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Chapter Author(s): Love L. Sechrest

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ANTITYPES, STEREOTYPES, AND ANTETYPES:
JEZEBEL, THE SUN WOMAN, AND
CONTEMPORARY BLACK WOMEN

Love L. Sechrest

Introduction

It is possible to make the case that technological innovation was a necessary accompaniment of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. Without news broadcasts of scores of confrontations between nonviolent black civil rights protesters and angry uniformed and nonuniformed white protectors of the status quo, this nation might never have granted the sons and daughters of enslaved Africans the most basic rights of citizenship. Today's ubiquitous cell phone cameras and video recording devices operated by officers and civilians as well as journalists may similarly be stimulating a new era of Civil Rights protest. When this ever-present technology captures violent encounters between police and unarmed black men, women, and children, it plays no small part in moving a new generation of blacks to demonstrations and protests. Footage of Freddie Gray's arrest, Sandra Bland's traffic stop, and Tamir Rice's and Walter Scott's murders at the hands of the police sometimes makes all the difference when it comes to making the case regarding police misconduct in interactions with African Americans, even if it is still not enough to result in criminal charges and convictions against the officers. Media images even played a part in removing Confederate flags from state symbols and public spaces across the South in the wake of the 2015 Charleston massacre: Facebook images of Dylann Roof draped in a Confederate flag arguably helped unveil his racist motivation for the murders of nine blacks at prayer in an African

Methodist Episcopal church. In other words, images are powerful purveyors of values; they shape conduct, stimulate action, and frame meaning.

In the wake of powerful media images of law enforcement's over-militarized responses to protests of a police officer's shooting of an unarmed black teenager in the summer of 2015 in Ferguson, Missouri, another image fired my imagination: a photo of a T-shirt worn by a black female protestor proclaimed, "This Ain't Yo Mama's Civil Rights Movement." This statement was evocative and stimulating on a number of levels as it simultaneously honored the too-often overlooked contributions of black women in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s while also proclaiming the advent of an updated, different, and perhaps edgier refrain in the struggle for black dignity in the #BlackLivesMatter movement.¹ Young women wearing that kind of T-shirt might be expected to be as devoted and bold in their confrontation with oppressive systems of law and order as were their mothers who marched with Martin Luther King Jr. But those who view the marches of those mothers through a romanticized patina of decorum might also be disappointed that such contemporary T-shirt wearing women are eschewing any politics of respectability that might have characterized their mothers' efforts. This slogan hints at the complicated nature of agency and the way that women's agency is transformed and transferred from generation to generation between mothers and daughters, parents and children.

Musings on the power of images can be as fruitful in the realm of biblical interpretation as it is in contemporary political critique. This essay explores two of the women in Revelation through the lens of a womanist hermeneutic by peeling away marginalizing ancient and contemporary stereotypes. I recover and analyze the agency displayed by two of the female characters depicted in Revelation and put this recovered agency into conversation with contemporary black women who have new and fresh ways of exhibiting perseverance and faithful witness.² The essay

1. The #BlackLivesMatter social movement was founded by three young black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, in the aftermath of the exoneration of George Zimmerman in 2013. Zimmerman, a private citizen, had been arrested for killing Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teenager who, during a visit, was walking in the Florida neighborhood where his father lived. For more on the movement, see the founders' website ("Who We Are," n.d.) and a different public account of the movement on *Wikipedia* ("Black Lives Matter," n.d.).

2. In this article I use a definition of *agency* developed by William H. Sewell. In an article that discusses the way that human agency and social structures mutually influence each other, Sewell (1992, 20–21) defines agency as the culturally determined

examines “Jezebel”³ the “false” prophet in Rev 2:20–23 as well as a female character who may be her antitype,⁴ the Sun Woman of Rev 12 (i.e., the woman clothed with the sun). In the first case John uses Jezebel imagery to thwart an influential leader in a particular church and to depict her and her associates as idolatrous, while in the second case he uses the Sun Woman as a composite symbol of the fidelity of God’s people who suffer oppression and combat evil.

The essay also explores the way that stereotypes, ancient and modern, intersect with interpretations of feminine agency. It is likely that John used ancient stereotypes about “good” and “bad” women in describing Jezebel and the Sun Woman by playing on tropes about proper and improper feminine behavior in the public sphere in a way that obstructs our vision of feminine agency in Revelation. Today, Jezebel imagery like the one used in Rev 2 lies behind a common stereotype of the hypersexed uncontrollable foreign woman that disparages black, Latina, and Asian Pacific women. Similarly maternal stereotypes of black women, Latinas, and Asian Pacific women—mammies, maids, and dragon moms—also intersect with readings of the Sun Woman in Rev 12, and both of these characters’ portraits have the power to shape and constrain ideas about

human capacity to exert “some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree.” According to Sewell, “the capacity for agency—for desiring, for forming intentions, and for acting creatively—is inherent in all humans” though people vary by social location with respect to the degree of control they have over social transformation.

3. Here I use quotation marks around *Jezebel* because I am referring to the person in ancient Thyatira who may have been the historical referent for the woman described in Rev 2:20–23. However, I use this convention sparingly in the balance of this essay to avoid the distractions of cumbersome punctuation.

4. In this essay, I differentiate the words *antitype* and *antetype*. I use the word *antitype* to refer to images that are opposite of each other while also corresponding to each other with respect to the point of the contrast. This is the relationship between Jezebel, John’s symbol of the idolatrous church, and the Sun Woman, the symbol of the faithful church. Though the word *antitype* may sometimes be used to refer to an object that foreshadows another later-occurring and similar object, herein I use the word *antetype* to describe such relationships. I contend that the two female figures in Revelation anticipate two varying postures later taken by black female Civil Rights activists in the modern period. Thus I am pressing an etymological difference between *antitypes* as opposing figures, and *antetypes* as those that temporally precede a given figure.

agency for contemporary female readers. My purpose is to discuss images of feminine efficacy in contemporary black life and how the two female characters in John's apocalyptic vision can serve as antetypes for black female activists. In particular, I put these two images of feminine agency in Revelation in conversation with each other and with a contemporary intergenerational conversation among black female activists. In other words, this essay engages in an interwoman(ist) conversation between Jezebel and the Sun Woman that is analogous to the intergenerational conversation that is evoked by the contemporary T-shirt wearing black female activists who critique and honor their mothers all at the same time.

Characterization in the Apocalypse

The characterization in the Apocalypse is an absorbing subject in its own right and the four iconic female characters in Revelation are endlessly fascinating to contemporary readers. Whereas characters in the gospels are developed through dialogue, the characters in the Apocalypse are developed through description. Details about the characters emerge through their actions but especially by means of their appearance and using comparisons and contrasts to other characters in the narrative. For example, in Rev 1:13–16 Jesus first appears as a towering figure robed as a priest and cloaked in the sun, with white woolly hair, fiery blazing eyes, glowing legs like furnace-burnished pillars, and a voice that sounds like the rushing waters of a waterfall. Jesus's next appearance in the narrative is much more complicated, however, as the prophet first describes him as a majestic conquering lion before the vision shifts through the dream logic of apocalyptic into the form of a slaughtered lamb (5:5–6). Thus we may read the Apocalypse as a drama, alert to the fact that major characters often change costumes and that these costume changes reveal new and critical information about the nature of the underlying character.

Many characters in Revelation represent particular individuals or persons; for example, Jesus is clearly a central character, as is the sovereign God enthroned in heaven. Other characters that are depicted as individuals, however, are better understood as composites that represent whole groups of people. One set of characters that fit this description is encountered early in the work, as each of the angels of the seven churches somehow represents the Christians in the corresponding churches. Jesus addresses each one of the angels of the churches in Rev 2–3 via singular pronouns and verbs while also clearly referring to the collective actions

of the Christians in the corresponding church with plural nouns and verbs: for example, “I know your works [οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα] ... you have a few people [ἔχεις ὀλίγα ὀνόματα] in Sardis who have not soiled their garments [ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν]” (3:1, 4 NASB). Even more slippery are the various costumes of the people of God in Revelation. There are a number of characters that represent the church in Revelation: the martyrs under the altar in 6:9–11, the temple in 11:1–2 (cf. 3:12 and altar imagery in 6:9–11 and 16:7), the innumerable multiethnic crowd of 7:9–10, the 144,000 virgin soldiers of 14:1–4 (cf. 7:4–8), the two prophets in 11:3–12, perhaps the twenty-four elders in the throne room (4:6; 5:6),⁵ the Bride in 19:7–8, and the holy city New Jerusalem in 21:10–14. All of these characterizations communicate various aspects of John’s particular understanding of the people of God.

Another element that is important to John’s narrative characterization that is also relevant for our purposes is his use of contrast in character development. In some ways John’s use of contrasting characters stands at the heart of the theology of the Apocalypse as the description of the beast from the sea in Rev 13:1–4—the anti-Christ in rhetorical effect if not by explicit mention—contrasts with and opposes Christ’s depiction as the resurrected Lamb who receives power and authority from God. Just as John attributes characteristics of God to Christ (see 1:14; cf. Dan 7:9), he uses a similar strategy to describe the relationship between the dragon and the beast from the sea. He assigns to each the same number of heads and horns, thus assigning the symbolism associated with the number of heads and horns with both characters: seven, a number symbolizing divine perfection, and ten, a number attesting to the cosmic extent of oppressive power (cf. 12:3; 13:1; Beale, 1999, 634). While the Lamb is worthy to take the book of judgment from the hand of the one sitting on the throne and to unleash its terrors in chapters 6 and beyond, John narrates a similar relationship between the beast and the dragon, twice mentioning that the

5. Beale (1999, 322) helpfully lists some the various ways that the twenty-four elders have been interpreted: (1) astrologically understood stars; (2) angels; (3) Old Testament saints; (4) heavenly representatives of all saints; (5) patriarchs and apostles who represent the whole people of God; (6) the twenty-four books of the Old Testament. In addition, Bauckham (1993) sees these as political figures and Moore (1995) and Aune (1983) see in the twenty-four elders of Revelation an echo of Domitian’s innovation of doubling the twelve lictors in the imperial courts of his predecessors (cf. Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 67.4.3).

dragon gives his authority to the beast (13:2, 4) in what amounts to a condensed summary of the more elaborate empowerment scene in 5:6–14. That we may identify this beast as the anti-Christ, however, is also evident from the parallel that John draws between Christ and the beast as we learn that one of the beast's seven heads has received a mortal wound that has been healed (13:3), a data point that does not quite rise to the level of imitating the remarkable depiction of Christ as the Lamb that *still stands* as if it had once been slaughtered (5:6).

Having established how John uses characterization in the Apocalypse, herein I suggest that the Sun Woman of Rev 12 exhibits agency analogous to other depictions of the people of God in Revelation and that as a symbol of faithful obedience, she is the antitype of Jezebel, who represents the unfaithful church. As a symbol of the people of God, the Sun Woman is one of several composite characters in a complex network of personas that appear in multiple other guises in the narrative. For instance, it is the failure to recognize that the Sun Woman and the Bride *both* represent different aspects of the people of God that comes in tension with Tina Pippin's (1992a) insistence that women are excluded from New Jerusalem, which in her view is only populated by the male virgin-warriors of 19:14 (cf. 7:1–8; 14:3–4).⁶ The important point here is that John's ecclesiology emerges from both masculine and feminine images of the church, which connects this multifaceted character to God and Christ in an intimate, participatory connection.

A Lady by Any Other Name: Typecasting the Sun Woman

Though many scholars treat the Bride as a symbol of the church in a continuation of the literary habit of identifying Zion with the people of God,

6. Pippin 1992a, 195: "The New Jerusalem is a woman, but women are not included in the utopian city. God's future world excludes women but not before marginalizing them first. Of the four females in the text, Jezebel and the Whore are destroyed, the Woman Clothed with the Sun is left in exile, and the Bride is submissive and controlled." For a concurring view see Schaberg, 1992. Though Pippin's analysis of the gender ideology in Revelation is second to none, I still find the preceding quotation to be a puzzling position with respect to the narrative logic of Revelation on its own terms. How can New Jerusalem be absent women when bride imagery is used to name the heavenly advent of the holy city in 21:2, 9–10? When one recognizes that the Sun Woman *is* the bride in a different historical moment, the idea that women are excluded from New Jerusalem is even more difficult to understand.

there is more debate about the Sun Woman's identity.⁷ Yet as the woman who gives birth to the Messiah and who is costumed in dream-symbols that evoke the twelve tribes of Israel in Gen 37:5–11, we can see that she also represents a different aspect of the same entity. Though she is one symbol of the people of God in Revelation, we can see that she is also depicted as a female who "acts like a woman" in an ancient setting, by which I mean that she is seen as both passive and maternal (Selvidge 1992). However, if we understand the role of the church in John's vision in its deep connection to the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb, we will be in a better position to understand how the Sun Woman of Rev 12 reveals John's ecclesiology and to see the nature of her agency.

The Sun Woman is dressed in white in a way that connects her to other depictions of the faithful in Revelation. The symbolism of white garments appears first with respect to the faithful saints in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. In 3:4–5, Christ promises these Sardinians (and all people in the churches who are overcomers) that perseverance will be rewarded with permission to walk with him dressed in white robes "because they are worthy" (*ὅτι ἄξιοί εἰσιν*; cf. 4:11; 5:9).⁸ The innumerable multitude in 7:9–14 who come out of great tribulation also wears white robes that have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (cf. 19:13); and the armies of heaven in 19:14 are similarly clad. In 14:14, the crowned Jesus figure who reaps the harvest of humanity is dressed in a white robe as are the twenty-four elders in 4:4. The white garment symbolism in Rev 6:11 is similar to that in 7:9–14 and is particularly striking. In this verse, the martyrs under the altar are given white robes as they wait for the number of their slaughtered company to be complete. The imagery of white robes surely symbolizes the purity of the wearer, but this association between white robes and suffering (7:9) and martyrdom (6:11) also suggests that

7. See, for example, Huber's (2010, 159) association of the Bride with the traditions in Ezek 16, Hos 1–2, and Isa 61:1; Mounce (1977, 236), who sees ideas in Isa 54:11; 2 Esdr 10:7; see also Gal 4:26 as a background, and similarly Blount (2009, 344), who connects the Bride with the theme of Israel as the bride of the Deity in Isa 1:21; 54:1–8; Jer 2:2; Ezek 16:8–14; Hos 2:5; see also Eph 5:32.

8. The promise to overcomers (*ὁ νικῶν*) in 3:4–5 is one that is addressed to all the churches and not strictly to those in Sardis, given that the exhortations to *each* of the seven of the churches of Asia in chapters 2–3 are intended to be overhead by all (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

they symbolize actions that imitate the Lamb's own sacrificial and praiseworthy actions (5:9; 7:14; 19:13).

Indeed, this idea of the symbolic purity of the white robe coheres with the interpretation of the bright linen wedding garments of the Bride, which is given in chapter 19. Verse 8 tells us that these (white), bright, pure linen clothes are "the righteous deeds of the saints," but the preceding survey suggests that the white clothing symbolism should be understood as the standard costume of the saints in Revelation. In this light it is no wonder that the crowned Sun Woman of 12:1 who represents the people of God and gives birth to the Messiah is also clothed in the sun, that is, clothed in bright, white-hot garments that resemble the Lord in his own regalia (1:16; cf. 10:1; 14:14). This, then, renders the exhortation in 3:18 all the more vivid, as the tepid Laodiceans whose temperature can no longer be differentiated from the ambient environment are urged to purchase white robes to cover their shameful nakedness. The imagery suggests that the problem in Laodicea is that the church is so like its surrounding culture that it has hopelessly compromised its witness and has so few "righteous deeds" for the making of a garment that they are essentially naked. Thus, the Sun Woman is dressed in righteous deeds that echo Jesus's own sacrificial acts, Jesus who is the Faithful Witness from whom all other faithful witness derives (1:5; 3:14). Further, if the two prophets in chapter 11 may be identified as a symbol for the faithful, prophetic church, then the Sun Woman's garb helps us to see her in this same light and not simply as a passive woman who is acted upon rather than being an agent exercising her own agency. In other words, the Sun Woman symbolically *wears* her righteous agency.

The nature of the connection between God, Jesus, and the people of God is further developed in the imagery in chapter 21 where we meet Jerusalem who, in the fluid symbolic universe of the Apocalypse, is both a bride adorned for a husband and a city. Similar to the way that the Sun Woman wears garments that are reminiscent of the Lord Jesus, Jerusalem is depicted in terms that are reminiscent of the description of God. Jerusalem shares the glory of God and the Lamb who light up the city (21:11, 23), and her radiance is described by appealing to some of the same rare jewels that also appear in the description of God in the throne room scene in chapter 4: jasper, carnelian, emerald, and crystal. From this imported throne-imagery in the vision of Jerusalem thus emerges an eschatological portrait of the perfected bride who descends from heaven looking a bit like God. In other words, the appearances of these two women symbolize

the agency associated with their faithful witness and participation in the divine activity of God and the Lamb.

Yet when it comes to a contextualized *contemporary* reading of the female symbols in Revelation, none of them fare well in modern scholarship. Adela Yarbro Collins (1976, 57–100) describes the Sun Woman as someone who flees from the dragon and who fails to stand as the ally of the hero or even to participate in the defeat of the foe. For Tina Pippin (1992a, 203) the ideology of gender in the Apocalypse is linked to the passive and controlled agency permitted to women in a patriarchy: giving birth (i.e., 12:2), eating and drinking (i.e., 2:20; 17:4), fornicating (i.e., 2:20; 17:2), or remaining a virgin (i.e., 19:7):

The mother in Apocalypse 12 is a prime example of women's reproductive power being controlled by men. The war takes precedence, and the child is taken from her... In the Apocalypse the Monster/Whore is destroyed and replaced with the controlled and controllable image of the Bride. The Bride is passive and receptive to male authority and power. (201–2)

But even as we found above that the Sun Woman *wears* her agency by being dressed in garments that symbolize her sacrificial righteous deeds that imitate the Lamb, there is more to this woman than meets the eye. I suggest that while a judgment regarding the Sun Woman's passivity is a natural and perhaps an inescapable one from the perspective of contemporary thought, it is possible to uncover the woman's agency from within the narrative world of the text. I contend that we may retrieve the Sun Woman's exercise of agency by a focus on three dimensions of the portrait in chapter 12: the ethics of her survival posture (12:6, 14), her capacity for flight (v. 14), and her part in overthrowing evil (10–11).

The first thing that we note is the fact that the woman survives two concentrated attacks by the dragon. In 12:5, the woman's son escapes attack by being taken to heaven, and she herself escapes the dragon's pursuit by fleeing to the wilderness (12:6, cf. vv. 13–14).⁹ In addition, the

9. I maintain that the woman flees to the wilderness in 12:6 and that this action is recapitulated in 12:13–14. The scene in chapter 12 unfolds in a three panel triptych in which panels 2 and 3 partially recapitulate the action in the first panel while also adding detail to the story. Panel 1 (12:1–6) introduces the main characters: the Sun Woman in labor, her mortally endangered son, and the dragon. Panel 2 (12:7–12) advances the story by giving us more detail about the defeat of the dragon in heaven

woman survives a flood of water aimed at her from the dragon's mouth—perhaps symbolic of being overwhelmed by a flood of chaotic and deceptive speech (12:15–16). Sometimes interpreters describe these incidents as evidence that highlights the passivity of the Sun Woman: instead of taking action on her own behalf, others have to come to her defense when she is under duress. The Sun Woman is a patriarchal vision of femininity. As Paul Duff writes:

The issue of gender provides an additional contrast between 2:18–29 and chapter 12. In 2:20, as shown earlier, “Jezebel’s” deportment is both active and aggressive. Conversely, John depicts the woman of chapter 12 as a passive feminine figure. Whereas “Jezebel” is the subject of virtually all of the active verbs in 2:20, the woman of chapter 12 stands as the subject only of the verbs connected with birthing and flight. It is perhaps fair to say that she does not act in this text but rather is acted upon. She is threatened by the beast and consequently she has to flee “into the wilderness, to a place which had been prepared for her by God” (12:6); the active roles here belong to the beast and the deity. The next part of the scene again emphasizes the passive nature of the woman: in the wilderness, she is fed and protected by God. Later in the text she is pursued, again by the beast, and again she is saved, this time by the earth (12:13–16). (2001, 93–94)

Such interpreters are right that the Sun Woman seems passive in the story and relies on others to rescue her, a posture that anticipates a racialized gender stereotype for white women that I take up in the next section. But I think it is important to set the Sun Woman's behavior in context. In the Apocalypse, God and the Lamb are the only agents that matter; the various characters that symbolize the saints in the work are all either the beneficiaries of God's action, or they are somehow allied with God in performing action through the participation theme discussed above. Further, there is something slightly distasteful in disparaging this woman for needing help in being extricated from dire harm. Persons on the margins who have diminished agency in a system who receive help from powerful others in the community should not be shamed for accepting this help, even if we would agree that the best solutions are those that increase agency for all while simultaneously eliminating danger. It is true that survival cannot

and subsequent eviction to earth, and the last section (12:13–17) tells about the continuing conflict between the woman and the dragon on earth.

or should not be the *sole* end for those on the margins, but the agency of unconstrained self-determination as is celebrated in the American myth of rugged individualism may not be the most desirable end either; indeed, it too may be the product of patriarchy.

More important, a part of the reason that the woman survives attack is that in 12:6 she receives nourishment while she is in the wilderness, and the implication is that somehow she is fed in the wilderness by God or perhaps the angels of God (12:7), something that contributes to the helpless, feckless portrait of the woman that we discussed above. How can the fact that she is fed like a helpless child or infant suggest something about her agency? We can move forward by remembering that eating is a moral choice in the Apocalypse, something that is especially highlighted in the letters to the seven churches. In Pergamum, some members of the church are rebuked for eating food sacrificed to idols, and Christ promises that those in this city who resist eating food sacrificed to idols will eat manna instead, God's special food (2:17). The letter also attributes the teaching that promotes eating food sacrificed to idols to the Nicolaitans (2:14–15), which implies that the eating of idol food had been a problem in the church of Ephesus as well since the Nicolaitans are also mentioned in that letter (2:6). Indeed, the letter to Ephesus likewise offers an opportunity to eat God's food instead of idol food, when Christ gives overcomers permission to eat from the tree of life (2:7). Food sacrificed to idols may be the central issue in Thyatira, especially if the fornication mentioned in 2:20 is simply a way of symbolizing the unfaithfulness of eating food sacrificed to idols mentioned in that same verse (*πορνεῦσαι καὶ φαγεῖν εἰδωλόθυστα*: to fornicate, that is, to eat food sacrificed to idols). In addition, one might also surmise that the relative poverty of Smyrna and wealth of Laodicea is connected to the degree to which the Christians in these communities were integrated into the socioeconomic fabric of the cities, an integration which might well involve participation in the imperial cult or local trade guilds and thus activities that would likewise involve moral choices about eating (Osborne 2002). Given this emphasis on the morality of eating in Revelation, I suggest that when the Sun Woman *chooses* to put herself in the situation where she has to depend on God for food she is, in John's universe at least, demonstrating morally praiseworthy ethical agency.

The Sun Woman's capacity for flight also represents feminine agency. With eagle's wings she flies to the desert in the midst of her conflict with the dragon (v. 14), and I contend that accounts of the woman's diminished or missing agency are overlooking the woman's flight as direct and positive

action. Inasmuch as all virtue, agency, purity, or resistance comes from God in the Apocalypse, the wings of the eagle may serve to depict the woman as bearing aspects of the image of God, as in the way that Jerusalem's appearance connotes something similar. If it is true to any extent that the four living creatures personify aspects of God (e.g., Blount 2009, 93), then it may be true that the woman's wings evoke the imagery in Exod 19:4, which say that God bore the Israelites on eagles' wings in their wilderness sojourn and perhaps also the idea that God has the capacity to be anywhere. Against this understanding of the connection and shared agency between the church, Christ, and the one on the throne, we can suggest that the God-given eagles' wings may not be so much about depicting the Sun Woman as flying *from* conflict and attack. Instead, by noting that with wings the woman could have gone anywhere, we can highlight that she flies *into* the desert.

While many associate wilderness imagery with a time of testing and read the Sun Woman's flight there in light of the exodus motif in which Israel was led and fed in their desert wanderings, we should also note that within the narrative horizon of Revelation John has subtly added the idea that the wilderness is also a place of conflict. In 17:3, Babylon is in the wilderness, and inasmuch as she is the only other character that is placed in that setting aside from the Sun Woman, we should perhaps see the Sun Woman's flight to the desert less as an escape and more as entering an arena of engagement with Babylon. Rather than choosing compromise so as to participate safely in the socioeconomic life of the surrounding culture like "Jezebel" advocates, the Sun Woman flees one kind of conflict with the dragon only to engage in another kind of conflict with Babylon.

The most direct example of the Sun Woman's agency, however, appears in the explicit mention of her part in overthrowing evil in 12:10–11. The hymns in Revelation often function to explain the significance of the symbolic action in the surrounding narrative much like the choruses in a Greek play (Osborne 2002, 473). For instance, the hymns in 4:8–11 declare the utter sovereignty of God as depicted in the throne room scene in that chapter, and the hymns in 5:9, 12 likewise unpack the significance of the Lamb's grasp on the scroll of judgment. In keeping with this pattern then, 12:10–12 provides an interpretation of the Sun Woman's story that is told and twice retold in the surrounding narrative. Revelation 12:10 proclaims that God's kingdom has been inaugurated because Satan, the accuser who accuses "our comrades" day and night, has been overthrown, presumably by Michael's angelic host mentioned in 12:7–9. Despite the angels' work of throwing Satan to earth, 12:11 insists that "they" defeat Satan, most likely

referring to the saints in 12:10. But it is important to note that in 12:11 the hymn goes on to declare that the defeat of Satan is accomplished by the coincident action of the blood of the Lamb along with the word of their *testimony* (διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν); that is, that they did not love *their life* (οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν) even in the face of death.

I maintain that all of this is relevant for understanding the Sun Woman's agency when we note that the comrades have a single testimony and life in 12:11 in a way that is analogous to the single mouth (cf. 11:3, 5; πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν), testimony (11:7; ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν), and body (11:9a; βλέπουσιν ... τὸ πτώμα αὐτῶν) of the two witnesses in chapter 11. This singularity points to the fact that the two witnesses are a composite character that symbolizes a whole group, and this same literary device applies to the woman of chapter 12 in a way that links her to the other representations of the people of God in the Apocalypse. Thus in context the hymn in 12:10–11 proclaims the Sun Woman's participation in the defeat of Satan as the symbol of the people of God in this part of the narrative. She and her children participate with Christ in overcoming Babylon through their testimony, fearlessly flying into conflict with Babylon even in the face of death, much like the chapter 11 witnesses engage evil earth-dwellers in the great city "called ... Sodom and Egypt." The prophets and the Sun Woman are the same character in different garb, and both are shown in stories that narrate their participation in the overthrow of evil. The Sun Woman's agency especially appears in her moral choice to enter into direct conflict with Babylon, Satan's proxy.

Antitypes and Stereotypes:

Jezebel, the Sun Woman, and Contemporary Women of Color

In this section, I consider the depictions of the Sun Woman and Jezebel with a particular interest in the way that contemporary gendered and racialized stereotypes of women intersect with the interpretation of these characters. I suggest that just as ancient patriarchal stereotypes and tropes about the proper conduct of women may have given rise to details in the characterizations of the women, so too do contemporary gendered and racialized stereotypes intersect with readings of Revelation and the understanding of feminine capacity for action. By engaging two scholars who have explored ancient tropes that may have influenced the construction of the portraits of Jezebel and the Sun Woman, we will be in a better position to see how these ancient tropes reverberate with ste-

reotypes affecting contemporary women of color. Ultimately, this exploration prepares us for the final section where I show how the two depictions of agency resident in the portraits of Jezebel and the Sun Woman function as antetypes for contemporary interpretations of black women's activity in the public square.

Duff's work explores the fear of the uncontrolled and out of control woman in ancient rhetoric. According to Duff, a woman was considered so susceptible to sexual desires and other urges that she was sometimes likened to a wild beast that needed to be tamed and domesticated (2001, 109). Lack of self-control was especially problematic when it came to behavior in the public sphere and women in the public were thought to pose a real threat to the social order, resulting in particularly severe strictures on women's movements outside of the home. She posed a danger to society if she were not controlled by her husband, brother, or father, and social prejudice might label her as a prostitute or sexual predator in ways that are not dissimilar to the rhetoric John uses in describing Babylon. Thus, in view of the lack of clear evidence that sexual sin was actually a problem in John's churches, Duff suggests that the charge of sexual immorality (*πορνεία*) was elicited by Jezebel's public persona and openness to the larger pagan society (107).

As Duff points out, John does not explicitly call Jezebel "satanic." Nevertheless, he accomplishes something similar by depicting evil Babylon in ways that help readers think about his earlier portrait of the rival leader in Thyatira whom John strategically dubs "Jezebel":

First, Ahab's wife [Jezebel] was a queen—of the kingdom of Israel in the ninth century BCE; the regal bearing of "Babylon" in chapter 17 would call the Israelite queen to mind. Second, she was associated with sexual promiscuity in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the later Jewish tradition, just as "Babylon" is accused of *πορνεία* in this text. Third, in addition to the *πορνεία* she was accused of, Queen Jezebel was also guilty of spilling the blood of the prophets of God (see 1 Kings 18:3–4; 13). In this she corresponds to the bloodthirsty whore of Revelation 17 who is drunk on "the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus." Fourth, the number of allusions to Elijah in other places in the Apocalypse would also point to the figure of Jezebel in this passage, since in the biblical narratives, Elijah was Queen Jezebel's nemesis. Fifth, the fact that the flesh of "Babylon" is devoured in 17:16 calls to mind the fate of the Israelite queen (1 Kings 21:23–24), whose body was eaten by scavengers.... Consequently, it seems fairly obvious that the text invites

the readers to consider “Jezebel” in connection with “Babylon” in the Apocalypse. (2001, 90)

Thus, John attempts to drive a wedge between this female leader of the church who is recognized as a prophet and teacher in the Christian community by using imagery that brands her as a dangerous and out-of-control interloper. She is depicted as an ethnic Other, a loose woman who spews forth deceptive messages that beguile those under her power. Some scholars suggest that Jezebel of Thyatira may not have been advocating a religious practice regarding eating food sacrificed to idols that was broadly considered out of bounds (cf. 1 Cor 8–10). It may be that Jezebel’s offense was that she had a difference of opinion with John and was nonetheless able to remain popular in the community (Rev 2:20–23).

Barbara Rossing is the second scholar who investigates ancient stereotypes through her exploration of the two-woman topos that contrasts a good woman with a bad woman as a way of constraining moral choice:

This topos furnished a framework for exhorting a choice between any two opposing courses of action or allegiances, one of which is personified as seductive and evil and the other which the author wants to recommend as good.... The two feminine figures provide only a dualistic structure of ethical contrast that can be adapted and filled out with a wide range of topics.... Revelation employs the two-woman topos for the purpose of political critique and exhortation ... by filling out the contrasting feminine figures as two powerful empires—God’s empire versus Babylon—the author constructs a comprehensive indictment of the Roman empire and an invitation to citizenship in God’s alternative realm. (1999, 14–15)

According to Rossing, there are several basic rhetorical elements that make up the topos, which can then be applied in a wide range of social, economic, political, and religious circumstances: (1) the personification of an either/or moral choice as choosing between an evil woman and a good woman; (2) a description of the women’s appearance, especially with respect to contrasts in dress and other physical details; (3) a moral disparity between the women; and (4) an ethical exhortation to embrace the one and reject the other (1999, 18). While Rossing explores the two-woman topos with respect to Jerusalem and Babylon as women and cities, I want to suggest another possible use of the two-woman topos that contrasts “evil” Jezebel and the “good” Sun Woman as opposing images that serve to critique

and exemplify John's compromised and faithful churches respectively. In addition, I propose that we read Jezebel and the Sun Woman as presenting contrasting images of Christian agency and difference. Jezebel represents a potent independent influence that has been maligned, while the antitypical Sun Woman depicts a participatory agency that has been embraced.

Though above Duff, Rossing, and I make the case that the Sun Woman represents the people of God as a composite character that John uses to highlight particular aspects of this group, Edgar J. Bruns (1964, 460) proposes that she represents both an individual and a composite character. Though certainty is impossible at this distance, it may be that Jezebel similarly represents both an individual and a composite symbol of a group. She may have been a historical female teaching in Thyatira while also representing a theologically compromised church. While the Sun Woman depicts the faithful people of God from the time of the patriarchs through the messianic age contemporary with John, antitypical Jezebel, both as a historic individual and as a composite construction, represents the ideologically compromised people in the church. Both Jezebel and the Sun Woman are depicted as mothers, but Jezebel engages in illicit sexual activity, whether real or metaphorical, while the Sun Woman's labors in childbirth resulting from an approved sexual activity (Duff 2001, 94). While Jezebel's teaching brings potential harm to her children, the Sun Woman removes her children from attack through dependence on God and by taking flight to the desert. Against the backdrop of the two-woman topos, we can see that all of these contrasts serve to exhort John's churches to emulate the one and reject the other.

Notwithstanding the referents beneath these symbols, however, is the troubling nature of the two-woman topos for contemporary readers. According to Pippin's oft-cited work on the topic, John uses two basic feminine archetypes in constructing female images in the Apocalypse—the Heroine and the Whore:

Reading for gender in the Apocalypse reveals the ideological commitments of the text. The female figures in the text are marginalized, scapegoated, and silenced. The central scene of this erotic fantasy is in the death of the Whore (the evil city) and the transformation of the Bride into the heavenly city. The pure and faithful males are called to come out of the Whore and enter into the Bride. The themes of death and desire are strong in the Apocalypse; although both men and women die, the social construction of the female body is central. This body is both

adored and destroyed. The Apocalypse is a misogynist male fantasy of the end of time. (Pippin 1992a, 193)

Pippin (1992a, 194) says that “in terms of an ideology of gender, women characters in the narrative and women readers are victimized.” Similarly, it is common to describe Jezebel and the Sun Woman as a study in contrasts—the former aggressive and guilty of sexual sin and the latter a passive woman without agency who must rely on others to extricate her from her difficulties (Duff 2001, 93). In modern society, the belief that females are weaker and more emotional than males has been one of the most enduring gender stereotypes (Durik et al. 2006, 430–31). The trope of the helpless white women reveals the residue of values from Greco-Roman culture that are still present in modern European American gender typecasts in which pure, child-like, and passive women are protected by men who are strong and competent (431). In contrast to the image of European American women in terms of Victorian and Greco-Roman ideals, Jezebel imagery has become associated with the *femme fatale* in contemporary American culture at best and as a low-down dirty “ho” at worst. Jezebel is seen as a “contradictory, controlling, carnal foreign woman” who is the “foreign influence that is dangerous and brings destruction” (Pippin 1995, 222–23); she is a woman of “masculine temperament” who is able to sway her husband at will (Gehman 1970, 492).

What becomes clear is that the image of Jezebel and the Virgin are archetypes that are played out in various ways about ethnoracial minorities in modern contexts, as many of these same images become ways of excluding and marginalizing women of color in contradistinction from white women. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2004), black women have historically been conceived in terms of two opposing images, that of the Mammy and the Jezebel, both originating from the dysfunction and rationalizations of slavery. The Mammy “house slave” ideal was one in which black women were conceived of as strong, obese, nurturing, ugly, and overwhelmingly loyal to whites. She was Hattie Daniels’s beloved (by white audiences) character in *Gone with the Wind*. Collins sees this figure continuing in contemporary black male comics in drag who portray the African American woman as the ugly, masculinized, overbearing mother figure.

The Jezebel, on the other hand, was the antithesis of the paradoxically neutered Earth Mother Mammy.¹⁰ As the other side of the same coin,

10. Collins (2004) uses the images of Mule and the Whore in her exploration

she was a hypersexualized, morally loose man-eater who is, to use class-conscious contemporary slang, a ho (Morton 1991).¹¹ There has been the suggestion that the Jezebel image may have evolved somewhat from the forced oppression of slavery inasmuch as black women were forced to disrobe in auctions and could not help but expose her limbs when forced to do backbreaking labor in the fields (White 1985). Equally, however, the ideology of casting black female slaves as loose women also served as a rationalization for rape by their white male owners, for both economic reasons—such offspring increased the assets of that owner—and out of sexual desire and power. By labeling the black female slave as a Jezebel, the master's sexual abuse was justified by the reasoning that it is impossible to rape an oversexed promiscuous woman (Morton 1991; White 1985; Collins 2004; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991).

These stereotypes also play out regarding other women of color as well. Asian Pacific Americans “in general are often perceived and/or portrayed as quiet, submissive, good at math, hard-working, and nerdy” (Okazaki 1998, 44). As the “lotus blossom,” Asian Pacific women are fetishized¹² as “exotic, hyper-erotic ... [and] desirous of sexual domination ... the ideal ... gratifiers of Western neocolonial libidinal formations.” As the “antidote to visions of liberated career women who challenge the objectification of women.... Asian Pacific women ... ‘discipline’ white women, just as Asian Pacific Americans in general are used against their ‘nonmodel’ counterparts, African Americans.” Thus, when seen through the colonial mindset, Asian Pacific American women project “a compliant and cater-

of racialized gendered stereotypes rather than those of Mammy and Jezebel. Despite the slightly different imagery, it is easy to see that she is referring to the same social phenomenon that I am.

11. I find it interesting that in discussing racialized and gendered stereotypes with students in my classes, students invariably identify the higher paid “call girl” as a white woman but the “ho” as a black street walker.

12. In Kim (2011; cf. Said, 1979, 92–103), an investigator conducted internet interviews with nine white men who posted ads “seeking an Asian female.” One man responded that he was seeking to diversify his experience in dating women from other ethnic groups. Another suggested that a quid pro quo dynamic prevailed: unattractive white males can win with Asian females because such women are seeking white males because they are “superior ... with more money ... and more power.” On the other hand, over three quarters of the respondents referenced the (sexual) submissiveness and exotic beauty of Asian women as the source of their desire to date Asian women exclusively, the classic terms of the geisha/Suzie Wong/Madam Butterfly fetish.

ing Asian feminine nature [that] feeds harassers' belief that Asian Pacific American women will be receptive objects of their advances, make good victims, and will not fight back" (Cho 1997, 166). So then, just as African American stereotypes of women involve both asexual and sexually promiscuous modes, so, too, do Asian Pacific American stereotypes. Indeed, stereotypes of Asian Pacific women in popular culture also include a version of the Mammy. In contrast to the passive lotus blossom and the sexually submissive geisha, another prominent stereotype of Asian Pacific women can be found in the image of the "dragon lady," which is popularized recently in the so-called "Tiger mom," a masculinized version of Asian Pacific women that concedes female agency while simultaneously belittling and marginalizing it.

With respect to Latina/Latino stereotypes, gendered stereotypes for this community center around the masculine ideal of *machismo* wherein men are expected to be authoritative, aggressive, and dominant and the feminine ideal of *marianismo* where women are expected to be loving, asexual, passive, emotional, weak and subservient, and thus vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse (Durik et al.; Espin 1986). Similar to the dichotomy of the Mammy and the Jezebel in the African American community and the Lotus Blossom and Geisha stereotypes among Asian Pacific American women, Hispanic stereotypes of women are likewise divided into the "good woman" (*marianismo*) and the rebellious "Hot Tamale" bad woman (Lopez 2015, 102). The *marianista* perspective sees women as hyperfertile mothers, nurturers, care givers, and servants—the apron wearing housemaid—while the "hot Latina" is exotic, sexually available, and more motivated by physical and sexual pleasure than white women" (101–2; Beltran 2002, 82).

It is not too hard to see that black women, Latinas, and Asian Pacific female stereotypes are of a piece. Each group has an aggressive hypersexualized *femme fatale*, the Jezebel who is embodied in the Ho, the Geisha, and the Hot Tamale, and a neutered asexual version embodied in the Mammy, Lotus Blossom, and Maid. Thus society attempts control over all women of color through images of a marginalized and masculinized version centered on out-of-control sexuality and a neutered feminized version that achieves control through the depiction of a lack of agency. But just as the agency of black women and other women of color are constrained by stereotypes that depict them as strong, hypersexualized, and exotic, so too do white women have to contend with living in prisons of passivity, weakness, and confinement to feminized and thus devalued spaces (Morton 1991,

9).¹³ Thus “the discourse on Jezebel is guided through the colonial mind. The image of the Other, the foreign, the dangerous and thereby seductive woman is used against medieval women and slave women” no less than on “Southern women who break with tradition” (Pippin 1995, 230). Notwithstanding the fact that society attempts to control all women through the normalization of patriarchal values about proper and improper behavior, we should not lose sight of the fact that not all women suffer equally under these strictures. Even while there are neutered, asexual feminine stereotypes available to women of color in terms of the behavior expected of them which grant a measure of agency, these stereotypes do not generally extend to them the “benefits” of being the objects of protection by society or individual men. The racialization of poverty as represented by the image of the overweight, out-of-control, and ignorant black “Welfare Queen” can also stand as a measure of the way that all poor women are brutalized by stereotypes that undermine broad commitment to antipoverty programs.

“Jezebel” and the Sun Woman as Antetypes
for Contemporary Black Women’s Agency

Above, I have contended that both Jezebel and the Sun Woman exercise agency. Admittedly, Jezebel’s agency is easier to recover given that John’s project partially rests on undermining her by portraying her as an out of control woman exercising shameful activity in public. But by connecting the Sun Woman with other portraits of the people of God and closely examining the context of her story we were also able to discern her initiative in engaging Babylon in the wilderness and her participation in overcoming the dragon, who is evil personified. In terms of positive activity, both women exercise intellectual agency, “Jezebel” by teaching, prophesying, and resisting rebuke and the Sun Woman by choosing the desert experience and the conflict associated with it while also trusting that she would be provided for in it. The Sun Woman is thus credited with participating in the overthrow of evil through her trusting witness. On the other hand, both are also victimized by a combination of cultural stereotyping and political critique: Jezebel is shamed in antiquity by practicing the economics of compromise, which makes her indistinguishable from

13. Also see Gwin (1985, 46): “Just as black women were forced to be strong, white southern women often were compelled to appear weak.”

the surrounding culture, and the Sun Woman is shamed in posterity by accounts of her helpless mien. In addition, both women considered here are victimized by violence in the narrative. The Sun Woman is endangered by the dragon himself, the alpha beast at the top of the unholy triad, and the threats against Jezebel *from within the Christian movement* are among the most violent in the whole work and clearly exceed those delivered against Balaam and the Nicolaitans (Marshall 2010, 27).

Likewise the Civil Rights mothers and the #BlackLivesMatter daughters exercise agency in real, though different ways while they are also being marginalized through a combination of cultural stereotyping and political critique. Like the antotypical Sun Woman, the Civil Rights mothers had to be resourceful in using all of the resources in the environment to survive and to participate in their own rescue. These mothers and their families were daily threatened by the violence of a state that had never found its moral and ethical moorings, and they too explicitly placed their faith in God to provide for their needs. But whatever the politics of respectability they may have engaged, we cannot underestimate the sheer courage it took to enter the wilderness of conflict, march into a face-to-face encounter with blatant racism and unreasoning hate backed by empire, and come out overcoming on the other side.

Somewhat like “Jezebel,” the #BlackLivesMatter daughters are openly exercising agency in the public square and are on the receiving end of hostility for their troubles. Just as John rebuked “Jezebel” from within the Christian movement for countenancing compromise with trade guilds and the imperial cult, so too are the #BlackLivesMatter daughters being rebuked by their allies on the US political left who scold them for their forceful, public, and disruptive resistance to ongoing violence and injustice. Due to the romanticized patina through which the Civil Rights movement is now imagined, today these young women are coming under attack for using their mothers’ same strategy of nonviolent direct action in their protests. Thus, like “Jezebel” was disciplined by John for actions that were sanctioned by Christian leaders in a by-gone era but are deemed inappropriate in a new temporal horizon, so too are the #BlackLivesMatter daughters maligned for using tactics from their antotypical mothers in the sixties that are normally held up as not only legitimate and perfectly acceptable, but even praiseworthy and morally high-minded. Finally, it is important to note that in Revelation “Jezebel” is threatened with violence on a scale that exceeds that which is directed towards other compromisers in the seven churches in a way that seems analogous to the over-militarized

state sanctioned violence that the #BlackLivesMatter daughters face today. The women and men in this contemporary movement protest violence against black and brown people who are routinely, cavalierly, and mortally threatened by racist policing practices that are exacerbated by broken accountability structures in which the same prosecutors who are charged with protecting the people's access to justice are complicit in perpetuating a callous indifference to black and brown lives.¹⁴

In my view, it is the recognition of the logic that underlies deployment of the Jezebel trope that those 1960s-era mothers of the Civil Rights movement resisted when they carefully adopted the politics of respectability. Even as these mothers engaged in nonviolent protest and unruly civil disobedience, they did so while carefully coiffed and groomed in all of the accoutrements available to them in imitation of demure white womanhood. Caught in the double bind of maneuvering between stereotypes of lawless, out-of-control black predators, on the one hand, and a passive acceptance of the indignities of black life in the Jim Crow regime, on the other, these mothers of the Civil Rights movement steered a careful course by managing the images of the movement as they and others deliberately chose Rosa Parks as the right face of the movement.

Younger black women today appear to have less patience with the compromises made by their mothers in an earlier generation as indicated by the way that they are eschewing respectability in public and willingly embracing labels such as “aggressive” and “disruptive” that are intended to silence and suppress actions that are unseemly to the white gaze and that challenge white authority. The T-shirt that so captured my attention—“This Ain't Yo Mama's Civil Rights Movement”—represents an intergenerational conversation about the nature of black female agency, one that reminds me of the tensions between the female images of the church in John's account—one pictured as faithful and the other as compromised.

14. The harrowing account of black life in Ferguson, Missouri, as documented in the Department of Justice report on the local police and criminal justice system, is required reading for anyone interested in getting a detailed description of the contemporary face of racism, including routine violations of the First and Fourth Amendments by police. This report can be accessed online (“Investigation of the Ferguson Police Department” 2015).

Conclusion

By comparing and contrasting two portraits of feminine agency in the Apocalypse and in modern black life, I am not setting up a “cat-fight” by construing one model as an ideal and a second as deficient and therefore excluded as a norm. It is true that the inner church conflict in Revelation can be understood in terms of tension between two women, with Jezebel as a representative of the compromised church, on one hand, and the Sun Woman as representative of the faithful, engaged, and trusting church, on the other. But instead I am suggesting that both of the women in Revelation preserve and pass down their mitochondrial DNA—those genetic markers that are transmitted only through the female line—allowing modern readers of Revelation to detect their connections to ancient feminine portraits of agency. If the ideologies of Revelation are deemed oppressively misogynistic, then it can help to read the text through the analogous experiences of contemporary marginalized women of color who *are* agents and who take up the work of saving their sons, daughters, and themselves using the God-given resources available to them through the public demonstration of the power of their intellect, the strength of their resistance, and the moral force of their choices.

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