



The Presence and the Role of Senses in Proto-Apocalyptic Book of Joel

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ABSTRACT: The proto-apocalyptic Book of Joel attracts attention with a multitude of sensory references. They not only provide the dynamics of the text but also create an experience of interpersonal contact that is elusive in cursory reading. The synergy in which they remain and the mutual reinforcement raise the question of the role of the senses in the process of persuasion undertaken in the apocalyptic context and text. Analyses of the semantic layer, with the application of the methods of literary analysis, with reference also to the theory of affect, conducted on the biblical text in synchronicity, reveal the radical turns of thought, marked by references to the senses, as well as counterpoints highlighting the main points of the message. They make it possible to perceive the various stages of the communicative exchange, its coherence, and the specificity of affect, where the removal of blockages in the interpersonal relationship is located. The application of the guidelines of the theory of affect reveals, among other things, the space of perception offered in the Book of Joel through references to the senses, in accordance with the culture of the recipient. The power of persuasion, pointing to the active work of God, conveyed through the language of the senses, becomes graspable to the recipient who experiences trauma and adversity.

KEYWORDS: Book of Joel, apocalyptic, senses, persuasion, affect

In the last two decades of the 21st century, literary scholarship concerning sensory perception has expanded to encompass biblical text. This analysis is carried out in terms of the presence of sensory responses,¹ references to the sense organs,² metaphors in which senses play a role in particular passages of Scripture,³ their number, and the specificity of their representation resulting from the cultural image of the world.⁴ These works develop in bib-

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¹ See: A. Schellenberg – T. Krüger (eds.), *Sounding Sensory Profiles in the Ancient Near East* (ANEM 25; Atlanta, GA: SBL 2019) 55–214.

² See: M.J.C. Warren, “Tasting the Little Scroll: A Sensory Analysis of Divine Interaction in Revelation 10:8–10,” *JSNT* 40/1 (2017) 101–119; D.A. Kurek-Chomycz, “The Fragrance of Her Perfume: The Significance of Sense Imagery in John’s Account of the Anointing in Bethany,” *NovT* 52/4 (2010) 334–354.

³ See: N.L. Tilford, *Sensing World, Sensing Wisdom: The Cognitive Foundation of Biblical Metaphors* (AIL 31; Atlanta, GA: SBL 2017).

⁴ See: Y. Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (LHBOTS 545; New York: Clark 2012); Y. Avrahami, “The Study of Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible: Notes on Method,” *HBAI* 5/1 (2016) 3–22.

lical studies in parallel with the interest in the question of emotions.⁵ Actually, the focus on sensory references in the text came forth from the attention to emotions, as a natural consequence of the search for stimuli which evoke the given feelings described in the pages of Scripture. Both lines are very relevant to the study of biblical apocalypticism, which developed out of prophetic literature as a reaction to a threat affecting Jewish identity – and consequently national, cultural, and religious identity. It transcended the external, territorial state framework by becoming the aggressor against each individual by virtue of his ethnic and religious affiliation. Not surprisingly, it evoked extreme emotions among the Israelites – fear, insecurity and desire to escape. As they had taken control of the individual's functioning, they made it impossible to perceive any cognitive message through traditional persuasion channels – because they simply made it unreliable. What was needed, therefore, was to interact at the level of stimuli that was perceived sensorially, and thus earlier than the moment when emotions were born. Hence, in apocalyptic texts, there is such a large number of references to elements implying sensory reactions. Through their help and mediation, the message had a chance to become effective. The variety of sensory references is due to the specificity of each book and is conditioned by its *leitmotif*. The lightness with which the authors of apocalyptic texts use them is due to their cultural roots, especially orality, as well as the peculiarities of everyday functioning – very close to the earth/nature, from where they also draw – based on observation – inspiration for literary images. The verbal workshop grew out of prophetic and wisdom texts, from which apocalyptic literature as a genre also originated.⁶ Among the books of the Old Testament, the Book of Joel is considered proto-apocalyptic⁷ – this classification is recognized by authorities in the field such as J.J. Collins.⁸

This paper examines the sensory references in the Book of Joel, exploring their distinct characteristics and highlighting features typical of apocalyptic contexts. It proposes a role for the senses in shaping the text, and investigates their function in the persuasive process, drawing on affect theory. The analysis adopts a synchronic approach to the text.

⁵ See: R. Egger-Wenzel – J. Corley (eds.), *Emotions from Ben Sira to Paul* (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook 2011; Berlin – Boston, MA: De Gruyter 2012); F.S. Spencer (ed.), *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature* (RBS 90; Atlanta, GA: SBL 2017); K.M. Hockey, *The Role of Emotion in 1 Peter* (SNTSMS 173; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019); F. Mirguet, "What Is an 'Emotion' in the Hebrew Bible? An Experience that Exceeds Most Contemporary Concepts," *BibInt* 24/4–5 (2016) 442–465.

⁶ R. Rubinkiewicz, "Apokaliptyka u progu ery chrześcijańskiej," *RBL* 41/1 (1988) 56.

⁷ This designation of the Book follows the terminology established by leading exegetes in the field like J.J. Collins and S.L. Cook (S.L. Cook, "Apocalyptic Prophecy," *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* [ed. J.J. Collins] [New York: Oxford University Press 2014] 25).

⁸ For the argumentation regarding the classification of the Book of Joel as proto-apocalyptic, see S.L. Cook, "Apocalyptic Prophecy," 25; also: O. Plöger, in S.L. Cook, *Prophecy & Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 1991) 7; J.R. Strazicich, *Joel's Use of Scripture and the Scripture's Use of Joel: Appropriation and Resignification in Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity* (BibInt 82; Leiden: Brill 2007) 99, 101.

1. Context for Sensory References – Literary Specificity of the Book of Joel

Y. Avrahami, based on the biblical idea of vitality/life, singles out the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, speech and movement/kinesthetics in the cultural outlook of the biblical authors.⁹ Observation and science indicate that the synergy between them repeatedly makes it difficult to qualify the experience unequivocally. For this reason, it seems reasonable to speak of multisensory approaches to the Bible as well. This is almost perfectly realised in the Book of Joel. Its *leitmotif* seems to be the raid of locusts, which is compared to the invasion of an army,¹⁰ which passes into the image of the day of the Lord by way of penetration.¹¹ The first of them is a threat against which the ancient Semites were completely powerless; no means of deterring these insects were developed, only the wind that brought them could also take them elsewhere.¹² Most often, however, locusts left the area only after completely devouring the vegetation, which led to natural disaster. The depiction of several phases of the development of these insects in Joel 1:4 ('What was left of the gazam ate the locusts, and what was left of the locusts ate the jelek, and what was left of the jelek ate the chasil'), indicates the great duration of this plague and its intensification. The multiplicity of references to almost all the senses is not surprising – the image even enforces them.

Of similar origin in this regard is the parallel image of the invaders in Joel 2:1–11, which reflects the experience of danger through historical or para-historical references. Both images also open up spaces of social interaction and relationship with God and introduce new sensory references. Shifting attention to God, however, does not mean immediately understanding/accepting His guidance, due to intense emotions. Attempts to grasp His presence in the face of danger are culturally characterised and thus presented in a manner emblematic of ancient Israel, with an emphasis on His lordship over every event. However, there is no room initially for interpersonal closeness. This is born only slowly as a result of turning to Him and to a dialogue with Him,¹³ and is reinforced by sensory experience, described in Joel 2:19–3:5. The last chapter of this Book is the transformation of the world system, the restoration of order, and hence there are also many references to kinetics. Paradoxically, the main event described in it is the so-called Judgment in the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

9 Y. Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible*, 67–77.

10 According to M. Szmajdziński, this motif dominates the first two chapters of the Book of Joel ("Blitzkrieg w Jl 2,1–11," *StLov* 16 [2014] 269).

11 E. Assisi, *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope* (LHBOTS 581; London: Bloomsbury – Clark 2013) 27–31; see also J. Lemański, "Nadzieja zbawienia dla wzywających imienia Pana (Jl 3,1–5)," *VV* 9 (2006) 33.

12 H.W. Górska, "Rodzaje wiatru występujące w opisie plagi szarańczy (Wj 10,13.19). Charakterystyka zjawisk meteorologicznych oraz analiza zmian wprowadzonych w Septuagincie i Wulgacie," *STHŠO* 40/2 (2020) 17–20.

13 J. Barker, *From the Depths of Despair to the Promise of Presence: A Rhetorical Reading of the Book of Joel* (Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 11; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2014) 268.

The Book of Joel, as a proto-apocalyptic text, has a clear prophetic feature. An argument corroborating this is the opening formula, in the form of the Word of the Lord to Joel, son of Petuel (Joel 1:1), an appeal for a change in functioning (Joel 1:5), and repentance toward God (Joel 1:13–15).

On the borderline between prophecy and apocalypticism lies the Day of the Lord motif present in the Book of Joel,¹⁴ which is heavily explored by Amos, Isaiah, Micah, and Zephaniah. Its role and saturation of events, however, depends on the context in which it is sometimes mentioned – from fear, triggered by guilt over the wrongs done to people (Amos 5:18–20) to joy at the presence of God (Isa 61:2). In its cosmic contexts, as in Joel, it gains an apocalyptic trait, going beyond references to interactions at the level of nations/states. Rich imagery is also common, although its specificity already differentiates these types of biblical literature. The mention of God-given communication in visions, prophecies and dreams unites the two genres. Extremely intense sensuality to the point of being excessive in perception, as marked by repetition (Joel 1:4) and the accumulation of terms (as in Joel 2:5), is, however, only characteristic of apocalyptic literature.

The discussion regarding the date of origin of the Book of Joel varies between the view that the Book was redacted in the seventh century BCE, through convictions locating it in the period just before or during the Babylonian captivity. Others argue that the Book should be dated within the 4th–3rd centuries BCE, yet this is hardly plausible.¹⁵ It is worth noting, however, that the apocalyptic feature of a given biblical text does not reflect only the experience of the era and therefore of the entire nation, but can also reflect individual or group experiences. This type of literature does not derive from the era, but at its core is the specificity of experience. The apocalyptic character of the Book of Joel is supported by the specificity of the threat – all-encompassing and insurmountable. In the face of danger man stands in total powerlessness. This is depicted in the image of a locust raid, the motif of judgment carried out over all nations (Joel 4:2, 12, 14), the cosmic transformation of created reality (Joel 2:10; 3:4; 4:15), and a theophany enacted through natural phenomena (Joel 4:16), as well as the motif of the harvest-press-vats (Joel 4:13) and war with an army of skyrocketing proportions (Joel 2:2), which is subordinate to and directed by God (Joel 2:11).

Based on the arguments regarding content, as well as language, it seems reasonable to consider the Book of Joel as belonging to the early or developing apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew Bible. Thus, the analysis of the presence and role of the senses will be conducted, with special attention to their importance in affecting a traumatized human being who experiences a threat from which he has no chance or way to defend himself.

¹⁴ According to T. Lyons, it has two contrasting portraits here (“Interpretation and Structure in Joel,” *JIBS* 1/1 [2014] 102); cf. I. Balla, “The Role of God’s Mighty Acts in Joel: The Book of Joel as an Example of Trauma Literature,” *BA* 11/1 (2021) 68, 70.

¹⁵ More see: E. Assisi, “The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel,” *VT* 61/2 (2011) 163–183.

2. Vocabulary Describing the Senses in the Book of Joel

An analysis of the Book of Joel in terms of references to the senses surprises us by their number. However, this fact has found little interest in contemporary exegesis, except of Brady Alan Beard's doctoral thesis, which has as its subject the search for iconic references in artefacts to better visualize and understand the images of the Book of Joel.¹⁶

Attention is drawn to the multitude of terms related to the sense of speech. This indicates a strong interpersonal and relational feature. The operation of this sense is represented by terms that can be combined into several groups. The first is a rich vocabulary of complaining, lamenting, and crying. They express a strong sensory reaction (perception?) to the destruction of reality and the danger resulting from it. Two terms, derived from the same core, are located here: בָּכָה – weep, bewail, emblematic of situations of stress and pain (Joel 1:5; 2:17) and בָּכִי – weeping, semantically related (Joel 2:12). In addition to these, mention should be made of the onomatopoeia לִילִיל (Joel 1:5, 11, 13) and the suggestive מִסְפָּדָה (wailing – Joel 2:12), counted as sonorant based on the sound of the stem. There is also no shortage of terms related to the context of death, mourning, such as lament, הָלָה (Joel 1:8) and אָבֵל, used in describing reactions to the death of loved ones. The latter in Joel 1:9, 10 represents a reaction to the desolation of the land and the resulting lack of sacrificial matter.

The second group of speech sense expressions is formed by words more marked by interpersonal reference, such as נָרַק (call, proclaim – Joel 1:14, 19; 2:15; 3:5), זַעַק (cry, cry out, call – Joel 1:14) – and accompanying it, captured by the sense of hearing, the roaring of animals אָגָן. Attention is drawn to the inclusion of the first of these – by reference to God – in the act of saving life – this is seen in Joel 3:5:

But everyone who calls upon [אָשָׁר יְקַרֵּא] the name of the Lord shall be saved, for there shall be deliverance in mount Zion and in Jerusalem, as the Lord foretold, and among the saved will be those whom the Lord has called [אָשָׁר יְהֹוָה קָרָא].

On the borderline between the second and third groups are the words connected with communication: בְּבָרֶךְ, describing perceptions of God's actions (Joel 1:1; 2:11; 4:8), and אָמַר, pertaining to both God's actions (Joel 2:19; 3:5) and man's actions (Joel 2:17bis; 4:10).

The third category consists of terms describing the activity of the sense of speech, arising from God's initiative. Located here are: סִפְרָה, meaning to relate, to count, to convert (Joel 1:3), נִבְאָה (to prophesy – Joel 3:1). It is noteworthy that, in Joel 2:17, there is an invitation or even a call to activate the sense of speech – both בָּכָה and אָמַר (twice). Utterance changes consciousness relieves the tension caused by the threat. On the other hand,

¹⁶ B.A. Beard, "Seeing Visions with the Prophet: Toward an Iconographic Hermeneutic of Joel," 2023, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371306846_Seeing_Visions_with_the_Prophet_Toward_an_Iconographic_Hermeneutic_of_Joel [access: 10.09.2024].

the mention of God's **רְבָרָבָה**, perceived by the people with the sense of hearing (implicitly evidenced by the reactions) from the first verse of the Book, with an emphasis on the dynamism inherent in this word, also through the proclamation by that God's authority over every threat (Joel 2:11) and with an emphasis on its causality (Joel 4:8), allows us to grasp with the senses the message of security and the support that God represents. The guarantee of communicative exchange, which is enriched by cognition, is provided by the reference to prophecy (**נְבָרָבָה**) as a result of the outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 3:1.

A strong sensory experience is also offered by **רָאשׁ** (roar) – the intensive vocalisation accompanying the theophany of Joel 4:16. It is related semantically, and perhaps more so in Joel contextually, to the term voice – **קֹל**. The latter, which is several times grasped by the senses, flows both from the threatening phenomenon and from God. Significant, however, is the predominance of the evocation of the second: it is located in the space of communication with that which causes danger and shows God's power (Joel 2:5); it also accompanies, as elevated, intensified, God's direct/sensory input in Joel 4:16.

The activity of the sense of speech is described not only in terms of the present but also gains its place in the future. Attention is drawn to the placement there of **הַלְּלִיל** – the activity of blessing God (Joel 2:26) and **נְבָרָבָה** – prophecy (Joel 3:1). In those acts, speech, explored so mournfully in the first two chapters of the Book, will find its new shape. The response of the sense of speech to the threat enables to reduce its power by phasing and verbalising those threats. It is located in two spaces: the relationship with God (including a cultic context) and within the community of Israel, which is expressed by the convening of all states of the community.

Thomas Lyons, studying the phenomenon of voice by analysing the grammatical forms of verbs, notes in the Book of Joel transitions in the initial part of the Book from the commanding mode concerning the collective to the personal lament of the prophet, and then, in the second part, the introduction of declarative modes centred around the theme of deliverance.¹⁷

The heightened tension experienced by the Book's characters is indicated by just two references to the sense of hearing, both contained in Joel 1:2. Their sequence – first **עָמֵד** (Joel 1:2 **עָמֵד־עָמֵד**), followed by **לְעָמֵד**, suggests the sender's perception of the disability, the weakness of the recipients, and moving to a more fundamental level: the encouragement of the recipients to make a decision and activate their ears. Exploration of the sense of speech seems much more liberating than listening, which is why such a negligible percentage of activation of this sense.

Undeniably, the sense of kinetics dominates the analysed Book, as shown by the number of terms associated with it. Interesting conclusions can be drawn by looking at their semantics. One can see, among them, terms pertaining to calm movement itself, such as **בָּוָס** (Joel 1:13, 15, 21; 2:9; 3:4; 4:5, 11, 13), **הַלְּכָה** (Joel 2:7, 8; 4:18), **צָאָה** (with an accent on going out – Joel 2:16; 4:18), **עַבְרָה** (pass over – Joel 4:17). These describe both the movement of

¹⁷ Lyons, "Interpretation and Structure in Joel," 97, 99, 100.

the people – in the stimulus view (בּוֹא – Joel 1:13; 4:11; 4:13; יִצְאָ – Joel 2:16) and the act (בּוֹא – Joel 2:9; 4:5; הַלֵּךְ – Joel 2:7, 8; עַבְרָ – Joel 4:17), but also the phenomena and timing of God's entry into the history of the world (בּוֹא – Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:4; הַלֵּךְ – Joel 4:18; יִצְאָ – Joel 4:18). H. Vosburgh sees here the aspect of revival and the changing of spatial and chronological distance.¹⁸

In the second and third chapters of the Book, this movement is intensified through such concepts as: רָזֶן (run – Joel 2:4, 7, 9), קָקְשׁ (run about, rush – Joel 2:9), פְּלִיטָה (escape – Joel 2:3; 3:5), מָלַט (slip away – Joel 3:5), רַקֵּחַ (skip about – Joel 2:5), and חַיל / חָול (whirl, dance – Joel 2:6). It is noteworthy that the contexts for all these words in the Book of Joel describe a threat experienced by man. Its perception through the sense of kinetics illustrates the power of its impact. In Joel 4:11, the biblical author introduces a term related to the same sense: עִזָּשׁ (come to help – Joel 4:11), highlighting the feature of interpersonal and relational orientation.

The biblical author, referring to the sense of kinetics, also introduces the concepts of contrasted words indicating ascending: עַלְהָ (Joel 1:6; 2:7, 9, 20; 4:9, 12), עַוְרָ (Joel 4:7, 9, 12) and descending, downward movement – יַדַּר (Joel 2:23; 4:2). They involve not only the aspect of conquest, but also the growth of negative elements perceived through the other senses – taste, smell and sight (such as rot and suffocation – עַלְהָ in Joel 2:20). They also include a mental awakening, a 'poking' (עַוְרָ – Joel 4:12). The descent described by יַדַּר is, in both texts (Joel 2:23; 4:2), a sensory reaction as a result of God's action.

References to the sense of kinetics within the Book of Joel also include the vocabulary of gathering, collecting, such as נְסָפָא (Joel 1:14; 2:10, 16; 4:15) – with the aspect of pooling, inbreeding – and קְבֻצָּה (Joel 2:6, 16; 4:2, 11). Both describe the perception by sense of kinetics of the action of two collective entities: people and heavenly bodies. There also appears a verb concerning ordering עַרְךָ (Joel 2:5) perceived by the sense of kinetics. There are also terms with the opposite semantics, such as dividing, breaking up: פָּזַר (Joel 4:2) and חַלֵּק (Joel 4:2). They occur together in the same verse and have as their object first the people (פָּזַר) and then the land (חַלֵּק). There is also a semantically correlated פָּרַשְׁׁ (spread out – Joel 2:2), allowing us to capture the movement of people, which is similar to mist.

The mention of dripping is also noteworthy, as it introduces a completely different movement with a different specificity: נְטָף (Joel 4:18). When juxtaposed in this verse with the double הַלֵּךְ and יִצְאָ, it gives a very remarkable growing semantic and sensory gradation present in these dynamics.

The term בּוֹשֵׁב, with its characteristic multi-faceted reference growing from turn back, return (Joel 2:12–14; 4:1, 4, 7), also appears among the terms related to perception through the sense of kinetics. It refers to both the movements of man (Joel 2:12, 13) and God (Joel 2:14; 4:1, 4, 7). It is noteworthy that the latter predominates, which demonstrates the greater dynamism of God's actions, directly aimed at man, and therefore His greater involvement.

¹⁸ H. Vosburgh, "The Day of the Lord in the Book of Joel," *JODT* 24/69 (2020) 161–178.

The term **שָׁלַח** (send – Joel 2:19, 25; 4:13), and even more **שָׁגַג** (approach – Joel 4:9) opens another semantic pool of concepts indirectly related to the sense of kinetics, more registered by the sense of touch (in the proxemic aspect) – such as: **חָקַק** (be, or become, far, distant – Joel 2:20; 4:6) or **קָרְבָּן/קָרְבָּן** (near – Joel 1:15; 2:1). They are compatible with the Book's essential conviction of God's Presence in the midst of Israel.¹⁹ Human movement is marked only in Joel 4:9 (**שָׁגַג**) and Joel 4:13 (**פָּלַשְׁת**), the other places describe God's actions.

The Book of Joel also contains terms opposed to kinetics, which show its absence, like **יָשַׁב** (sit, remain, dwell – Joel 1:2, 14; 2:1; 4:12, 20) or **נִכַּן** (settle down, abide – Joel 4:17, 21). They describe the status of people (**בָּשָׁבָב** – Joel 1:2, 14; 2:1) and of God (**בָּשָׁבָב** – Joel 4:12, 20; **שָׁכַנְתִּי** – Joel 4:17, 21). In the latter case, they bring with them the experience of stability and stopping. As a whole, this perception makes it possible to recognise points of reference.

The consistency in the biblical author's introduction to references to the sense of touch is surprising. Through it, one perceives the experience of cutting off, taking away (**כְּרָתָה**): wine from the mouth (Joel 1:5), food (Joel 1:16), offerings from the temple (Joel 1:9), and tearing (**קָרְעָה**) redirected from garments to hearts (Joel 2:13). The absence of **בָּצָע** (cutting off), associated with wounds, can also be noted. This reveals an element of exhibition/exposure, and at the same time, a change of condition/state – by virtue of graspable, and therefore conscious references. Classical experiences perceived by this sense, like pressing (**קָדַד**) or falling (**נִפְלָא**), are mentioned as absent (Joel 2:8 – 'They will not jostle one another, each will go his own way. And though they encounter weapons, they will not be wounded'). Only the taking (**לִקְחָה**), directly related to touching of jewels by Tyre, Sidon, and the Philistines (Joel 4:5), is recorded, as well as the touch of the human body, marked in the imagery of the girding by the priests (Joel 1:13) and the girding with a sackcloth (**קָנְגָרָת-שְׁמַחַת**) by a virgin (Joel 1:8). This last element suggests the strength of the stimulus – the unpleasant cloth is drawn closer to the skin. The aim of wearing sackcloth, according to the Israel tradition, is to redirect thoughts toward God. On the other hand, the mention of a mouth that has had its wine taken away gives the experience of a touch taken away and a taste taken away in Joel 1:5, and thus the loss of memory of these experiences.

Granting of the Spirit, which is relevant and reflexive in the narrative of the Book, is also described by means of a reference to the sense of touch through the verb **שָׁפַךְ** (to pour out). It guarantees the breadth of the action encompassing the whole person, and at the same time, the real grasp of Him by the endowed subjects. The abundance, the aspect of washing, cleansing, refreshing and revitalising, is also apparent here. These sensations intensify sensory memory, perpetuating the experience and giving it the power to affect consciousness in the future.

The awe-inspiring experience of being eaten (**אָכֵל**) or total destruction dominates the image of locusts (Joel 1:4, 6). There is mention of teeth – compared to those of a lion – and molar teeth (Joel 1:6), which also makes the perception even more acute. This is paralleled by the image of drinking and alcoholic stupor, which leads to a disruption of consciousness

¹⁹ Assisi, "The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel," 173–174.

(Joel 1:5). It is difficult to find the trait of taste in these references – it is removed in favour of touch and kinetics. The only suggestion of taste seems to take place in Joel 4:3, where the familiar term שְׁתָה from Joel 1:5 appears.

The visual stimuli invoked in the Book of Joel set a typically apocalyptic mood. The activity of רָאָה itself is mentioned only in reference to a vision (חַיּוֹן) in Joel 3:1. The sense of sight captures landscapes such as the change/fluctuations of the light of the sun and moon and stars (Joel 2:10; 4:15), up to the complete plunge of the sun into darkness (Joel 3:4), the change of the colour of the moon (Joel 3:4). It registers the spread of the hostile reality like that of the morning aurora (חַשָּׁ – Joel 2:2); in Joel 2 it is compared to an army. M. Szmajdziński sees in the term חַשָּׁ a reference to the reflection of light in the wings of locusts.²⁰

Two pairs of terms, perceived by the sense of sight: קָשָׁרָה (darkness) and אַפְלָה, and עַרְפָּל accentuate successively two experiences of the inability of the sense of sight to work properly – first, due to the lack of access to the image, further, because of blurred shapes, and thus they lead to intensification of the experience of anxiety.²¹ A noteworthy element, grasped by the sense of sight, is תִּימְרָה – smoke resembling the shape of a palm tree or mushroom.²²

Obviously, the sense of sight registers both the threat – like its appearance (threat/locusts), similar to that of horses (כָּמָרָא סְוִסִּים מִרְאָהוּ; Joel 2:4), the destruction of nature (Joel 1:7 – ‘He made my vineyard a wilderness, and my fig tree he hacked down: he bare them utterly and forsook them, so that their branches turned white’), but also the renewal of vegetation (Joel 2:22 – ‘The pasture on the steppe is covered with green, for the trees bear fruit again, the fig tree and the vine bear fruit’). The emphasis on the sense of sight by the use of the term מִרְאָה – sight, appearance, in the former of these texts, it suggests a deliberate reference to the senses made by the biblical author. The term could readily be omitted without compromising the content, however, now it allows us to grasp the prominence of sensuality in this text. This is also confirmed by the four enumerations of the rebirth of flora (Joel 1:7). The synergy of sight with touch and smell as experiential elements of this reality is implicit.

3. Synergy of the Senses within Images in the Book of Joel

The most common interaction in the text occurs between the senses of touch, sight, and kinetics. This is interesting, because these are the senses that allow full freedom in the act of perception. It is impossible to escape from olfactory sensation, or speech, or taste at any given time.

²⁰ Szmajdziński, “Blitzkrieg w Jl 2,1–11,” 280.

²¹ Szmajdziński, “Blitzkrieg w Jl 2,1–11,” 276.

²² Lemański, “Nadzieja zbawienia dla wzywających Imienia Pana (Jl 3,55),” 38.

The synergy of touch and sight takes place in the perception of heaven and earth, shaken by the actions of a hostile reality (Joel 2:10), and the wilderness, which is the result of the presence of locusts (Joel 1:7, 11, 12, 15, 17). Interestingly, the latter set is dominated by the use of touch, which is perceived in relation to cutting off, deprivation (for example: 'He made my vineyard a wilderness, and my fig tree he hacked down: he stripped them completely and abandoned them, so that their branches turned white' – Joel 1:7). A number of verbs that combine the sense of touch and sight appear here, such as: **חָמַת** (a snapping or splintering in Joel 1:7), **נָשַׂר** (strip off, strip in Joel 1:7), **נָלַשׁ** (throw, fling, cast in Joel 1:7), **נָשַׁדֵּשׁ** (devastate, ruin in Joel 1:10), **יָבַשׁ** (be dry, dried up in Joel 1:10, 12, 17, 20), **אָבַד** (perish in Joel 1:11), **נָשָׁדֵשׁ** (violence, devastation, ruin in Joel 1:15), and **הַמְּנַשֵּׁדָה** (a devastation, waste in Joel 2:20).

An extremely evocative image, in the perception of which both sight and touch are involved, is the desert (**רָבָדָה**) – e.g., in Joel 4:19, subjected additionally in Joel 1:19, 20; 2:3 to the action of fire, which causes activation of the sense of smell. The synergy of these senses, albeit in a slightly different context, is shown in Joel 1:17: 'The grains have rotted under their sods, the gums are destroyed, the granaries are demolished, for the grain has withered.'

Through the interaction of the senses of touch and sight, it is also possible to grasp the image of fulfilment (**מְלָא**) and completeness (**צַוָּק**). This is very significant in the Book of Joel, because of the hope it brings when it refers successively to the grain and the winepress (Joel 2:24). A term from the same semantic pool, **מְלַשֵּׁׁ**, describes the manner of recompense, the fulfilment of the lack that God will make for Israel (Joel 2:25). It is accompanied by an experience of satisfaction, satiation on all levels (**שְׁבֻעָה**), which is offered by God in Joel 2:19, 26.

Touch and kinetics meet in the imagery of transforming ploughshares into swords and sickles into javelins in Joel 4:10. They are accompanied – in the name of the synergy of the senses – by a commentary using the sense of speech, which can be grasped by the sense of hearing. In contrast, Joel 1:10 depicts, by means of touch, sight, and the sense of speech, the landscape with crops ravaged by locusts ('Desolate is the field, in mourning is the land, for the grain is desolate, the must has dried up, the olive tree has withered' – Joel 1:10), and in Joel 1:20 ('Even the animals of the field sigh longingly to You, for the streams of water have dried up, and fire has consumed the pastures of the steppe'). This synergy makes the images strongly evocative and sets the created realities in a communicative space – since the earth is assigned the activity of mournful wailing (**אָבֵל** – Joel 1:10), and the animals the attitude of longing (**גַּרְעָל** – Joel 1:20).

From the intersection of kinetics and touch, we have **שָׁעֵר**, describing an earthquake in Joel 4:16 – and **גַּרְעָל**, another word transferring the experience of shock, quake, to the speech space – in Joel 2:1, 10. It also has its softer/milder form **נַנְגֵּן** – impel, thrust, in Joel 2:20 and **תַּקְעֵעַ** – thrust, blast, in reference to the shofar in Joel 2:1. It is worth noting that each of these phenomena is also perceived with the sense of hearing. The phenomenon that adds to the aforementioned senses the sense of sight is **שָׁאֵל** – fire flame – **לְבָהָלָה** (fire in action?, consuming?) and the verb **לְהַלֵּא** – blaze up, flame – associated with it (Joel 1:19, 20; 2:3, 5; 3:3).

The synergy of touch and kinetics takes place in the term **שְׁפָךְ**, describing the pouring out of the Spirit (Joel 3:1) and the shedding of blood (Joel 4:19). Interestingly, in the latter image, it dominates the olfactory experience. Also, **עַבְשׁ** is a polysensory term and it describes the rotting of grains in Joel 1:17. It combines visual, olfactory, and tactile experiences, which is intensified by another term depicting perception by the sense of kinetics – **מָשַׁׁחַ** – be desolated, appalled, and **סְרַחַ** – throw down.

A remarkable sensory connection takes place in Joel 2:5, in the image of fire (**שָׁאֵל**), whose flame (**הַבָּאֵל**) has its own voice (**לִקְיָה**), an individualized sound. Visual perception merges with auditory perception; kinetic experience is also strong here, due to the dynamics of the flame.

The synergy of sight and smell occurs in the perception of the signs of Joel 3:3, which are in the sky and on the earth: blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. Such a variety of connections leaves no doubt about the role of the senses in the arrangement of the entire Book.

4. The Senses and the Construction of the Text

The analysis of sensory references in the Book of Joel shows the presence of contrasting images which function in relation to each other according to the references: problem – solution/cure of the problem. This is evident in the motif of drought, drying up, evident especially in Joel 1 (but also in Joel 4:19), which passes into the image of the outpouring of the Spirit in Joel 3:1, mountains dripping with must, and hills overflowing with milk, and the filling of streams with water (Joel 4:18). It is remarkable that these contours are not merely background to the desolation caused by the locusts and then the abundance offered by God (cf. Joel 2:19). They go far beyond, not only by virtue of the number and variety of words, but also by virtue of the contexts – the outpouring of the Spirit is more than rain falling on a field (Joel 2:23), although this one has an anticipatory function. Sensory perception makes it possible to grasp the intensiveness of the contrast – as in the juxtaposition of Eden with the desolate desert (**הַמְּאַשְׁׁחַשְׁׁ בָּאָה**) in Joel 2:3. It is meant to allow one to perceive the change, the destruction in the second image of the attack of the horsemen, which is parallel to the one of the locusts.

The biblical author of Joel performs a delicate balancing act, particularly in Joel 4 (and, to a lesser extent, in Joel 2), weaving together the experiences of offering and giving/receiving to emphasise the theme of reciprocal interactions. The sense of kinetics and motion emerges most prominently in this dynamic, especially in the Book's final chapter. These conclusions are confirmed by Lyons in the study of the Book's structure, based on grammatical forms, conducted and contrasted with other currents. He speaks of positive redirection and contrast as the governing semantic structure in the Book of Joel.²³

²³ Lyons, "Interpretation and Structure in Joel," 100.

The leading senses explored throughout the Book are kinetics and speech. In the latter, its subjects change – from presenting the people who are complaining, shouting and crying, the biblical author moves on to showing the voice of God and His words. Intensification of sensations perceived through the sense of speech takes place in the first two chapters. At the beginning of the Book there is a kinetic stagnation of the people; there is no reaction of this sense, while there is an intensified activity of the sense of speech. Instead, they perceive with their sense of sight, hearing, touch, and perhaps smell the movement of locusts and armies, which gets more intense in the second chapter.²⁴ In the second part of the Book, the contrast related to the sense of kinetics concerns the sitting posture of God and the movement of the people perceived with the same senses. Such a sequence allows us to draw a conclusion about the increasing mobility of the people in the Book and its confrontation with the stable but effective intervention of God, with movement which is ordered and correlated with the verbal message. It is worth noting the changes within the movement, the sudden turns in the last chapter of the Book; it is intended to illustrate an active exchange, an interaction perceived through the senses of sight and speech. The *theatrum* is space, not just land (cf. Joel 4:15, 16), but it is graspable by the senses.²⁵

The multiple references to the activity of consuming, eating (לְכַא) by locusts (Joel 1:4 – 3 times; 2:25), by fire (Joel 1:19, 20; 2:3, 5), by an unknown entity (Joel 1:16), creates not only an atmosphere of total destruction, but implicates the feeling of the existence of forces that are fundamentally all-consuming and progressive. This gives rise to a sense of danger from which one cannot escape, which acts like a bulldozer. However, the author does not leave the recipient without hope: he juxtaposes the devouring by locusts with the vision of eating and man being satiated by God's action (Joel 2:25–26).²⁶ This perspective is typical of apocalyptic texts.

It is significant that, with such an elaborate sensuality, there is no mention of any of the sensory organs throughout the Book – the only reference can be seen with the verb אָזַן (Joel 1:2) through its stem.

5. The Senses and the Process of Persuasion

The introduction of such intense sensory perception by the biblical author of the Book of Joel enables recipients to recognise the correlation between his experiences, captured stimuli, and the content of the Book. Thus, it provides a so-called emotional valve, allows one to recognise the universality of experiences, and gain hope for their transience or resolution of difficulties. Above all, however, the sensual coherence created during the reception of the text makes it possible to register the content – God's message. In traumatic situations,

²⁴ Szmajdziński, “Blitzkrieg w Jl 2,1–11,” 270.

²⁵ Lemański, “Nadzieja zbawienia dla wzywających Imienia Pana (Jl 3,1–5),” 38.

²⁶ K. Scott, “Time and the Locust Plagues in the Book of Joel and the Sefire Inscriptions,” *CBQ* 85/1 (2023) 28.

its transmission is possible at every level, but perception may happen only through the senses. The Book of Joel makes this possible perfectly – the proof is the emotional experience that any viewer receives by simply reading this text in translation.

The number of references to the sense of speech creates an atmosphere of active interpersonal exchange, shows the stages of perception, the phases of communication, and, in this way, it expresses approval for any human condition. In parallel, the developing kinetic terminology builds an awareness of movement, change, a kind of whirlpool of events, but also of the transformations that take place in them – and not all of them are dependent on human decisions or acts. Touch, taste, and – marginally – smell, sanction the importance and seriousness of registering reality at these levels, and liberate from communication blockages (tangibility allows for a change in the channel of perception and language of transmission, allowing for renewed efforts and exchanges in the relationship).

It is noteworthy that, with the help of sensual references, the recipient's attention is gradually shifted to God. First, He is present as the Summoned, with the cry (אֶלְךָ) in Joel 1:14, 19, and אמר (אָמַר) in Joel 2:17; from Joel 2:19 on, He becomes an Interlocutor, so that in Joel 3:5 the proclamation can be made: 'But everyone who calls on (אָשָׁר־יְקַרֵּא) the name of the Lord shall be saved (תִּלְבָּשָׂה)'. The word תִּלְבָּשָׂה in niphil, suggesting an escape provided by God, becomes a turning point here; it opens up a pool of sensory stimuli, the perception of which shows specific divine intervention in the defence of man/people. In this way, the senses redirect the recipients' attention to the dynamics of divine action, giving them an assurance of God's intervention in their cause, in their current situation. Neither the form nor the time of the solutions is given – what is shown is the closeness of the person of God, His relationship with the individual, and involvement in particular human situations.

6. Affect Emerging from Sensory Experience in the Book of Joel

The analysis of sensory references in the Book of Joel raises the question of affect.²⁷ The related new trend in biblical studies under discussion²⁸ seems very valuable for a better reading of the apocalyptic.²⁹ Noticing affect in the account of the biblical text makes it possible to see the presence of human experience before God.

The theory of affect does not identify affect with emotions.³⁰ Observation links affect to the senses. Affect transcends experience and has a sovereign existence as long as the

²⁷ More about the affect theory in the Bible see: F.C. Black – J.L. Koosed (eds.), *Reading with Feeling: Affect Theory and the Bible* (SemeiaSt 95; Atlanta, GA: SBL 2019).

²⁸ S.D. Moore, "Biblical Hermeneutics Without Interpretation? After Affect, Beyond Representation, and Other Minor Apocalypses," *Religions* 15/7 (2024) 755, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/15/7/755> [access: 10.09.2024].

²⁹ About the multifaceted nature of the text, see M. Kotrosits, "How Things Feel: Biblical Studies, Affect Theory, and the (Im)Personal," *Brill Research Perspectives in Biblical Interpretation* 1/1 (2016) 34.

³⁰ B. Massumi, "Autonomia afektu," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2013) 117.

material that evokes it lasts.³¹ Thus, affect cannot be drawn from memory, but neither does it transcend actual experience while remaining independent of the subject;³² one could debate its performative character. Affect stands, as it were, outside perception, not inside it. The perception, as such, is individual, specific, and different for each culture. It is worth noting, for example, the strangeness of the motif of the dynamics of locust voracity for the modern European. The sovereignty of affect enables each viewer to respond in accordance with his or her culture, while at the same time setting him or her immediately in the space of contact with God. This is important for properly evaluating the process of persuasion that the recipient of a biblical text enters into. In the case of the apocalyptic, it allows one to meet the affect conveyed ‘in’ the record and apply it, as it were, to his or her experience, time, life situation. The Book of Joel makes it possible, among other things, to confront a threat. At the same time, the affect captured from the outside helps to read, understand, and accept the recipient’s own emotions. Thus, it makes the existence/appearance of such an effect acceptable – despite the intensity of sensory experience, as in the plot of the Book of Joel.

The text first leads to accepting the fact of the existence of an affect, but it does not standardise and qualify the specifics of its ‘entrance’ into a person. Perhaps because affect describes a possibility.³³ Also because of this, the biblical message remains always relevant.

The application of the issue of affect to the analysed sensual references in the Book of Joel is made possible by both their synesthetic specificity and their mutual transformation,³⁴ and their autonomy, which is extremely evident here.³⁵ However, those sensory references do not lead to flight from God, but to contact with Him. The theory of affect allows us to lean into the consequences of these interactions – affect leaves traces in humans and in the world.³⁶ It affects thinking and decision, and not just feelings – but on this subject, with regard to the Book of Joel, any informed viewer will be most competent.

Conclusion

An analysis of Joel’s sensory vocabulary, when compared to other biblical texts, positions the Book prominently among its peers. Notably, its terminology closely aligns with that of Zechariah, another Old Testament apocalyptic text, though it diverges surprisingly from Daniel – a difference potentially attributable to Daniel’s later composition. Joel’s apocalyptic nature stands out distinctly from Zephaniah, marked by vivid sensory imagery of locusts,

³¹ C. Rudnicki, “Koncepcja aury immanentnej,” *Estetyka i Krytyka* 30/3 (2013) 102.

³² C. Rudnicki, “Koncepcja aury immanentnej,” 102.

³³ M. Kotrosits, “How Things Feel: Biblical Studies, Affect Theory, and the (Im)Personal,” 4.

³⁴ B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Post-Contemporary Interventions; Durham – London: Duke University Press 2002) 35.

³⁵ B. Massumi, “Autonomia afektu,” 124–125.

³⁶ F.C. Black – J.L. Koosed, “Some Ways to Read with Feeling,” *Reading with Feeling*, 2.

armies, and the outpouring of the Spirit. While both Joel and Zephaniah share consistencies in their depiction of the Day of the Lord, Joel's vocabulary related to the sense of speech also echoes the Book of Lamentations. These lexical patterns reinforce the multisensory character of Joel.

Straddling the boundary between prophecy and apocalyptic, the Book of Joel unfolds as a discourse, with its sparse narrative elements serving a secondary role. Its rich sensory language not only enhances its persuasive power but also plays a crucial role in conveying its theological message. This sensory richness proves an effective communicative tool in times of crisis, breaking down barriers and enabling readers to find solace in God's supportive actions toward humanity.

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