

The characteristics and reception of Jacob

The biblical patriarch Jacob, primary subject of the Jacob Cycle (Genesis 25-50), is of enormous significance to the history and identity of the nation which bears his name, Israel.¹ This essay will explore the characteristics of Jacob and consider whether Jacob's story of struggle and blessing might in fact be a metaphor for the nation.² Illuminating aspects of Jewish and Christian reception of Jacob will be examined, including inter-textual biblical references, and insights from a Queer Theology perspective will be applied.³ This analysis will focus on what is, for this student, the 'hinge passage' in the Jacob Cycle: Jacob wrestling with an angel (Gen. 32:22-32);⁴ a piece of contemporary artwork, a lithograph by Benton Murdoch Spruance, *Vanity II: Jacob and the Angel*, will be assessed to illustrate a queer reception of Jacob's struggle. The Jacob Cycle will be considered into three sections: *Blessing and Struggle*, *Jacob and the Angel*, and *Struggle and Blessing*.⁵

'Blessing and Struggle'

In Genesis 25, God tells Rebekah, who was previously barren: 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger' (v.23). This sets the scene for what follows: Esau is the firstborn, with Jacob gripping his heel (v.26). Esau is born 'red, all his body like a hairy mantle' (v.25) and grows up to be a strong, skilled hunter – his father Isaac's favourite. Meanwhile Jacob would become 'a quiet man, living in tents', and the favourite of his mother (vv.27-28). Mathias Winkler highlights the dynamic of the 'masculine' Esau juxtaposed with the 'feminine' Jacob.⁶ Michael Carden concurs, illuminating the contrasting 'heteronormative' Esau with 'effeminate' Jacob, questioning the implicit sexuality of a man 'living in tents' – a distinctly female realm. He considers an interpretation of the twins as gay, suggesting that stereotypical roles of 'bear' and 'femme' might be applied

¹ Jacob is given the new name 'Israel' (Gen. 32:28), although the Genesis narrative continues to use the name Jacob until chapter 37, and occasionally thereafter; for ease of understanding and consistency, the name Jacob will be used throughout this essay, even when referring to events which follow Genesis 32.

² None of the sources in the bibliography for this study appear to consider the character of Jacob to be entirely fictitious, although a number of scholars recognise the 'archetypal' nature of the patriarchs in Genesis and acknowledge that the final form of the Genesis narrative is a composite work, not completed until the time of the Babylonian exile and so reflecting the concerns of that period, among them: T.E. FRETHERM 'The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections' in *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Vol. I. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), pp.19-31.

³ Queer Theology has been a fruitful area of inquiry for this student of Biblical Interpretation, as it seeks to challenge accepted conventions, particularly where these relate to matters of personal identity (see: P.S. CHENG 'Contributions from Queer Theory' in A. Thatcher (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality and Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.153.). In this present study, it is hoped that the removal of a heteronormative perspective might offer fresh insights into the characteristics of Jacob.

⁴ There are many examples of 'hinge passages' in the Bible which fall at the central point within a narrative and which reveal a deeper, central meaning to the whole story which renders the other details to be of less significance; for this student, Jacob wrestling at Peniel, taking on the identity of Israel, would appear to be the central purpose of the entire Jacob Cycle, embodying Jacob's struggle. It is recognised as the 'climax of [Jacob's] entire biography' by Bergsma and Pitre, see: J. BERGSMAN and B. PITRE *A Catholic Introduction to The Bible: The Old Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2018), p.144.

⁵ These subheadings have been chosen to reflect the chiasmic structure which, for this student at least, is apparent in the Jacob Cycle, and highlight the centrality of Jacob's struggle at Peniel (Genesis 32).

⁶ M. WINKLER 'The ancestors' masculinities in Genesis' in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2021, Vol.46(2) [Online].

to the brothers, comparing them with Enkidu and Gilgamesh in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.⁷ Whilst this inference of Jacob's homosexuality, or at least queerness, is interesting, the important characteristic for this student is Jacob's non-conformity to the gender expectations of a patriarch, and his consequent struggles.

Jacob's initial struggle is with Esau. He acquires his brother's birthright by offering a desperate, famished Esau a bowl of stew in exchange for it (Gen. 25:29-34); Philip Kern suggests that deception is consciously employed by Jacob: Esau is tricked by the stew's colour into thinking it is a meat dish rather than bread and lentils (of lesser value to the hunter) which leads Esau to 'despise his birthright' (v.34).⁸

The division deepens in Genesis 27, when Jacob is encouraged by Rebekah to claim Isaac's blessing, which Isaac intended for Esau. Dale Davis observes that Isaac's desire to act against God's will is used by Paul (Rom. 9:10-12) as an example of God's decisions being made without needing humanity's consent: God's will prevails over human intentions.⁹ Rebekah prepares a meal, dresses Jacob in Esau's clothing and puts kid skins onto his smooth arms and neck, so as to deceive Isaac (vv.9-17); thus, maternal favouritism develops into maternal deception, scaffolded onto sibling rivalry. When challenged, Jacob lies to Isaac and receives the blessing. These events certainly give the impression of a deceitful young man, willing to lie, disguise and cheat in order to get what he wants, as Terrence Fretheim discusses, although he notes that all four protagonists display both light and dark characteristics.¹⁰ Andrew Jukes posits that Jacob is simply 'young and eager to be blessed', and does not yet recognise his unworthiness although he will come to see this later.¹¹ The episode also alludes to the dominance of Jacob's mother, often a feature of the experiences of queer men, and his obedience to her instructions; this might challenge the accepted interpretation of a deceitful Jacob. However, the prophet Jeremiah would draw on the image of Jacob the deceiver, declaring that one should 'Trust not even a brother' (Jer. 9:3); Adele Berlin and Marc Brettler observe that the Hebrew text reveals the depth of similarity between the phrasing of Jeremiah's prophecy and these Genesis passages.¹² This might suggest that the Jacob Cycle could derive from the reception of Jeremiah.¹³

An intriguing contemporary analysis is proposed by David Zucker: Jacob is actually deceived by his parents into receiving the blessing from Isaac, thus minimising Jacob's culpability. Whilst recognising the established critique of Rebekah as the controlling agency, Zucker highlights Isaac's complicity in ignoring the obvious

⁷ M. CARDEN 'Genesis' in M. West and R.E. Shore-Goss (eds.) *Queer Bible Commentary*. 2nd edn. (London: SCM Press, 2022), p.29.

⁸ P.H. KERN *Jacob's Story as Christian Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), pp.4-6.

⁹ D.R. DAVIS *God's Rascal: The Jacob Narrative in Genesis 25-35* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2022), p.16.

¹⁰ T.E. FRETHEIM 'The Book of Genesis', p.186.

¹¹ A. JUKES *The Types of Genesis: A Bible Study of God's Creation of the World, Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, Cain and Abel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph* (Pantianos Classics, 1892), p.179.

¹² A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.930.

¹³ Given the ambiguous dating for the composition and editing of Genesis (see: T.E. FRETHEIM 'The Book of Genesis', pp.19-20), it is surely conceivable that there might be an overlap in the writing of the Jacob Cycle, based on its earlier oral tradition, and the transcription of Jeremiah's prophecy; if this was the case, then the Genesis account might well be considered to be a work of reception of Jeremiah as well as the oral history.

factors of Jacob's voice, the feel of the imitation hair, and the taste of the meal; without Isaac's collusion, the trick would surely have been unsuccessful.¹⁴ This is an interesting perspective, and there is much in Zucker's analysis which is convincing; his argument that the unmarried 'homebody' Jacob was being tested by his parents to ensure he was up to the task of shouldering the mantle of patriarchy is certainly compelling,¹⁵ and confirms a queer interpretation. Whether through Jacob's deception or his deceit, God elected to place Jacob in the exalted position over his brother, and human cunning ensured that Isaac's blessing was given accordingly. It also ensured division between the brothers.

Fearing Esau's retaliation, Jacob flees to his uncle Laban, under the pretext of seeking a non-Canaanite wife (Gen. 27:41-28:5). Carden suggests that 'a crash course in patriarchy' is the true purpose;¹⁶ Jacob will be forced to become more masculine: to work in servitude, to father children with multiple women, and to stand up for himself and his family.

While travelling, Jacob dreams of a stairway reaching to heaven, with angels 'ascending and descending' (Gen. 28:12); Jacob talks with God, receiving the covenant previously made with Abraham and Isaac (vv.13-15). On waking, Jacob praises God, in what Kern considers to be a turning point: Jacob realises that his hope must not be in himself but in God.¹⁷ This might represent repentance on Jacob's part for his struggle with Esau. Kern notes a correlation with John 1:50-51, in which Jesus refers to 'angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'; Jesus uses the image of Jacob's stairway to present himself as the bridge between heaven and earth.¹⁸

Jacob meets Rachel, younger daughter of Laban, and falls in love, in a story reminiscent of Rebekah's introduction in Genesis 24. Jacob agrees to work for seven years in exchange for marrying her (Gen. 29:9-20) but is deceived by his uncle, and unwittingly sleeps with Leah (Rachel's older sister); thus, the roles of deceiver and victim have been recast. Consequently, he is required by Laban to work a further seven years for Rachel. John Bergsma and Brant Pitre observe that God uses Laban's trickery and Jacob's servitude to punish and humble Jacob, but that God remains faithful to his chosen:¹⁹ an allusion, perhaps, to Israel's punishment – the Babylonian exile (Isaiah 39-40). Jacob's skill as a shepherd is evidently well-honed, as he rears sufficient animals to depart with, in spite of further deception by Laban, heading for Canaan (Gen. 30:25-31:17). This deceit is important as it shows resilience and determination in Jacob's character, while potentially serving as recompense for his earlier deception of Isaac (although Jacob's susceptibility to trickery does lend credence to Zucker's proposed reading of Genesis 27). It could be argued, therefore, that there is also a redemptive aspect to this story.

¹⁴ D.J. ZUCKER 'The Deceiver Deceived: Rereading Genesis 27' in *Jewish Bible Quarterly* January 2011 [Online], pp.52-53.

¹⁵ D.J. ZUCKER 'The Deceiver Deceived', p.48.

¹⁶ M. CARDEN 'Genesis', p.30.

¹⁷ P.H. KERN *Jacob's Story as Christian Scripture*, pp.28-29.

¹⁸ P.H. KERN *Jacob's Story as Christian Scripture*, p.27.

¹⁹ J. BERGSMA and B. PITRE *A Catholic Introduction to The Bible*, p.144.

Jacob fathers children with both wives and their two maidservants: a total of twelve sons and (at least) one daughter; the children are conceived through the prayers (and manipulation) of the wives (Gen. 29:31-30:23), with God allowing Leah to have sons while Rachel is barren, until God remembers her and she bears Joseph and, later, Benjamin.²⁰ The twelve sons are the 'progenitors of most of Israel's tribal groups', who, as Fretheim observes, were born in the midst of struggle and difficulty, reflecting the birth and life of the nation.^{21 22} This could be seen as further evidence pointing towards the Jacob Cycle having been composed as a metaphor.

Jacob makes a covenant with Laban (Gen. 31:43-55), and sends a generous gift of livestock to Esau in hope of appeasing him ahead of his return (Gen. 32:13-20), further reinforcing Jacob's potential repentance. This might also suggest that Jacob now prefers peace to challenge, seeking, as he does, to settle in his homeland with his large family. Roger Whybray remarks on 'a riot of deferential bowings and honorific titles' used by Jacob in Genesis 33, noteworthy because this contrasts with the welcome and forgiveness shown by Esau.²³

'Jacob and the Angel'

The Jacob Cycle now reaches its 'hinge passage'.²⁴ Before meeting with Esau, Jacob spends a night alone in the hill country. He wrestles with an unnamed figure all night, with neither apparently victorious; Jacob is injured (on his thigh), but evidently has a hold over his assailant and refuses to let go unless he is given a blessing (Gen. 32:24-26). This might suggest a determination and strength on Jacob's part, although, as Kern discusses, the story shows both that Jacob is blessed (and, in asking his combatant's name, reveals that he does not yet appreciate from whom his blessing comes) and that being blessed comes at significant cost.²⁵ For Kern, the resonance is clear: Jesus' triumph on the cross was achieved despite physical weakness; as Paul writes, 'whenever I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10b).²⁶

Jacob is given a new name – Israel – as he has 'striven with God and with humans, and prevailed' (v.28). Fretheim notes that this renaming is of critical importance in the identity of the Jewish people: 'Jacob is Israel'; Jacob becomes more than just an individual – his struggle becomes that of the nation.²⁷ This underlines

²⁰ Berlin and Brettler cite Talmud references to the important roles played by the matriarchs in the patriarch cycles, with Rachel following in succession to Sarah and Rebekah in conceiving a miracle child after being unable to conceive; it is God alone who is given credit for these children, not their fathers, as they are conceived in response to prayer. See: A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp.56-57.

²¹ T.E. FRETHERIM *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), p.87.

²² The correspondence between the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve tribes of Israel is not wholly accurate, as Joseph's place is taken by his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, allocated a 'half tribe' each, having been blessed and received by Jacob as his own sons (Gen. 48:5), see: A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp.56, 88-89.

²³ R.N. WHYBRAY 'Genesis' in J. Barton and J. Muddiman (eds.) *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.59.

²⁴ See earlier discussion.

²⁵ P.H. KERN *Jacob's Story as Christian Scripture*, pp.90-92.

²⁶ P.H. KERN *Jacob's Story as Christian Scripture*, p.92.

²⁷ T.E. FRETHERIM *The Pentateuch*, p.86.

Jacob's birthright as God's chosen one, as the Israelites would consider themselves to be God's chosen people.

Jacob believes he has 'seen God face to face' in this encounter (v.30). This leads to a question: who was the person with whom Jacob wrestled? One Midrash perspective is that the being is the 'patron angel of Esau', whose role was to weaken Jacob; the figure was received as a divine being with 'supernatural' power since 'angels can appear in human form'.²⁸ Carden returns to his reading of the twins as gay men, suggesting that 'wrestling all through the night is a powerfully masculine image of male/male lovemaking'.²⁹ Read in this way, Jacob might be asserting his new-found masculinity with Esau (or indeed Esau's patronal angel),³⁰ either in an attempt to prove his heteronormativity or to square up to his brother. Christian interpreters might suggest God as the being with whom Jacob fights, since the incarnation of Jesus enables an understanding of God's potential to interact with humanity in human form. For Carden, it is more difficult for Jewish readers to accept the concept of an incarnate God, hence their acceptance of an angelic being, sometimes considered to be Satan.³¹ In neither theology, however, is the being considered to be Esau himself (or any human), which, for this student, dilutes Carden's 'Divine Twins' concept. Indeed, Jacob is reunited with Esau immediately after this incident, in a reconciliation which Carden considers to have the potential for Esau recognising in his brother a newly-developed masculinity: Jacob returns with a large family and amassed herds – he has proven himself as a man.³² Perhaps, Carden posits, Esau had previously displayed homophobia towards Jacob, ashamed at being 'bested by this pansy', and this is now assuaged,³³ illuminating themes of forgiveness and reconciliation. As Lori Lefkowitz observes, Jacob's 'passing as a man' is effective, but not without residual feelings of anxiety;³⁴ Jacob chooses not to live with Esau but to reside in Shechem.

Jacob has wrestled, as the Israelites would wrestle with the indigenous Canaanites (Joshua), and emerged with a blessing; like Jacob, Israel would continue to face trials (for example, the Babylonian exile – see 2 Kings: 24-25). Indeed, this struggle was received by the prophet Hosea as a trial of Jacob for his sins and faithlessness, echoing the trials and faithlessness of Israel in the prophet's own time (Hosea 12); it is surely possible, however, that the witness of Hosea, like Jeremiah, might have influenced the portrayal of Jacob in Genesis. For this student, the story of Jacob's struggle with the angel lends weight to the idea that the character of Jacob might well be a metaphoric representation of the history and theology of the nation which would bear his name.

²⁸ A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp.62-63.

²⁹ M. CARDEN 'Genesis', pp.29-30.

³⁰ A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp.62-63.

³¹ M. CARDEN 'Genesis', p.32.

³² M. CARDEN 'Genesis', pp.32-33.

³³ M. CARDEN 'Genesis', p.33.

³⁴ L.H. LEFKOVITZ 'Passing as a Man: Narratives of Jewish Gender Performance' in *Narrative*. 2002, Vol.10 (1) [Online], p.99.

‘Struggle and Blessing’

Having made peace with Esau and settled in Shechem, Jacob’s daughter Dinah is kidnapped and raped by a Canaanite prince; in response, Jacob agrees marriage terms with the perpetrator’s father. Jacob is angry when his sons instead exact revenge on the people of the town (Gen. 34). Davis reflects on Jacob’s pragmatism: he wants to live in security and peace, and so seeks to avoid trouble; Davis also observes the absence of any reference to God in Genesis 34, suggesting that this implies condemnation of all its events.³⁵

Jacob is grieved at the death of Rachel, who dies in childbirth (Gen. 35:16-20). Jacob’s grief is even more profound at the loss of his favourite son, Joseph (Rachel’s firstborn) whom, through deception by Joseph’s jealous brothers, he believes to have been killed (Gen. 37). Jacob repeats the cycle of favouritism, prioritising the sons of his favourite wife (especially the firstborn, Joseph), while apparently not caring about the others, notably Dinah. Joseph is described in very queer terms in both the Genesis account and later Jewish and Islamic writings.³⁶ It is perhaps for this reason that Jacob favours Joseph, in whom he might recognise something of his earlier self, and also why Joseph’s brothers despise him. This favouritism is clarified further when Jacob initially refuses to allow his sons to take Benjamin to Egypt to ensure the release of Simeon (held captive by the not-yet-recognised Joseph), saying: ‘My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he alone is left’ (Gen. 42:38); Jacob appears to consider himself to have only two true sons: Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob is only ‘revived’ from his grief when he hears that Joseph is still alive (Gen. 45:25-28).

When Jacob meets Pharaoh, he is asked his age. Jacob’s response, ‘few and hard have been the years of my life’ (Gen. 47:9) might reveal Jacob’s own self-characterisation: he has struggled, been cheated and suffered bereavement. This further adds to the concordance with Israel’s national history. Jacob blesses Joseph’s sons, adopting them as his own.³⁷ Before his death, Jacob addresses his sons, cursing and rebuking some, commenting neutrally or favourably on others, and heaping praise and blessings on Joseph (Gen. 49). According to Whybray, the ‘Blessing of Jacob’ is a Davidic addition which reflects the character of the tribes.³⁸ Ellen Frankel observes that Jacob’s blessing of Joseph uses ‘female imagery’,³⁹ which, Carden suggests, might reveal that Jacob ‘accepted his very queer son’.⁴⁰ This motif would indeed be valuable and affirmative for contemporary queer readers.

³⁵ D.R. DAVIS *God’s Rascal*, pp.112-113.

³⁶ Citations from Ostriker (1994:111-112) and the Qur’an (Sura 12) used by Carden: M. CARDEN ‘Genesis’, pp.34-35.

³⁷ A. BERLIN and M.Z. BRETTLER (eds.) *The Jewish Study Bible*, pp.88-89.

³⁸ R.N. WHYBRAY ‘Genesis’, p.64.

³⁹ E. FRANKEL *The Five Books of Miriam: A Woman’s Commentary on the Torah* (New York: Putnam, 1996), p.89.

⁴⁰ M. CARDEN ‘Genesis’, p.41.

An example of Jacob's reception in contemporary art

The lithograph reproduced as Figure 1 depicts Jacob wrestling at Peniel, as discussed above. Whilst the text makes no reference to an angel, the choice to portray an angel as Jacob's combatant by Philadelphian artist Benton Murdoch Spruance (1904-1967)⁴¹ reflects this story's reception history.



Figure 1: Benton Murdoch Spruance, *Vanity II: Jacob and the Angel*.⁴²

The image is striking in a number of ways. For this student the most immediate observation is the homoeroticism of the image: the nakedness of the two (male) muscular figures; the intimate physical proximity of their bodies – in particular their faces and crotches; and the positioning of hands suggesting a frantic, sexually-charged connection with Jacob clinging to the angel while the angel embraces Jacob, reaching down towards his posterior. The figures fill the entire space between the rocks at either side of the picture, enhancing the sense of closeness. The overtly masculine portrayal of Jacob might reflect his newly-developed masculinity after his time with Laban (Gen. 29-30), as Carden discusses.⁴³

The 'otherness' of the angel can be seen in the artist's use of colour, with an unearthly hue used for the angel's skin; this isn't a graceful angel as featured in many renaissance portraits, likely to be feminine in appearance and dressed in white robes,⁴⁴ but a more rugged, and definitely masculine being. Indeed, it is only the wings which identify this figure as a 'traditional' angel.

⁴¹ PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS (2020) 'Vanity II: Jacob and the Angel' [Online].

⁴² BENTON MURDOCH SPRUANCE, *Vanity II: Jacob and the Angel* [Lithograph] (1950)
<<https://www.pafa.org/museum/collection/item/vanity-ii-jacob-angel>> [Accessed 5 July 2023].

⁴³ M. CARDEN 'Genesis', p.30.

⁴⁴ See, for examples, VCS 'Exhibition: The Annunciation' [Online].

Jacob reports seeing God 'face to face' (Gen. 32:30). The face of the angel in this image, however, appears to mirror the face of Jacob, as though perhaps being two halves of one whole, unified face. Considering the image further, particularly focussing on the possible unity of the faces of the two figures, it seems possible that Jacob is in fact wrestling with himself – his two natures (queer and patriarch) coming into contact as a sign of an inner struggle. Perhaps the face becomes whole when Jacob unites with his 'other side', or from a queer perspective, accepts his sexuality; the revelation of his full being might be what Jacob describes as coming 'face to face' with God.

As there is little information about the artist accessible to this student, aside from outline biographical details on gallery websites,⁴⁵ it is difficult to get a sense of the artist's intention for the piece. A fundamental tenet of reception history, however, is the lack of any intrinsic meaning within a work: meaning is generated by the reader/viewer.⁴⁶ This student's response to the work, and its homoerotic qualities, suggest that the image lends itself to a queer understanding of the incident portrayed. Other works of art on this subject display a similar intensity and homoerotic nature, for example Jacob Epstein's sculpture *Jacob and the Angel*,⁴⁷ in which two large, muscular figures are locked in an embrace, their naked bodies held tightly together; the angel appears to be lifting Jacob slightly off his feet, perhaps helping him to stand.

Whilst this queer interpretation of Jacob might seem at odds with most traditional and even contemporary scholarship, it should be noted that the biblical text does not make such a reading invalid: nothing has been added to the text to draw these conclusions. As Alicia Ostriker comments, 'God has intended all the meanings that He has made us capable of discovering'.⁴⁸ In this student's response to Spruance's artwork he has drawn on the queer reception of Jacob, which is clearly evoked by this image with its homoerotic overtones.

Conclusion

As this analysis of the Jacob Cycle demonstrates, Jacob's is a complex character which has been significant within the development of Jewish history and theology and later Christian thinking. Jacob has traditionally been received as a deceitful trickster, who was nevertheless blessed by a faithful God who ensured he would become a great nation. The story of Jacob wrestling at Peniel is particularly significant because it identifies Jacob with the nation of Israel, opening the possibility that Jacob's characteristics (struggle, dubious ethics,

⁴⁵ For example, PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF THE FINE ARTS (2020) 'Vanity II: Jacob and the Angel' [Online].

⁴⁶ See: M.C. CALLAWAY *What's the use of Reception History?* (Presentation given at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting, San Antonio, Texas, 2004) [Online], p.4. Callaway refers to texts and their readers, but the principle can be inferred; reception history of biblical texts in various media and expressions is discussed by J. Roberts: J. ROBERTS 'Introduction' in M. Lieb, E. Mason, J. Roberts and C. Rowland (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of The Reception History of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.1-8, particularly p.4.

⁴⁷ JACOB EPSTEIN, *Jacob and the Angel* [Alabaster] (1940-41) [Online].

⁴⁸ A.S. OSTRICKER *The Nakedness of the Fathers: Biblical Visions and Revisions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p.xiii, cited by M. CARDEN 'Genesis', p.42.

lack of faith, servitude and exile, but remaining God's elect) correspond to the history of Israel, as it would have been understood at the time Genesis was composed.

Queer Theology has enabled a contemporary interpretation, in which Jacob speaks as a struggling queer patriarch who develops a masculine identity. This struggle, with God, an angel, or his own identity, is portrayed to good effect in the lithograph *Vanity II: Jacob and the Angel*.

Having reviewed the characteristics and reception of Jacob, it would seem to this student that the Jacob Cycle – and Jacob himself – is indeed a metaphor for the struggles of Israel, perhaps written in response to the experience of Israel at the time of the Babylonian invasion and exile, but a metaphor which can also speak to contemporary readers, both as a cautionary tale against faithlessness and as an inspiration for those who struggle – with God, with others, or with their own identities.

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