

Article

Mas(c/k) of a Man: Masculinity and Jesus in Performance

Megan Wines 

Department of Theology, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60660, USA; mwines@luc.edu

Abstract: While both narrative and performance criticisms take whole-story approaches to the texts they are engaging with, performance critical approaches are uniquely suited to considerations of the body, and particularly of gender. Alongside the growth in performance critical analyses of the gospels that place prominence on the embodied, performed dimension of the texts, when thinking about gender it becomes critical to examine the ways in which masculinity is constructed in and through performance, particularly in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. This article is an examination of the masculinity of Jesus as it is presented in the Gospel of Mark, as it argues that the Gospel of Mark presents a seemingly “unmasculine” depiction of Jesus that performers (as well as later interpreters) would have had to make performance choices about in their own depictions of Jesus for a given performance event. While narrative approaches have more space to hold multiple interpretations in tension with one another, performances of the texts would have necessitated making singular choices that would impact an audience’s understanding of the text.

Keywords: performance criticism; gender; masculinity; Jesus; drama; rhetoric; Gospel of Mark

1. Introduction

Since the beginnings of the official subdiscipline of performance criticism with David Rhoads’ 2006 two-part article “Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies” (Rhoads 2006a, 2006b), performance criticism¹ has become a developing field that places primary emphasis on the importance of the oral world of biblical texts. Since then, there have been 19 volumes in the Wipf and Stock Biblical Performance Criticism series as well as a number of other texts outside the series that have worked to expand the ever-growing field of literature about and surrounding performance and biblical texts. As many scholars of the early performance critical movement came out of narrative criticism, the two have been consistently linked.² While both narrative and performance criticisms take whole-story approaches to the texts they are engaging with, performance critical approaches are uniquely suited to considerations of the body, and particularly of gender. While much of the performance critical literature has touched upon the ways that *bodies* are critical to performance, and thus to the meaning of a story, a point I certainly will not contradict, what is lacking in current performance critical examinations is the consideration of the ways that bodies are *gendered*. The body is never a neutral site of meaning; this is particularly the case in performance, and especially the case in the ancient world, where a man’s status as a “man” was itself up for debate.

With the growth in performance critical analyses of the gospels that place prominence on the embodied, performed dimension of the texts, it then also becomes critical to examine the ways in which masculinity is constructed in and through performance. As the central figure of the New Testament—Jesus—is male, this article seeks to interrogate the ways in which the masculinity of Jesus was constructed to interact with societal norms of what a “man” should look like. Jesus, as an incarnate, *bodily* man, necessarily had to exist within, and be presented in terms of, masculinity. This masculinity is often left aside as scholars discuss the ways his *humanness* and his *divinity* interact and meld together. To be a human male is necessarily to present a type of masculinity, and if we are to assert the *humanity* of Jesus then it is also critical to examine the *masculinity* of Jesus.³



Citation: Wines, Megan. 2023. Mas(c/k) of a Man: Masculinity and Jesus in Performance. *Religions* 14: 1162. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091162>

Academic Editors: Christopher W. Skinner, Zechariah P. Eberhart and Kelly Iverson

Received: 20 July 2023

Revised: 1 September 2023

Accepted: 4 September 2023

Published: 12 September 2023



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As this article will work to demonstrate, trying to pin down one type or another of masculinity for Jesus is a difficult task, as his characterization seems to resist a clear-cut masculinity “type”. While a story exists solely on the page, it is possible for this multiplicity of interpretive options to exist simultaneously; but this only works if the story is being received in a literary capacity. The growing movement of performance criticism insists that the gospel stories would have been performed,⁴ and so I would posit that this would also require a performer to make a choice about the type of masculinity the character Jesus embodies in comparison with the other characters around him. While this choice could change across different performance events, within one performance a performer typically needs to choose a “type” of masculinity for a given character (in this case Jesus) or risk having a muddled, confusing performance.⁵ Theoretically, this need to make a choice would have been one that existed for every performance, as an ancient performer navigated what type of masculinity their version of Jesus embodied,⁶ and this article will illustrate how Jesus’s masculinity as it is depicted in the Gospel of Mark relates to the understanding of masculinity in his historical context as an itinerant, Palestinian man in the first century CE. This article is therefore proposing more broadly how a more thorough understanding of the presentation of Jesus’s masculinity, and how it fits into the broader social context, should be taken into consideration by performance critical scholars (especially those who use modern performance to influence their thinking). This article will begin with a brief overview of how masculinity is a constructed social entity, focusing on both the hegemonic masculinity of the Greek and Roman worlds, including how masculinity construction is tied up with performance, via rhetorical education and dramatic depictions, and then will examine what the Hebrew Bible can tell us about masculinity ideals for Jewish men. In the second section of the article, I will use the Gospel of Mark the hallmark text for many performance critical analyses, to illustrate how differing understandings of masculinity could yield different performances of the gospel.

2. Constructing Masculinity in Antiquity

While modern cries against the feminization of Jesus urge a return to a “biblical masculinity”, the gender ideologies found in antiquity do not map so easily onto modern ones.⁷ To lay the groundwork for examining how audiences of the New Testament could have understood the masculinity of Jesus in the stories they were hearing, it will first be important to delineate exactly what concepts of masculinity and understandings of gender were at play in the ancient world. This section will first examine the ways in which masculinity was understood in the Greek and Roman worlds (including a discussion of masculinity in Greek and Roman performance modes), and then move on to an examination of how that hegemonic masculinity⁸ was either reflected or challenged in Jewish understanding.⁹ Finally, it will look at the ways that these masculinities were presented and/or created in performance through a look at rhetoric and drama.

2.1. *The Body and Understandings of Gender in the Greek and Roman Worlds*

Discussions of the relationship of the physical body and gender have become more common as the movement for LGBTQIA+ acceptance has worked on challenging the gender norms related to bodily expression that have been predominant for generations. This “new” insistence on a more fluid understanding of gender, while taking on a different form, is not necessarily an entirely novel concept, as gender in the Greek and Roman worlds of antiquity also operated on a spectrum rather than in a harsh dichotomy.

In her book *Behold the Man: Jesus and Greco-Roman Masculinity*, Colleen Conway begins by illustrating how the concept of masculinity, rather than being biologically determined for the Greek or Roman man, was something that had to both be earned and maintained. While being born physiologically male was a good start, it was not necessarily a guarantee that one would achieve the status of “man”. Rather, “ancient masculinity was constituted more by the shape of one’s life than the shape of one’s body” (Conway 2008, p. 16). The body lacked any sort of definitive stability, and a man was always at risk of losing his

“manliness”, constantly trying to avoid the perils of a “slide into effeminacy” (Conway 2008, p. 17). Thomas Laqueur’s popular contention (based in Aristotle’s argument that women are incompletely formed men) that ancient thinkers understood the female body as being entirely different than a male one, as half-baked, or unfinished male ones (what has been called the “one-sex theory”) has historically been popular in examinations of gender and early Christianity. However, his model has been problematized in more recent scholarship that highlights the existence of a two-sex (but no less hierarchical) one.¹⁰ Helen King and Meghan Henning both point instead to the importance of bodily fluids as being a critical piece of gender determination for many ancient thinkers. Women were understood to be more cold, soft, and spongy, with men being understood as hotter and drier (Henning 2021, pp. 26–27; King 2016, p. 44). However, Henning also highlights that even with the two-sex model, the potential for the shifting nature of a body was always present:

...the two-sex model demands that any change in the equilibrium of the perfect male body did not merely indicate a slide down the hierarchical scale to femininity. Any such change also represented a full-scale incursion on that body’s perfection, and a more immediate shift in status from a perfect male body to the precarious existence of the weak, porous, cold, and more often dysfunctional female body. (Henning 2021, pp. 27–28)

So, if it was not one’s biological makeup that determined who became a man, how did one achieve the status of a “man”? It was through one’s actions: men were expected to “act like a man”. Judith Butler has become renowned for their argument that gender itself is performative, with people fulfilling culturally determined roles of what it means to be either a man or a woman.¹¹ This was no less the case in the Greek and Roman worlds than it is today, and the role of a Greek or Roman man relied on two major aspects that one had to adhere to in order to be a good “man”: (1) taking an active role (especially in terms of one’s private sexual life, but also more broadly in one’s public social life) and (2) exhibiting a display of self-control and restraint (regarding passions, as well as how one treats others) (Conway 2008, p. 22).

2.1.1. Active Role

In its most basic form, the requirement of a man taking an active role was tied to the idea that a man should be impenetrable. He was expected to be the penetrator in sexual activity: “penetration of a vagina, an anus (whether it be male’s or female’s), or a mouth (again either a male’s or female’s) was considered the proper sexual role for a *vir* [viz., “man”]. Romans did not distinguish between homosexual and heterosexual in the same way as modern Westerners do” (Stewart 2016, pp. 94–95). In addition to its sexual dimension, this impenetrability also meant that a man was also expected to be able to protect himself from being penetrated, pieced, hit, etc., in any form of assault.

This active role was also understood and constructed on the understanding of the male’s active role in creation. Men were believed to have the generative “seed” that was planted in a woman who merely served as a growing vehicle, or “field”, for child-creation rather than contributing biologically to the child. These two roles (active-male, passive-female) perceptibly impacted the ways in which gender was spoken of; for instance, Philo points to how “the female gender is maternal, passive, corporeal and sense-perceptible while the male is active, rational, incorporeal and more akin to mind and thought” (QE 1.8).

2.1.2. Self-Control and Restraint

While the meaning of the need to take an “active role” is relatively straightforward, the concept of exhibiting self-control and restraint is both more complicated, and at times in direct conflict with, the tenants of an active male sexuality. The ways in which men were expected to exhibit control was often tied up with the understanding of the virtues,¹² with self-control being on most (if not all) virtue lists. By the first century BCE, the virtues encompassed four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, self-control, and courage (Stewart 2016, p. 96). While all four virtues were important, Conway highlights how ancient authors

upheld self-control as central: “Moderation, or self-mastery, was frequently discussed in terms of mastery of the passions, especially lust and anger, but also self-restraint in eating, drinking, and luxury in general” (Conway 2008, p. 24). In fact, self-control becomes so central that it surpasses the active/passive binary in determining ideal masculinity, with sexual attractions for one’s own wife serving as a potentially emasculating desire if not controlled (Conway 2008, p. 25).

The control of anger is particularly interesting, because anger can be looked at in one of two ways: either it should be understood as a loss of control, and therefore an antithesis of what it meant to be “manly”, or it should be viewed as a display of one’s convictions, which would instead make the display of anger a “manly” act. This has serious and problematic implications when one holds the God of the Hebrew Bible up to these ideals, as frequently throughout the text God is described as being angry.¹³ In *On the Unchangeableness of God*, Philo works to alleviate this dissonance by reframing it in terms of the need for instruction and discipline, but he is not alone in trying to reframe anger as something that could potentially enhance one’s masculinity rather than something emasculating, as later Christian writers like Lactantius and Basil attempted to similarly alleviate this tension. Lactantius frames divine anger in terms of God’s kindness, and re-masculinizes God through pointing to how God, unlike mortal men, has *control* over his anger: (Conway 2008, p. 28)

And so, lest those things be done which the lowly and men of mediocre station and even great kings do through anger, his temper ought to be moderated and suppressed, because of the danger that being without control of his mind he might commit some unpardonable crime. God, however, is angry, and not for the present moment, since He is eternal and has perfect virtue and is never angry unless rightly. (*Ir.* 21)

So, the argument becomes that anger is only justifiable for God because of God’s self-control, and even *kings*, who were supposed to be the ultimate man in the Greek and Roman worlds, lack the necessary self-control to keep anger responsibly in-check. Again, we have here an instance where self-control becomes the ultimate sign of masculinity and is able to trump any other considerations. It is also in the contradicting depictions of the possibilities of righteous *or* uncontrolled anger, like the contradiction of sexual self-control and mandate of generativity, that hegemonic masculine ideals again seem to be at odds with themselves (Conway 2008, pp. 27–29).

2.2. Masculinity in Performance

When thinking particularly about performance and masculinity, in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds there are two major aspects that are relevant here: (1) the construction and defense of masculinity in rhetoric, and (2) the feminization of the male body onstage, but particularly in Athenian tragedy. For both rhetoric and drama, the body itself, and particularly the *male* body, is the vehicle for and place of performance. To lose sight of this is to misunderstand the ways in which gender is constructed in and through performance.

2.2.1. Constructing Masculinity in Rhetoric

A training in rhetoric was the final stage of education in the Greek and Roman worlds, and it is this final stage in which boys were taught, quite literally, how to be good men. In fact, “in this period school exercises were not what separated the men from the boys, but what made boys into men” (Gleason 1995, p. xxii). Maud Gleason highlights the way in which masculinity was not an achievement earned, but something that was constantly being battled for and defended in the rhetorical arena. Additionally, there was also a specific connection between the concepts of a good man (*vir bonus*), being a good speaker, and authority.¹⁴ Not only did the learning of rhetoric help to establish a man’s masculinity, but:

Rhetorical performances were the means by which men of power showcased their power and laid claim to its legitimacy, both by attempting to dominate other elite men through persuasion and invective, and by instructing non-elite members of society about their inferior status. (Myers 2015, p. 195)

While most academic interactions with rhetorical texts today handle them as textual objects, both Gleason and Erik Gunderson center the fact that this rhetorical performance was a *bodily* one. A man had to perform with his whole self: controlling voice, facial expression, gesture, etc., to win his rhetorical matchups.¹⁵ This reinscribing of masculinity in and through rhetorical performance serves as an excellent example of what queer theorist Judith Butler calls the “sustained and repeated corporeal project” of gender construction (Butler 1988, p. 552). Since gender, and thus masculinity, is not tied to any inherent traits of a person, it is through this rhetorical sparring that men became, and stayed, “men”.

2.2.2. Drama and Unmanning the Hero

If rhetoric was the arena in which orators became men, the stage was where masculinity was questioned and shifted.¹⁶ Athenian drama was made by men, performed by men, for audiences that were likely predominantly male.¹⁷ The plays often served as a reflection of society, but with tragedy’s tendency to feature female primary characters, there was always a sort of gender-play at work. To begin, men literally cross-dressed to play female roles (of which there are many in Athenian drama), and then even within the dramas the masculinity of the male characters was always at stake in relation to these (often quite powerful) female characters. In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, the effeminate Dionysus convinces king Pentheus to cross-dress to spy on the wild women of Thebes (*Bacchae* 811–45, 912–46), and Pentheus ends up entirely dismembered at the end of the play (*Bacchae* 1100–42); in *Alcestis*, Admetus’s wife, Alcestis is the one who dies a noble death in the place of her husband (*Alcestis* 990–1005); in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, Antigone is consistently challenging the kingly degrees/power of Creon (*Antigone* 44–47, 245–47, 441–70); and in *Trachiniae*, we see Hercules slowly unmanned as he suffers a long and gruesome death (*Trachiniae* 963–1278). This is in no way an exhaustive list of the ways in which gender ideologies were explored and played out on the Athenian stage, but as Katrina Cawthorn has pointed out in *Becoming Female: The Male Body in Greek Tragedy*, “the tragic (female and male) body is essentially in a state of transition, subject to becoming other” (Cawthorn 2008, p. 6). Jeff Jay has explored the ways in which the Gospel of Mark exhibits a tragic “mode” throughout the narrative. My later section on the crucifixion will serve to show that as part of this modality, the broken, abandoned body of Christ on the cross is not something to skip over in the quest to maintain or examine the masculinity of Christ, but if Mark is truly operating within a tragic mode, it is precisely the devolution into a feminized, pierced, broken body that completes the tragic narrative. As Cawthorn puts it:

To some extent Athenian tragedy as a genre can be read as ultimately failing to settle on a note of safety, as failing to leave male culture intact...the tragic hero often remains feminized, and this effect is further reinforced by many of the plays finishing on a note that is unsettling, and disturbingly for male culture, open-ended.¹⁸

Masculinity in tragedy creates a touchpoint for making sense of the otherwise unmanly death of Jesus, especially if there is an understanding that Mark would have been presented in performance (even if that performance event falls under a different performance genre than a theatrical one).

2.2.3. Performance Is Not a Genre

Yet, while these ancient performance parallels are useful for thinking about the ways in which gender and performance interact in antiquity, they should not be used as direct correlations to the ways that we think about the performance of biblical material. There are no dramas in the bible, and so to try to read biblical material as if it were a drama (whether

ancient or modern) is to read the texts out of their genre categories. Biblical scholars have long debated over what the genre of a gospel is, worked to find the types of rhetoric in Paul's letters, and argued over what exactly an "apocalypse" is; all working with the concept of literary genre. When performance criticism began, there was an overwhelming push to see these texts as something that grew out of an "oral world" and, thus, would have been "performance". However, "performance" is a medium, not a genre. To lump all genres of performance into one bucket and call it "performance" does a disservice to our understandings of the function, rules, and parameters of certain types of performance. To use our two previously mentioned categories of rhetoric and drama, in antiquity a performance by an orator was distinct from those by the actors in the theatre. Even within theatrical performances there were subgenres (tragedy, comedy, pantomime, etc.), the importance and prevalence of which shifted throughout time. Within these different performance genres, then, there operate different rules of engagement, and this was especially true in regard to proper gendered action.

2.3. Jewish Understandings of Masculinity

While understanding the ways in which Greek and Roman culture upheld certain aspects of masculinity as normative, it is important to note how Greek and (particularly) Roman masculine ideals made up the *hegemonic* masculinity present at the time the gospel texts were written. As Jewish men, Jesus and his disciples would also (and perhaps more so) have needed to adhere to the ideals of manliness put forth by their own Jewish community. Rather than existing as two separate spheres of influence, Jewish men of Jesus's time would have had to carefully balance the influence of the dual expectations of Roman hegemonic masculinity and Jewish communal masculinity. This section will examine what the Hebrew Bible tells us about how Jewish men understood their roles as "men".¹⁹

Just as the texts of the Hebrew Bible are multifaceted in time, location, genre, etc., so too do they present a range of potential options when seeking to identify what qualifies as correct or appropriate "masculinity", or what will determine a "good man" from a lesser one. Additionally, the different social locations of the various men in the Hebrew Bible will present or attempt to conform to differing masculinities: the masculinity of David will look different than that of Abraham, or that of the prophets (who all seem to exhibit their own types of masculinity). The wide range of genres and eras present in the Hebrew Bible requires us to "zoom out" to see if there are common traits that men are expected to have or adhere to across social location, time, and genre. In general, Susan Haddox pulls out an emphasis on honor, potency, and wisdom as the three overarching characteristics of Hebrew Bible masculinity.²⁰ David Clines, across his body of work, has similarly created a list of what he sees as "traditional male characteristics": strength, violence, bonding, womanlessness, solitariness, musicality, beauty, persuasive speech, honor, binary thinking, and objectifying.²¹ While there is an extensive amount that could be said about the variety of constructions of masculinity in the Hebrew Bible, for the sake of space I want to narrow the focus to three threads that are most relevant to this study of the masculinity of Jesus: (1) how the masculinity of God is constructed and how men relate to that masculinity; (2) what connotes a kingly masculinity, with a specific look at David; and (3) how the prophets seem to exhibit an alternative masculinity to the masculinities presented elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

2.3.1. A Masculine God

The unquestioned masculinity of God necessarily creates questions about how other, earthly, men are to relate to God. This issue is the central focus of Howard Eilberg-Schwartz's *God's Phallus*, where he focuses on the difficulties for men in worshipping a male deity since they necessarily need to become feminized to appropriately worship God.²² Haddox points to criticisms of Eilberg-Schwartz' emphasis on the marriage of God to the people of Israel as an image that only frequently appears in the prophets, and there is little other evidence that an emphasis on natural complementarity would have been necessary. However,

she does draw out that “In a society in which masculinity was a common representation of power, Yhwh had to be perceived as the most masculine. Everyone else was in a subordinate position” (Haddox 2016b, pp. 183–84). This necessary subordination of everyone else to God is seen in the interactions of Moses and God (where Moses cannot even look at God in Exod 3:4), Abraham and God (where Abraham is willing to sacrifice his only son because God asked it of him in Gen 22:1–19), Jacob and God (where the wrestling of Jacob with the angel in Gen 32:25–33 leads to a bodily injury²³), etc. The unquestioned masculinity of God is also seen in Hellenistic Jewish thinking, particularly in places like Philo’s discussion of the gendering of the virtues, where he states:

As indeed all the virtues have women’s titles, but powers and activities of consummate men. For that which comes after God, even though it were chiefest of all other things, occupies a second place, and therefore was termed feminine to express its contrast with the Maker of the Universe who is masculine, and the feminine always comes short of and is lesser than it. (*Quaest in Ex* 1.8) (Satlow 1996, p. 26)

This dynamic will also be seen in the relationship between Jesus and God. It is in this necessary subordination of all to God that makes up one of the primary characteristics of what “biblical” masculinity looks like in the Hebrew Bible, and this submission to God, like the Greek and Roman emphasis on self-control, often eclipses and overrides any other masculine behavior (Haddox 2016a, p. 8).

2.3.2. Kingly Masculinity

In terms of the masculinity of a king, the Hebrew Bible constructs masculinity very similarly to the ways in which masculinity was constructed in the Roman world.²⁴ In his study of the masculinity of David, David Clines sets forth six characteristics of masculinity that David exhibits.²⁵ First, as is prevalent across masculinities, the necessity of a man to be strong is tied to the identity of being a warrior or soldier, with strength being tied to violence. In David, this capacity for violence is fully fleshed out, as he is depicted as having a death-toll body count of around 140,000 (Clines 1995, pp. 216–17). Men were expected to not only be strong, but to put that strength to use on the battlefield. Clines also points to how Hebrew does not have a separate word for courage or bravery; rather, the words that often get translated into modern English as “courage, courageous” are derived from the root קָוָה (‘be strong’) (Clines 1995, p. 218). Second, when not on a battlefield, kings could display their power in other capacities, and the power of persuasion and gifted speech was one of the most primary. “To be master of persuasion is to have another form of power, which is not an alternative to, and far less a denatured version of, physical strength, but part of the repertory of the powerful male” (Clines 1995, p. 220). Third, David is described as beautiful, a feature often attributed to great men, but one we will not see in our discussion of Jesus, as the New Testament entirely lacks a physical description of him.²⁶ Fourth, David is depicted as having close friendships with other men, fulfilling a category Clines refers to in modern terms as “male bonding”, where friendships with men are privileged above all other relationships in a man’s life. Fifth, while David has a number of wives, so is not technically without a woman, there is a certain lack of necessity of women for David that leads Clines to highlight that this tenet of masculinity points to the idea that “real men can get along fine without women” (Clines 1995, p. 226). Finally, Clines highlights David’s musicality as another characteristic of masculinity.

2.3.3. The Prophets and Alternative Masculinities

While the depiction of warriors and kings in the Hebrew Bible seem to slot into a hegemonic masculine ideal fairly easily, the picture in the prophetic writings is a little more complex. The prophets are often men whose bodies are not their own, but as belonging to God, and as such are subjugated to torture or ridicule and emasculation. God is depicted as having total control over the prophet’s body, often using the physical bodies of prophets

to perform sign-acts that hinge on the way in which the prophets' male bodies will be understood. This is seen, for instance, in the humiliating/shameful exposure of Isaiah's buttocks in Isa 20:1–5 in a treatment that would be associated with prisoners of war. This display of nakedness is used as a sign of the humiliation Israel will face if they ally with Egypt against Assyria (Graybill 2016, p. 3). The central metaphor of Hosea is a marriage that Hosea is forced into with a prostitute on God's orders. Ezekiel's body is consistently the vehicle through which his prophecies are delivered. Rhiannon Graybill's work has pointed to the ways in which this embodied capacity of the Hebrew Bible's prophets queers ideas of masculinity.²⁷ Yet, the prophets continuing to obey and perform that which God asks of them is still in line with the central aspect that Haddox points to as being critical to Hebrew Bible masculinity: complete and total submission to God.

3. Jesus's Masculinity, Performance, and the Gospel of Mark

For a case study to examine what a performance critical consideration of masculinity may look like, I have chosen the Gospel of Mark to focus on, both due to its complicated depiction of Jesus's masculinity and also because it has been the center of much of the performance critical work conducted thus far.²⁸ And while works like Whitney Shiner's *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* highlight many facets of performance that are tied up in masculinity (i.e., honor/shame, authority, competition, etc.), masculinity as a component of performance is often something left unsaid.²⁹ This section will show that the ways in which the interpreter-performer understands and constructs the type of masculinity Jesus exhibits will necessarily impact the way in which they present his character.

The complicated nature of the characterization of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is especially present in masculinity studies on Jesus. While Jesus starts the gospel on a high note, as the audience is told that this is the "beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, [Son of God]" (Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [υἱοῦ θεοῦ]),³⁰ the gospel ends with his broken body, pierced on a cross, and crying out as being abandoned (Mark 15:34, 37). This is not alleviated (as in other gospels) with a resurrection scene, and the gospel itself ends with the message of the resurrection in the hands of fearful women. In order to illustrate how there exists a multiplicity of ways to read (and, thus, perform) Jesus's masculinity in Mark, this section will be a close examination of three of the ways in which to understand masculinity in the crucifixion: in the frame of (1) noble death traditions, (2) the tragic hero, and (3) prophetic masculinity. Ultimately, rather than focusing only on the ways in which Greek and Roman ideals influence and shape the ways in which the masculinity of Jesus is constructed in Mark, I want to show that as a text forged in a Jewish community under the hegemonic masculinity of the Roman world, how masculinity as constructed in the Hebrew Bible would still have been present in constructions of masculinity for Jewish writers. While this article is not attempting to put forth any of these interpretations as "correct", by drawing out various options I hope to illustrate that if we are to take seriously that Mark would have been a story primarily performed for an audience rather than silently read, a performer must have had to (or, in the case of modern performances, must continue to) make choices about their depictions of Jesus's masculinity.

3.1. Crucifixion: The Unmanning of Jesus?

As has been mentioned, Mark's Gospel is the only one of the four gospels that does not include a resurrection appearance. The last time we see Jesus, he has cried aloud from the cross, died, and his body is handed between Pilate and Joseph of Arimathea for burial. From the tears he sheds in Gethsemane where he begs God to take the cup from him to his suffering and death on the cross, there is nothing particularly "manly" about the way he dies in the Gospel by hegemonic masculine standards.³¹ This section will examine varying ways of understanding his unmanly death, as I first look at a solution that has early traction for making sense of the death of Jesus,³² the model of understanding the crucifixion as a noble death. Then, I engage with two alternative models I see: the tragic model and the prophetic model (in line with the ways in which Graybill has understood prophetic

masculinity from the Hebrew Bible). Additionally, as I discuss each, I will posit potential performance choices that would be influenced by each understanding.

3.1.1. A Noble Death

One method of explaining away the otherwise “unmanly” death of Jesus via crucifixion is to frame it as being in line with noble death traditions in the Greek and Roman worlds. Noble deaths, as an extreme example of self-control, were ones in which men, often in battle, died in place of/for the men around them.³³ In fact, as Conway illustrates through her example of the suicide of Otho as described by Suetonius, an otherwise feminine man could claim his masculinity via a noble death (Conway 2008, p. 29). The ability of a man to die bravely and often on behalf of others seems at face value to be a good option for understanding the death of Jesus. In fact, in 10:45 he even tells us that the reason he has come is to “give his life as a ransom for many” (δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν). However, when the time comes, a far different picture emerges. Beginning with his prayer in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus seems unwilling to fulfill this role as he asks (begs?) God to “take this cup from me” (παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ). While he swiftly defers to God’s will, “but not what I wish, but what you wish” (ἀλλ’ οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σὺ 14:36),³⁴ when compared with other Jewish examples of noble deaths, like 4 Maccabees, it falls far short of the manly ideal.³⁵ In 4 Maccabees, the brothers are depicted as nobly dying for the law, each giving a reasoned speech about their deaths and facing death bravely without groaning. This juxtaposition also highlights two other feminizing aspects of the crucifixion narrative that pose problems for the noble death model: the relative silence of Jesus during his trials, and then the cries he emits from the cross. In a culture where a man’s ability to speak well and defend himself literally made the man, Jesus’s silence during his trials can be interpreted either as a manly stoicism *or* feminine silence.³⁶ Similarly, Jesus’s cries from the cross seem to indicate that he is not “taking it like a man”. The question of whether men could cry out in pain is explored by Cicero, who indicates that typically a brave, wise, “manly” man will not cry out in pain.³⁷

Placing these difficulties aside for a moment, what would a performance that centers the understanding of Jesus’s death in Mark as a noble death look like? I posit that noble death performances would necessarily be performances that rely on communal understandings that the (seemingly unsatisfactory) end of Mark is not the end of the story. A noble-death Jesus would be consistently strong and stoic. He would comfort his disciples even as he tells them they will desert him (14:25–31). His distress and trouble in 14:33 could be posed as being distressed for/about his disciples rather than for himself, which would then also frame the desire to not leave his disciples to serve as a motivator for his asking God to take the cup, before he realizes/remembers that it is through his death that they will ultimately be saved. Jesus’s silence (14:61a) is a stoic self-control as he refuses to stoop to the level of those giving false testimony about him, and only speaks to indicate his authority as “the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One” (ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ; 14:61b) before prophesying of his future coming and power (14:62). Before Pilate, Jesus gives little to no answers, only delivering a cool “you say so” (15:2) before giving no further replies. This then amazes Pilate with Jesus’s display of (manly?) stoicism. Jesus then moves on to the endurance of his various physical trials, until he reaches Golgotha where, shortly before he is nailed to the cross, he is offered wine mixed with myrrh (an ancient anesthetic)³⁸, which he refuses. Jesus is able to endure this without the help of any anesthetic. The cries from the cross would necessarily have to be delivered in line with the athletic strength cries that Cicero cites, where athletes in intense competition shout to push themselves.³⁹ Conway highlights the way in which scholars like Robert Gundry have understood the cry just in that way (Conway 2008, p. 102). While absent an embodied performance illustration due to the medium of journal articles, hopefully this has given a sense of the ways in which the text could be pushed to present a Jesus in line with noble death traditions.

3.1.2. A Tragic Hero

In his *Tragic in Mark*, Jeff Jay has worked to show the ways in which Mark exhibits a “tragic mode”, and argues through the illustration of the tragic mode in other Jewish and Greek and Roman literature, that “Mark’s evocations of tragic drama were quite intentional and intelligible to many early recipients”.⁴⁰ Particularly in relation to the end of the gospel, Jay highlights the ways in which the tragic concept of a *deus ex machina* has been used to understand the potentially unsatisfying end of the story (Jay 2014, pp. 198–204; see also Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 92–93). While a full examination of Mark and tragedy is beyond the scope of this article, the work of scholars like Jay allows for the reading of the masculinity of Jesus in Mark as in line with how masculinity is presented in tragedy. The suffering of Jesus in the passion narrative has been linked to the way in which Heracles’ suffering is depicted in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, as both stories end with the gruesome death of the central (deity-fathered) male.⁴¹ Just as Jesus is characterized throughout the Gospel of Mark as being a strong,⁴² virile,⁴³ leader of men who meets a thoroughly unmanly death, so too does Heracles, the paragon of masculine strength, meet his end at the hands of his wife, and the play features a groaning, weeping, suffering Heracles onstage. Cawthorn highlights that this is not an isolated incident in tragedy, and that tragic male heroes are frequently unmanned through suffering: “Suffering plays a key role in both creating and skewing these masculine/feminine associations of the sexed body and remakes the male body into something else” (Cawthorn 2008, pp. 10–11).

Thus, a performance of the end of Mark that was leaning into the “tragic mode” of the narrative would be one that necessarily plays with the ways in which the suffering of Jesus should not be relegated to the back seat, but rather leans into the cries from the cross as a Jesus in pain, as it is this pain and death that serves ultimately as the salvific vehicle. A performer could then heighten the miraculous (*machina*-esque) nature of the tearing of the Temple curtain in two and the appearance of the angel at the empty tomb. A tragic understanding of the Gospel of Mark opens up space for Jesus to safely appear less masculine than many interpreters would usually be comfortable with. As Heracles’ status as a masculine figure in Greco-Roman imagination is not hindered by his depiction as a suffering, groaning, feminized figure onstage, so too is there space here for the same to be true for Jesus.

3.1.3. Prophetic Model

For the most part, when scholars talk about masculinity as it relates to the study of Jesus, they are quick to jump to the hegemonic Roman ideals of masculinity as their starting point.⁴⁴ While I do agree that the hegemony of the Roman masculine model would have influenced and impacted the way in which Jesus is depicted, I also want to take seriously the influences of the Hebrew Bible on masculinity formation for Jewish men. The discussions surrounding the authorship of Mark and debates about if he was Jewish or Gentile serve as a good indication that in the Gospel of Mark, there is a fusion between Roman/Hellenistic ideals and Jewish ones (Yarbro Collins 2007, pp. 1–6). Adela Yarbro Collins, in her commentary on Mark, concisely indicates this fusion: “The author of Mark has taken the model of biblical sacred history and transformed it, first, by infusing it with an eschatological and apocalyptic perspective and, second, by adapting it to Hellenistic historiographical and biographical traditions” (Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 1).

This section suggests that the same sort of hybridization that Yarbro Collins sees in the genre forms of Mark is also seen in the ways in which masculinity is depicted. It is at this point that I turn to prophetic masculinity as a model for understanding the end of the Gospel of Mark.⁴⁵ Like the failed masculinity depicted onstage in Greek tragedy, Graybill wants to highlight that so too can “prophecy can be read as a series of failures of masculinity—or, alternately, as transformations to the very representation of “masculinity” as a category” (Graybill 2016, p. 14). Just as Greek tragedy shifted and adjusted hegemonic Greek ideals of masculinity, so too do the prophets present a shifted and adjusted version of the masculinities of the Hebrew Bible.

From the very beginning of the narrative, the presence of the Hebrew prophets is felt in the quotation from Isaiah (1:2–3).⁴⁶ The story begins with a theophanic baptism scene that, while not as dramatic, is reminiscent of the various calls of the prophets (cf. Jer 1:4–10; Isa 6; Ezek 1–2), and throughout the narrative Jesus primarily teaches through action, mirroring the sign-acts of prophets like Ezekiel. Like Ezekiel’s eating of bread baked on human dung (Ezek 4:12), so too does Jesus eat in “unclean” or problematic situations (cf. Mark 2:15, 18). We find Jesus asleep in stormy waters (4:38) like Jonah (Jon 1:5) and he raises dead children (5:35–42) like Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8–37). The Markan “apocalypse” of chapter 13 calls upon images found in Daniel, and scholars regularly point to how Jesus can be understood as the “suffering servant” depicted in Isaiah.⁴⁷ Framed in light of Jeremiah’s constant complaints (largely found in Jer 12–20) about his prophetic role, Jesus’s asking God to remove the cup from him in Gethsemane is not a question that is completely out of left field (Graybill 2016, p. 15). Perhaps most importantly, Jesus even self-identifies as a prophet (6:4).⁴⁸

So, what does a performance of Jesus as a prophet look like in terms of masculinity? The prophetic texts illustrate in imaginative detail the masculine ideal of total submission to God as greater than any other tenant of masculinity. Like the prophets, Jesus’s body is entirely under the control of God, and perhaps we could even read his life as an extended prophetic sign-act, where instead of having the sign explained after the fact, we receive it beforehand in the institution of the eucharist. As Jesus breaks the bread and pours into the cup, he presages his broken and leaking body, but, as his passion predictions (8:31–9:1; 9:31–37; 10:32–45) indicate, he will be raised from the dead to come again and judge in power (13:26; 14:62). Yet, while none of this is in his control, as instead his body is being used as a sign-act to increase the people’s faith in God, an understanding of the necessity of the completion of a sign-act in line with what Jesus has predicted/explained will happen can help to alleviate the tension of an ending that does not feature the bodily appearance of the resurrected Jesus. Performances that kept (or keep) in mind the prophets will draw on existing performance traditions of those texts (or ones described within the texts, which are often two modes that are not identical).

4. Conclusions

As the earliest full narrative of the story of Jesus, later changes made by other evangelists and redactors of the Markan text itself should indicate that the masculinity of Jesus presented in the Gospel of Mark left further generations of Jesus followers wanting. It is for this reason that Mark should hold a special place in the examination of gender in critical scholarship. The author chose to depict a Jesus who, although he begins his story as the “stronger” one, the Son of God, ends his story like a tragic hero, alone, abandoned, and suffering, with the news of his resurrection left in the hands of fearful women. When moving from narrative analyses (where a multiplicity of interpretations can often comfortably exist simultaneously) to performance ones, it becomes necessary to begin to make choices. How to handle this “unmanning” of Jesus is something a performer must deal with if they are to perform the gospel, as multiple masculinity options cannot exist simultaneously in performance without the risk of creating a muddled picture of Jesus that would not deliver successfully in performance.

This article has only begun to scratch the surface of the multiplicity of ways in which the masculinity of Jesus can be constructed and interpreted using the same material. I first laid the necessary groundwork for an examination of masculinity by detailing the varying ways one could be or become a man in the Greek and Roman worlds. Being a man was not a given, and to adhere to the hegemonic norms it was necessary for men to earn and maintain any masculinity they possessed or risk a slide into effeminacy. As this paper was concerned with masculinity in performance, I also examined the opposing performance fields of rhetoric (where boys became men) and drama (where men became women) to point to how gender in performance also contains a plethora of options. Then, since the Gospel of Mark is a text that came out of a Roman *and* Jewish context, I explored specific

formations of masculinity as they are presented in the Hebrew Bible, with a particular emphasis on God's masculinity, kingly masculinity (via David), and alternative prophetic masculinities. Ultimately, it became clear that submission to God is the most defining feature of a masculinity constructed out of the ideals of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, I examined ways of performing the Gospel of Mark through three different models of masculinity: noble death, tragic heroes, and prophetic masculinity.

While Conway's full-length analysis of the masculinity of Jesus across the New Testament (from the Pauline corpus to Revelation) provides a useful overview of Jesus's masculinity across the New Testament literature, she specifically chooses to focus solely on Greco-Roman ideals of masculinity. Further study of the masculinity of Jesus should take more seriously the ways in which the communities producing and consuming the gospel texts would have been a mixed group of Jewish and Gentile persons, and so the ideals of masculinity would also have been mixed. Deeper study of the ways in which Hellenistic Jewish writers, like Philo, handle masculinity, as well as constructions that would be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, could continue to fill in the picture of the ways in which the hegemonic, dominating Roman empire forced their masculinities upon the people they dominated (with domination itself being an indicator of masculinity). This article has sought to show the benefits of bringing together research on the constructions of masculinity found in the Hebrew Bible and the hegemonic masculine ideals of the Greco-Roman world (as most Hebrew Bible scholars focus on Hebrew Bible masculinities and New Testament scholars focus on Greco-Roman ones). Just as the early Christian communities blended cultures, so too will we see blended understandings and framings of masculinity as we explore the ways in which Jesus's masculinity is depicted and performed in the gospels and broader tradition.

Finally, current studies of the masculinity of Jesus often leave out considerations of performance, even though, as this article has sought to show, masculinity was often tied up with various genres of performance. While narrative approaches have more space to hold multiple interpretations in tension with one another, performances of the texts would have necessitated making singular choices that would impact an audience's understanding of the text. Masculinity studies are particularly enhanced by considerations of performance because of this relationship between masculinity formation in the Greek and Roman worlds and performance (particularly via avenues such as rhetoric).

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ For the purposes of clarity, when I talk about performance criticism, I mean the process of interacting with ancient texts in which the primary emphasis is placed upon the oral contexts of a work's historical situation through an active study of (1) the cultures/groups that the work grew out of, (2) the world contained within the work/narrative (this becomes less relevant with performance critical discussions of epistolary material), and (3) the ways in which the work has been received and re-received as/in performance throughout history. This does not necessitate attempts to re-create ancient performances, but neither does it preclude them. Peter Perry has helpfully pointed to the ways in which scholars working on performance critical questions seem to have fractured into six avenues (though I will note that there are scholars whose work easily falls under one of these avenues who do not even consider themselves to be performance critical scholars), creating a vast field of study with fluid edges. Peter Perry (2019).
- ² See, for instance, studies like Kelly Iverson (2014).
- ³ Graybill helpfully asserts that in specifically working to talk about the masculine, scholars recognize that there is not "feminine" and "neutral" (as the field has often treated the two categories), but rather that "another important component of this work is gendering the masculine in order to break the link between masculinity and neutrality"; there is no "neutral", especially not in dealing with texts for and by men from patriarchal societies who hold very strict and detailed ideals about masculinity. To not speak of the gendered nature of masculine things is to ignore a large part of the gender dynamics at work. Rhiannon Graybill (2016, p. 12).
- ⁴ By "performed" here, and "performance" in general, I take a rather wide definition, understanding *performance* as any action that is framed and presented to affect some sort of engagement of its audience.

- 5 Performers are often encouraged to make bold choices, as anything between can read as wishy-washy and thus fall flat for audiences. For a performance to be successful and engaging, these types of bold or clear choices would have to be made.
- 6 This is to say that multiple options are always available to the performer, but that only one can be actualized in performance at once. This does not exclude the possibility of a performer changing their performance in reaction to audience receptions.
- 7 The idea of a “rugged” masculinity for not only Jesus but Christian men overall is explored in texts like Will Moore (2022) and Kristin Kobes Du Mez (2020), and a quick Twitter search of “biblical masculinity” brings up accounts like @MichaelBrynkus and @BiblicMasculin (among others) that spout patriarchal, often highly problematic takes that they package as “biblical masculinity” for their audiences.
- 8 “Hegemonic masculinity”, a label coined by Tim Carrigan and expanded upon by Raewyn Connell in her book *Masculinities*, is typically tied up with institutions of power, and often is held up as more of an ideal to strive for than a masculinity that is attained by specific men. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination or women” (Raewyn Connell 2005, p. 77). Susan E. Haddox goes on to provide a list of characteristics that cross-cultural studies have determined to be typical components of hegemonic masculinities: military might, bodily integrity, honor, virility, provisioning, and spatiality. Susan E. Haddox (2016b, pp. 179–83).
- 9 While I do not have the space to delve into postcolonial theory within the scope of this article, Colleen Conway is right to highlight that postcolonial theories and the ways in which indigenous peoples and cultures subordinated under an imperial power often exhibit a type “of ‘mimicry,’ in which the indigenous subject reproduces rhetoric and ideologies of the dominant power” can be seen to be at play, as the early Jesus movement had to navigate between Jewish understandings of masculinity while also simultaneously adopting pieces of Greco-Roman masculine ideals as they sought for greater cultural acceptance, and so it is important to examine both the hegemonic culture (Greco-Roman masculine ideals) against and with Jewish/Palestinian culture. Colleen Conway (2008, p. 8); the word and analysis of colonial “mimicry” she borrows from Homi K. Bhabha (1994).
- 10 Thomas Laqueur (1992). For examples of scholars who problematize his understandings of ancient conceptions of the body, see Helen King (2016); Meghan Henning (2021, pp. 23–49).
- 11 As this article will be moving into discussions of gender *in* performance, I want to be clear that what Butler is talking about is rather the performative aspects of the construction of gender, rather than the representation of gender in performances. The latter half of this paper will be examining the ways in which specific cultural productions (literary, oral, theatrical, etc.) reinforce or challenge these performatively constructed notions of gender. Judith Butler (1988, pp. 519–31); Judith Butler (1990).
- 12 The Latin word, *virtus*, translated frequently into English as “virtue”, is etymologically connected to the word for man, *vir*. This etymological link between positive masculine traits and the word for man is also seen in Greek with the word ἀνδρεία, courage, which has the ἀνδρ-root. Conway (2008, pp. 24, 29); Stewart (2016, p. 94).
- 13 Cf. Gen 6:7, Deut 9:8; Exod 32:10–11; Num 11:1–2, among many others. Conway (2008, p. 27). This could, however, answer some questions about the textual variant in Mark 1:41, where σπλαγγνισθεῖς (moved with compassion) replaced ὀργισθεῖς (anger) as the tradition worked to move from the more complicated masculinity presented in Mark to one where the masculinity of Jesus is less in question.
- 14 Erik Gunderson (2000, pp. 6–7). Gunderson points to the ways in which the ideal speaker and the ideal man are related and conflated in various treatises, including (but not limited to) the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Cicero’s *De oratore*, *Orator* and *Brutus*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*.
- 15 Gleason (1995, p. xxii); though the book itself explores embodiment throughout. Gunderson (2000, pp. 59–86).
- 16 There is a consistent wariness of orators not to stray into the realm of the theatrical, for being “too theatrical” risked becoming a worse orator, and thus losing one’s masculinity. For an in-depth exploration of the relationship between orators and actors, see Gunderson (2000, pp. 111–48).
- 17 For intersections of Athenian drama and Judaism, see Jeff Jay (2013, pp. 218–53). The section on Tragic Heroes below will talk more about Christianity/the Gospel of Mark and drama.
- 18 Cawthorn (2008, p. 17). That the ending of Mark is unsettling for its male audience can be seen not only in the way the other evangelists handle the ends of their gospels (with the post-resurrection Jesus making appearances in all of them), but also in the ways in which more “satisfying” endings were added onto the Gospel of Mark itself.
- 19 While this paper has chosen to narrow the focus to primarily the texts of the now-canonical Hebrew Bible, a greater examination of the plurality of Jewish masculinities (Hellenistic Jewish ideas through Philo and Josephus, or Rabbinic masculinities) could also serve as fruitful avenues of exploration.
- 20 Susan E. Haddox (2016a, pp. 6–7). Haddox’s work is largely centered on the texts of what is now the Hebrew Bible, rather than an examination of Jewish ideals of masculinity more widely.
- 21 David Clines (1998, p. 354). While the scope of this article does not allow for a deeper dive into the origins of all these facets Clines highlights as indicative of masculinity, his work more broadly on the topic of masculinity across Hebrew Bible and New Testament texts is impressive.

- 22 He focuses a little too much on the marriage metaphor, and I have doubts about his centrality of heteronormativity in his worry of the homoeroticism of males worshipping a male deity (see [Eilberg-Schwartz 1994](#)). Haddox highlights some of these issues as she draws out the threads she finds important ([Haddox 2016b](#), pp. 183–84), and I think a queer engagement with Eilberg-Schwartz's work would be a fruitful endeavor in making heads or tails of the complexities of gender relations to/with God/the divine.
- 23 Even if you discount interpretations that understand "hip" as a euphemism for "genitals", as Eilberg-Schwartz does ([Eilberg-Schwartz 1994](#), p. 156), a disabled body was also inherently a feminized body.
- 24 That this form of masculinity was expected of the kings of the Roman world is evident in Conway's discussion of Caesar Augustus. See: [Conway \(2008\)](#), pp. 39–49).
- 25 I have chosen to focus on the ways in which David's masculinity is characterized due to the Son of David/Davidic line resonances and statements about Jesus throughout the gospels. There is certainly more to cover in terms of the ways in which various other kings depicted meet or do not meet the categories set out in David [Clines \(1995\)](#), pp. 212–43). In her overview of the field, Haddox outlines other studies on similar warrior/kingly figures in the Hebrew Bible. See [Haddox \(2016b\)](#), pp. 186–93).
- 26 In her study, Conway points out that while physical descriptions of beauty are present in other accounts of extraordinary men in antiquity (her project uses Augustus, Moses, and Apollonius as examples), we do not have a physical description of Jesus ([Conway 2008](#), pp. 149–50). This is a departure from both Greek and Roman ideals *and*, as Clines would have us understand, ideals from the Hebrew Bible as well.
- 27 I will return to Graybill's work in the final section of the article as I discuss the crucifixion of Jesus.
- 28 For instance (and this list is by no means exhaustive), see: [Boomershine and Bartholomew \(2015\)](#); Whitney [Shiner \(2003\)](#); Richard W. [Swanson \(2005\)](#); Antoinette Clark [Wire \(2011\)](#); Joanna [Dewey \(2014\)](#).
- 29 While a narrative treatment rather than specifically a performance treatment, this same phenomenon of talking about masculine traits without mentioning/considering the ways in which masculinity is at play is also seen in the way in which the characterization of Jesus is talked about (particularly in the discussion of authority) in [Rhoads et al. \(2012\)](#), pp. 104–15).
- 30 Unless otherwise noted, for biblical quotations the Greek text is from the NA28 and English text is the NRSVUE.
- 31 For a close analysis of the features of this unmanly death (particularly how it relates the changes to it made by Matthew and Luke), see Susanna [Asikainen \(2018\)](#), pp. 156–84).
- 32 The reinterpretation of Jesus's death as a noble or vicarious death is seen as early as Paul, where he uses language of Christ dying for "our sins" or "all" frequently throughout his letters. See [Conway \(2008\)](#), pp. 70–73).
- 33 See examples like Homer, *Iliad* 15.494–97; Plato, *Symposium* 178d4–179b5 (instance of dying for love); Horace, *Carm.* 3.2.13–16; Diogenes Laertius, 5.7–9 among others.
- 34 Slightly revised from the NRSVUE translation.
- 35 For an extensive exploration of the masculinity via noble death as presented in 4 Maccabees, see [Moore and Anderson \(1998\)](#), pp. 249–73).
- 36 This also seems to be in conversation with the traditions around the death of Socrates. For the sake of space, this article has not delved into the ways in which masculinity was reframed and reformed by various schools of philosophy, but there is certainly interaction with various philosophical schools' ideals of masculinity. For an engagement with the philosophical schools as they apply to masculinity and Jesus, see [Asikainen \(2018\)](#).
- 37 Conway cites Cicero's *Tusc.* 2.22.55 and then also indicates how scholars like Robert Gundry have taken Cicero's wiggle room in allowing for men to cry out in strength (like athletes on a racecourse) to read Jesus's cry as a further display of strength (an opinion I have also heard among Markan scholars in SBL Mark session debates about how to understand the differences between 15:34's use of βoάω compared with 15:37's "ἀφείς φωνήν μεγάλην").
- 38 For myrrh as an ancient anesthetic see Tat-siong Benny [Liew \(2003\)](#), p. 111); [Rhoads et al. \(2012\)](#), p. 111).
- 39 This is still seen today, I think specifically of rock climbers, many of whom scream as they reach for difficult holds and moves. Adam Ondra is particularly known for his on-the-wall screams and is arguably one of the best climbers currently climbing.
- 40 Jay defines mode as "a 'selection or abstraction' from genre, which it nonetheless 'evokes' because it incorporates samples of a genre's internal repertoire, especially its motifs, moods, and values, which are all means by which a mode may 'announce itself'". Jeff [Jay \(2014\)](#), p. 13).
- 41 For work on the comparison of Jesus and Heracles, see: David [Aune \(1990\)](#), pp. 3–19); Herbert Jennings [Rose \(1938\)](#), pp. 113–42); Courtney J. P. [Friesen \(2018\)](#), pp. 243–61).
- 42 Cf. Mark 1:7 and John the Baptist's assertion that one "stronger than me" (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός μου) is coming after him and 3:27 and the parable of the strong man.
- 43 Tat-siong Benny Liew suggests that the consistent agricultural metaphors in Mark about seed sowing (particularly the parable of the sower [4:1–20]) all work to construct Jesus as a virile, manly man who "sows" (all sexual-generative allusions intended). [Liew \(2003\)](#), pp. 100–3).
- 44 See [Conway \(2008\)](#); [Stewart \(2016\)](#); [Myers \(2015\)](#), [Liew \(2003\)](#) among others.

- ⁴⁵ This article does not have space to directly deal with the larger understanding of Jesus as the suffering servant from Isaiah (cf. Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12); this is also something that lends weight to the understanding of Jesus in terms of prophetic masculinity. The connection of servanthood/enslavement and prophecy is also seen in interpretations of the parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:2; cf. Jer 7:25; 25:4; Josh 14:7; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:4–6). Eric Thurman (2003, p. 156).
- ⁴⁶ Textual variants change ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ to just τοῖς προφήταις, likely in recognition of the fact that the quote is actually a blend that also includes text from Exodus and Malachi. (Yarbro Collins 2007, p. 133).
- ⁴⁷ Cf. Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12
- ⁴⁸ While this list is in no way exhaustive, I want to illustrate a few of the potential prophetic resonances that audiences may (or may not) have heard.

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