Female Seed as a Metaphor: Queer Kinship in Revelation 12, Ancient Medical and Literary Texts and the Septuagint

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Abstract
New Testament texts frequently use the metaphor of family as a concept that structures a social and religious experience of kinship. They thus point to the socially constructed aspect of family ties and can be connected to current queer notions of kinship. Not only notions of families are construed, but already the seemingly natural process of procreation. The metaphor of female seed exemplifies this. Female seed in the sense of sperm and offspring appears in ancient medical and biblical texts. It shows how bodily processes and metaphorical concepts intermingle. Female seed links the surrogate mother Hagar to Protennoia, the voice of the Coptic hymn Three Forms of the First Thought, and the mother in Rev. 12; all of them deconstruct concepts of families based on blood ties and demonstrate metaphorical kinship constructions that nonetheless cannot be detached from female bodies. In this article, I establish a notion of imaginary seed, based on Judith Butler’s idea of the imaginary phallus, and thereby link New Testament texts to current debates about queer kinship.

Keywords
Female seed, queer kinship, Judith Butler, Revelation, two-seed theory, Hagar, metaphor

1. Introduction: Female Seed – Metaphors – Queer Kinship
Debates about reproductive medicine, adoption rights and surrogacy currently suggest that kinship is more than the transmission of biological traits through
heterosexual sex. A look at ancient texts, however, shows that these debates are not a recent development. The discursive construction of kinship has always existed alongside its biological implications. In this article, the discursive aspect of kinship will be connected to the ancient notion of female seed. The question of whether ancient medical texts and the Bible assume that men and women contribute seed to reproduction has generated a large amount of research literature, which also extends into the realm of New Testament scholarship. However, Rev. 12.17 has not been considered in this debate. In this verse, seed in the sense of offspring is attributed to a woman, which connects it to other texts that conceive of women as the origin of seed. The metaphor of female seed is examined more closely in this article to show that the redefinition, metaphorization and denaturalization of kinship in the book of Revelation are consistent with the construction of kinship as a metaphor for Christ-believing communities that are not built on blood lines (see, e.g., Mk 3.31-35; Jn 19.26-27; Gal. 4.19-26; 1 Jn 3.9). Female seed thus links queer kinship to Early Christian texts.

In the following, I will first juxtapose metaphor theory with Judith Butler’s reterritorialization of the imaginary phallus that exemplifies the interrelatedness between bodies and discourses, between the natural and the normative. The concept of the imaginary phallus will be applied to female seed as imaginary seed in the course of this article. In a second step, I will pursue the notion of female seed, first throughout ancient medical and literary texts, and then in the Septuagint. Hagar and her seed will play an important part in this section and in a final discussion of Hagar, Rev. 12 and utopian kinship. First of all, however, I will introduce the three main aspects of this article: female seed, metaphors and queer kinship.

In Rev. 12, a woman gives birth to a son. Her child is then threatened by the Satan-dragon. The dragon’s behaviour finally leads to its violent expulsion from the heavenly sphere. As a reaction to its fall from heaven, the monstrous creature starts to follow the woman in order to kill her. Frustrated by its unsuccessful endeavour, Satan starts to fight against her offspring. The passage ends with the words ‘Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring – those who keep God’s commands (τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ) and hold fast their testimony about Jesus (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ)’ (Rev. 12.17 NIV). The English phrase ‘rest of her offspring’ is expressed by μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς in Greek, meaning literally ‘against the rest of her seed’. It is a conventionalized metaphor (see Coenen 2002: 83-86), because

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1. See Boylan 1984; Chapman 2016; Delaney 1998; Flemming 2018; Gherchanoc 2020; Presti 2014; Quick 2021; Roby 2017.
2. See Myers 2017; Rothschild 2010; Seim 2005; van der Horst 1990.
3. See Dunderberg 2020; Seim 2005: 374; Gerber 2005; Kahl 2000.
‘seed’ means ‘offspring’ in this and – as we will see later – many other passages. The metaphor theorists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) would nonetheless regard it as a structural metaphor and underline its metaphorical impact. Conventionalized metaphors are no less metaphorical than others, because ‘our ordinary conceptual system, in which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature’ (3) and ‘[t]he essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’ (5). The word σπέρμα can designate offspring and seed (botanical and human). It therefore conceptualizes human procreation in terms of the planting of seed. In the sense of offspring, the metaphor of σπέρμα connects procreation as a male bodily process (source domain) to offspring as a concept (target domain) and thus structures the experience of kinship. It structures it in a way that closely connects male procreation to male ancestry lines and genealogies, that is, to male dominion over procreation. The metaphorization of seed, however, reveals that there is a gap between the source (male semen) and the target domain (offspring as a concept), because a metaphorical expression always contains an ‘is’ and an ‘is not’. Hence, if offspring is described as the effect of male semen, difference and similarity is stressed. The gap between ‘is’ and ‘is not’ (Ricœur 1991: 10) suggests that the bond between the male bodily process and the social conceptualization of offspring is not necessarily normative. In Rev. 12.17, the seed is ‘her’ seed in the sense of offspring. The gap between the source domain (male semen) and the target domain (offspring as a naturally caused concept) is widened when the source domain is not male, but female semen. By suggesting that semen is not necessarily male, and that male semen is not necessarily the normative cause of offspring, the notion of female seed stresses that male seed is a metaphor.

The image of female seed can be juxtaposed with queer theory, because the latter frequently resorts to the motif of reproduction and family, questioning the entanglement of what is considered as natural and what counts as normative. One of the most influential books with this impetus is Kath Weston’s Families we Choose (1997). Weston disentangles so-called natural procreation from various social forms of families. Accordingly, Judith Halberstam notes that queerness has the effect of questioning the priority of families over ‘all sorts of other alliances

4. See LSJ (II.3).
5. Hylen 2011: 782: ‘The abundant use of conventional metaphors is one indicator of a deeper human tendency to think metaphorically’. Susan E. Hylen engages with Lakoff/Johnson and the idea of conceptual metaphors to state that the image of conquering shapes the imagination: ‘[I]t may motivate and constrain the imagination to see even God’s accounting of justice as a zero-sum game’ (784). For a literary analysis of structural kinship metaphors in poetic language, see Turner 1987.
6. Delaney 1998: 8: ‘The seemingly simple word seed is anything but simple or neutral. By evoking associations with agriculture and the natural world, the image naturalizes a structure of power relations as it also conceals it’.
7. See, e.g., Rubin 1975; Eng 2003; Butler 2002; see also Carsten 2004.
and coalitions’ (Halberstam 2011:70). Lee Edelman (2004), however, locates queerness outside the social order, because queer sexuality (gay men are his main point of reference; see Parvulescu 2017: 89) does, in his view, not lead to procreation. Queers thus cannot participate in the all-encompassing ideology of ‘reproductive futurism’ (Edelman 2004: 2), because ‘futurity is tied to the Child’ that embodies the ‘telos of the social order’ of sameness (11). His view has often been criticized, recently as obsolete, because the age of reproductive technologies disentangles reproduction from heterosexual sex (see Parvulescu 2017: 89). Being queer does not equate with childlessness anymore. Neither does childlessness equate with ‘no reproduction’ if a wider meaning is ascribed to the notion: ‘As long as the elderly need care, work in the tradition of women’s work … we are dealing with reproduction. Women mostly continue to carry the burden of reproduction’ (90). Not to be part of biological reproduction consequently does not mean to be outside reproductive logics. This criticism fits very well to what we have already said about the effects of metaphorical language: reproduction is not only a designation of bodily processes. José Esteban Muñoz (2009) takes a different path in his critique of Edelman. He repudiates the ‘assertion that the future is the province of the child and therefore not for the queers by arguing that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope’ (Muñoz 2009: 11). According to him, queerness offers the sphere of the utopian to a society, because it ‘lets us feel’ that ‘something is missing’ (1); it detects ‘an opening and indeterminacy’ that opens up, what seems ‘locked-down’ (4). Laura Heston applies these thoughts to queer kinship which, according to her, is utopian, because it embraces fluidity in the question of who is part of the family as well as in the ascription of gender roles within the family (see Heston 2009: vi). It is, however, not utopian if it relies on the reproductive labour of women and thus reiterates exploitive structures. The utopian aspect of queer kinship fits perfectly to the gap that the metaphor of female seed opens up between physical processes and kinship construction. It points to missing female genealogies and opens up the naturalization of male ancestry lines. Female seed and queer notions of kinship are utopian because they underline that procreation is not only natural, but also construed. They accentuate the gap within normative conceptions of families and procreation.8 Judith Butler is certainly the most influential theorist who has written about the coexistence of normative constructions and corporeality. I shall now demonstrate that her theoretical approach can be linked to metaphor theory.

2. Metaphors as Reterritorialization

In Bodies that Matter (2011) Butler speaks of the phallus as phantasm: ‘But precisely because it is an idealization, one which no body can adequately

8. See also Carsten 2004: 29: ‘I pursue the elusive boundary between physical and social connectedness further by focusing on metaphorical uses of kinship’.
approximate, the phallus is a transferable phantasm, and its naturalized link to masculine morphology can be called into question through an aggressive reterritorialization’ (53). The phallus symbolizes the penis, which it is therefore not. This gap between phallus and penis makes the phallus a phantasm always in danger of not being itself. ‘Reterritorialization’ is a notion that frequently appears in Gille Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Mille plateaux* (1980). The French philosophers do not really define the term but explain it by the image of orchid and wasp (see 1980: 17): the orchid deterritorializes because it looks like a wasp. Its genuine ‘orchid-ness’ is threatened in order to attract the wasp. When the wasp carries the orchid’s pollen, the animal helps the plant to reproduce. The wasp reterritorializes the orchid. Likewise, the wasp deterritorializes by becoming part of a plant’s reproductive system and reterritorializes at the same time by keeping itself alive. Orchid and wasp do not have fixed positions: they are in the process of becoming-orchid and becoming-wasp. The phallus in Butler’s chapter ‘The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary’ (2011: 28-57) can be deterritorialized because no specific material form is attributed to it. The gap between penis and phallus is a deterritorialization. The phallus is reterritorialized, for example, in the phallic use of other body parts in lesbian sexual intercourse (see Butler 2011: 55-56): ‘When the phallus is lesbian, then it is and is not a masculinist figure of power … the phallus (re)produces the spectre of the penis only to enact its vanishing …’ (56). This is a specification of Butler’s deconstructive move that links materiality to social construction: The phallus refers to material bodily characteristics and is at the same time a social construction. As she sees it, the link between the phallus and masculine physical characteristics is not a link that exists in the realm of essentiality, of a reality independent of social norms.

Metaphors work like the reterritorialization Butler speaks of. They repeat a word, notion or concept in a new context and by making them symbols reveal the gap between a material given and its symbolic discursivation. The twofold function of metaphors to stress similarity and difference can cause a twofold process: metaphors ‘shape the way an audience understands a particular concept’, but they can also ‘challenge conventional ways of envisioning a particular concept’ (Huber 2007: 79) – in our case, kinship and procreation. When, for example, Christian communities are depicted as families in New Testament texts, the concept of ‘family’ is reterritorialized into an idea of a religious community. In this process, the characteristics of a family are under debate: if a Christian community conceptualizes itself as a family, the importance of the material genetic connection (metaphorically conceptualized as ‘blood’)9 in the definition of a family is questioned. The metaphor reveals a gap between material characteristics of

9. Chapman 2016: 126 states that anthropologists have revealed that ‘blood relatedness is culturally constrained, a uniquely European concept that finds its fullest articulation within British imperialism …’.
families and the imaginary concept of a family. Meanwhile, this same gap shows that materiality and construction are two sides of the same coin.

In this article, I understand Butler’s notion of the phallus as an example that could also be shown with other material corporeal manifestations and their metaphorical deconstruction, for instance, the concept of male seed as the natural and normative source of ancestry lines. In that the metaphor σπέρμα in the sense of ‘offspring’ is applied to women, the concept is repeated and reterritorialized. It reveals the conceptual construction in the physical material and the gap between male procreation and male dominion over ancestry lines. Let us now take a closer look at the metaphorization of seed in the ancient contexts of biblical texts to elaborate further on this gap.

3. Female Seed in Ancient Texts

3.1 Female Seed in Ancient Medical Texts

The idea that already the word ‘semen’ or σπέρμα ‘seed’ is a metaphor can be underlined by its use in Greek literature, as Eireann Marshall states: ‘Marriage is often described in ancient literature as the sowing of fields, and children are seen as the produce, or offshoots from this sowing’ (1998: 104).

3.1.1 The Metaphor of Seed

Aristotle writes: ‘[C]hildren before birth are evidently affected by the mother just as growing plants are by the earth’ (Pol. 1335b; trans. Rackham, LCL). The Hippocratic text On the Nature of the Child states:

For I have explained that everything that grows in the earth lives from the moisture of the earth, and that whatever kind of moisture a particular earth has in it, this same kind of moisture a plant (sc. growing in it) too will have. In the same way, a fetus also lives from its mother in her uterus, and however much health the mother enjoys, the fetus too will have (27.1; trans. Potter, LCL).

The botanical metaphor of the planted seed also pervades through founding myths of cities (see Marshall 1998 and, e.g., Pindar, Pyth. 4.42–43.254). The metaphor makes procreation an (active) male process of sowing and a (more or less passive) female assumption of the seed that is nonetheless essential to the process of growing.

3.1.2 Fatherhood without Motherhood

A notion of procreation that consists of a superior male and an inferior female part culminates in the possibility of fatherhood without motherhood. Aeschylos’s

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10. See also Dunderberg 2020: 465 on Philo’s use of the metaphor.
11. For further reading on botanical metaphors for procreation processes, see Roby 2017.
Eumenides must be read as a ‘pseudo-justification of a mother killer’, not as a ‘reasonable theory’ (Connell 2016: 97 n. 7), but it nonetheless states what others might have thought or wished, too:

The mother of what is called her child is not the parent, but the nurse of the newly-sown embryo. The one who mounts is the parent, whereas she, as a stranger for a stranger, preserves the young plant, if the god does not harm it. And I will show you proof of what I say: a father might exist without a mother’ (Eum., 658-66; trans. Smyth, LCL).

It is not a simple coincidence that Apollo expresses these thoughts to Athena in Aeschylus’s play, because procreation without a mother is also suggested in the story of Athena’s birth. In Homer (see II. 5.880), Zeus fathers (ἐγείναο) her, which can also be translated as ‘gave birth to her’. In Hesiod’s Theogony Zeus swallows Athena’s mother Metis, and Athena thereafter emerges full-grown from Zeus’s forehead (see Theog. 886-99; 924-26). Athena is not the only child Zeus gives birth to: Dionysus is a premature offspring of his mother Semele. Zeus, ‘snatching the sixth-month abortive child from the fire, sewed it in his thigh … But at the proper time Zeus undid the stitches and gave birth to Dionysus …’ (Apollodorus 3.4.3).12

In this context, the birth of Aphrodite Urania is also of interest. She is a product of Uranus’s disembodied penis and grows in the white foam of the sea (see Hesiod, Theog. 185-90). The disembodied penis evokes Judith Butler’s notion of the imaginary phallus, because it is not simply a body part, but it conveys social norms connected to fatherhood. Like the imaginary phallus, it develops a life of its own, detached from its original connection to an individual person, which is at the same time the condition of its possible reterritorialization (we will see later how Isis reterritorializes Osiris’s penis). Plato calls Aphrodite Urania motherless (ἀμήτωρ; Symp. 180d)13 and contrasts her to Aphrodite Pandemos. Whereas the foam-born Aphrodite ‘partakes not of the female but only of the male’ (Symp. 181c; trans. Fowler, LCL), Aphrodite Pandemos partakes in both, female and male, and draws people to love both, men and women. The pure love for the soul of men is a love originating in Aphrodite Urania. Also, Xenophon’s Symposium suggests that Aphrodite Urania is the cause of love for the soul, whereas her counterpart brings forth love for bodies (see Symp. 8.10). In Butler’s discussion of Plato, she states that for Plato, ‘the feminine is a permanent and, hence, non-living, shapeless non-thing which cannot be named … Plato’s discourse on materiality … is one which does not permit the notion of the female body as a human

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12. See also Homer, Hymn 1, where Dionysus is called the ‘Insewn’, ἐιραφιῶτα. For material on pregnant male gods in ANE mythology, see Budin 2015: 32-34.
13. See Dunderberg 2020: 465 and Philo’s use of ἀμήτωρ ἀρχή in Her. 62.
form’ (2011: 95). Feminine materiality is body-less and therefore other bodies are ‘formed through – but not of – that feminine materiality’ (96). In the myths of Athena’s and Aphrodite’s births, the female body is downgraded in the process of procreation. It is not completely bypassed in Athena’s and Dionysus’s birth stories, but the creation of goddesses that embody rationality and purity is finally shaped by the male part: ‘[W]hen a male was portrayed as giving birth, he is not necessarily bent towards a feminine quality ... he might equally well express male completion and omnipotence having consumed or usurped the female’ (Seim 2010: 101).

3.1.3 Motherhood without Fatherhood

The idea of fatherhood without a mother can be understood as the counterpart to parthenogenesis, procreation by women only. Procreation by women only, the bypassing of the male body, is a threat to the patriarchal system. It deterritorializes male dominance in the process of procreation because it questions the derived status of the female within this process. In antiquity, the fear of female independence was based on so-called two- (dual) seed-theories. Galen and Aristotle, for example, held the view that men and women generate seed. Galen states that men and women generate seed that serves procreation at sexual climax. Aristotle also suggests that female seed exists (in the form of menstrual blood), but there is still a significant difference to Galen (see Connell 2016: 107). For Galen, female seed is a white fluid; for Aristotle, menstrual blood is seminal. For Aristotle, women contribute matter by their seed, whereas men contribute the overall organization, the form, of the embryo, because ‘if females had the ability to complete the organization of offspring there would be no need for males’ (Connell 2016: 99; see Aristotle, Gen. an. 722b.13-14). Female semen is not of the same quality, it ‘provides passive matter’ (Quick 2021: 43). Menstrual blood is an indication that women cannot fully heat up their seminal secretion, because they are cold (see Aristotle, Gen. an. 728a.18-22). Aristotle is ‘most keen to establish that form is better than, superior to and separable from matter’ (Connell 2016: 120; see also Presti 2014: 933). Also, Galen makes a clear point against parthenogenesis: female semen is cold and therefore infertile. It cannot generate anything on its own (see Sem. 2.4; UP 14.6; cf. Losekam 2010: 197). Soranus of Ephesus, a Greek physician, goes even further when he writes that female seed is useless in procreation (see Soranus, Gyn. 3.12). All in all, ancient medical theories assumed ‘that the female produces a weaker contribution to

14. On parthenogenesis in the Gospel of John, see Rothschild 2010.
15. The notion was coined by Laqueur 1990, e.g., 35-43; see also Preus 1977; Boylan 1984; Quick 2021: 44 n. 18.
16. Gherchanoc 2020, however, attenuates the idea that the female body has no effect on the physical and psychical characteristics of a child in ancient texts.
generation and that the female body suffers a related infirmity’ (Connell 2016: 119).\(^{17}\)

From the point of view of ancient medical theories, the woman in Revelation is under the suspicion of parthenogenesis. No father of her child is mentioned.\(^{18}\) Her offspring is only her seed. Hence, she seems like a contradiction to Aristotle and Galen. This contradiction links her to what Nicolò Sassi (2019) calls the ‘Shaping of the Sacred Feminine’, female divine characters, who are shaped as the origin and cause of life – contrary to the assessment that life is created through, not by, female bodies. Sassi compares the Gnostic hymn of the *Three Forms of the First Thought* or *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII.1), dating probably from the second century, chanted by a voice belonging to the First Thought of the invisible spirit, to the characteristics of the Egyptian goddess Isis. It comes full circle that Isis can also be compared to the woman in Rev. 12 (see Schreiber 2007; von Gemünden 2019: 306-10; Yarbro Collins 2009: 21).\(^{19}\) Mythology has it that Isis was Osiris’s sister and wife. As their second brother Seth wanted to regain all the power, he killed Osiris, cutting his body into pieces and scattering it all over the country (see Diodorus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.21). Isis put the pieces together again, but she could not find his penis. Necessity being the mother of invention, Isis built a surrogate – imaginary? – phallus (see Plutarch, *Is. Os.* 18) on the body of Osiris and conceived a child, Horus, who was then threatened by Seth. Isis had to flee with him to protect him. The myth of Isis and Osiris reterritorializes the phallus that the myth of Aphrodite Urania deterritorializes by making it a detachable body part that can also be rebuilt with other materials. Isis can be depicted with astral symbols like the sun, the moon and stars (see von Gemünden 2019: 306 nn. 82, 84) – comparable to the woman in

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17. The extensive debate on similarities and differences between Aristotle and Galen has been summarized by Flemming 2018: 107: ‘Galen was, after all, a two-seed man, but his feeble female *sperma* enacts the sexual hierarchy just as clearly as Aristotle’s un-concocted female residue. Galen himself argued that it does so more clearly, or, at least, that this forms part of a more complete and cogent account of female imperfection than Aristotle offered’; see also Flemming 2021.

18. See Barr 2009: 66, who detects a ‘lack of symmetry’ between Rev. 12 and myths in Imperial cults: ‘[T]he Queen Mother does not have a husband present’.

19. I will compare her to Hagar later. This does not mean that one comparison is more accurate than the other, but the metaphorical conception of the woman in Rev. 12 allows for different aspects and intertextual connections to be called to the readers’ minds. To tie the meaning of this metaphor down to one single explanation would mean to misunderstand the way metaphors work; see, e.g., another explanation as to the woman’s identity in Dochhorn 2010: 140-59, who sees in her the ‘woman Zion’; see also Barr 2009: 60: ‘[M]ythological thinking is not much concerned with discrete identities … Her traits suggest a conflation of the various Queen of Heaven myths with the stories of Israel and Eve …’, or Yarbro Collins 2009: 22-24, who compares the woman to Leto.
Seth, who threatened her, can be portrayed as a dragon – comparable to the dragon who threatens the woman in Revelation. Moreover, Isis (Isis Serapis) was worshipped in Ephesus and Pergamon (see von Gemünden 2019: 310). She is therefore not only an iconographic, but also a local context of the woman in Rev. 12.

Isis and the woman in Rev. 12 have a lot in common, but an intertextual thread also leads to Protennoia, the voice of the First Thought. She is trimorphic, that is, she embodies three aspects of the invisible spirit’s first thought (Evans 1993: 50). The Coptic text (NHC XIII.1) can accordingly be divided into three aretalogies portraying first Protennoia as the Voice of the divine Thought, second as the Speech of this Thought’s Voice and, third, as the Word of the Speech of the Thought’s Voice (see Turner 1990: 376): ‘first she comes as an all-pervasive general sound (hrouu), then as the articulation of that sound in voice (Smē), and finally as the rational content of speech (logos)’ (Emmel 1978: 5).

Different sections of Protennoia’s self-presentation start with ‘I am’, suggesting an intertextual link to the Isis-aretalogies in Diodorus, *Bibl. Hist.* 1.27.3-5 (see Turner 1990: 384). Moreover, the ending of the longer version of the Apocryphon of John (II.1.30,11–31,25) is similar to passages in NHC XIII.1.21 There, the Saviour (‘Father, Mother, Son’; Ap. John II.1.2,14-15) presents himself as the thrice-descending Pronoia. Given many similarities between the two texts (see Turner 1990: 384-92), John D. Turner (1990) suggests that ‘*The Trimorphic Protennoia* is an expansion based upon the source behind the hymnic Pronoia text now found in the longer ending of the Apocryphon of John’ (386). A connection to John’s gospel and Johannine language is also evident and probably ‘due to a sapiential background common to the Johannine prologue and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*’ (Turner 1990: 393). It is possible to suggest a contextual line between the idea of female semen in *The Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Apocalypse of John.22 Protennoia, appears as a queer creator of life: ‘I am

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20. See the depiction of a fresco in Philolacus’s house in Pompeji in von Gemünden 2019: 307 (LIMC 5.2, 513 Isis 210; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MANNapoli_8836_Isis_Fortune_painting.jpg, 9.9.2021).
21. E.g., 38.11-16 and 40.12-18 ‘are drawn from the *Apocryphon of John* and reworded as first-person’; Turner 1990: 376.
22. This supposed line does not imply a statement on historical authorship, but on the attribution of authorship in the sense of a ‘Johannine’ discourse that functions under the label of the author-name ‘John’ (see Breu 2019; Breu 2020: 157-59; King 2006:10). We have seen that *The Trimorphic Protennoia* and *The Apocryphon of John* are connected. The *Apocryphon of John* is a competitive sequel to the Gospel of John, as Karen King suggests in her comparison of both texts (2006: 235-38): The earlier text announces the *parousia* of Christ in 14.3, the later text represents it. King, however, does not mention allusions between the *Apocryphon* and the Apocalypse. Elaine Pagels (2013:87) advances the view that the *Apocryphon* offers an addition to the Apocalypse without further elaborations. It is evident, however, that there are no direct quotations, but some intertextual links between the *Apocryphon of John* and
androgynous. (2) [I am Mother (and) I am] Father since [I] (3) [copulate] with myself. I [copulate] with myself (4) [and with those who love] me, [and] (5) it is through me alone that the All [stands firm]. I am the Womb (6) [that gives shape (εἰκών)] to the All by giving birth to the Light/that (7) [shines in] splendor (8)’ (Three Forms 45.2-8; trans. Turner 1990: 402-33). She is not simply a female figure, but transcends clear ascriptions of gender.23 It fits very well into the overall picture that she speaks of her own seed: ‘I am unrestrainable together with my (17) Seed (σπέρμα), and my Seed (σπέρμα), which is mine, I shall/[place] (18)/into the holy Light within an (19)/incomprehensible Silence. Amen (20)’ (Three Forms 50.17-20); or: ‘I cry out in everyone, and they recognize it (i.e., the voice), since a seed (σπέρμα) indwells [them]’ (Three Forms 36.15-16; trans. Turner 1990).

Another text from the Nag Hammadi Library speaks of procreation without a father, but pejoratively. In the Hypostasis of the Archons (NHC II.4), Sophia, the hypostasis of wisdom, creates life without a male partner. Consequently, matter is established as part of a shadow empire. Her son is a miscarriage, an androgynous lion-like being called Yaldabaoth.

In antiquity, seed was not regarded as a matter only attributed to men, but female seed was degraded as not having the same effect on procreation as male seed. The narration of the woman in Rev. 12 and her son fits into a series of texts that detach procreation from a necessary union between a man and a woman. It thereby questions notions of the process of procreation as a natural given. Seed is revealed as a metaphor that undermines patriarchy when detached from male procreation, because it stresses the possible self-sufficiency of women. It thus functions like Judith Butler’s reterritorialization: It denaturalizes seemingly natural norms in that it is detached from its primary input space, male procreation, and applied to what is conceived of as derived from male physical conditions, female procreation.

We will now look at a further elaboration of this metaphor, its use in the sense of ‘offspring’ in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint.

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23. On the figure’s ambivalent role, see Gilhus 1994.
3.2 Seed in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint

In this section, we will take a closer look at the metaphor of seed in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint. We will progress from a wider perspective to a close-up one by focusing first on the use of seed as offspring that mostly designates male procreation, then on the ascription of seed to women and finally on the attribution of seed to a specific woman, the Egyptian slave Hagar.

3.2.1 Seed as Offspring

The metaphor of ‘seed’ is frequently used to designate offspring in the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint. Looking at the passages in the LXX containing the word σπέρμα (♀ in the Hebrew Bible) in the sense of offspring, it becomes obvious that this word is mostly applied to men, frequently followed by the pronoun αὐτοῦ or αὐτῶν, often by σου. Most frequently, it designates Abraham’s offspring (e.g., Gen. 13.15-16; Isa. 41.8; cf. Jn 8.33; 7.42), but also Isaac’s (e.g., Gen. 26.24), Jacob’s (e.g., Gen. 28.4; Num. 23.10), Aaron’s (e.g., Exod. 28.43; Num. 17.5) and David’s (e.g., 1 Sam. 24.22). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are often mentioned as a chain of ancestors (e.g., Exod. 33.1; Deut. 1.8). Women appear as the means to produce offspring, for example, in the passage in 1 Sam. 2.20.

The fact that offspring is mostly attributed to men matches genealogies that create history and identity in the Septuagint and Hebrew Bible (see Gen. 4; 5; 10; 11; 25: 35; 36; 46; Exod. 1; 6; Num. 3; Ruth 4). Genealogies are patrilineal, deriving kinship from the father’s line of ancestors. Nonetheless, women are frequently named and appear in OT genealogies. Hagar, for instance, is part of kinship constructions and identity formation, even when not determining a line of ancestry (see Chapman 2016: 1-5). She is named in a genealogy in Gen. 25.12 as an essential part of a family line: ‘This is the account of the family line of Abraham’s son Ishmael, whom Sarah’s slave, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham’ (NIV).

24. I focus on the LXX here to maintain the Greek word σπέρμα as a connection between ancient medical traditions and the Bible.

25. Ada and Zilla in Gen. 4.19; Sarai and Milka in Gen. 11.29; Ketura in Gen. 25.1; Lea, Rahel, Bilha and Zilpa in Gen 35.23-26; Ada, Oholibama and Basemat in Gen. 36.2-5; Jochebed in Exod. 6.20; and Elisheba in Exod. 6.23.

26. In Jesus’ genealogy in Mt. 1, the women mentioned are Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Uria’s wife. The line of ancestors leads to Joseph, Jesus’ legal father. Mary is mentioned as the woman who gave birth to Jesus. This reveals that Jesus’ Davidic ancestry line is not a genetic one. Scholars have suggested that this text supposes Jesus’ adoption by Joseph (see Friedeman 2020) and therefore his integration into the Davidic ancestry line. Davidic offspring is thus revealed as a metaphorical construction by the text because it suggests that Davidic ancestry is not simply a question of genetics, but a construed family narrative that is, in the case of Jesus, based on a legally asserted chosen family. The normality of adoptions in Rome suggests that ‘paternity’ was defined ‘less in biological and more in legal terms’ (Seim 2010: 109).
3.2.2 Female Seed
At some points, the patrilineal system of ancestry in biblical texts nonetheless allows for an attribution of seed in the sense of offspring to women. We will now have a closer look at those passages that connect seed/offspring to a woman.

In Gen. 3.15 God punishes the snake by instigating animosity between the snake’s and the woman’s offspring/seed.27 In this passage, σπέρμα is accompanied by a female pronoun. It suggests the idea of a female ancestry line when seen as a prefiguration of Gen. 3.20, where Adam calls his wife ‘Eve’, ‘because she would become the mother of all the living’.

Also Lev. 12.2 is of interest here, a passage that has been analysed by Laura Quick (2021: 48-49; see also Erbele-Küster 2017: 107): ‘When a woman produces seed and bears a male child, she will be unclean seven days, as she is unclean during the days of her menstruation’ (trans. Quick 2021: 49).28 The active hiphil stem of the word זרע in the Hebrew Bible (‘to produce seed’; cf. Gen. 1.11-12) has been corrected to the passive niphal stem (‘to become pregnant’) by the Samaritan Pentateuch, followed by the LXX (ἥτις ἐὰν σπερματισθῇ ‘if she is impregnated’). Quick therefore concludes that ‘the woman has produced זרע “…seed” equivalent to that produced by the male, which is to say, semen’ (2021: 49; see also Heb. 11.1129).

Female seed also appears in Ruth 4.12. Boaz is blessed by the elders with the words: ‘May your house become like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, from the seed whom the Lord gives to you from this young woman’ (trans. Quick 2021: 49).30 ‘Grammatically, the “seed” comes not from Boaz, but from both God and the young woman, namely Ruth’ (Quick 2021: 49).

These few examples underline once again that the notion of female seed is not common in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint. The multiple meanings of seed (botanic/offspring/semen) led to translations that covered up the possible attribution of seed to a woman in Lev. 12.2 and Ruth 4.12. Hence, female seed was regarded as queer or at least unusual by these translations. Contemporary scholars like Quick, however, assume that the notion of female seed existed in Ancient Israel.

3.2.3 Hagar and Female Seed
In Gen. 16.10 seed is attributed to a slave-woman, Hagar. Abraham and Sarai are not blessed with children for a long time. They decide to turn to the slave Hagar as a surrogate mother. But when Hagar gets pregnant, Sarai feels such a strong animosity that Hagar is forced to flee into the desert. She survives at a

27. This seed of a woman has been interpreted as a reference to Christ by the Church Fathers; see Irenaeus, Haer. 5.21. Jesus appears as seed in Gal. 3.16.
28. Emphasis original.
29. See van der Horst 1990 on this passage.
30. Emphasis original.
place near a spring (like the woman in Rev. 12 for whom a place is prepared in the desert). God’s angel tells Hagar to come back, transmitting God’s message: ‘I will increase your descendants (σπέρμα) so much that they will be too numerous to count’. In this verse, σπέρμα is connected to a woman. Later on, Hagar is sent to the desert a second time, this time with her son Ishmael. Sarah, who meanwhile had given birth to Isaac, fears for Isaac’s inheritance. God’s angel appears a second time. This time he talks to Abraham: ‘I will make the son (ὑιός) of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring (σπέρμα)’ (Gen. 21.13). In this verse, Abraham is the source of σπέρμα, whereas Hagar’s kinship to Ishmael is expressed by the word υιός. Yvonne Sherwood states that Hagar shares many attributes with those patriarchs to whom the word σπέρμα is mainly attributed:

[S]he becomes a quasi-patriarch, receiving a direct repetition of the Abrahamic promise … Acting out all the patriarchal prerogatives, she names her own progeny and she names God, and then she puts a signpost in the landscape (just like the patriarchs), naming a well as a sign of her encounter with the God who hears (Gen. 16.3; 16.14; cf. 22.14). (2018: 462)

Hagar’s motherhood as a surrogate mother and Sarai’s animosity reveal that, although surrogacy was an accepted means to attain legal offspring by adoption, the construction of kinship was under debate and differentiated from blood ties. Philo conceives of adopted children as both insiders and outsiders: ‘In the same way, I should say, adopted children, in so far as they inherit from their adopters, rank with the family; in so far as they are not their actual children (οὐ γεγέννηται πρὸς αὐτῶν), with outsiders’ (Philo, Congr. 23; trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL).

A thin line connects Hagar’s story to another passage that explicitly speaks of female ancestry. In Gen. 24.60 Rebecca, Isaac’s future wife, is chosen by Abraham’s messenger. Her family says farewell with the words: ‘Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring (σπέρμα) possess the cities of their enemies’. Two verses later, the first encounter between Isaac and Rebecca is described. Isaac’s new dwelling place (Gen. 24.62) is the same place Hagar called ‘well of the living one who sees me’ (Gen. 16.14), when God supported her in her distress. This topographic link connects Hagar’s offspring, Ishmael, to his half-brother’s Isaac’s new family with Rebecca.

To summarize, in the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint, most instances of the word ‘seed’ in the sense of ‘offspring’ connect it to men. Some passages, though, speak of female seed and thus link the Bible to ancient medical theories. These theories often suppose a two-seed-theory, suggesting that men and women produce seed in the process of procreation. Some texts use the notion of female seed in the sense of sperm (Lev. 12.2; Ruth 4.12), some attribute seed in the sense of offspring to women (Gen. 3.15; 16.10; 24.60). All of them undermine the
patrilinear system of male ancestry because they show that kinship is not only a question of genetics, but also a result of narrative construction and metaphorization.\textsuperscript{31} If kinship is the result of narrative construction, the possibility of different narratives remains open. These (future, utopian) narratives are already inscribed in biblical texts about Eve, Rebecca and Hagar, and their genealogies:

> In recent dramatic changes to the nuclear family (blended families, surrogate families, i.v.f, gay parents), we feel the strange contemporaneity of the old figure of Hagar … Hagar appears as an intrusive remnant of older times when families and nations were more open because they were written, as stories – not recorded as bureaucratic records … The story of Hagar proclaims that families and solidarities and origins are not given or natural. They are created. (Sherwood 2018: 465)

### 4. Queer Kinship in Revelation?

#### 4.1 Revelation 12 and Hagar

The idea of female seed in the sense of offspring suggests a connection between Hagar and the woman in Rev. 12 that can be underlined by narrative similarities: Both are mothers of sons, they are threatened and have to flee, they find refuge in the desert (twice), God provides for them, both are connected to water (see Treacy-Cole 2005). Above, we saw similarities between Isis and the woman in Rev. 12, but parallels between the woman and Hagar are also striking and refer to comparable motives in Hagar’s story and Israel’s Exodus from Egypt (Egyptian slavery, flight, desert, God provides).\textsuperscript{32} The \textit{tertium comparationis} between Isis, Hagar and the woman in Rev. 12 is a form of motherhood that points to the constructed aspect of kinship. Isis gets pregnant from a dead man, Hagar is a surrogate mother, and in Rev. 12 no male partner is mentioned.

Hagar not only appears as a prefiguration of the woman in Rev. 12, she is also part of Paul’s allegory of Hagar and Sarah in Gal. 4.21-26:

> Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? (21) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman (22). His son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise (23). These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One

\textsuperscript{31} Besides female seed, breast milk can be an important part of kinship construction in the OT. It is a good example to show how closely bodily characteristics and social construction are connected, because some OT texts reveal the ‘understanding that a mother or wet nurse transmitted her ethnicity and status (royal or priestly) to her suckling through the act of breastfeeding … Children who nursed from the same mother had a relationship similar to that of uterine siblings’ (Chapman 2016: 125). For the NT use of this metaphor, see Myers 2017: 77-108.

\textsuperscript{32} See Dozeman 1998: 28-32, who also elaborates on similarities between Hagar and Moses.
covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar (24). Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children (25). But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother (26) (NIV).

Marianne Bjelland Kartzow explains this passage from an intersectional perspective as a metaphorical conceptualization that uses female characters in a process of othering:

His [Paul’s] target is to explain the difference between us and them; the abstract phenomenon of being under the law is explained by a more concrete phenomenon: the difference between the foreign slave-motherhood and familial wife-motherhood. He also needs a thought figure in which heritage and offspring play a role. Two versions of women and mothers, Sarah and Hagar, the first wife and the concubine-slave, function as the sources. (2018: 60)

Bjelland Kartzow states that offspring is used as a metaphorical (and rhetorical) means here. This assessment is also made by Brigitte Kahl (2000), who speaks of a ‘christocentric spermatology’ (41) in Galatians that shifts focus from physical fatherhood to birth and mother terminology in Gal. 4. It even leads Paul to state that he gives birth in Gal. 4.19 (see 2000: 42). The metaphorization of kinship in Gal. 4 and Rev. 12 is even stressed by the fact that both texts belong to the field of figurative language. Paul writes that this passage should be understood allegorically (ἀλληγορούμενα; Gal. 4.24), and the text about the woman in Rev. 12 is introduced as a σημεῖον ‘sign’ (see Rev. 12.1). Given the supposition among New Testament scholars that Revelation contains confrontations with Pauline community building and theology (see Müller-Fieberg 2009), the intertextual link might not be just accidental.

The proximity of the woman in Rev. 12 to Hagar contains a point that seems to be directed towards Paul’s rhetorical strategy in Gal. 4. His main goal has been described as stating that God’s promise to Abraham includes ‘Israel and other nations alike’ against opponents, who wanted new Christ-believers to adhere to the whole law, including circumcision (see Hogeterp 2010: 352). Philo describes Hagar as ‘an Egyptian by birth (γένος), but a Hebrew by her rule of life (τὴν δὲ προαίρεσιν)’ (Philo, Abr. 251, trans. Colson and Whitaker, LCL). To him, Hagar plays a positive role; she becomes Hebrew by choice (see Borgen 2021: 183). Paul, on the contrary, suspects that his opponents ‘copy the pattern of Hagar’ (Borgen 2021: 179) by becoming ‘Hebrews by their rule of life’. They want non-Judean converts to follow the Laws of Moses, including circumcision, by choice, which is – according to Paul – a way of staying enslaved (see 2021:

33. See also Schüssler-Fiorenza 1980: 126-27; Müller 2014: 129; Karrer 2017: 66.
34. Eastman 2006: 311 calls this a ‘new consensus’ on the passage.
183). Paul constructs his readers as offspring of Sarah. They should not turn to a mother who is not their birth mother by becoming Hebrew by choice.

By contrast, the woman in Rev. 12 shares characteristics with Hagar, suggesting that ‘those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus’ (Rev. 12.17) are Hagar’s offspring. In Revelation, as in Paul’s allegory, Hagar’s offspring is connected to a certain way of life, which is a positive thing in Revelation and bears negative connotations in Paul’s text. The Pauline sentence ‘the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother’ (Gal. 4.26) fits very well into the overall storyline of Revelation. In Revelation, the heavenly Jerusalem descends from heaven providing a place of godly presence. This heavenly city is not depicted as a mother, however, but as a bride (see Rev. 21.9-10). Those who adhere to her are told to enter her (see Rev. 22.14). They are not depicted as her natural offspring, but as a ‘chosen family’. Accordingly, the mother in Rev. 12 is a threatened mother relegated to the periphery of the desert, and her offspring is a chosen family consisting of ‘those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus’. Ancestry is based on a decision. But, like Hagar is Sarah’s counterpart in Paul, the antagonist to the woman in Rev. 12 and the bride in Rev. 21 is also another woman: the whore Babylon. The chosen family is told to get out of her (see Rev. 18.4). The identity of ancient Christ-believers is conceptualized as kinship with the ‘right’ woman in Paul and Revelation. This metaphorical use of kinship in the sense of being on the right side reveals that kinship construction can be detached from genetic material and likewise depends on its existence. Genetic material is the input space the metaphor is built on. The metaphor of seed contains the decision to belong to a group; it does not only designate a natural given. The idea of female ancestry connected to female seed challenges the idea of unified, stable family ties. It underlines that kinship is a construction that offers a metaphorical framing for the question of who is an insider and who is an outsider.

4.2 Revelation and Utopia

In this last section of my article, I draw lines between the woman in Rev. 12 and the 144,000 in Rev. 14, in order to determine that a reading of Revelation alongside queer kinship and metaphor theory can be part of an imagined different future.

35. Leithart 2018: 29 identifies the woman in Rev. 12 with Hagar, but his strict allegorical dichotomy that also identifies Hagar’s offspring with ‘Jews’, Hagar with the whore Babylon in Rev. 17 and Paul’s Sarah with the heavenly Jerusalem has an anti-Semitic effect that does not fit to Revelation’s continuation of OT prophecy and texts (see, e.g., Kowalski 2011).

36. Müller-Fieberg 2009: 101: ‘Noch vor Johannes von Patmos verquickt Paulus das Stadtmotiv mit demjenigen antagonistischer Frauengestalten’.
Female figures in Revelation do not appear in a good light. A perspective on Revelation that ‘challenges conventional ways of envisioning’ (see Huber 2007: 79) procreation does not change this. It does, however, deconstruct male dominion over procreation and ancestry lines. The here-engaged reading of female seed in Rev. 12 thus counters the long tradition of a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ (Ricœur 2008: 30), which detects the continuation and enforcement of patriarchal/kyriarchal structures within New Testament texts and their interpretations, with a ‘reparative reading’ (Sedgwick 2003) that engages hope and the imagination of a different future (see 2003: 146).

As far as queer kinship is concerned, the metaphor of female seed is not an isolated case within the book of Revelation and its metaphorical world: The 144,000, who ‘have not defiled themselves with women’ (Rev. 14.4), keep their seed to themselves, like soldiers before battle or priests (see Stenström 2011: 188), whereas the woman in Rev. 12 produces seed in the sense of offspring. The virginal metaphor puts the Christ-believing community metaphorically outside the logics of reproduction and blurs gender ascriptions: the virgins are male. The male plural form of virgins is employed here (παρθένοι γάρ εἰσιν), which is unusual in the first century (see Huber 2008: 5, 7). Furthermore, they are depicted as brides marked with the name of the Lamb (see 2008: 17). The implicit de-emphasis on procreation can be read as ‘motivated by social resistance’ (2008: 20) to the Roman Imperial paradigm of ‘Masculinity-as-fatherhood’, which was closely connected to the Imperial Cult. The Imperial family embodied the ideal household, whereas living a virginal life was regarded as unnatural (see Burrus 2005: 65). The male virgins ‘reject the Imperial call to “focus on family”’ (Huber 2008: 20). Instead, their new community is based on metaphorical kinship with the Lamb. Kinship between God, the Lamb and the Christ-believers offers an alter-imperial concept of kinship that counters the ideal of the Imperial

37. This also applies for Babylon and Jezebel; see, e.g., Breu 2020: 289-302; Carter 2009; Marshall 2009; Menéndez-Antuña 2018; Økland 2009; Selvidge 1996; Stewart 2017; Thimmes 2009; Yarbro Collins 2009.
38. Schüssler-Fiorenza 1995: 15: ‘A hermeneutics of suspicion does not presuppose the feminist authority and truth of the Bible, but takes as its starting point the assumption that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and serve patriarchal functions’.
39. See also Muñoz 2009: 12.
40. The Lamb itself also blurs clear gender ascriptions. It is feminized as a wounded and passive object and likewise depicted as a male ruler (see Frilingos 2003). Jesus’ breasts in Rev. 1.13 add an interesting picture to this observation (see Petersen 2018: 26-27).
41. See also Stenström 2011: 198.
42. The question of how queer Revelation is, because it is ‘at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant’ within the Roman Empire would make an interesting paper of its own. As this is, however, not the main focus of this article, I refer to others, who have dealt with Revelation’s relation to the Empire; see, e.g., Aymer 2005 and her term ‘alter imperial’; see also Wood 2015; Menéndez-Antuña 2018.
family (see Huber 2007: 182). The virginal metaphor is part of a redefinition, metaphorization and denaturalization of kinship like the metaphor of female seed. Sexual self-control distinguishes the 144,000, whereas Tina Pippin reads the woman in Rev. 12 as an example of ‘women’s reproductive power controlled by men’ (Pippin 1992a: 201) in her approach to Revelation, which is based on a hermeneutics of suspicion. Tina Pippin focuses on Revelation’s female figures and stresses their passivity and victimization (see 1992b: 69). The woman in Rev. 12 is placed in exile, reduced to giving birth (see 1992b: 71-72) and disappears from the narration after her child is born, who is then taken away from her. The woman in Rev. 12, however, is not only passive; she also flees into the desert and gives birth to a child. She is the origin of an ancestral line. The notion of female seed that defines the origin of an ancestral line does not simply realign with the recovery of the woman’s agency. It helps to imagine that male procreation and male genealogy do not have to be intertwined like a ‘locked-down’ system forever. It points to what is missing, to female genealogies: ‘The suppression of the genealogy of women correlates to the reduction of women to the role of natural reproduction. The key to challenging the relegation of women to the natural realm, then, lies in creating a genealogy specific to women’ (VanderBerg 2005: 137).

It would be too simple, however, to conclude from these metaphorical concepts of kinship that Revelation as such is queer, given the difficulties of defining this term, which is ‘by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers’ (Halperin 1995: 62). This elusive definition provokes a never-ending search for what is queer or what performs queerness. It is not a characteristic tied to one thing; it disturbs identities rather than defining them (see Edelman 2004: 17). Revelation is at odds with the dominant and is itself dominant at the same time as, e.g., the depiction of female figures and the notion ‘alter-imperial’ suggest, and as its problematic reception history shows until today. Queerness

43. Sechrest 2016: 123 sees in Rev. 12.4 the woman’s ‘capacity for flight’ and thus stresses her agency. She moreover reframes the desert as a chosen refuge: Instead of flying from attack, ‘noting that with wings the woman could have gone anywhere, we can highlight that she flies into the desert’ (124). Instead of focusing with Love Sechrest on the cause of the flight as a search for conflict with Babylon, who dwells in the desert, I advocate a different approach to space in Revelation. I do not think that the woman and Babylon meet there but conceive of space as a multidimensional structural metaphor describing the woman’s location as an in-between-space, between affliction and salvation, that points to the necessity of utopian thinking.

44. Natasja VanderBerg here summarizes Luce Irigaray’s thoughts on female genealogy; see Irigaray 1993.

45. See also the notion ‘(Kontrast-)Analogie’/‘contrastive analogy’, coined by Witulski 2017: 289; see Breu 2020: 139-150.

46. See, e.g., de Villiers 2015; van Henten 2017; Merkt, Nicklas, and Verheyden 2011.
has to be searched for in the text. Revelation’s kinship metaphors, however, can be read as queering the naturalization of genealogies and relatedness. ‘The normal’ and ‘the legitimate’ are often connected to what is constructed as natural, such as notions of kinship that are based on the entanglement of family with bodily and genetic characteristics. Kinship metaphors in Revelation that queer normative notions of kinship can be part of ‘mapping utopia’ (see Muñoz 2009: 18). Utopia on a map is an empty space or a gap. It is thus comparable to the gap between the corporal-material and metaphorical meaning of ‘virgin’ and ‘female seed’ that also points to the gap between male procreation and male dominion over genealogies. Also, the safe space provided for the woman in Rev. 12 in the desert is a gap, a space that cannot be accessed by the dragon and fully belongs to neither earth nor heaven (see Breu 2018: 32-35). In this space, the already existing and the still missing realization of God’s alter-Empire on earth clash together. The woman’s active flight exposes what is missing; it points to the negative spin-offs of a patriarchal connection between female reproductive power and male dominion that pins women down to giving birth and being mothers. The portrait of the birthing woman in distress, who is being cared for, points to the missing care for mothers, who ‘carry the burden of reproduction, not only because they are implicated in the ideology of the child but also because history and an enduring political economy force them into this role …’ (Parvulescu 2017: 90).

This point of view does not necessarily make Revelation (or Rev. 12) feminist and/or queer, but it shows that even the depiction of a victimized woman can be read in a reparative way, because it contains gaps. These gaps need to be mapped in order to map utopia.

5. Conclusions

I showed in this article that Butler’s notion of the imaginary phallus and its reterritorialization can be applied to the metaphor of female seed that appears in ancient medical theories and biblical texts. Not only the phallus, but also seed can be described as imaginary. If this link between the realm of the imaginary and concrete body parts or bodily functions is juxtaposed with metaphor theory, it stresses that procreation has always been a mix of bodily processes and social constructions. Like the phallus, seed is a ‘transferable phantasm’ (Butler 2011: 53) that can be attributed to women and thus reveals patrilineal and heteronormative kinship constructions as imaginary by detaching them from seemingly natural facts.

The stories of Isis, Hagar, Protennoia and the woman in Rev. 12 are timely in a certain sense. They show that kinship not only became queer since same sex couples have gained access to reproductive medicine and adoption. Kinship has already been queer in ancient times, because the metaphorical conceptualization
of reproduction always produced a gap that caused reterritorializations of the ‘spreading of seed’. Kinship, a concept that draws boundaries, always contained the possibility to redefine and blur these same boundaries. It therefore comes as no surprise that the conceptualization of adherence to Christ as a chosen family in Rev. 12 matches queer theories on forms of relatedness that are not based on blood ties.

There is not only an imaginary phallus, but also imaginary seed. The seemingly natural process of procreation is also a socially normalized concept. Bodies and social norms have always been closely connected: a glance at biblical and other ancient texts reveals that the matter of seed has continuously been a matter of discourse. The juxtaposition of seed and the imaginary encourages new ways of thinking about procreation and its social discursivation. It opens up a gap for the imagination of a different future of female genealogies, care for mothers and the acknowledgment of diverse forms of kinship.⁴⁷

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