

*SCREAMING SILENCE: THE FEMALE VOICE
IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:
AN IMAGINATIVE RE-DISCOVERY*

By

Cynthia Weldon
B.A., University of Toronto, 1989.
B. Ed., University of Ottawa, 1991.

PROJECT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

In the Graduate Liberal Studies
Program of the
Faculty of Arts

© Cynthia Weldon 2003
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

November 2003

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

APPROVAL

Name: Cynthia Weldon

Degree: Master of Arts

Title of Project: Screaming Silence: The Female Voice in the Old Testament: An Imaginative Rediscovery

Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. Steven Duguid
Professor, Humanities Department
Director, Graduate Liberal Studies

Dr. June Sturrock
Senior Supervisor
Professor, English Department
Associate Director, Graduate Liberal Studies

Dr. Donald Grayston
Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities

Dr. Susanna Egan
External Examiner
Professor, English Department
University of British Columbia

Date Approved:

November 22 2003

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENCE

I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Screaming Silence: The Female Voice in the Old Testament: An Imaginative Re-Discovery

Author:

(Signature)

Cynthia Weldon

(Date Signed)

December 8 2003

ABSTRACT

Many feminist Bible scholars argue that, while the Bible needs to be re-examined from a feminist paradigm, feminism should not reject all of Christianity as useless for women. The collection of dramatic monologues that follows is my attempt to reclaim the Bible by searching for and hearing the voices and stories of the women who are silenced or absent. By doing so, I hope to rediscover the human condition in the Bible from a feminine perspective.

In choosing a genre to voice stories of the biblical women in the Old Testament, I felt that the dramatic monologue was the best one available. It reveals character development through the speech of a character at a specific moment in time, within in a specific setting. In it, the character addresses an identifiable listener. This listener, however, is silent and so the reader is only privy to *one* interpretation of the dramatic context, much like over-hearing one half of a telephone conversation. Dramatic Monologues are fun for the reader as they often portray a speaker unintentionally revealing a secret (or an aspect of their personality, which leads to deep insight into his or her character. The reader's amusement results from trying to guess the character's motivations, faults or secrets.

As a perusal of the genre indicates, characters from myth, legend or literature are often used, and for all of these reasons, it is an excellent genre for delivering the voices of biblical women. This project begins with an essay explaining the perspective from which I re-examine the Old Testament for the female voice. It explains the reasons behind how I read the Bible the way I do, and the methodology I use in approaching my analysis of its

stories. The introduction is followed by the monologues and their footnotes which provide the reader with historical, anthropological, psychological, and theological insight into the women's stories. Literary allusions and diction within the monologues are trans-temporal in nature for reasons of stylistic integrity and characterization.

DEDICATION

To Allison who believed in this idea, and in me, long before I put pen to paper; and to Dona, Bob, Don and Patrick, who through their unfailing friendship and support, encouraged me to persevere when the events and business of life threatened to keep me from writing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to Donald Grayston for his direction of this project since its inception. He not only directed my reading, but he generously donated hours of his time to debate and discuss points of theology and biblical exegesis. His uncompromising insistence that I clarify my argument or expand on ideas where necessary, as well as his sharply-honed eye for English grammar, has led to a piece of work much improved as a result of his dedicated attention.

I would also like to thank June Sturrock for her meticulous editing and suggestions regarding the referencing and footnoting of my research. I am also grateful for her attention to the literary and creative aspects of my work. Her insights into the characterization of the speakers, and her insistence that I continue to persevere until there was a wide variety of tone within the respective voices of the biblical women, has led to a balance of characters that I would not have achieved on my own.

Much gratitude is also extended to Bob and Robert MacKie, and to Penny Simpson, for their help with the technological and computer support that made this project a reality.

Finally, I wish to thank Simon Fraser University for the generous bursary which allowed me to stay home and write, and Teresa McBride for the hours of day-care that enabled me the freedom to be creative.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval	ii
Abstract	iii
Dedication	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Table of Contents	vii
Introduction	1
Monologues	24
<i>Evensong (Genesis 2:20 – 3:24)</i>	25
<i>Sarai (Genesis 12:1 – 23:20)</i>	27
<i>Hagar (Genesis 16:1 -15; 21:8 – 20)</i>	31
<i>Ewe Betrayed (Genesis 29:6 – 35:19)</i>	35
<i>A Virgin of Jabesh Grown Old (Judges 19 – 21)</i>	39
<i>Dinah (Genesis 34)</i>	44
<i>Love Song of Tamar (Genesis 38)</i>	49
<i>Job’s Wife (Job 2:9)</i>	53
<i>A Woman Spurned (Genesis 39)</i>	59
<i>Mirror^m (Exodus 2:1 – 8; 15; Numbers 12)</i>	63
<i>The Spy Who Loved Me: Rahab’s Story (Joshua 1 -6)</i>	68
<i>Jael (Judges 4:17 -22)</i>	71
<i>Deborah (Judges 4:1 – 5:31)</i>	74
<i>Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:25)</i>	78
<i>Bilquis (1 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 9)</i>	82
<i>Hannah (1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:36)</i>	86
<i>Jezebel’s Eulogy (1 Kings 16:29 – 22:40; 2 Kings 9:30 – 37)</i>	90
<i>Vashti (Esther 1:1 – 9)</i>	94
<i>Esther’s Response (Book of Esther)</i>	98
<i>Ruth (Book of Ruth)</i>	100
<i>Judith (Book of Judith in the Apocrypha)</i>	103
<i>God/ess: She Speaks</i>	106
Works Consulted	109

INTRODUCTION

As a child, I was fascinated by the stories of the Bible. I used to try to imagine what it would be like to be a great pilgrim like Abraham or a leader of people like the prophet Moses. It was thrilling to hear about God's intervention in the lives of his people, and I would sit in wonder trying to visualize the parting of the Red Sea or the thunderous collapse of the walls of Jericho. The Bible's pages were resplendent with a varied and exotic cast of characters. What did the Queen of Sheba look like in all her finery, and what did the boy Samuel have in his bearing that made him special enough to merit God speaking to him personally? The settings were also exotic - one could spend hours imagining the temple of Solomon, visualizing every exquisite detail like any architect in planning. Always one for horror films, I shuddered in gleeful consternation as my inner ear rang with the echo of the flood waters drowning out the cries of its victims. I also loved the story of an angry Samson pulling down the pillars in rage and revenge, and I cheered in my imagination when the injustice against Joseph was reversed in the classic pattern of a hero made prince. The perseverance and steadfast loyalty of heroes like Daniel, who even braved a fiery furnace for God, were inspiring. I wanted to *be* like them. *I tried to be.* When, in Grade 8, I was chosen to play the lead part of Daniel in the school musical, I couldn't have been more ecstatic. Who *couldn't* love these stories? They had it all: creation, destruction, love, hate, lust, betrayal, adultery, war, acts of courage, intrigue, espionage, catastrophes, miracles, and even *some* happy endings! In brief, they were good stuff.

I learned much later in life that my childhood fascination with these stories put me in good company. From great literary critics like Northrop Frye or authors like Margaret Atwood to famous psychologists such as Carl Jung or mythologists like Joseph Campbell, scholarly opinion is in agreement that the Bible is perhaps the most significant book in Western civilization. Many famous writers have been quoted as saying that if marooned on a desert island, their choice of book would indubitably be the Bible. Its

stories have endured the test of time and still continue to spark debate and discussion after three thousand years.

While the stories have continued to draw my attention and curiosity, however, my original enchantment began to wane with maturity. Being a sensitive child, and a reader who needed to feel community and empathy with the characters with whom I developed a reading relationship, I began to find a certain dimension missing in my experience of reading the Bible. For example, in my quest to develop an affinity with its characters, I had always searched for a character who I felt shared the same temperament. A natural fit was the warrior king, David. He was just *so human*! Sincere but intense, courageous but often bumbling, he stumbled his way passionately through life's events with a steadfast and open faith. His prayers were devout, but as any reading of the psalms will attest, his emotions were often anything but noble or beautiful. His big heart, and his passion for life and love, got him into trouble regularly. But it also made him lovable: to his women, by his friends, and by God. In short, despite his status and greatness in the eyes of God and his people, David was an imperfect man.

And this was essentially the problem. David, like almost all of the other heroes in the Bible, was male. Oh there were the exceptions, like Judith or Deborah, but even they were one-dimensional or flat; and with maturity, stereotyped characters no longer seemed quite so interesting to me. At one point, I began to reread the Bible specifically for stories about women in order to find a role-model. Was there anyone worthy of respect who was also a dynamic character in the literary sense? My disappointment and sense of dissatisfaction began to grow. For the most part, the stories about Old Testament women left me wanting to know more. What happened next? What did she think? What did she say? Most of the narratives with women characters in them required reading between the lines because the women themselves had no voices. Their silence began to scream from between the lines of their stories, and I found myself wanting to dialogue with them, wanting to hear their stories from their own point of view.

Finally, after years of dissatisfaction, I had the idea of re-writing the stories from the perspective of the female characters themselves. I felt that they *had* to be re-written

in order to redeem the female characters and give them dignity. I wanted these women to reveal their *souls*. To convey their stories as realistically as possible and through the medium of their own voices, I decided that the dramatic monologue was the best genre. The Handbook to Literature states that dramatic monologues “reveal a soul in action,” where a character “within a dramatic situation” is speaking to an “identifiable but silent listener” during a “dramatic moment in the speaker’s life” (158). Further, it states that “the circumstances surrounding the situation, one side of which we *hear* as the dramatic monologue, are made clear by implication in the poem, and a deep insight into the character of the reader may result” (158). I knew that the dramatic monologue, therefore, was the proper vehicle through which we could examine the women’s “[souls] in action,” but I now had to re-examine these women’s stories in order to find out what the narratives were really saying to us.

However, to do this properly, I had to re-read the Bible carefully in order to try to ascertain whether or not the biblical version of the stories themselves offered any clues to possible reanalysis. This was not a task to be taken lightly when one considers that the Bible is considered by many to be a revelation of God. Nor was it made easier by choosing a different hermeneutical approach. Even if I did not believe in the Bible literally, it was a daunting task to begin tinkering with a work of sacred literature and perhaps the most significant book in Western civilization.

I began my quest for a different reading of the Bible with an analysis of its place in Western thought, culture and history. According to Northrop Frye in his great work on the Bible, The Great Code, despite the fact that the Bible should be read more like a small library than a single book, “the [Christian] Bible has traditionally been read as a unity and has influenced Western imagination as a unity” (xiii). Further, he argues that “a student of English literature who does not know the Bible does not understand a good deal of what is going on in what he reads: the most conscientious student will be continually misconstruing the implications, even the meaning” (xii). This comment suggests, therefore, that the Bible’s status as a sacred text is also an extremely important factor in understanding not only modern literary scholarship, but the whole history of western thought.

In other words, if one does not understand the religious tradition out of which the Bible appears, it will be very difficult to understand its influence. It is impossible to read the collection of work now known as the Bible without realizing that it is not just a piece of literature; it is a piece of *sacred* literature. If, as the Oxford Dictionary states, “religion is an expression of worship of a superhuman controlling power entitled to obedience and worship,” then what is considered ‘sacred’ must be the “items or ideas which are safeguarded or required by that religion.” The Bible is one such item. However, the Bible is also ‘sacred’ in a way that is not religious, *per se*. As Frye argues, some stories will take on a central significance in a society and will serve the function of telling a society what is important for it to know. The Bible is ‘sacred’ because as Frye argues, the stories of the Bible are “charged with a specific seriousness and importance. Sacred stories illustrate a specific social concern” (33). With this mythological understanding of the word ‘sacred,’ it is important to realize that this was indeed the case of the Christian Bible until well into the twentieth century. Thus, the Bible is ‘sacred’ in that it is not only a safeguarded and required item of the Christian religion, but *also* a collection of some of the most significant and important stories which have shaped Western culture. It is this status as a sacred text, which as Frye argues, makes the Bible more than just an anthology of ancient Near Eastern literature

Christianity, however, developed out of Judaism, just as the Christian Bible developed out of the much older Hebrew Bible. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh, the Christian Bible ordered the canon of inspired books in a different sequence, placing the Prophets at the end of the recently-compiled and edited Jewish collection. As Jack Miles argues, “the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament are not quite two different works but to speak more precisely, are two very different editions of the same collection” (18). While Frye’s mythological definition of ‘sacred’ can also be applied to the Hebrew canon in terms of a cultural influence, the other and more traditional connotation of the work ‘sacred’ does *not* apply. There are some major differences between the two canons and how they are viewed within their respective traditions. For the Hebrews, the scriptures were *literature*. Their *interpretation* of them, suggests Miles, was another matter completely. Thus, in the Hebrew Bible there is no sacred/profane dichotomy such

as exists in our modern and post-modern thinking, because the Scriptures were for the Hebrews a body of their own literature including inspiring *as well as* grisly stories.

Inspirational or grisly stories notwithstanding, as a body of literature, both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible contain narratives that claim divine revelation. What does the reader of the Bible do with these? Perhaps that is a matter best discussed by philosophers and theologians. However, the fact remains that whether one interprets them as divinely-rendered messages and the Word of God, or simply a collection of culturally sacred stories, their influence is considerable. As Frye asserts, the biblical stories are *mythoi*. Contrary to our modern understanding of myth as meaning something that is untrue, Frye's use of the word 'myth' is closer to the meaning of the Greek term *mythos* or the ordering of events in plot. Referring to Aristotle's distinction between history and poetry, Frye argues that the Bible's stories must not be read as history. History, he points out, makes particular statements. External criteria of truth or falsehood, therefore, can be applied to these particular statements. In contrast, Frye asserts, the biblical stories are much more like Aristotle's definition of poetry, because "poetry expresses the universal in the event, the aspect of the event that makes it an example of the kind of thing that is always happening" (46). A myth, Frye argues, is designed not to describe a specific situation in history but "to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to that one situation" (46). An anti-literalist, Frye takes as his starting point the understanding that the biblical stories are to be read as *mythoi* and thus, seen through this lens are universally, and not historically, true.

If we can accept that the biblical stories did not need to record actual events in order to be "true," then it becomes immediately easier to access the truths within the women's narratives. This, however, necessitates a hermeneutic re-reading of the text. Hermeneutics requires and enables interpretation from one culture to another and involves two main steps within its approach to the reading of a text. The first step is to decide what the original author thought he was saying. In other words, what does the text say to us from within the context of its own time and place? The second step is where the application of Aristotle's universal meaning comes into effect, for its emphasis is to try and distinguish meaning in the text that we can bring to our own time and place. The

goal of authentic exegesis is to approach the text with as few preconceived notions as possible. This is especially important when approaching the stories of biblical women. If we fail to approach their stories imaginatively or with an open mind, the characters are left undervalued and flat. Their stories must be reinterpreted carefully in order to redeem them from the traditional stereotypes and to reclaim what many feminists now commonly refer to as 'herstory,' or the inclusion of the female experience in what we have traditionally called *history*.

In her work on scriptural analysis, Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, like many other feminist biblical scholars such as Tribble, Ruether, and Pagels, makes the argument that a female hermeneutic should be applied to biblical analysis. She asserts that this is necessary because the "life setting of a text is just as important to its understanding as its actual formulation" (Memory, xv). While she acknowledges that textual biblicism and literary formalism challenge this principle, Schussler-Fiorenza asserts that "biblical texts are not verbally inspired revelation nor doctrinal principles but historical formulations within the context of a religious community" (xv). Or in the words of Rosemary Ruether, "the hand of the divine does not write on a cultural tabula rasa" (Ruether, Sexism, 14). Feminist theory, therefore, on the basis of its belief that all texts are the products of patriarchal history and its resulting androcentric culture, insists upon a reanalysis of the Bible that includes all areas of scientific inquiry and research in order to construct heuristic models that are more appropriate. These new models are necessary if we are to understand the human condition in a way that has previously been impossible because of the insufficient inclusion of the female experience within androcentric texts.

Schussler-Fiorenza, in her feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins, demonstrates that after being subjugated by the Bible for centuries, women can now use close scriptural analysis to liberate themselves from the political use of the Bible against them. She asserts, as does Ita Sheres, that there is enough contradiction within the text of the Bible itself to indicate the "androcentric process of redaction, which 'qualifies' information that could not be omitted" (49). She argues against taking androcentric texts as "informative data and accurate reports" and suggests instead, that we must read their "silences as evidence and indication of that reality about which they do not speak" (49).

While Schussler-Fiorenza's work focuses mainly on the Gospels and New Testament, the principle of redaction to which she refers here is strongly evident within the stories of the Old Testament. The story of Dinah in Genesis 34 is a prime example and worthy of examining for the purpose of illustrating this point. Despite the fact that the account is a chapter in length, the actual story of the *character* Dinah amounts to four verses. All we are told is that she goes out to visit the daughters of the land and is raped by a local prince in Shechem. The prince then falls in love with her and asks his father to procure her for his wife. At this point, nothing else is said of Dinah and the tale involves the bartering between her family and the rapist's, as well as the eventual revenge her brothers enact upon the town of Shechem for the rape of their sister. In her work on the story of Dinah, Sheres poses a strong argument that what remains of the Dinah story in Genesis might be "the sole remaining remnant of an original tale (with probably two layers) about a much more complex character, perhaps even a heroine" (130-137). In fact, evidence for an earlier original story lies right in the very text we still have. Thus, the more important question becomes: why was it removed and what does this tell us about the silence of women's voices in the Bible?

According to Sheres, the narrative source responsible for the existing version of the Dinah story is a group of ideological leaders in Judea after the destruction of the kingdom of Judah. This particular school of writers was active for almost two centuries, beginning as early as the exile of the sixth century, and possibly continuing as late as the fourth century BCE. Following the classical prophets (8th to 6th century BCE), most of these writers would be post-exilic (6th century and after). Strict monotheists, they believed that their Law had been handed down to them by God through the prophet or lawgiver, Moses. Believing that they were the Chosen People, they had to put their exile and hoped-for return to the Promised Land in context, and thus, they chose to see the exile in Babylon as a punishment for their apostasy. Following the classical prophets, the metaphor of a marriage between God and His people was familiar to them, with Israel represented as the unfaithful wife/whore who constantly strayed from the relationship. (This metaphor is especially evident in the characteristic prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). As a result of this, their emphasis was on loyalty and commitment to the true

faith of Yahweh (God). According to Sheres, they also emphasized purity and this emphasis was almost always accompanied by a negative attitude towards women. Because of the exile experience, these editors were writing from a survivalist and minority perspective. They were inward-seeking, one could even say xenophobic, in their desire to keep their culture and especially their religion, homogeneous. Thus, as Sheres argues, in redacting the Genesis stories, these editors would take a “violent stand” against any character that was seen as xenocentric because their theological position “demanded that they redact stories that could ... be used as ideological weapons” (27). Dinah’s story states that she “goes out to visit the daughters of the land” [Genesis 34:1]. The redactors would have seen this as extremely dangerous, because, as Sheres asserts, Dinah is positioning herself as an independent woman with an individual identity. Even worse than this, however, is the fact that she is being inclusive and accepting of women from other cultures and religions. Her story, therefore, had to be rewritten for the period of the return to Zion (534 BCE) and made into a parable with “a strong moral lesson for the whole Jewish population, but particularly for the women” (Sheres, 47).

Several aspects of this story show evidence of male redaction from a later period. Sheres argues that Shechem’s kind words to Dinah (in contrast to her father’s lack of compassion) after the rape suggest that this is a remnant in the text of a much larger story that has probably been edited. Not many rapists want to subsequently marry their victims. Further, she suggests that the redacted version indicates a conviction on the part of the redactors, that when it comes to matters of sex and friendship with strangers, women should not be granted empathy (73). Further evidence of narrative tampering is also seen in the actions of Shechem. He shows a willingness to perform the Israelite rituals (betrothal rituals and circumcision), but he does them in the wrong order. This is symbolically important, suggests Sheres, because while he shows an openness in intermarrying with his neighbours, he is unclean because he has taken his bride before the proper betrothal rituals and before he is pure (circumcision). The redactors have portrayed Shechem, therefore, as someone unable to survive in the Hebrew culture. Also significant is Dinah’s silence in a story that is *about* her. By omitting her motives in “going out,” which is in strong contrast to her brothers’ expression of all of their motives

and feelings, Sheres argues that the redactors create a moral ambiguity for Dinah's actions. In her silence, Sheres states, "Dinah is a prototype for other Hebrew women" (116); "silence is a powerful tool within the Hebrew tradition because it stands out as one of the most dreadful things that can happen to an individual or community. Silence is the opposite of discourse and communication, and losing one's voice is indeed losing one's identity and sense of belonging" (115).

When juxtaposed against what we know from archaeology and history, the textual clues within the remaining narrative thus point to a much larger original story (Sheres, 132-37) that has been expunged for political reasons. If one takes into account that the whole family of Jacob has just returned to Canaan from Aram/Haran, then this story seems to be one of land occupation and the rivalry between two competing clans for its resources. One clue is the mention of the Hivites who are portrayed in this story as the enemies of Dinah's brothers as well as the kin of her rapist. The Hivites are often confused with two other groups of peoples, most important of which was the Hurrians, who were "originally western Semitic and exceptionally expansive" (Sheres, 134). As Mesopotamians, they did not practice circumcision. We know, Sheres states, that there was a Hurrian tribe living in Canaan as late as the fourteenth century in Shechem. Two things come to the fore for questioning here. First, if Dinah and her brothers came into violent contact with authentic Hivites (who were Canaanite and who by that very fact would have practiced circumcision), why would they need to be circumcised? Second, the story states that it is Simeon and Levi who are mainly responsible for annihilating the town of Shechem and taking *all* of its land. This account, as Sheres suggests, is obviously inflated, but what makes it even stranger is that it is precisely these two tribes, who, as Hebrew tradition attests, later have no land of their own. Sheres poses a very important question: How could they have lost what they won in so inflated a manner within this story?

There are even more clues which point to an original story behind the surviving text. As Sheres points out, all of the Genesis matriarchs originate in Haran, and Dinah spent most of her life there before moving to Canaan with Jacob: "There is thus no question about these women's familiarity with Hurrian customs and social norms, since

these people were very strongly present in Haran during the patriarchal period” (Sheres, 135). In fact, archaeology tells us that Haran was a very important centre for moon-worshippers with a particular emphasis on the participation of women. Is it possible, then, that Dinah was familiar with the Hurrian custom of worshipping the moon goddess, Hepa, from her time in Haran? If there was indeed a Hurrian community in Shechem rather than a Canaanite one at the time of the original telling of the Dinah story, then it is possible that Dinah’s visit to “the women of the land” was for an already familiar purpose. Furthermore, Sheres points out that the usage of the “noun ‘eres, “land”, is a sexual echo that brings to mind sexual rites practiced within the goddess cults” (135). There is also a third clue to an original story, in the use of the verb *tame*, “to pollute”, in the description of Shechem’s rape of Dinah. Sheres points out that the narrative uses this verb twice. “*Tum’a*,” “pollution” is a profoundly religious concept dealt with extensively in the Priestly Code” (Sheres, 135). It was especially prevalent in describing things regarding temple worship and sex. Is it possible that the redactors specifically chose this form of the word “pollute” to describe the violation of Dinah, because they believed her to be involved with goddess worship? Did an earlier story indicate this? One must also note that the word “*zona*” is also used by her brothers when justifying their destruction of Shechem to their father. They ask their father “Should our sister be treated like a whore (*zona*)?” [Genesis 34:31]. This word is closely affiliated to the word “*qedesa*,” or “holy prostitute.” Sheres poses the theory that when combined with the other aforementioned textual clues, the brothers’ use of the term “*zona*” in their characterization of Shechem’s deed with their sister “takes on a different dimension” and “points to their sister’s possible involvement with cultic rituals [affiliated with Canaanite goddess worship]” (136). Thus, as the story of Dinah and the textual analysis done by scholars like Sheres demonstrates, there are many textual clues within the biblical narratives about women that indicate a high incidence of male redaction for socio-historical and political reasons.

Another factor that relates to the silencing of women’s voices is the patriarchal nature of the canonization process. “Canon,” argues Schussler-Fiorenza, “is a record of the historical winners” (55). A ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ is called for, in her opinion, because one must carefully consider the patriarchal context of the canonization process.

She makes the compelling argument that if we look in the surviving canonical texts, or even outside canon in the writings of the leaders of patristic orthodoxy, we see that the information on women is not value-neutral. It documents instead the history of a progressive patriarchalization of the Church's offices that struggled against an earlier Christian tradition that tolerated a degree of equality between the genders. This study of the New Testament and its canonical process is not digressive when considering the canonization of the Old Testament. Indeed it is illustrative for two reasons. First, it shows the continuation of a male-dominated canonical process which pre-dated it in the Jewish tradition for centuries, and second, students of Western culture looking at the stories of the Old Testament, cannot forget that they are looking at these stories through the muddy lens of the *Christian* history and culture that followed it.

In Schussler-Fiorenza's opinion, the male-biased selection of Christian material dates back as far as the early days of the Jesus Movement in first century Palestine. Like Marcus Borg and Thomas Cahill, she argues that the purity system and scribal regulations controlled everyone in Jewish culture, but it controlled the women most of all because it determined their "access to God's presence in the Temple and the Torah" (141). She asserts that the Jesus Movement was a welcome alternative for early Jewish women of the period. If one examines the gospels, and the Pauline letters that have survived as part of the New Testament, there is the temptation, especially in the Pauline letters, to assume that the role of women after Christ's death was at best peripheral. After all, there are no gospels written by women and no surviving letters to the early Christian community that are attributed to women. However, Schussler-Fiorenza makes the argument that when Pauline letters mention women as Paul's colleagues, this does not mean that they were helpers or subordinates to him. We can tell this, she suggests, because mentioning their names or placing their names before male names indicates the important status within the Christian community of these early female leaders. An example occurs in Acts 18:2 where the writer states that Paul stayed at the house of Aquila and Priscilla the first time he mentions them. In a later reference, he mentions only Aquila and not Priscilla; however, as Schussler-Fiorenza points out, this could be evidence of later redaction, and therefore serves to reinforce her argument that women were central to the early Christian

movement. The important question, therefore, is why are there no letters or gospels by women in the New Testament? Or similarly, why are there no accounts of the works of early female apostles?

These writings *do* exist. In fact, the second century writing entitled *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* was considered canonical by many in the first three centuries. It describes

Thecla as Paul's protégée but also as someone who goes on to enjoy quite a unique and independent tradition unto herself. Paul is not as central to the narrative as she is, and it is interesting that in Carthage at the beginning of the third century, women still argued for the authority to teach and baptize based on the authority of the apostle Thecla (Schussler-Fiorenza, 173).

This is an obvious example of the importance of the male-dominated canonical process in removing the presence of women from what became canon. As the Pauline letters are often perceived as the only authoritative texts regarding the earliest stages of the Christian movement, Schussler-Fiorenza poses the theory that the more removed a female apostle was from Paul's missionary movement, the less likely it was that she would be remembered in history at all. A similar dynamic is also at play when one considers Elaine Pagels' analysis of the secret gospels, revelations, mystical teachings, and early Gnostic writings. She argues in her book *The Gnostic Gospels* that they are among the "most rejected from the list of twenty-six that comprise the New Testament collection" (113). This was often because of their emphasis in describing God through both male and female imagery. Pagels states that every one of these texts considered sacred by the Gnostic community were rejected as "'heterodox' by those who called themselves 'orthodox' (literally, straight-thinking) Christians" and that by the time this canonization process was "concluded, probably as late as the year 200 [C.E.], virtually all the feminine imagery for God ...had disappeared from 'orthodox' Christian tradition" (113). The question that must be answered here is why. While conclusive answers are impossible, one conjecture does make sense. Pagels argues that the Gnostic description of God through both male and female imagery infers the principle of equality between men and

women, and thus, has practical and social implications within the infrastructure of Gnostic communities. The orthodox pattern, which describes God in exclusively male terms, also “translat[ed] into sociological practice” (116). While Pagels is careful to point out that it would be simplistic to conclude that this is the *only* reason for exclusion of Gnostic tracts from canon, she does suggest that it appears plausible that one key reason for their exclusion was the “explosive social possibility of women acting on an equal basis with men in positions of authority and leadership” (115).

What then, can an understanding of the canonization of the New Testament do to shed light on the same process at work in the Old Testament? If we accept that the Judaism within which the early Jesus Movement operated had as its precursor the patriarchal culture of Israel, then the leap is not too difficult. In their work on the canonical formation of the Old Testament, Davies, Philip, and Rodgeron do a careful analysis of the sources of different narrative streams within the Old Testament. Until fairly recently, it was accepted in scholarly circles that the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) had been pieced together from four major literary sources. First there was J (the Yahwist) who probably wrote in the ninth century BCE. The second source E was so named for referring to God as *Elohim* and is dated a little later than J. In the seventh century there was a writer referred to as D, who is mainly responsible for the book of Deuteronomy; and finally there is the last source, P, which refers to the Priestly school writing from the period of exile or post-exile. This was called the Documentary Hypothesis. However, as Davies et al. demonstrate, most recent scholars are now moving away from those traditional conclusions. Pentateuchal criticism now generally believes that the only source that is conclusively certain is D. E is considered never to have existed, or to be, at best, only intermittent. Many scholars also doubt the existence of J, or place it much later than previously thought, probably in the exilic period. The Priestly source is now seen as “the final or near-final creator of the Pentateuch in its final form, and thus becomes less of a source and more of an author/revisor of the final product” (361). (For a complete summary of all Old Testament books that existed before the exile, see Davies et. al., 358). The reforms documented in the reign of Josiah (621 BCE) seem to indicate a watershed moment in Israel’s history,

and suggest a massive attempt to unify Israel into a “single national cult based upon obedience to divine law and set in the context of an enlarged story about the identity and responsibility of Israel” (Davies, 359). It would take the exile and its consequences, however, to provide the context for the impulses seen during Josiah’s reign to become “movements, and the idea of an authoritative collection of sacred books [to] become an actuality” (Davies, 359). If the New Documentary Hypothesis is true, then the Pentateuch was completely written by the post-exilic period and revised for political purposes at that time. Moreover, if P is the final creator/reviser, then the previous discussion on the Dinah story becomes even more important as an exemplar of the kind of political processes at play not only in the redaction, but also in the canonization of the Pentateuch during the period between the sixth to fourth centuries BCE. As stated previously, the priestly editors of the exile and post-exilic period focused on a purity system that was often accompanied by a strong negativity towards women. Thus, given the perceived political necessities of the priestly editors/revisors, it is conceivable that not only were original stories regarding women or foreign fertility worship subject to redaction, but they may also have been excluded from the formation of the canon altogether.

In summary then, the women of the biblical stories were not only silenced by the socio-historical context of their own time, and the political agenda and redaction process of their writers and editors, but they have also been victims of the canonization or selection process by which stories were declared sacred. If we add to this the patriarchal biases of traditional academe, the problem of legitimately hearing their original stories becomes more difficult still. Referring to Collingwood’s argument that historical knowledge is inferential, Schussler-Fiorenza muses that all historical evidence must be weighed within some frame of reference by the historian, and that this frame of reference is always shaped by his/her own philosophical or cultural perspective. “Historical interpretation is defined by contemporary questions and horizons of reality and conditioned by contemporary political interests and structures of domination” (Schussler-Fiorenza, xvii). This is important when considering biblical exegesis, because if one considers that, until only very recently, most of the traditional

academic disciplines were dominated by men, then most of the interpretation was framed within a patriarchal framework and the historiography rested upon a patriarchal ideology. Interpretation is determined more by the questions one asks than the answers one thinks one finds, and the questions, according to Schussler-Fiorenza, always come from the ideological framework under which the academic is operating.

An example of how biblical interpretation has subjugated women is the misogyny traditionally attributed to Paul in the New Testament. Not only did centuries of Jewish interpreters have the subordination of women well ingrained, but the later institution of the Christian Church misinterpreted some passages of the Pauline tradition and ignored others, with the consequence that the Christian Church's emphasis on the subordination of women, based on New Testament interpretation, influenced how it would *continue* to misinterpret the *Hebrew Bible* once the Christians appropriated the text as their Old Testament. Some of the most controversial passages to feminists are found in Titus, I Timothy and Hebrews, and most biblical scholars now agree that they were written after Paul's death and attributed to him for the sake of legitimacy. Some of the most contentious remarks attributed to Paul, such as the infamous comment in I Timothy that women should not speak in Church (2:12), or should concern themselves only with childbearing (2:15), were antithetical to Paul's teaching and were probably not even written until about forty years after his death (Cahill, 156). For centuries, male academic and theological interpretation has used these passages, as well as the passage about women covering their heads during worship (I Corinthians 11:1-7), to relegate women to a secondary role in the Church. In his reinterpretation of Paul's directive for women to cover their heads in church, Cahill says the following:

Paul and his fellow Christians were already fighting a war on three cultural-political fronts: against Jews who accused them of the capital crime of blasphemy, against Greeks who found the Jewish notion of physical resurrection hilarious, and against Romans who were eager to round up "troublemakers", especially ones who prayed to a "god" that the Romans themselves had executed. In their monotheism, Christians were accused of atheism, in their Messianism, of heresy. In their communism, they appeared an obvious threat to the economics of class; in their joyous

inner freedom and their comprehension of the essential quality of all human beings before God, they stood an outrageous challenge to the whole sociopolitical order of the Roman Empire. How many fronts could they fight on? ...If in addition to the wars they were already waging, Christians had followed their ideas to their logical conclusions and taken up cultural crusades against patriarchy and slavery, they would never have survived and we would never have heard of Christianity. If the [said] passage was Paul's way of exhorting his converts not to rock society's boat any more than they had to, it is also possible to read into the standard formulas that he trots out here a hint that his heart was not in his instruction....against the unqualified enthusiasm of Jewish figures like Josephus and Philo [in their apologias for Jewish mores as more patriarchal than Roman ones], Paul's 'approbation' of this [Jewish] code, balanced by instructions, (missing from other contemporary articulations) on the corresponding obligations of the *pater familias*, looks downright tepid (232-33).

If as Cahill argues here, Paul is a pragmatist and not a misogynist, then it is clear that nearly two thousand years of interpretation have misrepresented Paul's motives, with the result that the role of Christian women in the first century has traditionally been viewed as a peripheral one, and not central to the early Church's survival and growth. Moreover, this interpretation of women in the NT as secondary in status to male apostles continued to diminish women's place in the Church for centuries. What is important to remember here is that if male-dominated academics have misconstrued New Testament passages through an androcentric lens for the last two thousand years, the same lens is what is being peered through in theological reading of the Old Testament as well.

The male domination of academe not only affects theological or historical criticism. It also has far-reaching implications for the act of translation and thus *future* interpretation of the text. Referring to the work of Abba Ben-David in 1967, Robert Alter, in his introduction to his translation of Genesis, asserts that there is now evidence that the Hebrew Bible may have had a distinct and restricted vocabulary because it was a language reserved solely for literary use and was different from the everyday Hebrew vernacular. The evidence for this comes from the fact that linguists can now track a new

Hebrew which became the language of the early rabbis (first century BCE) and which reflected the influence of the Aramaic vernacular, “loan words” from the Greek and Latin languages, and most significantly “Hebrew terms that are absent from the [Hebrew] biblical corpus (xxiii). Alter makes the argument that this suggests that rabbinic Hebrew was probably built on an ancient vernacular that was never part of the literary Hebrew that had been used as the canonical language of the Old Testament. The implications of this argument are that the language of the Old Testament narrative was stylized and dignified, and as such, was easily recognized by its ancient Hebrew audience as a language of literature only. The implication for modern scholarship and translation is that, despite the fact that the Tyndale or King James versions of the Bible did not benefit from the modern archeological and philological discoveries, which have aided modern scholars in a better understanding of ancient Hebrew, they are still much better than the vernacular English ‘spin-offs’ today, because they imitate a high or dignified literary convention.

The ancient literary Hebrew seems to have an abundance of parallel clauses which are as finely expressive, argues Alter, as lexical choices. Furthermore, he also points out that the syntactical parallelism is often used for the crucial purpose of “indicating shifts of narrative perspective” (xxx). Because of the modern English propensity for variety in translation, Alter asserts, a word that is meant to be repeated due to its many definitions, is changed to a slightly different synonym that changes the connotation completely. This often dramatically changes the meaning of the narrative, or destroys the subtle change in point of view referred to above. For reasons of continuity, I will use Alter’s analysis of the Dinah story to demonstrate this principle.

Alter argues that Dinah is first referred to as “Leah’s daughter,” not Jacob’s, for it is Leah’s sons, Levi and Simeon, who will avenge her fate. (See *Monologues*, 40). The initial descriptor of ‘daughter’ also aligns her with both the “daughters of the land” and Shechem, Hamor’s son, because as Alter asserts, ‘son’ and ‘daughter’ are cognates in Hebrew. Shechem later repents his rape, and begs his father to “Take me this girl [*yaldah*] as wife.” In contrast to the term woman [*na’arah*], that he uses when bartering with Dinah’s brothers, it is significant that he has described her to his father as a ‘girl-

child.’ After her brothers demand circumcision from Shechem as a betrothal prerequisite, “the narrator reports, ‘the lad [*na’ar*] lost no time in doing the thing” (xxix). Now that the “catastrophe of this gruesome tale becomes imminent, we learn that the sexually impulsive man is only a lad, probably an adolescent like Dinah - a task that is bound to complicate our moral judgement” (Alter, xxix). Alter also suggests that it is significant at this point in the story, that Dinah is called “Jacob’s daughter” because that is how Shechem sees her (xxviii-xxix). What is clear from this analysis, argues Alter, is that “a translation that respects the literary precision of the biblical story must strive to reproduce its nice discrimination of terms, and cannot be free to translate a word here one way and there another, for the sake of variety or for the sake of context” (xxix). What is significant in this discussion when applied to the role of women in the Old Testament Narratives is that if the English propensity for variety in translation has led to a loss of narrative integrity and character perspective in general, how much more has it affected the narrative perspective of the subjugated female characters?

Equally important are grammatical errors in gender when translating ancient texts. Not only do they affect our stories about women in the Bible, but they also affect our understanding of God Him/Herself. In fact, as Borg (as well as writers such as Cahill, Johnson and Ruether) points out in his work, the theological implications of this are staggering. In his analysis of Proverbs 8, Sirach, and the Wisdom of Solomon, Borg effectively demonstrates that in the Jewish Wisdom tradition, Sophia is not only a personification of Wisdom, she is actually described with the same language as God is described. She is referred to as being present in Creation (Proverbs 3:19, Wisdom of Solomon 6:22, 7:22, 11-12); she is active in Israel’s history (Wisdom of Solomon 10:15, 18-19); and she is identical with the Jewish concept of Shekinah, or the divine presence of God. A number of recent feminist scholars, such as Schussler-Fiorenza, Ruether, and Pagels, have noted that neutral gender or female gender nouns have often been incorrectly mistranslated as male ones, with profound consequences for women. And in the case of obvious feminine imagery such as what we see with Sophia, Borg shrewdly notes that traditionally, [male-dominated] scholarship has most often chosen to interpret

it as an “interesting use of the literary device of personification” (102). However as Borg demonstrates, and as other recent scholarship has shown:

Sophia is closely associated with God, at times becoming indistinguishable from God in terms of the functions and qualities ascribed to her, so that one may speak of a “functional equivalency” between Sophia and God. Thus the language about *Sophia* is not simply personification of wisdom in female form, but personification of God in female form. Sophia is a female image for God, a lens through which divine reality is imaged as a woman (Borg, 102).

Thus, as Schussler-Fiorenza argues, many of the biblical narratives about women have to be reclaimed not only from a redaction and canonization process that marginalized them, but also from the traditional academic interpretation which has trivialized and stereotyped them for centuries through inadequate exegesis and faulty translation.

What then, do contemporary women of biblical religion do with these stories? As Schussler-Fiorenza argues, some of the more radical feminist stances “too quickly concede that women have no authentic history within biblical religion and too easily relinquish women’s feminist biblical heritage” (xix). While the alternative has subjugated Christian women for nearly two, or in the case of Jewish women, three thousand years and therefore must be rejected, this radical feminist stance is also unacceptable. It must, as Schussler-Fiorenza argues, “either neglect the influence on women today or declare women’s adherence to biblical religion as ‘false consciousness’” (xix). The radical feminist stance, therefore, must be rejected by the women of biblical religions. Her argument is reinforced by Ruether, who argues that while feminism cannot seize upon “marginal Christianities as unambiguously positive, it also cannot reject all of dominant Christianity as unusable for women” (Sexism, 37). To demonstrate practically what this means for women, Ruether states that:

women must reject a concept of the Fall that makes them scapegoats for the advent of evil and uses this to ‘punish’ them through historical subordination. At the same time women cannot neglect the basic theological insight that humanity has become radically alienated from its true

relationship to itself, to nature, and to God. This alienation, which is not just individual but systematic, has defined the condition of humanity in history. Not sex, but sexism, ...- the distortion of gender into structures of unjust domination and subordination – is central to the origin and transmission of this alienated, fallen condition. Feminism, far from rejecting concepts of the Fall, can rediscover its meaning in a radically new way (Ruether, Sexism, 37).

Therefore, “insofar as biblical religion is still influential today, [our stance] must take into account the biblical story and the historical impact of the biblical tradition” (Schussler-Fiorenza, xix).

The significance of this is that women can still believe in the divine revelation of God’s word within the Bible, while not literally believing in the historical truth of the women’s stories. Phyllis Trible’s work is instructive here. She argues in her essay “Depatriarchalization in Biblical Interpretation”, that the voice of God is found “embedded” in scripture, and that if the exegete listens carefully to the text, and interprets it with great care, it is possible to find God’s intention. Further, in the same essay, she states that “depatriarchalizing is not an operation which the exegete performs on the text. It is the hermeneutic operating within the Scripture itself. We expose it; we do not impose it” (49). This is a statement of profound comfort to women who have been alienated by the biblical narratives, but who remain persons of faith with a biblical religious background, and consequently turn to the Bible for the metaphysical truths that comfort them and direct their spiritual consciousness. Trible uses the exquisite metaphor that the Bible is itself a pilgrim “wandering through history to merge past and present” (Trible, God ..., 1); and, as such, I believe that it still has a role in helping women in modern, contemporary culture to find meaning in their lives now. It means that our exegesis can involve a hermeneutic of suspicion *and* a critical reanalysis, while simultaneously allowing us to access divine revelation and “God’s intention” in the act of reading scripture.

However, if we are no longer reading the stories for historical truth, this change not only affects how we view the female characters, but also how we view the character of God. Remembering Frye's definition of the sacred as meaning something close to Aristotle's definition of poetry, then we must try to access God's revelation by trying to read the Bible for the universal in the events of plot. This would be an approach similar to those of modern scholars such as Karen Armstrong or Jack Miles, who analyze the story of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible to show God as a character in his own drama. Both authors' analysis of the God found in the Old Testament show a character who is constantly stumbling and making mistakes as he interacts with his human creations. He is loving and cruel, compassionate and overly-sensitive, protective and vindictive, and at best, he is a thoroughly capricious character who is living his life and learning how to interact with humanity one moment at a time.

No wonder readers of the Bible suffer what Miles terms "God-anxiety"! If one were to leave the analysis of the Bible on simply a literary plane, then our analysis of him as a literary character is over and we have finished an interesting intellectual exercise. However, this is not the only reason that many people read the Bible. Millions, including women, also read it for spiritual guidance and revelation, whether that revelation is believed to be divine or mythical in the universal sense. And it is at this level that one enters the spiritual plane. Wanting a perfectly balanced and omniscient God, as well as one who is benevolently transcendent and in control, readers of the Bible find that God is anything but that.

Seeing God as the character Miles portrays in God: A Biography (or Armstrong, In the Beginning) requires a paradigm shift. And it requires more than just forgiveness of this character's temper tantrums, or His arbitrary decisions. This paradigm shift requires getting beyond just seeing Him as a literary character, and absorbing the enormity of what the literary analysis has shown us: namely, a much larger philosophical conception of what the term 'God' spiritually connotes. Conceiving of God in this way requires viewing the universe in a different way. Most contemporary theory is caught in the old Greek paradigm of dualistic thinking. We still tend to see God as absolute (as in terms of Plato's idea of forms). In imagining God in a modern universe, we must learn to

conceive of Him differently. If the universe is constantly changing, then God cannot be static. He is finite *vis à vis.* us, but is infinite *vis à vis.* Himself. (For a further discussion of these ideas see Fritjof Capra's book *The Tao of Physics*). If the universe is constantly changing, as modern physics seems to suggest, then our old conception of God as purely transcendent no longer applies. The appearance of the universe and the physical reality of it are two very different things. The same can be said of God. If God is immanent or to be found throughout the universe, then God must constantly be in process too. This new way of conceiving of God is called Process Theology. Based on the Process Philosophy of Whitehead and Hartshorne, Process Theology believes that as the universe is expanding physically, God is expanding metaphysically. There is no way one can spiritually read the Bible and feel at peace with it if one does not reconcile this constantly changing and seemingly arbitrary God with Process Theology. To fail to do this is to suffer the God-anxiety of which Miles speaks.

God-anxiety, or the discomfort experienced by readers when facing God's conflicting personalities, has been one of the principal reasons for certain groups and individuals finding the Bible inaccessible for centuries. The God of the Old Testament *bothers* people. God is supposed to be a just god, a fair and loving god, and yet again and again He does things according to whim, with no rhyme or reason. Some characters are favored, while others receive a raw deal. Of no group is this more generally true than the female characters of the Old Testament. Worst of all, not only can God be arbitrary and unfair, but He also seems to have no compulsion to justify His actions. If this has bothered readers in the power elites throughout the centuries, the injustice of God's actions is even more bothersome if one is a member of a marginalized group, such as women.

My quest, therefore, and my purpose in writing the monologues which form the greater part of this project, is to read the Bible differently in order to redeem the female characters. It has also been a quest to redeem myself. Cady Stanton's insight that "divine revelation is articulated in historically limited and culturally conditioned human language" (Schussler-Fiorenza, 13) is apt, and concurs with Tribble's earlier comment that depatriarchalization is a hermeneutic already present within the text of the Bible, and

lying ready for us to unearth it. In digging through the limitations of history and culturally-conditioned language, I believe, I have found a sliver of the hermeneutic Trible referred to as embedded within Scripture. Some of the revelations I found there were incorporated into the monologues of my characters as I struggled to give voices to the women whose names they bear, and to let them articulate their own experience. In the process, I have not only come to appreciate the fuller reality of the possibilities within the female narratives of the Old Testament, but I have also come to appreciate the fuller reality of a God in process, a God who continues to change and grow as S/He interacts with us.

MONOLOGUES

*Evensong*¹

You really *were* the most beautiful creature in the Garden,
Resplendent, actually, your silky skin glimmering in prismatic splendour.
Everything about you was impressive: so comfortable in your own skin, so to speak,
Yet shedding it as often as it bored you, to reveal another identity beneath.
As transitory and shifting as the Moon, you wrapped your universal pulse around the
Cosmos,
Layering your kundalini folds one on top of the other in resonating challenge to Him.
Everything about you was sensual: your writhing, phallic gait,
Your rhythmic way of punctuating your phrases with gesticulating limbs,
Your turns of speech, falling off that forked tongue of yours!
What's that? Of course not! That wasn't the *only* thing!
Truth be known, it was for your sophistry and sophistication,
Your restlessness born of the interminable perfection all around us
That I felt the most affinity.
You, my beautiful one, were in a garden all of your own making,
And bored as I was, I was drawn to the pilgrim soul in you.²
You understood, I mean really *understood* me.
Two thousand years of posterity have got it all wrong, sweetheart.
And don't call me a feminist either: them's fighting words!
It's oversimplification, and one in *your* position knows better.
Hmmm, well, you might be right, but I don't think it was seduction
So much as acquiescence.
I mean, after all, you can't rape the willing, now can you?
What's that? Lilith be damned! It's not revisionism either:
I'm all there was, and he was bloody well happy to have me.
It's pathetic really: two millenia of calling *us* the *weaker* sex
When in reality, it was so easy.
What's really got them spooked is the fact
That it wasn't my body I used. It was my will.
The whole thing was about power. And *who* really wielded it?
Now wait just a damned minute. What are you implying?
Choosing to eat of the Tree of Knowledge was a **choice**.³

¹ All references and quotes from the Bible within these monologues are taken from the New Oxford Annotated (New Revised Standard) Version.

² The phrase "the pilgrim soul in you" is taken from William Butler Yeats' poem, "When You Are Old."

³ Armstrong argues that the Bible is different from other sacred scriptures because it is "knowledge" and not "death" which separated mankind from God. The knowledge which Adam and Eve seek in the garden, however, is not "the scientific or philosophical knowledge of the Greeks, but the practical wisdom [in the

And an easy choice it was. Paradise has its restrictions, now, doesn't it?
But why am I asking you that?
*Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.*⁴
You already knew better, didn't you? And you shared.
(Which is better than I can say for that other Character).
I partook, willful disobedience making me giddy.
And I forsook the benefits of Eden's treasures:

The consequences of Knowledge better than any of the benefits of the Garden.
Choice...and Power... the only *real* aphrodisiac.
That's right, Big Boy, they call *you* the Seducer,
But it was he that was seduced, not me!
All I had to do was to appeal to his fear; his ego did the rest.
Manipulate that and the rest, if I may use a pun is *history*.
What? Not his alone? I'm afraid you're mistaken, my friend!
The genesis of choice determines the essence of the plot,
The individuality of the *Experience*,
The impossibility of an interwoven and mutual Fate.
I *chose* to do a swan's dive into the Fall.
So believe what you will, you slippery-tongued Devil.

Hebrew tradition] which would provide them with blessing and fulfillment" (27). Armstrong states that Eve is symbolic of our human desire for blessing and the good things (sensual) in life, and the serpent is our human tendency to question and rebel. While these aspects of human nature are destructive, argues Armstrong, they are also responsible for some of the greatest achievements of human civilization. As these traits are God-given, she poses the question as to whether or not the Fall may have been inevitable. While I agree with Armstrong's interpretation that God's creation embodies both the good and the evil impulses within man as god-given, I have chosen to make my character Eve a victim of the serpent due to her own hubris.

⁴ This is from Milton's "Paradise Lost" 1.263.

*Sarai*⁵

I'm defiant ? Well that certainly is the pot calling
The kettle black. It's true. I admit it. I wasn't above
Doubting the abilities of your god. Yes, it's a fact that I sent
You to my Egyptian slave as a form of insurance. Yahweh
Had promised us fertility four times. **Four times!**
And still we were without child. Who wouldn't have
Been doubtful? And if defiance is laughing at the news
That I would bear a child in old age, well then,
Guilty as charged! After all, the last time God had made
That promise had been twenty-three years earlier. Why
Would I believe him? **Your** god is ludicrous! And as I
Recall dearie, on the fifth promise with no proof,
He now demanded that your penis be bared to the knife
As a sign of your covenant with him. You yourself
Fell on your face laughing.

Are you angry because I mirror your own feelings
Of suspicion? Who **would** willingly deal with
Such a hypocrite? *Go forth and multiply!*
He said, and then kicked us out for eating of the tree of life.
He created us, only to prohibit us from living forever!
A little contrary isn't he? And then there's that whole matter
Of the flood. He completely destroyed the earth, only to
Prohibit murder. Now how's that for a
Series of double standards? He's forever changing his
Mind, this character, and his dealings are shady. I, for one,
Could not trust him if my life depended on it.

What is this Covenant he's asking anyway? He would
Want you to believe that it's an honour for you. But it's not,
My dear. Oh no, He's only revoking a power
That he earlier gave to humankind. He said

⁵ In this monologue, many of the insights of my character Sarai are heavily indebted to Jack Miles' work. As Miles demonstrates, God has a role as both a Creator and a Destroyer. The primary problem in monotheism is that what can be seen as opposing forces in polytheism (manifested through the appearance of several deities) is now incorporated within one divine personality. The result is a divinity who seems conflicted and whose actions often seem contradictory or arbitrary. The God of Genesis is both a creator and a destroyer, because after having created humans, He realizes that their ability to reproduce rivals his own creative power. In interacting with his creation, God is seen as contradictory and capricious, because it is through his interaction with his created subjects, that God discovers what to do and how he will further interact with them (Miles, 27– 66).

Go forth and multiply but *that* creative power rivals His!
So now, by limiting his benevolence to *one* chosen people,
The reproductive capacity of all of us is reduced: the others
Through not being blessed, and yours by the realization
That your fertility is not your own to exercise.⁶
And what a stupid symbol of obedience! I can't
Believe how willingly you underwent the knife.
You conceded to the charade, backing down from the
Power struggle and off came the foreskins of all our men,
Including yours and Ishmael's. But you didn't really
Surrender. Do not for an instant think that
I did not hear your bitter laugh and skeptical words:
O that Ishmael may live by your favour!
I know you, Abram! You were not counting
On *another* son. You could only have confidence in
What was tangible. You didn't *really* believe him.
For who can trust a god that is that threatened
By our sexuality? Oh, and another thing...

Not once had this Yahweh ever made your
Righteousness a condition of our fertility,
But when we were as old as we were, after a life of
Obedience, it suddenly became an issue.
Rather convenient, don't you think? If I didn't
Conceive, it was suddenly our fault and not his!
Such a *moral* god. Hardly! When he destroyed
Sodom, it was not for immorality, as he would have
You believe! It was because they had dared to consider
Gang raping God and his two angels. An interesting
Reversal on God's demand for a piece of your penis, no?
Let's be realistic, Abram. This isn't about ethics.
It has *always* been about power.⁷

So let's save the hypocrisy and theatrics, shall we?

⁶ As Miles' analysis of the Abraham and Sarah story (47-66) so thoroughly demonstrates, the repeated promise of fertility without it being fulfilled, not only engenders doubt in Abraham (as his increasing silence and then outright questioning, sarcasm and laughter indicate), but also in the reader of Genesis (51). The covenant and God's demand for a piece of the penis to be cut from Abraham and all of his descendents, is exactly what the covenant is all about according to Miles. "God is demanding that Abraham concede, symbolically, that his fertility is not his own to exercise without divine let or hindrance" (53).

⁷Miles argues that in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, human "sexual autonomy, always indirectly an affront to God's control over life, here becomes a direct affront; in fact, a literal sexual attack." He goes on to make the point that it is power, not morality, which is the central issue here (57).

Yes, I'm defiant, but so were you.
When we first obeyed him, and forsook all to
Move to Canaan, he rewarded us with famine.
And off to Egypt we went. Now let's discuss a
Little accountability, shall we sweetheart?
You didn't give me to Pharoah because there
Was danger of being attacked because of my beauty:
It was a passive aggressive move against your god:⁸
To act out your displeasure to the Lord, you were
Willing to give children to someone else. Not once, but
Twice. Your circumcision was still healing when
Your criminally procrastinating deity *finally*
Demonstrated his power. But even the destruction of
Sodom didn't impress you enough to trust him.
Believing that there was no fear of God
In Gerar, you *again* took matters into your
Own hands rather than trust your uncertain
Household god. And insultingly, I was
Used repeatedly as leverage in your
Personal little power struggle.
I did not appreciate being the plaything
Of Abimelech.⁹ And I believe unequivocally, that
That little matter of sacrificing our only child,
Was retaliation for your intransigence in Gerar.
How could anyone ask a mother to let her
Husband put her child to death? A little above
The call of duty, isn't it? I don't know with whom
I am most angry: you or the demands of your *god*.

Never, *never*, was I privy to your thoughts:
And I believe I deserved that privilege after
A lifetime of nearly being torn to shreds in
The tug of war between you and your talisman.
Oh yes, Abram, (you can forget Abraham.
I refuse to use the name), you went through the motions
Of preparing to sacrifice Isaac, but no one will
Ever know whether you really intended to do it.

⁸ The lower case for "god" has been used throughout this poem to indicate Sarai's refusal to accept God as an omnipotent entity.

⁹ In Genesis 20, Abraham moves to Gerar after the destruction of Sodom. He again gives Sarah away because he believes that the people have no fear of God there and will attack him. My character, however, is inferring that she believes she is being given away repeatedly, because Abraham, too, has lost faith in God's promises. As Feiler notes in his work, the proximity of "two events (Sarah's conceiving and bearing Abraham a son, and his previous act of giving her to Abimelech) has led some commentators to question Isaac's paternity" (72).

Not even me. Your God stopped you: so you had
To prove nothing. And in his seventh and final
Promise to make *your descendants as numerous*
*As the stars,*¹⁰ your god didn't even call your bluff,
Because **he** didn't trust **you**.¹¹ And after using me
All my life, neither do I. As I said before, that would
Be the pot calling the kettle black. Now wouldn't it?

¹⁰ Genesis 22: 16 –17. Despite the more widespread traditional belief that Abraham did not have to sacrifice his son, but was willing to do so, there are other strong traditions to the contrary. Feiler traces the medieval development of the Jewish belief that Isaac perhaps died and was resurrected by God. This is based on scripture's emphasis that God had to call Abraham *twice* to stop him from murdering his son. Within this tradition, Isaac becomes a symbol of the ultimate victim who personifies Jewish suffering. In other words, he had to be *resurrected* as a "reward for his righteousness so he could provide salvation for his descendants" (99). While these ideas are interesting, I have chosen to keep with the traditional interpretation, because it is more in keeping with Sarah's portrayal both of God's motives and Abram's passive-aggressive personality.

¹¹ This idea concerning the ambiguity of Abraham's actions in proving himself is also taken from the chapter entitled "Creator/Destroyer" in God: A Biography. The main premise of this book is that if one looks at God as a literary character, it is possible to see that God is influenced as a personality by his interactions with his human creations. God is a character, therefore, who undergoes a constant process of personality or character development (Miles, 59).

*Hagar*¹²

You've *got* to be kidding! Not *You* again!
Get outta here! I've tried it your way before,
Remember? After Sarah threw me out the
Last time, you told me to return. And,
Fool that I am, I listened to You. How do
You like that one? I should have trusted my
Intuition, and continued on my merry way,
For all the good returning to that household
Did me! So enough of your advice and words
Of comfort, OK? I've just about had enough
Of doing what I'm told. I knew the first time
She wouldn't change. What did she expect?
Giving me away to her husband like that?¹³ Of
Course *she* said that I looked with "contempt on
Her," which isn't entirely the truth. I was pretty
Disgusted, alright, but not for the ludicrous
Reasons she has dreamt up! I was only sixteen¹⁴
When she took me from my native Egypt. And I had
Had only been in Canaan ten years when I was given
To her husband. How would *You* like being forced
To sleep with a ninety-nine year old when

¹² This story is about the slave owned by Abraham's wife, Sarah. The Hebrew word *shifhah* has often been translated in English versions of the Bible as "maid" or "handmaiden" instead of slave. This implies a connotation of gentility counter to its original Hebrew meaning. As Alter carefully argues in his recent translation of Genesis, this is misleading because Hagar is Sarah's *slave* (67). Also important to an understanding of this story is the double identification required by readers for two distinct sets of characters. For example, quoting one of the leading interpreters of women in the Bible, Carol Newsome, Feiler argues that the readers of the Hagar story must divide their sympathy two ways. While we know that "our primary identification has to be with Abraham, Sarah and Isaac," our "moral sympathy...seems to be with Hagar and Ishmael" (65).

¹³ Still childless in her old age, Sarai gives up trust in YHWH, and takes matters into her own hands. She gives her husband her slave-girl, Hagar, in the hopes that she can become a mother by providing a surrogate to bear the child. As Alter points out in his translation of Genesis, the custom is well attested in ancient Near Eastern legal documents. However, "living with the human consequences of the institution could be quite another matter, as the [writer of this Genesis story] shrewdly understands" (76). Sarah soon becomes jealous of Hagar.

¹⁴ All the bible states of Hagar is that she was Egyptian. I am taking liberty here with her age. It is also important to note that the ages quoted in Genesis are usually inflated and figuratively interpreted as meaning very old or far beyond child-bearing age.

You were only twenty-six? I thought so. No answer
 For that one, have you? And what are *You* staring at?
 I was afraid of you last time,¹⁵ but I'm past caring
 What happens now. You convinced me that I
 Should return to Sarai and "suffer harassment at
 Her hand," because it was a fair price to pay for
 My son, Ishmael,¹⁶ and the promise that my seed
 Would be beyond all counting."¹⁷ What was I
Thinking? You also told me that my son
 Would be "a wild ass of a man" and that
 The "hand of all would be against him."¹⁸
 Not a very nice prophecy, is it? But with
 The final pronouncement, and in the perverse
 Way of all mothers and optimists, all I heard
 Was that he would "encamp in despite of all
 His kin."¹⁹ Why did I think all *that* was worth
 Returning for? And not only that, You traitor;
 When I returned as you bid me, and put up
 With the living hell that Sarah made my life,
 What was my reward? To stand by, impotent,
 As the old man horribly disfigured my only son!
 Have you *seen* the boy's penis?²⁰ What mother
 Should have to bear this atrocity? And what's more,
 Old Abe told me it was because *You* had demanded it!
 Now that just takes the cake, doesn't it? A horrible

¹⁵ In Hagar's first divine epiphany (Genesis 16), she says "You are El-roi" and "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?" The most evident meaning of the Hebrew name, Alter argues, is "God Who Sees Me," and the translation "reflects a scholarly consensus that what is at issue is a general Israelite terror that no one can survive having seen God. Hagar, then, would be expressing grateful relief that she has survived her epiphany." It could also, Alter asserts, be a "somewhat garbled etiological tale to account for the place-name Beer-lahai-roi (understood by the [original Hebrew] writer to mean "Well of the Living One Who Sees Me)" (71).

¹⁶ Feiler demonstrates that there is much controversy over which son was Abraham's favored one, with the Jews and Christians siding with Isaac, and the Muslims eventually coming down on the side of Ishmael (101-105).

¹⁷ Genesis 16:10. This verse has generally been accepted in tradition to mean the Arabian peoples.

¹⁸ Genesis 16:12 Feiler makes the point in his work that "scholars dispute the meaning of these words, though most agree [in contrast to *my character*, Hagar] the term *wild ass*, instead of being pejorative, refers to the character of the bedouin, specifically the wild desert ass that roams in herds." He goes on to make the hypothesis that the following line in the Bible "does suggest Ishmael's wilderness lifestyle will bring him into conflict with the world" (66).

¹⁹ Alter argues that *his [Ishmael's] hand against all*, while being a "somewhat ambiguous blessing, does celebrate the untamed power of the future Ishmaelites to thrive under the bellicose conditions of their nomadic existence" (71).

²⁰ Circumcision was an outward sign of the covenant between God and Abraham.

Situation had gone from bad to worse: not only
 Was I to endure the fact that my son was marked, but I had
 To live with the knowledge that that it had happened
 Due to my own naïveté and stupidity in believing
 A capricious and unreliable God like you!²¹ You have
 No idea what I have borne in their camp! If you did,
 You never would have bid me return! It wasn't enough
 That the old man, who is also the father of *my* son I might add,
 Has let his wife sentence me to death twice. (No, as a
 Matter of fact, I *don't* think that's hyperbole! How
 Do *You* describe exile without supplies in a desert?) Oh no,
 He also let her do it to **his own son!** And the reason *this* time?
 Because Ishmael²² had the audacity to laugh the day Isaac was
 Weaned! (Fancy that. Couldn't have any laughter
 On such a solemn occasion, now could we?) The
 Cold-hearted bitch actually made him do away with
 Me a second time. But she also banished *my child*.
 She harped at the old man day and night until he
 Couldn't take it any longer. Old Abe was
 A little crazy, but he did have a conscience and a kind
 Heart. He had real difficulty turning us out.²³ I could see he was
 Troubled. But not her! No, she could hardly wait to see
 Us gone. "Cast out the slave woman with her son!" she cried.
 "For the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with
 My son Isaac."²⁴ Funny, how after all these years of knowing
 Us intimately, we didn't even have names!²⁵ But You know

²¹ Several modern scholars such as Armstrong or Miles argue that the very anthropomorphic character of God in the Hebrew Bible demonstrates not only the best, but sometimes the very worst, of human traits.

²² In Hebrew, Isaac's birth is accompanied by Sarah's words *Laughter has God made me*. Alter argues that the ambiguity of both the noun *tsehoq* (laughter) as well as the pronoun *li* ("to" or "for" or "with" or "at me") call into mind the absurdity of a "nonagenarian becoming a mother." The laughter may be because Sarah is experiencing great joy, but in her joy, she might also feel the situation is ludicrous. Furthermore, asserts Alter, *tsehoq* also means "mockery." He posits the theory that perhaps in making Sarah a mother at such a late age, "God is doing something *to* her as well as *for* her." The name Isaac means *He-Who-Laughs*. When later, Ishmael is said to laugh during the weaning celebration of Isaac, the Hebrew word used for his laughing is *metsaheq*. Alter makes the argument in his Genesis translation that there is ambiguity as to whether or not Ishmael is laughing or mocking Isaac. Already concerned with Ishmael's encroachment on her son's inheritance, Alter suggests, Sarah would surely not brook any mockery of this important celebration. Furthermore, Alter asserts, given the "inscription of her son's name in this crucial verb, we may also be invited to construe it as Ishmael's 'Isaac-ing-it'" or "presuming to play the role of Isaac, child of laughter, [and] the legitimate heir" (97-9).

²³ Genesis 21:11

²⁴ Genesis 21:10

²⁵ As Alter points out in his translation, the central theme of Hagar's first encounter with God is the naming of Ishmael. In contrast, during the second encounter, the boy's name is never even mentioned. Alter suggests that the narrator, almost as if he is "conspiring with Sarah," refuses to name the boy Ishmael.

Me intimately don't You?²⁶ Well, it's funny, but I no longer
Fear You. Do with me what You will. I no longer care for
Things past. Before my son was given, I had only heard of you,
But now, now I behold you.²⁷ I *know*²⁸ You. Your living waters
Quench our thirst; they make me clean; they let us live. And yet,
While You have given me the *power to give shape to my world*,
*Nothing has ever been real without my beholding it.*²⁹

Instead, God hears the boy crying out in anguish and tells Hagar that they will be saved because God "has heard the voice of the boy where he is." The central theme of this part of the story, asserts Alter, is the echo of the etymology of Ishmael's name "God will hear" (100).

²⁶ In much of the work done by recent feminist scholars, hermeneutics is being used to look at the female characters differently. Phyllis Tribble has emphasized Hagar the Egyptian as a worthy heroine because like the Old Testament's patriarchs, Hagar is one of the few characters in the Hebrew Bible who experiences a theophany (Brownstein in Büchmann and Spiegel, 189).

²⁷ Like Job and others who have seen God, Hagar now *knows* God as an experiential reality rather than a simple belief. Cast out into a desert, Hagar has been crying out because she is fearful of dying for lack of water. Yet Genesis 21:19 states that God "opened her eyes and she beheld a pool of water." Read metaphorically, this verse underscores the point that when one has an experiential relationship with God, one's fundamental way of perceiving the world changes.

²⁸ The Jewish tradition which speaks of people who "know" God used the same word for "know" that was used for sexual intercourse. At this point in her relationship with God, Hagar experiences Him intimately.

²⁹ This line is quoted from Rilke's *The Book of Hours: "The Book of Monastic Life"* (I.1), 47. At this point in her experiential understanding of God, Hagar realizes the reciprocity needed in a relationship with God. He is no longer transcendent and unapproachable, but rather, He is immanent and within.

*Ewe Betrayed*³⁰

Oh my beloved, I cried, give me children or else I die!
The cow³¹ gave birth, as did your concubines
But I, counterpart ewe to your black sheep³²
Had been left barren of seed, my womb empty of fruit.
O give me a son! Or barring that, some mandrakes!³³
You resented my sarcasm. But did not the calves, bring
The cow fertile flesh of wanton fruit? Was not every gift
A humiliation to me? A reminder of my empty vessel?
Be warned, I cried. I was not above taking matters into my own hands.
You preferred me, and chose me over her, yet
She was the honoured one.
Chattels we were. Bought and sold,
Passed between our father and you as objects:
Symbols of the male prerogative.
But those mandrakes, my love, likewise reduced you!
It was a humiliating position, was it not,
To be the token of exchange between two women?³⁴
I sold your rights to my bed
For that ripe medicine: for seed to rival yours.

³⁰ Many of the emotions Rachel expresses in this monologue are based on literary insights argued in an essay by Ilana Pardes. Pardes demonstrates the many parallels in the respective Jacob and Rachel stories. She especially highlights the mirroring that occurs with respect to their shared characteristic of ambition (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 27-40).

³¹ “Leah” and “Rachel” mean “cow” and “ewe” respectively as indicated by a pun that Jacob uses in Genesis 31:38 (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 33).

³² Pardes notes that Rachel is the greatest matriarch of the Hebrew tradition, despite the fact that she is such a black sheep. If, as Pardes tries to demonstrate, Rachel is a “*ficelle* –Henry James’s term for a secondary character who serves to set off the protagonist’s representation,” (31) then my problem was how to symbolize or convey Pardes’ fascinating ideas in poetic form. I interpret Jacob as much **more** of a black sheep than Rachel, a “ram” to her “ewe” in this regard, and have tried to develop a correlation between the words “ewe” and “black sheep” to signify this. Further, I am also playing with the pun ewe/you as a means of symbolizing the I/You of the mirrored Jacob/Rachel relationship.

³³ Mandrakes are an ancient fertility symbol.

³⁴ Pardes asserts that when Leah barter her mandrakes for Rachel’s place in Jacob’s bed, it “evokes the notorious bargain between Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25.” Furthermore, she also makes the point that when Jacob becomes the “token of exchange” between Rachel and Leah, it makes the mandrakes story “the one conspicuous spot in this double plot [between the stories of Rachel and Jacob] where a reversal of hierarchies is at work” (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 32).

Give me children, my beloved, or else I die!
 Oh what a loving response you gave:
 He withheld it from me, but not from thee.³⁵
 How could you taunt me? How dare you abdicate all responsibility?³⁶
 In God's stead? No! Certainly not!
 But couldn't you at least have been an advocate on my behalf?
 Did not your father act so to your mother?
 Did not he gird up his loins by her?³⁷
 Why exactly were you so angry with me, my beloved?
 Was it my accusation of your weakness? Or your own impotence
 In the face of the lifelong ambition you had practiced?
 Oh Jacob, I am the ewe to your black sheep:
 I **know** you. I am your female counterpart, your soul mate.
 Reflect with me a little...
 Just as you had betrayed Isaac to outfox power from Esau,
 So had I betrayed Laban by stealing his household *terafim*.
 It was a cunning imitation of filial deception. Hah! Oh yes,
 He felt through my luggage all right: but he was more *touched*
 By the fact that the custom of women was upon me.³⁸
 Couldn't you understand, Jacob? I too, was forced into ambition.
 I had to steal his household gods. **Your God** was not doing me any good!
 So long I had waited. Finally, a wife and a mother, but
 My son would never be first, my son would never be honoured.³⁹
 Unlike **you**, I had always been second, **my** joy belated.
 I secretly prayed that you would understand, not judge me.

³⁵ This line is spoken by Jacob in Genesis Rabba LXXI.7 (Pardes in Büchmann & Spiegel, 36).

³⁶ The Genesis account of Rachel's accusations of Jacob leaving her childless seems quite irrational. There are rational explanations for her accusations, however. As Pardes argues, there is an ancient midrashic tradition (Genesis Rabba. LXXI. 7) where an angry Rachel confronts Jacob, not Yahweh, as the reason for her infertility. Unlike his paternal ancestors, asserts Pardes, Jacob is not using his patriarchal privilege and his close standing and relationship to God to petition on his wife's behalf. In Genesis, Jacob answers her with a very angry response that often seems quite harsh to the modern reader. However, as Pardes argues, it is Rachel's justifiable exposure of his ineptness in exploiting his relationship with the Lord that has made him so furious. According to midrashic tradition, Jacob knows that she is right, and that is why he snaps back in anger (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 36).

³⁷ These lines have been adapted for this poem, but are from Rachel's speech in Genesis Rabba. LXXI. 7. (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 36).

³⁸ Pardes makes the argument that in stealing the household *terafim*, Rachel is taking the leadership role in the rebellion she and Leah are mounting against their father, Laban. Jacob earlier rebelled against his father by stealing what was not rightfully his by birth. A further similarity between the two characters is their use of the sense of touch in successfully stealing blessings which do not belong to them. Like Isaac who was also duped by the sense of touch, Pardes argues that Laban's "feeling" of Rachel's belongings in his search for his *terafim* reinforces the fact that touch is no protection against offspring who engage in trickery (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 34).

³⁹ Pardes notes that even though she is now a wife *and* mother, Rachel needs the *terafim* to ensure that her son, Joseph, will have a preferred status over Leah's progeny (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 34).

We were the same: two as one flesh.
 I was a usurper. Like you, Jacob,
 I wore ambition like a second skin.
 But alas,
 It was too fine a mirror;⁴⁰ it repulsed you to look within me.
 The interfacing of our love was a double-edged sword, a threat.
 Anyone with whom you find your gods, you swore to my father, shall not live.⁴¹
 Were my aspirations, modeled on yours, too much, my beloved, even for you?
 Were you willing to sacrifice even me?
 Aiiee... Well then. I cannot deny the truth.
 After seven years of hungering for you, longing for you,
 After a lifetime of loving you, of serving you,
 After forsaking my homeland and all that I knew to follow you,
 Even after working in truce with that fat cow to deceive our father,
 (Because he had sold us and had used up the money given for us):⁴²
 You betrayed me. Not once, but twice.
 Yes, my sweet, my courage surpasses even yours!
 For upon my premature deathbed, I pant, open-eyed
 Against the curse which will bury me outside the land of your ancestors.⁴³
 My resting place: A vagrant's grave.
 Damned Ewe! An outsider.⁴⁴ A female black sheep.
 Even in death, the cow will win.
 I shared your lust- filled bed,
 But it will be she who shares your ancestral burial place.
 Ultimate betrayal? Hardly.
 (The irony is not lost on me that I am dying in the act of life
 For which I've spent most of my life praying.
 But even so, Aiiee! I am still among the living

⁴⁰ Pardes poses the question of whether or not Jacob's curse against the *terafim* thief is not an "expression of an unwitting wish to set limits to his counterplot's plot. She is a fine mirror, but at times her mirroring comes close to self-representation" (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 36).

⁴¹ Genesis 31:32. Upon being accused of stealing the *terafim* by his father-in-law, Laban, Jacob curses whoever has stolen it, not knowing that Rachel is the thief.

⁴² Genesis 31:14-16. Pardes argues that to leave Laban for Canaan, Jacob must obtain the consent of his wives who have learned to cooperate in hard times for the good of the family (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 33). In contrast, I interpret Rachel's cooperation with Leah as requiring every ounce of strength she possesses. I see her grudging cooperation with Leah as the ultimate sacrifice of a barren woman, only done to earn from Jacob a love which she feels is later betrayed.

⁴³ Genesis 35:19.

⁴⁴ Leah's "ultimate triumph," notes Pardes, is to be buried with the patriarchs and their wives, in contrast to Rachel, who is buried beside the highway. However, Pardes goes on to argue that Rachel is "mourned by Jacob his whole life," and further, that she "transcends time" as the quintessential matriarch of Israel (Jeremiah 31:15-17); (Pardes in Büchmann and Spiegel, 39-40). However as my intent here is to get into the psyche of my character, my Rachel is bound by the restrictions of time and place. As such, she dies believing that she is second-best and an outsider, as well as estranged from and betrayed by Jacob.

In these last throes of childbirth!)⁴⁵

No! It is the betrayals of Life that hurt most. Not Death.

When you saw Esau's camp nestled in your homeland across the river,
You sacrificed even me.⁴⁶

With the rest of your family, even I,

Was sent across the river before you to test your brother's wrath.

Ewe betrayed! Me!

My ambition was equal to yours, my beloved,

But in facing your betrayal,

It is my courage,

Not my ambition,

That even you

Cannot begin to rival.

⁴⁵ Genesis 35:18-19.

⁴⁶ Genesis 32:22-23.

*A Virgin of Jabesh Grown Old*⁴⁷

You're a good girl! You keep a clean tent:
Your bread's good, your curds tart.
And your hunger for Yahweh! I see that.
Chaste too (as if that ever did a woman any good),
But you're too smart for your own good.
Oh yes, my pretty, I've seen you eavesdropping
When your brothers take their lessons!
That won't serve you well, you know!
Oh now, you wish you were a boy, do you?
I suppose we all have at times, more freedom...
What? Because you want to know as much as a Levite!
Vipers!⁴⁸ There's a difference between knowledge and wisdom, little one!
Sit here. I'll quickly tell you a thing or two.
Only because you need it, mind!
I'll whip you myself if you ever breathe a word,
But this is a matter of urgency: and for your own good
Because you're always asking uncomfortable questions.
I'd tell you to keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut,
But knowing that insatiable curiosity of yours, I guess
I'm as good as any to explain the facts of life,
And trust you to mind your p's and q's.

Now, as for the *respected* and righteous Levites,
Here's a little insight on *that* matter! When I was a very young girl
A holy and well-respected Levite from the hills of Ephraim⁴⁹
Was passing through the territory of Benjamin. He was

⁴⁷ Miles demonstrates the different functions which Yahweh assumes at different points in Israel's history. Miles argues that God's role from a Creator/Destroyer changes to that of a Law-Giver, and then that of a Conqueror/Warrior as the ancient Hebrews must conquer and settle the land of Canaan. The accounts of violence, even genocide, perpetrated by the tribes of Israel on the Canaanites are concise and matter of fact in the Book of Joshua. However, as Miles points out, during the Book of Judges, "what was once a disciplined, unified, invading army has degenerated into guerrilla bands, or at best, militias" (158). As if to demonstrate the down-warding spiral of self-interest amongst the tribes of Israel, this story of the Levite and his concubine is by far the "the worst incident of brutality reported in the Book of Judges ... and pits the Israelites against one another" (158).

⁴⁸ This is an allusion to Christ's later term for the New Testament equivalent (Sadducees) of the Israelite priests (Levites) found in Mathew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33 and Luke 3:7.

⁴⁹ This story can be found in Judges 19 – 21.

Returning home to his hill country with an impudent concubine, who had
Disobediently run away back to the home of her father in Bethelhem.
Embarrassed and sorely grieved, the weary,
Old Levite stopped to rest for the night with an Ephraimite
Who lived in the lands of Benjamin in the town of Gibeah.
But just as in the story of Sodom, the Benjamites there
Rushed the dwelling and would not be turned away
Until they had had a chance to speak to the Levite, to *know* him.
Well, silly girl, what do you *think* it means? Of course, yes.
Most men do. And as usual the Ephraimite offered his own
Virgin daughter as well as the Levite's concubine.
No, you heard me right. I said, "As usual".
Why do you *think* I'm telling you this little bedside story?
But the men of Benjamin wouldn't have any of that:
Their cries and anger grew louder.

What's that? They weren't acting like God's *Chosen* People?
Well I never! Hah! Hah! Now that's a good one!
You've got a lot to learn about life, young lady.
Chosen for what? To be His spoiled brat or his personal whipping boy?
No, I'm sure you *haven't* heard these sentiments before.
Certainly not while eavesdropping on *that* Viper's lessons!
But where was I?
We're certainly not any more moral than our neighbours, if you ask me.
We've committed genocide, for God's sake!
No wonder they don't trust us! Who would after Joshua?
But that, *at least*, was sanctioned by Yahweh.
Once the arm of God's wrath,
We have generated into a squabbling group of partisan guerrillas.
What do you mean astute? Where do you *think* you get your brains?
You're not my granddaughter for nothing!
Why do the young think they invented good political insight,
Or the monopoly on aversion to hypocrisy?
Didn't think an old crone like me had it in me, did you?

Anyway, back to the Levite. He had this beautiful concubine with him.
Yep! You guessed it. Out she went!
And the Benjamites spent all night abusing her...
Eh? Didn't she have *any brothers*?
You mean like Dinah?⁵⁰

⁵⁰ There is an ancient legend that the sons of Jacob swore a false covenant with the sons of Shechem. When the men of Shechem agreed to form a covenant with the men of Israel, they underwent circumcision as a sign of the covenant. As the men of Shechem were recuperating from the procedure, and were thus vulnerable, the Israelites attacked and killed them. It is believed that this was vengeance for Shechem's rape of their sister, Dinah (Miles, 77). See page 17-18 of the Introduction to this work.

Hmm...If so, they weren't there, but
Metaphorically speaking, dearie, all the tribes of Israel
Are the brothers of Dinah.
And as such, all the daughters of Israel
Should be safe! *But she died.*
Now patience, my young gazelle!
Why do you so condemn the Benjamites?
Let's see if I can give that Viper a run for his money
In teaching you a lesson in logic.
Think! Was not the single, most brutal act that of the Levite?⁵¹
For the very next morning, he opened the door, and seeing her lying
With her hands upon the threshold, said, "Get up. Let us go."
That is all. "Get up. Let us go."
This from a man of Yahweh? Or worse, one's *husband*?
Aah, you could be right, gazelle. But capital punishment
For running home? Be careful, my child, for those
Jewel-encrusted vipers are cowards and hypocrites all!

Look at the moral arrogance we have fallen into! And all
Under the direction of *holy* men, vowing they act in *God's* name.
How do we know we are a *Master Race*? For in my old
And wise opinion (though silent and safe,
I hope it will remain, if you catch my drift),
What is that really, but a *distorted image of a chosen people*?⁵²
But arrogance breeds vengeance, and we surely have that in spades!
Patience my dear, and I'll explain. Each of the other eleven tribes
Received a part of the concubine's body. Yes,
He carved her up. Can you *believe* that?
And that very same holy man whipped them into such a frenzy
That when they were done, many men, women and children

⁵¹ This idea is expressed by Miles in God: A Biography (159).

⁵² Alicia Ostriker ponders the implications of being a "chosen people." While Judaism's belief in the "universality of God" can lead to a universal love and compassion, an infinite cherishing of new life, a new ethics," the law given to the Jews at Sinai can also feed "the tenacious pride of those who consider themselves chosen, who will rejoice at the death of an unbeliever. ...It is a pride that will encourage the narrowness of the narrow in spirit" (49). Contemplating the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews during this last century, Ostriker poses the question: "For what is a Master Race if not the distorted mirror image of a Chosen People?" (Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 49). The implications of this question so intrigued me that I decided to base the musings of my character solely around this key question. I realize that the terms ("Chosen People," "Master Race," and "Final Solution") I have chosen to use as my character grapples with this question may cause extreme discomfort to the modern reader. However, I believe that they are extremely effective in illustrating the dangers inherent in the distorted mirror image Ostriker describes.

In the tribe of Benjamin were dead: the battle took three days, and
Of twenty-six thousand armed men, only six hundred remained.
The rest of the tribes swore an oath that they would not let
Their daughters marry the men of Benjamin. A once proud nation
Reduced to civil war, with one tribe doomed to extinction.
There you have it, my dear, an answer to one uncomfortable question.

I feel weary suddenly, tired of talking...Eh?
Ah, yes... you miss nothing, do you?
So why then, are there still Benjamites?
Well...the people of Jabesh, my childhood town,
Were pacifists: they didn't believe there
That "two wrongs make a right."
When the call went out in Israel to annihilate
The Benjamites, Jabesh abstained.
So... Israel turned on us⁵³

.....
Sh! Sh! Are those tears I see?
There, there, dearie, I'm all right.
Numb, I guess. I haven't told a
Soul about this for over seventy years.
But my silence needed to be broken today,
And we must finish what we started,
For you are a young girl called to witness,
And so am I.

There was one small remnant of
Benjamite soldiers who survived.
But they could not touch the women of Israel.
And because of the vow Israel had made,⁵⁴ one tribe
Was lacking in Israel: so ordered the Levites.
But soon, Israel, and her "Holy" men felt regret
For destroying the *completeness* of the Master Race.
So... Jabesh...became the Final Solution.
Of my family, I was the only survivor.
And this, by the hand of my very own people!
We virgins were permitted to live
And were taken to sacred Shiloh,
The site of the holy ark of the Covenant:
And there, during the *merrymaking* of the *religious* festival,⁵⁵

⁵³ Judges 21:21:8-12.

⁵⁴ Judges 21:17-18.

⁵⁵ Judges 21: 21.

One rape was atoned for another,
By the tribe of Benjamin.
And there, our Master Race, our *Chosen People*,
Was fully preserved with impunity.

No...no...I'm all right now.
That happened a long, long time ago.
But refrain from too many uncomfortable questions.
Let your brothers attend to their lessons,
For the men have much to learn.
And as for you, Sharon's tender rose,
Hark to what your grandmother tells you and
Never trust a Levite!

*Dinah*⁵⁶

Watch my tongue and give you what? Respect?
By what prerogative? Your rights as my father? Hmph,
Now that's a good one! When were *you* ever a
Father to me? In fact, why don't you look me in
The eye and tell me that you loved even *one* of us?⁵⁷
What's the matter, old man, cat got your tongue?
Too repulsive an idea to even conceive, isn't it?
You disgust me. Playing favorites with your children,
While pathetic, is all too human, but the way you
Treated our mother is unforgivable. She was never your wife,
Just a whipping post for your own sins and guilt.⁵⁸
Ironic, isn't it. When the bitch⁵⁹ finally conceived her firstborn
She said, "God took away my reproach," but
That is *exactly* what he turned out to be for you! Your game of
Playing pet destroyed us all. Not one of us ever got a cloak.
Or a tear for that matter. Not one tear was shed for me,
But the snitch⁶⁰ was mourned for years, despite all our
Best efforts to comfort you. Irrelevant, weren't we?

You're not one for learning lessons quickly, either.
How could you even think of naming an infant
"Benjamin"?⁶¹ You deserved every last ounce

⁵⁶ Unlike Rebekah (Genesis 24:15) or Rachel (Genesis 29:6) who, Sheres argues, *go out* to the cistern to water the flocks of the patriarchs to whom they belong, Dinah *goes out* "to visit the women (Canaanites) of the region" (Genesis 34:1). This, asserts Sheres, is a transgression not only because Dinah does not get the approval of the males in her family, but also because it is inclusive of the values of the 'other' which is strictly in opposition to the exclusivity being preached by the deuteronomist redactors (Sheres, 10, 16, 27, 132). For further detail, see the introduction to this work.

⁵⁷ Leah was the mother of several sons and one daughter, Dinah. None of these children were ever as beloved by their father, Jacob, as his other wife, Rachael, and her two children.

⁵⁸ As Karen Armstrong argues, Jacob never forgave Leah for Laban's deceit. As the firstborn daughter, it was Leah's right to marry first. However, as a younger son who had deceitfully robbed the birthright of his older brother Esau, Jacob was reminded of his own sins and wrongdoing every time he looked at Leah (In the Beginning, 84 -87).

⁵⁹ Rachel is Dinah's aunt and her father's favorite wife.

⁶⁰ The first time Joseph is mentioned after his birth is in Genesis 37:2 where he is reported to have brought back "a bad report [of his brothers]" to his father (Armstrong, In the Beginning, 100).

Of grief you got. I don't blame Reuben⁶² one bit
For pulling his stunt. You were, after all, trying to
Rob him of his birthright just as you did to your own
Brother. You hate us for turning on you and the Snitch?
Tell me then, Daddy dearest, how are we any different
From you? You have been deceived as you deceived.
You have reaped the hatred and the favoritism you have sown.
I *deserved* it?! Good girls don't walk the hills alone?
Since when? Even your *beloved* gathered herbs
And spices for the easing of daily life.⁶³
You *dare* to infer that this is *my* fault? A result of my
Actions? I do concede that I wandered the hills in
Search of herbs and remedies. And I often wandered
Alone. To condemn me for wanderlust and a restless
Curiosity is the pot calling the kettle black, isn't it?⁶⁴
How are my innocent day trips in the name of all that
Is respectable, any different from those of you or your sons
Who wander as shepherds? They are good at husbandry,
My brothers, contributing much to our great wealth.
But I too, Jacob, am well respected despite my lack of
Years. And when the women paid me in gratitude,

⁶¹The name means "Child of My Right Hand" and as such, violated the rights of Jacob's first son, Reuben, who was the only one who could claim this position (Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 99).

⁶² Reuben, in an attempt to assert his position as firstborn, slept with his father's concubine, Bilhah. Symbolically, this is the son trying to take the father's place. The concubine he took was not his mother's handmaid, but the dead Rachael's. Armstrong suggests that this could be a "posthumous aggression" against the woman that Leah's children could not have helped hating (Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 99).

⁶³ In her novel, *The Red Tent*, Anita Diamant posits the theory that several of the old fertility religions may have been practiced concurrently with the worship of YHWH. In her story, it is the matriarchs and female characters of the Jacob cycle of stories that practice these rituals and share these beliefs. Women were required in ancient Israel to undergo a ceremonial cleansing each month when they were menstruating. Diamant uses the gathering place of a Red Tent, and the rituals and rites of passage which accompany womanhood, as symbols for the practice of these ancient fertility religions. In her story, many of the female characters (such as Rachael and Dinah) are midwives, and thus are liaisons between Jacob's family and the cultures and religions of others. They are also the initiators and protectors of the fertility cult rites within their own family. Thus, Diamant's novel portrays the women in Jacob's family as being friends and allies. While Diamant's illustration of the syncretism of ancient Levantine religion is both fascinating and credible, for the purpose of this monologue I have chosen to interpret the biblical passage of Dinah quite differently. The tensions within Jacob's family are more pertinent to my treatment of this story.

⁶⁴ Jacob, who becomes known as Israel, was a great wanderer. He first flees to his uncle's for twenty years to escape the wrath of his brother Esau, and then, in maturity, uproots his whole family of wives, concubines, and children to return home. A mythological reading of Genesis, such as Armstrong's, requires an analysis of the symbols and patterns within the story. Jacob's return becomes "an important symbol of integration and reconciliation" both on an individual level and later, in the "collective faith of Israel" (*In the Beginning*, 90). In this monologue, however, I am choosing to explore the aspects of Jacob's life that are NOT reconciled, mainly the tension in the relationship between Jacob and his wives, Leah and Rachael, and how it is reflected in the division between the two groups of Jacob's children.

I too, contributed to my keep. You never once
Reprimanded me for amassing my medicines, let
Alone acknowledged my skill. Why is it, that until
My so-called defilement, there was never an issue with a
Daughter who wandered? When one has the responsibility
That I had in ministering to the women of the region,
How else does one procure what one needs
For the pangs of childbirth?⁶⁵ You know, as well as I,
That the markets of Shechem were expensive, and
So, practicing the careful husbandry I had been taught
In your camp, I gathered often. Besides, without
Our poultices and medicines, how would any of you
Men or your flocks survive? I was out walking that day,
Yes. Just as I have all my life. You've always enjoyed
Our cooking and remedies before. Why are they
Suddenly an excuse for promiscuity? Like father, like daughter
I say. At least I inherit it honestly. Ur, Haran, Canaan, Haran,
And now Shechem. Wanderlust runs in the family, no?
Why condemn me for wandering too far gathering flowers,
When you and your ancestors have wandered for
Generations?

Let's get this over with. Is it to be stoning
Or banishment?⁶⁶ We both know, that as a virgin, I deserve
Neither, but your hatred for me has always been strong.
Jacob, and I know it.⁶⁷ Your shame at robbing Esau made
You scapegoat my mother all her life. Never mind that
She gave you six sons. No. Every time you looked at her,
You were reminded of how Laban robbed you. And you were
Doubly enraged, first at the memory of being duped, and more
Deeply, for knowing that whatever sins one commits, they double
Back. You projected your guilt outward⁶⁸ and made

⁶⁵ Genesis 34:1 "Dinah...went out to visit the women of the region." This very ambiguous verse could lead one to conclude that Dinah was a midwife or a midwife-in-training. Anita Diamant sets her whole novel around this conclusion.

⁶⁶ Between 1450 and 1250 BCE, Assyrian law declared that if a man raped a woman, the father or husband of that woman was allowed to rape the offender's wife or daughter. Another alternative was for the man to marry his daughter to the rapist. If the woman was betrothed or married, the last part of the law (which the Hebrews also practiced) stated she must be put to death (Stone, 59).

⁶⁷ As a foil to Jacob's love for Joseph because he is the child of Rachael, Jacob will dislike Dinah all her life because she is not only female, but the child of Leah (Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 88).

⁶⁸ Armstrong argues that throughout Genesis, the reader sees many characters wrongly project their guilt away from themselves (eg. Adam, Eve, Noah, Jacob). "Perhaps as the elder sibling, [Leah] reminds [Jacob] too strongly of the wrong he had done Esau." He is never able to forgive her for her father's deceit in giving her to Jacob before the woman he loved, Rachael. For these reasons, instead of looking at his own

My mother's life a hell. Tell me, Jacob, do I *look* like her?

Disgraced you, fouled your honour, blackened the name of Israel?
Jacob, forgive me, for I did not see him approach me.
Has your God given you no compassion? Have you no mercy?
Shechem defiled⁶⁹ me, but your sin is worse! You did nothing!
Did you come for me? Did you rescue me? Did you do anything?
No! You sat silently contemplating how to turn my misfortune
Into economic advantage. You held your *peace!*⁷⁰
At least my brothers were outraged. Murderously angry.⁷¹

You were no better than the Hivites. Just think: they treat
My rape as an incidental happy coincidence, a joyous excuse
For marriage and an ally. And it certainly crossed your mind too!
Didn't it, Father? To you, I was an object, a bartering tool.
At least *my brothers* avenged my honour. Simeon and Levi
Rescued me, old man. And when the others looted Shechem for
All it was worth, the shameful city got what it deserved.
Was the massacre heinous? Yes! But what do you
Expect from a household that has been seething
With hatred and envy for years? They over-reacted!⁷²
You know, *the sins of the Fathers...*
Father, you never murmured one word of condolence, sympathy or advice
Until after Israel had genocide on its hands. In your silence
Lies your shame.
You, you *held your peace!*

guilt with regard to Esau, Jacob projects it onto Leah and makes her the scapegoat of his self-loathing (*In the Beginning*, 85-7).

⁶⁹ The account of Dinah's rape in Genesis 34:2 is quite devoid of details except that she was taken by force. Most of what *is* said about it appears later in the text and involves how other characters (Dinah's brothers and father, the rapist, the rapist's family) interpret the event. In stark contrast is the later apocryphal account of it in Judith 9:2-4. In this story, the devout Judith assassinates the general of an invading army, Holofernes, and in so doing, saves the fate of the Israelite people, and upholds the glory of God. Before her mission, she prays to God for courage in what she is about to do, and mentions the story of Dinah. This later allusion to the Dinah story uses quite graphic and violent imagery to describe her rape. This suggests that subsequent Hebrew tradition had a much more negative outlook on the rape itself, seeing her defilement as a defilement of Israel itself.

⁷⁰ *Hekharish*, the Hebrew word for peace in this context, "usually connotes culpable inertia or negligence" (Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 94).

⁷¹ In the Genesis story, Jacob and his family are approached by the Hivites who try to make amends by offering a dowry of any price to secure Dinah for their prince. Israel agrees that they can have her if they are circumcised. After the whole city undergoes the procedure, the sons of Jacob sweep down upon them while they are convalescing, and murder all the men and loot the entire city.

⁷² Armstrong suggests that because of the tension and resentment towards their father, the brothers might have over-reacted as a direct consequence of the "callous indifference" of their father towards their sister's rape (*In the Beginning*, 95, 97).

Instead of silence...
You could have cried for my innocence!
You could have cried out at Shechem!
You could have cried out in horror.
But no! Instead, you only expressed fear,
Fear that their actions might bring reprisal *against you*.

After they came back, having done
What you had no inclination or courage to do,
You rebuked them, saying that the Canaanites
Might not want us in this land and might rise up
And destroy us.⁷³ I have news for you, Israel,⁷⁴
I've already been destroyed. Besides, is it not better,
Father, to die with honour and dignity than to
Cower in fear and let everyone think they can
Do to us as they please? My brothers did not think
I should be treated as a whore."⁷⁵ You really don't either,
Do you, Papa? Do you?
Papa?

⁷³ Genesis 34:30. According to Armstrong, when Jacob finally breaks his "shameful silence" in this verse, the "inadequacy of his response is one of the most shocking moments in a shocking story. It is as odious as his initial indifference to Dinah's plight" (*In the Beginning*, 97).

⁷⁴ Armstrong argues that a mythological reading of Genesis requires an analysis of the "psychological impulses which propel the characters". Jacob, although he is blessed with riches and offspring (the traditional symbol of God's blessing), has no sense of the divine. This, suggests Armstrong, is because he must first attempt to integrate the inner self. When he confronts his past by confronting Esau, he confronts himself and literally comes face to face with God in the form of an angel. Unfortunately, he doesn't transfer this epiphany to his conduct. Nothing changes in the way he interacts with his family and the events of his life (*In the Beginning*, 90).

⁷⁵ Genesis 34:31.

Love Song of Tamar

Father, forgive me for what I have done!
You left me no recourse. What was I supposed
To do? There was never a bride more excited
Than myself. Never a woman who awaited her nuptials
With more anticipation than me. But that was
Short lived. Er spent more time with his flock
Than me. Something a little unnatural there, if
You ask me, and I'm not the only one who thinks so.
YHWH seems to have agreed.⁷⁶ That's when you were
Forced to give me to Onan.⁷⁷ Huh? Do you think you were
The only one who was worried! I hadn't conceived
Yet, and if there was not a child born of this second union,
I would be disgraced and despised. I knew all too
Well the plight of a widow, and all too well the
Station of a second or third wife. If I did not have
A son, a future caregiver and provider, the rights
Due me would be less than the scraps given a dog.
And then it happened again; I didn't conceive!
I never lost faith, though - not in *my* fecundity, for this
Time too, I was never given a chance! Onan wasn't
Content with only robbing me of pleasure under cover of night;
He also had to make a mockery of me in public too.⁷⁸
Instead of fulfilling the law as a husband should,
He treated me as a whore and not a wife!
The selfish bastard!⁷⁹ No wonder YHWH

⁷⁶ Genesis 38:7. Er was "wicked in the sight of the Lord and the Lord slew him."

⁷⁷ According to levirate law, which was enacted to retain the ownership of property within the family as well as to preserve the family line, a widow was to be taken as a wife by the deceased husband's brother (Deen, 42).

⁷⁸ According to Genesis 38:9, Onan practiced *coitus interruptus* with Tamar, thus not only robbing her of pleasure by a less than satisfactory sexual encounter, but also robbing her of the pleasure and right to offspring (Curtis-Higgs, *Really Bad Girls*, 208).

⁷⁹ Not only is Onan selfish in denying Tamar sexual pleasure and offspring, but he is also greedy. While any children born to Tamar would be biologically Onan's, they would be considered descendants of Er's family line. Thus the family inheritance would have to be split between Tamar's son, Onan and his younger brother. By denying Tamar children, Onan only has to split his inheritance two ways instead of three (Curtis-Higgs, *Really Bad Girls*, 207).

Widowed me twice!⁸⁰

So, as I say, I was quietly confident in my own fertility,
And I had faith in the Lord for His discernment,
But I understand your concern, Judah,
I really do. What's that? No doubt! I
Was beginning to worry about appearances too.
(No wonder you later tried to burn me at the stake!)⁸¹
But don't worry, Father. In your place, I would have
Done exactly the same thing! I would have sheltered
My baby too. You weren't the only one left wondering.
It was also crossing my mind whether or not I was
Jinxed.

But you have always proved to be a fair man, Judah.⁸²
Think of it from my point of view. Here I was, widowed
Twice, apparently sterile, and forced to go back to my
Own family! There was no shame worse than that,
And you know that in banishing me from your family
Until Shelah grew up, you were humiliating me beyond
What any woman should have had to bear. I wasn't stupid!
I knew immediately, when you sent me away, that you'd
Never marry me to your youngest son. But one thing I have
Is patience. And something else neither you nor your sons had:
A sense of self-respect. None of you deserved it,
But your wife did! And so I waited.

Believe me, I did not cherish the idea of sleeping with an old man

⁸⁰ Genesis 38:10.

⁸¹ Genesis 38:24. Upon hearing much later that Tamar has committed adultery and is pregnant, Judah uncharacteristically and quite severely orders her to be burned at the stake. The regular punishment for adultery was death by stoning. Burning was reserved only for witchcraft or the promiscuity of a priest's daughter. Judah's actions, therefore, signify his belief that Tamar was a witch responsible for the deaths of his two sons (Curtis-Higgs, Really Bad Girls..., 218).

⁸² Later in the Bible, in an impassioned speech to Joseph, Judah is willing to place himself in Benjamin's stead as a hostage in order to spare his father, Jacob, more pain. During the speech (Genesis 44:18-32), Judah accepts full responsibility for the crimes of his family. Unlike his father, Judah's suffering had "enabled him to enter the inner world of the father who had wronged him". Armstrong connects the story of Judah and Joseph with that of Judah and Tamar. She argues that Judah's stance in this part of the Joseph cycle as the *one* member of Jacob's family "who had learned compassion," is a direct result of his experience with Tamar. Through treating her fairly, Judah learns that only when we take responsibility for our own actions can we stop the "ongoing cycle of violence, deception, and reprisal that holds us in thrall." Therefore it is Judah and *not* Joseph, who is truly responsible for the reconciliation which occurs in Jacob's family, because it is through his dealings with his daughter-in-law, Tamar, that Judah has learned the compassion which is the pre-requisite for reconciliation to occur (Armstrong, In The Beginning, 111-12, 115).

Any more than I enjoyed the idea of robbing the cradle,
But when you were finally appropriately single,
I knew that I had to seize my chance!
The fork at Timnah was never so forked as my tongue,
In executing the deceit I practiced upon you that day.
I trembled as you approached me, praying that God
Would veil my identity as I had veiled⁸³ my face,
And He did. The years of living away from you in
My Father's camp protected me well. Your memory
Had dimmed. And so had your wits, I might dare say,
For when we bartered, you not only gave me a
Handsome payment of a goat, but your pledge as well.
Well I would use that staff, that seal and cord,
To hang you with your own words and deeds.⁸⁴

You sent people to pay the *quedeshah*, but she was
Nowhere to be found. I waited until I could hide no
More. When my belly began to grow, you were told
That your daughter-in-law was guilty of prostitution!
A common *zonah*.⁸⁵ Interesting choice of words, Judah.
And burned? I was *not* the daughter of a priest. It was in your
Moment of supreme power over me, when I fully realized
How frightened of me you really were.

I had compassion. I did not publicly decry you.
Do not thank me, for it was a matter between only
You and me. You could have what? Aah yes, I know.
But I was no longer afraid of any accusations you *could* make.⁸⁶

⁸³ Many scholars (eg. Armstrong, Eisler, Hadley, Miles, Stone) agree that the ancient Hebrews in Canaan may have simultaneously worshipped not only their own God, El, also known as YHWH, but Canaanite goddesses as well. In fact, again and again in the Old Testament, there are repeated cases of them doing so. As Curtis-Higgs states, Assyrian law at the time prohibited common prostitutes from being veiled in order to differentiate them from the cult prostitutes whose acts of intercourse with men were considered to be a reenactment of union with the goddess. (Really Bad Girls, 212).

⁸⁴ Afraid that she will have no proof that Judah has slept with her, Tamar asks for a pledge of payment until Judah sends the goat. He gives her his seal and cord, as well as his staff (Genesis 38:18).

⁸⁵ *Quedeshah* means a temple prostitute and *zonah* means common prostitute or whore (Curtis-Higgs, Really Bad Girls, 216).

⁸⁶ No reader can avoid being struck by Tamar's faith in Judah's righteousness. She sends her messenger in private with the cord, seal and staff and tells Judah that it is the owner of these items with whom she has slept. Judah could have stolen them back leaving her with no defense. He could also have accused her of theft or intentional incest. Curtis-Higgs argues, however, that the generous gift of life in her womb, makes Tamar generous of spirit in giving Judah back his possessions, so that he can "confess his disobedience before God and his witnesses, in his own words, in his own way" (Really Bad Girls, 219).

I knew God had already blessed me and wouldn't
Let anything happen to the babe. I had nothing but
Faith in your integrity. And my loving Father, you
Were so worthy. You declared me the "more
Righteous" one, you never touched me again,
And you took the blame for what had happened.⁸⁷
You taught me the true meaning of the word love,
Judah. For other than God, and the fruit of my womb,
There is no one I love and honour more than you.

Having once stood by silently while you and your brothers
Sold Joseph, and having watched your father grieve for years,
You were quick to realize your sins, and the irony of Fate
In teaching lessons. You learned what it was like to
Lose a son twofold.⁸⁸ And despite Jacob's preferences,
Your House would thrive most: for from my womb would come
Multiple blessing: a great tribe, a great nation, a mighty King.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Genesis 38:26.

⁸⁸ Scholars have always considered the departure from the Jacob cycle into the Judah family at this point in biblical literature to be an abrupt break. However, compassion is sorely lacking in Jacob's family. It is important to place the story of Judah and Tamar (where there is compassion) immediately after the sale of Joseph by his brothers (a story where compassion is non-existent). Furthermore, there is also the parallel theme of a father's grief. Just as Jacob will grieve for his lost son, Judah will grieve twofold, for he will lose more than one son (Armstrong, *In the Beginning*, 104-5).

⁸⁹ In a psychological or mythological reading of Genesis, such as that done by Karen Armstrong, the story of Judah has a strong and symbolic closure. Despite the blessings of Jacob upon each of his sons (Genesis 49:1-28), Armstrong argues that Judah, even more than Joseph, is the son who will have the most eventual prominence. Not only are his two lost sons replaced by Tamar's twins, but his line (through his son Perez) will eventually lead to King David and even a rival kingdom to the House of David: the southern kingdom of Judah (*In the Beginning*, 104-5, 116).

Job's Wife

*Suffering?*⁹⁰ What do you think *you* know about suffering? Get back in this tent this instant, young lady! If you don't, I swear advanced years will not impede me from issuing the punishment you deserve. Wipe that insolent look off your face and answer my question. *Right now!* Yes, that's the one: where *were* you all afternoon? I'm waiting! And don't tell me you were gathering herbs again. *That* one is beginning to try my patience! I will not be stalled with silence either, my young strumpet! Shall I wager a guess? Could it be possible that you were up in the hills again with that herdsman I saw you with last week? Yes, you know the one: skin like a lamb's and raven curls as black as night. I thought I told you to avoid him. He has a pretty face, my sweet, but *that* one's trouble, if I have ever seen it! I do not need calamity brought on this family a second time. If I see you with him again, you will be blackened and blued, is that clear? What's *wrong* with him? *Everything!* You are not called the most beautiful in all the land, for naught.⁹¹ Since the time of your ripening, we have had men around here like flies to honey, Jemima. And I'm almost at my wits' end. I really am. The last thing I need is your betrayal of all that has been bestowed upon you. I have enough trouble getting the neighbouring tribesmen to listen and respect our ways, without having to worry about an untrustworthy daughter!

Oh dear. Let's start over, shall we? I have not approached this with tact. My anger and fear curtain my true intent. Your hurt expression says as much. I didn't mean that you would *intentionally* dishonour our name, little one. It's just that, at thirteen, what do you know of the ways of men? You are a bud not yet opened: tender, vulnerable, precious; old enough to be aware of your charm, and wanting your freedom, but too young to know the danger of your exquisite fragility. How, at your tender years, could you possibly know the power you exude? On the cusp for so short a time, you are woman-child, that rare flower ripened on the vine, so ready to be plucked. I would be the thorn that protects the downy petal, for I would not have you experience the strength of the sun, before the spring's rain has made you ripe. Oh, daughter! Be your mother's child for just a while longer.

⁹⁰ The Book of Job is one of the greatest pieces of literature dealing with the theme of suffering and its role in human life. It attempts to ask the age old question of why bad things happen to good or innocent people. In his introduction to the Riverhead edition of The Book of Job, Thomas Moore, a well known psycho-therapist, makes the observation that the mystery or riddle of Job is as pertinent to the human condition as ever. Modern therapy, he argues, is "nothing less than a re-enactment of the Book of Job, a frustrated search for reasons and explanations carried out while some other process [is] in play." He goes on to state that the more important challenge "might be not how to make sense of suffering, but how to live when life is empty, wounded or miserable" (vi – vii).

⁹¹ Job 42: 14-15.

Have some warm milk and sit down, sweetheart. I'm sorry for being so angry, but I just cannot abide being lied to. Taste your milk. Is it warm enough? Good. Now where were we? Time ...ah yes, it's time you and I had a little talk, mother to daughter, about the facts of life. And not *those* facts either. The *spiritual* facts. It's true that your father treats you, Keziah, and Keren-Happuch differently than most fathers treat their daughters, and it is true that you will receive an inheritance⁹² along with your brothers, but that is because you are so precious to your father, not because you are better than other women! *And certainly not because you are better than I am.* Your privileges in life make you an easy mark for the *wrong* kind of man, Jemima, and this is why you must learn to trust your father and me in choosing a mate for you. Beauty and wealth are dangerous, especially in combination, so it is even more important for a girl like you to listen to the wisdom of her elders. I see that I am *finally* getting your attention. You like being spoken to as an adult? Good. In the future, I expect you to *act* like one. You know your father is unparalleled in all the land of Uz.⁹³ Why do you think that is? Ah, you concede, then, that it is not our wealth. Good! We make an auspicious beginning. What do you think it *is*, then? "*Gentle*"? Now, that *is* a good word for it. Spiritual wisdom. Your Papa loves God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and with all his soul.⁹⁴ And the light of that kind of love shines right through him, doesn't it? I have had a very blessed life living with a man like that, and *nothing* less is good enough for my daughters!

Now please do not misunderstand what I say. It is not that your father wasn't a very good looking man when he was young. He was! And despite what gravity and the elements have done to me, my reputation was known as well.⁹⁵ I know that it is hard to

⁹² Job 42: 15. "...and their father gave them an inheritance along with their brothers." This is a very strange verse, for in ancient Israel the system of inheritance was divided between brothers, and in contrast to other cultures of the period, Hebrew women were not given an inheritance other than their dowry. Even in the case of the daughters of Zelophehad, when the father passed on his property to his daughters as a result of their being no male heirs, the elders of Israel determined that the women could only keep the property if they married within their own tribe. This egalitarian treatment of his children by Job is therefore unique. In his essay, Mitchell observes that the prominence of the feminine at the end of this story is "enormously satisfying", and may be a literary reflection of the fact that once Job learns to surrender to God at the end of the tale, his "world too gives up the male compulsion to control." He remarks that the daughters of Job have "almost the last word," and that like the "luminous power of figures in a dream," we "can't quite figure out why they are so important, but we know that they are" (Mitchell, xxx).

⁹³ Some biblical commentaries guess that this might be the land of Edom. In any case, it is interesting that Job is a foreigner and yet worships the Lord. It is also interesting that as a foreigner, he is the protagonist of one of the major stories of the Old Testament canon.

⁹⁴ Mark 12:30. Her words describing Job here foreshadow Christ's command to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

⁹⁵ In his work, Otwell makes a thorough argument that women in ancient Israel enjoyed a much higher status than previously thought due to their status as "the locus of the basic manifestation of the benign presence of God in the midst of the people"(192). This was because of the woman's unique function of giving life to people through God working in her womb. Otwell's argument emphasizes the positive nature of sexual attraction between men and women in the OT as one of the greatest gifts of God to his people, and he does a thorough study of the evidence of sexual attraction in its stories. In Job 31:1, Job states, "I

imagine your parents as young and full of passion, especially at your age, but I need you to try because our love was no less passionate or romantic than what you think you are now experiencing for your young herdsman. A lifetime, however, cannot be based only upon this, Jemima. Your young shepherd may be nice to look at, but a husband needs to have character: the kind of character that lasts not only through prosperity, but also through disaster. I am glad you are silent, my little one. You are thinking seriously about what I say. And this is good. But, you look troubled. Are my words arousing questions? Have you heard the rumours? I see you have. Well, they're true. Your father and I once *did* have another family when we were young. You *had* heard the rumours? Well, good, at least it's not a total shock. Has anyone ever told you what happened?

It's quite the story, my little one. We were punished so badly, that if I had been with any other man than your father, I would have lost trust in him completely! (Or at least my faith in God). One or the other, because with what happened to us, it seemed like there was no way it could have been anything other than a curse for a heinous act. I remember after losing all of our children (Yes, Jemima, every last *one* - can you even *conceive* of it?), that I thought I was going to die. As I recall, I nearly did. I ate nothing for weeks. And when I finally revived, it was only to discover that all our livestock was gone too. In one fell swoop, we had lost everything! We were destitute. I didn't think I could take it any more and began to plan elaborate ways of ending my life: right down to the last detail. And that's when your father took sick! No one had ever seen anything like it. He had boils all over his body! Some were as big as a small plum. And the stench from the pus was enough to knock down a ram. It's funny. I could take my own grief. I could even take my own life. But I could not stand to see your father suffer. I knew he was too good a man to deserve what was happening. So . . . that is when I decided to live. The only thing we both had left was each other and our friends, and with friends like ours, we sure as hell did not need enemies. When his friends came to charge him with every sin in the book, Job never defended himself or lost belief in God. ***Not once!*** And the more they took turns at him, trying to get him to admit to sins I knew he had not committed, the angrier I got. At them, *and* at God. I decided to live just to spite the world. And that's when even the stench of your father's wounds no longer repulsed me. *My man* was being accused of every thing in the book, just so the countryside could feel safe in the world! You see, darling, no one could handle the idea that a man as good as Job the Edomite could be visited with such suffering! You see, this meant that the world is not *fair*, that YHWH doesn't know what He's doing, or worse, that *He's* not fair. A world without reason, a world without meaning, was too scary a proposition, so they came from far and wide to take stabs at your father, trying to pin the blame on him. Finally, I

have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I look upon a virgin?" This statement by Job, asserts Otwell, anticipates Jesus' words about lusting in one's heart in Matt. 5:27, and is the strangest testimony in the OT to "the power of sexual attraction" and "Job's righteousness" (29). Otwell states that in The Book of Job, the issue is not "so much adultery as conduct which protects Job from being attracted by the charms of any woman other than his wife" (29). I interpret Job's marriage as being an excellent example of what a good marriage should be: spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and physically.

couldn't take it any more. "Stop!" I cried. "Curse God and die!"⁹⁶ And he did! He never repudiated the Lord, but he cursed *at* him with all his might! This is what made them so truly angry.⁹⁷ First Eliphaz⁹⁸ took a run at him, the dolt! "Suffering", he said, "is sent by God in order for us to learn." Well of course, *this* only depressed your father further. Of course one learns from suffering, but what about the truly tragic things in life? What was there for your father to *learn* in the freak accident which killed all of our children? I wanted to scream at Eliphaz that sometimes, proverbial shit just happens! In the face of this kind of simplicity, what *could* Job do? Your father sank further and further into depression.

And then came Mr. Good-Living, that idiot, Bildad!

"If you just do the right thing, follow the laws, and seek after God, everything will be OK," he advised. (With a little insinuation that of course, your Father had failed to fulfil the *whole* law). You know the type! Sanctimonious pricks! I call them the Gene Simmonses of the desert: eat this, don't eat that; prepare it this way. Always preaching about what's good for you. *Behave* the *right* way, they preach, and you too can avoid pain. That's *their* maxim. But your father rejected this argument too. Unlike Bildad, your Father could *take* a little suffering. He could live it, be in it, explore it! "What God worth his salt would design a universe governed by cause and effect?" your father demanded, "As if purity laws and their fulfilment determine the mystery of life!" At best, the Bildads of the world are cowards; at worst, narcissists. Your father was having none of that argument. A life of subscribing to a rulebook out of fear, was no way to live for Job. He was too much a man!

Then, came that guilt-tripper, Zophar! What a weasel! I had *always* hated him.

"Look," he whined, as he sidled up to your father. "We know you've *done* something. We *all* have! So why not just own up to it and get it over with?" You know the type of man. "C'mon Job, how *dare* you pretend to be innocent?" I call *his* type the "misery loves company" variety of human: he isn't spiritual in the real sense himself, so he doesn't really believe anyone else can be either.

⁹⁶ According to Biblical commentary, the word "curse" is a euphemism here and actually literally means "bless." Job's wife, no longer being able to see his agony, wants his suffering to end, but still believes in his integrity.

⁹⁷ In his introduction to his translation of Job, Stephen Mitchell makes the comment that the friends' arguments can be boiled down to the following: "*Suffering comes from God. God is just. Therefore Job is guilty. Job: Suffering comes from God. I am innocent. Therefore God is unjust.* A third possibility is not even thinkable: *Suffering comes from God. God is just. Job is innocent.* (No therefore)." These syllogisms point out that the dialogue between Job and his friends is not really about "theological positions, but human reactions." Job's friends are terrified that he could be innocent. Their way of dealing with this terror is to stay locked within their own positions about God's justice, rather than trying to understand what it is in its own right (xiii -xiv).

⁹⁸ For the summary of the friends' theological positions found on this page, I am heavily indebted to an essay by Thomas Moore from his introduction to The Riverhead Sacred Text Series The Book of Job. He does an outstanding analysis of the friends' arguments which I have tried to paraphrase during this section of my monologue. Moore's essay also includes much more detailed objections to each of the friend's theological positions than those I have had room to include here (Moore, xvii -xx).

I was ready to scream, I tell you. I *knew* your father was innocent, and I knew he was a better man than all of them put together. Subjected to their idiocies, your father was beside himself, his responses to them as varied as the emotions he was feeling. He wanted to defend his innocence. He wanted to rage at God for abandoning him. He wanted to die! The more they accused him, the more he began to accuse God!⁹⁹ Your father had been raging for months! “Why me?” he kept asking. Now the question was no longer enough to keep him going. For months he had wanted an answer, had wanted God *to hear* his cries.

“Hear me!” he now raged, “I have questions for you!” And then came the whirlwind. It arose out of nowhere and towered above us. We scrambled prostrate on the sand, not daring to look at it, for it was YHWH, and we knew it. But your father was surrounded. He told me later, that there is a *reason* that the answer to the meaning of life is found only within the voice of the whirlwind.¹⁰⁰ Your father saw the Lord, but the answer was his own; it resonated within what God told him as it does for all people. The response of the voice is different within each of us, because each of us is unique in our questioning of meaning. And this is the mystery of suffering: there is no answer, but our own.¹⁰¹ Your father was not heard by God: his question was not answered. But he *heard* the Lord. He *knew* Him. And when it was all over, he was rewarded tenfold for not giving in to the worldview of his friends - that the righteous are rewarded just because they’re righteous. *My* husband saw the world for what it is: both awesome and dreadful at the same time, both joy and suffering simultaneously; both edges of the sword which is our mortality.¹⁰²

In facing God, your father had surrendered his ideas of God.¹⁰³ In failing to accept,

⁹⁹ In his introduction to his translation of The Book of Job, Mitchell makes the point that the more Job’s friends accuse him, the more he accuses God. He also argues that at this point in his suffering, Job has become Everyman. As the great book about “moral outrage,” Mitchell asserts, the Book of Job “gives voice to every accusation against God” that humans can conceive of, and that furthermore, its “blasphemy is cathartic” (xvi-xvii).

¹⁰⁰ Moore makes the point that knowledge and expression are not the same in secular life as they are in religious life, and that each “operates under different laws and principles.” The whirlwind and the voice within it do not bring a vision (knowledge) to Job; they serve only to “bring Job to a respectful silence.” This is because there is a “level of consciousness where language trails off into silence, where emptiness is more impressive than substance.” Job’s friends have exhausted their rational explanations and Job his condemnations. The time for talk is finished. If read properly, Moore suggests, the silence that the voice from within the whirlwind engenders in Job is a reminder to the modern reader that sometimes we say “too much about things which are best left mysterious” (Moore, xxvi).

¹⁰¹ Moore argues that the answer to human suffering is not solved by human intellect but by “remembering the context of our [own] lives” (Moore, xxvi).

¹⁰² Mitchell argues that in the end, Job’s comfort is his mortality: “the physical body is acknowledged as dust, the personal drama as delusion...the world of our senses ...the breath-thin surface of a bubble.” Both “suffering and joy come then, like a brief reflection, and death like a pin” (Mitchell, xxviii).

¹⁰³To enter into the whirlwind to meet God, Mitchell asserts, Job must let go of all of his conceptions about God. However, unlike most versions of Job as the submissive and patient character of tradition, Mitchell’s

he had reciprocated meaningfully in spirit. And it was this, *this* that YHWH rewarded! What would you have done, my little one? Would you have pleaded on behalf of the friends who had deserted you? *I* would not have. But your father did. Yet again, his spirit shone through and I marvelled at the man who was my life's mate. I am a better woman through his example, through his loving me. And this, Jemima, this is what I would have for you. Not a perfect human being. No. Not *one* of us is that. But a man of spirit, a man who seeks to know God, that is the only partner worth having. This world around us is too dreadful, and too marvellous, not to see it through the eyes of spirit.

hero does not submit to God in the final passages within the Whirlwind section of the poem. Submission according to Mitchell is always a form of "spiritual depression." Surrender, however, is "the whole-hearted giving up of oneself. It is both the ultimate generosity and the ultimate poverty, because in it the giver becomes the gift" (xxvii).

*A Woman Spurned*¹⁰⁴

Isis help all women with husbands like ours!
Ah, I see I've struck a chord. Don't *worry!* Your secrets
Are safe with me. If we women don't stick together, who
Can we trust, after all? I know your story, darling, I always
Choose my friends well. Common interests, that sort of thing.
You're aristocratic, well-connected, wealthy, and ...*bored*.
Relax! You're new to court. You need friends. And I
Know of your husband through mine. His name? Potiphar.¹⁰⁵
Tall, burly, once good-looking. A real man's man.
Bodyguard to the Pharaoh even.¹⁰⁶ Well, that's if
You take the job description seriously. I suppose
Even if I'm disgusted with him, I should be fair.
He's not literally a bodyguard. Give credit where
Credit is due, I suppose. He's actually an officer in the army,
A captain to be honest, and head officer of the guard.
Yes, I suppose he's done well enough. It's not a
Bad station in life, really, and he *did* work his
Way to the top. I have everything from him a
Woman could want *materially*. What does your husband do?
Yes, I *had heard* that. Quite a good salary, too. Your home must have
A complete set of high rooms surrounding the main
Room then? Why *thank* –you. It *could* be bigger, but
It serves *our* humble needs. We did the pool last spring.
I can recommend a landscape artist for your inner
Courtyard if you'd like.

If one has to have a husband,

¹⁰⁴ As Brownstein argues, “feminist scholars have helped us to useful new emphases.” If one re-examines the female characters of the Hebrew Bible in a hermeneutic spirit, and if one follows the lead of “Islamic artists, one might argue ... speculatively for Potiphar’s wife as a feminist heroine of desire” (Brownstein in Büchmann and Spiegel, 189). This would be in contrast to the more conventional Christian theological interpretation of fundamentalists such as Curtis-Higgs.

¹⁰⁵ The story of Potiphar’s wife is an interesting episode within the Joseph cycle and very much resembles a mid-thirteenth century BCE Egyptian tale entitled “The Two Brothers.” Whether it is the work of a biblical redactor familiar with Egyptian culture, or a remnant of a truly historical event, is an interesting question (Goldman, 57).

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 39:1

I suppose he might as well be rich, eh? I *hate* having him
 Under my feet, though. *You* know? Heh, heh.
 What's that? Only good for one thing?
 Not likely! I had to take care of *that*
 Problem long ago. First other officers, then
 The occasional merchant. They were all too risky though.
 A person might be spotted around town. About ten
 Years ago, I started buying handsome slaves.
 They'll do *anything* for you. And they know who
 They owe their loyalty to! That's right, it might
 Be his money, but I'm the one who holds the fort,
 And the only face they see from month to month while
 He's away. You don't care for foreigners?
 Well, I disagree. It's exactly because they're forbidden,¹⁰⁷
 That he was so exciting. *Who?* I thought the whole Court
 Knew about that one! At first his strange little customs¹⁰⁸ and
 Piety were endearing. But that's before I had to put the
 Sanctimonious little prick in his place! Hold on, I'm *getting there*, darling!
 A good bit of gossip has to be placed in context: He was
 Potiphar's overseer, Joseph, the one he bought from the Ishmaelites.
 I nearly lost everything because of the little bastard!¹⁰⁹ It's a good thing
 My hubby is known for his brawn and not his brains, or
 I wouldn't be here having tea today. Oh don't worry about that!
 It would have been his word against mine, and none
 Of the other servants would have *dared* contradict me! At least
 Not if they know what's good for them! I have a little
Something on all of them. How else does one pass away

¹⁰⁷ Genesis 43:32. There were strict ritual laws prohibiting Egyptians from eating food with Hebrews. This, as well as other textual evidence in the Bible, suggests the degree to which Egyptians found "inferior" cultures repugnant.

¹⁰⁸ Not only was the Hebrews' behaviour different from the Egyptians, but their appearance would also have been very different. As Goldman argues in his work, the Semitic ideal depicting a heroic male was a warrior with long hair. In fact, he states that Judges 5:2 has even been translated (and supported by the Septuagint) as "When long locks of hair were worn loose by the warriors of Israel." In contrast, however, the Egyptians were closely shaven and there is even hieroglyphic evidence of their repugnance for the "hairy Asiatics" (62).

¹⁰⁹ According to Goldman in his work on the Joseph and Potiphar story, Near Eastern folktales were full of biblical heroes. The post-Biblical legends concerning this tale varied greatly from one another, with some legends making it less sexually titillating, and some trying to explain the erotic content by adding more details that further explained or enhanced the narrative. In the Qur'án' (12:24) for example, Yusef (Joseph) is almost seduced by Potiphar's wife, Zuleikha. He only escapes her after she has unfastened seven of the knots on his pants, because it is divinely predetermined that he should. Joseph, therefore, is not a hero for his ability to resist sexual temptation as he is in the Biblical rendition of this story. In fact, some rabbinic legends present an even more negative sketch of Joseph's character, portraying him as a person who is aware of his good looks, and who in his vanity, is partially responsible for the events which happen to him (37 – 45).

The long hours? I make sure I have as much on them as they have
 On me. In fact, I never tell *any* of my secrets, *darling*, unless
 I first have a little dirt or ammunition as insurance. *Do* have another drink.
 Yes, I had heard that you had a little trouble in that arena yourself.
 Thank God for faithful servants, eh? Oh? *Now* you remember....?
 Was yours good looking? I know *exactly* what you mean.
Never was there a better looker anywhere than our Joseph.¹¹⁰
 Broad shouldered, narrow waist, and when he moved, it
 Didn't take much to imagine the cloak gone, I tell you that!
 A real change from the overstuffed croc I'm married to!
 It's not that Potiphar wasn't a real looker in his day,
 But thirty years later, and one too many officers' feasts
 At the Pharoah's, his appetite is the only thing he cares about!¹¹¹
 The pig! I have appetites of my own! Why can't
 He understand a *woman's* hunger? Alone, year after year,
 With only the house and my servants! *What did he expect?*

When my parents arranged the marriage, I was quite satisfied.
 He was civil enough despite his reputation for being the cruellest of
 His regiment. And he did well by me, too. The best linens, the best
 Ointments money could buy. But no matter how good I looked,
 Or how well I aged, he was always too busy working.
 He deserved it! He still does! Thank God he's so stupid!
 I've shown him! Just like I showed Joseph, may he rot in prison!
 Turn *me* down? Not a chance! How could he refuse *me*? *Me*?
 A beautiful, aristocratic woman? Was he crazy? I gave him
 As many chances to redeem himself as my pride could tolerate,
 And then, *then* I cried rape. I was furious! How *dare* he
 Refuse me? Did he not know his good fortune?
 As far as I'm concerned, they both deserve what they got.
 Funny though, I could have sworn the big lout looked
 Hurt! He couldn't have doubted me, could he?
 He's too stupid. Isn't he? It couldn't
 Be that after all these years, he actually love....
 No. That's ridiculous. He *deserved* what he got.

Still...? What do you mean?
 A funny punishment?¹¹² Are you *insinuating*....?

¹¹⁰ Genesis 39:6

¹¹¹ Genesis 39:6. "So [Potiphar] left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate."

¹¹² Curtis-Higgs poses the interesting question of why Potiphar jailed Joseph instead of killing him instantly for betraying his trust. This would most surely have been the practice. It raises the question as to whether or not Potiphar believed his wife's version of events (55).

Never! He would have to have loved Joseph more than...

.....

Hmmm

Thank-you. How old do you *think* I am?

It's nice to have such *good* friends.

Only another woman could truly understand.

Do you? What's his name?

Mirror^m 113

Can you hear me *between the lines*, Sir? Does Your
Scholarship hear the Silence? And far beneath that
The weeping? The weeping of the Daughters of Israel?
It was during my lifetime, spent mainly in the desert,
That our Law was rendered. Forever after, women would be unclean.
Our menstrual blood and secretions a paradigm for every conceivable filth.
Our cycle of creative maternity ever more an abomination:
As shameful as the mysterious symbols of the pagan cults,
Because like them, we too, were earthy, fecund.
What is Leviticus, after all, if not a list of prohibitions¹¹⁴
Against the love of things physical? And what is more physical
Than a woman, my young man? God forbids contact with female defilement,
But what prohibition doesn't secretly beg fascination with the forbidden?¹¹⁵
We women must be ritually cleansed, isolated and silenced.
For Yahweh is a jealous God! Thou shalt love only Him!

Very well then. *Read between the lines!* Yahweh forbade the *graven* image.
But he said nothing about language, *we will rule your metaphor.*
Ruach, Hokmah, Rachmanes¹¹⁶ are all Holy, but feminine, as are

¹¹³ This title is a pun on the name Miriam, who was the sister of Moses. Moses stuttered, and therefore was a very poor orator. Even though his sister was undoubtedly better than spoken than he, because she was a woman, she was not permitted a voice. For this reason that I have chosen to name this monologue after her. In this monologue, the female voice deeply hidden within the Hebrew Bible beckons the scholar to penetrate its mysteries. She teases the male scholar, however, warning that the images of the ancient scriptures are often distorted or backward reflections of reality. They seem real, but are not quite accurate, and are very similar in this way to what we see in a mirror. Their images are often vague shadows of reality, dancing with us out of what we see reflected in Scripture. The title *Mirror^m*, therefore, is an appropriate pun to play with this concept of the distorted mirroring found within the Hebrew Bible.

¹¹⁴ The ideas explored in this monologue are indebted to the work of Alicia Ostriker. She explores the relationship between images, the Word of God, the spoken word and the written word of sacred texts. Further, she argues that "the triumph of the Word is the repression of the Mother," and that not only is "sensuous perception subordinated to intellectual principle," but that the "invisibility of God means the paternity of God." She explores the relationship between imagery and the Word, stating that "instead of a graven image, God is language" and that the "subduing of the body" is ultimately the "subduing of woman." However, in an ironic twist, what the Deuteronomists tried to exorcise from the text invisibly "propagates, increases, and multiplies throughout the laws, statutes, and ordinances designed to contain her" (Alicia Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 50-1).

¹¹⁵ This question is posed by Alicia Ostriker in her essay in Büchmann and Spiegel, 51.

The many images of **Shekinah** : Moon, Sea, Faith, Wisdom.
“Shekinah,” a wife to tickle your fancy; “Sabbath” a bride to
Arouse your attention!¹¹⁷ Do these images prick your intellect?
Or are you shy, my young scholar? Excited, but reticent
In your desire to slowly unwrap the Torah;¹¹⁸ to peel back
Her knitted layers of meaning. Delicately concealed, her axioms lie
Complete and resplendent, under garments of woven metaphor.
She lies there vulnerable, awaiting your penetrating interpretation.

But be warned, my naïve young scholar,
In her nudity, she is honest:
Deeply hidden *between the lines*,
Her Truth is both beautiful *and* repugnant in its complexity.
She will pull you ever inward,
Until you breathe in rhythm with her essence, and slowly
Dive beneath the flesh of composition, to the very skeleton
Of the narrative structure. There, deep inside
The bare bones of naked candour,¹¹⁹
Her mirror hides nothing.

It will be there,
Between her lines,
In the stillness of her breathing,
That you begin to hear my silence, screaming ever louder.

I am an ancient voice: one who risked all to barter with royalty
And who in my youth in Egypt, hid a saviour in the reeds.
It was I, too, who, arms uplifted in wild exaltation
To the drums and the timbrels, led the women in a victory dance.
I, once witness to waters parting, heavenly manna, and a pillar of fire,
Was also struck with leprosy (while my brother, Aaron the Levite,

¹¹⁶ *Ruach* (Spirit), *hokmah* (Wisdom) and *rachmanes* (Compassion) are all of feminine gender in Hebrew, and, as Ostriker suggests, it is in “metaphor that woman [the feminine face of God] waits” for the scholar of the Torah (Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 52).

¹¹⁷ The etymological and connotative analysis behind the images I provide here is presented by Ostriker in Buchmann and Spiegel. 52.

¹¹⁸ The Torah is the Jewish Holy Book. Ostriker says, “if Torah herself is the king’s child who shows herself little by little to her lovers – then it is inside the language, the place of interpretation, the place of dialogue...here in the place of metaphor where woman waits...and therefore, ...Shekinah, who is the feminine portion of God, became the spouse of Moses...” (Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 52).

¹¹⁹ There is a long tradition in the literature of many different cultures of spiritually transformative experiences purported to derive from physical union with the divine. This spiritual union and consequent awakening is known by many different names depending on the culture or the religion. Lacking the adequate language to articulate the experience of divine union, again and again, human beings have resorted to describing the experience in terms that are erotic/ecstatic.

After apostasy and calf-worship, was left strangely untouched)
Just for claiming Yahweh had *spoken* to me. So far reduced:
My leprosy an extension of female defilement, I dare say.¹²⁰

But now that you have *listened* to the Silence, you begin to *see*
The bare bones of *my* story, before it was fleshed out.
You can neither close your eyes, nor mute my weeping.
And how I weep!
For the daughters of Israel.
For Moses.
Especially for Moses.

I have waited so long to have you here with me, my young scholar.
To have you, feet planted firmly *between the lines*, and
Reading the story with me, as if for the first time.
That is my brother there, immortalized in Scripture,
The greatest of the Prophets. I shake my head
And marvel at the irony of it: The scribes laboured
Steadfastly over the centuries, and there he stands
Reigning over the Torah in majesty. *Can you read between the lines?*
I said “irony” by design, for never did he
Speak without that self-conscious stutter and fundamental fear,
The earnestness to do Yahweh’s bidding and his love for
The People of Israel nearly causing him to choke upon his awe;
Never once did he take a stand against Pharaoh.
Or our People (but to myself or Aaron he would turn,
And with a puzzled glance, would seem to ask, “Why me?
I did **not** ask to be a guardian to such a People!”)
So you, my young scholar, are not the first
That I have gently seduced to
Read between the lines, to see the sorrow and
The confusion of an unloved Prophet. Sir, he would
Not be the last to do as Yahweh bade him, but he
Would be the most tragic: such a fate
Is the destiny of prophets, but no other
Would be so thoroughly crushed between the demands of his God
And the hateful infant, Israel, that spoiled brat who –
How shall I phrase this – always refused the nipple!¹²¹
Oh what a colicky child! Forever disobedient,

¹²⁰ Ostriker states that “leprosy is figuratively a female disease” (Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 51).

¹²¹ Ostriker compares Israel to “a monstrous child at [Moses’] breast, a mindless, colicky, sickly child” who “always refused the nipple” Moses offered it. She argues that Moses was always crushed by God from above and the people of Israel from below (Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 44).

Constantly forgetful, endlessly obstinate:
A sickly, ruthless and monstrously dependent baby:¹²²
A Being to whom Moses was
No Creator, yet unwitting guardian,
And for whom, he was condemned
To create freedom, history, identity and Law¹²³

This recalcitrant ward of desert refugees
Was Yahweh's CHOSEN people!
And for them, my brother plead unfailingly, and
Bore the weight of Yahweh's indifference.
Was it for *this* fate that I had loved and safeguarded him?

For a destiny of never being loved? Surely, he could have expected
More from the Burning Bush! More from this immortal Friend?
But no! The Burning Bush is not fair. He is not just:
The plight of the daughters of Israel could have foreshadowed this,
If Moses had only *read between the lines*.

Oh, your rabbis have done a good job, all right,
Of cleaning up the story.
The cruel fate of my brother has been nicely glossed over: he has
Finally been given the love he deserves. Shekhina now replaces
Zipporah as his wife, and *they* say she has always
Been with him, his comforting companion and secret joy¹²⁴

Why is your Torah a woman, my young scholar?
Read between the lines!
As a Father, He was too stern.
Who could commune with such a one?
A misogynist does not invite union
Like the soft embrace of a woman.
The more He exorcised the feminine,
The more Israel fantasized.
Forbidden to cast a graven image,
They envisioned and captured Him through language:

¹²² As Jack Miles argues, if we consider God to be like a literary hero, and therefore the hero of his own drama, a lot of what He does is spontaneous and a direct result of what He learns *through* his interactions with his human creations. Miles argues that when "God saves the Jews from Egypt, He does not realize that the victory will leave Him with an entire people on His hands, and will require him to become a lawgiver for them and conquer a land for them to live in" (250). In this respect, Moses as God's prophet, or as His human representative to Israel, has something of a daunting task.

¹²³ Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 44.

¹²⁴ Ostriker in Büchmann and Spiegel, 52.

Their own personal Zipporah.
So much more palatable was He
As a comely, young bride and companion,
Shekhinah.

So now, the seventh veil has dropped.¹²⁵ The story
Stands naked of illusion before you. The unrevised
And original story? You figure it out!
Read between the lines!
Moses. Ever loved?
Not in his entire earthly life.
I know. I was there.

Looking into the depths of the Torah,
You modern scholars
See only distorted images,
Like those of a mirror.
Similar perhaps, but still illusions.
You *must read between the lines*,
To find what you seek:
Ecstatic communion with metaphor.

¹²⁵ In an ancient dance, best immortalized by Salome when she danced for Herod, seven veils are dropped until the dancer is naked (Mathew 14:1-2; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9). Each veil is a metaphor for the illusions that are dropped during the dance of life, or in other words, the process of living (Robbins. 455-68).

The Spy Who Loved Me: Rahab's Story

Now Boaz,¹²⁶ we've been through this a thousand times!
Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can ... Oh?
Well, they don't hurt *me*, so don't let them hurt you either.
Eh? Yes, my little one, I *do* know what their mothers call me.
But it doesn't matter. This is our little secret and better not to lord it
Over your playfellows, but a long time ago in Jericho, the Lord
Revealed to me that I would be one of the righteous ones of Israel.
A mighty ancestress: the source of future kings, prophets, and salvation.
How they would laugh if they heard that, those arrogant daughters of Israel!
But judge them not too harshly, Boaz. It is perhaps their lack of worldliness,
In and of itself a good quality, that prevents them from forgetting my past
And makes me yet a whore. Yahweh's instrument, I helped ensure
Their Promised Land. But to them, I am a tarnished woman, a Canaanite Judas.

An instrument of God. Sounds like quite the tall yarn, doesn't it? But it's true.
Who would risk it all and sell out to the enemy without a good reason?
He came to me in a dream, a dream so ominous that I knew at once
I needed to heed its warning and convert immediately. Well, so to speak.
Human nature is complicated and the heart's recesses are mysterious and many.
Rumours of Egypt's plagues and the Divided Sea had reached us
Long before Joshua's invasion had been spotted from our city's ramparts,¹²⁷
It was obvious that these people had one strong deity protecting them.
This dream of mine made conversion suddenly more *palatable*.
Suffice it to say that my motivations were diverse and manifold. Men,
Wanting always to believe in our simplicity, underestimate the complicated nature
Of women, and perhaps these daughters of Israel are not as naïve as they look.

Come sit on my knee, little one, and wipe away that tear.
Mama will tell you a story. Again? You've heard that one
A million times. I guess all little boys love tales of espionage, war, treason
And glory. Especially when one's parents are the main protagonists.
Once upon a time, there was a Canaanite woman...What?
One of the most beautiful women in the world?¹²⁸ Hah! You've

¹²⁶ Matthew 1: 5-6. "Salmon, the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab..."

¹²⁷ Joshua 2:8-11.

¹²⁸ According to rabbinical tradition, Rahab was one of the most beautiful women in antiquity (Curtis – Higgs, Bad Girls, 156).

Been listening to your father again...

For all his religious zeal, he's still a man!

(A whore turned holy! Talk about a complete package! Suitable to the Levites on Sabbath, suitable for my husband, Salmon, at sunset.)

*...This woman lived on the fringe of society. And her home
Stood snugly between the rampart walls at the gate of the town.
When two spies came to her establishment, warned by her dream,
She decided to barter her life, and the lives of all of her family,
In exchange for providing them refuge. It didn't hurt that one of them
Had the panache of a Hebrew Double O Seven!! Yes, I know, honey,
This IS where the story gets good! Having been spotted by their
Clothing and accents, the two spies were in grave danger.
The king of Jericho had ordered a search for them... Yes, I know,
Honey. It would have been awful if they'd been found. If there
Had been no Daddy, there'd have been no you. And I'm so
Glad we have you!*

*...The woman was in danger too. This was high treason!
But she was clever: she knew that the art of lying
Lay in telling partial truth. Knowing that the men
Had been seen entering her inn, she told the authorities
That yes, she'd entertained them. But that after dusk fell,
They had left and she no longer knew where they were.¹²⁹
She told the officials that they had better check the plain
Outside of the gate for them, and when the authorities left,
She...What's that? That's right, honey. Underneath the
Flax on her roof. Spurred on by the conviction of her
Strange dream, and the certainty that their God was
More powerful than any of her people's, she asked the
Men to swear a binding oath to ensure her safety and
That of her family members when they attacked the city.
They agreed and late that night, when the men could
Safely escape, she let them down on a scarlet cord she hung
From her window. Knowing the ways of her king and his
Troops...*

***(For after all, I had served them all in one manner
Or another, and I knew the men of my city!)***

¹²⁹ Joshua 2: 4-5.

*She warned the men to hide in the hills for three days until the search was over.¹³⁰
That's right, little one. My advice saved Daddy's life and he escaped.
But so did I!...The woman immediately went out and found all of her
Family members and convinced them to come stay with her.
(And not once while I ran through the streets preparing to save my family,
Not once, did I feel an ounce of pity for those who had reviled me,
Looked down on me, refused to meet my eye, or acknowledge
My presence, even the many mornings after they had
Fornicated in my bed!)
Familiarity, they say, breeds contempt,
But that, unfortunately for them, was a two-way street!)*

*...She couldn't believe it when her relatives willingly came.
Perhaps they believed what she had said about her dream,
For she certainly wasn't stupid enough to risk telling them about the spies!
Or maybe, it was just the fact that during the long seven days
Of the siege of Jericho, when the Israelites surrounded the city,
They figured they had nothing left to lose. The fact is, they came.
And then, there was that final shout! The unanimous and fierce shout
That brought down the walls of Jericho and led to the
Killing spree on all its inhabitants.*

What's that, honey? No, that's the one part of the story Mommy doesn't
Understand either. Why was the lady's house still standing
When it was part of the wall? A miracle, I guess.

*...And that leads us to the biggest miracle of all:
The happy ending to this story. The handsome Israelite spy,
Salmon, married the beautiful Canaanite woman,
And they lived happily ever after.*

Now give Mother a kiss. Yes honey, I love the story too!
Only? ...Only what?
You don't believe in fairy tale endings?

¹³⁰ Joshua 2: 16.

*Jael*¹³¹

WHY? You have forced me here for an audience,
Against my will *just to satisfy your curiosity?* You surprise
Me, Prophetess, for I hear that that is what you are.
Judge¹³² of all the land, *your* Lord's anointed and all that.
I do not prattle needlessly, am not given to idle speech,
But if you really need to *ask*, you're not as wise as I thought.
In *your* language, your name is far prettier than mine,¹³³
But our constitutions and temperaments are quite similar,
So go ahead. Why do *you* think I did it? I'm sure
You have many a theory. You're certainly happy enough
That the deed's been done! I heard you blessing me
Last night in the drunken hymn you sang with Barak¹³⁴ in celebration.
Go on. Let's get this over with. I do not like your people,
I do not like you, and I am not into social niceties.
What's that? *Hated* him? Not in the least; I hardly *knew* him.
But his lord, Jabin, was king of Hazor, and therefore an ally.¹³⁵
No, I'm not forgetting something. There *had* been a falling out with relatives.¹³⁶

¹³¹ In this story, the ancient Israelites go to war against King Jabin of the Canaanites. The Israelite general, Barak, seeks counsel from the prophetess, Deborah, and is told that the great Canaanite general, Sisera, will be killed by the hand of a woman. Barak mistakenly assumes it will be Deborah herself, but it is actually a Kenite woman named Jael who performs the deed.

¹³² Deborah is dated during the time of Judges, after the conquest of Canaan by Joshua but long before Israel's golden age of Kings David and Solomon. It is considered to have been a very difficult transition period characterized by competition between several clans and tribes and constant inter-tribal warfare. Judges were leaders of tribal militia who were also responsible for ensuring that the new emerging nation of Israel (consisting of tribes from the highlands of central Canaan) remained loyal to their Lord (YHWH) instead of worshipping the rival Canaanite fertility gods Baal and his consort Astarte.

¹³³ In Hebrew, Deborah means "bee" and Jael means "mountain goat" (Curtis-Higgs, Really Bad Girls..., 48).

¹³⁴ Judges 5:24-25.

¹³⁵ In Judges 4:2, it states that because of Israel's apostasy, "the Lord sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan." The title "king of the Canaanites" is actually inaccurate. Judges 11:1, where Jabin is referred to as "king of Hazor," is probably much more accurate. According to biblical commentary, Hazor was an trading city in Galilee, important because of its proximity to trade routes.

¹³⁶ In the midst of the Deborah story, there is very strange tangent, one verse in length. After telling Barak that he will not get credit for killing Sisera, Deborah prophesies that a woman will kill Jabin's great general. The next verse, Judges 4:11, which seems to have apparently nothing to do with the story, but which explains tribal alliances, actually gives a foreshadowed hint of who the anonymous woman will be.

But when doesn't that happen in large families? It doesn't mean,
Does it, that one changes allies like camels! Despite family squabbling,
And our physical separation,¹³⁷ blood is thicker than water. But I
Wouldn't expect you to know anything about that, would I?

You people are weaned on intertribal betrayal, aren't you? No, no...
It wasn't hate. I'd never seen his ugly mug before. And if you think it was some
Kind of personal hatred, Deborah, then you're not thinking very hard.
Nope, wrong again! You amuse me, you really do.
Because I favoured *your* people And wanted *them* to win?
I *despise* your backwoods kinsmen!
I wish you'd just stay up in your hill country.¹³⁸ Why would I want
To befriend a tribe of hillmen with a barbaric sky god?
Give me the civility of farming and artisans¹³⁹ any time
Over the marauding in-fighting of *you* infidels! My people have culture,
Sophistication, and art, and our metal work knows no comparison!
No, sorry, Deborah, I had nothing to gain by an alliance
With back-country shepherds. And before you even open your mouth,
Don't insult me with what I think is about to be your next guess.
It sure as hell wasn't for fear of *your god*. Let me set you straight.
Any people who renounce the balance between the male and female energies
Are just asking for trouble. No thanks, I'll take Baal and Astarte
Any time, over an angry master who denies the joy found in living.
Stumped? Think power and who holds it, you stupid woman!
Hmmm? No problem. I can wait while you reason it out
Huh? Wrong again! Even though I was alone, he would never
Have risked *that!* You've forgotten to think the alliances through.
No, that's not it either. I had heard of Barak's victory, but I wasn't
Just hedging my bets and siding with the victor. If there is anything
Life has taught me, it's that victory and power are temporary. Glory? No,
I'm a simple woman, Deborah; glory is useless. *Especially* for a woman.
It's not a hatred of men or blood thirst either. No, it was fatigue.
Yes, that's right, Deborah, you heard me right. *Fatigue*.
Sisera died because I am a mother, a wife, a sister, a grandmother.

Jael, wife of Heber, belongs to a tribe (the Kenites) traditionally allied with the Canaanites rather than the Hebrews (Curtis-Higgs, *Really Bad Girls...*, 52).

¹³⁷ As cited in Curtis-Higgs, Jael's husband, a Kenite named Heber, has a name which means "ally" in Hebrew. The Kenites "were a dark-skinned, semi-nomadic tribe of farmers and metal workers who sided with the Hebrews (*Really Bad Girls*, 49). With his physical separation from his tribesmen, Heber's alliance becomes ambiguous. Does he now no longer side with his family and therefore, traditionally with the Canaanites? Or since his name means "ally" in Hebrew, is this meant to mean he now sides with the Hebrews? The verse is unclear.

¹³⁸ It is generally believed that during the period of the Judges the people who would be subsequently known as Israel were a loosely confederated group of tribes centered in the central highlands of Canaan.

¹³⁹ The Kenites were artisans who were known for their exceptional metal work.

You claim to be a judge, great lady, but where is your knowledge of Justice? I lured him with words of peace; the only sound I've ever Wanted to hear my whole life. And when I splattered his brains all over my Tent with one blow, I did it to ensure that my sons and grandsons Would know the sound of silence too, the stillness of leisure, the heartbeat Of domestic rhythms, instead of the soldier's drum. If Sisera had lived, There would only have been another battle to regain his prestige. And then a counter-attack, followed by an eternity of sunrise After sunrise of moves and countermoves. The peg was raised high For my sisters: for the wives, and daughters, and mothers who Toil in labour; who nurse the young, who wash the stinking wounds; Who keen in heartbreak; who prepare the dead; and who, despite the Hardships they endure, steadfastly plod on.

I brought down my hammer to the metal¹⁴⁰ and pierced the tender flesh For those who suffer the indignities and the cruelty of war, the carnage and the Rapes, and who, in the cold, and blood-drenched morning after, somehow rise To minister to those worse off than they: to those in need. I did it for The "collateral damage"¹⁴¹ in a war of theology and imperialism. You should be thankful it wasn't Barak, who wandered in the way Of my tent in search of solace, rest, food and drink. Or *you* for that matter. You and I are both women, but it ends there, Prophetess. While you Sit there so certain in your judgment and ideology, I have one desire And one desire only: a generation of peace.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Curtis-Higgs observes that Jael's choice of weapon is interesting. In the nomadic cultures of Canaan, she points out, it was the women who pitched the tents. Quoting Morton Bryan Wharton, she remarks, "Who would have ever thought of that device but a woman?" She also adds the insight that with trees sparse in the area, and because the Kenites were metal-smiths, a metal tent peg would have been the logical choice (*Really Bad Girls...*, 56)

¹⁴¹ Many writers have recently discussed the relationship between contemporary warfare and the debasement of language. Writing specifically of the war in Kosovo, Michael Ignatieff coined the phrase "virtual war" to describe a situation where one army is so technologically advantaged in comparison to another, that the common soldier can enjoy the safety and cold detachment previously only reserved for military leaders. When the leaders of countries (as well as modern soldiers) are removed from the carnage of the battlefields, they often speak of the body-count as "collateral damage." It is this euphemism that I am particularly interested in here. Throughout the centuries, while different language has been employed in different eras, the suffering of real people can be hidden behind a clean and precise term, enabling the perpetrator of violence to focus instead on the ideological reasons behind a war rather than the human consequences of it. Military and political leaders have always done this. The suppressed anger and pain which I have chosen to imagine as the impetus behind Jael's action, illustrate the power of the collective anger and pain experienced by the innocent bystanders of war over the last several millennia. While predominantly male generals clash over imperialist rivalries or ideological disagreements, women have mourned the human consequences, and yet have been powerless to stop the forces of the patriarchal value system in which they live.

¹⁴² After Jael's murder of Sisera, the land had peace for 40 years. The number 40 symbolizes a generation (Judges 5:31).

Deborah

You, my dear, and please excuse me for the cliché,
Are an *angry* woman. Sit down and have some
Apple tea with me. Let us be civil, please, for there are a few
Issues we need to discuss, a few rebuttals I need to make.
I'll take it as a given that you do not like my people. I can
Accept that. I will even agree with the fact that there have
Been tribal rivalries between us, just as there has been squabbling
Among you Kenites. But pride, my dear woman, requires
That I defend our traditions a little. You say that you wish to
Have nothing to do with hillmen, tribes that are not sophisticated.
And yet, your people have allied with *Canaanites*.¹⁴³ Is this not
The pot calling the kettle black, so to speak? Yes, you beauties of
Dark skin are skilled in labour and sophisticated in the ways of art,
But your allies and friends murder children! Don't glare at me like
That. You know it's true. Don't you know that you are judged by
The company you keep? Did you consider *that* before you
Taunted me with the "sins" of my people? Did you think of Hinnom¹⁴⁴
Before you insulted us for keeping to our hills? I would rather be
In the company of rough shepherds any day, than in keeping with
The civilized farmers you admire for infanticide! I would rather embrace
The sky, you poor woman, than inhabit the valleys of death. You repudiate
My God. You accuse us of worshipping what is barbaric! What is more
Barbaric than *making holocausts of living children to the god Moloch*?¹⁴⁵
From our vantage on high, we can see the wicked flames; licking
Constantly at the pyres of iniquity. Upon descent one can even hear
The screams. Tell me, my sweet, whose people are really more *barbaric*?
Yes, we kill. Yes, we seek justice. And in the end, what better reason
Is there to fight? You accuse me of killing innocent women and children.
Well? What of the children in Hinnom? The Lord seeks vengeance
And His call must be heeded, His order obeyed. You snidely deride us,
Saying that we deny the balance of male and female energies. I should

¹⁴³ Jael's husband, a member of the Kenite tribe, was allied with the Canaanites under a King of Hazor named Jabin. This is historically rather ambiguous, as the earliest Hebrew tribes intermingled with the early tribes of Canaan and so, in some contexts can also be referred to as Canaanites.

¹⁴⁴ Referred to as "the Valley of Hinnom" in prophetic literature and as Gehenna by Jesus in the New Testament, Cahill states that Jesus "uses it as an image of the ultimate horror" (Cahill, 80).

¹⁴⁵ The italicized phrase in this line is from Cahill, 80.

Ignore the comments as coming from ignorance, but I am a teacher, a sage, The voice of reason and justice, and I cannot let ignorance pass. Tell me, Jael, how many women in your “sophisticated culture” have my status? The temple prostitutes? Oops, I’m *sorry*. Did I actually say that out loud? Freudian slip, I guess. I meant priestesses. Yes, I know that they deliver “*Prophetic*” messages. But so do I in the name of my Lord, and I don’t Have to share my body with any other than my husband. Yes, Jael, I *am* Insinuating something. When I am required by God to deliver His word, There are no disgusting ritual strings¹⁴⁶ attached. I am honoured For the strength of my intellect, for the wisdom of my words. I am honoured for **who I am**. I do not have to defile myself in Some disgusting reenactment of union, because I already dwell In Him and He in me. I am His conduit. I am all that I am Because of Him acting *in* and *through* me. I take no honour for Myself, but that which belongs to Him. YHWH is faceless, Immanent, transcendent, within, without. YHWH is *Being*. And *Being* is neither male nor female, Jael! Enough About renouncing a balance between the male and female Energies, you ignorant woman! My god is the *living* God. I am the great prophetess: honoured as greatly as any man For being Deborah, for the love I have for the Divine Essence, For the Sophia¹⁴⁷ that is incarnate in me. She is *intelligent, holy, Unique, manifold, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving Good, keen, irresistible, beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, Free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating Through all spirits*.¹⁴⁸ She is with us now, she will be forever, and she was In the beginning.¹⁴⁹ I belong to the almighty Womb.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Here Deborah is mocking the ancient pagan ritual reenactment of the coming together of the male and female gods. This was celebrated in many cultures within the ancient Near Middle East, including the tribes and inhabitants of ancient Canaan.

¹⁴⁷ Borg argues that there is a long tradition within Judaism of Wisdom (especially within the Books of Proverbs, and the inter-testamental books of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon), and that “she [Wisdom] has qualities and functions normally attributed to God” (101). He argues that “in Jewish wisdom literature, wisdom is often personified in female form as ‘the Wisdom Woman.’ Consistent with this personification, wisdom is a feminine noun in both Hebrew (*hokmah*) and Greek (*sophia*). Among scholars, it has become common to name this personification *Sophia*, even when the reference is to a Hebrew text. The obvious reason for doing so (besides the fact that Greek texts use *sophia*) is that Sophia is a woman’s name in English, thereby reminding us of the female personification in a way that the neuter sounding word *wisdom* does not” (98). Unfortunately for most of Christian history, we have chosen only one metaphor [the Father] to describe God when there are indeed many metaphors which try to capture the image of the divine.

¹⁴⁸ The italicized attributes of Sophia are from Borg, 101.

¹⁴⁹ Wisdom of Solomon 7:22, 11-12. As in Proverbs and Sirach, Borg argues in this passage that The Wisdom of Solomon (6:22) also makes the point that Sophia is present from the beginning. In the italicized passage, note that the attributes of Sophia, similar to those of Shekinah elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, are similar to or interchangeable with those we identify as God’s. Borg makes the argument that

You say that you want to keep Baal and Astarte? Not me.
I have drunk from the *living* waters. I need no false gods.
You accuse us of killing and fighting for glory. But you
Killed as well, so how are you any more blameless than I?
Whether it is the death of one or of many, all are but a part
Of the One. Like a grain of sand in the dune, Jael, each of
Us is unique, but we are a part of the whole: the desert.
We must never forget that each of us needs the other. That
Not one grain is more important than another from the point
Of view of the Desert. The Desert *is* the grains of sand, and
The grains of sand *are* the desert.¹⁵¹ Even when the Source reveals
Itself to me, Jael, I tremble with humility and fear to carry out
Its vision. What if I am wrong? What if I have interpreted the
Message incorrectly? I act in humility and fear. Always. And
The glory is never mine, just as the acts and the consequences are

when one reads these passages from Proverbs, Sirach and from the Wisdom of Solomon, one sees that like God, “[Sophia] is omnipotent and the sustaining source of life.” What was once thought of as a literary personification in the past, asserts Borg, has been seen as something much more in recent scholarship. He states that “the language about *Sophia* is not simply personification of wisdom in female form, but personification of God in female form...Sophia is a female image of God, a lens through which divine reality is imagined as a woman” (Borg, 101 -102).

¹⁵⁰ In his work, Borg states that “the Hebrew word for “compassion” whose singular form means “womb” is often used of God in the Old Testament.” He argues that Jesus’ image of God has compassion as its central quality, and that this is striking. He asserts that to say that “God is compassionate is to say that God is “like a womb” or to coin a word that captures the flavor of the original Hebrew, God is “wombish” ...In its sense of ‘like a womb,’ *compassionate* has nuances of giving life, caring, perhaps embracing and encompassing.” Borg suggests that when Jesus exhorted us to “be compassionate as God is compassionate,” these female nuances of the womb seem to be how Jesus viewed his intimate relationship with Abba/Father (48). This begs the question therefore, of whether or not Jesus’ experiential relationship with God, as based on his understanding of his Jewish tradition, was composed of both masculine *and* feminine qualities.

¹⁵¹ Thich Nhat Hanh’s work comparing the teachings of Buddhism and Christianity makes use of a metaphor of water/waves when distinguishing between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds. He states that when one speaks of humankind being created by God, we are talking “about the relationship between water and wave” (7) or the cause and effect sequence of the phenomenal world. However, Nhat Hahn also observes that God is, in the term of Paul Tillich, “the ground of all being” and as such, represents a noumenal reality. Nhat Hahn observes that on this last point, both Christians and Buddhists would agree. However, in typical Buddhist fashion, he goes on to say that it is very difficult to talk about the noumenal world with the water metaphor, because “all the nouns and adjectives we use to describe waves cannot be used to describe God”(8). In Christian terminology, he is differentiating between the idea of God being transcendent and the concept of God as immanent. In contrast, in Buddhism, it is Nirvana which is noumenal, or “the ground of being equivalent to God” (10). He points out that one cannot know the noumenal world, the ground of being, without first learning how to touch the phenomenal world “deeply enough” (8). Thus, using the metaphor of water, “the wave is the water, and we know that the water is the [grounding] of the wave” (9). While Nhat Hanh emphasizes the fact that language and concepts do not capture noumenal awareness, the closest we can come to understanding the concept with the use of the water metaphor is that water both makes the wave in relation to other waves [phenomenal] and *is* the wave [noumenal] (8-13). I have taken his ideas and tried to capture them in my monologue with a metaphor better suited to the ancient Levant: the desert.

Not of my making. You, however, acted in solitude. Hubris
 Is *your* guide. Do you really think your actions are your own?
 That *you* could change one moment of eternity by the actions of
 Your own hand? None of our actions are ours, unless we are
Pregnant with God, unless we are free from all self-seeking, and
*Our will is wholly merged into the will of God and dead to our own.*¹⁵²
 When you killed Sisera, you acted according to your
 Own desires, not those of the Divine. And in this, Jael, lies
 Your ultimate failure.¹⁵³ None of us, not even those with good
 Intentions, can profess to see what the Source sees. You accuse me
 Of cold ideology and moral absolutism. Not at all. I glory *in God*.
 I sing to Him; I dance for Her. I do not rage; I do not question.
 I did not dance for glory and victory over earthly things. I did
 Not dance for victory in war. Certainly not in the human sense of the word:
 I danced to celebrate the death of God's enemies: hate, greed, lust, fear,
 Want, desire, self, envy, doubt, pride, hubris, apathy, despair, corruption.
 These are the children of the false gods we are purging from Canaan. I did
 Not kill for glory; I lead Barak in following God's will. *God asks only that*
*We get out of His way, insofar as we are creatures, and let him be God in us.*¹⁵⁴
 When we remove ourselves from the outcome, *He begets His spirit in our*
*Inmost recess.*¹⁵⁵ Then, we cease to be. We are God in action.
 A prophet who does not *deliver* the Word is no prophet.
 Do not question my decision to lead Barak in war. *It was not mine.*¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Italics in this line are taken from Eckhart in O'Neal., 15 – 16.

¹⁵³ As Rabbi Telushkin points out in his work, Deborah's parting insult to her enemies is, "So may all Your enemies perish, Oh Lord." "According to the Talmud, Rabbi Akiva, one of the greatest figures in Jewish history, was a direct descendant of Sisera. That a descendant of this great enemy of the Jews became a great Jewish rabbi and scholar represented the Jews' ultimate victory over their ancient Canaanite opponent" (71).

¹⁵⁴ Italics are quoted from Eckhart, 69.

¹⁵⁵ Italics are quoted from Eckhart, 68.

¹⁵⁶ My aim as I struggled to convey the worldview of this character was to explore the spiritual necessity of emptying one's self to God's will. I believe that I have successfully explored the relationship between believing in God's transcendence and immanence, and the implications of emptying one's self in order to be filled with His word. However, that being said, this character's blind absolutism and exclusivity, as she sits in judgment over the worldviews of others, leaves me extremely uncomfortable. The shadow side of blind faith can be a close-minded and lethal certainty in the righteousness of one's own actions, as well as a belief in the deserved fate of people one considers apostates. The sad fate of modern Israel and the Palestinian situation was ever-present in my mind as I worked on this piece.

Bathsheba

Hah! Advice my little one? It has been a long time
Since anyone has asked me for that! Well, have a seat,
And a little tea, and tell me what ails you. Women? Ah
Yes, I always found harem politics a little difficult myself.
If you don't mind me saying so, sweetheart, you're an exceptional
Beauty. That's not going to endear you either. Other
Women hate that, and in a harem my son's¹⁵⁷ size, that must make
Your life quite difficult. What's that? Yes I'm rather disappointed¹⁵⁸ in
That aspect of his behaviour myself. Homogeny is always best,
I think, when it comes to religion and child-rearing. But enough
Of the preliminaries, my sweet. I can give you advice aplenty
On how to become one of his most frequent to bed; but your beauty
Already ensures that. And for a favoured wife, popularity with the
Others is a small price to pay, isn't it? You're after something else,
Aren't you? And I'll bet its how to ensure the rights of your son!
No? Don't look so shocked! Your red cheeks betray you.
And besides, I'm actually quite flattered. You're here
To pick my *brain*, and that is quite the novelty.
It's been a long time since *anyone* has been interested in me.
Perhaps since my husband died, and that was years ago.
And if they do condescend to endear themselves ingratiatingly,
All they want, after all, is the dirt. The gossip about the once
Beautiful tramp. You know the kind of malicious tripe:
Did she or didn't she? Was it a bath or ***was it a bath?***

Tsk, tsk! Don't protest so much. If I thought you were
One of the same, I would hold my cards close. But you're not!
Something about your eyes reflects a younger version of myself:
I admire that kind of raw ambition. And so, I'm going to tell you.
The *facts*. You're smart enough to draw the conclusions.

¹⁵⁷ Legends surrounding the court of Solomon, suggest that his harem was the largest of any of Israel's rulers, and may have numbered more than a thousand women (See I Kings 11: 3).

¹⁵⁸ Unlike his father, David, who spends his whole life thirsting after God, and who rejects his first wife Michal for mocking his ecstatic dancing in God's name, Solomon filled his court with many foreign wives who must have practiced foreign religions. Interestingly, Curtis-Higgs suggests that Proverbs 31:10 which states "A wife of good character who can find?" is traditionally attributed to Bathsheba, and is in fact, her rebuke of Solomon for marrying the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1); (Really Bad Girls..., 15).

Besides, if my suspicions are right, you're more interested
In statesmanship than pillow talk. I used my brain
To make Solomon king,¹⁵⁹ not my body through bedding his father!
A little bit of advice, dear, if you really want to win
At harem politics, don't ever forget their greatest weakness:
Falling into the fatal trap of being blinded by your beauty,
They will always, and I mean *always*, underestimate you.
Needing to knock you down, they'll console themselves
With petty talk of your simplicity and feeble-mindedness.
And all the while they're wagging their tongues and
Making excuses for *your* many nights with *their* husband,
You can put that brain of yours to good use in
Doubling your pleasure!

For almost seventy years, the gossips have not been
Able to decide whether I was an innocent or a whore.
And I'm not going to settle the matter! It's irrelevant!
Was my bathing premeditated or not? Who cares!
I'm not going to dignify their concerns with a response.
The Law says that when a woman is finished bleeding,
She must wait seven days and then cleanse herself.¹⁶⁰
I was on my roof, doing what the Law required of me
Like any good Hebrew woman. And where else do women
Bathe in this city, but upon their rooftops?¹⁶¹ Besides, how
Was I supposed to know that, contrary to custom, the
King wasn't away at war with his troops? Whether the
King could see me or not was not my concern. I was
Circumspect enough. If he was a voyeur,
That was no concern of mine.

His next move *did* concern me though. He called me to him
And asked me to lie with him. Can you imagine?
I could have said no, of course, but he was my king!¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ As I Kings 1:17-27 attests, Bathsheba moves quickly to secure the throne for Solomon. She first colludes with the prophet, Nathan, and then appeals directly to King David before he becomes too senile.

¹⁶⁰ 2 Samuel 11: 4.

¹⁶¹ Even to this day in the Middle East, many of the houses have a flat roof which can be used as an extra room for storage, sleeping, and other activities.

¹⁶² Because of the silence of Bathsheba in the story, it is hard to establish whether or not she is complicit in the guilt of adultery. If David simply ordered his men to bring her to him and gave her no choice, then she can be considered a rape victim. Conversely, if she bathed in full view by design, she can be viewed as a scheming femme fatale. Or there could have been a middle ground as well. Perhaps she bathed in a circumspect fashion, was spied by David and ordered to his castle. While the chain of events was beyond her control, there is no way of knowing whether or not she too might have been attracted to her king. If she was, Curtis-Higgs suggests, then royal decree or not, Bathsheba is guilty, and the fact that he was her king

How does one disobey a command like that?
What my personal feelings in the matter were, is immaterial!
By taking me, David wronged **my husband**,¹⁶³ not me!
Uriah was a good husband to me, and I loved him in my way.
I was a respectful wife, and performed my every duty as required.
When I conceived and David later took Uriah's life,¹⁶⁴
I did what was ritually required and mourned him
For the prescribed period.¹⁶⁵ Everything looked as if it was
Going to be OK. Soon after my husband's death,
David called for me, and made me his wife. I was pleased!
Not only was my child to be a prince in the royal house
Instead of a bastard, but I was to have an exciting and handsome
Partner for my husband: a man's man, a man of action!
But if things are too good to be true, sweetheart,
They usually are! That damned Nathan got involved!

And this, **this** I will never forget! Not until my dying day,
For he condemned David's actions and cursed my child.¹⁶⁶
David might have been guilty, but I did not count myself
So! David had not asked my opinion when he took me.
And this in itself absolved whatever guilt **I** might have carried!
But my child? How could David's god punish
My innocent babe? I had never been a mother,
And I was inconsolable when after his birth
He became suddenly ill.

But I loved David, my husband. When Nathan gave
His prophecy, David prayed for our child. And when
The child died, unbecoming his royal station and
Despite his many wives and concubines, David grieved
To the point where he would not eat or drink.¹⁶⁷
If I had ever doubted his love, I was sure of it then.
In our grief, we turned to each other and there was
Comfort.¹⁶⁸ David was my hero, for he knew that

and ordered her to his castle is just a convenient excuse for Bathsheba to enter into an affair with a charismatic ruler without having to suffer the pangs of guilt (Really Bad Girls... 141-2).

¹⁶³ As mentioned earlier in footnote 69 of my Dinah monologue, the ancient Middle East considered rape to be a crime against the husband or father of a rape victim. This was because as a wife or daughter, the woman was simply property.

¹⁶⁴ 2 Samuel 11: 14-15.

¹⁶⁵ 2 Samuel 11: 26.

¹⁶⁶ 2 Samuel 12: 14.

¹⁶⁷ 2 Samuel 12: 17.

¹⁶⁸ 2 Samuel 12: 24.

*His journey did not consist of courageous acts,
But of a life lived in self-discovery.*¹⁶⁹ David,
My great King, and husband, had humbled himself before God,
More fearless an act than all his exploits of war.
And I loved him so much, that despite being Hittite,
I opened my heart to forgive his god,¹⁷⁰ and learned
To seek after righteousness as well. We had five sons together.
And of course your husband was my second-born.

What's that, dear? ***I still haven't answered your question!***
Get away from me, strumpet! For I see I have
Erred in judging you to be quick-witted. I have given you
All the facts. It is you who must draw the conclusions!
David gave me peace and completeness, and we were
Beloved of the Lord.¹⁷¹ A woman must learn to turn adversity
To her advantage. And this requires all of her resources:
Her physical attributes, of course, but more so
Her inner qualities: intelligence, perseverance, faith,
Humility, and most of all, love. Solomon, is king, for one
Reason, and one reason only. ***Because of me.***
Now ***you*** decide which of my attributes persuaded David
To honour his promise to me. Are you as smart as I think,
Sweetheart? How will ***your*** son fare?

¹⁶⁹ Quoted from Joseph Campbell in interview series entitled The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers.

¹⁷⁰ The lower case is used here to recognize the ancient pagan practice of showing respect for the gods of others as well as one's own.

¹⁷¹ Solomon, the second born son of David and Bathsheba, means "peace or completeness." Their third son, was Jedidiah, which means "beloved of the Lord" (Really Bad Girls, 157).

*Bilquis*¹⁷²

Menelik,¹⁷³ the time has now come to tell you about your father.
Sit beside me, son, and listen well, for in this story
You will learn all that it is necessary to know to be a successful
Man. Remember my son, this must always be your first priority: without
Being a good person, friend, husband and father, you will never
Be a just or beloved king. Solomon had great wisdom, discernment,
And breadth of understanding. They said it was as vast as the sand on
The seashore,¹⁷⁴ His reputation reached as far away as here, and I found
Myself intrigued. Ruling a people is never easy; it takes patience
And self-discipline, but more than these, it takes the light and clarity
Of cold reason. No, I don't mean to say, my son, that one does not
Love one's subjects. That is of utmost importance. Without compassion
And love, nothing is possible. What I meant was that one's emotion
Must be married in complete integration with one's intellectual faculties.
I knew all of these things. I was a good queen, but I was lonely.
When his fame reached my shores, and all credit was due his Lord,
I began to prepare for the long journey. I had some hard questions.¹⁷⁵
I packed our camels with gold, spices and precious stones, for *without*
Even knowing him, I knew too, that he would have heard of me.¹⁷⁶
The attraction began long before we ever set eyes on one another:
Both blessed with prosperous kingdoms, loyal and obedient peoples
Souls filled with concern for the good of others, our reputations

¹⁷² In the West, the Queen of Sheba remains unnamed, taking only the name of her country. However, in the Eastern tradition, in both the Ethiopian Christian and the Islamic religions, she is called Bilquis. Her kingdom was cited as African in origin by the classic Jewish historian, Josephus, but modern archeologists are digging in modern day Yemen in what is "considered the remains of the queen's realm" (Marina Warner in Büchmann and Spiegel, 157).

¹⁷³ Menelik, who is the legendary father of the Ethiopian race, is understood as the son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Tradition, both in the East and in the West since the sixth century, has imagined the "passionate and fertile love" of King Solomon and the Ethiopian Queen (Marina Warner in Buchmann and Spiegel, 151).

¹⁷⁴ 1 Kings 4:29

¹⁷⁵ 1 Kings 10:1. "When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon (fame due to the name of the Lord), she came to test him with hard questions."

¹⁷⁶ The stories we inherit from the Bible tend to leave the impression that only men ruled the kingdoms of the ancient Near East. However, in 1961, the archeologist Landes wrote of the "superior position of women being in agreement with nomadic practice" and stated also that queens, such as the Queen of Sheba (@ 950 BCE), at times led Arab states or tribes (Stone, 54-5).

Served as magnets pulling us ever closer to our mutual flame.
 No, it is not that I am a romantic, Menelik; in my position, one can't
 Afford that luxury. It is just that the preconditions for love at first sight
 Were already there in mutual respect. Remember that, my darling. Above
 All, remember that when *you* choose a mate. The surface beauty fades,
 And it is the beauty beneath that must last a lifetime. So choose wisely
 And well. Now where was I? Oh yes, those hard questions. I tested him,¹⁷⁷ all right,
 And for the first time in my life, I did not know loneliness.¹⁷⁸ All my life,
 I had never had anyone capable of truly understanding me, and never,
 Never had I been able to share my thoughts and aspirations with an equal!¹⁷⁹
 After communing with him in all of the affairs of my heart, he too, felt
 The shock and joy of wholeness and integration. For the first time in his
 Life, he trusted someone with all that he knew and understood. The
 Energy between us was so intense, that our first audience lasted
 Twenty-four hours! When the second dusk began to fall, we laughed
 To see that a day had passed. We were satiated with the climax
 Of probing the inner recesses of each other's minds, and we tumbled
 Giddy from his audience chamber, relaxed and confident in the absolute
 Trust of each other. It was the first time either of us had ever had a capable
 Listener worthy of our thoughts. We were fulfilled. I breathlessly¹⁸⁰ proclaimed
 That his reputation did not do justice to what I had found in him, and in love
 Beyond my wildest dreams, I converted to his Lord right then and there.
 Solomon's justice was known far and wide, and in his discernment
 I sensed a presence far greater than that of earthly knowledge. To sacrifice
 A lamb to know the ewe, and thus proclaim love, was a subtlety not

¹⁷⁷ The cross-references of biblical commentators often direct the reader to other passages where such "hard questions" are put, and in all cases, they concern male heroes. The Queen of Sheba seems to be a unique female in that she is alone in commanding this intellectual respect (Marine Warner in Buchmann and Spiegel, 152).

¹⁷⁸ According to the theories of Dabrowski, a psychologist of the highly gifted, when an individual's IQ surpasses his or her fellows by two or more gradations from the mean, the individual cannot help but pick up on more stimuli in his/her environment. Given this, the emotional reaction of the individual cannot help but differ from that of others. This phenomenon leads to a profound sensitivity in most highly gifted individuals which unfortunately results in an extreme loneliness if they are not exposed to other highly gifted individuals who understand them and can interact with them as equals (Jackson, 80-88).

¹⁷⁹ As defined by psychologists and educators associated with the Columbus School (1990), "giftedness is asynchronous development in which advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity combine to create inner experiences and awareness that are qualitatively different than the norm. The asynchrony increases with higher intellectual capacity. The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling" (Jackson, 208). I have chosen to imagine Bilquis and Solomon as two highly gifted, but lonely, individuals who experience communion for the first time upon their meeting one another. As Marina Warner so aptly puts it, they **are** the "reciprocating other" (Warner in Büchmann and Spiegel, 157).

¹⁸⁰ I Kings 10:5 states that after hearing all that Solomon told her, "there was no more spirit in her." According to Biblical commentary, "spirit" can be translated "breath" so that it could read, "the queen was breathless with amazement."

Conceived by man alone. Justice had always been my aspiration,
 Always my concern, and under the mighty weight of delivering it impartially
 I had always striven. Now here, here for the first time, I had Object
 To my Subject, I had definition.¹⁸¹ All that was excitable in me, calmed in
 The quiet of compassionate understanding. But then came a night of dark despair:
 I had transcended myself through him, and the one I *had* been had had to die!¹⁸² I tossed
 And turned for three days and three nights within the tents of my love,
 Within the chamber prepared for me. When I awakened, my beloved was there.
 I had community, but more importantly, communion. Gone were the times
 When upon my bed at night, I had sought him whom my soul loves
 And found him not.¹⁸³ After complete disintegration and despair,
 I was reborn. My mind and my soul were whole, and for
 The first time in my life, I could give myself freely to another. He
 Took me into his chamber. He did not gaze harshly at me because I was dark.
 I was black, and comely¹⁸⁴ And after a few days' visit, he gave me my
 Every desire as well as his own royal bounty.¹⁸⁵ He praised my adornments:¹⁸⁶
 I was the rose of Sharon, the lily of the Valley, and under his sun
 My petals opened to the warmth and the embrace of all that had never been.
 Despite our years in power, or our lack of youth, he was like a gazelle or a young stag.
 And while we lounged together eating apples and raisins, we laughed
 At our own metaphors, and giggled like the young. To me he was En-gedi,
 Precious as the bag of myrrh between my breasts.¹⁸⁷ And the time of respite

¹⁸¹ Marina Warner asserts that the Queen of Sheba is the reciprocating other who “completes the male principle of wisdom, embodied by King Solomon: she symbolizes the carnal condition of woman in its fullest form – vitality, seductiveness, fertility, and wisdom too. This added element, Sheba’s reputation for wisdom that matched Solomon’s, her status as his peer and natural partner, gives a different, mixed flavor to the heathenness of her Moorish persona.” She is a prototype for the future Gentile Christians who will also be included within the covenantal fold (Warner in Büchmann and Spiegel, 157).

¹⁸² According to the theories of Dabrowski, gifted individuals often exhibit one or more (psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional) excitabilities. These individuals often must have a kind of emotional disintegration which, while it manifests itself like the negative disintegration experienced by most people in the throes of an emotional breakdown, is instead, an integral part of the gifted person’s healthy development to a higher state of consciousness. Thus, it is called a positive disintegration (Jackson, 76 -88).

¹⁸³ Song of Songs 3:1.

¹⁸⁴ Song of Songs 1:5. The erotic love imagery found within the Song of Songs has long been attributed in Western tradition to the relationship between Solomon and Bilquis.

¹⁸⁵ According to the commentary in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, Oxford Annotated Edition, the Ethiopians have a tradition according to which every desire that she expressed included an heir who later became king of the Ethiopians. It has also been suggested that because there is a clear distinction in the biblical verse 1 Kings 10: 13 between “all of her [other] desires” and the “king’s royal bounty,” “bounty” means Solomon’s personal affections (Marina Warner in Büchmann and Spiegel, 153).

¹⁸⁶ In the Song of Songs (1:2-17) traditionally attributed to Solomon and Bilquis, the lovers exchange such compliments.

¹⁸⁷ Song of Songs. Chapters 1 and 2.

With him left my soul replenished and my body softened with the quickening
Of new life. Your father changed me, Menelik, and while he introduced
His Lord to me, he was not a cruel or exclusive man.¹⁸⁸ He was open to
The exchange of ideas, no matter what the domain, and even things spiritual
Were, to him, an opportunity for enquiry and respect. So there you have it;
You *now* know who your father is. You *now* know what kind of man
You must try to be. Until the time is ripe, watch and grow, but when
The time comes, son, open to the Beloved.

¹⁸⁸ Tradition states that Solomon had many “foreign” wives which implies that despite building the greatest temple to YHWH in ancient Israel, he may have had the ‘*wisdom*’ to practice a sort of religious toleration. If one accepts this as a possibility, then the Queen of Sheba’s conversion upon meeting him is even more significant.

Hannah

Eli, Eli! Most holy one, my heart exalts you, my lord.
Over here, sir. It is me, your maidservant, Hannah.
Why thank you, my lord, I am well. This babe
Is not causing me the illness of the last, praise be!
And the journey has been much better due to it.¹⁸⁹
You are looking well, Eli. Why yes, we have only just
Arrived this moment. Yes, thank you. The journey
Was good, and the other children are fine, sir. So
Many years have passed, since first you rebuked
Me at the sanctuary.¹⁹⁰ Many years now have I made the
Journey to Shiloh from Ramathaim, and yet it never dulls
In sweetness from the first time I returned to see him. All year,
I wait for this day, to embrace him and present these linens.
If you will excuse me, lord, while your constitution seems
Good, your heart seems heavy. What is it? Is it Samuel?
No? Thanks be to Him Who Must Not Be Named!
If it is not the child, then what is it, liege? You will not
Be so named? Have a seat? Sir, I am a woman! Surely,
You must not be seen speaking to me as an equal.
Sit! I will then, friend. I will. But pardon me, I must
Take the seat below you on this staircase. It is only proper.

It is a child, you say, but not mine? Ah, I see.¹⁹¹ The children
Are yours? My heart chills, good sir, for I have heard the rumours
Of their sacrilege. Two sons will die? Predictions, friend,
Are sometimes wrong. I fear for you, however, if it was made by
Another like yourself, for that would only be fitting. Is there
None to comfort you? No? That is why you have turned to me?
Sir, I am not worthy! There must be some mistake.

¹⁸⁹ 1 Samuel 2:20–21. Each year Hannah returns with Elkanah for the yearly sacrifice to YWHW, as well as to bring her young son, Samuel, little robes for him to wear. Each year, Eli, armed with the knowledge that Samuel is favoured by God, blesses Elkanah and Hannah, saying “May the Lord repay you with children by this woman for the gift [Samuel] she made to the Lord.” Hannah bears her husband two more sons and three daughters.

¹⁹⁰ 1 Samuel 1:14. When Hannah first comes to pray for a child at the temple, she prays silently. Seeing her, Samuel mistakes the motion of her moving lips as those of a drunkard and he rebukes her.

¹⁹¹ 1 Samuel 1:27–36. This passage is a prediction of another holy man to Eli, that his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will soon die and that they will both die on the same day.

The *Lord* told you to seek comfort here?¹⁹²
 It holds *you* who are the anointed one, lord, not I! It is *you*
 Who is the authority of the land.¹⁹³ There' is no authority
 When one speaks of the Spirit?¹⁹⁴ Are you saying, Friend,
 That YHWH instructed you to humble yourself to *me*?¹⁹⁵
 Your humble servant has only the tools of compassion, Eli,
 But this I have aplenty. What a pack of fools! They think
 That saying something so foolish, eases the pain? How does
 Losing only two children of many lighten the burden of grief?
 I would like to say that I cannot believe such fools gave such
 Advice, but I am too wise and have seen such reasoning before.
 When I could not conceive, although he was tender and gave
 Me double the portion when he sacrificed, Elkanah did not
 Understand my pain. What can a husband and father
 Understand of the longing for a tender recipient of
 Love ready to be given? When I wept and grieved for my
 Condition, he responded, "Am I not more to you than ten
 Sons?" I did not respond, Eli. What could I have said to that?

¹⁹² My creative license here is justified for several reasons. In her essay on Hannah, Marcia Falk argues that at the moment of Hannah's prayer in the sanctuary, the "sanctuary where priests officiate as men [and] offer up their sacrifices," Hannah becomes an extraordinary woman. It is extraordinary that she prays in the sanctuary, because not only is she the first woman to do so, but she is also the first ordinary *person* to do so. Furthermore, at "this point in time before institutionalized prayer has replaced sacrifice as the means of public worship," Hannah "stands poised to become a symbol for rabbinic Judaism, in that she provides for them a model of authentic prayer or "prayer of the heart" (Marcia Falk in Büchmann and Spiegel, 98). This model stems not only from her courage in praying for herself, and in justifying her act to Eli, but also from the example of the content of good prayer, as given in 1 Samuel 2. The content of her **prayer** is as important as the act of praying, because the song of Hannah is generally accepted as a precursor for the Magnificat of the New Testament. Hannah is a prototype for later women, in that in her act of teaching Eli *about* prayer, she is the one singular woman in the Old Testament who corrects a prophet in this thinking. This is similar to the only person in the New Testament who corrects Jesus, also a woman (Mark 7.24 -30).

¹⁹³ As the prophet of Israel, Eli was not only supposed to be a man of spiritual authority, but he would also have been the political authority during this era of Israel's history (Falk in Buchmann and Spiegel, 98).

¹⁹⁴ Falk suggests that in the moment that Eli listens to Hannah's defense of his false charge of drunkenness, he is also listening to her bear witness to her spiritual expression. And in doing so, he might have learned (from the woman calling herself his servant) that prayer of the heart has more legitimacy than sacrifice. Falk also suggests that the meaning of spiritual authority could have been altered at this moment in Israel's history (Falk in Büchmann and Spiegel, 99).

¹⁹⁵ Future rabbinic law will formulate a ruling that when falsely charged, one must defend one's self as Hannah does in her story. In her essay, Falk argues that "so impressed were the rabies with Hannah's prayer and with her defense of it to Eli that they interpolated the following words into those of the Bible story: "Hannah said to him [Eli]: You are no person of authority in this matter, and the Spirit of Holiness is not upon you, since you have been suspicious of me in this matter," and further, "You are no person of authority, nor is the divine Presence or the Spirit of Holiness with you, since you have presumed me guilty rather than innocent. Are you not aware that I am a woman in anguish?" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 31b; Marcia Falk in Büchmann and Spiegel, 99). As Falk suggests, this more gutsy rendition of Hannah found in Talmudic midrash allows our imaginations to have more license with this story.

*Human relationships do not fill in for, do not substitute for,
 Do not replace each other!*¹⁹⁶ I did not yet have a son, but I
 Knew the lack of one. I knew the loss of being denied forever
 What I held so dear. And in a way, Eli, I have lived with his
 Loss since Samuel's birth, for even before he was weaned, I knew
 That once made, my terrible promise had to be
 Fulfilled. Having waited so long for a child to fondle
 My breast at suckling; having suffered so long without
 His warm and tender breath on my face as he first learned
 How to coo in recognition; having waited so long for the
 Welcome prick of milk letting down as he drew sustenance
 From me; the degree of my fulfilment cannot be described.
 Or, for that matter, the bitter sweetness of our shortened days.
 I now have a sixth child on the way, my lord, but none of
 The others replaces my Samuel. None of them is a salve
 For the impotence we experience as parents in facing
 The *fear* of loss. You are not losing two of many children:
 Your are losing *two ones, two onlys*. I have many children
 Now, *but in bereavement, each child is a sole.*¹⁹⁷ Samuel
 Cannot be replaced by my other children, and neither can Hophni and
 Phinehas. Funny too, that despite their merits, *or demerits*,
 It doesn't ease the pain, does it, Eli? You may know disappointment
 And suffering, or pride and honour, but despite what they bring
 They are still the infants you fell in love with upon the day of their
 Birth Why, *why, my Friend, do people judge the pain of others?*
 By denying me my pain, Elkanah treated me almost as badly as
 The taunts I received from his other wife, Penninah. Why can we not
 Be more like the Lord, and seek to understand, rather than to be understood?¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ This is a direct quote from Falk's essay (Büchmann and Spiegel, 97).

¹⁹⁷ The preceding four lines are a paraphrasing of the profound argument in an essay by Falk. She states that even with a life free from tragedy, we are afraid of even the potential of loss when it comes to our children. Furthermore, from a parent's point of view, a living child's continued well-being does not stop the grief one experiences for the loss of another child. She argues that "*in the context of loss, each child is an only.*" I have tried to capture this insight regarding the uniqueness of each child with the pun on "soul/sole." (Falk in Büchmann and Spiegel, 97).

¹⁹⁸ This is a paraphrasing of the prayer of St. Francis: "That I may rather seek to understand, than to be understood...."

This Samuel, *this* is true reciprocity. In trying to ease the pain of others
We condescend so often with shallow platitudes, empty condolences,
When it would be so easy to honour one another. I will stop talking,
My Friend. I will listen. *Then the knowing comes: I can open
To another's life that's wide and timeless.*¹⁹⁹
I will honour your story, Eli, until it is finished.
And in so doing, I will honour you.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ This is from Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God I.5., (51). This statement is referring to God himself, but if one acknowledges that the spirit of God is within each of us, then we are all of us just a part of the cosmic God. By knowing one another, we come to know Him.

²⁰⁰ Falk suggests that Hannah's voice which "has been misunderstood by the men of her day" and which God fully hears, is changed from the voice of a petitioner to a benefactor, because she "approaches even her relationship to God with self-respect and with the assumption of reciprocity" (Falk in Büchmann and Spiegel, 101).

Jezebel's Eulogy

I suppose you're wondering why I'm carefully
Painting my face and adorning my body.
Well, you life-denying old fool,
I'm preparing to die with dignity, and that means
Celebrating my life. You stupid old man! You have
Battled with me all my life, railing against
My supposed iniquity to anyone who would
Lend you their ears. And I'm tired of your
Negative propaganda and smear campaign.²⁰¹
I'm wise enough to know when I'm beaten,
*But perhaps too shallow or too wise to become
Overly-attached to suffering.*²⁰² I will therefore
Await Jehu²⁰³ serenely, for betrayal will surely come
From the cowards within my house. I know this, and
So will calmly prepare for my death with the
Confidence of someone who has lived a good life.

I am a royal princess, daughter of King Ethbaal,
King of the Sidonians. I am a Phoenician Princess,
An Israelite Queen. I am a daughter; I am a mother;
I am a wife. You seek to make me object, but I refuse.
I am a subject, and for this, you find me dangerous.
Your prophecy makes you honoured and revered,
Elijah, but whether you like it or not, so does my
Royalty.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Canaanite-Phoenician relics from the archeological site at Ugarit point to the fact that Jezebel's vilification is most certainly the work of Deuteronomist redactors bent on highlighting the evil of marrying foreign women. There is also support from revisionist scholarship. Quoting Ackroyd's work "Goddesses, Women and Jezebel," Tribble makes the comment that no woman (or man) has received "a more distorted press" than Jezebel" (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 170).

²⁰² This is adapted from a quote by the character Ellen Cherry in Tom Robbins' *Skinny Legs And All*, that is indirectly about Jezebel. I have chosen, however, to place it in the mouth of Jezebel (Robbins, 178).

²⁰³ 2 Kings 9:1-4. Jehu is appointed the real king of Israel by God. He is told by the messenger of the prophet Elisha, that he is to purge all of Israel of the House of Ahab. He wages war against the King of Israel, King Joram, and the King of Judah, King Ahaziah. He kills both of them and then continues on to Jezreel to kill Jezebel as he has been instructed to do (2 Kings 9). When he calls out "Who is on my side?" two or three eunuchs look down at him. He tells them to throw her down and they do (2 Kings 9:32-3).

I arrived here through an arranged marriage,
 And don't think that was easy! I missed my
 Native Phoenicia: the purple dyes²⁰⁵ as deep
 As the mauves of the sunset over the sea,
 The coastal towns rimmed by palms,
 The tang of the sea air, and yes, my childhood
 Gods. You have slandered me from the beginning,
 Saying that I was a Baal-worshipper, but that is untrue.
 He is only the consort. I worship Astarte:²⁰⁶
 Light of the World, the Great Mother, the *only* goddess.
 Yes, I worshipped as I had been taught and
 Who can blame me? I prayed to the same goddess
 As most of the world: Ishtar, Kali,
 Demeter, Ostara, Freya, Isis, Nut, Hathor or
 Neith.²⁰⁷ Take your pick! She answers to them all.
 Revered as the Great Source of everything,
 She makes your god look like an infant,
 A "Yanny come lately"!²⁰⁸

Your pettiness knows no bounds. You've vilified
 Me and framed me every chance you got,
 Just because you didn't have confidence that your
 Little infant had more than a precarious foothold
 Over Matriarchy. You proselytizers couldn't even pronounce
 Her name, because of your fear of her power.
 So you turned me into a Baal worshipper.
 Say what you will, but you and I both know the real story.
 I was the result, not the cause, of Ahab's
 Canaanization policy.²⁰⁹ One thousand years of patriarchy

²⁰⁴ Tribble argues that Elijah's prophecy and Jezebel's royalty respectively give them both privileged positions in their society (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 171).

²⁰⁵ Phoenicia was a port city known for its purple dyes.

²⁰⁶ In the Bible, there is confusion between the use of the word *asherah* as a sacred pole, object or tree, and the name Asherah which signifies the goddess. Hadley makes the suggestion that it is not Asherah, but Baal, as a male rival to YHWH, that so angers Elijah. She poses the theory that the worship of Asherah may even have been a legitimate part of Yahwist worship at the time of this story (Hadley, 66-83). Astarte would have been the Phoenician name for the goddess.

²⁰⁷ Robbins, 49-50.

²⁰⁸ This too, is a quotation from *Skinny Legs and All*, and is one of the wittiest lines in the whole novel (Robbins, 49).

²⁰⁹ Tribble's article entitled "The Odd Couple: Elijah and Jezebel," raises some interesting arguments: if a fresh trial of Jezebel were held today using all of the new archeological and historical evidence available, she would be vindicated of many of the traditional things said about her. This line is a direct quotation from this essay (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 169).

Hadn't erased covert worship of the goddess.
Not in Phoenicia, not in Israel.

And as for Naboth,²¹⁰ what political leader hasn't dabbled
In a few shady land deals? Talk about bad press!
If you stopped being so sanctimonious for a second or two,
You'd realize I was a good wife! As your story has it,
I encouraged Ahab to go for what he wanted. Well,
What good wife isn't caring and solicitous?
If the King wants a vineyard, the King gets a
Vineyard! What of it? Isn't that royal
Prerogative? I hear that Naboth was charged
With blasphemy and stoned to death! Unfortunate, but
What can I do? I'm afraid I knew nothing
Of the matter. You've finagled that little
Rumour just to discourage foreign wives
Among your vulnerable little Jews.

Listen you little miscreant! *If you are Elijah,
Then I am Jezebel!*²¹¹ You would like to flatter
Yourself that you won victory on Mount Carmel,
That more prophets of Baal were killed, than
Were prophets of the Lord. But you have forgotten
One small, but important detail. Even in surpassing me
You emulated me.²¹² And call me perverse,
But I'm going to take that as a compliment!
What's a statistic when it comes to definition?
We're the same you and I. And even
In death, I defy you.

You want me to be contrite, to cower in fear.
But I will not. So help me, Astarte, I would
Do it all again. And to the last, I honour my
Own vision. Do your best to vilify me,
I will not be the object²¹³ of your recriminations:

²¹⁰ In his work, Otwell states that what seems like an act of royal oppression, "was also a political intervention." He says that Jezebel acted "on Ahab's behalf as she believed a [monarch] should act. It was a partial usurpation of the throne dictated by a [Phoenician] understanding of monarchy alien to Israel" (138).

²¹¹ As argued by Tribble, the marvelous juxtaposition of their names bespeaks the theological battle" (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 172).

²¹² In speaking of their capacity for murder, Tribble remarks that "even when Elijah emulates Jezebel, he surpasses her" because her murder attempts have been frustrated by an Israelite, Obadiah, who hid a hundred prophets from Jezebel's men. Elijah, however, manages to kill all the prophets of Baal at Wadi Ishon (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 172).

I choose, instead, to be Subject, to voice
My eulogy. I was consort to a man who had
Seventy sons,²¹⁴ but I am the only wife worthy
Of your hatred. That right *there*, is a hymn of praise!
In hating me, You place me on an equal footing
With my husband.

And the characteristics you hate, I honour:
I was a loyal consort and lover,
A strong wife and mother,
A strong role-model and queen,
A religious and devoted servant of Astarte,
And most of all, I had character!
Like my goddess, I celebrate life,
And I calmly behold the mystery which is death.
While you have repudiated life, Elijah,
I have *lived* it!

²¹³ Tribble makes the statement that “entrapped by hostile editors,” Jezebel appears “as object without voice or action” (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 171).

²¹⁴ Tribble comments that “[Jezebel] forges an unusual relationship of equality with her husband, [in contrast to] his other wives [who] receive no mention despite the fact that Ahab has seventy sons” (Tribble in Büchmann and Spiegel, 169).

*Vashti*²¹⁵

Listen here, naïve one, I've had enough of the honour paid your name!
They hail you as the saviour of the Jewish people, the virtuous heroine,
But in my eyes, you are nothing but a spineless little beauty queen.²¹⁶
A passive little child who does whatever Mordecai²¹⁷ tells you.
You are nothing but an orphan, and a *Jew* at that! He
Dared to replace my royal bloodline with the filth of a subjugated tribe!
Your people have told the story for years as if it were providence
In action, but I tell you here and now, that it was the whims of a fool!
You think Purim²¹⁸ is wild! Well, not half as wild as the Saturnalia we enjoyed
And which my stupid husband²¹⁹ not only misunderstood, but whose sanctity
He violated!²²⁰ I had guests of my own at Susa that night, and how was

²¹⁵ In the story of Esther, Vashti is a foil to the protagonist, Esther. She is the “not-Esther, or anti-Esther, the queen who dared to say no to being a sex object, who refused to exhibit her beauty on demand to a party of drunken men” (Brownstein in Büchmann & Spiegel, 187).

²¹⁶ The Book of Esther is the only book of the Bible besides the Song of Songs that does not mention God. It has always been a controversial text, rejected by the Essene community and not included in the canon until at least 90 C.E. Christians in general have a difficult time responding to the story’s “happy” ending, a killing spree that includes two days of genocide in which the Jews are allowed to commit a bloody revenge against their captors (Celina Spiegel in *Out of the Garden*, 192).

²¹⁷ Esther’s cousin, Mordecai, is the real brains behind the plot to save the Jews under Ahasuerus’ reign and any reader of the story can plainly see that contrary to the characteristics of the classic hero/heroine, Esther is passive.

²¹⁸ In an innovative and clever essay entitled “The World Remade: The Book of Esther,” Celina Spiegel argues that the Book of Esther must be read as a satire. She states that while some critics have admitted to occasional examples of “farce and invention, the Book of Esther is filled with historical improbabilities, exaggerations, coincidences, and neat ironies that point to a reading of Esther as satire, expertly structured to mock the established order while empowering the Jews.” She asserts that the story, like all satires, takes a realistic world and sets it upside down on its head. Born of tragedy, the satire in the Book of Esther, illuminates the constant tension between the “loftiest and most crucial issues of identity and survival” and a “farcical lightness and comic exaggeration.” Upon reading Esther as satire, Spiegel asserts, it is easy to see why the story of a near massacre “lends itself so readily to the boisterous celebration of Purim, the only Jewish holiday where all are required to drink without restraint” (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 193). The Book of Esther “addresses the fears of diaspora Jews, ultimately empowering them through a fiction in which the reader, like the riotous celebrant of the Purim festival, is drawn into the tale, compelled to participate in fantasy” (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 193).

²¹⁹ King Ahasuerus. Historians have identified Ahasuerus with Xerxes I, but there is no historical evidence of a Jewish Queen of Persia such as Esther.

²²⁰ As Spiegel argues, variations of the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia, where the celebrants were encouraged to acknowledge and socially and culturally enact the elements of satire and inversion, were practiced in almost every Near-Eastern culture. At the beginning of the Book of Esther, the King and his

I supposed to leave hundreds of women and friends to host his guests?
 I was not some bauble to be displayed for its beauty; I was no plaything.
 Some of the guests spread rumours that I had leprosy! Now, I ask you
 Do I *look* like I have leprosy?²²¹ Some even say that I was enacting what
 Was a sanctified right under the rules of our festival, but they too, are wrong.
 It was *not* an act of political defiance, *not* some peevish will to disobey my
 Husband. No! It was modesty. Yes, Esther, *modesty*.²²² You know, that
 Quality they hail *you* for? Well, that is why my husband divorced me
 And held a nation-wide beauty contest to replace me.²²³ I refused.
 Nice, eh? Dumped for doing the proverbial *right thing*. Traded in
 For a newer and younger model. You've a lot to be proud of, don't you?
 But I laugh. At whom? Why at you, you innocent little dolt, you useless white slate
 Upon whom, not only the King, but Mordecai, Haman and others would
 Write. But I have to smirk at *him* too. Fool or King: hard to tell!
 Have you stopped to consider that little matter of his edict?²²⁴ Now, *that* was original,
 Wasn't it? Order men to do what men have *always* done. *That's* clever!
 Time to sober up, Big Boy! And it served him right! Where he had cast out a woman
 For being forthright and honest, he would gain one who was deceitful and a liar.²²⁵

people are engaged in a 180 day banquet with the Saturnalian characteristics of “excess, luxury, unlimited drinking and the inclusion of the mighty and lowly alike.” Spiegel asserts that according to classical authors such as Horace, Saturnalia was the one time that roles were often reversed and the lowly were allowed to criticize their superiors. If the King’s seven day drinking party at the beginning of the Book of Esther was a Saturnalia, Spiegel hypothesizes, then it would not have been improper for Vashti to refuse her husband’s request to appear before his guests. Not only was it the one time of the year that disobedience was sanctioned, but it would have been the custom for her to have been hosting her own party as Esther 1:9 indeed states. In the Book of Esther, however, Vashti is divorced by the King for her disobedience upon the advice of his courtiers (Esther 2:16-18; Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 194-5).

²²¹ As Spiegel asserts, there are many unanswered questions “which lurk at the centre of this tale.” Why does Vashti refuse her husband, and more importantly, why are his actions so inconsistent with what we know of ancient Persian practice? (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 192).

²²² It was contrary to Persian practice at the time for a woman to publicly display her beauty except for her husband (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 192).

²²³ Esther 2:2-4.

²²⁴ Esther 1: 16 – 22. In this edict, afraid that all women within the kingdom will follow the example set by the queen, the King’s advisors encourage him to proclaim that all women will give honour to their husbands. Spiegel notes that this edict states what, in reality, would have been the status quo. It is, therefore, absurd. In the genre of satire, however, it serves to illuminate the anxiety and insecurity of the King and his advisors in their own ability to rule (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 195). Moreover, as Brownstein asserts in her essay “Chosen Women,” it also serves to illustrate a sub-theme of the story: that of the “vanity of tyrants” and “absolute power’s terrifying selfishness and arbitrariness.” Vashti has self-respect and dignity, and contrary to the traditional reading of the story, should not be pitied. As Brownstein asserts, her story demonstrates the common interest “and anxiety of tyrants large and small, and interestingly indicates that one woman’s rebellion makes all men feel endangered” (Brownstein in Büchmann and Spiegel, 187 – 190).

²²⁵ Esther 2:10. Esther does not disclose her true cultural identity to the King.

In contrast to your cousin,²²⁶ you kept strangely silent about your Jewishness, didn't you? What? You saved the life of the King?²²⁷ Well, I don't buy it. Can you say "*dupe*"? Pawn? A card played out in their game? Mordecai's advancement, Haman's nemesis?²²⁸ I feel sorry for you, I really do. Despite your fame, you're nothing but a stock figure, A flat character, a stereotype of the dutiful young virgin. When Haman ordered the destruction of the Jews²²⁹ to fulfill his vengeance upon Mordecai You foolishly entered the King's presence to plead on their behalf. And fool that He is, he flouted his own law for your favours!²³⁰ Many applaud your courage on behalf Of your people. But I question whether it was courage so much as foolhardiness. After all, Haman's demise and the salvation of your people Were not the children of your fancy, but the machinations of a political intellect Much more acute than yours. And so... where I had refused brazenly to brandish My sexuality at a banquet, you flaunted yours. It was not good enough to have Haman killed, his sons executed and displayed, or Mordecai Set in authority over all Haman's property and people; It was not good enough to reverse the royal decree and save your people. Oh no! You had to ask for the massacre of *my* people. Tell me, You *virtuous* young woman: why such need for revenge? Where is the

²²⁶ As Spiegel asserts in her essay Mordecai's epithet "Mordecai, the Jew." is strange "in a text that is part of the Jewish canon." In his defiance of Haman, she argues, Mordecai is the "allegorical every-Jew" (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 197).

²²⁷ Esther 2:22

²²⁸ When the King promotes the Persian, Haman, to the highest of all positions within his kingdom, Mordecai refuses to bow down to him and offers only the excuse that he cannot because he is a Jew. Despite his good character, Spiegel asserts, Mordecai's main characteristic is his "emphatic insubordination" and his "primary objective within the story is to make a buffoon of Haman." In doing so, Spiegel argues, he "acts the role of the wise fool, a stock figure of satire, who gains power and explodes ironies through seemingly naïve manipulation" (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 196).

²²⁹ Haman is a descendant of Israel's mortal enemy, the Amalekites. When he is given permission by the King to kill all the Jews of Persia, in typical satirical fashion, his plan is reversed and he is to be defeated by them in the Jews' massacre of the Gentiles. This is a fulfillment of Deuteronomy 25:19 where the Jews are urged to "blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven" (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 197).

²³⁰ In Persian law, entering the presence of the King without being called for was punishable by death. When Esther does this, the king takes Esther into his arms, ignoring his own decree. He also does it again when she requests that he reverse his decree to kill the Jews. During this second episode, he extends his scepter to Esther. It is while he raises this golden rod, that he states that the laws are for their subjects only and not for them. The significance of these actions if one is doing a satirical reading of Esther, is to point out the "dubious moral authority of the [Persian] law" in comparison with the "natural moral sense of Mordecai" who is a representative of the Jews and the laws which they follow as prescribed by God. Furthermore, the phallic imagery of the rod cannot be ignored, and underscores the fact that "inborn and natural. Esther's sexuality is presented as the embodiment of Jewish virtues" (Spiegel in Büchmann and Spiegel, 200-2). This monologue, however, takes the point of view of the Persian queen, Vashti, who would not see any moral sense in the law of the Hebrew God.

Virtue in that? Our Persian laws may have run empty of moral authority,
But where is the justice in yours? I do not understand your God, for
What had those innocent women and children ever done to you?
What had they done to deserve the fate that befell them?
Their screams still ring in my ears: music enough to drown your
Thirst for revenge. Even five hundred deaths were not enough!²³¹
You requested a *second* day of killing. And *fifteen thousand* more died!
Tell me, my little innocent, my sweet heroine, what does it feel like
To be such an empty slate? To have no opinions of one's own,
To be wiped clean and then written upon by men in power. Does
Your surface feel defiled? Are there hidden recesses of your own
Behind that calm exterior? Or are you at peace:
With being used,
With being right,
With being absolved,
With being vindicated,
With being certain
Of your moral absolutes?²³²

²³¹ Esther 9:9-14.

²³² At the very core of the Book of Esther are the issues of nationalism and cultural identity, and the feelings of vulnerability by a group of people whenever they find themselves in a situation where it seems that there is a risk of threatened cultural identity. There is always a human propensity to alienate one's culture from whatever one considers "other." The voice of the "other" in this very ancient Hebrew text, calls to mind the situation in modern day Israel. I have very consciously chosen to retell this most Hebrew of stories from the Persian perspective, in order to play with the notion that while "other," our rivals or enemies are still human. If we do not remember to hear the silent voices within nationalist stories, we may suffer the ever-present danger of what happens whenever any culture justifies its persecution of another group with moral absolutes, or the conviction that its point of view is sanctioned by its own anthropomorphized projection of God.

Esther's²³³ Response

It is not my God who is at fault here, Vashti. Nor is it me.
But I will not be bitter at your words. They come from pain,
And much of this have I known myself. Filth? A subjugated
Vassal to defile your king? How can one *not* feel suffering when
Coming from such a people as you have determined *us* to be?
Now you too have experienced pain, and so have your subjects,
And when this happens, it is only natural to look for someone to
Blame. That is easier, perhaps, than facing the truth, or the hard
Work of collective introspection. It is not my God who is corrupt or broken;
It is our human world. It is not He who loves violence and hatred,
Or who sends suffering. This is the result of the separation we
Experience when we are alienated from Him. You speak of injustice,
As if ten thousand talents of silver were not exchanged for our lives,²³⁴
As if the fourteenth day of the month of Adar never existed. How are
Your people any more or less human than mine? A certain "hostile people,"
The King's decree called us, at Haman's bidding, "who have laws contrary
To those of every nation."²³⁵ Our sin? "Perversely following a strange manner
Of life and laws,"²³⁶ which were supposed to undermine the stability of the
Empire. What nonsense! How *could* we have done that? We were captives!
In a physical and political sense, Haman could not have been more of a liar.
The irony of it, however, is that more than anyone else, he and only he,
Understood the real harm we represented: an insidious, destabilizing
Element right in your very midst. A spiritual danger, precisely the kind
That you can never see and fight, for it is the strongest enemy
To any man-made empire. Can you guess what it is, Vashti?
It is love. The love of Him Who Must Not Be Named. The ruler of

²³³ Brownstein, like Spiegel and Tribble, has difficulty with the "compulsion of binary opposition" found in the "several pairs of contrasted women the Bible presents" (Brownstein in Büchmann and Spiegel, 82-8). The general consensus among feminist scholars of the Bible is that these contrasted pairs of female characters must be examined through the lens of hermeneutics.

²³⁴ Esther 3:7-11. Haman, a head advisor to the King, despises Esther's cousin, Mordecai, because he refuses to do obeisance to Haman. For vengeance, Haman, draws up and unjustly fixes lots to destroy the whole of Mordecai's race. He then advises the King that there is one race in his kingdom that it is not expedient to tolerate, and he pays the king ten thousand talents of silver to make the decree to kill them. The deal is sanctioned when the King gives Haman his royal signet ring to show that the decree is legal.

²³⁵ Esther 13:4

²³⁶ Esther 13:5

The Universe. The Emperor of all emperors. Our kind of stubbornness
Can never be vanquished or eradicated, for what do we care for the ways
Of this world or for emperors who come and go? Our emperor is
Not of this world. *Our* laws are those ordained by God, and as such,
It may seem perverse to others when we ignore what is unimportant,
But we Jews have become good at perseverance, and at waiting,
Vashti, and so, your insults regarding my passivity are but a compliment.
Whatever the reason, I do not claim to know the ways of your people,
You were ultimately divorced for disobedience. *Disobedience*,
Vashti, for we are all the humble servants of Providence.
It does not matter the custom, or the ritual, or the season. *You* disobeyed.
You call me a bauble. You call me a dupe. You call me, worse yet, *passive*.
Like Mordecai, *thousands at his bidding speed*. But like me, *they also serve who only
Stand and wait*.²³⁷ My passivity, as you call it, was waiting. It was *how* I was called
To serve. You do not understand obedience, and so you do not understand that
When one follows the call of Providence, one's body, mind, and most importantly,
One's *will*, become a vessel, or a channel for the Lord. You say *you* were modest, and
That *I* am nothing but a beauty queen. Your disobedience was wilfulness: and
There is a difference between modesty and humility, Vashti. In obediently letting
Myself be *used by* Mordecai and my people, my service was courage.
I yearn to be a blank slate, to have God's word written upon me, upon my life.
You think that I am weak, but one consequence of suffering is patience, and my
People have known tribulation in spades! *I* have known it! Why do you mistake
Silence for weakness? Obedience as passivity? I am different from you, Vashti,
I am a *Hebrew* woman: one of the daughters of my Lord.

²³⁷ This allusion is from "On His Blindness" by John Milton (Safier, 303).

*Ruth*²³⁸

You know the kind of woman, Naomi. We've
All experienced *her* kind once! The kind of
Best friend who endears herself, insinuating herself
Into your bosom over the shared intimacy of several
Years. You know, the one who laughs with you,
Cries with you, celebrates your joys, empathizes
With your burdens, and listens carefully and loyally
To your most intimate secrets. She listens sometimes
Five, sometimes as long as thirty years. She knows you.
She is your sounding board: the keeper of your
Deepest fears, your darkest secrets, your biggest insecurities,
And your most burning shames. She is the confessor who
Knows what you most desire in yourself, and
What you most despise! The only friend, who when
She turns against you, is like a double-edged sword,
Capable of plunging its blade deeply and viciously.
Who can hurt us more than this person, this
Mirror to whom we have told all? Our *best* friend!
Men may know loyalty to one another, but they
Will never know the viciousness of *this* kind of betrayal;
For they've never experienced the intimate reciprocity of the
Female relationship. Or its rupture. It is unique to our sex.
I don't know if this is a blessing or a curse for them ...
Yes, Naomi, we've all had this kind of "friend" once,
The consequence of bad judgment. So stop! Please cease
From warning me of the hardships our journey will entail. I know
The road will be long, and the way will be hard. I know that
Once arrived, our life will be impoverished, but

²³⁸ June Jordan makes the argument that this female relationship is comparable to the great adventure stories of the male heroes within the Old Testament. Despite the fact that Naomi and Ruth are dependent on men for survival (Ruth must marry Boaz in order for them both to survive), Ruth and Naomi make brave choices in a "circumstance that allows them no freedom." She goes on to assert that despite that fact that their relationship is very different in character from the other great example of friendship in the Bible, that of Jonathan and David, the difference is only determined by the social environment's expectations of gender roles. Indeed, it is "marvelously true that Ruth's love for Naomi is the equal of Jonathan's great love of David ... [and] that Ruth's love for Naomi surpasses her love of men even as David's love of Jonathan surpasses his love for women"(Jordan in Büchmann and Spiegel, 86-7). This story of Ruth and Naomi is unique in the Old Testament as it is the only story about a female friendship.

Having finally known the joy of true friendship, and your love,
 Mother, I will never be dissuaded from returning
 With you to Bethlehem, *for where you go I will go,*
And where you will lodge, I will lodge; your people
Shall be my people, and your God my god. Where
You die I will die, and there will I be buried. May
The Lord do so to me and more also if even death
*Parts me from you.*²³⁹ Love knows nothing of
 Birthplace, conventions, or traditions of loyalty.²⁴⁰
 Men may fight wars, may till the fields, may erect
 Great monuments, my friend. But, it is the circle
 Of female friendship that is the glue of life.
 We minister to one another in labour, care
 For each other's children when we are sick,
 Organize the dull routines and details that men
 Fail even to imagine, and yet that need to be done.
 When a woman ceases to be able to function,
 It is rarely her husband who knows what to do.
 It is her friends who double their own workload
 To care for her family and children, who change
 The dressings, clean the vomit, empty the waste,
 Clean the baby, deliver the food, and wash the linen.²⁴¹
 What woman would forsake this kind of friendship?
 Or could do without this kind of love? You must know
The ebb of my tide, but also its flood, for in you, Mother,
*I find the field which I sow with love and reap with thanksgiving*²⁴².
 Life's pilgrimage is too long, too hard, too lonely
 To walk the path alone. I want to lighten your burden,
 Carry you when you are tired, minister to your suffering,
 For when I am with you, I bask in a warmth I have
 Not known since the womb: *Your love is patient; your love*
Is kind: your love is never boastful or arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;
It does not rejoice in wrongdoing; but rejoices in the truth.
It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures
*All things.*²⁴³ Through your love, I know God. I know Him,

²³⁹ Ruth 1:16 – 17.

²⁴⁰ This is a quote from Jordan's essay (Büchmann and Spiegel, 87).

²⁴¹ In her essay on Ruth and Naomi, Jordan recalls her own struggle against breast cancer and how it was the love of women who took care of the mundane details so she could fight to live. When contemplating where public praise or celebration of this kind of love could be found, Jordan turned to her Bible and the story of Ruth and Naomi (Jordan in Büchmann and Spiegel, 85).

²⁴² Italics taken from *The Prophet* (Gibran, 76 -77).

²⁴³ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Because I see him within you. Through the communion
Of friendship, the divinity within each of us is experienced.
*Let there be no purpose in [our] friendship but the deepening
Of spirit.*²⁴⁴ Oh Naomi, my life with you has taught me many things:
But of them all, the greatest is love. It is that love which has
Healed and affirmed me. And given me conviction:
A conviction to forsake loneliness for community,
A conviction to *be* the friend that I have found.

²⁴⁴ Italics taken from The Prophet (Gibran, 77).

Judith

I find your questions insulting, sir. What *exactly* are you insinuating?
I am revered by everyone: I am considered a saint. And none but you
Has questioned my assertion of purity upon my return.²⁴⁵ What is the purpose
Of your visit? Aah, so we can agree that I have not soiled myself with that pig?
Then what is it, sir? What brings you here to my chambers in such secrecy?
In such a state of concern? ***It is the soiling of my soul you question!*** From
Whence comes this accusation, friend, for you injure me with these questions!
Was I not right to humble you when you struck a compromise with the citizens
Of Bethulia? Did not Charmis and Chabris also recognize the wisdom in my words?
Did we not all agree that it was a sin to test our Lord? ... We did. Well then,
We are agreed. So wherein lies my transgression? If my words led you to follow
A different and better path, then why resent my rebuke? I don't understand! You say
I was right to correct your thinking. My theology was sound? Good! Then why are
You here before me tonight? ***A hypocrite!***²⁴⁶ Sir, those are strong words, and you
Risk being thrown out, regardless of your station. There was once a time, Uzziah
When I was pure in your eyes, when you thought my behaviour beyond reproach!
Despite the gold and silver Manasseh left me, did you ever hear of me in anything but
Sackcloth? Despite the resources at my disposal, did I ever do anything but fast and
Pray? The charge of blasphemy is preposterous! How dare you question the Lord's
Providence? You always have to be the great leader, don't you, Uzziah? You're not
Happy unless you're the ***only*** shepherd in the flock,²⁴⁷ the great shepherd gathering your

²⁴⁵ Judith 14:16. Judith swore upon her return from Holofernes' camp that he had "committed no sin with [her]."

²⁴⁶ I have Uzziah challenging Judith here for her theological hypocrisy. In Judith 8: 12-17, Judith counsels Uzziah and the other town elders not to question God's motives or His plan because they are incomprehensible. She advises them not to try "to bind the purposes of the Lord our God; for God is not like a human being, to be threatened, **or like a mere mortal to be won over with pleading**" (Judith 8:16-17). Yet ironically, in Judith 9:11-13, Judith herself approaches God with her plan of how to deal with Holofernes and the invading forces. Instead of trusting the mysterious ways of Providence, she goes beyond the actions for which she has corrected the elders. *They* only gave the Lord longer to intervene on their behalf, before proposing to take matters into their own hands by surrendering to the invading forces. It could be said that Judith trusts the Lord ***even less*** than they, taking it upon herself to give God a plan and earnestly pleading in supplication to the Lord to accept it and help her execute it.

²⁴⁷ Here Judith is taunting Uzziah for his ability and competence as a great spiritual leader capable of giving courage and inspiration to a demoralized people. Judith 7:29-30.

People back to the fold of their faith.²⁴⁸ It wouldn't do to *share* the pulpit with a lowly Woman now, would it? Or worse than that – a widow!²⁴⁹ No Uzziah, you Enjoy your privileged position of the devout leader too much, don't you? Back To the question at hand! You think that tirade was a digression, do you? Not I! *I* Think it's the crux of the matter. But very well, I guess since you're here, you might as Well get it *all* off your chest. So you think I'm a flirt, do you? All those lonely Years of being a good girl, just got the better of me, and I needed to kill two birds With one stone, so to speak? Now, that's a good one. "*Gee, I have a little pent-up Frustration here: one part sexual repression, two parts patriarchal rage: Think I'll Go get lucky, and make myself Superwoman of Judea while I'm at it.*" Oh yeah, That *must* be it, Uzziah!Well, what do you expect? Of *course*, I'm being Sarcastic! Like you, I don't mind my moral inconsistencies being pointed out By a friend, if it leads more quickly to my salvation. But an attack is an attack.

Tell me honestly. What bothers you more? My supposed hypocrisy in lacking faith, Or the fact that I enjoyed using my beauty to kill the prick? Is wreaking vengeance For my people and my God a sin? Or is the sin that I refused to let you in on my plan?²⁵⁰ You are having difficulty reconciling my purity with my deceit, aren't you? How can a pious and wise woman, use tools such as vanity and deceit and still remain Pure? How can a murderess be considered a saint? How can one who doesn't trust In Providence, be the Lord's handmaid and trust in His protection? The simple Answer is, I don't know either. A plan came to me. Who knows from where! Who Cares! We are avenged, and the hills are drunk with their blood, not ours!²⁵¹ Am I Perfect? No, Uzziah, I am not. Were my motives pure? I think so, but what subject

²⁴⁸ I have chosen to play with the conventional traditions about Judith, one of the greatest heroines of the Apocrypha. I chose to play with her complexities, using modern psychology to analyze some of her darker motives or impulses. All individuals are prone to defense mechanisms to avoid psychological pain. Some of the defense mechanisms I am playing with here involve reaction formation which is the denial of unacceptable emotions or impulses by exaggerating the opposite state; projection, which is the transferring of unacceptable motives or behaviour to others; and sublimation, which is the channeling of unacceptable desires or impulses into activities which are considered constructive or socially acceptable. Much of Judith's religious piety and devotion could be seen through the lens of a strong sexuality that she feels she needs to control. Her actions could also represent a strong need to be loved, or in its absence, to feel community affirmation through religious approval. In the absence of other avenues to power, the status and respect derived from religious piety would have been one of the only means for approval open to women in this particular society.

²⁴⁹ In ancient Israel, widows were the lowest of the low on the status scale. In fact, they were considered so low in status that in Chapter 9:2-4, Judith specifically mentions it in her prayer to be taken as seriously as her ancestors were in avenging the wrongs done her people.

²⁵⁰ Judith 8:34. Upon beginning to put her plan into effect, Judith warns the others not to try to find out what she is doing. This is a strange verse and arouses the question why she desires such secrecy. Is she aware of the fact that she is taking matters into her own hands and may be dissuaded or criticized? Is she vain? Is she anticipating the chance to use her feminine wiles and is ashamed of the fact? One can imagine that Uzziah, like any spiritual leader or elder of his time period, might have wondered what *exactly* Judith did to defeat Holofernes.

²⁵¹ Judith 6:4.

Operates objectively? I confuse myself, friend. But I am confused by you too, Uzziah. “*Is he simply jealous, or does he have my best interests and salvation in mind?*” I ask Myself. “*Or is it both?*” You ask if it was vanity and sublimation on my part. Or Was it divine inspiration? Who knows? Who can plumb the depths of the human Heart or understand the workings of the human mind?²⁵²

²⁵² Judith 8:14.

*God/ess:*²⁵³ *She Speaks*²⁵⁴

In the stillness, I come; in the emptiness, I fill.
In the unspeaking centre, there is communion.

In the silence, there is recognition
Of the vastness, of the complexity, of the mystery
Of Who I am.

You have called, oh Daughter, and I am here. I was, I am, I will be.²⁵⁵
The Lord by me founded the earth; by understanding he established
The heavens.²⁵⁶ I was his master builder, his delight, rejoicing before
Him always, rejoicing in his whole inhabited world²⁵⁷ and delighting in the

²⁵³ The title for the divine here is Ruether's (God-Talk, 46).

²⁵⁴ I am indebted here for an idea from one of Rilke's poems from The Book of Hours: Love Poems to God, (Poem I, 17). Rilke says "it's she who drives the loudmouths from the hall/ and clears it for a different celebration/ where the one guest is you." I interpret the "she" as Wisdom (one of the female metaphors for God) and the part of God which is immanent within us. The pronoun "you" I see as the traditional concept of "God" as we know it, the transcendent God. In this line, Wisdom is driving rational thought from the "hall" (our mind) to ready the subject for a more *divine* experience of knowledge through intimacy and communion with God. In the last stanza the poet states, "You are the partner of her loneliness,/the **unspeaking centre of her monologues.**/With each disclosure you encompass more/ and she stretches beyond what limits her,/to hold you." I see this as the union of both aspects of God, the one within us and the one beyond us, which happens every time a person properly empties herself to receive the divine. Rilke is using God in the feminine mode here, playing with the metaphor of Wisdom.

Conventionally in the Jewish tradition, Wisdom has been a feminine metaphor for God, often also translated as "spirit." I interpret "she" much as the concept of Holy Spirit here, in that it is the part of God which is within each of us. When Wisdom speaks to a subject *from within*, her deepest or most divine knowledge must come from her "unspeaking centre." I interpret this as our deepest part of knowing and believe that it only happens when we have emptied ourselves enough for the transcendent God to come in and fill us. This is what I believe Rilke is referring to when he speaks of the "unspeaking centre of her monologues." Rilke is also playing in this poem, as he does elsewhere in Love Poems to God, with the idea of God's need for a relationship with us, and the interdependence which is the fundamental aspect of our relationship with God (Barrows, and Joanna Macy eds., 64).

²⁵⁵ As Borg argues, there is a strong tradition in which Wisdom is portrayed as an integral part of God and that her origin in God has been since the beginning of time. Quoting Proverbs, and the inter-testamental books of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, Borg lays out a carefully crafted argument that Sophia has divine attributes and that it is *through* Sophia that God created the world (100).

²⁵⁶ Proverbs 3:19.

²⁵⁷ This evokes the classical phrase "the whole inhabited earth," because that is the translation of the Greek *oikoumene*, from which the word "ecumenical" comes. It makes the point that God is interested in the unity of the human race, that we are one race, the human race.

Human race.²⁵⁸ I am omnipotent; I am omniscient; I have many names.²⁵⁹

Anahita, Anat, Athirat, Asherah, Astarte, Au Set, Ishira, Ishtar, Innin, Inanna, Nana, Kali, Nut, Hathor, Gaia, Demeter, Aphrodite, Kali, Isis, Ostara, Freya, Nut, Hathor, Neith, Venus, Shekinah, Mary, Sophia.

I am the *Formless Void*. I am the Waters of Chaos.

I am the *Darkness Covering the Face of the Deep*.²⁶⁰

I am ever-changing and variable. I am the power of Evolution.

I am steady and steadfast. I am Natural Order.

I am Great Mother Earth. I am the Giver of Life!

I am the Great Almighty Womb.

And the Dust to which you shall return.

I am Reason.

I am Passion.²⁶¹

I am Intuition.

I am the Ebb.

I am the Flow.

I am timeless,

And I have more phases than the moon.²⁶²

I am Spirit: intelligent, holy, unique, manifold,

Subtle, flexible, unpolluted,

Loving the good, beneficent, humane, steadfast.

²⁵⁸ Proverbs 8:30 - 31.

²⁵⁹ "Archeologists [have] traced the worship of the Goddess back to the Neolithic communities of about 7000 BCE, some to the Upper Paleolithic cultures of about 25,000 BCE. From the time of its Neolithic origins, its existence was repeatedly attested to until well into Roman times" (Stone in Christ, 124).

²⁶⁰ Genesis 1:1-2. Basing my ideas on another phrase in Proverbs 8: 22-24 which places Sophia with God **before** the beginning of the earth, I have chosen to describe her through the imagery of water. Chaos was often depicted by water, the abyss, the void, or as the dragon (Leviathan) in ancient creation myths. She too, is often present before the creative act of the "god" takes place. Symbolized as "latent," "unformed," or "undifferentiated," she (Chaos) is the matter from which "god" makes the earth, and she must therefore, be conquered, controlled and put in order by that god. Whether it be Yahweh, Baal, or Tiamat, the ancient religions all had some kind of myth where the necessary matter of chaos (usually portrayed as feminine) is shaped by a male god in some kind of a beautiful and creative act, representing the ancient religious belief that creativity was divine. (Armstrong, The History of God, 10). However, while Chaos is not the creator in the ancient myths, and is instead, the matter with which the creation is made manifest, she is still as necessary as the male impulse if creation is to take place. I have blended the identities of Sophia and Chaos here, and have used the imagery of water to represent Her. Also, instead of seeing Her as mere matter only, I have portrayed Her as an active partner in creation's process.

²⁶¹ The first, core course of Graduate Liberal Studies has as its central focus the study of the symbiosis of Passion and Reason. This project has been an excellent study of this symbiosis, as one needs both traits to successfully approach God/ess.

²⁶² This is a phrase from Tom Robbin's novel Skinny Legs and All (50).

Free from all anxiety,
Keen, sure, overseeing all,
Penetrating through all other spirits...²⁶³
I am What I Am.

I am **no** Athirat to El! No Asherah to Yahweh – I *am* El. I *am* Yahweh.²⁶⁴
I have no Son, but sons and daughters!²⁶⁵
I am Logos!²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Quoting the Wisdom of Solomon in this passage, Borg goes on to make the argument that these characteristics are all the attributes of God and that in the book of Solomon as a whole, Wisdom “has qualities and functions normally attributed to God.” In the wisdom tradition of Israel, argues Borg, what was once seen as a mere literary device or personification of wisdom is now re-evaluated by recent scholarship. Upon careful examination, one sees that the “functions and qualities ascribed to [Sophia]” are often indistinguishable from those of God, and thus, one may speak of “a functional equivalency between Sophia and God.” Therefore, “the language about *Sophia* is not simply personification of wisdom in female form, but personification of *God* in female form” (100-1).

²⁶⁴ Hadley argues compellingly in her work that the worship of Asherah may have been a legitimate part of Yahwist worship (73 -87).

²⁶⁵ I do not deny the existence of Christ. I am trying to make a theological point about the exclusivity which occurred through translation within the Christian tradition. Cahill makes the point that when Jesus uses the Hebrew/Aramaic word “ABBA,” it was often translated “Father,” when it really means ‘Daddy’ or ‘Papa’ in the metaphysical sense. He makes the point that Jesus was not trying to say that he was the “Son of God,” so much as he was trying to direct us to the possibility of a more intimate relationship with God that he himself experienced and also wanted us to enjoy. Furthermore, Cahill argues that when Paul refers to Jesus as “God’s ‘son’ and us God’s ‘sons’ by adoption, the Greek original ‘huios’ can refer to children of both sexes and that there is no question that Paul means to include females in what he is saying” (131).

²⁶⁶ In his analysis of Pauline verses such as I Corinthians 8:6 and Colossians 1. 15 – 17, Borg argues that there is a significant connection between the language that Paul is using to describe Christ and the Jewish language about Sophia. The “preexistence of Christ – Christ existing from eternity with God and being active in creation” [Logos] is described in the same language found within the Jewish Sophia tradition. Being a Pharisee, argues Borg, Paul would have been heavily influenced by this tradition. However, Borg asserts that Paul does not only identify Jesus with Wisdom, but “for Paul, Jesus is the embodiment of Sophia” (106 -7).

WORKS CONSULTED

- Alter, Robert. Genesis. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Armstrong, Karen. In the Beginning: A New Interpretation of Genesis. Toronto: Random House of Canada, Ltd., 1996.
- Armstrong, Karen. A History of God: The 4000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.
- Bloom, Harold and David Rosenberg. The Book of J. New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1990.
- Borg, Marcus, J. Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco-HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.
- Brenner, Athalya, ed. A Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Brownstein, Rachel M. "Chosen Women." Büchmann and Spiegel 167-79.
- Büchmann, Christina and Celina Spiegel, eds. Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible. New York: Fawcett-Columbine – Ballantine Books, 1994.
- Cahill, Thomas. Desire of the Everlasting Hills. New York: Random House, Inc., 1999.
- Campbell, Joseph. The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers. Ed. Betty Flowers. Toronto: Anchor Books - Doubleday, 1988.
- Capra, Fritjof. The Tao of Physics: 25th Anniversary Updated and Revised Edition. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.
- Christ, Carol P. and Judith Plaskow, eds. Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1979.
- Curtis-Higgs, Liz. Really Bad Girls of the Bible. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press – Random House, Inc., 2000.
- Curtis-Higgs, Liz. Bad Girls of the Bible. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press – Random House, Inc., 1999.
- Daly, Mary. Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation. 1973. Boston: Beacon Press, 1985.

- Diamant, Anita. The Red Tent. London: St. Martins Press, 1998.
- Dennis, Trevor. Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament. London: SPCK, 1994.
- Dreifuss, Gustav, and Judith Reimer. Abraham: The Man and the Symbol: A Jungian Interpretation of the Biblical Story. Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 1995.
- Eisler, Riane. The Chalice and the Blade. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1987
- Falk, Marcia. "Reflections on Hannah's Prayer." Büchmann and Spiegel 94-102.
- Feiler, Bruce. Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths. New York: William Morrow, 2002.
- Frye, Northrop. The Great Code: The Bible and Literature. Markham: Penguin Books, 1981.
- Gibran, Kahlil. The Prophet. London: Arkana - Penguin Books, 1992.
- Goldman, Shalom. The Wives of Women/The Wives of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish and Islamic Folklore. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.
- Gross, Rita. "Female God Language in a Jewish Context." Christ and Plaskow 167-78.
- Hadley, Judith M. The Cult of Asherah in Ancient Israel and Judah: Evidence of a Hebrew Goddess. Cambridge: Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Cambridge Press, 2000.
- Harmon, William and Hugh C. Holman. A Handbook to Literature. 5th ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1986.
- Ignatieff, Michael. Virtual War. Toronto: Penguin Books, Canada Ltd., 2000.
- Jackson, Susan P. Bright Star: Black Sky: Origins and Manifestations of the Depressed State in the Lived Experience of the Gifted Adolescent: A Phenomenological Study. (M. A. Thesis). Norwich: Vermont College of Norwich University, 1995.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Discourse. New York: Crossroad, 1992.
- Jordan, June "Ruth and Naomi, David and Johnathon: One Love." Büchmann and Spiegel 73-81.
- Metzer, Bruce M. and Roland E. Murphy, eds. The New Oxford Annotated Bible (New Revised Standard Version). New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Miles, Jack. God: A Biography. New York: Vintage Books – Random House, Inc., 1995.

- Milton, John. Norton's Paradise Lost. Ed. Scott Elledge. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1975. 13.
- Mitchell, Stephen (Trans). The Book of Job. New York: HarperPerennial – HarperCollins Publishers, 1987.
- Moore, Thomas. Commentary. The Riverhead Sacred Text Series The Book of Job. New York: Riverhead Books – Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998, v-xviii.
- Moore, Thomas. The Education of the Heart. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996.
- Moyers, Bill. Genesis: A Living Conversation. New York: Bantam Doubleday - Dell Publishing Group Inc., 1996.
- O'Neal, David, ed. Meister Eckhart from Whom God Hid Nothing: Sermons, Writings and Sayings. Boston: Shambhala Books, 1996.
- Ostriker, Alicia. "The Nursing Father." Büchmann and Spiegel 41-53.
- Otwell, John. H. And Sarah Laughed: The Status of Women in the Old Testament. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977.
- Ozick, Cynthia "Hannah and Elkanah: Torah as the Matrix for Feminism." Büchmann and Spiegel 88-93.
- Pagels, Elaine. The Origin of Satan. New York: Vintage Books – Random House Inc., 1995.
- Pagels, Elaine. The Gnostic Gospels. New York: Vintage Books – Random House, Inc., 1979.
- Pagels, Elaine. "What Became of God the Mother?" Christ and Plaskow 107–119.
- Pardes, Ilana. "Rachel's Dream of Grandeur." Büchmann and Spiegel 27-40.
- Rilke. Book of Hours. Trans. Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy. New York: Riverhead Books – G.P. Putnam's Sons., 1996.
- Robbins, Tom. Skinny Legs and All. New York: Bantam Books, 1990.
- Rodgerson, John. W., and Davies, Philip. The Old Testament World. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1989.
- Ruether, Rosemary. "Motherearth and the Megamachine: A Theology of Liberation in a Feminine, Somatic and Ecological Perspective." Christ and Plaskow, 43-52.
- Ruether, Rosemary. Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology. Boston: Beacon Press, 1983.

- Ruether, Rosemary, and Eleanor McLaughlin. Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Tradition. New York: Simon Schuster, 1979.
- Schussler-Fiorenza, Elizabeth. In Memory of Her. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983.
- Sheres, Ita. Dinah's Rebellion: A Biblical Parable for Our Time. New York: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 2000.
- Spiegel, Christina. "The World Remade: The Book of Esther." Büchmann and Spiegel 191-203.
- Spong, John Shelby. Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture. New York: HarperSanFrancisco – HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.
- Spong, John Shelby. Living in Sin: A Bishop Rethinks Human Sexuality. New York: HarperSanFrancisco – HarperCollins Publishers, 1988.
- Stone, Merlin. When God Was A Woman. New York: A Harvest Book - Harcourt Brace & Company, 1976.
- Telushkin, Rabbi Joseph. Jewish Literacy: the Most Important Things to Know About Jewish Religion, Its People, and Its History. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991.
- Thich Nhat Hanh. Going Home: Jesus and Buddha As Brothers. New York: Riverhead Books – Penguin Putnam Inc., 1999.
- Trible, Phylis. "The Odd Couple: Elijah and Jezebel." Büchmann and Spiegel 166-79.
- Trible, Phylis. God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.
- Trible, Phylis. "Depatriarchalization in Biblical Interpretation." JARR 41 (1973) 30-49: 49.
- Warner, Marina. "In and Out of the Fold: Wisdom, Danger and Glamour in the Tale of the Queen of Sheba." Büchmann and Spiegel 143-149.
- Yeats, William Butler. "When You are Old." Fannie Safier. Ed. et. al. Adventures in English Literature. Athena Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston – Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996. 930.