

3

Haggai's Temple, Constructed, Deconstructed and Reconstructed*

1. The Temple Constructed

The Second Temple was not just an edifice built by Judaeans; it was also a mental artifact constructed by Haggai. It was Haggai's intention, according to the book, to get the temple constructed; but we have to ask ourselves, What kind of a temple did he have in mind? How did he himself construct the temple? What construction, we might say, did he put on the term 'temple'?

Here are eleven building materials the text of the book provides us with. Let us see whether by taking an inventory of them we can reconstruct Haggai's construction of the temple.

1. The temple is to be 'the house of Yahweh' (1.2). This apparently means a building that will be owned by Yahweh; he obviously does not need it for living in, or for being in Jerusalem

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himself in person; for even before the temple is rebuilt he already is 'with' the people of Judah (1.13).

2. The temple stands in need of 'rebuilding' (1.2)—which means (a) that it is to be the same building as the one that once stood in this place (you can't rebuild a new building, only an old one), and (b) that it is at present unbuilt or derelict (as also in 1.4, where it 'lies in ruins').

3. The people, whom I will take to mean the Jews of the province,¹ say that the time has not yet come for the house to be rebuilt (1.2). This saying of theirs implies that they think there *is* a time, in the future, when the house *should* be rebuilt.² Now perhaps the narrator means us to believe that they will *always* be saying this, as a way of forever avoiding building the temple; but we had better not jump to that conclusion.³ Certainly we can assume that what Haggai thinks, as against the people, is that the right time is *now*. And now we must ask, Why would *one* person think the time is right when almost everyone else doesn't? Must we not answer, It looks as if he knows something that the rest of the people do not know.

4. Zerubbabel and Joshua do not apparently know what the people are saying about the time for rebuilding the temple (or

¹. The identity of Haggai's audience has at times been a contentious issue, but scholarly opinion seems to have settled down in favour of this, the simplest, view. See e.g. David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8* (Old Testament Library; London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 80-82 (with particular reference to 2.14).

². Some older commentators (e.g. Jerome, Rashi, Kimchi) thought that the people may have been awaiting the fulfilment of the 70 years prophecy of Jeremiah (Jer. 25.11-14). But most moderns would agree with T.T. Perowne that 'It is clear from the sharp rebuke here administered, and from the severe judgments with which their procrastination had been visited (ver. 6, 9-11), that the excuse was idle and the delay worldly and culpable' (*Haggai and Zechariah* [Cambridge Bible; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893], p. 27). This seems to me, however, to be something of a shallow moralizing interpretation that does not reckon with Haggai's notion of the eschatological 'time'.

³. Nor had we better invent pseudo-economic and pseudo-psychological explanations such as that of John Bright: 'The people, preoccupied with the struggle for existence, had neither resources nor energy left over to continue the project' (*A History of Israel* [London: SCM Press, 3rd edn, 1981], p. 366). This does not take account of the question of the right 'time'.

perhaps they are only 'thinking' it, since *rma* can mean that too). For the report of what they are saying or thinking is not something Zerubbabel and Joshua know for themselves; it is informa-

tion delivered to them as a ‘word of Yahweh’ via Haggai the prophet (1.2).⁴

5. What is needed if the temple is to be built is timber, to be fetched from the hills (1.8). Now if we can permit ourselves a little excursion *hors du texte* in the company of the Meyers, we will find that the only trees growing on the Judaeian hills are the sycamore; and their timber is unsuitable for large buildings. So the timber Haggai demands for the temple cannot be for the construction of the temple itself. It must be for the scaffolding and ladders the builders will need.⁵

6. When the temple is rebuilt, Yahweh will ‘take pleasure in it’ and ‘be honoured’ (1.8). This means that he is at the moment displeased and dishonoured by having a ruined temple.⁶

⁴. Commentators do not seem to be troubled by the fact that the divine speech to Zerubbabel and Joshua consists, not of a divine oracle of judgment or promise, but only of a piece of information such as we would rely on Gallup polls to give us these days. For Petersen, the verse ‘points to a demonstrable unwillingness...to participate in the reconstruction of the temple’ (*Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, p. 48); but I would have thought that if the unwillingness were ‘demonstrable’ there would have been no need for a divine message to Zerubbabel and Joshua to inform them.

⁵. Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers give this explanation (*Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* [Anchor Bible, 25b; Garden City: NY: Doubleday, 1987], pp. 27–28), as had Koole earlier. For a lengthy list of other explanations offered, see Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 65–66. There are others who think that the timber may be firs, oaks, poplars, cypresses, palms or olives—and indeed *some* of these might have been used, could they be found, for the building proper; see further, Hans Walter Wolff, *Haggai: A Commentary* (trans. M. Kohl; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), p. 45.

⁶. The RSV tells us that the purpose of building the temple is so that ‘I [Yahweh] may appear in my glory’, which sounds like a ‘theophany’; but *dbkʾaw* can hardly mean that. Wolff also thinks that the verb is best rendered by ‘I will show myself in my glory’ (cf. Walter Baumgartner *et al.*, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, II [3rd edn; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974], p. 434a), which means ‘the manifestation of that acceptance [as God’s house] through God’s presence, power, and compassion’ (*Haggai*, p. 46). Peter R. Ackroyd also, in my opinion, overinterprets the word by translating, ‘I will let myself be honoured’, which means, he says, ‘I will accept the worship which tends to my honour’ (*Exile and Restoration: A*

7. The temple had been, before its destruction, 'glorious'. 'Who is there among you who survives who saw this house in its original glory (d/bK)?', asks Yahweh in 2.3,⁷ certifying that 'glory' is something quintessential to the nature of the temple. Merely beginning the rebuilding of the temple does not make it glorious, we observe, for even a month after the work of rebuilding has been renewed,⁸ it still remains without glory; for Yahweh attributes to the people the opinion that the temple must still be 'as nothing in your eyes by comparison with it [the former temple]' (2.3).⁹

8. Yet, in a 'little while' (ayhif[m]tj b'd/[, 2.6), the temple will become full of 'glory' (d/bK). Perhaps it will by that time have been rebuilt, perhaps it will not; we do not know.¹⁰ But what we do know is that it is not the builders of the temple who will fill it with 'glory'. It is Yahweh himself who will do that ('and I will fill this house with glory', d/bK; h7a' tyb'ata, ytalell, 2.6).

9. How the temple will be filled with glory is that Yahweh will

Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century BC [London: SCM Press, 1968], p. 160). There is simply nothing about worship here.

⁷. According to Meyers and Meyers, *kā bôd* 'here designates splendour and perhaps also [is] a term which can be related to God's presence as bestowing glory' (*Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, p. 50). But to see the temple 'in its glory' cannot mean 'in God's presence'.

⁸. The date is 21.vii.2 compared with 24.vi.2 as the date of recommencement of building (cf. 2.1 with 1.15).

⁹. The text does not mean exactly "To you does it not seem as if it were not there?" (REB) or 'Does it not seem as though there is nothing there?' (NJB), for the issue is not whether there is anything there, but whether what is there has any glory or not.

¹⁰. Some scholars seem to know this; Otto Eissfeldt, for example, thinks of Haggai and Zechariah 'depicting the grace of Yahweh and the coming of the age of salvation as being primarily dependent upon the building of the Temple' (*The Old Testament. An Introduction* [trans. Peter R. Ackroyd; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966], p. 433). Similarly Gerhard von Rad: '[F]or these two prophets the rebuilding of the Temple is actually the necessary precondition of Jahweh's advent and of his kingdom' (*Old Testament Theology, II* [trans. D.M.G. Stalker; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965], p. 281). Similarly Georg Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. David Green; London: SPCK, 1970), p. 460: 'Haggai... expects, upon completion of the building, a convulsion that will shake all nature and all nations'.

‘shake’ all the nations so that the ‘riches’¹¹ of all nations will come into the temple (2.7).¹² Riches are what make the temple glorious.¹³ These riches take the form of silver and gold,¹⁴ and Yahweh lays claim to them already, even while they are still in the possession of the nations: ‘mine is the silver and mine is the gold, says Yahweh of armies’ (2.8)—with a certain determination if not actually aggressively.¹⁵ Presumably ‘the silver’ (sKḥ) and

¹¹. It does not make much difference whether we read the MT tDḥ , ‘desire of, i.e. desirable things of’ (as Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, p. 103) or emend to tDḥj ‘desired things of’ (as Karl Elliger in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967], p. 1062), Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, p. 53; et al.).

¹². I think we are right in assuming that the text speaks of an event that will happen, but I am nevertheless attracted by the possibility that it is all hypothetical, as Arthur Penrhyn Stanley put it: ‘[E]ven if the present tranquillity of the world must needs be broken up, even if some violent convulsion should once again shake all nations, yet abundant treasures would flow into the Temple’ (*Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*, III [London: John Murray, new edn, 1883], pp. 91-92).

¹³. So also Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, p. 104: ‘This is not God’s glory but the abundance and preciousness of the desired things which will become available to the temple’; and Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, p. 68: ‘The possessions, rather than God, will provide *kā bōd*’; and cf. Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1958), p. 79: ‘*Kabod* designates whatever had weight—it is used of riches: Gen. 31.1...Hag. 2.7’. What we cannot say is: ‘[W]hat need has he of earthly splendor, when all silver and gold are his?’ (Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi* [Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986], p. 100).

¹⁴. What kind of interpretation is it to say: ‘[T]he nations’ treasures consist of more than material resources, even though the text mentions only silver and gold. In Israel’s history the nations contributed such cultural achievements as architectural styles, musical instruments, and melodies for singing (1 Kgs. 4–5), titles for addressing Yahweh, and consequently insights into the mysteries of faith (Ps. 29; 48:1-8; 89:5-13)’ (Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Rebuilding with Hope: A Commentary on the Books of Haggai and Zechariah* [International Theological Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], p. 30). Given interpreters like this, what does a prophet have to do to be believed if he actually means ‘silver and gold’?

¹⁵. Cf. Gerhard von Rad, ‘The City on the Hill’, in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), pp. 232-42 (240): ‘A starkly challenging sentence proclaims Yahweh’s exclusive right to possess them. It is as if they have been hitherto

'the gold' (bhzh) mean 'silver and gold in general', 'all the silver and gold there is'.¹⁶

10. What this 'shaking' of the earth will amount to is unclear. The language itself suggests a *physical* cosmic upheaval, with a shaking of the heavens and the earth, of the sea and the dry land (2.6); but it is hard to see how a universal *earthquake* could bring the wealth of the nations into the temple.¹⁷ Presumably the language of *physical* upheaval is symbolic of a *political* upheaval that will issue in Judah's dominance over all other nations. Whether the upheaval will be by military means¹⁸ or some more pacific rearrangement we cannot tell. And how the wealth will 'come' to Jerusalem, whether as booty or as taxes,¹⁹ is equally inexplicit.²⁰

on temporary loan, and are still held back from their true purpose as the property of Yahweh. In the eschaton, however, they will return from this misappropriation into the exclusive control of Yahweh, their rightful owner.'

¹⁶. Similarly Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 69: 'Yahweh might be claiming that all silver and gold are ultimately his in order to justify taking them away from the nations'. It can hardly be a matter of the precious vessels stolen from the first temple, for they could hardly be called the 'riches of the nations' (contrast Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 68: 'Haggai does not expect ingots of gold but, rather, precious vessels and other metallic accoutrements for the temple cultus...[P]recious objects belonging to the temple had been lost to the nations. And their return was a necessary part of a proper restoration.'). Can it be the spoils from his victories in holy war (Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, p. 105)? Perhaps (cf. Nah. 2.10 [EVV 9]; Mic. 4.13; Ps. 60.8-10 [EVV 6-8]; Josh. 6.19), but there is a marked absence of hostile intent in Haggai's depiction.

¹⁷. According to Joyce G. Baldwin (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* [Tyndale OT Commentaries; London: Tyndale Press, 1972], p. 48), Haggai sees 'the whole universe in such a series of convulsions that every nation will gladly part with its treasures' (why would convulsions make them do that?, I wonder), but, as Verhoef observes (p. 102), this explanation would require us to attach a literal meaning to v[r in v. 6 and a figurative meaning in v. 7.

¹⁸. Verhoef sees here the language of holy war, the wealth being spoils dedicated to the victor (*Haggai and Malachi*, p. 103).

¹⁹. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, p. 53, envisage the nations 'send[ing] tribute through their ambassadors and emissaries'.

²⁰. We might even consider, with Dean Stanley, whether freewill offerings from gentiles might not be in mind: 'If its own children should neglect it, the heathen whom they despised would come to the rescue' (*Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*, III, p. 91). Cf. Achtemeier, *Nahum-Malachi*,

11. There is so much silver and gold out there waiting to be shaken into the temple that, when it is all in, ‘great shall be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former’ (2.9).

The data are not complete and at times not entirely clear. But the resultant picture is unambiguous. Haggai constructs the temple as nothing but a *treasure-house*. It is a place where precious objects can be stored and displayed. When it is in ruins it obviously cannot serve as a storehouse and display-case. Its owner, the god Yahweh, is inevitably dishonoured by having a ‘house’ that is in disrepair, and worse, a house that by being in disrepair cannot display the *kā bôd* that comes from owning many precious objects. It is therefore essential, for the deity’s self-respect, that the house should be rebuilt. All the silver and gold in the world may belong to him by rights and in principle; but they bring him no honour unless they are gathered together in a ‘house’.

There is another dimension to Haggai’s construction of the temple, though. It is that there is an *urgency* about rebuilding the house. For it is only a short time, ‘yet a little while’, before the cosmic upheaval is going to occur that will bring the wealth of all the nations flooding into Jerusalem.²¹ Preparations must be made for the arrival of all that silver and gold. The *people* do not realize that the ‘time’ is pressing, for they do not have Haggai’s conviction about the imminent overthrow of all the kingdoms. *Haggai*, on the other hand, knows that Yahweh is about to ‘shake’ the heavens and the earth—perhaps he has already started²²—so it is high time that the temple be readied to receive the treasures that will fall out of the pockets of the nations when Yahweh will imminently turn them upside down (°ph) and give them a good shaking.

p. 101: ‘[A]ll peoples will finally come with their offerings to the Lord of Hosts’.

²¹. I can hardly agree that with the phrase ‘yet a little while’ Haggai ‘refers not so much to the shortness of the interval as to the vastness of the powers involved’ (Achtmeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, p. 102).

²². We note that the present participle in 2.21, ‘I am shaking’, is not preceded by ‘yet a little while’ (as in 2.6); does this perhaps not mean that the shaking has already begun? The commentators do not observe this difference from 2.6, and generally translate the participle as a future, even if a *futurum instans* (Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, p. 143).

Everything in the book of Haggai becomes coherent when we recognize how Haggai constructs the temple. How rebuilding the temple connects with 'glory', how 'glory' connects with silver and gold, how silver and gold connect with world upheaval, and, especially, how world upheaval connects with the 'right time' for rebuilding the temple—all make sense when Haggai's temple is understood as a *treasury*.

Of course, there are many other ways of constructing the second (or, rebuilt) temple, some of which a Haggai would no doubt have consented to. It would be hard to deny, for example, that the author of the book of Haggai, whether or not that person was the historical Haggai, would have thought of the temple, or the temple to be, as a place of sacrifice. Where this essay stands, however, is on the observation that the author of the book chose not to speak of the temple in that way, ever.

It proves very difficult for modern scholars, however, to believe that an author could have such a restricted vision of the temple. We all know, and our dictionaries and encyclopaedias confirm it, that the Jewish temple had many significances, and our tendency is to recall those significances whenever we read the word 'temple', as if all of them were present in the minds of speakers and hearers of the language at every moment. James Barr has invented the *mot juste* for this habit of ours: it is 'illegitimate totality transfer' when we insist on reading all the possible meanings of a word into each of its occurrences.²³

Here are some of the ideas that occur to commentators when they read 'temple' in Haggai.

1. It is the 'place of the presence of God'. So, for example, Verhoef (a Calvinist who nevertheless lapses into Latin in the face of the almost palpable holiness of the temple) writes:

The second major theme of Haggai's message concerns the rebuilding of the temple... To appreciate the importance of this message, we will have to consider the theological significance of the temple. In the history of Israel the tabernacle and subsequently the temple were the places of the *praesentia Dei realis*

²³. James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 222 (it is 'illegitimate *identity transfer*' on pp. 218, 235 [my italics]).

among his people.²⁴

²⁴. Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, p. 34.

Another way of putting it is this:

God's presence is reestablished through the powerful symbolic means of his dwelling made habitable.²⁵

Or,

God's presence is made manifest in his 'glory'. In fact, God's 'glory', as distinct from his 'name' appears to represent an extraordinary and dramatic manifestation of God's presence and power.²⁶

2. It is a symbol of the glory of Yahweh. So Petersen writes that Yahweh will have

greater prestige now that this house is finished.²⁷

And Mason:

[F]or [Haggai], the significance of the Temple is *eschatological*. It will be the place where God appears again in His glory.²⁸

Or, more simplistically,

[Haggai] believed that the temple must be rebuilt so the glory of the Lord might return and dwell with his people. Any person who longs for the presence of the Lord is a good man.²⁹

3. It is a place of God's self-revelation. So Ackroyd:

The divine presence...expresses itself in the Temple as the chosen

²⁵. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, p. 28.

²⁶. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, p. 28, referring to J.G. McConville, 'God's "Name" and God's "Glory"', *Tyndale Bulletin* 30 (1979), pp. 149-63. Does this mean that there are unextraordinary manifestations of this divine 'presence' in the temple? What would a 'manifestation' of a divine presence look like? Am I alone in thinking that not a lot has been explained when I read that God's presence is made manifest 'in' something that is a manifestation of his presence?

²⁷. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 51.

²⁸. Rex Mason, 'The Prophets of the Restoration', in *Israel's Prophetic Traditions: Essays in Honour of Peter R. Ackroyd* (ed. Richard Coggins, Anthony Phillips and Michael Knibb; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 137-54 (143).

²⁹. Ralph L. Smith, *Micah-Malachi* (Word Biblical Commentary, 32; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), p. 149. The reader may care to note any female person who would like to become a man now knows how to achieve that.

place of divine revelation... The God who is lord of heaven and earth, who cannot be contained in a building, nevertheless condescends to reveal himself and to localize his presence in order that blessing may flow out.³⁰

**4. It is a place of worship, of human encounter with the divine.
So Achtemeier:**

[T]he prophet concentrates almost singlemindedly on the necessity for the Judeans to restore their place of worship... When Haggai... calls for temple rebuilding, it is... an announcement that the Lord of Hosts yearns to give himself again... to enter into covenant fellowship with the Chosen People once more. Their years of abandonment under God's judgment are over. They should prepare themselves for the Lord's return... The temple will be sign and seal of their renewed hearts' devotion—the evidence that they have finally come to terms with reality.³¹

And Ackroyd:

[T]he failure to rebuild is much more than a matter of reconstruction of a building. It is the reordering of a Temple so that it is a fit place for worship... Without a properly built temple, that is a ritually correct place for the worship of God, such worship is impossible.³²

5. It is a sacral centre, necessary both for Israel's survival and as the focus of a universal religion. Thus von Rad:

The Temple was, after all, the place where Jahweh spoke to Israel, where he forgave her her sins, and where he was present for her. The attitude taken towards it therefore determined the attitude for or against Jahweh... [T]he eschatological Israel was to have a sacral centre, and... this alone would guarantee her existence... It was for this time, when Jahwism would throw off its national limitations and become a universal religion—the time of the Messiah—that the temple had to be rebuilt.³³

And Bright:

The community desperately needed a focal point about which its faith could rally.³⁴

³⁰. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, pp. 154, 160.

³¹. Achtemeier, *Nahum–Malachi*, pp. 94-95, 97-98.

³². Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, pp. 156-57, 160.

³³. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II, pp. 281-82.

³⁴. Bright, *History of Israel* (3rd edn), p. 368.

Similarly S.R. Driver had described Haggai's picture of the temple as

the religious centre of the world (Is. ii. 2-4), nations coming in pilgrimage to it, delighting to honour it with their gifts, and so making it more glorious even than the temple of Solomon.³⁵

6. It is the channel of salvation. Thus Wolff writes:

Haggai does not press for the temple to be rebuilt in order that the priestly cult may function. The purpose is 'so that Yahweh may enter into it, and may appear for the salvation of the people'.³⁶

7. It is also a symbol of, or, rather, a vehicle for the community itself and its identity. Thus Meyers and Meyers:

The restoration of the sacred temple in Jerusalem is the key to the establishment of the new, largely ecclesiastical system of community autonomy under Persian rule.³⁷

8. It is the economic and administrative centre of the postexilic Yahwistic community. So Petersen,³⁸ following the hypothesis of Joel Weinberg that the community is best understood as a 'Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde',³⁹ a collectivity that provided its members with an identity and a rudimentary administration based on the 'father's house' as the primary unit of social administration.

Each of these views can be argued on its own merits, and they may well be correct accounts of ideas that were abroad in

³⁵. S.R. Driver, *The Minor Prophets. Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Century Bible; Edinburgh: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1906), p. 152.

³⁶. Wolff, *Haggai*, p. 46. Wolff's quotation is from K.M. Beyse, 'Serubbabel und die Königserwartungen der Propheten Haggai und Zacharja', *Arbeiten zur Theologie I/48* (1972), p. 75.

³⁷. Meyers and Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, p. xlii.

³⁸. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, pp. 30-31.

³⁹. J. Weinberg, 'Das beit 'abôt im 6.-4. Jh. v.u. Z.', *Vetus Testamentum* 23 (1973), pp. 400-14; *idem* (J. Vejnberg), 'Probleme der sozialökonomische Struktur Judäas vom 6. Jahrhundert v.u. Z. Zu einigen wirtschaftshistorischen Untersuchungen von Heinz Kreissig', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (1973), pp. 237-51.

Haggai's time.⁴⁰ But whatever their validity in reference to the historical actuality of the sixth century BCE, if we have them in our mind when we read the book of Haggai we inevitably misunderstand the book, for *it* thinks of the temple as a treasure-house, no more, no less.

2. *The Temple Deconstructed*

If I have now rightly reconstructed Haggai's construction of the temple, it remains a question whether this construction is open to *deconstruction*. Now to deconstruct a discourse, according to Jonathan Culler, is 'to show how it undermines the philosophy it asserts, or the hierarchical oppositions on which it relies'.⁴¹ And there are in this text, to my mind, three points at which a deconstruction of such a nature imposes itself.

1. *Honour*

The book's initial set of oppositions is between the unbuilt temple and the built temple. (1) The unbuilt temple is a site of shame, lack of glory; the built temple will be a place of honour. (2) The unbuilt temple is a signal of human disregard of the divine, or disobedience (cf. 'obey', 1.12): they live in ceiled houses, while the deity's dwelling is in ruins. The built temple will be a testimony to human enthusiasm for the divine. (3) The unbuilt temple causes divine displeasure; the built temple will be an object Yahweh will take pleasure in (1.7). (4) The unbuilt temple brings economic disaster to the populace; the built temple will spell blessing upon the grain, the new wine, the oil and what the ground brings forth (cf. 1.11).

Now it comes as something of a surprise, amounting (I think) to a deconstruction, that it turns out that the rebuilding of the temple, though demanded so strongly, will *not* in fact achieve the aim of bringing 'honour' (*kā bôd*) to the deity and his house. For in 2.7 we learn that it will be when the treasures of silver and gold from the other nations come into the temple that it will be

⁴⁰ See for a survey of the kinds of ideas that may have been held about the temple in the Persian period, David L. Petersen, 'The Temple in Persian Period Prophetic Texts', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 21 (1991), pp. 88-96.

⁴¹ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 86.

filled with *kā bôd*. If filling the temple with precious objects is what produces *kā bôd*, then it cannot be finishing the building itself that does so. And vice versa. We may call this a deconstruction because the text itself shows no hint of awareness of the conflict between the two statements; the conflict is hidden, and so we may say that the text *undermines* itself.

It is a further element in the deconstruction that whereas the book initially made out that the producing of *kā bôd* for the temple is entirely in the hands of the people who build or who fail to build, 2.7 affirms that it is Yahweh's own personal filling of the temple with treasure that will bring *kā bôd*, as if the people's activity was nugatory. Perhaps, of course, we should harmonize the text, avoiding the deconstructive possibility, and say that if the people do not finish rebuilding the temple, there will be no temple for Yahweh to fill with his treasures; so in that sense the people's activity may be a *precondition* of the divine activity that will ensure the deity's honour.⁴² But the simple fact is that the text itself does not confront the tension between the people's contribution to the *kā bôd* and the deity's, so each of the poles of the tension tends to undermine or deconstruct the other.

2. Uncleaness

A more deep-seated deconstruction arises from the obligation laid on the people to rebuild the temple, on the one hand, and the affirmation that 'every work of their hands' is unclean (2.14), on the other.⁴³

⁴². Similarly Robert P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1979), p. 161: '[U]ntil the temple was rebuilt the wealth of nations could not flow into it. So the rebuilding of the temple had become a prerequisite for the expected event of salvation.'

⁴³. I am ignoring the argument that the 'people' in question are not the Judaeans but the Samaritans (as e.g. J.W. Rothstein, *Juden und Samaritaner: Die grundlegende Scheidung von Judentum und Heidentum* (Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, 3; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908); D. Winton Thomas, 'Haggai', *Interpreter's Bible* (ed. George Arthur Buttrick; New York: Abingdon, 1956), VI, pp. 1036-49 (1047); von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II, p. 283; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Haggai-Sacharja 1-8-Sacharja 9-14-Maleachi* (Kommentar zum Alten Testament, 13/4; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1976), pp. 49-50; Wolff, *Haggai*, p. 94. The most recent scholarship

agricultural produce.⁴⁴ For in Deut. 14.29, 16.15, 24.19, 28.12 and 30.9 we have the phrase 'all the work of your hand(s)'⁴⁵ in reference unmistakably to the produce of the fields; and, more importantly, within the book of Haggai itself the phrase can be shown to have this meaning. For in 2.18 we find, 'I smote you—all the work of your hands—with blight and mildew and hail'.⁴⁶ If 'agricultural produce' is all the phrase means, were we then right to think of the building of the temple when we read in 2.14 that 'all the work of their hands' was unclean?

Yes, I believe so. I would argue that it is not at all surprising that in the context of agricultural labour, such as we encounter in those passages in Deuteronomy, 'the work of your hands' should refer to field produce and not to pots, silverware or linen, or any other of the hundred and one things that could reasonably be called 'the work of the hands'. But in other contexts, 'the work of the hands' can mean quite different things. For example, in 2 Kgs 19.18 idols are called 'the work of the hands of a human'; in Jer. 32.30 the Israelites have been angering Yahweh 'by the work of their hands', presumably transgressions in general; and in Song 7.2 (EVV 7.1) jewels are 'the work of the hands of a craftsman'. Even in Deuteronomy itself the phrase quite commonly refers to human activity in general (e.g. 2.7 'Yahweh your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands' while travelling through the wilderness; 31.29 'provoking Yahweh to anger through the work of your hands', not specifically making idols, as in 4.28). Only the immediate context can give the phrase a more specific meaning than 'activity'.

The question can be answered yet another way also. Let us suppose that 'all the work of their hands' (2.14) means specifi-

⁴⁴. It seems a mistake to restrict the 'work of their hands' to their offerings, as is done for example by Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, p. 168: 'The emphasis in Haggai's own message to the people concentrates on the uncleanness of the people's offerings in the shrine'. On the contrary, the emphasis is on *all* the works of their hands, of which their offerings are only one example.

⁴⁵. Deut. 16.15 and 24.19 have $\dot{u}dy: hc\dot{e}p\dot{h} | k\dot{p}$ 28.12 and 30.9 have $\dot{u}dy: hc\dot{e}p\dot{h} | k$; and 14.29 has $hc[\dot{t}' rva] \dot{u}dy: hc\dot{e}p\dot{h} | k$;

⁴⁶. 'The people ("you") are defined in terms of the work of their hands...agricultural commodities' (Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 93).

cally their produce from the fields (as, admittedly, it does in 2.17). May we not go on to ask: if the people are unclean and are consequently defiling their agricultural produce, will they not equally be defiling everything they touch?⁴⁷

Strangely enough, the text of Haggai remains very innocent over this question of defilement, not realizing its significance for the building of the temple. And so do the commentators, who only very rarely recognize how problematic is a building of a temple by workers in a state of ritual impurity.⁴⁸ Uncleanness is very contagious, so Haggai avers, and he has not needed any consultation with priests to know that; it was a commonplace for any Jew of whatever period. The idea of building a temple, by definition a holy place, using the labour of unclean builders is almost ludicrous. But Haggai represses the implicit conflict between the uncleanness of the builders and the cleanness of the building. Why? He is not stupid; he must know at some level that there is a conflict. But he cannot cope with it. Either he has to give up his dream of seeing the temple rebuilt, or he has to allow that the people are not after all in a state of ritual impurity. He cannot do either, and the result is a text that deconstructs itself.

⁴⁷. How the people come to be unclean, in Haggai's view, is not a question we need to go into here. I cannot accept Petersen's elaborate argument that it is not the people but the temple that is unclean ('the impurity can only derive from the place to which the sacrifices are being brought' [*Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 84]). Cf. also Baldwin: 'The ruined skeleton of the Temple was like a dead body decaying in Jerusalem and making everything contaminated' (*Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, p. 33). It would be a strange way to go about demanding a ceremony of ritual purification for the temple to blame the people for letting themselves be contaminated by the temple whenever they bring offerings to it. The text implies, in my opinion, that the sacrifices are unclean before they arrive at the temple.

⁴⁸. Mason, 'The Prophets of the Restoration', in *Israel's Prophetic Tradition*, pp. 137-54 (144), believes that we should see the phrase 'the work of their hands' as referring to their building activity; but he does not draw the conclusion that the temple must therefore be ritually unclean. Rather, he merely ethicizes the 'uncleanness' into an '[in]capacity for self-regeneration', observing that it is not the work of the people but the eschatological 'Coming' of God that will fill the temple with glory. He overlooks the fact that uncleanness transmits itself to temples but incapacity for self-regeneration is quite harmless to sancta.

What is truly intriguing about this deconstruction is how it comes to be inscribed in the text in the first place. Why does the whole issue of the transmissibility of holiness and uncleanness get raised at all?⁴⁹ The elaborate question and answer process between Haggai and the priests seems designed, not to elicit authoritative answers to currently debated or unclear issues, but principally to lead up to an explanation of why the Judaeans' harvests have been so poor. The logic seems to be as follows (though there are no causal connectives in the text): everything the people do is unclean; their offerings at the altar are unclean; God punishes them for this infringement of cultic purity by sending blight, mildew and hail to decrease the productivity of their fields.

This is in itself a quite unexceptional line of reasoning, but its appearance at this point is startling. In the first place, it runs counter to the explanation that has hitherto been the burden of the text. From the beginning of the book, the logic has been: 'You have sown much, and harvested little...Why? Because of my house that lies in ruins' (1.6, 9). The *reason* why they do not build the temple is because they think the time has not yet come; and the *result* of not building the temple is that the deity withholds prosperity from them. The *next step* that they can take if they want to change things is to start to build the temple. Given the presuppositions, everything in this line of argument makes good (and familiar) sense. But how is this explanation to be squared with the other, that their lack of prosperity is a punishment for their *uncleanness*? Are they being punished for their *neglect* of the temple or for their *impurity*? If it is for both offences, if they are *both* negligent and unclean, why is not a word about their uncleanness breathed until three months after they have resumed work on the temple (cf. 1.15 with 2.10)?

⁴⁹. It can hardly be, as Achtemeier would have it, that the temple-builders are in danger of becoming self-righteous and believing that 'association with the things of God automatically communicates moral purity... Haggai addresses this temptation with a parable and its explanation... The question is, ... Having dealt with God's holy place, have they themselves become holy?' (*Nahum-Malachi*, pp. 102-103). Cf. also Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, p. 169: 'There is no automatic efficacy in the temple, no guarantee that by virtue of its existence it ensures salvation'.

In the second place, where is the logic in the second explanation? Where is the *reason* or *cause* why they are unclean? They have been contracting the uncleanness from somewhere, but do they know where? Since they do not, what are they to do about it as a *next step*? Assuming they do not want to remain in a state of impurity, what move can they make? Even if it is not literal impurity that we are reading about here, but some sort of moral incapacity, what are they expected to do about it? It can hardly be, can it, that the ‘uncleanness’ is a metaphor for their unreadiness for the work?⁵⁰ If that were so, they would surely have been ‘purified’ from such a uncleanness by their commencement of the work on the twenty-fourth of the sixth month, a good three months ago. And furthermore, how is the promised blessing of 2.19 connected with the uncleanness? It’s all very well to be blessed, but what does that do to the impurity? Is that to be removed? And if so, how? How can the category of impurity drop out of sight, and be replaced by the category of blessing? Impurity is got rid of only by rituals of purification; impurity is impervious to ‘blessing’. All the ‘blessing’ in the world will not turn an unclean thing into a clean, will it?

There is at bottom something gratuitous (must we not conclude?) in this excursion into matters of the holy and the clean. All that arises from it are complications that deflect the force of the original thrust of the book.

So must we conclude that the text exhibits a kind of ‘bad faith’, according to which the people can never be praised for doing what they are encouraged to, and can only be required to do what it is impossible for them to do? If they don’t build the temple they will be punished for their negligence, and if they do build the temple they will defile it.

3. *Zerubbabel*

We have just now observed a case where the text suddenly takes off in an unexpected direction, implicitly undermining what has

⁵⁰. So e.g. Perowne, *Haggai and Zechariah*, p. 24: ‘Their one sin in neglecting the Temple spreads its moral pollution over “every work of their hands”’; May, ‘“This People” and “This Nation” in Haggai’, p. 196: ‘Through their failure to honor Yahweh with proper attention to his house, they had become, as it were, unclean’.

preceded. Now we find, in the final four verses of the book (2.20-23), an even more striking divergence from the previous course of the book, and an equally disturbing deconstructive situation. It is fascinating that both these deconstructive texts (2.10-19; 2.20-23) are signed with the same dateline: the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month of the second year of Darius. According to this text, therefore, Haggai the prophet deconstructs the whole of his prophetic ministry on its last day!⁵¹

The final oracle, addressed to Zerubbabel, is a quite remarkable one, designating him as nothing less than the universal and eschatological ruler. This significance of the oracle is, surprisingly, not generally recognized by commentators.⁵² But the eschatological framework is quite clearly signalled by the language of cosmic upheaval we already met with at 2.6. The heavens and the earth are to undergo a 'shaking', symbolical no doubt of the political shaking that the writer envisages. More explicitly than in 2.6, where it was simply a matter of 'shaking' the nations, here we learn that Yahweh will also 'overthrow the

⁵¹. In the older scholarship this day has sometimes been very differently esteemed, as the 'birthday of Judaism', the day when the temple was founded and the prophet definitively 'rejected willing but cultically suspect helpers, thereby inaugurating the sequestration that was to be typical of later Judaism' (Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 460).

⁵². Meyers and Meyers, for example, think that the day in question is 'the day in which the Yehudites will once again achieve political independence and self-rule under the Davidide Zerubbabel' (*Haggai, Zechariah 1-8*, p. 67)—which hardly seems to match the cosmic language of 2.21-22. But elsewhere they speak of Zerubbabel's appointment as an eschatological event (e.g. pp. 70, 82). And Wolff sees the announcement to Zerubbabel that Yahweh would 'overthrow (°ph) all nations' as Haggai's 'offer[ing] to the worried Zerubbabel the immediate and lasting reminder that Yahweh is the God who controls all the political conditions and affairs of the great powers' (*Haggai*, p. 102). In Zerubbabel's shoes I would not need this reminder, nor would I glean it from Haggai's words; I would be more likely to start drafting my policy as world ruler. Wolff thinks that 2.23 'designates [Zerubbabel] as the personal bearer of hope' (*Haggai*, p. 108); this is an amazingly other-worldly reading of what is transparently a political statement. Smith (*Micah-Malachi*, p. 163) also fails to grasp the immediacy of this revolution in world order when he writes: 'Zerubbabel of the line of David was only a Persian governor of a tiny community. But it would not always be that way. Yahweh was going to shake the nations.'

throne of kingdoms', 'destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations' and 'overthrow the chariot and its riders', the horses and their riders 'going down', each by the sword of his fellow (2.22). This prediction signifies a new political order corresponding to the picture of the dominance of Jerusalem reflected in 2.7.⁵³ Into that new eschatological political order there is to be inserted Zerubbabel as its chief ruler.

The language about Zerubbabel in 2.23 is unmistakable. Zerubbabel's appointment will take place 'on that day', which (even if we did not recognize the phrase already as the technical term for the eschaton) must be the eschatological time, for the 'day' when he will be appointed is plainly the time of cosmic 'shaking'. Having 'chosen' (rj b) Zerubbabel, Yahweh will 'take' (j q l) him, as various persons have previously been 'taken' for high office.⁵⁴ Further, Zerubbabel is termed 'my servant' (ydb l),⁵⁵ whom Yahweh will 'set as a signet-ring' (wtwj), presumably upon his own finger as a symbol of Zerubbabel's

⁵³. The text is being domesticated by Achtemeier when she writes: 'He speaks not of the overthrow of Persia but of the subjection of all nations to God' (*Nahum–Malachi*, p. 105)—as if Haggai dealt in ethical platitudes and had no agenda you could call political. Ackroyd's reading is more sophisticated, but still fails to satisfy: 'The events are not necessarily to be thought of in military terms, but rather in terms of the subordination to the divine will of those powers which set themselves up as authorities in their own right' (*Exile and Restoration*, p. 163). For how does he (or the prophet) imagine such a subordination as coming about, then, if not by military means (including no doubt supernatural military means)?

⁵⁴. The term signifies 'interventions that are going to bring about a change of place, calling, and function' (Wolff, *Haggai*, p. 105). See also W.A.M. Beuken, *Haggai–Sacharja 1–8: Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der frühnachexilischen Prophetie* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica, 10; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967), p. 80.

⁵⁵. According to Wolff, 'Zerubbabel is...addressed in the same way as David...According to Haggai's line of thinking, this relationship will have been related to Zerubbabel's efforts for the building of the temple' (*Haggai*, p. 105). I doubt this, for why would Joshua, equally responsible for the temple building, not be in view here also? And in any case, was David responsible for the first temple? I doubt, in other words, that the promise to Zerubbabel is connected with temple building at all. And that 'Zerubbabel, as Yahweh's seal, would then be the guarantor of the temple's completion' (Wolff, *Haggai*, p. 106).

appointment as ruler (cf. the language used of Jehoiachin, 'Coniah, king of Judah', in Jer. 22.23-25 as 'the signet-ring on my right hand').

So the book of Haggai ends with the announcement that Zerubbabel is to be appointed world ruler.⁵⁶ No matter how brief the oracle, the claim it makes is astounding. When we recollect how the envisaged eschatological ruler is portrayed elsewhere in the prophetic literature (e.g. Isa. 9.6-7; 11.1-3; 16.5; 55.4; Jer. 23.5; 30.9; Ezek. 34.23-24; 37.24-25; Mic. 5.1-4 [EVV 4.14-5.3]; Zech. 3.8; 6.12-13), we are drawn up sharp by the realization that here for the first time in Old Testament prophetic books a prophet actually knows the name of this hoped-for figure, and moreover that it turns out to be the name of a contemporary of the prophet,⁵⁷ a man who is at this moment walking about the streets of Jerusalem. The historical Zerubbabel was, so far as we know, only a governor (hjp) of the Persian province of Yehud and a member of the Judaeen royal house, nothing more startling, so the astonishing boldness of the identification can hardly be exaggerated. He must be the first real person in history to have been identified with the eschatological son of David.⁵⁸

⁵⁶. Wolff is remarkably reticent in only allowing that 'it is not entirely improbable that... Zerubbabel will in the future be declared the new David. But it must be stressed that this promise is couched in extremely muted terms.' His argument is that important messianic terms like jvm and °lm are missing and there is nothing said of the struggle, victory and peace of the messianic age (*Haggai*, p. 106). I myself find what Haggai says much more persuasive than what he doesn't say. In contrast to Wolff, von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, II, p. 284, says: 'He clearly and unequivocally designated as the coming anointed one David's descendant Zerubbabel'; cf. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, p. 236: 'a clear messianic expectation'; J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (trans. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1976), p. 325: 'The messianic kingdom was about to be inaugurated, its sovereign was to be the last scion of the house of David, Zerubbabel'.

⁵⁷. According to the chronology of the book of Zechariah, Zechariah will be saying something very similar in two months' time (cf. 1.7) about 'the Branch'; but although the identity of the Branch is an open secret, Zechariah does not go so far as Haggai in giving his name as Zerubbabel.

⁵⁸. Von Rad says that 'It is common to point out that Haggai here differs radically from the pre-exilic prophets by naming a living member of the

Now where a deconstruction begins to open up is over the question, So what is the important thing for this prophetic text? What is the *point* of the book of Haggai?

Until we have read to within four verses of the end of this book we are in little uncertainty about its overall point. No one doubts that it concerns the rebuilding of the temple, the consequences of ignoring it and an encouragement to begin it.⁵⁹ But, suddenly, in the last four verses we encounter an entirely new theme, the appointment and naming of the world ruler. And the former issue of temple building suddenly becomes invisible—just as, for its part, the universal significance of Zerubbabel had been in all that preceded.

Any book, of course, may have more than one topic, more than one aim. A book does not deconstruct itself merely by taking up a new topic, even in its last four verses. Where the deconstructive aspect lies, I think, is in the fact that the two topics, each of such moment, and each not self-evidently subordinate to the other, are nevertheless not brought into relation with one another, so that the reader experiences an *aporia* over what should be designated the overall theme of the work.⁶⁰ It is not

house of David as the coming anointed one' (*Old Testament Theology*, II, p. 284); but I have not found any other traces of this 'common' observation.

⁵⁹. So too Wolff, *Haggai*, p. 22: 'Haggai is impelled by a single question: how can the devastated temple in Jerusalem be rebuilt?' Wolff relates the address to Zerubbabel to this theme by the assumption that Zerubbabel is 'appointed authorized guarantor of the temple's completion' (*ibid.*); but of course there is nothing in the Zerubbabel oracle about the temple. A focus on the temple has not however been universally recognized; cf. e.g. Perowne, *Haggai and Zechariah*, p. 22: '[I]t was the stern call, "Repent ye", with which he was principally charged'. Here the pragmatic demands of the text have been moralized, as so often happens.

⁶⁰. Attempts to relate the two parts of the book are extraordinarily unsuccessful; thus Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1-8*, p. 105: 'Through [Haggai's] efforts... the temple was well on the way to reconstruction. Now it was time to focus on other issues, including the civil polity of Israel.' Is that what 2.20-23 is about, 'the civil polity of Israel'? And is a phrase like 'now it was time to focus on other issues' not an elaborate way of saying that we cannot see the connection between the first issue and the second? See also Stuhlmüller, *Haggai and Zechariah*, p. 16: 'Haggai's focus was exceptionally clear. All of his energies were directed toward two goals: the

that the two purposes flatly contradict one another, as if, for example, part one had said that Joshua was to become the world ruler and part two had said Zerubbabel. It is that in the first and major part of the book the one thing worthy of attention is the glory of Yahweh evidenced by the influx of treasures to the temple and in the second part of the work the one object of attention is the glory of Zerubbabel as world ruler designate. Zerubbabel is not, it is true, in *competition* with Yahweh for glory, for it is Yahweh who is appointing Zerubbabel to his glorious office. But it is hard to see how the two themes are related.

It is not that Zerubbabel himself is going to bring about the achievement of the glory of Yahweh which the first part desiderates; for it is not Zerubbabel as distinct from Joshua who leads the work of rebuilding (1.1, 12, 14; 2.2, 4); and in any case it is not the rebuilding that is going to acquire glory but the filling of the temple with wealth by Yahweh himself (2.7). Nor does the completion of the temple bring about in any way the success of Zerubbabel, for his appointment is not linked to the completion of the temple (in fact, the *completion* of the temple hardly seems to be the issue; it is the *working on* the temple that seems to matter).

As a result, every attempt we make to state the aim or theme of the book seems doomed. In this major respect too the book deconstructs itself, professing to be about one thing and then, without telling us that it has changed its mind, turning out to be about something different (without ceasing to be about the first thing at the same time).

3. *The Temple Reconstructed*

I always worry about what to do with a text after it has been deconstructed. In this essay I want to propose a *reconstructive* process. I will focus first upon reconstructing the realities surrounding the text's composition, and secondly upon reconstructing the eventualities surrounding the text's reception.

rebuilding of the temple and the restoration of the Davidic rule.' But he does not even hint at what the relation of the two goals might be.

a. *The Composition of the Text*

Why was this text written? I will not try to answer that question by speculating about the author's intention or the psychology of the prophet, of course, and especially not by double-guessing Persian political strategy or extrapolating from archaeological artifacts. Taking a leaf out of Frederic Jameson's book,⁶¹ I will assume that this text, like others, is written in order to suppress or repress (using the Freudian metaphor) a social conflict. Texts are written on paper, and paper is used for pasting over cracks, especially cracks in the social fabric. The question, Why was this text written?, can then be answered by reconstituting the social reality it implies. Now this is not quite the same as reconstructing the actual social reality in Jerusalem in 520 BCE, to which of course we have no access, since all we have are texts, texts that purport to give us access to those times, indeed, but that are, being texts, constitutionally incapable of doing so. No matter; we cannot access the actual first readers of Haggai's book either, but we *can* reconstitute its implied readers. We cannot ever grasp the social reality of Haggai's time, but we *can* profile the social reality implied in the book.

If texts are written to suppress conflicts, and we want to bring those conflicts to the surface, deconstruction seems to me a good way of doing it. In a deconstruction, a chasm in the text opens up; and we have the choice of timidly averting our gaze from the giddy depths or of boldly peering down into them to what lies hidden (or partly hidden) at the unconscious level.

1. The first deconstruction I identified concerned the issue of honour. It appeared that the people are dishonouring the deity by not rebuilding the temple, and yet for all their rebuilding they will not achieve the honour the deity requires. There is a conflict here between the people and what they can do, on the one hand, and the leadership (the prophet and his accomplices, the high priest and the governor) and what they want on the other. There is, in other words, a social conflict lurking beneath the text and coming to expression in its deconstructability.

In this case, of course, the conflict is not entirely latent. For the text itself portrays the very same conflict, though it doesn't tell

⁶¹. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981).

us the whole truth about it. It represents the conflict as being between the enthusiasts for rebuilding the temple and the 'people'. On the one side are Haggai the 'prophet', Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. These leaders will have their support groups, presumably of prophets, administrators and priests. On the other side are the 'people', everyone else. They are farmers and householders. The conflict comes about

when the people with power think that the people without power should stop farming and putting ceilings in their houses and should spend their days in unpaid labour on building the temple. The people without power do not think this is a good idea.

In whose interest is this rebuilding? Not the people's. Even if they are not economists, they can see that temple building is not contributing to the gross national product, and even if they are not atheists they can see that the worship of the deity is not being impeded in any way by the incompleteness of the temple. Sacrifices are being offered, prayers are being said, priests and levites are being fed by tithes. The temple is a prestige project promoted by the elite, and its construction serves *their* sense of fitness, their vanity. The people at large are understandably not so enthusiastic, for they have little to gain and plenty to lose by the project.

So there is a social conflict beneath the text, implied by the text. The text by no means obscures it completely, but it does try to suppress it. And the way it does so is to tell the story of how the conflict was overcome, i.e. resolved. We recall that Jameson regards texts as attempts to suppress *unresolved* social conflicts. If a conflict has been resolved, it won't generate a text; if everything in the garden is lovely, there is nothing to write home about. Now the way this text tries to suppress the conflict that generated it is to claim that the people were won over to the opinion of the leadership, and so set about rebuilding the temple, thereby removing the tension. What the text suppresses (almost) is that the conflict was *not* resolved, for not all the people *did* co-operate in the building of the temple. Only a *remnant* worked on the temple—which implies that the majority did not. We can tell that this is the case, for while 'the people' as a whole are claimed to say that the 'time is not yet come' (1.2), and it is the people as a whole who are unclean and defiling the temple (2.14), it is only the 'remnant of the people' who obey the prophet's demand, have their spirit stirred and are addressed as its builders (1.12, 14; 2.2).⁶² A remnant is a good thing to be; it is

⁶². Another way of suppressing the conflict is to translate *rav* as 'the rest' of the people (as REB at 1.12, 14; 2.2); everyone knows, on the contrary, that '[i]n Hg and Zc "the remnant of the people" means the faithful

the nearest the proletariat can get to being an elite. If you are a remnant, you are still there; you are still in the reckoning. If you don't belong to the remnant, you have been written off. Now the text of course says not a word about the non-remnant, those who did *not* obey the prophetic word; it tries to write them out of existence. But the word 'remnant' gives the game away; for any semiotic square with 'remnant' at one corner is bound to have 'non-remnant' at another. In short: after Haggai had finished all his prophesying, the conflict between those who wanted the temple built and those who did not remained—so a text was called into being. *That is the implication of the text.*⁶³

2. The second deconstruction, concerning the issue of uncleanness, points up more sharply the same implied social conflict, between the leadership and the populace. Where it differs from the first is that it expresses not just the fact of the conflict but the feelings of the elite about the conflict. The prophet, and with his class, cannot cope with the fact that they despise the people they are dependent on, and they express their anxiety about the tension by creating a deconstructable text. That is to say, they recognize that without the labour of the 'people' there will be no temple building; indeed, without the free and voluntary labour of the lower orders the prestige project of the elite will not be accomplished. Haggai (the character in the book of Haggai) expresses his distaste for the 'people' by pronouncing them 'unclean', and he attempts to gain a secure vantage point for himself over against the people by setting up an artificial dialogue with the priests as his power base. But his categorization of the people as 'unclean' backfires on him when it leads him to declare 'all the work of their hands' unclean. Implicitly that must include the temple building, but he and the class he represents cannot allow that; the text is generated by the unresolved

grouped around Jerusalem' (so NJB footnote)—or rather, the supporters of the leaders in Jerusalem. It is, incidentally, not a problem for the distinction between 'the people' and 'the remnant of the people' that in 1.12 'the people' fear before Yahweh and in 1.13 Yahweh says to 'the people', 'I am with you'; for the 'people' in question in the verses have just now been defined by 'the remnant of the people' at the beginning of 1.12.

⁶³. Whether it was the historical reality is more than we can say, of course.

conflict.

3. The third deconstruction, concerning Zerubbabel, evinces a different social or political conflict implied by the text, namely over the status of the governor. At its most simple, the point is that Haggai doesn't need to pronounce this oracle about Zerubbabel if everyone already agrees with it, and he doesn't need to write it down if everyone has accepted his prophecy about Zerubbabel at the time when he delivered it. The very existence of the Zerubbabel oracle in the text is *prima facie* evidence of resistance to it in the historical reality the text implies. Commentators indeed often recognize that the oracle addresses a situation of conflict, but, since they tend to think in psychological, personalistic and theological categories, they don't see that it is a *political* conflict. They think it is a conflict within Zerubbabel's own psyche, that he needs 'encouragement'. Maybe anyone in Zerubbabel's position *does* need encouragement, but more than that he needs a public announcement of support from his various power bases. Haggai provides that here on behalf of the prophetic cadre.⁶⁴

There is bound to be conflict in a society when one group begins promoting one of its number as a world dictator and promising a shaking of all fixed points of reference. Shopkeepers and farmers are not going to welcome a cosmic upheaval; they need weather they can rely on and steady trade. A shaking of the heavens and the earth that will result in one ruler being substituted for another is more attractive to potential rulers and their hangers-on than to folk who have to earn a living by the 'work of their hands', to coin a phrase. And even if the wealth of all the nations is going to come pouring into Jerusalem, no one expects it to end up in the pocket of Joe Citizen; turning the local shrine into Fort Knox is not everyone's idea of eschatological bliss. Everyone under their own vine and fig tree...now that's a different matter. Haggai's elite do not know this; they think everyone should be impressed by the idea of Zerubbabel's being the signet ring on the deity's finger. The text actually represents this elite as so out of touch with reality as needing to be informed by a

⁶⁴. Cf. the notation of Ezra 5.2 that, at the rebuilding of the temple by Zerubbabel and Jeshua, 'with them were the prophets of God, helping them'. How? We may presume that the prophets did not carry stones.

divine oracle what their people are thinking: the time is not yet come, say the people, says the Lord, by the hand of Haggai. Do rulers so ignorant deserve to be rulers?, we ask ourselves. The gulf between the governors and the governed is intolerably wide; even the surface of the text witnesses to that fact, and the deconstruction confirms it.

b. *The Reception of the Text*

Haggai's book was plainly not a 'popular' work; it is not the product of the 'people'. Rather, it portrays, from the point of view of the leadership, a conflict between them and that section of the people that does not belong to the 'remnant'. But equally plainly, it found its way into the biblical canon, and was accepted by the 'people'. How did they cope with its inconcinnities? Why did they not notice its self-deconstructability? Why did no one see through its papering over of the social conflicts it so revealingly attests?

Being professedly the words of a prophet has a lot to do with it. Being a *book* attributed to a prophet was even more important. It is writing that creates truth, for the truth about the past is what is remembered about the past. Writing a book of prophecy is therefore what makes a prophet a true prophet—even if that prophet tells palpable falsehoods like 'yet a little while and I will shake the heavens'.

That is to say, if you regard the words of Haggai as essentially the words of the deity written down 'by the hand of' Haggai', which means to say, if you believe 1.1, all tensions in the text have to be explained away, for everyone knows that the deity does not contradict himself. In fact, you don't need to explain away tensions, for if you believe that these are the words of the deity you will not be expecting to find tensions, and you will not believe the evidence of your eyes when you encounter one. It will also not occur to you to side with anyone in the text except Haggai, for he is the prophet of the god; the people therefore *are* unclean, and the temple most certainly *should* be built, the moment Haggai says it should. In short, through most of the history of the reception of the book, its deconstructability and its suppression of social conflict has simply been ignored because of the authentication of the prophet by the religious community.

What has happened, however, in the days since the interpreta-

tion of the Bible was wrested from the control of ecclesiastical authorities? Sad to say, not a lot. The prophet's book remains canonical scripture, and most interpreters feel some constraint to offer readings in accord with the parameters of doctrinal purity.

Two quotations from latterday readers of the book of Haggai should be enough to testify to the reception the book enjoys these days. In response to the depiction of the wealth of the nations flowing into Jerusalem, in which many a reader might well see a touch of the grandiose and of wishful thinking, Hans Walter Wolff writes:

What is being expressed here is not greed on Israel's part, or some kind of Jewish egoism; it is the sovereign claim of Yahweh, who turns to his impoverished people in their necessity.⁶⁵

Compare with this the words of Wolff's Heidelberg predecessor, Gerhard von Rad:

There is no question here of greed for gain, but a proclamation by Yahweh which the prophet sets down with uncompromising boldness, and any exegesis which casts doubt upon this mighty purposefulness of Yahweh in the present world-order stands self-condemned in its own supposed spirituality.⁶⁶

The text, that is to say, cannot possibly represent any kind of unlovely motivation on the part of the prophet or his supporters. In fact, say Wolff and von Rad, what we find here are not really words of the prophet himself, but 'the sovereign claim of Yahweh', 'a proclamation by Yahweh' that is consequently as unassailable as the moral character of Yahweh himself. These are not the words of some postexilic Jew, poverty-stricken and marginalized in some far-flung outpost of empire, giving voice to a fantasy about world dominion and economic supremacy for his kinsmen; no, these are the very words of the 'mighty purposefulness' of the universal god, 'turning to his impoverished people in their necessity'. Let no reader of these esteemed Old Testament scholars reflect for a moment on the social divisiveness of Haggai's book, or remark that it is a funny way of turning to your empoverished people to promise them all the silver and gold lining the pockets of the Gentiles and then do

⁶⁵. Wolff, *Haggai*, p. 82.

⁶⁶. Von Rad, 'The City on the Hill', pp. 232-42 (240-41).

nothing about it. Such exegeses stand self-condemned, von Rad assures us, so we know in advance where we stand with the guild of biblical scholars if we try to write an essay like the present one. The text owed its origin to its suppression of a social conflict in ancient Israel; and it owes its continuing existence (does it not?) to its facility to suppress conflict among its readers. And in the same way, and in the same 'prophetic' succession, the works of Wolff and von Rad also owe *their* continued existence to *their* power to suppress divergent readings, outlawing in advance 'any exegesis that casts doubt'.

This is the depth of the corruption in our academic discipline that surrounds us, even in this year of grace 1995, for all the splendours of the Enlightenment and the glories of scientific biblical criticism. It would be ironic if Haggai's book should come to serve for the unmasking of the abomination of religious authority standing where it should not and for the breaking loose of conflicts within the scholarly community that have been too long hushed up in the name of collegiality and tolerance.