

Thus far I have been interested in the obvious terms for ping and pong, noting how they form a crucial matrix for understanding the worldview of the biblical Hebrew. But now I come to my prize exhibit, a far more subtle term that evinces the full workings of semantic clusters: yarekh. The basic sense of yarekh, at least according to Koehler and Baumgartner’s lexicon, is the “fleshy part of the upper thigh” (Koehler, Baumgartner, & Stamm 2001, vol. 1, p. 439), or more generally the region between one’s hips and upper thighs. Within its semantic cluster we also find thigh, hip, hip joint, side, base, hollow or recess. But it also means couilles.

The Yarekh Shake

So let us begin our exploration of yarekh with what I would like to call the “yarekh shake” of Genesis 24:2 and 9, as well as Genesis 47:29. In these cases, one grabs another man’s genitals and makes an oath. So, in Genesis 24:2-3 we find, “Put your hand in the place of yerekhi and I will make you swear by Yahweh, the God of heaven and the earth,” while in Genesis 47:29 the text reads, “Put your hand in the place of yerekhi and promise to deal loyally and truly with me.” The implication: if you don’t abide by this oath, may Yahweh rip your bloody rocks off! Or, as Ullendorf puts it in his quaint prose, “the sacredness attributed to this organ would lend special solemnity to an oath of this character” (Ullendorf, 1979, p. 445).

The context for the first yarekh handshake is Abraham’s concern in Genesis 24 that he may well be in the grave before Isaac gets around to choosing a wife (Gunkel (1997 [1964], p. 244) indeed argues that in its initial form the story may have included Abraham’s death). So Abraham calls on his old, trusted and nameless slave to swear that he, the slave, will not procure a wife from among the Canaanite women but find one from among Abraham’s own relatives (the incest taboo notwithstanding). Eventually the slave will set out to bribe Rebekah to come and marry Isaac (Gen 24:10-61), but not before Abraham tells him to grab Abraham’s own nutmegs and swear that he will find a relative for Isaac to marry. Verse two has the instruction and verse nine its execution, although one gains the impression from the way the story is structured that the slave has taken hold of Abraham’s swingers when instructed to do so in verse two and then fondles the patriarch’s doodads during the entire exchange between the two of them (until verse eight). This is certainly the literary effect of the passage, in which the well-hung origins of the Abrahamic religions sit snugly in a servant’s hands.

The context for the other occurrence in Gen 47:29 is very similar. Here the ageing and fading Israel/Jacob calls on Joseph to grab his father’s danglers and promise not to bury him in Egypt, but to take him back to Canaan and bury him with
his fathers. Here we find the same phrase: “Put your hand in the place of my yarekh.”

A number of features stand out in these two stories: the one who has his cojones fonderled is old and close to death; only the one who swears the oath grasps the family jewels of the one to whom he swears; handling a man’s shaggy bearings has profound legal implications; the oath concerns clan matters, either finding a woman for a son among one’s own relatives or ensuring that one is buried with one’s ancestors; yarekh obviously concerns a range of very legal matters in relation to continuity and descent, in short, what issues from the patriarch’s chestnuts (on that see more below).

Jacob’s Nuts and Co.

Can the same be said for other occurrences of the term? In some cases, yes, but in other cases yarekh would need to swing a little to incorporate the sense of low hangers. Let us take the more obvious instances first, for here we find that translators—for the sake of good religious decency—are all too keen to hide these biblical jingleberries from public view, slipping on a pair of briefs if not a full cloak as soon as possible. One such case concerns the knackers of yet another patriarch in Genesis 32, which should really be called the story of Jacob’s nuts. At this moment in the narrative, Jacob is about to return to Canaan to meet his brother, Esau. Both are resplendent in clans, cattle and armed men, but Jacob is left alone at the ford of the Jabbok where he wrestles all night, desperately and alone, with a “man” who turns out to be God—that is, his demons, his past, his fears for the future, his estranged brother. Unable to prevail over Jacob, this God touches Jacob on kaf-yerekh (Gen 32:26, 33 [ET 25, 32]). Now, this phrase is usually rendered as the “hollow of the thigh” or the “socket of the hip joint” (Gunkel, 1997 [1964], p. 347; Brett, 2000, pp. 98-9), with the rabbinic commentators going so far as to identify the sciatic nerve (Jennings, 2005, p. 253). But the more basic sense of kaf is hand, which is a common euphemism for penis, so I would suggest that kaf-yerekh simply designates Jacob’s block and tackle. Picture the scene for a moment: some thug accosts Jacob at the ford but can’t prevail over him, so in the tradition of street-fighting he knees him in the nads. Despite the excruciating pain, in which Jacob’s itchy and scratchy (kaf-yerekh Ya’aqov—verse 26/25) are turned inside out (teqa’), he hangs on for a blessing. Once granted, Jacob limps from the scene because of his excruciatingly painful yarekh (verse 31/32). At this point the Hebrew text is a little too hasty in seeking an etymological explanation for what went on, suggesting that this story explains why Israelites do not eat the schlong and stones (verse 33/32) of an animal. But the true etymology of the story shows up a little earlier, for in the blessing, Jacob has his name changed to Israel, meaning “God struggles” or “the one who struggles with God.” For most men a solid knee in the nut cups makes one feel as though you have met your maker. Make that a blow to the plums by a divine thug and it certainly does feel like one has seen the face of God (Pen’el—verse 31/30).

The evidence for the bean bag bias of yarekh is certainly thickening. Let me be perfectly clear: I seek to give due attention to this sense of yarekh where appropriate but I do not wish to extend this meaning beyond what it can reasonably bear. For instance, in Ezekiel 24:3-4 the text reads:
Set on the pot, set it on
pour in water also;
put in it pieces of flesh,
all the good pieces,
yarekh and shoulder;
fill it with choice bones.

Now the usual translation of yarekh here is “thigh,” but given the polemical context and the semantic cluster of the term, I would suggest that “prairie oyster” is perfectly viable. So, along with the flesh, shoulder and bones, this text provides a basic recipe for a delicious stew. Further, in the summary of Samson’s slaughter (yet again) of the Philistines, “hip and thigh” (shoq al-yarekh) in Judg 15:8 may simply be rendered “he smote them hip and nut sack”—much like the expression “arse over tit.” And then the description of the lamp stand—that is the menorah—in the tabernacle (Ex 25:31) is more than suggestive. The text reads yarekhah weqanah, usually rendered “base and shaft,” but given the obvious nature of the arrangement, I would suggest that “globes and pole” is both a fairer translation and reveals the ideological workings of a text like this.

Out in the Cluster

What, then, of the other uses of yarekh? Before we brush over these senses of the term, let me invoke the idea of semantic cluster. I agree that it would be silly to argue that every occurrence of yarekh means the boys down under, although I stress that in some cases (those I have surveyed above) that sense has been suppressed far more than it should have been. However, even if the meaning of gooseberries is not explicit, I suggest that whenever the word is used it implicitly evokes its full semantic cluster. One sense may rise to the surface above the others, but it is structurally connected to those other senses; without them it would be orphaned. This argument has ramifications for the salami logic of Hebrew and those who used that language, for beneath a range of apparently innocent meanings we also find the charlies. So, for example, the primary meaning of yarekh is often “thigh”: one strikes a yarekh with one’s hand (Jer 31:19; Ez 21:17) and one straps a sword to one’s yarekh (Ex 32:27; Jud 3:16, 21; Ps 45:4; see also Neh 4:18 [ET 4:12]). Or the word may, metaphorically, mean a “side,” especially of the tabernacle (Ex 40:22, 24; Num 3:29, 35) and perhaps also of the altar (Lev 1:11; 2 Kgs 16:14). However, if we keep in mind my comments concerning semantic clusters, then even in these cases the buttons are never too far from the surface. You may indeed strap your sword to your thigh, but as you do so the sense of yarekh incorporates the clock weights between your legs, of which the sword is but a prosthetic addition. Or when you refer to the tabernacle, you may also be invoking the tabernacle’s orchestra stalls, or indeed the altar’s clappers.

Nevertheless, an astute reader of the Hebrew Bible will object that on two occasions—Numbers 5 and Song of Songs 7—yarekh actually refers a woman’s
equipment. The appearance in Numbers 5—where we have the ludicrous and magical procedure for a man to verify or falsify his vague jealousies concerning his wife’s possible infidelities (see further Boer, 2006)—refers quite clearly to a woman’s yarekh. The magic potion (“waters of bitterness”) concocted by the priest-cum-witch-doctor is supposed to cause her yarekh to fall away, at least if she is guilty (Num 5:21, 22, 27). Is yarekh a thigh in this case? Is it a womb and thereby parallel with beten? Or is it her cunt that must, if she is guilty, sag like that of old woman? The last sense (without the sagging) is supported by the Song of Songs 7:2, where we read: “Your curved cunt (yerekhayik) is like ornaments, handwork of an artisan.” But perhaps yarekh in both these cases refers only in a secondary manner to the vagina. Let me put it this way: if we keep in mind the title of that old AC/DC song, She’s Got Balls, then the use of yarekh in these situations may refer to the fact that she does in fact have cannon balls, as in she won’t take no shit.15 Or it may be a more earthy reference to what are variously known as meaty flaps or luscious lips.

Conclusion

I have been engaged primarily in an exploration of what may be called the gonad economy of biblical Hebrew, although I have on a couple of occasions noted the implicit fragility of these exposed and swinging bags of gristle. Throughout my argument has been the assumption that at this formal level of linguistic usage—in which halatsayim and motnayim become key terms for strength and weakness, bravery and illness, even actors in their own right and in which the semantic cluster of yarekh exercises a subtle extension into oaths, tabernacles, lamp stands, culinary delights and vital engagements with the divine—we can trace a pervasive albeit inconsistent ideology of testicular dominance that has worked its way into the sinews and fibers of the language itself.

The splattered supremacy shows up best in one usage I have kept until now, namely, the two phrases yatsa’ halatsayim and yots’e yerekh. The first of these (found in Gen 35:11; 1 Kgs 8:19 and 2 Chr 6:9) was once translated with a phrase that I still use in reference to my children, “fruit of one’s loins,” but the second (Gen 46:26; Ex 1:5; Judg 8:30) usually makes do with “offspring.”16 We can do much better than that, for yatsa’ halatsayim really means “the issue of his spunk holders,” while yots’e yerekh should be “those going out of ye olde creamery.” For these terms evoke a very earthy, active image, much like the money shot in porn, the spermatic spurt in which a male can already see his descendants leaping forth from the end of his dick.17 Actually, we can come even closer to the Hebrew, keeping mind the alliteration of both yatsa’ halatsayim and yots’e yerekh: ball burst, or perhaps baby blast, or rather, given the linguistic logic, father lava.

References


——. (2010). Too many dicks at the writing desk, or, how to organise a prophetic sausage-fest. *Theology and Sexuality* 16(1), 95-108.


**Notes**

1 Transliteration of Hebrew follows the General-Purpose style as per the Society of Biblical Literature Style Guide.

2 A non-exhaustive list includes albondigas, apples, bangers, baubles, beechnam’s pills, bean bag, bearings, berries, bijoux de famille, bird’s eggs, bolivers, booboos, boys down under, bullets, bum balls, buttons, cannon balls, charlies, chestnuts, clangers, clappers, clock weights, coffee stalls, coin purse, couilles, cojones, crystals, cubes, danglers, diamonds, doodads, doohickeys, eggs, family jewels, footballs, frick and frack, globes, gonads, gooseberries, grapes, itchy and scratchy, jingleberries, Johnny bench nut cups, knackers, knockers, little boys, love apples, low hangers, male mules, marbles, marshmallows, mountain oysters, mud flaps, nads, niagara falls, nicknacks, nutmegs, nuts, nut sack, orchestra stalls, oysters, pebbles, pee-nuts, pills, ping and pong, plums, potatoes, punching bag, rocks, seeds, skittles, sperm factory, spunk holders, stones, swingers, tallywags, testimonials, the twins, vitals, ye olde creamery, and whirligigs. In what follows I seek to repeat not one term for testicles. As for the penis, I can only bow to the comprehensive list at [http://www.gregology.net/Entertainment/Dicktionary](http://www.gregology.net/Entertainment/Dicktionary). For a more serious study, albeit not without its own attractions, see Cornog (1986).

3 As one example, the Danish word *køre* refers to both driving a car (or truck or bus) and riding a bicycle. Danes will often speak of driving a bicycle, or simply “driving” to somewhere when they mean riding a bicycle. To an English speaker it sounds odd, since the semantic cluster of “drive” does not include bicycles. (The same thing can happen even within the same language: For example, in Canadian English to “visit” may mean to spend time with a person, whereas in British English it can only mean to pay a visit, or visit retribution, or to examine.)

4 For a full discussion of this text, see the companion piece to this article, “Too Many Dicks at the Writing Desk, or, How to Organise a Prophetic Sausage-Fest” (Boer, 2010).

5 We should not be surprised at the frequency of the term in Ezekiel, given the graphic sexual nature of much of his imagery—the source for more than one exploration of the text’s or even the reputed author’s psychological state (Halperin, 1993; Schmitt, 2004; Garber, 2004; Jobling, 2004).

6 *Dhvq* also has the sense of sticking to something, which is always a risk with a soiled and smelly egg bag.
In a brilliant circumlocution, Gunkel calls it the “oath by the reproductive member” (Gunkel, 1997 [1964], p. 248).

Tahat may also have the sense of “in the place of” apart from its more usual “underneath.”

Edwardes (1965, p. 65; 1967, p. 59) points out that in Latin one also finds a distinctly legal sense, since the words “testicle” and “testis” are derived from the roots testiculi and testes, meaning “the (two) witnesses.”

Eilberg-Schwartz (1993, pp. 152-3), following Smith (1990), argues that yarekh does indeed refer to the genitals—Eilberg-Schwartz’s obsession is the penis—but only as a euphemism. Obviously, I go a step further.

Gunkel makes the intriguing suggestion that—given the indeterminateness of the pronouns in verse 26—it may well have been Jacob who kneed the god in the divine bum balls (Gunkel, 1997 [1964], pp. 349-50). By verse 33 we find a later and more “acceptable” interpretation.

Rashkow (2000, pp. 133-9) comes closest to my reading, interpreting the story as a dream embodying the castration anxiety. Yet she does not join the dots. In this respect kaf functions in a fashion similar to regel: with a primary sense of “feet,” it often designates the genitalia—as when Ruth lies at the “feet” of Boaz in Ruth 3:14. Regol is the topic of another study.

Jennings’s effort (2005, pp. 253-9) to read Genesis 32 as a paradigmatic homoerotic story (see also Carden, 2006, p. 50)—full of fury, violence, blessing and love—would have been enhanced immeasurably had he realized the import of the Hebrew.

Shoq al yarekh seems to me to be a rather idiomatic way of saying the same thing, with yarekh and shoq sounding much the same.

This sense also applies to hagerah … motneha in Proverbs 31:17, where “gird her loins” refers to the super-woman of Proverbs 31.

In a work concerned with procreation and politics, I find it exceeding strange that Brett (2000) has completely missed the importance of these phrases.

Without even the trace of a fear of the nocturnal emissions that troubled the church fathers so. Concerning those patriarchal anxieties, see Brakke (2009).

Roland Boer
University of Newcastle/AUSTRALIA
e: roland.t.boer@gmail.com