

THE BRILL REFERENCE LIBRARY OF JUDAISM

מִתְחַלְחֵל

Sparks  
of the Logos

Essays in Rabbinic Hermeneutics

*by Daniel Boyarin*

BRILL

## SPARKS OF THE LOGOS

# THE BRILL REFERENCE LIBRARY OF JUDAISM

*Editors*

J. NEUSNER (*Bard College*) — H. BASSER (*Queens University*)  
A.J. AVERY-PECK (*College of the Holy Cross*) — Wm.S. GREEN (*University of  
Rochester*) — G. STEMBERGER (*University of Vienna*) — I. GRUENWALD  
(*Tel Aviv University*) — M. GRUBER (*Ben-Gurion University of the Negev*)  
G.G. PORTON (*University of Illinois*) — J. FAUR (*Bar Ilan University*)

VOLUME 11



# SPARKS OF THE LOGOS

*Essays in Rabbinic Hermeneutics*

BY

DANIEL BOYARIN



BRILL  
LEIDEN · BOSTON  
2003

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Boyarin, Daniel

Sparks of the logos: essays in rabbinic hermeneutics / by Daniel Boyarin.

p. cm. — (Brill reference library of ancient Judaism, ISSN 1566-1237 ; v. 11)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 90-04-12628-7 (hard cover : alk. paper)

1. Bible. O.T.—Criticism, interpretation, etc., Jewish. 2. Bible, O.T.—Hermeneutics.  
3. Midrash—History and criticism. 4. Body, Human—Religious aspects—Judaism. 5. Christianity  
and other regions—Judaism. 6. Judaism—Relations—Christianity. I. Title. II. Series.

BS1186.B69 2003

296.1'206—dc22

2003058269

ISSN 1566-1237

ISBN 90 04 12628 7

© Copyright 2003 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means,  
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,  
without prior written permission from the publisher.*

*Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by  
Brill provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright  
Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers 01923,  
USA. Fees are subject to change.*

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

## CONTENTS

Foreword .....		vii
Part I	Midrashic Studies .....	1
Chapter One	The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic .....	3
Chapter Two	“This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel”: Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel .....	24
Chapter Three	Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe .....	59
Chapter Four	Take the Bible for Example: Midrash as Literary Theory .....	89
Chapter Five	The Bartered Word: Midrash and Symbolic Economy .....	114
Part II	Diacritical Marks .....	165
Chapter Six	The Politics of Biblical Narratology: Reading the Bible like/as a Woman .....	167
Chapter Seven	The Subversion of the Jews: Moses’s Veil and the Hermeneutics of Supersession .....	184
Chapter Eight	<i>Épater l’Embourgeoisement</i> : Freud, Gender, and the (De)Colonized Psyche .....	211
Chapter Nine	The Talmud Meets Church History .....	246
List of Works Cited .....		285
Acknowledgement of Sources .....		293
Index of Names and Subjects .....		294
Index of Scripture and Ancient Sources .....		299

*This page intentionally left blank*

## FOREWORD

This book constitutes the record of an intellectual development over a decade that was crucial in my scholarship, a decade that took me from *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*<sup>1</sup> at the beginning, to *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*<sup>2</sup> at the end, that is, a trajectory that began with midrash and literary theory and ended with arguing for the ongoing creative interaction of nascent Christianities and Judaisms throughout the late antique period, and even beyond. Between these two poles, I attended intensively as well to race, gender, and sexuality in rabbinic Judaism. At the beginning of the decade I was searching for what it was that made/makes rabbinic Judaism unique, what makes it a different cultural system than Christianity. By the end of the decade, I had convinced myself that there is no such essential characteristic but that it was precisely the process, the long process, of separation from each other, the very *Auseinandersetzungen*, that made the difference, the product, therefore, of the ends of the history in late antiquity and not a premise of its beginnings. This latter project has carried me forward, as well, into my first book of the new millenium, *Border Lines: Hybrids, Heretics, and the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, to be published in January 2004 at the University of Pennsylvania Press.

In the various articles reprinted here, I show perhaps more of the intellectual underpinnings that supported the conclusions of the four books published in that decade than I have done in the books themselves. Some of these essays ended up being “out takes” for the books, either because they were too detailed and specific or because somehow by the time the books were done, they seemed slightly off the topic, or, for one prominent category, because they were essentially reviews of literature that articulated the place of that literature in motivating my projects and making them clear to me.

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*, The Lancaster/Yarnton Lectures in Judaism and Other Religions for 1998 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).



I would identify two major themes running through this work (and the books that accompanied them): the first is the typological relation of rabbinic Judaism to Christianity, while the second is the re-animation, by going back to the roots, of a rabbinic Judaism that would not manifest some of the deleterious social ideologies and practices that modern orthodox Judaism generally does, a project that I thought of a “radical orthodoxy,” long before that term achieved its current—and almost diametrically opposing—sense among Christian theologians.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part consists of several essays on midrash, exploring various aspects of rabbinic culture and their relation to hermeneutic practices. These papers are essentially more detailed studies of particular issues that were raised in two of my books, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* and *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (California: 1993). The second part of the book consists of reprints of four essays published in the journal *diacritics* during that same decade. Below I shall have something to say about this extraordinary journal.

In all of the essays in the first part, I endeavor in various and different ways to show that what characterizes the Rabbis is a particular notion of hermeneutics that is correlated with a particular anthropology, and that it is this combination of hermeneutic practice (and implicit theory) with a theology of corporeality that constitutes the phenomenological difference between rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. By the last paper in the volume, however, I am largely moving beyond this project of differentiation into quite another kind of exploration of these two “religions,” as they emerge from late antiquity.

In the first of these essays, *The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic*, I argue for the particular connection between midrashic hermeneutics and an important rabbinic theological judgment, that God can be seen. I try to show that the midrashic texts that represents the visibility of God are responding well to significant moments within the biblical text itself and that, therefore, the characterization of “Judaism” as a religious system in which God can be heard but never seen, a commonplace of much critical discourse, is simply mistaken, at least insofar as the religious culture of the Rabbis is considered an important part of said Judaism. There is, however, an even deeper connection between midrash and the seeing of God, for the practice of midrash, as I try to show, was figured as an almost

contemplative technique that on the rare occasions of its proper performance would lead to an actual vision of God delivering the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

The second chapter of this section continues the themes of the first one. Where the first chapter ended with a discussion of the contrast between Origenist allegory and midrash, the second picks up with a discussion of Augustine's charge against the Jews that they read carnally and are blind to spiritual meanings in the biblical text. Augustine thus confirms, in a powerful way, the points of the first chapter. I accept his point but reverse its value, connecting, in turn, the refusal of body/soul dualism manifested in midrashic hermeneutics with a series of other practices characteristic of rabbinic discourse, including the insistence on the value of physical circumcision and its thematization of the relations between God and Israel as an erotic one.

In the third chapter, I change direction somewhat and discuss the different meaning/s that "reading" had in the Hebrew language and the culture of the biblical and rabbinic periods, arguing that we miss important aspects of the culture unless we realize that reading in our modern sense is a modern production. This discussion leads into an intervention into a hotly contested issue in the interpretation of biblical prose narrative. One important theorist/critic, Robert Alter argues that we must read this narrative as "prose fiction," while another, equally important one, Meir Sternberg, argues that we must read it as "historiography." I suggest that the recognition that the reading and writing practices of biblical culture are fundamentally differently organized than ours are provides new ways of thinking about this question and a way to incorporate the correct insights of both "sides" in the discussion. This analysis grows directly out of the ethnosemantic reanalysis of the meaning of "reading" in ancient Hebrew culture, which leads directly into the fourth chapter, *Take the Bible for Example*, in which I take up the question of how the Rabbis themselves dealt with the question of the fictionality/historicity of the biblical text, arguing that the notion of exemplarity, of the Bible as a *maša*, a parable was a paramount. I argue that the rabbinic way of reading biblical narrative as real events that have exemplary force provides another way out of the dilemma presented by Alter and Sternberg.

The last chapter of this section of the book returns to the theme of the first and forms a kind of *inclusio*. It is a kind of intellectual thought experiment, a frank application of a certain kind of marxian

thinking to the explanation of the homologies between bodily practice and hermeneutic practice in rabbinic texts. Following in the wake of theoretical work by marxists such as George Thomson and Jean-Joseph Goux, I tried in this paper to make rabbinic Judaism the product of a certain stage in the development of a monetized economy and relate those ranges of symbolic practice to that point in the development of the abstract form of money. I would not judge this experiment a particularly successful one now but reprint it, nonetheless, both in the hopes that there is something there of value, at least in the details, if not in the overall argument, and also as part of establishing the turnings, and dead-ends of my thinking, as well as what has turned out to be its more productive pathways. In general, I should say, I have resisted the temptation to update any of these essays; they are published as is (or as were, as it were) with only necessary bibliographical information updated within square brackets.

At this point, I would like to spend a few lines discussing the journal, *diacritics*, in which the final four papers in the volume were originally published. This altogether remarkable journal provides a near-unique opportunity for a particular kind of essay that I have enjoyed writing very much. Basically, *diacritics* invites one to reflect on works of critical literature—whether essays or monographs—, either singly or in groups that are related in some way or fashion, if only by association in your own mind. These reflections do not, however, need to take the form of traditional reviews in which the theses of the works reviewed are set out and then critically appreciated but rather the essays can be used as an opportunity to develop a theme of one's own in conversation with, response to, animadversion to, or sometimes just resonance with the texts that one is reading. I have found the genre a delightful one with which to encounter various bodies of critical thought in my intellectual journey through the nineties; each of the books that I wrote then has a *diacritical* essay accompanying it. The titles and lists of works treated at the beginning of each of these diacritical marks will provide, I trust, sufficient as a come-on to their contents.

I would like to express here my gratitude to Prof. Jacob Neusner and to Ivo Romein of Brill Publishers for giving me an opportunity to make this sentimental journal and hope it will be a bit more than that for at least some readers.

Berkeley, May 8, 2003

PART ONE  
MIDRASHIC STUDIES

*This page intentionally left blank*

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EYE IN THE TORAH: OCULAR DESIRE IN MIDRASHIC HERMENEUTIC

It seems to have become a commonplace of critical discourse that Judaism is the religion in which God is heard but not seen. Thus in a recent article by Martin Jay we can find the following remarks:

Whereas some commentators contrast the Jewish taboo on graven images or seeing the face of God with the Christian toleration for the word made flesh in the incarnation, a toleration that supports the visible sacraments and the mimetic *imitatio Dei*, Ellul staunchly asserts the iconoclastic impulse in both faiths. Not for him is the contention that Christianity contains both Hellenic and Hebraic impulses. Instead, he insists that like Judaism, it worships an invisible, non-theophanous God, a God who speaks to humans who only listen.<sup>1</sup>

Reading Jay's text, as well as Ellul's text, from which it dissents, I am interested in what is assumed, hidden, implied, and mystified in the comparative expression "like Judaism." Both Ellul and Jay (and nearly everyone else) casually accept the characterization of Judaism (a reified fiction of four thousand years of a culture) as a religion that devalues the experience of vision of God (and vision in general) and relegates it to the realm of idolatry. It is an absolutely unexamined axiom that "Hebraic impulses" must be toward an invisible God, who does not show Himself to humankind and only speaks that they may hear. Jay's statement reveals one source of the confusion that has led to the consensus that in Judaism God cannot be seen: it casually equates a "taboo on graven images or seeing the face of God" with an assertion that God is invisible and speaks but does not show Himself to humans. In fact, a threefold distinction must be drawn among (1) a theosophical doctrine that God is a being who cannot be seen; (2) a normative stricture (absolute or contingent) on seeing a God who can be seen;

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Jay, "The Rise of Hermeneutics and the Crisis of Ocularcentrism," *Poetics Today* 9 (1988), 307-8; hereafter abbreviated "RH."

and (3) a stricture on making images of a visible God. Jay elides all three of these. In this essay I will try to show that the first of these is false for Talmudic Judaism, and the second is relative and contingent. The third is, of course, an absolute stricture.

My construction of the position of the eye in Rabbinic Judaism<sup>2</sup> (and Christianity) represents almost a reversal of the roles “Hebraic” and “Hellenic.” A powerful case can be made that *only* under Hellenic influence do Jewish cultures exhibit any anxiety about the corporeality or visibility of God; the biblical and Rabbinic religions were quite free of such influences and anxieties. Thus I would identify Greek influences on Judaism in the Middle Ages as being the major force for *repressing* the visual.<sup>3</sup> The Neoplatonic and Aristotelian revision of Judaism undertaken by the Jewish scholastics was so successful that it has resulted in the near-total forgetting of the biblical and Rabbinic traditions of God’s visibility. W.J.T. Mitchell’s characterization of the Rabbinic tradition is a perfect example of this “forgetting.” In order to position Judaism in a typology of cultures, Mitchell cites Moses Maimonides. Mitchell’s reading of Maimonides is well-founded; the problem lies rather in the identification of Maimonides as if he typified the old Rabbinic tradition.<sup>4</sup> In my view, he represents a distinct departure from that tradition. This Platonic departure was indeed

---

<sup>2</sup> I have concentrated here on the “classical” texts of the canon of so-called normative Rabbinic Judaism, where this issue has been little discussed in the scholarly literature. For a discussion of this topic in other texts, see Christopher Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 10 (Dec. 1979): 137–54, and Ira Chernus, “Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 13 (Dec. 1982): 123–46. It becomes increasingly clear that Rabbinic Judaism cannot be strictly separated from earlier apocalyptic or later mystical traditions, but the exact nature of the connections is a present agenda of research.

<sup>3</sup> A similar point has been made by Gedaliahu Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ,” *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983): 270–71, where Stroumsa argues that the idea of the “total immateriality of God” developed in Christianity under the “pervasive influence of Platonism.” On the other hand, “the encounter between Jewish thought and Platonic philosophy, was severed soon after Philo, and Jewish exegesis was left to struggle with biblical anthropomorphisms without the help of the most effective of tools: the Platonic conception of a purely immaterial being.” My only dissent from Stroumsa would be from his implication that this constitutes a deficiency in Rabbinic Judaism. In a full-length study of the body in Talmudic culture, I hope to argue that the Rabbinic belief in the corporeality of God is part of an entire cultural-semiotic system with major consequences for representation and social practice vis-à-vis women, the body, and sex.

<sup>4</sup> See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago, 1986), p. 32.

marked and condemned as such by many of his contemporaries, but it has become the almost unchallenged orthodoxy of later Judaism as well as of the critical tradition.<sup>5</sup> The memory of having seen God in the Bible and the desire to have that experience again were a vital part of Rabbinic religion. They constituted, moreover, a key element in the study of Torah, the making of midrash.

The two moments, according to Rabbinic tradition, in which God was held to have shown Himself to Israel were the two high points of the *Heilsgeschichte*, namely the giving of the Torah and the crossing of the Red Sea. At least in theory, the most severely textual/aural of all experiences was the revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai. If there is any experience that ought a priori to be describable as involving “a God who speaks to humans who only listen,” it is certainly this one. The Torah itself already explicitly indicates that at the former event God made Himself visible to the people. In Exod. 24:7–11 we read,

And [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the ears of the People, and they said, All that we have heard we will do and we will hear. . . . And Moses and Aaron, Nadav, Avihu and the seventy elders went up. And they saw the God of Israel and under His legs it was like a paving of sapphire and bright like the sky. And unto the nobles of the Israelites He did no damage, but they saw God and they ate and drank.

It is actually quite astounding that Judaism could ever be described as having an invisible God, given the evidence of these verses and many others. In the Torah God *can* be seen, and indeed this conclusion is well accepted in biblical studies today.<sup>6</sup> Normally one is not permitted to see God, and it is very dangerous to do so, which is why here the Torah makes explicit the fact that in this special moment the

---

<sup>5</sup> In my forthcoming book I hope to be able to explore these historical changes within Judaism more fully. It is important to note that vital strains of the older tradition were maintained in the Kabbalah, which for all its Neoplatonism was often closer in spirit to the religion of the Rabbis of the Talmud than was the theology of the Jewish scholastics.

<sup>6</sup> For a full collection of biblical passages that refer to people seeing God, see G.W.W. Baudissin, “‘Gott schauen’ in der alttestamentlichen Religion,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 18 (1915): 173–239. See also James Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism in the Old Testament,” *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 7 (1960): 31–38.



people were vouchsafed this vision without there being any danger.<sup>7</sup>

It will be more significant to establish, however, that in Rabbinic religion, even after the contact with Greek culture starting in the fourth century B.C., there was continued belief in and desire for the vision of God. We can find many texts that indicate such belief and desire. At the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Torah tells us that “all of the People saw the voices” (Exod. 20:14). On this verse the midrash comments, “Rabbi Ishmael says, They saw what could be seen and heard what could be heard,” but Rabbi Akiva, who, as we shall see, strongly privileges seeing, interprets, “They saw what can be heard.”<sup>8</sup> At the time of the giving of the Torah, even that which normally only could be heard could be seen! Thus it is not surprising that that which can be seen was seen at that time.

I find the most dramatic counterevidence to the claim of purely linguistic/aural revelation in that, for the midrash, sight of God inhabits the very heart of revelation as part of its essential structure, and even the very communication of the Law is at least partly visual. This shift from the aural to the visual in the revelation is signaled in midrash by a shift in understanding of the demonstrative pronoun.<sup>9</sup> Demonstratives can mean in three ways: as anaphora and kataphora they refer to discourse, that is, to that which is heard about and not present to sight at the moment of speech. As deixis, however, they invoke an actual movement of pointing on the part of the speaker, necessarily, therefore, designating an object present in the field of sight. It is indeed remarkable that the Rabbis of the midrash almost invariably (if not invariably) read demonstratives in the commandments of God as deictics. Thus, in the following passage from *The Mekilta de-*

---

<sup>7</sup> Barr makes the same point: “There is however, and I think from very early times, the tradition not so much that the deity is invisible as that it is deadly for man to see him” (Barr, “Theophany and Anthropomorphism,” p. 34).

<sup>8</sup> *The Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, trans. and ed. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, 3 vols. (1933–35; Philadelphia, 1961), 2:266; hereafter abbreviated *M*. I have provided my own translations rather than use Lauterbach’s translations of this text.

<sup>9</sup> In her brilliant text “Sacred Language and Open Text,” Betty Roitman has analyzed the midrashic understanding of the demonstrative in ways that partly intersect with, partly complement, and partly differ from mine. Her concern is with its marking of a “sememe of concretization, of recognition, and of singularity” (Roitman, “Sacred Language and Open Text,” in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick [New Haven, Conn., 1986], p. 161) whereas mine is, of course, with the sememe of visibility.

*Rabbi Ishmael*, the early midrash on Exodus, we find a whole series of such demonstratives read as deictics with quite striking results:

*This month shall be for you* [Exod. 12:12]. Rabbi Ishmael says: Moses showed the new moon to Israel and said to them: In this way shall you see and fix the new moon for the generations. Rabbi Akiva says: This is one of the three things that were difficult for Moses to understand and all of which God pointed out to him with His finger. And thus you say: “And *these* are they which are unclean for you” (Lev. 11:29). And thus: “And *this* is the work of the candelabrum” (Num. 8:4). [*M*, 1:15–16]

Owing to the midrashic conviction that a demonstrative always denotes deixis, at least two of the verses cited here undergo remarkable semantic transitions. The most obvious reading of the Exodus verse is that God is referring to the month as an abstract entity—a passing of a certain amount of time—and saying, this upcoming month, this month of Nissan, will be for you the most important of months. Such a rendering takes the demonstrative as kataphora, referring to that which is yet to be mentioned in the discourse. Yet because the Rabbis insist on the deictic reading of the demonstrative, they are forced to understand the verse as referring to a concrete and visible object, the moon. A similar thing happens in the case of the verse from Leviticus. Again it seems the demonstrative is referring to that which is heard in the language of the verse, that is, to the *list* of the unclean animals; however, as the midrash reads the text, as deixis, there is an actual pointing to the animals themselves. What is significant in the present context is not so much the shift in meaning the verses undergo, but the implication of this deixis, drawn so explicitly by Rabbi Akiva: namely, that God’s finger—the instrument of pointing—was also visible to Moses at the time of this revelation and that this visual moment—this primacy of the eye with its capacity for immediately grasping that which is absent in purely linguistic expression—is that which made possible the very communication of these laws between God and Israel. Already we can see that we have powerful counterevidence to the commonplace description of an invisible God and purely aural revelation in Judaism.

The implication of this text for our concerns was finely and explicitly drawn in a somewhat later midrashic text, which can be taken as a commentary on the one just cited:

Rabbi Assi said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: One who blesses the New Moon in its time is as if he had received the face of the Divine

Presence, for it says here *This Month*, and it says there *This is My God, and I will beautify Him* (Exod. 15:2).<sup>10</sup>

According to my understanding, this text is best read as an indirect reference to the previous one. That is to say, we have not only a linguistic analogy here (*gezerah shavah*),<sup>11</sup> but a stronger claim for thematic analogy, or even for mimetic *imitatio dei*.<sup>12</sup> God has shown His finger when He said “This Month,” and the proper response must be that we point back at Him and say “This is my God.” In any case, what has been emphasized so clearly in this text is the visibility of God, a God Whose presence can be received and to which we can pay homage.

Since the verse “*This is My God, and I will beautify Him*” is part of the Song at the Sea, the praise that the Jews rendered God immediately after the miracle of crossing the Red Sea, the Rabbis understood as well that at that moment in history God showed Himself clearly to all of the people present. Had He not done so, they could hardly have pointed at Him and said, “This is My God.” Thus we find the deictic reading of the demonstrative pronoun once more giving rise to a theosophical understanding of the visibility of the Godhead. This point is made quite explicitly in another text of the *Mekilta* where Rabbi Eliezer says, “Any servant at the Sea saw what neither Isaiah nor Ezekiel nor any of the other prophets have seen, for it says: *This is my God, and I will beautify Him*” (*M*, 2:24). The Israelites could only have made such a declaration if they saw God and could point to Him with their deictic fingers.

Again, however, we are not dependent only on the Rabbinic-midrashic tradition for the theophany at the Red Sea. It is signaled in the biblical discourse itself in several ways, most dramatically in verses that indicate God Himself physically, as it were, split the sea. We can find fragments of this tradition in such poetic verses as Ps. 77:17, “The waters *saw You*, O God, the waters *saw You* and were convulsed” (my emphasis). Midrashic texts have rendered these fragmentary memoirs of God’s self-showing at the sea very explicit and unmistakable, as in the following text:

<sup>10</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 42a.

<sup>11</sup> Compare Roitman, “Sacred Language and Open Text,” p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> For a somewhat similar reading of this passage, see A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, 2 vols. (Oxford and London, 1927–37), 2:103.

*And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea* (Exod. 14:21). The sea began to resist him. Moses said, “in the Name of the Holiness,” but it did not yield. *The Holiness, Blessed be He, revealed Himself*; the sea began to flee, as it says, “The sea *saw* and fled” (Ps. 114:3).

Its *mashal*; to what is the matter similar? To a king of flesh and blood, who had two gardens, one inside the other. He sold the inner one, and the purchaser came to enter, but the guard did not allow him. He said to him, “In the name of the king,” but he did not yield. He showed him king’s signet, but he did not yield until the king came. Once the king came, the guard began to flee. He said, “All day long I have been speaking to you in the name of the king and you did not yield. Now, why are you fleeing?” He said, “Not from you am I fleeing, but from the king am I fleeing.”

Similarly, Moses came and stood at the sea. He said to him, “in the name of the Holiness,” and it did not yield. He showed him the rod, and it did not yield, *until the Holiness, Blessed be He, revealed Himself in His glory*. The sea began to flee, as it is said, “The sea saw and fled” (Ps. 114:3). Moses said to him, “All day long I have been speaking to you in the name of the Holiness, Blessed be He and you did not submit. Now, ‘what has happened to you, O sea, that you flee?’ (Ps. 114:5).” He answered him, “Not from before you am I fleeing, son of Amram, but ‘from before the Master, tremble Earth from before the God of Jacob’ (Ps. 114:7–8).” (*M*, 1:227–28)

This midrash is a very complex hermeneutic and cultural document, which I have treated at length in another context.<sup>13</sup> Here we are interested in a thematic aspect. The sea refused to be moved until God showed Himself in His Glory over it, until God revealed Himself. The “Glory,” as is well known to students of biblical theology, is a kind of *pleroma*, the visible appearance of God.<sup>14</sup>

What is the source of this midrashic claim? The midrash is a reading of Ps. 114:

<sup>1</sup> When Israel went out from Egypt; the house of Jacob from a foreign nation.

<sup>13</sup> See Daniel Boyarin, “The Sea Resists: Midrash and the (Psycho)dynamics of Intertextuality,” *Poetics Today* 10 (Winter 1989): 661–77.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Exod. 18, Num. 14:10, and especially 1 Sam. 4:21 for the actual physical reality of the “Glory.”

- <sup>2</sup> Judah became His holy one; Israel His dominion.  
<sup>3</sup> The Sea saw and fled; the Jordan turned back.  
<sup>4</sup> The mountains danced like rams; the hills like lambs.  
<sup>5</sup> What has happened to you, O Sea, that you flee; O Jordan that you turn back?  
<sup>6</sup> O mountains, that you dance like rams; O hills, like lambs?  
<sup>7</sup> From before the Master, tremble Earth, from before the God of Jacob.

The psalm itself is generally taken as a prosopopeia, a rendering in visual terms of that which cannot be seen. As read by Sir Philip Sidney, the personifications of nature in this psalm are a figure, an *enargeia*, of the God who cannot be seen by eyes of flesh:

[David's] handling his prophecy . . . is merely poetical. For what else [are] . . . his notable *prosopopeias*, when he maketh you, as it were, see God coming in his majesty, his telling of the Beasts' joyfulness and hills' leaping, but a heavenly poesy: wherein almost he showeth himself a passionate lover of that unspeakable and everlasting beauty to be seen by the eyes of the mind, only cleared by faith?<sup>15</sup>

Commenting on this passage in Sidney, Murray Krieger remarks:

The prosopopeia is a form of personification which gives a voice to that which does not speak and thereby gives presence to that which is absent. Through this figure, Sidney argues, God enters David's poem (we are made to "see God coming in his majesty"). It is as if this figure is made to serve the larger objective of *enargeia*, the verbal art of forcing us to see vividly. Through "the eyes of the mind"—an appropriately Platonic notion—we are shown the coming of God and his "unspeakable and everlasting beauty." Here, then, are words invoking a visible presence, though of course to "the eyes of the mind" alone. Though God's may be only a figurative entrance through His personified creatures, the poet makes us, "as it were" see this entrance. He is there, in His living creation, and absent no longer.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to Sidney for whom the psalm is the figure of an absence, for the midrash it is read as the record of a presence—not eyes of the mind, stimulated to imagine the presence of God through the depiction of the effect on His creatures, but eyes of flesh saw God in history.<sup>17</sup> The psalm is a poetical rendering of an actual occurrence

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Murray Krieger, "Poetic Presence and Illusion: Renaissance Theory and the Duplicity of Metaphor," *Critical Inquiry* 5 (Summer 1979): 601.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 601–2.

<sup>17</sup> In my fuller analysis of this text ("The Sea Resists," p. 670), I have presented

in which the sea did not want to be split and only the actual revelation of God convinced it to move. It is this event that is remembered in the verse of Ps. 77:17 as well, “The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You and were convulsed.” Once God was visible on the sea and to the sea, naturally not only did the sea perceive His Presence, but the whole people did as well:

The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name [Exod. 15:3]: Rabbi Yehuda says: Here is a verse made rich in meaning by many passages, (for) it declares that *He revealed Himself to them* with every manner of weapon:

He revealed Himself to them as a warrior girt with his sword, as it is said, “Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O warrior” (Ps. 45:4);

He revealed Himself to them as a cavalry officer, as it is said, “And He rode upon a cherub, and did fly” (Ps. 18:11);

He revealed Himself to them in coat of mail and helmet, as it is said, “And He put on righteousness as a coat of mail” (etc.) (Isa. 59:17);

He revealed Himself to them with a spear, as it is said, “At the shining of Thy glittering spear” (Hab. 3:11), and it says, “Draw out also the spear, and the battle-ax” etc. (Ps. 35:3);

He revealed Himself to them with bow and arrows, as it is said, “Thy bow is made quite bare” etc. (Hab. 3:9), and it says, “And He sent out arrows, and scattered them” etc. (II Sam. 22:15);

He revealed Himself to them in buckler and shield, as it is said, “His truth is a shield and a buckler” etc. (Ps. 91:4), and it says, “Take hold of shield and buckler” etc. (Ps. 35:2).<sup>18</sup>

---

arguments against reading the midrash itself as figurative, a reading that would attenuate my use of it here in this discussion. Because of the importance of this point for the present thesis, I will briefly summarize my arguments: (1) There is no internal warrant for reading this text allegorically—no hint or ungrammatically in it that points to another meaning. The only reason to allegorize would be precisely because of a doctrine that God is incorporeal and invisible and that the sea can have no sentience, but that would be a perfect example of a vicious circle. The very move to allegorize is a Platonic impulse, as I shall suggest below. (2) There are many Rabbinic texts that speak of God’s self-revelation at the sea and *all* of them would have to be allegorized. (3) The Rabbis explicitly and frequently contrast *mashal* as figurative narrative and fiction to the “real” (see my “History Becomes Parable: A Reading of the Midrashic Mashal,” *Bucknell Review* [1990, 54–72]). It follows, then, that since one part of this text is explicitly designated *mashal*, the rest is considered to be “real.” While none of these arguments may be deemed incontrovertible alone, their cumulative weight is, in my opinion, nearly unanswerable.

<sup>18</sup> Aside from changing Judah to Yehuda, I have cited here Judah Goldin’s excellent and elegant translation of this passage in *The Song at the Sea, Being a Commentary on a Commentary in Two Parts* (New Haven, Conn., 1971), pp. 124–25; my emphasis. On this text, see Stroumsa, “Polymorphie divine et transformations d’un mythologème: l’*Apocryphon de Jean*’ et ses sources,” *Vigilae Christianae* 35 (Dec. 1981): 421.

“The Lord is a man of war” is the verse immediately following “This is My God.” It describes, therefore, how God looked to the people when they pointed to Him above the Red Sea. In order to thicken that description, as it were, the midrashist collects all of the verses in the Bible in which God is described as having weapons and the form of a warrior. These are the guises in which He revealed Himself to the sea and to the people Israel at the time of the passage. In concluding this section, I would say that there can be very little doubt that in early Rabbinic Judaism God was understood as a being who could be seen. There was, of course, an absolute taboo on making images of God, but the taboo on seeing God was only relative. Similar to the taboo of approaching the Holy Ark for those who were not fit to do so, violation of the taboo could result in death or injury, but it was nevertheless, even then, possible to see God. Moreover, there were certain circumstances in which God also permitted special people (and even, occasionally, the entire people) to see Him. In my next section, I will try to show that such occasions as remembered from history and projected as possible futures were a focus of desire on the part of the Rabbis,<sup>19</sup> and, moreover, that the hermeneutic practice of midrash was understood as a means to reachieve such moments of seeing God.

Not only did the Jews see God at the crossing of the Red Sea, but they left a text in which that sight is eloquently described. The text is the Song of Songs, in particular chapter 5 of that book, in which there is a detailed description, a blazon by the maiden of her now hidden and desired lover. In the midrashic reading, which is *not* an allegory (as I shall presently claim), the maiden is Israel and the lover, of course, is God:

Rabbi Eliezer decoded [*patar*] the verse in the hour that Israel stood at the Sea. *My dove in the cleft of the rock in the hiding place of the steep* (Song 2:14), that they were hidden in the hiding place of the Sea—*Show me your visage*; this is what is written. “Stand forth and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exod. 14:13)—*Let me hear your voice*; this is the singing, as it

---

<sup>19</sup> See Rowland, “The Visions of God in Apocalyptic Literature,” p. 153: “The way in which other biblical imagery merges into the production of the various visions may all point to a setting in which a free meditation took place on the chariot-chapter, so that, as in Rev., the visionary’s own experience could make an important contribution to the ‘seeing again’ of Ezekiel’s vision.”

says, "Then Moses sang" (Exod. 15:1)—*For your voice is lovely*; this is the Song—*And your visage is beautiful*; for Israel were pointing with their fingers and saying, "*This is my God and I will beautify Him*" (Exod. 15:2).<sup>20</sup>

The description of His beauty in chapter 5 is then the description of the vision of that beauty that was vouchsafed Israel at the moment of their greatest closeness to the bridegroom, the crossing of the Red Sea. That moment is invested with a great erotic charge by the reading of Song of Songs into it, precisely that erotic charge assigned to ocular desire by St. Augustine.<sup>21</sup> As expressed by Jay:

A frequent source of hostility to vision has, of course, been the anxiety unleashed by what Augustine called "ocular desire" in the more ascetic, anti-hedonist critics of idolatry. What they have recognized is that desire is a source of restless dissatisfaction, preventing humans from contentment with their lot. As such, it provides a stimulus to living in an imagined future or perhaps returning to a lamented past. That is, it has a deeply temporalizing function. ["RH," p. 311]

But this is precisely the point of the midrash. There *was* an experience of unmediated vision of God, and it has unleashed a desire to live in an imagined future or return to a lamented past.

---

<sup>20</sup> *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ed. Shimson Dunsky (Tel Aviv, 1980), p. 73; hereafter abbreviated *SSR*. The verse of Exodus, where it says "stand forth," is tallied with the verse of Song of Songs where the speaker, appealing to his beloved who is hidden, calls to her to come out from hiding and show him her face. The rest follows from this. The last clause requires explanation, however. The word I have translated as "visage" is generally glossed as "countenance." However, its root is from the verb "to see." Moreover, it can be understood as a participle of the causitive form of that verb, thus meaning "showing or pointing out." Rabbi Eliezer accordingly takes it to mean, "And your pointing is beautiful," that is, when you pointed to Me with your fingers and said in the Song at the Sea, "*This my God and I will ascribe beauty to Him.*"

Rabbi Akiva interprets the verse of the Song of Songs using the same hermeneutic principles but applies the text to a different context in Exodus, namely the Revelation at Sinai. Not surprisingly, in light of the text cited above, for him, the "seeing" described here refers to the voices: "Rabbi Akiva decoded the verse in the hour that they stood before Mount Sinai. *My dove in the cleft of the rock in the hiding place of the steep* (Song 2:14), for they were hidden in the hiding places of Sinai. *Show me your visage*, as it says, 'And all of the People saw the voices' (Exod. 20:14)—*Let me hear your voice*, this is the voice from before the commandments, for it says, 'All that you say we will do and we will hear' (Exod. 24:7)—*For your voice is pleasant*; this is the voice after the commandments, as it says, 'God has heard the voice of your speaking; this which you have said is goodly' (Deut. 5:25)." [*SSR*, p. 73]

<sup>21</sup> *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. E.M. Blaiklock (Nashville, Tenn., 1983), bk. 10, ch. 35, pp. 274–77.



Another midrashic text renders the experience of that vision and the poignancy of its desired return exquisitely:<sup>22</sup>

*This is My God, and I will beautify Him* (Exod. 15:2). . . . Rabbi Akiva says: Before all the Nations of the World I shall hold forth on the beauties and splendor of Him Who Spake and the World Came to Be! For, lo, the Nations of the World keep asking Israel, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful of women?" (Song 5:9), that for His sake you die, for His sake you are slain, as it is said, we have loved you unto death [*'ad mwt*] "for thus do the maidens [*'almwt*] love Thee" (Song 1:3)—and it is said, "for Your sake we have been killed all the day" (Ps. 44:23). "You are beautiful, you are heroes, come merge with us!"

But Israel replies to the Nations of the World: Do you know Him? Let us tell you a little of His Glory:<sup>23</sup> "My beloved is white and ruddy, braver than ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is curls as black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by springs of water. . . . His cheeks are like perfumed gardens. . . . His palate is sweetmeats and He is all delight; *This* is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem" (Song 5:10 ff.). [*M*, 2:25–26]

A complex set of intertextual connections and echoes sets up the motions of desire in this text. The most important is the connection between Exodus and the Song of Songs. According to the earliest strata of Rabbinic hermeneutics, the Song of Songs was *not* an allegory in the sense of paradigms projected onto the syntagmatic axis or concrete entities and events that signify abstractions. Rather it was an actual love dialogue spoken by God to Israel and Israel to God in concrete historical circumstances, or written by Solomon, as if spoken by Israel and God in those circumstances.<sup>24</sup> The circumstances themselves were a subject of some controversy. Some of the early Rabbis held that the Song had first been pronounced at the crossing

<sup>22</sup> For a fuller reading of this passage and in particular its problematic connection with martyrdom and history, see Boyarin, "Language Inscribed by History on the Bodies of Living Beings": Midrash and Martyrdom," *Representations* 25 (Winter 1989): 139–51. Some of my discussion here is repeated verbatim from that essay.

<sup>23</sup> See above note 14. Note that God's beauty is not unspeakable (contra Sidney) but merely inexhaustible.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of these two possibilities, see Saul Lieberman, "The Teaching of the Song of Songs" [Hebrew], in *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, ed. Gershom G. Scholem, 2d ed. (New York, 1965), pp. 118–26, and Boyarin, "Two Introductions to the Midrash on the *Song of Songs*" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz: A Quarterly for Jewish Studies* 56 (July–Sept. 1987): 479–500.

of the sea, while others held that it was first delivered at the revelation at Mount Sinai. That is, both positions maintain that the *Song of Songs* is the description of Israel's experience of seeing God at one of the high-points of the *Salvation History*. This is, of course, especially the case for the verses of Song 5:10–19, which are a detailed and desiring description of the male beloved by the female lover, that is, of God by Israel.

Rabbi Akiva's midrash belongs obviously to the tradition that the Song of Songs was sung at the Red Sea, an expansion, as it were, of the Song at the Sea itself. The midrash represents the relationship of God and the Jewish people as an erotic one—through the reading of Song of Songs into Exodus. However, Thanatos also introduces itself into this erotic idyll, both formally and thematically.

For, lo, the Nations of the World keep asking Israel, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful of women?" (Song 5:9), that for His sake you die, for His sake you are slain, as it is said, we have loved you unto death [*ad mwt*], "for thus do the maidens [*almwt*] love Thee" (Song 1:3)—and it is said, "for Your sake we have been killed all the day" (Ps. 44:23).

The midrash here cries out at the necessary "intertwining of death and desire" ("RH," p. 318), but it proposes a response to that cry as well. The answer that the text proposes for the terrible irony of Eros that leads to death is that the experience of seeing God was so wonderful that the Jews are willing to suffer and even to be killed if only there is a promise that through this action they will be restored (individually or nationally) to the state in which they could see God in His beauty.<sup>25</sup> The Rabbis do not valorize an end to ocular desire but rather

---

<sup>25</sup> It is fascinating to see how this motif is transformed in the later mystical literature. Compare the following discussion by Chernus, "Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism," pp. 129–30: "we know that the dangers facing the mystic in the ascent to the Merkabah form a substantial and pervasive theme in the Heikhalot literature. The dangers are often said to intensify as one approaches the throne of God, and so it seems likely that they would culminate with the vision of God Himself. Yet these dangers do not make it impossible to see God. On the contrary, since the dangers are the price one must pay for the ultimate vision of God, their existence in fact confirms that such a vision is possible. I think, then, that the text is saying that no creature can see God under ordinary circumstances, but if an individual is willing to accept these terrifying dangers then he may in fact see God."

The cultural continuity of this theme from the Bible through the Rabbis and up until this early medieval tradition is impressive. "This passage seems to imply that death, or at least the risk of death, is the price one must pay to obtain a vision of God" (Chernus, "Visions of God in Merkabah Mysticism," p. 131). See also Susan

seek its fulfillment. A fuller reading of the text will help us to fathom this desire.

Midrash often signifies by allusion to other biblical passages. These allusions are discovered by observing the ungrammaticalities of the midrashic text, that is, linguistic forms that either do not quite fit their context or belong to another linguistic stratum. While the phrase *‘al mwt* could mean “until death” in Rabbinic Hebrew, its grammar is sufficiently unusual to call attention to itself; the normal form would be *‘ad mwt*, as the midrash indeed glosses it. I would read this nearly ungrammatical form as an intertextual clue. The only place in the Hebrew Bible where *‘al mwt* occurs in the sense of “until death” is in Ps. 48:15: “*this* is God, our God, until eternity. He will lead us until death.” Moreover, this verse begins with language strongly reminiscent of the very verse that Rabbi Akiva’s midrash is reading, “*this* is God.”

This verse is also (according to Rabbinic hermeneutics) a record of a theophany, again because of the deictic “this.” Rabbis of a period only slightly later than Rabbi Akiva animate the rich ambiguity of the Psalms verse by reading “until death” as “maidens,” in precisely the reverse move of Rabbi Akiva’s reading of “maidens” as “death” in the Song of Songs verse:

Rabbis Berechia and Helbo and Ula and Rabbi El’azar in the name of Rabbi Hanina have said: In the future God will lead the dance of the righteous . . . and they will point to Him with their fingers, as it says, “*this* is God, our God, until eternity. He will lead us until death [*‘al mwt*]” as maidens [*k’alamot*], in the dances of the righteous. [SSR, p. 152]

It seems to me not too much to suggest, therefore, that Rabbi Akiva’s midrashic transformation of “maidens” into “until death” alludes to this very verse, in which *death* is transformed into *maidens* by the later midrash.

Now it is very important to note that Ps. 48 is itself a meditation on history. The psalmist, speaking at some indefinite time, recalls the distant past of the splitting of the sea in a series of blatant allusions

---

Niditch, “Merits, Martyrs, and ‘Your Life as Booty’: An Exegesis of *Mekilta*, *Pisha* 1,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 13 (Dec. 1982): 166: “self-sacrifice, willingness to die, is seen as related to the problem of God’s continuing contact with Israel in a time of broken myths.”

to Exod. 15, the same text Rabbi Akiva is interpreting.<sup>26</sup> The psalmist declares, “as we have heard, so have we seen,” citing the very transformation of history into present experience that Rabbi Akiva enacts by his transformation of anaphora into deixis. The transformation in both cases is enacted precisely via a hermeneutic act: in the case of the psalm by connecting present reality with memory and thus reliving the remembered experience, and in the case of the midrash by reading the Torah in such a way that the experience of presence related becomes available to the reader. Finally, the psalmist draws past and present together with the future with his words, “In order that you tell the last generation: *this* is God, our God, until eternity. He will lead us until death.” “This is God,” God who is present, God whom we will again be able to see and point to:

Said the Holy Blessed One, in this world they were perishing, because they saw My Glory, for it says, “No person may see Me and live” (Exod. 33:20), but in the next world, when I will return My Presence to Zion, I will be revealed in all My Glory to Israel and they will see Me and live forever, for it says “Eye to eye will they see” (Is. 52:8), and not only that but they will point out my Glory one to the other with the finger, and say, “*this* is God, our God,” [our verse of psalms] and it says, “On that day, behold *this* is Our God Whom we have hoped for, *this* is the Lord for Whom we have waited” (Is. 25:10).<sup>27</sup>

The psalm replicates in its thematics the very interpretation of history that the midrash makes both in its thematics and in its hermeneutic method. For the psalmist, it seems, the promise of God’s self-revelation, of seeing Him again, as He was seen at the crossing of the sea, redeems the vicissitudes of history.

When we combine the midrashic text itself with its biblical subtexts, we can generate a strong reading of it. The interpreter stands in a position of desire. His Torah tells him of a moment of perfection when the people stood in such a marvelous union with God that what a servant saw then, no one has seen since. How can the desire to relive that moment of presence be fulfilled? The distance between the present reader and the absent moment of Presence is the tragedy

---

<sup>26</sup> For this reading, see Robert Alter, “Psalms,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), p. 257.

<sup>27</sup> *Midrash Tanchuma*, ed. S. Buber, 4 vols. (1885; Jerusalem, 1964), 4:18.

of history. Rabbi Akiva conquers history by bringing it into the present. For him, as well as for the psalmist, what we have heard is what we have seen, and if death, time, history interfere, they can be conquered through a reading strategy that eradicates them by effacing the difference among past, present, and future. Anaphora becomes deixis. This reading strategy is called midrash, a hermeneutics grounded at least in part on ocular desire, not on the need to reconstruct a message, a signified, but rather to relive an experience, a visual experience of the Presence of God. Here we have figured perfectly the paradoxical time of midrashic reading. The linguistic transformation of anaphora into deixis thematizes the issue of midrash brilliantly. Anaphora is the very figure of absence: this which I am telling you about; this which was in the past; this which is history. Deixis is the very figure of presence: this which I am pointing at; this which you can see. The absent moment of theophany is thus transformed into an evocation of a present moment of vision of God both in the form and in the content (or rather in the indistinguishable form-content) of the midrash. The absent moment of revelation is transformed into a present moment of reading:

*Praise the Lord; call His name; . . . sing to Him; seek out His face forever* (Ps. 105:1): Rabbi Yose the son of Halafta said to Rabbi Ishmael his son: If you wish to see the Face of the Divine Presence in this world, study Torah in the Holy Land.<sup>28</sup>

The revision of our understanding of Rabbinic religion I am proposing here has an important correlate in the reading of the Song of Songs. As I have been describing it here, the Song of Songs was read by the Rabbis as an actual love song sung between God and Israel at a concrete historical moment (or alternatively, as a song written later that renders that moment poetically). Many writers on the midrash of the Song of Songs understand it to be an allegorical reading similar in kind to the later Jewish interpretations of the poem as well as the Christian readings. The claim is made, in effect, that the hermeneutic method is the same, only the specific allegorical identifications are different, with God and Israel assuming the roles of the male and

---

<sup>28</sup> *Midrash on Psalms*, ed. Buber (New York, 1947), p. 448. On this source, see further the remarks of Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, 2:96.

female protagonists rather than Christ and the Church. One finds this view expressed in nearly every commentary on or introduction to the Song of Songs.<sup>29</sup>

However, it seems to me that we must clearly distinguish the midrashic reading of the Song from that of allegorists such as Origen. Aphoristically, we might say that the direction of Origen's reading is from the concrete to the abstract, while the direction of midrash is from the abstract to the concrete. Or, using Jakobsonian terminology, at least heuristically, we could say that allegorical reading involves the projection of the syntagmatic plane (metonymy) of the text onto a paradigmatic plane of meaning while midrash projects paradigms (metaphor) into a syntagmatic plane of narrative history. Thus, while these are seemingly similar strategies of reading (and often genetically connected ones),<sup>30</sup> Origen's allegoresis and midrash are really quite different from each other. I would like to add two clarifications at this point. The first is that the category of "allegory," both as a means of text production and as a reading practice, is a notoriously slippery one. Therefore, it should be clear that when I say allegoresis I mean allegorical reading of the Philonic-Original type, which has a fairly clear structure as well as explicit theoretical underpinnings. The other point that I wish to clarify here is that I am *not* contrasting Jewish with Christian modes of reading. The Gospels themselves, Paul, and even much later Christian literature contain much that is midrashic in hermeneutic structure (more, in my opinion, than is currently recognized, for example, *Piers Plowman*). Moreover, much authentic Jewish hermeneutic is allegorical or otherwise "logocentric" in structure. Nor am I trying to valorize midrash over Alexandrian allegoresis; I wish only to clarify the two modes of reading as different in order to understand midrash better.

Let us consider this difference by examining Origen's reflections on his method. In the third book of his great commentary on the Song of Songs, the Alexandrian father has discussed in detail the theory behind his allegoresis. It is explicitly founded on a Platonic-Pauline

---

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, *Song of Songs*, trans. and ed. Marvin H. Pope, vol. 7C of *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y., 1977), p. 19: "It is clear that [Akiva] must have understood the Song allegorically."

<sup>30</sup> See Ephraim E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," *Scripta hierosolymitana* 22 (1971): 247-75.

theory of correspondence between the *visible* things of this world and the *invisible* things of God.<sup>31</sup> Origen goes on to say:

So, as we said at the beginning, all the things in the visible category can be related to the invisible, the corporeal to the incorporeal, and the manifest to those that are hidden; so that the creation of the world itself, fashioned in this wise as it is, can be understood through the divine wisdom, which from actual things and copies teaches us things unseen by means of those that are seen, and carries us over from earthly things to heavenly.

But this relationship does not obtain only with creatures; the Divine Scripture itself is written with wisdom of a rather similar sort. Because of certain mystical and hidden things the people is visibly led forth from the terrestrial Egypt and journeys through the desert, where there was a biting serpent, and a scorpion, and thirst, and where all the other happenings took place that are recorded. All these events, as we have said, have the aspects and likenesses of certain hidden things. And you will find this correspondence not only in the Old Testament Scriptures, but also in the actions of Our Lord and Saviour that are related in the Gospels.

If, therefore, in accordance with the principles that we have now established all things that are in the open stand in some sort of relation to others that are hidden, it undoubtedly follows that the visible hart and roe mentioned in the Song of Songs are related to some patterns of incorporeal realities, in accordance with the character borne by their bodily nature. And this must be in such wise that we ought to be able to furnish a fitting interpretation of what is said about the Lord perfecting the harts, by reference to those harts that are unseen and hidden. [SS, p. 223]

Origen's text describes a perfect correspondence between the ontology of the world and that of the text. In both there is an outer shell and an inner meaning. We see accordingly the metaphysical grounding of the allegorical method used by Origen, and indeed by Philo as well.<sup>32</sup> In order for the Scripture to have an "inner meaning," there

---

<sup>31</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, Md., and London, 1957), p. 218; hereafter abbreviated SS. See also Jon Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), p. 63.

<sup>32</sup> Whitman writes that it is "Origen who first conceives of the different kinds of interpretation as a simultaneous tripartite 'depth' within a given passage, rather than simply alternate strategies for various passages" (Whitman, *Allegory*, p. 63). It may be that Origen first articulated such a theory explicitly, but surely Philo denied the literal sense of neither the historical nor legal passages of the Pentateuch while at the same time giving them an allegorical reading.

must be an ontological structure that allows for inner meaning. Allegoresis is thus explicitly founded in a Platonic universe. This Platonic universe is exactly the one in which God is incorporeal, cannot be seen with eyes of flesh, and can only be rendered in language by figures that make Him seem visible to the “eyes of the mind.” In that ontotheology, in order for God to become visible to man He must be transformed, incarnated in flesh. The text, too, is an incarnation in visible language of the invisible things of the world. As R.P. Lawson has pointed out, “If the Logos in His Incarnation is God-Man, so, too, in the mind of Origen the incarnation of the Pneuma in Holy Scripture is divine-human” (*SS*, p. 9). Hermeneutics, then, in this tradition, is an attempt to get behind the visible text to its invisible meaning.

In Rabbinic religion, on the other hand, as we have seen, there is no invisible God manifested in an Incarnation. God Himself is visible (and therefore, corporeal); language is also not divided into a carnal and a spiritual being. Accordingly, there can be no allegory. As we have seen, when the Rabbis read the Song of Songs, they do not translate its “carnal” meaning into one or more “spiritual” senses; rather, they establish a concrete, historical moment in which to contextualize it. If the impulse of Origen is to spiritualize and allegorize physical love quite out of existence in the allegorical reading of the Song, the move of the midrash is to understand the love of God and Israel as an exquisite version of precisely that human erotic love.<sup>33</sup> Reading the Song of Songs as a love dialogue between God and Israel is then no more allegorical than reading it as a love dialogue between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The Song is not connected with an invisible meaning but with the text of the Torah and thus with concrete moments of historical memory.

Meaning does not always show itself, just as God does not always show Himself, and, indeed, there are circumstances in which it is dangerous to see meaning just as it is dangerous to see God, but both

---

<sup>33</sup> For Origen’s views on the body and sexuality, see Peter Brown, “‘I Beseech You: Be Transformed’: Origen,” *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988), pp. 160–77. Denigration of the human body and the body of language are correlated with each other and with the doctrine of the incorporeality of God in Jewish religious history as well. When Judaism accepts the Platonic ontotheology, its reading practices become virtually identical to those of Origen and only the applications differ.



God and meaning are in principle visible. Hermeneutics is a practice of the recovery of vision. That is, it is ideally a practice in which the original moments of the unmediated vision of God's presence can be recovered. We find this model of hermeneutics explicitly thematized in the following story from the midrash on the Song of Songs:

Ben-Azzai was sitting and interpreting [making midrash], and fire was all around him. They went and told Rabbi Akiva, "Rabbi, Ben-Azzai is sitting and interpreting, and fire is burning all around him." He went to him and said to him, "I heard that you were interpreting, and the fire burning all around you." He said, "Indeed." He said, "Perhaps you were engaged in the inner-rooms of the Chariot [theosophical speculation]." He said, "*No. I was sitting and stringing the words of Torah [to each other], and the Torah to the Prophets and the Prophets to the Writings, and the words were as radiant/joyful as when they were given from Sinai, and they were as sweet as at their original giving. Were they not originally given in fire, as it is written, 'And the mountain was burning with fire' (Deut. 4:11)?*" [SSR, p. 42]

In this text, allusions to the Song of Songs are deployed very skillfully in order to describe the experience of midrashic reading. The Rabbi was interpreting the Torah in accordance with the methods of midrash. While doing this, he and the listeners had a visual experience indicating communion with God. Rabbi Akiva becomes suspicious that perhaps his colleague was engaging in forbidden or dangerous theosophical speculation and comes to investigate. He phrases his investigative question in the language of Song of Songs 1:4, "The King brought me into His chambers," the verse that gave rise to the mystical practice known as "being engaged in the inner-rooms of the Chariot." But Ben-Azzai answers that it was not that verse, that is, not a verse and practice that relate to mystical speculation, that brought him into communion with God but rather the application of another verse of the same Song, "Your cheeks are lovely with jewels, your neck with beads" (Song 1:10). The word for beads means that which is strung together into chains. Ben-Azzai's "defense" accordingly is that he was engaged in precisely the same activity as that exemplified by Rabbi Akiva's midrash above—linking "words of the Torah to words of the Holy Writings" as Rabbi Akiva linked the words of Exodus to the words of the Song of Songs. In order to recover the erotic visual communion that obtained between God and Israel at Mount Sinai, Ben-Azzai engages not in a mystical practice but in a hermeneutic one, the practice of midrash. The essential moment of

midrash is the stringing together of parts of the language of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Holy Writings, forming new linguistic strings out of the old, and thereby recovering the originary moment of Revelation itself. This practice is accompanied by the visual experience also beheld at the giving of the Torah and particularly by the appearance of fire. This will be then a hermeneutics of recollected experience and visual perception. It seems that even in that very culture which is simply assumed to worship “an invisible, non-theophanous God,” “the age-old battle between the eye and the ear is far from being decided one way or the other” (“RH,” pp. 308, 323).

## CHAPTER TWO

### “THIS WE KNOW TO BE THE CARNAL ISRAEL”: CIRCUMCISION AND THE EROTIC LIFE OF GOD AND ISRAEL

For the letter kills but the spirit gives life.

—2 Cor. 3:6

*Behold Israel according to the flesh* [1 Cor. 10:18]. This we know to be the carnal Israel; but the Jews do not grasp this meaning and as a result they prove themselves indisputably carnal.

—AUGUSTINE, *Tractatus adversos Judaeos*

When Augustine condemns the Jews to eternal carnality, he draws a direct connection between anthropology and hermeneutics. Because the Jews reject reading “in the spirit,” they are therefore condemned to remain “Israel in the flesh.” Allegory is thus, in his theory, a mode of relating to the body. In another part of the Christian world, Origen also described the failure of the Jews as owing to a literalist hermeneutic, one that is unwilling to go beyond or behind the material language and discover its immaterial spirit.<sup>1</sup> This way of thinking about language had been initially stimulated in the Fathers by Paul’s usage of “in the flesh” and “in the spirit” respectively to mean literal and figurative. Romans 7:5–6 is a powerful example of this hermeneutic structure: “For when we were still in the flesh, our sinful passions, stirred up by the law, were at work on our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are fully freed from the law, dead to that in which we lay captive. We can thus serve in the new being of the Spirit and not the old one of the letter.” In fact, the exact same metaphor is used independently of Paul by Philo, who writes that his interest is in “the hidden and inward meaning which appeals to the few who study soul characteristics rather than bodily forms.”<sup>2</sup> For both, hermeneutics becomes anthropology.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A.S. Worrall (San Francisco, 1989), pp. 107–12.

<sup>2</sup> Philo, *On Abraham*, sec. 147, in vol. 6 of *Philo*, trans. and ed. F.H. Colson

Pauline religion itself should be understood as a contiguous religious-cultural formation with other Hellenistic Judaisme.<sup>3</sup> Among the major supports for such a construction are the similarities between Paul and Philo—similarities that cannot easily be accounted for by assuming influence, since both were active at the same time and in two quite separated places.<sup>4</sup> The affinities between Philo and such texts as the fourth gospel or the Letter to the Hebrews are only slightly less compelling evidence because of the possibility that these texts already know Philo.<sup>5</sup> I take these affinities as *prima facie* evidence for a Hellenistic Jewish cultural koine that undoubtedly varies in many respects but has some common elements throughout the eastern Mediterranean.

Moreover, as Wayne Meeks and others have pointed out, in the first century it is in fact impossible to draw hard and fast lines between Hellenistic and Rabbinic Jews.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the Rabbinic movement *per se* did not yet exist, and on the other, Greek-speaking Jews, like Paul and Flavius Josephus, refer to themselves as Pharisees and, in Paul's case, as a disciple of Rabban Gamaliel, the very leader of the putative proto-Rabbinic party. I am going to suggest, however, that there were tendencies already in the first century that, while not sharply defined, separated Greek speakers more acculturated to Hellenism and Semitic speakers who were less so. These tendencies were, on my hypothesis, to become polarized as time went on, leading

---

(Cambridge, Mass., 1935), p. 75. It is very important to note that Philo himself is just the most visible representative of an entire school of people who understood the Bible, and indeed the philosophy of language, as he did. On this see David Winston, "Philo and the Contemplative Life," in *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Green (New York, 1986–87), pp. 198–231, esp. p. 211.

<sup>3</sup> I am aware that here I am placing myself in the middle of a great contest in the interpretation of Paul. Suffice it to say here that I am cognizant of the different possibilities of reading the Pauline corpus, including in particular the stimulating revisionist reading of Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver, B.C., 1987).

<sup>4</sup> See Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (1966; New York, 1984), and Peder Borgen, "Observations on the Theme 'Paul and Philo': Paul's Preaching of Circumcision in Galatia (Gal. 5:11) and Debates on Circumcision in Philo," in *The Pauline Literature and Theology*, ed. Sigfred Pedersen (ørhush, 1980), pp. 85–102.

<sup>5</sup> See Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (Leiden, 1965), and Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> See Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn., 1983), p. 33.

in the end to a sharp division between hellenizers who became absorbed into Christian groups and antihellenizers who formed the nascent Rabbinic movement. The adoption of Philo exclusively in the Church and the fact that he was ignored by the Rabbis is a sort of allegory of this relationship, by which the Christian movement became widely characterized by its connection with middle and Neoplatonism. In fact, this connection (between Philonic Judaism and Christianity) was realized in antiquity as well, for popular Christian legend had Philo convert to Christianity and even some fairly recent scholarship has attributed some of his works to Christians.<sup>7</sup>

The congruence of Paul and Philo suggests a common background to their thought in the thought-world of the eclectic middle Platonism of Greek-speaking Judaism in the first century.<sup>8</sup> Their allegorical reading practice and that of their intellectual descendants is founded on a binary opposition in which the meaning as a disembodied substance exists prior to its incarnation in language, that is, in a dualistic system in which spirit precedes and is primary over body.<sup>9</sup> Midrash, as a hermeneutic system, seems precisely to refuse that dualism, eschewing the inner-outer, visible-invisible, body-soul dichotomies of allegorical reading. Midrash and Platonic allegory are alternate techniques of the body.

---

<sup>7</sup> See J. Edgar Bruns, "Philo Christianus: The Debris of a Legend," *Harvard Theological Review* 66 (Jan. 1973): 141–45, and John Dillon, preface to *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, the Giants, and Selections*, trans. and ed. Winston (New York, 1981), pp. xi–xii, and pp. 313–14.

<sup>8</sup> See Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*. The notion that Paul has a background in Hellenistic Judaism has been advanced fairly often in the past. It has generally had a pejorative tinge to it, as if only Palestinian Judaism was "authentic," and terms like "lax" or surprisingly enough "coldly legal" are used to describe Paul's alleged Hellenistic environment. Recently this idea has been rightly discarded on the grounds that there is no sharp dividing line between Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism. If we abandon the ex post facto judgments of history, moreover, there is no reason to accept the previous notions of margin and center in the description of late antique Jewish groups, no reason why Philo should be considered less authentic than Rabban Gamaliel. The question of cultural differences between Greek- and Hebrew-speaking Jews can be treated in a different nonjudgmental territory. In that light I find the similarities between Paul and Philo, who could have had no contact with each other whatsoever, very exciting evidence for first century Greek-speaking Jews.

<sup>9</sup> I have limited the scope of this claim to allow for other types of allegory, including such phenomena as Joseph's interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams, as well as an untheorized allegorical tradition in reading Homer. When I use the term *allegory*, therefore, this is to be understood as shorthand for allegoresis of the type we know from Philo on.

*Allegorical and Midrashic Anthropology*

## Philo and the Rabbis on Anthropogeny

For the close and explicit connection between sign theory and anthropology, we need look no further than Philo, who interprets Adam as the mind and Eve as the body, the supplement, the “helper of the soul”: “With the . . . man a helper is associated. To begin with, the helper is a created one, for it says ‘Let us *make* a helper for him’; and, in the next place, is subsequent to him who is to be helped, for He had formed the mind before and is about to form its helper.”<sup>10</sup> The hermeneutic substance of the interpretation therefore thematizes its own method, for the interpretation that makes the distinction between primary substance and secondary form makes itself possible as an interpretation of the relation between Adam and Eve. Put perhaps in simpler language, the interpretation of Adam as spirit and Eve as matter is what makes possible the interpretation of the *story*, the language of the Adam and Eve narrative, as matter to be interpreted by reference to the spirit of its true meaning. Or once more, to reverse the relation, the idea of meaning as pure unity and language as difference is what makes possible the interpretation of Adam as meaning and Eve as language. It is from here that a historical vector begins that will ultimately end up in phallogocentric versus as-a-woman reading.

When we turn, accordingly, to Philo’s interpretation of the creation of woman we will find that it institutes and reproduces his “onto-hermeneutics.” He first establishes the very terms and methods of his interpretive practice: “Now these are no mythical fictions, such as poets and sophists delight in, but modes of making ideas visible, bidding us resort to allegorical interpretation.”<sup>11</sup> For Philo, the story is one of the creation of sense perception and its effects on Adam, who was formerly pure mind:

---

<sup>10</sup> Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis 2, 3*, bk. 2 sec. 5, in vol. 1 of *Philo*, trans. Rev. G. H. Whitaker, ed. Colson and Whitaker (New York, 1929), p. 227; hereafter abbreviated *AI*, bk.: sec.

<sup>11</sup> Philo, *On the Account of the World’s Creation Given by Moses*, sec. 157, in vol. 1 of *Philo*, p. 125.

For it was requisite that the creation of mind should be followed immediately by that of sense-perception, to be a helper and ally to it. Having then finished the creation of the mind He fashions the product of creative skill that comes next to it alike in order and in power, namely active sense-perception. . . . How is it, then, produced? As the prophet himself again says, it is when the mind has fallen asleep. As a matter of fact it is when the mind has gone to sleep that perception begins, for conversely when the mind wakes up perception is quenched. [*AI*, 2:24–25, p. 241]

The creation of sense perception in the state of sleep, while recognized by Philo as a necessity, is profoundly and explicitly unwelcome to him: “But as it is, the change is actually repugnant to me, and many a time when wishing to entertain some fitting thought, I am drenched by a flood of unfitting matters pouring over me” (*AI*, 2:32, pp. 245–47). And then,

“He built it to be a woman” (Gen. ii. 22), proving by this that the most proper and exact name for sense-perception is “woman.” For just as the man shows himself in activity and the woman in passivity, so the province of the mind is activity, and that of the perceptive sense passivity, as in woman. [*AI*, 2:38, p. 249]

And finally, the verse that in the Bible is one of the clearest statements of the acceptance of the fleshliness of human beings, even the celebration of it, becomes for Philo something else entirely:

“For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and the twain shall be one flesh” (Gen. ii. 24). For the sake of sense-perception the Mind, when it has become her slave, abandons both God the Father of the universe, and God’s excellence and wisdom, the Mother of all things, and cleaves to and becomes one with sense-perception and is resolved into sense-perception so that the two become one flesh and one experience. Observe that it is not the woman that cleaves to the man, but conversely the man to the woman, Mind to Sense-perception. For when that which is superior, namely Mind, becomes one with that which is inferior, namely Sense-perception, it resolves itself into the order of flesh which is inferior, into sense-perception, the moving cause of the passions. [*AI*, 2:49–50, pp. 255, 257]

It is easy to see here how for Philo the theory of the body and the theory of language coincide. His allegorical method, which privileges the spiritual sense (“the soul”) is exactly parallel to his anthropological doctrine, which privileges mind over the corporeal. The nexus of allegory and contempt for the senses is tight. In both, a secondary

carnal entity—respectively material signs, woman, the body—is contrasted to a primary, spiritual entity—allegorical meaning, man, mind.

In the Rabbinic formation as well there is a homology between corporeality in language and in anthropology. In order to demonstrate this parallelism, I would like to quote a midrashic version of the creation of man and woman, showing how here also the substance of the interpretation is thematized by its method:

*And God said let us make a human, etc.* Rabbi Yohanan opened:<sup>12</sup> “Behind and before You formed me, and You placed Your hands upon me” (Ps. 139:5). Said Rabbi Yohanan, if a man is righteous, he will enjoy two worlds, for it says, “behind and before You formed me”; but if not, he will have to account for it, for it says, “and You placed Your hands upon me.” Said Rabbi Yermia the son of El’azar: When the Holiness (Be it Blessed) created the first human, He created him androgynous, for it says, “Male and female created He them.” Rabbi Samuel the son of Nahman said: When the Holiness (Be it blessed) created the first human, He made it two-faced, then he sawed it and made a back for this one and a back for that one. They objected to him: but it says, “He took one of his ribs [*tsela*].” He answered [it means], “one of his sides,” similarly to that which is written, “And the side [*tsela*] of the tabernacle” (Exod. 26:20). Rabbi Tanhuma in the name of Rabbi Banayah and Rabbi Berekiah in the name of Rabbi El’azar: He created him as a *golem*, and he was stretched from one end of the world to the other, as it says, “My *golem* which Your eyes have seen.” (Ps. 139:16)<sup>13</sup>

Reading the midrashic text we will see that it also, in its constitution of language and meaning, fits its content as myth of simultaneous origin for the male and the female. Here there is no translation of the text onto another abstract meaning plane, no opposition of the letter, the carnal form of language, to its spirit, its inner, invisible

---

<sup>12</sup> “Opened” is a technical term for the production of a special kind of midrashic discourse before the daily lection from the Torah. It involves the citation of a verse from the prophets or the Hagiographa, which is then shown to be interpretative of the opening verse of the lection (in this case, Ps. 139:5). Its ideological function (in my view) was to demonstrate the interconnectability of all parts of Scripture as a self-glossing text.

<sup>13</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* [Hebrew], ed Jehuda Theodor and Chanoch Albeck, 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1965), 1:54–55. This is the classic and most important midrash on Genesis, and all my examples of Rabbinic interpretation of Genesis will be adduced from this text. As in all midrashic texts, it is a collection of many different sayings from different Rabbis and different periods, edited into a single, multivocal text, in Palestine some time in the fifth century or so. Its closest cultural congeners are, accordingly, the Greek Fathers.



meaning. The entire hermeneutic effort is devoted to working out the concrete details of what happened and specifying them. This is done, moreover, by relating the story in Genesis to another set of material signifiers, namely, Psalms 139, quoted twice in our midrashic text. One verse of the psalm—“Behind and before You formed me, and You placed Your hands upon me”—gives rise to the interpretation of the first human as a two-faced creature later separated into its component parts,<sup>14</sup> while another—“My *golem* which Your eyes have seen”—produces the interpretation of the first created human as an unsexed, undifferentiated embryonic human. The use of these two verses as keys to the interpretation of the events told in Genesis is rendered possible by a hermeneutic theory that sees the Bible as a self-glossing work and hermeneutics as a process of connecting concrete signifiers—not as a process of replacing concrete signifiers with their spiritual meanings.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, in this case it derives from a tradition that reads Psalms 139 as a commentary on the story of Adam. This is shown by the fact that two more verses from the same psalm are also interpreted with reference to Adam later in the same midrash.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, if Philo’s allegory is the restoration of the visible text (body) to its source and origin, to its spiritual, invisible meaning (spirit), midrash is the linking up of text to text to release meaning—without any doctrine of an originary spirit that precedes the body of the language of the Torah. The midrashic text thematizes neither a supplementarity for the woman<sup>17</sup> nor for its own materiality and physicality

---

<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the *Genesis Rabbah* text does not state this explicitly, but it is implicit in the structure of the midrashic text. The whole point of citing Rabbi Yohanan’s interpretation of the verse from Psalms is to chain it to an interpretation of the same verse that will be connected with the first verse of the lection, namely, Genesis 1:27. That connection can only be accomplished if the Psalms verse is indeed the background for Rabbi Yermiah’s statement. Later midrashic texts, which are the earliest and (culturally) closest readers of the midrash, explicitly read the text this way. See, for instance, *Midrash Tanhuma*, ed. S. Buber, 4 vols. (1885; Jerusalem, 1964).

<sup>15</sup> See James L. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven, Conn., 1981), pp. 137–38, which already marked this difference. See also Gerald L. Bruns, “Midrash and Allegory: The Beginnings of Scriptural Interpretation,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), pp. 625–46. Bruns’s description of midrash is fine; what is missing, paradoxically, is precisely some attempt to come to grips with the *differences* between midrash and allegory. This is not to say, of course, that the Fathers did not often read the Bible as self-glossing also.

<sup>16</sup> See *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis*, 1:89, 137–38.

<sup>17</sup> Even those Rabbinic readings that do not interpret the first human as androgy-

as text. Man and woman, body and spirit, language and meaning are inseparably bound together in it from the beginning. It escapes the logic of the supplement entirely because the culture resists the Platonic metaphysics of signification.

Gregory of Nyssa and Midrash on the Manna:  
Allegory and Asceticism

Verna Harrison has shown in a recent paper how in the commentaries of Gregory of Nyssa (a follower of Origen) the discourse of asceticism is coarticulated with allegory. Her discussion of Gregory's interpretation of the manna, when contrasted with the midrashic treatment of this sign, will give us an elegant emblem of the differences between these two formations. The literal interpretation of the manna as physical food had been one of the major bones of contention of the Evangelist against "Jewish" hermeneutic. In analyzing the Father's reading of this contention, Harrison provides us with an exceedingly clear formulation of one way of looking at the nexus between hermeneutics and the body:

For Gregory's primary audience in the ascetic community, where fasting and chastity are highly valued as spiritual practices, biblical texts involving food and sexuality, such as the Manna in the Exodus story and the conjugal love in the Song of Songs, are often pastorally inapplicable in their literal sense. Ascetics can read such materials as Scripture only if they are interpreted in another way. So Gregory finds it appropriate to understand them allegorically.

Moreover, within his broadly Platonic world-view, allegory allows him to transfer the concepts and images of nourishment and intimacy from the material to the intelligible world. In his hands, this deliberate transition from text to interpretation becomes an excellent tool for expressing how the ascetic re-directs natural human desire from bodily pleasures toward God. Exegetical method thus comes to mirror ascetic behavior itself and conversely embodies a redirection of thought which can serve as a model for the corresponding redirection of human drives and activities.<sup>18</sup>

---

nous do not (to the best of my knowledge) ever derive an ontologically secondary or supervenient status for women from her secondary creation. For further discussion see chapter three of my forthcoming book [Carnal Israel].

There is then a perfect fit between the hermeneutics and anthropologies of this system, as we have already observed for Philo. The troping of language from the literal to the figurative—which is called moving from the carnal to the spiritual—exactly parallels the turning of human intention from the desire and pleasure of the body to the desire and pleasure of the soul. Linguistic structure and psychology are thus isomorphic. Even more, I would suggest that this kind of allegorical reading as practiced by this line of Jewish and then Christian Platonists is itself an ascetic practice (and not only a model for one), for the very renunciation of the pleasure of the text, understood as story and about bodies, is itself a turning from corporeal pleasure to spiritual contemplation. This articulation between an allegorical hermeneutic and an ascetical anthropology is brought out particularly clearly with respect to the manna, which is taken as a figure for

the incarnation and perhaps also the Eucharist. Christ is the true food of the soul. However, the fact that the Manna is uncultivated is also interpreted as a reference to the Virgin, who conceives her son without a man's seed. Her womb, empty of any human impregnation, is filled from above with divine life. Like the stomach receiving food, it has become an image of the human person as receptacle. By implication, the ascetic, like Mary, is called to turn away from human relationships so as to be united with God, receiving him within herself. Gregory makes this point explicitly in the treatise *On Virginity*: "What happened corporeally in the case of the immaculate Mary, when the fullness of the divinity shone forth in Christ through her virginity, takes place also in every soul through a virginal existence, although the Lord no longer effects a bodily presence." ["AA"]

We observe here another moment that will be increasingly important in the analysis: the move of allegoresis from the historical specificity of events to an unchanging ontology. Manna, literally the record of real, corporeal, historical events that took place among a specific people, becomes transformed into the sign of an eternally possible fulfillment for every-man's soul. Accordingly, the analogy drawn between the human body—and its corporeal needs, pleasures, and desires—and the soul, on the one hand, and fleshly language versus spiritual,

---

<sup>18</sup> Verna E.F. Harrison, "Allegory and Asceticism in Gregory of Nyssa," paper presented at Society of Biblical Literature convention, New Orleans, Nov. 1990; hereafter abbreviated "AA."

allegorical meaning on the other, becomes a perfect vehicle for the transcendence of the physical, bodily life that is required to transform Judaism from the cult of a tribe to a world-cultural system.<sup>19</sup>

For the Rabbis of the midrash, the manna is the literal record of a corporeal food, miraculously given to this people Israel at a particular moment in history. To be sure, it was wonderful food, protean in taste, wondrous in odor and color, miraculous in its exact measure, and distinguished from all other food in that it was perfectly absorbed by the body so that there was no bodily waste. But it was food, not an allegorical sign of something spiritual. As such, it remains a sign of corporeality. Insistence on the literal, corporeal concreteness of the manna constitutes for the Rabbinic formation a claim that the physical, historical existence of Israel in the world remains the ontologically significant moment. There is, accordingly, a perfect homology between the sign theory or hermeneutics and anthropology of the Rabbis, as there is for the dualist Jews and Fathers as well. For the Rabbis, for whom significance is invested directly in visible, tangible, corporeal bodies in the world, the generating human body, the tribe, its genealogy and concrete history, and its particular physical, corporeal practices are supremely valued. This is, of course, a point of view that neither the more cosmopolitan Jews—like Philo—nor Christianity could tolerate. Both took advantage of a dualistic ontology to solve the cultural problem. For the less radical Philo, the body remained significant but was significantly downgraded vis-à-vis the spirit, both the body of sexuality and the body of language/history. Both the carnal and the spiritual were meaningful, but in a severely hierarchical way. For the more radical Paul and most of the Fathers, the body was devalued much more completely, retaining significance primarily as a pointer to spirit and the spiritual/universal sense.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> See Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), p. 5. Jaeger makes the point there that Johann Gustav Droysen, the “discoverer” of Hellenism, was motivated by the desire to explain how Christianity became a world religion!

<sup>20</sup> Implied here is a particular reading of Paul on the Torah and the Commandments that will be expanded later in the text. I take the sacraments to be a reproduction of the original *mysterion* of the incarnation, however, so resurrection in the flesh is problematic for me. See John G. Gager, “Body-Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection,

### God's Kisses: Origen and Midrash on the Song of Songs 1:2

Another excellent example of this hermeneutic of the body can be found in Origen. For this Father, words stand in a relation of correspondence to ideas that are immaterial and imperceptible. Although Origen's work on the Song of Songs has been shown to have close thematic affinities with the interpretations of the midrash,<sup>21</sup> his linguistic strategies are nearly opposite to them. In excess of Philo, for whom the flesh (and fleshly language) are understood as necessary helpers to the spirit (and the allegorical meaning), for Origen the carnal and the spiritual meanings do not parallel each other but are actually opposed, as the body is opposed to the soul. In Ann Astel's vivid formulation,

achieving the intensity of an erotic love for God depends, moreover, on the sublimation of every bodily desire—even, in Origen's own case, at the cost of self-castration. . . . The mark of a perfect soul is precisely this power "to forsake things bodily and visible and to hasten to those that are not of the body and are spiritual."

Origen's method of exegesis, then, directly parallels the process of mystical marriage which is the Song's secret subject. Even as the exegete moves away from the *Canticum's* literal, carnal meaning to its *sensus interioris*, the bridal soul, renouncing what is earthly, reaches out for the invisible and eternal. . . . An almost violent departure from the body itself and from literal meaning energizes the soul's ascent. To pass beyond the literal, carnal *sensus* is to escape the prisonhouse of the flesh.<sup>22</sup>

For Origen the very process of allegorical interpretation constitutes *in itself and already* a transcendence of the flesh. Accordingly the divine kiss is understood by him to refer to the experience of the soul, "when she has begun to discern for herself what was obscure, to unravel what was tangled, to unfold what was involved, to interpret parables and riddles and the sayings of the wise along the lines of her own expert thinking."<sup>23</sup> Since in Origen's Platonism the world of spirit is

---

Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity," *Religion* 12 (Oct. 1982): 345–64, for a very important discussion of this issue.

<sup>21</sup> See Ephraim E. Urbach, "The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-Literature*, ed. Joseph Heinemann and Dov Noy, vol. 22 of *Scripta hierosolymitana* (Jerusalem, 1971): 247–75.

<sup>22</sup> Ann W. Astel, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990), p. 3; hereafter abbreviated SS.

<sup>23</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies*, trans. and ed. R.P. Lawson (Westminster, Md., 1957), p. 61, quoted in SS, pp. 3–4.

the world of the intelligible, for him “intellection and loving are one and the same” (*SS*, p. 4),<sup>24</sup> and the discovery of the true and pure spiritual meaning behind or trapped in the carnal words constitutes the divine kiss. It enacts that “overcoming carnal desire [that] ultimately enables the soul to return to its original state and become once more a *mens*” (*ibid.*).<sup>25</sup>

In the midrash on Song of Songs 1:2, this very kiss is understood quite differently, albeit still as divine. In Origen, the erotic meanings of the kiss in the first verse of the Song, “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” are sublimated into intellection because of his doctrine that the body is a sign of the fall of the soul from God and must be transcended to be reunited with Him. In the midrash it is that very body, the actual mouth, that experiences God’s kiss:

*He will kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.* Said Rabbi Yohanan, “An angel would take the Speech from the Holy, Blessed One, each and every word, and court every member of Israel and say to him: Do you accept this Speech? It has such and such many requirements, and such and such many punishments, such and such many matters which are forbidden, and such and such many acts which are mandatory, such and such many easy and difficult actions, and such and such is the reward for fulfilling it. And the Israelite would say to him: Yes. And then he would further say to him: Do you accept the Divinity of the Holy, Blessed One? And he would answer him: Yes and again yes. Immediately, he would kiss him on his mouth, as it is written, ‘You have been made to see in order to know’ (Deut. 4:35)—by means of a messenger.”<sup>26</sup>

The erotic connotations, overtones, and charges of this description of divine revelation (even the prefiguration of Molly Bloom), as it was

<sup>24</sup> See also Gerard E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> For a related account of allegory in Augustine, which is nevertheless interestingly different, see Jon Whitman, “From the Textual to the Temporal: Early Christian ‘Allegory’ and Early Romantic ‘Symbol,’” *New Literary History* 22 (Winter 1991): 161–76, esp. p. 166.

<sup>26</sup> *Song of Songs Rabbah* [Hebrew], ed. Shimson Dunsky (Tel Aviv, 1980), p. 13; hereafter abbreviated *SSR*. By translating the Hebrew word *mehazzer* as *court* in the first sentence, I may be loading the dice in the direction of eroticism; however I do not think so. *Mehazzer*, while it may mean generally to attempt to persuade someone to do something, very often has the sense of persuading someone to marry one. Given the explicit eroticism of the context, therefore, I think this is the most adequate translation.

experienced by each and every Israelite, are as blunt as could be imagined.<sup>27</sup> Rabbi Yohanan explicitly connects this kiss with the visual experience of seeing God, also a powerful erotic image.<sup>28</sup> These erotic implications were to be most fully developed in the midrashic (and later mystical) readings of the rite of circumcision. In those readings, the performance of that rite was understood as a necessary condition for divine-human erotic encounter—for seeing God.<sup>29</sup>

The medieval Jewish mystics speak of a “Covenant of the Mouth” and a “Covenant of the Foreskin,” thus suggesting a symbolic connection between mouth and penis, between sexual and mystical experience.<sup>30</sup> The homology is already implied in the Torah itself, for there Moses is spoken of as “uncircumcised of the lips” (Exod. 6:30).<sup>31</sup> This analogy suggested to the Rabbis an extraordinary reading of circumcision as a necessary condition for divine revelation, whether oral or visual. Indeed, it is in the matter of circumcision that the midrashic tradition had from the beginning most sharply split from the Jewish-Platonic hermeneutic tradition.

Philo’s longest discussion of circumcision is in *On the Special Laws*, a tract whose name reveals what I take to be a common concern among such personalities as the author of *The Wisdom of Solomon*, Philo, and Paul; that is, the specialness of Jewish rites and the ways that these mark off the Jews from others.<sup>32</sup> Circumcision is, in a sense, chief among these, and by Philo’s own testimony ridiculed in his envi-

---

<sup>27</sup> Although, to be sure, a very late glossator has added the words, “It didn’t really happen so, but he made them hallucinate it” (*SSR*, p. 13 n. 4).

<sup>28</sup> See Daniel Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic,” *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Spring 1990): 532–50.

<sup>29</sup> The gender implications of this do not escape me and will be treated (to the extent that I am able) below.

<sup>30</sup> Compare the interpretations of this homology cited in Elliot R. Wolfson, “Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol,” *History of Religions* 27 (Nov. 1987): 189–215, esp. pp. 207–11; hereafter abbreviated “CV.”

<sup>31</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz offered another reading of this in “The Nakedness of a Woman’s Voice, the Pleasure in a Man’s Mouth: An Oral History of Ancient Judaism,” paper presented at the Annenberg Research Institute’s colloquium on “Women in Religion and Society,” Philadelphia, 6 May 1991.

<sup>32</sup> See Richard D. Hecht, “The Exegetical Contexts of Philo’s Interpretation of Circumcision,” in *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, ed. Frederick E. Greenspan, Earle Hilgert, and Burton L. Mack (Chico, Calif., 1984), pp. 51–79.

ronment.<sup>33</sup> Philo offers four standard explanations and defenses of the practice, all of which promote rational and universal reasons for being circumcised. In fact, Philo emphasizes that the Egyptians are also circumcised.<sup>34</sup> Finally, he offers in his own name two “symbolic” [*symbolon* (*OSL*, bk. 1, 7:105)] readings of circumcision. The explanation most relevant for us is the first, namely,

the excision of pleasures which bewitch the mind. For since among the love-lures of pleasure the palm is held by the mating of man and woman, the legislators thought good to dock the organ which ministers to such intercourse, thus making circumcision the figure of the excision of excessive and superfluous pleasure, not only of one pleasure but of all the other pleasures signified by one, and that the most imperious. [*OSL*, bk. 1, 7:105]<sup>35</sup>

For Philo, “the flesh of the foreskin [symbolizes] those sense-pleasures and impulses which afterwards come to the body.”<sup>36</sup> What we see, then, in Philo is a typical middle Platonist interpretation of the meaning of circumcision. It is middle Platonist both in its form and in its substance: in its form because it is allegorical in structure and in its substance because it is ascetic in content.<sup>37</sup> Once again the nexus of these two moments is demonstrated. Philo, however, typically berates

---

<sup>33</sup> See Philo, *On the Special Laws*, trans. Colson, in vols. 7 and 8 of *Philo*, esp. bk. 1, 7:101; hereafter abbreviated *OSL*.

<sup>34</sup> The circumcision of the Egyptians appears in a very early (late first century) polemic against “The Jews,” *The Epistle of Barnabas* (9:6), where the author writes, “But you will say: ‘But surely the people were circumcised as a seal!’ But every Syrian and Arab and all the idol-worshipping priests are circumcised; does this mean that they, too, belong to their covenant? Why, even the Egyptians practice circumcision!” (*The Epistle of Barnabas* [9:6], *The Apostolic Fathers*, rev. ed., trans. J.B. Lightfoot and J.R. Harmer, ed. Michael W. Holmes [Grand Rapids, Mich., 1989], p. 174). What was a defense in Philo’s apology for Judaism vis-à-vis “pagans,” becomes an attack in this apology for Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism.

<sup>35</sup> Philo’s second interpretation is also fascinating. He writes: “The other reason is that a man should know himself and banish from the soul the grievous malady of conceit. For there are some who have prided themselves on their power of fashioning as with a sculptor’s cunning the fairest of creatures, man, and in their braggart pride assumed godship, closing their eyes to the Cause of all that comes into being, though they might find in their familiars a corrective for their delusion. For in their midst are many men incapable of begetting and many women barren, whose matings are ineffective and who grow old childless. The evil belief, therefore, needs to be excised from the mind with any others that are not loyal to God.” [*OSL*, bk. 1, 7:105, 107]

<sup>36</sup> Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, bk. 3 sec. 52, supp. 1 of *Philo*, trans. Ralph Marcus (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 253.

<sup>37</sup> In content, if not in form, Moses Maimonides’s interpretation of the function



those who, having a proper understanding of the meaning of circumcision, ignore the physical observance of the rite.<sup>38</sup>

Paul goes much farther than Philo in a radical reinterpretation of circumcision. Where Philo argued that circumcision both symbolizes and effects the excision of the passions—that is, it symbolizes the reduction of all passion by effecting in the flesh of the penis a reduction of sexual passion—Paul “ties the removal of the fleshly desires exclusively to the believer’s crucifixion with Christ.”<sup>39</sup> Since he allegorically interpreted circumcision as the outer sign performed in the flesh of an inner circumcision of the spirit, therefore, I would claim that circumcision was for Paul replaced by its spiritual signified. Once again, as in the case of Gregory, the thematics and the form of an allegorical reading perfectly double each other, for the transfer from a “carnal” meaning of the language to a “spiritual” one exactly parallels the transfer from a corporeal practice to a spiritual transformation. Paul returns again and again to this theme, most clearly in such passages as the following:

Circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law; but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. [Rom. 2:25–29]

Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-workers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put not confidence in the flesh. [Phil. 3:2–3]<sup>40</sup>

---

of circumcision is very similar to Philo’s. According to him, it was instituted “to bring about a decrease in sexual intercourse and a weakening of the organ in question, so that this activity be diminished and the organ be in as quiet a state as possible” (Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. and ed. Shlomo Pines [Chicago, 1963], p. 609). It is fascinating to see how the influence of Greek philosophical attitudes produces the same results in Jews as unconnected as Philo and Maimonides.

<sup>38</sup> See Borgen, “Observations on the Theme ‘Paul and Philo,’” p. 86, and John J. Collins, “A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century,” in *“To See Ourselves As Others See Us”*: Christians, Jews, “Others” in Late Antiquity, ed. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, Calif., 1985), pp. 163–86.

<sup>39</sup> Borgen, “Observations on the Theme ‘Paul and Philo,’” p. 99.

<sup>40</sup> See also Gal. 6:11–17 and Col. 2:11: “In him also you were circumcised with

If the Romans passage were only an attack on hypocritical Jews who keep public commandments and ignore private ones, there would be nothing new in his doctrine at all. He would be a preacher continuing in the prophetic tradition, which we have no reason to doubt was continued in his day. No prophetic or pharisaic preacher, however, could produce an *opposition* between circumcision and the Commandments. Circumcision is one of the Commandments. What is new, then, in Paul's teaching on circumcision, is the opposition between some practices that are in the flesh and others that have to do with the spirit, that is, in the Platonistic organization of the opposition between that which is kept and that which is rejected by such Jews.<sup>41</sup> When Paul says "matter of the heart," he echoes Jeremiah; when he says "spiritual and not literal," he echoes Plato.<sup>42</sup> Paul goes farther than Philo in his explicit and repeated statements that the significance of the physical practice of circumcision is canceled by its spiritual meaning, "for in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

---

a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ." I do not quote this passage in the text because the attribution of this letter to Paul is in dispute.

<sup>41</sup> On this reading, the Romans passage is less of an embarrassment to a consistent reading of Paul as having held that spiritual meanings replace physical rites. See Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York, 1983), p. 204.

<sup>42</sup> Borgen produces a somewhat similar interpretation: "In this way we see that Paul has as background the Jewish dualism between a life in (pagan) passions and desires, and a life under the Law of Moses. He replaces this dualism, however, by the dualism between a life in (pagan) passions and desires and a life in the power of the eschatological Spirit."

As a result, if a person in this eschatological situation still claims that one has to live under the Law of Moses, he comes in conflict with the eschatological reality of the Spirit. In this way those who still cling to the works of the Law of Moses are with logical consequence pushed together with those who live in (pagan) passions, since both categories oppose Christ and the life of the Spirit. Thus, Paul's thinking moves from the idea of (pagan) fleshly desires to life under the Law also being flesh, since man in both cases puts his trust in man's effort and boasting (6:12-13), and not in the cross of Christ. [Borgen, "Observations on the Theme of 'Paul and Philo,'" p. 98]

### The Dialogue of Justin Martyr and the Jew Trypho on Circumcision

While there is scholarly doubt as to Paul's intentions with regard to circumcision, there is none whatever about the intentions of his earliest readers. They certainly understood him to be abrogating circumcision as the transcendable physical sign of an inner and invisible spiritual transformation. A remarkable text of the early second century will help us to appreciate the interactions between Jews and Christians (by this time we can and must speak of Jews and Christians) on the question of circumcision and its correlation with other issues of corporeality. I am referring to the famous *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*, perhaps the last occasion in late antiquity when something like a true dialogue between the two communities would be produced, that is, a dialogue in which the Jew is not merely a trope but a speaking subject.<sup>43</sup> Trypho quite eloquently represents the puzzlement of a Rabbinic Jew confronted with such a different pattern of religion:

But this is what we are most at a loss about: that you, professing to be pious, and supposing yourselves better than others, are not in any particular separated from them, and do not alter your mode of living from the nations, in that you observe no festivals or sabbaths, and do not have the rite of circumcision.<sup>44</sup>

In a word, we have here the true cultural issue dividing Christians and Jews, certainly by the second century and, I think, already in the first: the significance of bodily filiation, membership in a kin-group for religious life.<sup>45</sup> As long as participation in the religious community

---

<sup>43</sup> See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 1 of *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100–600)*, 5 vols. (Chicago, 1971–89), 1:15, and Robert S. MacLennan, *Early Christian Texts on Jews and Judaism* (Atlanta, 1990), pp. 53, 85–88. MacLennan's book is a most important summary of and contribution to our understanding of Justin's text and its background, and contains a rich bibliography on Justin (p. 49 n. 2). I do not cite it extensively here because I am focussing on only a small part of the text. It is important to note that Justin himself does not cite Paul explicitly. However, MacLennan notes the similarity of their expression on the issue that concerns us here (see pp. 74–75).

<sup>44</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, trans. and ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 10 vols. (1885; Grand Rapids, Mich., 1980–83), 1:199; hereafter abbreviated *DJ*.

<sup>45</sup> See *The Epistle of Barnabas*, p. 174.

is tied to those rites that are special, performed by and marked in the body, the religion remains an affair of a particular tribal group, “Israel in the flesh.”<sup>46</sup> The near obsession with circumcision in all of these people is not to be explained in the difficulty of the performance of the rite but in that it is the most complete sign of the connection of the Torah to the concrete body of Israel. People of late antiquity were willing to do many extreme and painful things for religion. It is absurd to imagine that circumcision would have stood in the way of conversion for people who were willing to undergo fasts, the lives of anchorites, martyrdom, and even occasionally castration for the sake of God.<sup>47</sup> And so Justin answers Trypho:

For we too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the Sabbaths, and in short all the feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined you,—namely, on account of your transgressions and the hardness of your hearts. For if we patiently endure all things contrived against us by wicked men and demons, so that even amid cruelties unutterable, death and torments, we pray for mercy to those who inflict such things upon us, and do not wish to give the least retort to any one, even as the new Lawgiver commanded us: how is it, Trypho, that we would not observe those rites which do not harm us,—I speak of fleshly circumcision, and Sabbaths, and feasts. [*DJ*, p. 203]

The crucial issue dividing Judaism from Christianity is, as I am claiming throughout this work, the relation to the body as a signifier of corporeal existence in all of its manifestations, and here in particular to its status as a signifier of belonging to a particular kin-group.<sup>48</sup> The dualism of body and spirit in anthropological terms transferred to the realm of language and interpretation provides the perfect vehicle for this carnal signification to be transcended. Justin repeats accordingly the gesture of Philo in understanding the corporeal rites, the holidays, the Sabbath, and circumcision as being “symbols” of spiritual

---

<sup>46</sup> See also the very helpful remarks in Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis*, pp. 17–18 and 51–60 on the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in Paul and Origen.

<sup>47</sup> On this reason for castration, see *ibid.*, pp. 60–62.

<sup>48</sup> This should not be understood as an analogical relationship—that is, of the body of the individual and the social body—but as an actual implication. If I am my body, then I am ontologically filiated with other bodies. The move from family to “nation” or “race” is, however, accomplished via the myth of origin of the cultural group in a single progenitor. For the close connection between “race,” filiation, and even place, see the quotation from Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus* that serves as the epigraph to the final section of this paper.

transformations (*DJ*, p. 201), again exceeding Philo, of course, in that for Philo the corporeal existence of the signifier was still crucially relevant, while for Justin it has been completely superseded:

For the law promulgated on Horeb is now old, and belongs to yourselves alone; but *this* is for all universally. . . . For the true spiritual Israel, and the descendants of Judah, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham (who in uncircumcision was approved of and blessed by God on account of his faith, and called the father of many nations), are we who have been led to God through this crucified Christ. [*DJ*, p. 200]

If, however, the allegorization of the Commandments on the part of a Christian like Justin creates the attractive possibility of a universalizing discourse, it also contains, perhaps inevitably, the seeds of a discourse of contempt for the Jews:

For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem. [*DJ*, p. 202]

The critique of one kind of particularism leads to one of another sort that threatens ideologically and in practice to allegorize the Jews out of existence. On the one hand Justin argues that Abel, Noah, Lot, and Melchizedek, all uncircumcised, were pleasing to God (a message of universalism), but on the other, “to you alone this circumcision was necessary, in order that the people may be no people, and the nation no nation” (*DJ*, p. 204). I would read, then, the resistance to dualism and any allegorization so typical of Rabbinic Judaism from the second century until perhaps the seventh as a gesture of self-protection.<sup>49</sup> The Rabbis and their flocks are saying: We will continue to exist corporeally, in our bodily practices, the practices that are our legacy from our carnal filiation and bodily history, and will not be interpreted out of fleshly existence.

---

<sup>49</sup> See Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, p. 289.

“From my flesh I will see God”

The Rabbinic interpretations of circumcision focussed strongly, of course, on the physical rite itself and the inscription that it made on the body. In their writings, this mark of natural or naturalized membership in a particular people is made the center of salvation. As early Christian writings are most strongly read as a critique of the corporeality of Judaism, with its emphasis on the physical practices of a particular tribe, so, I would claim, are the midrashic writings most strongly read as a critique of the deracination of historicity, physicality, and carnal filiation that characterizes Christianity. In midrashic interpretation of circumcision as well, there is a perfect homology between the form and content of the interpretation. The following text is exemplary:

All Israelites who are circumcised will come into Paradise, for the Holy Blessed One placed His name on Israel, in order that they might come into Paradise, and What is the name and the seal which He placed upon them? It is ShaDaY. The Shi”n [the first letter of the root], he placed in the nose, The Dale”t, He placed in the hand, and the Yo”d in the circumcision.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to Paul and his followers, for whom the interpretation of circumcision was a rejection of the body, for the Rabbis of the midrash it is a sign of the sanctification of that very physical body; the cut in the penis completes the inscription of God’s name on the body.<sup>51</sup> It speaks of circumcision as a transformation of the body into a holy object.

Some of the Rabbis, moreover, read circumcision as a necessary preparation for seeing God, the *summum bonum* of late antique religious life.<sup>52</sup> This is, of course, an entirely different hermeneutic structure from Platonic allegorizing because, although a spiritual meaning is assigned to the corporeal act, the corporeal act is not the signifier of that meaning but its very constitution. That is, circumcision here is not the sign of something happening in the spirit of the Jew, but it

---

<sup>50</sup> *Midrash Tanhuma* 14; quoted in Wolfson, “Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study in the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (July–Oct. 1987): 78.

<sup>51</sup> Although obviously circumcision only affects the male body, I shall suggest below that its symbolism did not entirely exclude females.

<sup>52</sup> See Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah.”

is the very event itself—and it is, of course, in his body.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere, for the Rabbinic formation, this seeing of God was not understood as the spiritual vision of a Platonic eye of the mind, but as the physical seeing of fleshly eyes at a real moment in history.<sup>54</sup> Thus, even when it spiritualizes, the Rabbinic tradition does so entirely through the body. Spirit here is an aspect of body, almost, I would say, the same spirit that experiences the pleasure of sex through the body, and not something apart from, beyond, or above the body.

Elliot Wolfson has gathered the Rabbinic (and later) material connecting circumcision with vision of God:

It is written, “This, after my skin will have been peeled off, but from my flesh, I will see God” (Job 19:26). Abraham said, after I circumcised myself many converts came to cleave to this sign. “But from my flesh, I will see God,” for had I not done this [circumcised myself], on what account would the Holy Blessed One, have appeared to me? “And the Lord appeared to him.”<sup>55</sup>

As Wolfson correctly observes there are two hermeneutic moves being made simultaneously in this midrash (see “CV,” pp. 192–93). The first involves the interpretation of Genesis 17:1–14, which is the description of Abraham’s circumcision, and Genesis 18:1 (and following), which begins, “And the Lord appeared to Abraham in Elone Mamre.” The midrash, following its usual canons of interpretation, attributes a strong causal nexus to these events following on one another. Had Abraham not circumcised himself, God would not have appeared to him. This interpretation is splendidly confirmed by the verse from Job. The Book of Job, together with the other Holy Writings, was considered by the Rabbis to be an exegetical text that has the function of interpreting (or guiding interpretation of) the Torah.<sup>56</sup> In this

---

<sup>53</sup> Here, of course, only *his* is possible. Circumcision is accordingly a very problematic moment in the constitution of gens and gender from my feminist point of view. All I can do, it seems to me at present, is record that problematic. See, however, “CV,” p. 191 n. 5.

<sup>54</sup> See Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah.” Justin Martyr provides an excellent example of a late antique Platonic version of seeing God with the mind’s eye (see *DJ*, p. 196).

<sup>55</sup> *Midrash Rabbah: Genesis* 48:1, 48:9; cited in “CV,” p. 192. Much of the following section is dependent on the material that Wolfson has gathered in the two papers cited above.

<sup>56</sup> See Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

case, the verse of Job, which refers to the peeling off of skin, is taken by a brilliant appropriation to refer to the peeling off of the skin of circumcision, and the continuation of the verse that speaks of seeing God from one's flesh is taken as a reference to the theophany at Elone Mamre. The reading of the sequence of the Torah's text is confirmed by the explicit causality that the Job text inscribes.<sup>57</sup> Circumcision of the flesh—peeling of the skin—provides the vision of God. As Wolfson remarks, this midrash constitutes an interpretation of circumcision that directly counters the Pauline one: "The emphasis on Abraham's circumcision . . . can only be seen as a tacit rejection of the Christian position that circumcision of the flesh had been replaced by circumcision of the spirit (enacted in baptism)" ("CV," p. 194). It is, of course, this very moment of the refusal of allegorization on the part of the Rabbis, their explicit resistance to being allegorized, that so provoked the Fathers and Augustine in particular. Yet from this passage we see as well that the characterization of Rabbinic Judaism as being unconcerned with spiritual experience is unwarranted. The physical act of circumcision *in the flesh*, which prepares the male Jew for sexual intercourse, is also that which prepares him for divine intercourse. It is difficult, therefore, to escape the association of sexual and mystical experience in this text.

The strongly eroticized character of the experience of seeing God established by the interpretation of circumcision is made virtually explicit in another (later) midrashic text, also cited by Wolfson, on Song of Songs 3:11:

*O, Daughters of Zion, go forth, and gaze upon King Solomon, wearing the crown that his mother made for him on his wedding day, on his day of bliss.* It speaks about the time when the Presence rested in the Tabernacle. "Go forth and gaze," as it is said, "And all the people saw and shouted and fell on their faces" (Lev. 9:24). "The daughters of Zion," those who were distinguished by circumcision, for if they were uncircumcised they would not have been able to look upon the Presence. . . . And thus it says, "Moses said, This is the thing which the Lord has commanded that you do, in order that the Glory of the Lord may appear to you" (Lev. 9:6). What was "this thing"? He told them about circumcision, for it says, "This is the thing which caused Joshua to perform circumcision" (Josh. 5:4).

"Which God commanded Abraham to do" (Gen. ?). It may be

---

<sup>57</sup> For an almost identical use of Job, see *ibid.*, p. 86.



compared to a shopkeeper who has a friend who is a priest. He had something unclean in his house, and he wanted to bring the priest into the house. The priest said to him: If you want me to go into your house, listen to me and remove that unclean thing from your house. When the shopkeeper knew that there was no unclean thing there, he went and brought the priest into his house. Similarly, the Holy, Blessed One, when He wanted to appear to Abraham, His beloved, the foreskin was appended to him. When he circumcised himself, immediately, He was revealed, as it says, “On that very day Abraham was circumcised” (Gen. 17:26), and immediately afterward “The Lord appeared to him” (Gen. 18:1).

Therefore, Moses said to them, God commanded Abraham, your father, to perform circumcision when He wished to appear to him. So in your case, whoever is uncircumcised, let him go out and circumcise himself, “that the Glory of the Lord may appear to you” (Lev. 9:6). Thus Solomon said, “O Daughters of Zion, go forth and gaze upon King Solomon,” the King who desires those who are perfect, as it is written, “Walk before Me and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1), for the foreskin is a blemish upon the body.<sup>58</sup>

This is indeed a remarkable text, not least for the blurring of gender that it encodes in its interpretive moves. The verse in question is also historicized, which is consistent with the entire midrashic enterprise of interpreting the Song of Songs. It is taken to refer to the event described in Leviticus 9, in which the entire People of Israel had a marvelous vision of God. This event is interpreted as a wedding between God and Israel, as are other moments of revelatory vision of God, such as the hierophany at Mount Sinai. The verse of Song of Songs that refers to King Solomon’s wedding is taken, then, as an interpretation of the wedding between God and Israel described in Leviticus. This, however, is where the complications begin. By a typical midrashic pun, King Solomon [*Schelomoh*] is turned into God, the king who requires perfection [*Schelemut*]. If the male partner is God, then the female partner must be Israel. Accordingly, the “Daughters of Zion” are Israel. But this also results in a gender paradox, for many of the Israelites who participated in that divine vision were men. Those very Daughters of Zion are accordingly understood as males. The word *Zion* [Hebrew *Tsiyyon*] is taken as a noun derived from the root *ts/y/n* [to be marked], and accordingly the Daughters of Tsiyyon are read as the circumcised men of Israel.

Now I would like to suggest that more than midrashic arbitrariness

---

<sup>58</sup> *Numbers Rabbah* 12:10 (Tel Aviv, 1960); also quoted in “CV,” pp. 196–97.

is at work here, for the mystical experience *au fond*, when experienced erotically often involves (perhaps only in the West) gender paradox. The mystical experience is interpreted as a penetration by the divine word or spirit into the body and soul of the adept. This is accordingly an image of sexuality in which the mystic is figured as the female partner. This paradoxical gender assignment (when the mystic is biologically male) is a problem for erotic mystic imagery.<sup>59</sup> Harrison has described a similar issue in the work of Gregory of Nyssa:

When the human receptacle is described allegorically in terms of sexuality, it has to be represented as female. It is no accident that in his first work, *On Virginity*, and in one of his last, the great *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Gregory chooses feminine language to speak of the human person, especially in describing our relations with God, which for him are the definitive aspect of human identity and existence. . . . In the treatise *On Those Who Have Fallen Asleep*, he speculates that in the resurrection human reproductive faculties may be transformed into a capacity to become impregnated with life from God and bring forth various forms of goodness from within oneself. This suggests that although human persons can be either male or female in this world and will be neither male nor female in the next (cf. Gal. 3:28), on a different level they all relate to God in a female way, as bride to Bridegroom. ["AA"]

My perhaps too bold suggestion is that our midrashic text is related to the same paradox of mystical experience. Circumcision is understood by the midrash as feminizing the male, thus making him open to receive the divine speech and vision of God. My interpretation of this midrash is that of medieval mystics (see "CV," pp. 198 ff.): "Rabbi Yose said, Why is it written, 'And the Lord will pass over the door [literally opening]' (Exod. 12:23)? . . . 'Over the opening,' read it literally as 'opening!' That is, the opening of the body. And what is the opening of the body? That is the circumcision."<sup>60</sup> Although this text is a pseudepigraph of the thirteenth century, I am suggesting that the

<sup>59</sup> See Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Nakedness of a Woman's Voice, the Pleasure in a Man's Mouth."

<sup>60</sup> *Zohar*, 2:36a; quoted in "CV," p. 204. As Wolfson so persuasively demonstrates, however, the dominant kabbalistic trend was to understand the mystic as male and the divine element that he encountered as female, the *shekhina*, or even the Torah represented as female, and then the circumcision was necessary for penetration of this female, just as it is required for human sexual intercourse (see "CV," pp. 210–11). For the Rabbis (of the premedieval period), such a divine female as a solution to the paradox of mystical gender was excluded and only feminization of the male mystic was possible.

idea is already embryonic in the midrashic text, in which circumcised men are “daughters.” The mystic pseudepigraph would then be making explicit that which is implicit in the earlier formation. This interpretation can be supported as well by various Rabbinic texts that refer to the Torah as feminizing its devotees.<sup>61</sup>

There is further important support for this notion from the reading of the famous verse of Ezekiel (16:6) in which Israel is figured as a female child.<sup>62</sup> God says to her, “I found you weltering in your blood,” and blesses her, “Live in your blood.” This blood is interpreted in Rabbinic literature as the blood of circumcision!<sup>63</sup> This displacement involves very complicated semiotic transactions. Israel is a female partner with respect to God, but many of the adepts in Israel are male. An event must take place in their bodies that will enable them to take the position of the female, and that event is circumcision. Ezekiel’s metaphor of “weltering” in one’s blood becomes the vehicle for a transformation of male blood into female blood and thus of male Israelites into female, precisely in the way that the circumcised men of Israel become “Daughters of Zion.” This transformation is still powerfully enacted at the ritual level today, when at a traditional circumcision ceremony the newly circumcised boy is addressed: “And I say to you [feminine pronoun!]: In your [feminine] blood, you [feminine] shall live.” These texts strongly suggest the possibility that circumcision was understood somehow as rendering the male somewhat feminine, thus making it possible for the male Israelite to have communion with a male deity.<sup>64</sup> In direct contrast to Roman accusations that circumcision was a mutilation of the body that made men ugly, the Rabbinic texts emphasize over and over that the operation removes something ugly from the male body.

A possible consequence of this interpretation, in particular the

---

<sup>61</sup> See also Eilberg-Schwartz, “The Nakedness of a Woman’s Voice, the Pleasure in a Man’s Mouth.”

<sup>62</sup> Howard Eilberg-Schwartz reminded me of the importance of this passage in this context.

<sup>63</sup> This interpretation occurs so frequently that it can be regarded as almost a *topos*.

<sup>64</sup> One could, of course, read this in the opposite way, namely, that there is here an arrogation of a female symbol that makes it male, and that circumcision is a male erasure of the female role in procreation as well. I am not trying to discredit such an interpretation but rather to suggest an alternate reading, both of which may be functioning in the culture at the same time.

repeated figuration of the foreskin as a blemish, would be simply that females do not need to be circumcised in order to see God, just as males born circumcised do not have to be circumcised in order to see God.<sup>65</sup> While I am well aware that this suggestion can be fairly accused of having an apologetic tendency, I would like tentatively to advance it nevertheless. In support of this reading are the texts that indicate explicitly that at the Crossing of the Red Sea both men and women were equal in their vision of God.<sup>66</sup> The androcentrism of this formation is of course not affected by this reading. Its valence may, however, be somewhat reoriented, for circumcision and subincision are understood in many cultures to produce feminized men.<sup>67</sup> While it seems, therefore, that circumcision in ancient Judaism emphasizes the male-male genealogical connection, it may nevertheless have been understood not as exclusion of the female so much as inclusion of the male in filiation.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, the persistent reference to the foreskin as a blemish may be understood as a reading of circumcision as an operation that renders men more like women by removing that blemish. On this reading, circumcision, *within this Jewish cultural formation*, has something of the valence of *couvade*.<sup>69</sup>

In any case, whether or not this last proposal can be accepted, the figure of revelation as an erotically charged encounter, of a vision of God, is certainly present here. What must be emphasized, however, is that in the period with which I am dealing here, the mystical experience of Vision of God is always represented as past and as

---

<sup>65</sup> That is, there are male infants born literally without a foreskin, which was considered a special sign of divine favor. I base this claim on the fact that Balaam was listed as one of the ten who was born circumcised, which I take to be an allusion to the fact that he is the only Gentile who is portrayed as having seen God! Whether a baby born circumcised needs to have a drop of blood drawn is a controversy in halakha and is not necessarily related to the question with which I am dealing here.

<sup>66</sup> See Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah."

<sup>67</sup> See Chris Knight, "Menstrual Synchrony and the Australian Rainbow Snake," in *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation*, ed. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb (Berkeley, 1988), pp. 232–55, esp. pp. 247–49.

<sup>68</sup> See Eilberg-Schwartz, *The Savage in Judaism: An Anthropology of Israelite Religion and Ancient Judaism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

<sup>69</sup> I advisedly do not draw on Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (New York, 1952), because I do not accept a reading that universalizes any set of meanings for a given practice in a psychoanalytic mode. Cross-cultural comparison is useful because it suggests possible valences for a given practice, not because it tells us what the meanings are in a particular formation.

future: as concrete experience in the *historical* life of the People, Israel, and as a future desired experience for both the individual and the community. The Song of Songs is not, then, allegorically read as the eternal erotic life of the soul with God but as a song that was sung at a concrete historical moment of intimacy, at a moment in which God showed Himself to all the People.

### Seeing God in History

In Rabbinic religion there is no invisible God manifested in an Incarnation. God Himself is visible (and therefore corporeal).<sup>70</sup> Language also is not divided into a carnal and a spiritual being. Accordingly, there can be no allegory.<sup>71</sup> For Rabbinic Judaism, the Song of Songs is the record of an actual, concrete, visible occurrence in the historical life of the People, Israel. When the Rabbis read the Song of Songs, they do not translate its “carnal” meaning into one or more “spiritual” senses; rather, they establish a concrete, historical moment in which to contextualize it.<sup>72</sup> It is a love song, a love dialogue to be more specific, that was actually (or fictionally, according to some

---

<sup>70</sup> This section repeats a bit of Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah,” for the sake of the present argument. It is important to emphasize, however, that this argument does not necessarily mean that God has a body of the same substance as a human body. Alon Goshen-Gottstein has recently written an excellent discussion of this issue in “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” paper presented at the conference on “People of the Body/People of the Book,” Stanford and Berkeley, Calif., 29–30 Apr. 1991.

<sup>71</sup> I would like to clarify two things at this point. The first is that allegory, both as a genre of text production and as a reading practice, is a notoriously slippery category. Therefore it should be clear that when I say “allegoresis” I mean allegorical reading of the Philonic-Origenic type, which has a fairly clear structure as well as explicit theoretical underpinnings. It is a hermeneutic structure in which narrative on the physical or worldly level is taken as the sign of invisible and spiritual structures on the level of ideas. It follows, therefore, that literal here is not opposed to metaphorical, for metaphor can belong to the literal pole of such a dichotomy, as was clearly recognized in the Middle Ages. Moreover, reflections on allegory such as Paul de Man’s or Walter Benjamin’s are not relevant for this issue. Note that I am not claiming here that midrash is absent from Christian reading. The Gospels themselves, Paul, and even much later Christian literature contain much that is midrashic in hermeneutic structure (more, in my opinion, than is currently recognized—in *Piers Plowman*, for example). My claim, rather, is that allegory, in the strict sense, is absent or nearly so in midrash.

<sup>72</sup> See Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, pp. 105–17.

views)<sup>73</sup> uttered by a lover and a beloved at a moment of great intimacy, at an actual historical moment of erotic communion, when God allowed Himself to be seen by Israel, either at the Crossing of the Red Sea or at the Revelation at Mount Sinai:

Rabbi Eliezer decoded [*patar*] the verse in the hour that Israel stood at the Sea. *My dove in the cleft of the rock in the hiding place of the steep* (Song 2:14), that they were hidden in the hiding place of the Sea—*Show me your visage*; this is what is written. “Stand forth and see the salvation of the Lord” (Exod. 14:13)—*Let me hear your voice*; this is the singing, as it says, “Then Moses sang” (Exod. 15:1)—*For your voice is lovely*; this is the Song—*And your visage is beautiful*; for Israel were pointing with their fingers and saying “*This is my God and I will beautify Him*” (Exod. 15:2).

Rabbi Akiva decoded the verse in the hour that they stood before Mount Sinai. *My dove in the cleft of the rock in the hiding place of the steep* (Song 2:14), for they were hidden in the hiding places of Sinai. *Show me your visage*, as it says, “And all of the People saw the voices” (Exod. 20:14)—*Let me hear your voice*, this is the voice from before the Commandments, for it says “All that you say we will do and we will hear” (Exod. 24:7)—*For your voice is pleasant*; this is the voice after the commandments, as it says, “God has heard the voice of your speaking; that which you have said is goodly” (Deut. 5:25). [SSR, p. 73]

To be sure, the lover was a divine lover but the beloveds were actual human beings, and the moment of erotic communion was mystical and visionary. The difference between the midrashic and the allegorical lies not in the thematics of the interpretation but in the language theory underlying the hermeneutic. This is the reverse of what is usually claimed. That is, one typically finds it stated that the methods of midrash and of allegory, with regard to the Song of Songs, are identical, and that only the actual allegorical correspondences have changed; but this is not so in my opinion. In the allegory the metaphors of the language are considered the signs of invisible entities—Platonic ideas of mystical love—while in the midrash they are the actually spoken love poetry of an erotic encounter. For many allegorists, the reading becomes a sublimation of physical love, while for the Rabbis, I would suggest, it is the desublimation of divine love, an understanding of that love through its metaphorical association with literal, human, corporeal sexuality. It is not irrelevant to note that the

---

<sup>73</sup> See Boyarin, “Two Introductions to the Midrash on the *Song of Songs*” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 56 (July–Sept. 1987): 479–500.

Rabbis all had the experience of carnal love.<sup>74</sup> The Song is not connected with an invisible meaning but with the text of the Torah: letter with letter, body with body, not body with spirit. This is an entirely different linguistic structure than that of Philo and his followers, even when the readings may turn out to be thematically similar or genetically connected.<sup>75</sup> For the Rabbis, it is the concrete historical experience of the Revelation at Sinai that is described by the Song of Songs, while for the allegorists it is the outer manifestation in language of an unchanging inner structure of reality—an abstract ontology, not a concrete history.

The disembodiment of history in allegoresis is most clearly brought out in Origen's brilliant interpretation of the Song of Songs. Once more, the contrast with Origen provides us with an especially effective way of seeing what is different in midrash. In the theoretical justification for allegory in his introduction, Origen remarks:

So, as we said at the beginning, all the things in the visible category can be related to the invisible, the corporeal to the incorporeal, and the manifest to those that are hidden; so that the creation of the world itself, fashioned in this wise as it is, can be understood through the divine wisdom, which from actual things and copies teaches us things unseen by means of those that are seen, and carries us over from earthly things to heavenly.

But this relationship does not obtain only with creatures; the Divine Scripture itself is written with wisdom of a rather similar sort. Because of certain mystical and hidden things the people is visibly led forth from the terrestrial Egypt and journeys through the desert, where there was a biting serpent, and a scorpion, and thirst, and where all the other happenings took place that are recorded. All these events, as we have said, have the aspects and likenesses of certain hidden things. And you will find this correspondence not only in the Old Testament Scriptures, but also in the actions of Our Lord and Saviour that are related in the Gospels.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> There are ways in which later Christian allegorical readers of the Song of Songs seem to be more like the Rabbis *in this respect, at any rate* (see *SS*, pp. 9–10). It is perhaps no accident that this shift takes place, as Astel notes, when monastic orders are founded that “recruited their members from among adults, all of whom had lived in secular society. Many were drawn from aristocratic circles; a high percentage had been married; most were familiar with secular love literature” (*SS*, p. 9).

<sup>75</sup> See Urbach, “The Homiletical Interpretations of the Sages and the Expositions of Origen on Canticles, and the Jewish-Christian Disputation.”

<sup>76</sup> Origen, *The Song of Songs*, p. 223.

Origen's text describes a perfect correspondence between the ontology of the world and that of the text. In both there is an outer shell and an inner meaning. The actual historical events described in the biblical narrative are dissolved and resolved into the hidden and invisible spiritual realities, which underlie and generate them as material representations.

We can do no better in illustrating the contrast between Origen's hermeneutic understanding and that of midrash than to take his very example. When the midrash reads this text, the scorpion remains a scorpion and the biting serpent a serpent:

*And they went out into the Desert of Shur* (Exod. 15:22). This is the Desert of Kub. They have told of the Desert of Kub that it is eight hundred by eight hundred parasangs—all of it full of snakes and scorpions, as it is said, "Who has led us in the great and terrible desert—snake, venomous serpent and scorpion" (Deut. 8:15). And it says, "Burden of the beasts of the Dry-South, of the land of trial and tribulation, lioness and lion, . . . *ef'eh*" (Isa. 30:6). *Ef'eh* is the viper. They have told that the viper sees the shadow of a bird flying in the air; he immediately conjoins [to it], and it falls down limb by limb. Even so, "they did not say, 'Where is the Lord Who has brought us up from Egypt, Who has led us in the land of Drought and Pits, land of Desolation and the Death-Shadow?'" (Jer. 2:6). What is Death-Shadow? A place of shadow that death is therewith.<sup>77</sup>

The hermeneutic impulse of this classical midrashic text is to concretize, to make tangible even more strongly than does the biblical text itself, the fearsomeness of the physical desert, of the physical thirst, of the physical fear of snakes and scorpions to which the historical Israel was prey in the desert, certainly not to translate these into symbols of invisible spiritual truths and entities.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *The Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. Jacob Z. Lauterbach, 3 vols. (1933–35; Philadelphia, 1976), 2:87–88.

<sup>78</sup> The knowledgeable reader may very well raise an objection at this point, since there is a midrashic text that reads the lack of water at Marah as a failure to study Torah, and this has been taken as a typical example of allegory in midrash. First of all, even if the example were relevant, its very marginality within midrashic discourse would nevertheless not change the description of midrash materially. Second, as I have argued in another context, even this text does not construct itself hermeneutically by the procedures of anything like Alexandrian allegory. See Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, pp. 57–80.



*Carnal Israel*

Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body. As a result of this state of mind he could never bear to talk about his race or his parents or his native country.

—PORPHYRY, *Life of Plotinus*

Porphyry exposes with rare incandescence the intimate connection between the corporeality of the individual and his or her connection with “race,” filiation, and place, and the Neoplatonic revulsion from both. This interpretation furnishes us with a key to understanding the resistance of the Rabbis to Platonism as well. As loyal a Jew as Philo was, he could not entirely escape the consequences of his allegorizing in a devaluing of the physical practices and genealogy of Israel. Where physical history and physical ritual exist only to point to spiritual meanings, the possibility of transcending both is always there. Ronald Williamson has put it this way:

It seems that for Philo, alongside traditional, orthodox Judaism, there was a philosophical outlook on life, involving the recognition of the purely spiritual nature of the Transcendent, in which one day, Philo believed, all mankind would share. In *that* Judaism the idealized Augustus, Julia Augusta and Petronius—among, no doubt, many others—had already participated.<sup>79</sup>

For Philo, such a spiritualized and philosophical Judaism, one in which a faith is substituted for works, remains only a theoretical possibility,<sup>80</sup> whereas for Paul it becomes the actuality of a new religious formation that tends strongly to disembody Judaism.<sup>81</sup> These elements of

<sup>79</sup> Williamson, *Jews in the Hellenistic World: Philo* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 13.

<sup>80</sup> According to H.A. Wolfson, Philo allowed for the possibility of uncircumcised “spiritual” proselytes. See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (1947; Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 369. Borgen (“Observations on the Theme ‘Paul and Philo,’” p. 87) seems to think that such uncircumcised proselytes could have been fully accepted as Jews by Philo, a proposition that I find unconvincing. Nor am I convinced by Borgen’s reading of the Talmud at *Shabbath* 51a to the effect that for Hillel circumcision was not a prerequisite for conversion. Shaye Cohen’s comprehensive work in progress on conversion in late antique Judaism should clear up many of these doubtful issues.

<sup>81</sup> In a recent letter to me, John Miles has made the following very important comments: “The faith-vs.-works dispute which you present as Christianity-vs.-Judaism has a long history, starting well before the Reformation, as a dispute *within* Christianity. A pagan who converted even to the Pauline form of Christianity was enjoined to fol-

embodiment are inextricable from one another. If the body of language is its meaning and essence and the body of the person is his or her “self,” then the history of Israel and the practices of that Israel are the physical history and practices of the body Israel. This resistance to dualism in language, body, and peoplehood is both the distinction of Rabbinic Judaism and its limitation, while post-Pauline Christianity, with its spiritualizing dualism, was universalizable but also paid an enormous price.

Paul’s allegorical reading of the rite of circumcision is an almost perfect emblem of this difference. In one stroke, by interpreting circumcision as referring to a spiritual and not corporeal reality, Paul made it possible for Judaism to become a world religion. It is not that the rite was difficult for adult Gentiles to perform—that would hardly have stopped devotees in the ancient world—it was rather that it symbolized the genetic, the genealogical moment of Judaism as the religion of a particular tribe of people. This is so both in the very fact of the physicality of the rite, of its grounding in the practice of the tribe, and in the way it marks the male members of that tribe (in both senses), but even more so, by being a marker on the organ of generation, it represents the genealogical claim for concrete historical memory as constitutive of Israel.<sup>82</sup> By substituting a spiritual interpretation

---

low a strikingly different ethical code and to abstain from a host of usages that were incompatible with monotheism. The result did not put him in continuity with Judah as a tribal, genetic community, but it was works, nonetheless, not just faith. It is, in fact, the survival of this much of the concrete Jewish program that makes Christianity indigestible for Gnosticism. The sentence to which I allude continues ‘whereas for Paul it becomes the actuality of a new religious formation which disembodies Judaism entire.’ Christianity looks disembodied by comparison with Rabbinic Judaism, but by comparison with Gnosticism it looks pretty corporeal.” [John Miles, letter to author, Mar. 1991]

The attentive reader will note that I have modified the quoted sentence in partial response to Miles’s wise cautions. Note that I am not claiming that there is a fundamental incompatibility between a literalist reading and Christianity. Even as radical an allegorist as Origen is very ambivalent with reference to the literal meaning of the Gospels and the sacraments, often distinguishing between the letter of the law, which kills, and the letter of the Gospel, which gives life. See Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis*, pp. 50–55. However, as Caspary points out, at other moments Origen proclaims that the letter of the Gospel also kills. See also the quotation above from Origen on the Song of Songs where he explicitly declares that the Gospel is also allegorical.

<sup>82</sup> See the brilliant interpretation of circumcision in Eilberg-Schwartz, “The Fruitful Cut: Circumcision and Israel’s Symbolic Language of Fertility, Descent, and Gender,” chap. 6 of *The Savage in Judaism*, pp. 141–76, and Eilberg-Schwartz, “The Nakedness of a Woman’s Voice, the Pleasure in a Man’s Mouth.”

for a physical ritual, Paul was saying that the genealogical Israel, “according to the Flesh,” is not the ultimate Israel; there is an “Israel in the spirit.” The practices of the particular Jewish People are not what the Bible speaks of, but of faith, the allegorical meaning of those practices. It was Paul’s genius to transcend “Israel in the flesh.” On this reading, the “victory” to which Charles Mopsik refers was a *necessary* one: “a split opened two millennia ago by the ideological victory over one part of the inhabited world of the Christian conception of carnal relation—and of carnal filiation—as separate from spiritual life and devalued in relation to it.”<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> Charles Mopsik, “The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition and the Kabbalah,” trans. Matthew Ward, in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadia Tazi, 3 vols. (New York, 1989), 1:49. The reading of Paul that I am promulgating here is a modified version of the revision of our understanding of Paul that has been recently advanced by Gaston and Gager. The older interpretations of Paul’s doctrine presupposed that he had held that Christian faith had *replaced* Jewish practice of the law. This conviction has in recent years been attacked as the origin for a theological anti-Judaism and even of anti-Semitism. Accordingly, some radical Christians (for example, Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* [New York, 1974]) have questioned the possibility of retaining Paul as the source of their theology, while Gaston and Gager have radically reread him as meaning *only* that Gentiles need not be circumcised and keep the Commandments in order to be part of the people of God. Gaston’s is a brave, noble, and stimulating exegetical effort, but ultimately stumbles on something that he could not have known, namely, that “Works of the Law,” as a synonym for the Commandments of the Torah, did exist in the Hebrew of Paul’s day, as we know now after the discovery of the Qumran text entitled “Some of the Works of the Law.” I am proposing that Paul need not be so thoroughly reread in order to redeem him from the charge of anti-Judaism. I find myself in agreement with Alan Segal who argues that “the idea of two separate paths—salvation for gentiles in Christianity and for Jews in Torah—does not gain much support from Paul’s writings” (Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* [New Haven, Conn., 1990], p. 130). This does not amount, however, to an accusation of anti-Judaism on Paul’s part. Gaston and Gager have convincingly argued that Paul was not attacking the Jews in his letters to the Gentiles but have not proven, in my opinion, that he was not reinterpreting the meaning of Torah for all and producing a critique of those who disagreed with him. Why shouldn’t he have done so? In my reading, Paul’s critique was not of legalism, nor was it a critique that denied spirituality to the pharisaic Jews; it was rather a critique of the understanding that membership in the kinship group, again whether natural or naturalized, as symbolized by circumcision, was of religious (soteriological) importance (see Segal, *Paul the Convert*, p. 124). In other words, I think that Justin Martyr understood Paul better than Rudolf Bultmann did, and Paul neither gives “a totally distorted picture of Judaism or else bases his portrayal on insufficient and uncharacteristic (even though authentic) evidence,” as a recent writer has put it (Heikki Räisänen, “Legalism and Salvation by the Law: Paul’s Portrayal of the Jewish Religion as a Historical and Theological Problem,” in *The Pauline Literature and Theology*, p. 68). Paul was a Jew

On the other hand, the Rabbis can be read as a necessary critique of Paul as well—or, if I am wrong in my reading of Paul, of other Christian thinkers who certainly held such views—for if the Pauline

---

who read the Torah in a particular way, a way prepared for him by his culture and the perceived requirements of his time. (On the connection of Paul to Philo, see also Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*.) The culture was the culture of allegory, and the requirement was to produce Judaism as a universalizable religion (compare Räsänen, “Legalism and Salvation by the Law,” p. 78). No form of Judaism that insisted on the literal reading of Israel’s history and practices could become a world-cultural system, not because the practices are too difficult, but because they are by their very nature too culturally specific and emphasize concrete, historical filiation and memory. Circumcision in Islam provides a further argument for this conclusion, for in that formation, of course, adult circumcision is practiced, and it has not been a bar to Islam becoming a world-cultural system. It is, therefore, not the practice of circumcision but the value or interpretation of circumcision within the Jewish formation that was disturbing. (This point was made to me by James Boone when I delivered this paper at Princeton.) This further raises the issue of the elision of Islam in general in my discussion, an omission that I am going eventually to have to rectify, but that I can justify in the meantime by confining my analysis to late antiquity. On the other hand, Boone’s remark stimulated me to begin thinking about Islam as the realization of a third structural possibility for the future of Judaism, which was present in solution, as it were, in the first century.

By coincidence, shortly after being favored with Boone’s powerfully stimulating intervention, I received an enormously helpful letter from Miles, which addresses the same issue in a brilliant formulation: “You show that Christianity is a thoroughly Jewish movement by showing that Rabbinic Judaism had to define itself by struggling against the ideal of a universalized, spiritualized Israel within its own ranks. Rather the same point can be made from the Christian side by noting how strong a fight the ‘Judaizers’ put up against the apostles—Peter’s vision in Acts is at least as important a witness in this connection as anything in Paul (Acts 11:1–10). But in more coded ways all the Gospels bear witness to this struggle. One New Testament scholar says that if there is any issue that may be said to occur on every page of the New Testament it is this struggle. And the Judaizers did have a viable alternative, even though they lost.

I mean that an aggressively internationalized, messianic Judaism need not have been a spiritualized Judaism. Consider the example of Islam, its scriptures in Arabic, everywhere; its relationship to a stated moment in history and a given place fully intact. Islam is undeniably international and yet one of the least spiritual—in the Platonic sense—religions of all time. I do think, in fact, that herein lay the brilliance of Muhammad’s double critique of Judaism and Christianity. He rejected the ethnocentrism of the Jews and the spiritualism and philosophical madness (homoousion vs. homoiousion and all that) of the Christians. Recall the stress that the first, still Judaistic generation of Christians placed on relations with Jerusalem—like Muslims’ with Mecca—and you see how viable the defeated alternative might have been.” [Miles, letter to author, Mar. 1991]

I would only add that in addition to the Jewish church, one could also cite the evidence for proselytizing on the part of non-Christian Jews in the first century and before. Islam thus completes the typology. Paul is no more an anti-Semite than Abraham Geiger, the founder of Reform Judaism, even if we conclude, as I do, that his hermeneutic was for ethnic Jews and Gentiles alike.

move had within it the possibility of breaking out of the tribal allegiances and the commitments to one's own family as it were, it also contains the seeds of an imperialist and colonizing missionary practice. The very emphasis on a universalism, expressed as concern for all of the families of the world, turns very rapidly (if not necessarily) into a doctrine that they must all become part of our family of the spirit with all of the horrifying practices against Jews and other Others that Christian Europe produced.<sup>84</sup> From the retrospective position of a world that has, at the end of the second Christian millennium, become thoroughly interdependent, each one of the options leaves something to be desired. If on the one hand the insistence on corporeal genealogy and the practice of tribal rites and customs produces an ethnocentric discourse, a discourse of separation and exclusiveness, on the other hand the allegorization, the disembodiment of those very practices, produces the discourse of conversion, colonialism, the "white man's burden"—universal brotherhood *in* "the body" of *Christ*.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup> See Marc Shell, "Marranos (Pigs), or From Coexistence to Toleration," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991): 306–35.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

### CHAPTER THREE

## PLACING READING: ANCIENT ISRAEL AND MEDIEVAL EUROPE\*

Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity. The black squiggles on the white page are still as the grave, colorless as the moonlit desert; but they give the skilled reader a pleasure as acute as the touch of a loved body.

—NELL, *Lost in a Book*

Robert Alter's book, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* is a vigorous description of (and defense of) the European practice of reading literature for pleasure. I hasten to add that this "pleasure" does not mean a hedonistic experience, but rather one of affective identification with the characters, an experience understood in our culture to be gratifying, but nonetheless edifying and improving of the reader. Alter identifies several of the distinctive features of this practice: "Very few people will take the trouble to read a novel or story unless they can somehow 'identify' with the characters, live with them inwardly as though they were real at least for the duration of the reading" (Alter 1989: 49). If we pay close attention to this statement, we will see that it conjures up several features of our reading practice. It assumes that reading is a voluntary act; people can choose to do it or not (Nell 1988: 2). Accordingly, it must cause some kind of pleasure to the reader or he or she will abandon the activity (Nell

---

\* This paper was originally delivered in earlier versions at a conference at Bar-Ilan University on the occasion of the retirement of Prof. Harold Fisch in November, 1989 and at the MLA session on the "Ethnography of Reading" in Washington, D.C. in December of that year and is being published in the volumes generated by both conferences. I wish to thank all of the respondents at those meetings as well as Robert Alter, Piero Boitani, Jonathan Boyarin, Joan Branham, Ken Frieden, Steven Fraade, Dell Hymes, Chana Kronfeld, Ellen Spolsky, Brian Stock, and an anonymous (and very nasty) reader for the University of California Press for their helpful comments. The section of European reading and the erotic was presented at a colloquium titled "Is Reading a Universal?" at the Townshend Center for the Humanities at Berkeley on November 13, 1990, and some important final revisions were incorporated in response to the discussion thereafter.

1988: 8–9). Second, the pleasure is produced by an affective identification between the reader and the characters in the story, a sympathy between the real reader and imaginary people and their imaginary adventures (Nell 1988: 39). Third, at least ideally, the pleasure of this identification is produced when the reader is in private and can “forget” reality in the illusion of the reality of the characters and their story.<sup>1</sup>

“Reading” as spoken of and described in the Bible has none of these features. The Torah names the function of its reading as a speech act. It declares of itself that its intention is, “it shall be with him, and he shall read in it every day of his life in order that he will learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep the words of this Torah and to perform the commandments” (Deut. 17:19). Reading is not a voluntary act, nor one that is supposed to produce pleasure. It is not an excitation of the emotions or sentiments but simply a demand that the reader fulfill the obligations that the read document contains. This is not a claim of lack of literary value and beauty in the biblical text. To our ears and eyes, the poetry of Jeremiah is full of such poetic value; nevertheless, it can hardly be said to have attempted to persuade or seduce its hearers with its poetry. There is nothing *dulce* in the *utile* of Jeremiah. It should be made absolutely clear that I am not invoking a positivistic content-form distinction; indeed, I am asserting that the very notion of form is a historicizable practice and not a given of language.<sup>2</sup>

In an extraordinarily suggestive recent interview, the French Jewish poet and theoretician, Henri Meschonnic spoke about the biblical term “Miqra,” the word that best translates the English word “reading.” Meschonnic’s central claim is that reading means something entirely different in biblical Hebrew because the written text is always read orally:

---

<sup>1</sup> Alter emphasizes, of course, that a reader who is psychologically normal never really forgets that he or she is reading a fictional story. To imagine that anyone claims otherwise is to set up a straw man (Alter 1989: 50).

<sup>2</sup> Thus, for example, while modern critics discover exceedingly “artful” wordplay in Jeremiah 36 (a text that I will be analyzing below), there is very little reason to suppose that the author/s of Jeremiah had any aesthetic (that is, ludic) intentions. The paronomasia serves not to delight and thus win over the hearer/reader but only to increase the effectivity of the speech-act, or, at any rate, this is a strong possibility. On the wordplay of Jeremiah 36, see now the paper of J. Andrew Dearman (1990). His paper was published too late to be fully integrated into my text, so the reader will find some overlap in the discussion of Jeremiah 36 below.

Keeping the tie between writing and reading is in the biblical name of *Mikra* itself. In a manner very characteristic of our European languages, the biblical corpus is called *Writing*. . . . I think that to say *Writing*—holy Writing, Writings, from *Scriptura* onward—makes the texts thus named enter culturally into a field radically different from the Hebraic, Jewish field, in the sense that to say *Writing* or *Scriptura* is to conceive fully an opposition, finally, of the subject and the social, of writing and reading, of the act and the word. . . . In the Hebraic field it is completely otherwise: the very term *Mikra*, which designates the biblical corpus, etymologically and functionally at the same time, signifies *reading*—not reading as we speak of reading by contrast to writing. *Mikra* assumes the gathering during which one reads or has read the texts in question, and since this reading is done out loud, the notion conjoins, indissolubly to my understanding, orality and collectivity in reading. (Meschonnic 1988: 454)

There is great insight in Meschonnic's remarks. However, since Meschonnic's claim that *Scriptura* is unknown in Hebrew is exaggerated—we do find, after all “*kithvei haqqodesh*” (Holy Scripture) as a title for the Bible—the relevant distinction seems to be not the designation of the Bible as the Writing or the Reading, but the fact that the word “reading” means, as well, the Bible. In other words, the point is not to situate the text in Jewish culture in the metaphysics of the reading-writing opposition, but to situate reading in that culture in its sociocultural semantic field. “Reading,” in ancient Jewish culture signifies an act which is oral, social, and collective, while in modern (and early-modern) Europe it signifies an act that belongs to a private or semiprivate social space.

By studying the structure of the semantic affinities and fields of the Hebrew words for “reading,” I hope to show that they do not belong to the same lexical categorization of practices that reading does in modern European culture. However, that alone would leave my investigation open to the sort of theoretical questions posed by Keesing:

To what extent are conventional metaphors, and the schemas they express, constitutive of our experience? Do varying schemas, whether of emotion, time, causality, social relationships, and so on, reflect contrasting modes of subjective experience, of thought and perception—or of simply different conventions for talking about the world, as creatures with our human brains and sensory equipment and bodies experience it? There is no simple answer. (Keesing 1987: 386)

In order, therefore, to corroborate the findings from this semantic inquiry, I will analyze biblical narrative texts that describe scenes of



reading; the descriptions of practice coincide with the semantics of the words involved. Then, I will interpret some European scenes of reading, which through contrast will point up how different “reading” is in the two cultural formations. In the last section of the paper, I will attempt to shed some light on an important critical debate vis-à-vis biblical narrative from the perspective developed in my main argument.

*The Bible: “Reading” as a Speech-Act*

A semantic analysis of the distribution of the root *qr'* in biblical Hebrew reveals the following points. The root encompasses a range of meanings including “to call,” “to proclaim,” “to summon or invite,” and “to read.” It will be immediately observed that the whole semantic field to which these glosses belong is that of speech acts and not of passive reception. And indeed, as I shall argue, “reading” in biblical Hebrew is a speech act. It nearly always means “to read aloud to someone,” as confirmed by the complements “in the ears of PN”<sup>3</sup> or “before PN.” In all of these cases the activity described is the reading of some kind of a message and its communication or proclamation to an audience. The following verses will point up the force of *qr'* in the Bible:<sup>4</sup>

1. “And the Lord *called out* to the Adam and said to him ‘Where are you?’” (Genesis 3:9)
2. “And the angel of the Lord *called out* to him from the heaven and said, ‘Abraham, Abraham.’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’” (Genesis 22:11)
3. “And now, *call out* in the ears of the People, and say, ‘Whoever is afraid and terrified, let him sit and watch from the Mountain of Gilead!’” (Judges 7:3)
4. “And he took the Book of the Covenant, and he *read* it in the ears of the People, and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken, we will do and we will obey.’ And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the People and said, ‘This is the blood of the Covenant, which God has enacted with you with regard to all of these words.’” (Exodus 24:7)
5. “When all of Israel come to appear before the Lord, your God at

---

<sup>3</sup> For non-Semitists let me explain that PN is a convention referring to unnamed persons; it stands for “personal name.”

<sup>4</sup> Emphasis is added in all translations from Hebrew throughout this chapter.

the place which he shall choose, *read* this Torah in the presence of all of Israel, in their ears. Gather together the People, the men, the women and the children and the stranger within your gates, in order that they hear and in order that they learn and they fear the Lord your God and watch to perform all of the words of this Torah.” (Deuteronomy 31:11)  
 6. “And you shall come and *read* out the Scroll which you have written in accord with my dictation.” (Jeremiah 36:3)

We learn several things from this very partial list of verses with *qr'*. First of all, in every case, the usage indicates an oral act, an act of the speaking of language. Second, the usage of *qr'* when there is a written text present is virtually identical to that when there is no written text present. From the point of view of the semantic structure of Hebrew, this is not even polysemy, but simply the same meaning. Thus, comparing example 3 with 4 and 5, we are hard-pressed to find any reason from the Hebrew to translate the verb differently in the latter cases than in the former one. I think it might not be going too far, indeed, were we to translate “call out (or proclaim) this Torah”!<sup>5</sup> The Rabbis seem, at any rate, to have understood this point well, for they commented on example 6, “Was Barukh used to speaking out in the presence of Jeremiah?”<sup>6</sup> Finally, all of these acts of speaking in which the verb *qr'* is used are immediately followed by the desired or actual result of the performance of the speech act in the performance of the listener. Looking into the semantic affinities of the root *qr'*, then, certainly seems to suggest that for the biblical culture, reading occupies a different place in the social world than it does for us, so different that it is nearly an entirely different practice.

When we begin to look at narrative scenes of reading—both prescriptive and descriptive—in the Bible, we will find the semantic analysis strengthened by the accounts of our informants, as it were.<sup>7</sup> In all

<sup>5</sup> Dearman also translates Jeremiah 36 “proclaim the words of the scroll” (1990: 405).

<sup>6</sup> *Sifre Bamidbar* 52.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Alter has argued (personal communication) that my “informants” are not clearly a random sample of the culture, as they are all centered around the Deuteronomistic school with its very heavily didactic tendency. He questions whether such documents as J and E would share D’s concept of reading. However, since J and E do not seem to ever mention reading at all, it is hard to argue from silence. Moreover, I believe that there is other corroborating evidence for my analysis of reading in the Bible which is not from the Deuteronomists per se. See, for instance the description of a scene of reading in *Nehemiah* 8, although it could be argued that this late text reflects the devolutionary influence of Deuteronomy, and that argument would have some merit. On the importance of the Deuteronomistic connections of

of the Hebrew Bible, there is no unequivocal usage of *qr'* in the sense of “to read to oneself,” no place where someone is described as silently (or even orally) consuming a text alone and/or without immediate public consequences.<sup>8</sup> Although in Deuteronomy 17:19, we are told that the king must write for himself a copy of Deuteronomy, and “it shall be with him, and he shall read in it every day of his life in order that he will learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep the words of this Torah and to perform the commandments,” we can learn what this “reading” would have been like from the description of the first occasion in which a king “read” this scroll:

[8] And Hilqiahu the High Priest said to Shafan the Scribe: I have found a Scroll of the Torah in the House of the Lord, and Hilqiahu gave the scroll to Shafan and he read it. . . . [10] And Shafan the scribe told the king, saying: Hilqiahu the Priest has given me a Scroll and Shafan read it before the king. [11] And it happened that *when the king heard* the words of the Scroll of the Torah, he rent his garments. [12] And the king commanded Hilqiahu the Priest and <sup>ʿ</sup>Ahiqam the son of

---

Jeremiah 36, see now Dearman (1990: 403–404) and *passim* and especially (420); and on the Nehemiah passage (409, n. 16). Moreover, we have not only evidence from “informants” but also the report of an ancient “ethnographer,” Hecateus: “At all of the gatherings of the people, the High Priest explains the commandments of the Torah, and the people listen with such willingness that they immediately fall on their faces and bow to the High Priest who reads and expounds to them.”

The caution remains, nevertheless, important. We have, at best, only partial data for any culture that we know only through literary remains, and allowance must be made, as sophisticated, recent critiques of ethnoscience teach us for variation, diachronic development (expressed as synchronic variation), ideological interests and cultural conflict (Keesing 1987: 371 and especially 388: “Models are created for the folk as well as by them.”).

<sup>8</sup> There are, to be sure, cases in which the orality of the reading is not explicit. However, even in those cases we find that the act of reading is accompanied by perlocutionary force—that is, it demands an action in response. The following example will make this clear: “And the King of Aram said, ‘Go and I will send a scroll [*sefer*, the same word that refers to a scroll of the Torah, or the Book of the Covenant!] to the King of Israel,’ and he went and he took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand golden coins and ten suits of clothes. And he brought the scroll to the King of Israel which said, ‘And now, with the coming of this scroll to you, I have sent to you Naʿaman my servant. Cure him of his leprosy!’ And when the King of Israel *read* the scroll, he rent his clothes, and said ‘Am I God that I can kill and revive? For this one has sent to me to cure a man of leprosy, but indeed, he is seeking a cause against me.’” (II Kings 19:5–7)

Since there is no more reason to believe that this king was himself literate any more than the king-protagonists of the texts that I will presently discuss, it is very probable that “when the king had read” means here “when the king had heard the reading of,” just as it does explicitly in the next text cited in the body of the paper.

Shafan and 'Akbur the son of Mikiah and Shafan the scribe and 'Asaya the king's servant, saying: [13] Go seek the Lord for me and for the people and for all of Judea with regard to the words of the Scroll which has been found, for the wrath of the Lord which has been kindled against us is great, because our ancestors did not obey [lit. hear!] the words of this Scroll to do all that is written for us. [14] And Hilqiah the Priest . . . went to Huldah the Prophetess . . . and she was sitting in Jerusalem in Mishneh and they said to her. [15] And she said to them: Thus has the Lord the God of Israel said, Go tell the man who sent you to me: [16] Thus has the Lord said: I hereby bring evil to this place and upon its inhabitants—all of the words of the Scroll *which the King of Judea has read*. (II Kings 22:8 ff.)

We can learn several things about the ethnography of reading in ancient Israel from this scene of reading. This event is portrayed by the Bible as the founding moment for the practice which Deuteronomy—the very Scroll which was discovered in the Temple—prescribes, so we can take it as a model for that practice. The scribe reads the Torah before the king and his attendant councillors of various types, and then the king is declared to have “read” the Scroll. According to Deuteronomy he is expected to respond to its import immediately, and according to the Kings text, that is exactly what happens. “Reading” is a proclamation, a declaration, and a summons. Even though the original reading, that of the scribe itself, here described in verse 8 seems to have been a silent reading, it is quite clear that it is preparatory for the real reading, that is, the public, oral proclamation and receipt of the message that the Scroll contains.<sup>9</sup> Each of the readers has to act, and the act of each is contingent on his social function: the scribe, having read, must read to the King. The King, having read, must send men to seek the Lord. As claimed by Meschonnic's text,<sup>10</sup> the noun form, “miqra” means both the “reading” and the “Holy Assembly” at which the reading takes place. Moreover, even this last sense of “miqra” has a double meaning, because it refers to the summons to come to the convocation as well as the calling out or reading that will take place there. The text, “Miqra” is the place one is summoned to and the place that summons. To dramatize the difference

<sup>9</sup> That is, a *perlocutionary effect*!

<sup>10</sup> In that text, it is Alex Derczansky (Meschonnic 1988: 454) who makes this point explicitly, but it is already contained within Meschonnic's remarks. I think it best to read that “round table” as a single dialogical text, a fiction with several voices.

in structure between that culture and ours, I would claim that the field of our social practice which most nearly fits that of *qr'* in the biblical culture would be “preaching” or even “adjuring” and *not* “reading.”<sup>11</sup> It is certainly significant that in English there is a synchronic semantic opposition between “reading” and “lection”—the reading of the Bible in church or synagogue—, while in biblical usage, of course, no such opposition exists. Reading in that culture is a public, oral, and illocutionary speech-act, an act, moreover, which when successful always has perlocutionary effect. And this is the only type of reading of which the Bible knows. There simply is no other word in biblical Hebrew which conveys the sense of processing and receiving written language, and there are no scenes described in the text which indicate private reading.

The above scene of reading is doubled in the famous incident described in Jeremiah 36. Exactly one generation after the discovery and reading of Deuteronomy described in Kings, the king and the people have been backsliding. God commands Jeremiah to “take a scroll and write on it all of the words that I have spoken to you about Israel and Judea and all of the nations, since the day when I first spoke to you in the days of Josiah and until now. . . . Perhaps the House of Judea will hear of all of the evil which I intend to do unto them, and will repent each one from his evil ways, and I will forgive their sin and their transgression” (1–2). The prophet, of course, performs as commanded. He has his scribe Barukh write down all of the words in a book, which is then read before all of the people, before the king, the son of Josiah and all of his councillors, the sons of the very same officials described in the Kings story. The emphasis on citing the genealogies of the persons—note that in the Kings story the officials’ genealogies are *not* given—seems intended to establish that this scene is a (reversed) antitype of the former one.<sup>12</sup> The reading of prophetic text, as that of the Torah, is expected to function as the

---

<sup>11</sup> Dell Hymes’s remarks: “Perhaps, in other words, *qr'* indicates a type of communicative event (a mode of communication, a way of ‘speaking’, using ‘speaking’ figuratively, in the sense of my chapter in R. Bauman and J. Scherzer, *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (Cambridge, 1974, 1989). A certain configuration, or set of relations, among participants and text and channels” (letter to the author, Spring 1991). Prof. Hymes’s remarks seem right on the mark.

<sup>12</sup> For a general literary comparison of the two chapters see Isbell 1978 and see now Dearman (1990: 409).

speech-act of command, and its intended perlocutionary effect is obedience—as opposed, for example, to an illocutionary act of exhortation whose intended effect would be persuasion. In this case, however, the speech-act does not have the desired perlocutionary effect. The king defies the warning in the scroll that has been read to him. The experience is, however, so threatening that he has the scroll burnt bit by bit as it is read to somehow neutralize its power. Once again, we see, that even when disregarded, the act of reading is public, social and illocutionary, not private and subjective in nature:

And it was in the fifth year of Yehoyakim, the son of Josiah, the king of Judea in the ninth month, they called [*qar'u*: Note that this is the same verb as the one used for the reading! The root is *qr'*.] a fast before the Lord, all of the people of Jerusalem and all of the people who come from the cities of Judea in Jerusalem. And Barukh read [*qara'*] in the book the words of Jeremiah in the temple in the office of Gemaryahu, the son of Shafan the scribe, in the upper court, near the entrance to the gate of the new House of the Lord, *in the hearing of all of the People.* (9–11)

After this reading, the text is brought before the king and all of the rest of his councillors, once more identified as the sons of the very ones who heard the first reading of Deuteronomy as above. When the scroll is read before them, “When they heard these words, each man was very afraid, and they said, *we will tell the king, all of these words.* And they asked Barukh, saying, ‘tell us, how did you write all of these words from his mouth?’ And Barukh said to them, ‘He called-out [*qara'!*] all of the words, and I write them on this scroll’” (16–18). The same root is used to signify the calling of the fast which is the setting for the reading, Jeremiah’s oral declamation of his prophecy, and the scribe’s reading out of that prophecy to its destinators.

And the king sent Yehudi to take the scroll and he took it from the office of Elishama the scribe and Yehudi *read it in the ears of the king and in the ears of all of the princes who serve the king.* And the king was sitting in his winter house in the ninth month and the fire-place was burning before him. And it was, that as Yehudi read three or four columns he ripped them with a razor and threw them into the fire that was in the fire-place until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire on the fire-place. And the king and all of his servants who heard these words were not frightened and did not rend their garments. (21–25)

In its very description of the *failure* of the speech-act and in its explicit contrast between this event and its type in the previous generation,

we have further evidence for how “reading” was conceived as a practice in the biblical culture. We see clearly that it was a social and public practice, more akin to a court’s sentence than to anything like the practice of private, recreative self improvement and ethical growth that we conceive it to be. The concept of a silent and private reading and that of the aesthetic pleasure of being taken up in an imaginative world (Alter 1989: 49), even only for a moment, is simply excluded from possibility both by the semantic structure of the language and by the actually described practices of reading in the text.

*“Reading” with the Rabbis*

When we turn to rabbinic literature, the texts of the Talmud and midrash, we find that the situation is somewhat more complicated, but still much the same picture will emerge. There are more relevant terms in this linguistic field. In addition to *qr*’, also *drsh*, *grs*, and *yn* belong to the semantic field, which can be generally characterized as the processing of written language. The last two can be dealt with very briefly, for neither of them have anything to do with interpreting the marks on the page as text or discourse, *grs* meaning to repeat over and over again and thereby memorize, while *yn* denotes merely the physical process of training one’s eyes on the writing. Thus, one who translates the Torah in the synagogue is required not to *yn* in the Torah, because the onlookers might err and think that his translation is actually written there.

Beginning once again with *qr*’, we find that in addition to the biblical usages of “to call, to invite, to summons,” it has several senses relating to the processing of texts in the Hebrew of the rabbinic period. The first is, as in biblical Hebrew, to read scriptures aloud in a communal, ritual setting. The sememe of “aloud” is attested in the contrast between what is written and what is read, as in the type of interpretation called “*al tiqre*,” that is, do not read what is written but read (pronounce) it differently, or in the Massoretic distinction between the “*k” and the “*q<sup>e</sup>re*,” that is the “written and the read.” Although certain words are written in the text, one is commanded to “read” them differently. Thus, for example, everywhere that the Holy Name of God [the Tetragrammaton] is written, we read “The Lord.” Since this is not an injunction to emend the text, “*q<sup>e</sup>re*” here cannot mean*

that which is read in our sense of “to read,” for to read something other than what is written is an oxymoron in our culture. It is only because reading means oral recitation of the text that this distinction between the written and the read can mean anything at all. *qr'*, in this sense, is typically used for the public, ritual reading of a portion of the Torah at every synagogue service.

The second sense of *qr'* in rabbinic Hebrew is to perform certain biblically ordained rituals which involve the recitation of passages from the Torah, once again out loud. Thus the daily recitation of “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one,” is designated “reading the Hear O Israel.” The third sense attested for this root in rabbinic Hebrew is to study scripture. Even in this last sense, the verb does not cover the ground of our “to read,” because a different root is used for the study of Mishna, as we clearly see in the following text: “And Rabbi Shefatia said that Rabbi Yohanan said, ‘Anyone who *reads* Bible [*qore'*] without a melody or repeats Mishna [*shone*] without a song, of him Scripture says, *And also I have given them bitter laws*’ (Ezekiel 20:25) [TB *Megillah* 32a].” The semantic dominant of *qore'* here is not reception of a text, but participation in the religious act of studying scripture. Indeed, to this day, the study of religious texts in traditional Jewish societies is typically carried out in pairs called “*hevrotot*” or in small study conventicles<sup>13</sup> and the term “reading the Talmud” simply does not exist in any Jewish language, while “reading the Bible” still exclusively means reading it out loud in the ritual setting. One could fairly say that “reading” in the European sense just does not exist in that traditional culture.

If we attempt a sememic analysis of all of these usages of *qr'* in this state of the language then, we notice that:

1. They all belong to the field of religious practice.
2. Most of them, indeed, belong to the semantic field and the social sphere of prayer.
3. They are all activities carried out in public places.
4. They are all speech-acts, not only performed out loud, but having some illocutionary; or perlocutionary force.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> See Jonathan Boyarin 1991 for an ethnographic description of such a contemporary conventicle—not, to be sure, an entirely typical one, but then none is.

<sup>14</sup> For an illuminating analysis of liturgy as a speech-act, whose perlocutionary force is to convince of the “truth” of the unprovable, see Rappaport 1976.



The second important root for us to consider in the context of rabbinic Hebrew is *drsh*, the verbal root from which “midrash” is derived. However we characterize that special style of interpretation, what it does is interpret narrative texts, and therefore is close to what we call “reading.” In this context what is important for us is, however, not what kind of reading it is in the sense of how it interprets texts, but rather what kind of social practice it is in the sense of what social settings it takes place in. Again we will find that the social setting of *drsh* is public and religious exclusively.

The two situations in which we find the practice of *drsh* are the study house, called the House of Midrash and the synagogue. In the first situation, we truly have an activity that seems closest to what we mean by “reading a text,” that is perusing it carefully and trying to make sense of its various linguistic levels. However, the project is undertaken always as part of a dialogical encounter. Thus, a typical situation involves a claim made by a given Rabbi, which is challenged by his fellows, and to which he answers, “I am reading [doresh] a verse from the Torah.”<sup>15</sup>

The second setting of *drsh* simply involves what we would call “lecturing” or, once again, “preaching.” The rabbi stands in front of a congregation and interprets for them the lection of the day with a view, of course, that they assimilate the messages intended and act on them. Thus there are subjects about which one is enjoined not to *drsh* at all. Again the contrast between *drsh* and “reading” can be sharpened by pointing out that while “reading” is typically understood as consumption (except in very special institutional settings like MLA meetings), *drsh* is *always* production of text. Clearly, *drsh* also, while covering some of the ground of “to read” does not provide a semantic fit.

Summing up the results of this brief semantic analysis, we can conclude that the structure of the semantic field which includes the practices analogous to what we call “reading” was entirely different in the Hebrew of the biblical and talmudic periods. In this light, there

---

<sup>15</sup> Gerald Bruns is one of the few theorists who has connected the social situation of midrash, that is its dialogical setting, with its hermeneutic practice. He has also clearly talked about how midrashic, “understanding always shows itself as action in the world” (Bruns 1987: 629–631). See also David Stern 1988, who has addressed the social setting of midrash importantly.

was simply no word in that language at all which meant what we mean by “reading a book,” that is, the essentially private, individual consumption of narrative with the effect of and for the purpose of “pleasure.”

*Europe: Reading in the Social Space of the Erotic*

Reading in the Bible and Talmud occupied the public social spaces of the forum, the synagogue, the House of Study, and the court. In contrast, there are two privileged social sites for the practice of reading in Europe in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Early Modern period: the study and the bedroom. Horace, in a famous and much discussed passage, refers already to “reading and writing which I like to do in silence” (*Sat.* 1.6: 122–3). The silent and private study of a sophisticated Christian like Ambrose also belongs to the tradition of studious, private reading.<sup>16</sup> Monastic reading of saints’ lives grows out of this tradition as well.<sup>17</sup> This sort of private reading, whose architectural trajectory takes it from the monk’s cell to the scholar’s study has a powerful ascetic element.

More revealing for our purposes here is the pervasive association of reading in the West with the private social spaces and meanings of the erotic. In order to evoke this moment of Western culture, I now will take a lightning tour of several of the most privileged scenes of reading in our European tradition. First, of course, is Augustine for any inquiry into European reading. Augustine is describing his early education and remarks, “Better indeed, because more certain, were those first studies by which there was formed and is formed in

---

<sup>16</sup> See discussion in Knox (1968: 423), however the Horatian text cited in Hendrickson (1929: 187) seems to contradict the interpretation that Horace enjoyed silent reading. In any case, he does refer here to reading as a pleasure. Notice that I am decidedly not claiming that “silent reading” was unknown or impossible in the Ancient World. In spite of the celebrated astonishment of Augustine at finding Ambrose reading silently, this might very well reflect just his backwater origins. Moreover, the practice of “reading for pleasure” can be an oral one in which the reader murmurs to himself or herself, and it is possible for readers to read certain kinds of documents silently even when the general practice is for narrative to be read publicly and orally. Knox makes it abundantly clear that reading silently was certainly possible for the Ancients.

<sup>17</sup> Private reading was developed especially among the Cistercians. See below n. 26.

me what I still possess, the ability to read what I find written down and to write what I want to, than the later studies wherein *I was required to learn by heart I know not how many of Aeneas's wanderings, although forgetful of my own, and to weep over Dido's death, because she killed herself for love, when all the while amid such things, dying to you, O God my life, I most wretchedly bore myself about with dry eyes*"<sup>18</sup> (Augustine 1960: 56 [emphasis added]). Now, on the one hand, it is quite clear that this text does not record an experience of the practice of reading for pleasure that our culture knows. Augustine is *required* to do these things, including weeping (apparently in the classroom) for Dido. One suspects, as have earlier readers of Augustine, that it was at least as much Dido's representation of Africa as her dying for love that produced this school requirement to weep over her fate (Brown 1969: 23). Be that as it may, there can be very little doubt that Augustine's story is one of the major sources of the practice of affective identification, and particularly affective identification with a female character, which is so emblematic of our reading practice. It is important to note as well that Augustine is drawing an implied contrast between the perverted ludic reading of his youthful education and the converted reading of his later life, between the weeping for Dido and the response to *tolle, lege*.<sup>19</sup>

It seems to me that it is not overinterpretation to see this affective identification as a development out of the cathartic identification with the characters which was earlier the mark of the tragic theater, and indeed Augustine's description of theater-going is not altogether different from his description of reading the *Aeneid* in school (Augustine 1960: 78).<sup>20</sup> This interpretation is supported as well by explicit notations in Aristotle himself:

---

<sup>18</sup> *Confessions*, Book 1, chap. 13. I am using the translation of John K. Ryan (Augustine 1960). There is another moment in this text which Jonathan Boyarin has called to my attention, namely the contrast between reading/writing and memorization with Augustine's valorization of the former over the latter.

<sup>19</sup> This is one, then, of a series of binary oppositions which structure the *Confessions*, which are, of course, in that work set out temporally. See now the reading of Jill Robbins in her work (Robbins 1992), chap. 2. What Augustine figure as perversion and conversion remains a synchronic structure in European culture, just as do Vergil and the Bible.

<sup>20</sup> Book 3, chap. 2.

In the next place, [tragedy is in fact the better form] because it has everything that epic poetry has, and has in addition an element of no small importance in its music, which intensifies our pleasure in the highest degree, then also it has the advantage of vividness *both when read and when acted*. (*Poetics* 26, Aristotle 1982: 78, emphasis mine)

It is, moreover, Aristotle as well who is among the first who speak explicitly of “pleasure” as the telos of literature (*Poetics* 4, Aristotle 1982: 47). We can locate, then, one historical source of “reading” in the pleasurable catharsis of ancient theater as theorized by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. However, we have not yet located the source of the strong association of reading pleasure and erotic experience in our culture.

A vital necessity for this move to take place is the transferral of reading from public to private spaces. Thus with regard to one of the poetic genres of the Middle Ages a recent scholar remarks:

Despite its high degree of self-reflectiveness, the *canso* remained public in that it was performed. Hermeticism for the troubadours was not possible in the same way as it was for, say, Mallarmé. A modern poet can occasion a private, silent confrontation between himself and his reader through letters on a printed page. But the troubadours worked within a tradition that was largely oral. The *cansos* which they composed were destined to be sung by a *jongleur* before a number of people. There was, then, an unavoidable tension between the private realm created by the song and the public setting in which it had to be verbalized. One way in which the troubadours reduced this tension was to use *senhals*, or pseudonyms. In giving secret names to the *personae* of the *canso*, the poet discouraged connections between the men and women mentioned in his song and those assembled in the audience. (Poe 1984: 15)

It follows that in order for such connections to be promoted by a reading practice and not discouraged by it, a private setting (not necessarily individual—“alone together” works fine) had to be invented for reading. One very important viaduct of this transition would seem to be the *Vidas* of the Provençal troubadours. These were prose biographies of the troubadours who composed the *cansos*. They seem to have developed when the *cansos* became collected into volumes called *chansonniers*, which from the thirteenth century were produced for private reading (Schutz 1939). They thus serve as a double transitional moment in the “erotic” formation of European reading, as a transition from oral, public to written, private and as a transition from poetry to prose as well. We have here a specific site of origin for an erotic connection

between the book, its author, its protagonist and the reader, an eroticized connection which is central to our notion of ludic reading. As a modern commentator on reading for pleasure evokes it, “Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity. The black squiggles on the white page are still as the grave, colorless as the moonlit desert; but they give the skilled reader a pleasure as acute as the touch of a loved body” (Nell 1988: 1). This is, in itself, an extraordinary comment, if only for the way that it testifies to how naturalized the sense of reading as erotic experience has become in our culture.<sup>21</sup>

Another crucial moment in the history of European reading is the story of H elo ise and Abelard, which marks the site of a cross or a juncture between the two traditions of reading that Augustine represents. On the one hand the reading of this couple belonged to the tradition of reading as monastic study, but on the other hand it quite obviously activates the Augustinian *Aeneid* topos of reading as erotic experience as well. Indeed Abelard in his autobiographical *Historia calamitum*, admits almost to a willful manipulation of these commonplaces (Abelard 1974: 66–67). This hybridization (or contamination) will find its fullest flowering, however, in Dante.

Perhaps the most famous “scene of reading” in European litera-

---

<sup>21</sup> There is a serious problem with Nell’s book. From this formulation, it would seem that the reading practice that leads to this kind of erotic pleasure is a trained one, that is not a given of being human. This “skill” would seem to be supremely cultural, like the erotic arts of ancient Indian culture for example. However, it is clear from other places in the book that the skill involved is the purely technical one to “rapidly and effortlessly assimilate information from the printed page” (Nell 1988: 7). This skill is more analogous to the ability to remove a partner’s clothing than anything else. Now, I can testify from personal experience that while I believe that I can rapidly and effortlessly assimilate information from a printed page, I do not share the pleasure of ludic reading, so something else is clearly required. Not being able to partake of that erotic experience in reading fiction, I have a feeling sometimes of inadequacy that would lead me to seek a reading therapist, who would presumably provide me with a surrogate book. More seriously, the very cultural precariousness of ludic reading as a practice is attested to by many teachers, including, most eloquently, Robert Alter: “Perfectly earnest, reasonably intelligent undergraduates, exposed for the first time to the fantastic proliferation of metaphor in Melville, the exquisite syntactic convolutions of the late Henry James, the sonorously extravagant paradoxes and the arcane terms in Faulkner, are often simply baffled as to why anyone should want to do such strange things with words, and to make life so difficult for a reader.” (Alter 1989: 78)

Complaints such as this, and they are legion, testify eloquently, sometimes against the manifest intention of their authors, with how much cultural effort is the practice of ludic reading constructed even today.

ture, and a crucial one for the association of reading with erotic experience, is the narrative of Paolo and Francesca in *Inferno*, Canto v (127 ff.). The text both alludes to earlier eroticized scenes of reading, Augustine and Dido,<sup>22</sup> and Hèloïse and Abelard (Dronke 1975), and forms a distillation of the history of European reading. Encountering the pair, Dante (the pilgrim narrator) is told:

One day, for pastime, we read of Lancelot, how love constrained him; we were alone, suspecting nothing.<sup>23</sup> Several times that reading urged our eyes to meet and took the color from our faces, but one moment alone it was that overcame us. When we read how the longed-for smile was kissed by so great a lover, this one, who never shall be parted from me, kissed my mouth all trembling. A Gallehaut was the book and he who wrote it; that day we read no farther in it.

While the one spirit said this, the other wept, so that for pity I swooned, as if in death, and fell as a dead body falls. (Dante Alighieri 1970: 55–56)

This is a text which explicitly thematizes a scene of reading for private [“we were alone”] pleasure [“to pass the time away”], but as we can easily see, it renders precisely that practice thoroughly problematic as well.

The crux of the problem, and indeed of the text, is Francesca’s charge “Galeotto fu ’l libro e chi lo scrisse.” How can the author and his book be accused of having caused the downfall of Paolo and Francesca? One possibility would be to understand Dante as indicting a certain type of literature as socially dangerous, much as Flaubert would do centuries later. However, this reading seems excluded by the fact that Dante in other places indicates approval of the Romances, precisely the texts that the couple were reading here.<sup>24</sup> How can its author, then, be referred to as a Galehot? Put somewhat differently, although the situation of these illicit lovers is comparable (and has intertextual connections) with the narrative of Hèloïse and Abelard in the *Roman de la Rose* (Dronke 1975: 131–135), no one to my knowledge has accused the book that they were *studying* or its author of leading to the downfall of *that* couple. This innovation is Dante’s, and it

<sup>22</sup> “Further, in both scenes [Augustine and Dido, Paolo and Francesca] the act of reading is disclosed as an erotic experience” (Mazzotta 1979: 168).

<sup>23</sup> Or “innocent of suspicion” (Musa).

<sup>24</sup> For Dante’s positive remarks on the Romances, see *Purgatorio* 25: 118–119 and *De Vulgari Eloquentia* I,10: 2. Prof. Boitani supplied these references.

is a crux. The question, of course, is to what extent is Francesca's claim that she was seduced by a book to be relied upon. Some critics [Dronke refers to them as the "hawks"] have understood that Dante is merely indicating here Francesca's Eve-like dissembling, an attempt to mislead the pilgrim and justify herself, reading his text as referring to a topos of feminine misreading (see Musa in Dante Alighieri 1984: 119 and see Hatcher and Musa [1968: 107–108]). However, the swoon of pity on the part of the Pilgrim militates against this reading. Although the pilgrim pities other sinners (and indeed expresses pity for Paolo and Francesca's fate even before hearing their story), in all the *Inferno* there is no such extravagant expression of identification with the plight of the condemned as here. His pity can only have been so aroused, I would argue, if he accepted (at least in part) Francesca's argument that the book and its pious author were in fact Panders and she and Paolo thus innocents.<sup>25</sup>

How then can the book and its author be accused of pandering? The question is even stronger according to the view of some Dantean commentators that the book that Paolo and Francesca were reading was the Cistercian<sup>26</sup> prose *Lancelot*, an anti-Romance, one in which the love of Lancelot and Guinivere is presented grotesquely (Hatcher and Musa 1968: 108) and with an awful end. On that interpretation, the trouble that Paolo and Francesca got themselves into was not at all because they were reading the wrong texts. Susan Noakes is one of the adherents of this interpretation. She concludes, "In short, the prose *Lancelot* cited by Dante had transformed the Lancelot story (already condemned by the Papacy a hundred years before the *Commedia* was written) into a religious attack on chivalrous values, showing that adulterous love brings only unhappiness. Paolo and Francesca are thus depicted as reading a text designed expressly to keep potential adulterers out of Hell" (Noakes 1988: 44). Noakes, in contrast to Musa, doesn't read this as dissembling on Francesca's part so much as denial and lack of insight, "'Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse,' expresses

---

<sup>25</sup> Against the argument that the pilgrim's reaction here is occasioned by his "falling in love" with Francesca is the fact that his pity is explicitly engendered by both of the figures and in particular by Paolo's weeping.

<sup>26</sup> This is a particularly interesting datum in light of the fact that the Cistercians particularly emphasized pious reading as a monastic practice, as pointed out in a recent lecture by Brian Stock.

an appalling blindness that she has carried with her into Hell, for it is she and Paolo (rather than a textual or authorial panderer) who have undone themselves by misreading a work written to edify them” (Noakes 1988: 46). The pilgrim faints, on this account, in terror at the “evidence of readerly blindness.” Both of these exegeses have in common that the author is *wrongly* accused of pandering.

I would like to suggest a different interpretation, namely that even if the text that Paolo and Francesca were reading was the pious prose Lancelot (and all the more so if they were reading Chretien), the text and its author can be *justly* accused by Dante of causing the evil that befell Paolo and Francesca, because of the very scene of reading which it presupposes—even against its overt intentions. Francesca emphasizes that the reading was private and “to pass the time away.”<sup>27</sup> I speculate, therefore, that notwithstanding the pious contents of a text, Dante is suggesting that the very practice of reading for pleasure can be morally dangerous.<sup>28</sup> This interpretation is supported by the swoon of the pilgrim as a sign of moral identification between him, Paolo, and Francesca. How so? The privacy and intimacy of the very act of reading of the anti-Romance covertly supports the practices of Romance, even as it overtly attacks them. Put another way, the way that the text wishes to achieve its effects is by stimulating and exciting the reader, and that is indeed what it did. Because the text is intended to seduce the reader to the moral life, it necessarily excites him or her, and the effect that it has willy-nilly is a seduction.<sup>29</sup> The similarity between the pragmatics of reading the Romance and that of the anti-Romance is stronger than the oppositions of their semantics and sufficient, indeed, for the text and its author to be condemned as panderers.

As Noakes argues, Dante’s narrative can be understood on the background of the *newly emerged practice of private reading for pleasure* (Noakes 1988: 42). This historical shift has been best documented by Paul Saenger (1982), who concludes most relevantly for us, “the habit of private silent reading among laymen seems to have begun at least a

<sup>27</sup> Or “for our delight” (Dronke 1975: 127); the Italian has *per diletto*.

<sup>28</sup> Since writing this, I have become aware that my reading is anticipated in large part by Mazzotta (1979: 166 ff.).

<sup>29</sup> Much has been written on the narrative text as seducer. Most recently, several articles in Hunter 1989 deal with this theme.



half-century earlier in Italy than in northern Europe. Dante's *Inferno* and *Paradiso* were intended to be held under the eyes of the lay reader"<sup>30</sup> (Saenger 1982: 410). Thus if one of the intertexts of Canto v is assuredly the tale of Hèloïse, another is such texts as Guillaume de Saint Thierry's exhortation against silent (and thus, private) reading even of scripture (Saenger 1982: 390). On this view, then, Dante announces here precisely the blurring of the two moments of private reading, the ascetic and the erotic, because of the social practice and space which they share. The moment of this blurring is most clearly marked, I suggest, by "that day we read no farther in it," almost surely an echo of Augustine's "I had no wish to read further" at the climax of his conversion by the book (Confessions viii: 12). The cell can be a bedroom, and holy literature read in a *boudoir* can be erotic. Indeed, I would argue that the very ambiguity of the nature of the text that the lovers are reading is a thematization of the perceived moral ambiguity of "reading for pleasure."<sup>31</sup> Dante is aware that this practice is not necessarily conducive to uplifting and moral behavior on the part of its practitioners no matter what they read. It is, after all, Francesca's identification of herself with the heroine that got her into all that trouble, as pointed out by Mazzotta (1979: 169). "The new privacy afforded by silent reading had dramatic and not entirely positive effects on lay spirituality. Private reading stimulated a revival of the ancient genre of erotic art" (Saenger 1982: 412). Note that this will be the case whatever Paolo and Francesca were reading, for even while the prose *Lancelot* thematically exhorts against the values and practices of Romance, *a fortiori* of erotic literature, as act of communication it works by indirection—seduction. The theory of *dulce et utile* is explicit in medieval poetics, including, of course, Dante's. The pilgrim, Dante, is panicked by the thought that given the reading practices of his time and place the same accusation might be leveled against him, and indeed, he was right, for the bitter, almost Sartrean irony of "as you see, he never leaves my side" has actually often been read by Romantic readers, themselves half in love with Francesca, as love conquering

---

<sup>30</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, trans. R. Manheim (London 1965) 299–302. [Note in Saenger's text—Ed.]

<sup>31</sup> Note that this reading also disempowers an easy division of reading by genre, e.g., into fiction and nonfiction.

hell! (Dronke 1975: 127, see Hatcher and Musa 1968: 107).<sup>32</sup> This mistake too was, of course, only possible because of the reading practices of our Romantic culture, and indeed of Dante's. Well might the pilgrim faint: If even so pious an author as the Cistercian who composed the prose *Lancelot* can be rightfully accused of being a Galleoto, what will be said of his intentions and his text which also will be read in such a culture?<sup>33</sup> Dante's text, then, can be said to be a historical sign of the rise of reading as a practice in the modern sense in the centuries just before his writing.

A final step in the distancing of reading from public, ritualistic, and controlled space to private, ludic, eroticized space is the development of the practice of reading in bed. Two of Chaucer's scenes of reading are very much to the point here. The first is his *The Book of the Duchess*, which both opens and closes with the insomniac protagonist reading in bed and proceeds to a romantic dream (Chaucer 1986) and see Boitani (1982: 140–149). The other is, of course, *The Parliament of Fowls*, once again the dream of a reader who after reading in bed falls asleep and proceeds to a dream whose thematics are explicitly concerned with the erotic (Boitani 1982: 169–183). Nell documents convincingly how preeminent the bed is as a privileged site for ludic reading even now (Nell 1988: 250).<sup>34</sup> Carrying out the sort of ethnographic characterization that I did for the Bible and Talmud suggests that here reading occupies a sociocultural space entirely different from the one that it did in the biblical and rabbinic culture. Rather than being speech-act, public, and liturgical in nature, reading is passive, private or semi-private, and belonging to the sphere of leisure and pleasure.

---

<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Dronke himself, while he does not share, of course, the ideology of the Romantic readers, proposes, nevertheless, a version of this reading (127 n. 29). Ironically, my reading implicitly answers Dronke's question that, "Did it ever occur to Dante, I wonder, that for some later readers Francesca's words might become as inflammatory as the tale of Lancelot and Guinivere had been for her and Paolo" (Dronke 1975: 116–117)? My reading suggests that Dante thematizes an answer to this very question. Dronke does suggest that Dante saw an analogy between the prose *Lancelot* and his *Vita Nuova* (127).

<sup>33</sup> This is a culture, after all, which has finally produced a text like the recent film, *La lectrice*, in which a young and attractive woman hires herself out to read *belles lettres* to people in intimate surroundings with predictable results.

<sup>34</sup> See also his comment on a nineteenth-century homology between the "degenerative physiological" effects of habitual masturbation and those of prolonged reading (Nell 1988: 29–30).

*“Reading,” “Historiography” and “the Bible as Literature”*

This analysis of the pragmatics of reading in Ancient Hebrew may help us get a clearer take on a recent debate in biblical hermeneutics. An important new development in the interpretation of the Bible is the application of literary canons of reading to its prose narrative. Two of the most subtle and skillful of practitioners of this criticism are surely Robert Alter (1981) and Meir Sternberg (1985). Both of them treat the art of biblical prose, showing through myriad examples how we can derive great aesthetic pleasure from an appreciation of such devices of linguistic art as repetition, variation, echoing, irony, and the like. The question at hand is, what historically justifies such a practice? Or indeed, is the practice justified? Some have argued, after all, that in truth it is not, because it is in the very nature of the biblical discourse to battle against such “trivialities” as aesthetics and literary art. To be sure, both Alter and Sternberg are sensitive to the theoretical problems that their critical/hermeneutic practice raises. I, for one, am convinced that their reading practice is justified by the profound effect that it has on the richness of our perception of the biblical text.<sup>35</sup> While I find their *practice* telling, however, I find its theoretical grounding in both of their works much less so for reasons that I will now adduce. That is to say, using a talmudic apophthegm: I am in accord with their practice but not their theory. I wish, nonetheless, to suggest that the practice of reading the Bible *as literature* (I use this disdained terminology advisedly—see below) can be reestablished on another theoretical footing, provided in part by the ethnography of reading approach here adumbrated.

I will begin by setting out the terms of the issue as Alter and Sternberg themselves laid it out. In his comprehensive work on biblical narrative, Alter has defended the thesis that, “prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative” (1981: 24). Among the criteria that Alter applied are the signs of intervention on the part of the narrator in the presentation of the story, namely, the conventionality of narrated events and other signs of verbal artistry. In a recent paper Alter (1992), has further elaborated and exemplified his

---

<sup>35</sup> This is not to claim, of course, that I agree with all they say, either on the theoretical level or on the level of “practical criticism.” See Boyarin 1990.

thesis. He argues from three “test-cases” (1992: 5) that, “If virtually every utterance of biblical narrative points toward the imperative concerns of covenant faith, it is also demonstrably evident that virtually every utterance of biblical narrative reveals the presence of writers who relished the words and the materials of storytelling with which they worked, who delighted, because after all they were writers, in pleasing cadences and surprising deflections of syntax, in complex echoing effects among words, in the kind of speech they could fashion for the characters and how the self-same words could be ingeniously transformed as they were passed from narrator to character or from one character to another” (Alter 1992: 9–10). I find Alter’s identifications of “pleasing cadences” and all the rest persuasive, but here’s also the rub.

Sternberg disagrees strongly with Alter’s description of biblical narrative, claiming that it must be understood as historiography. What is relevant in the distinction between historiography and fiction is the truth claims which the text makes as a function of its discourse—certainly not our judgment of those truth claims, nor our judgment of the plausibility of the evaluation of the events which the text presents (Sternberg 1985: 33–34). Sternberg argues that the fact that the “narrative . . . illegitimizes an thought of fictionality on pain of excommunication,” makes it impossible for us to understand it as anything but historiography. It seems to me doubtless as well that Sternberg has also put his finger on something important here. Our understanding of biblical narrative must at some level take into account the evidence that many people, including very likely its authors and first audiences did believe in its literal truth. I believe that the “ethnography of reading” approach adumbrated in this paper will give us a way out of the dilemma thus created by showing that the terms of the debate should be recast. Rather than talking about what biblical narrative is or is not, we should be talking about strategies and pragmatics of reading in different cultural moments.

In a recent essay, I have argued against Sternberg’s position that biblical narrative is historiography, to the effect that *since biblical narrative does not generally verify its factual claims by referring to evidence, but in fact at nearly every moment presents its data as that of an omniscient narrator*, from the point of view of our own time and our conventions of writing-reading, it belongs to the genre of fiction and not historiography (Boyarin 1990). Indeed Sternberg reads the Bible in essentially the

same way that Alter does, providing also illuminating readings of verbal artistry. His critical practice thus shows that the Bible's narrative reads like fiction. (The fact that much historiography is written like fiction does not obscure this argument; when historiography tells what goes on in the mind of a character, we read it as more or less plausible historical fiction.) All of his comparisons to various discursive strategies in texts closer to us in time and place are to fictional texts, and this is not accidental. Sternberg complains against the terminology of reading "the Bible as literature" (or of "literary approach to the Bible"), unless they are taken as shorthand for "reading the Bible as the literary text that it is" (Sternberg 1985: 3), but historiography is not the typical case of literary text for our culture. Indeed, when we read Gibbon in a literary way, precisely what we are doing is reading historiography as literature. He suggests that when we read the Bible we must suspend disbelief, but that also is an argument for its fictional status—not historiographical! When we read ancient historiography, we may enjoy its style and wit and be fascinated to learn what people thought about the world once, but we do not ask ourselves to suspend disbelief. Such suspension of disbelief is a practice which belongs in our culture to the reading of fiction, not of historiography. Indeed, the "suspension of disbelief" is one of the prime mechanisms of "reading for pleasure." Since the major discursive gesture that Sternberg finds, the omniscient narrator, and its concomitant requirement of the reader that she or he "believe" this narrator, belongs in our literary system exclusively to fiction, I think that Alter is right when he asserts "prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative."

Here I would like to propose that there is a real contradiction or tension in the very practice of literary criticism of the Bible, which Sternberg senses and which produces his problematic. As convincing as Alter's readings are, they seem also to be missing something by referring to the texts as fiction. Sternberg is surely right about something here; after all we don't excommunicate people for not believing in the literal truth of fiction. Sternberg, in fact provides one argument which I take to be very similar to the one I am promulgating here when he says that the Bible "internalizes its own rules of communication, whereby the remembrance of the past devolves on the present and determines the future" (Sternberg 1985: 31). However, this suggests exactly that my own discourse is prone to very much the

same contradictions as his, for I seemingly assert at one and the same time with Alter that the Bible is prose fiction and with Sternberg that fiction (and indeed “literature”) is an irrelevant concept for the language cum reconstructed culture of the Bible. If reading, as we know it, did not exist in the biblical culture, then certainly neither did “literature,” *a fortiori* fiction! We seem, then, to be caught in an adamant aporia.

It seems to me that cognitive anthropology will offer us possible avenues of rescue from the horns of this dilemma. In recent years a great deal of very important theoretical and descriptive work has been done in cognitive anthropology. One important area of research in this branch of ethnography has been based traditionally on the study of semantic fields in various languages, with the understanding that they are informative of ways of world making of the respective cultures.<sup>36</sup> Before getting into the substantive argument, I think it is necessary to spend a little time assessing the current status of this method. Holland and Quinn have put the question in the following way:

It has been colleagues from the more materialist traditions in anthropology, and indeed from some of the ideationalist traditions within the discipline as well, who have been at pains to point out the limitation of a research program for validating cultural models solely on the basis of linguistic behavior. These anthropologists observe that people do not always do what would seem to be entailed by the cultural beliefs they enunciate. . . . Do cultural models, they want to know, influence more than talk, and if so how? (Holland and Quinn 1987: 5)

For the type of research engaged in here the question is even sharper, since we have virtually no access to the culture other than what people said. Can linguistic behavior teach us anything significant concerning behavior in cultures about which we know very little other than their written and material remains?<sup>37</sup> Do linguistic cultural models reveal

---

<sup>36</sup> Immediately below I will discuss recent thinking on this subject. We no longer think that we have access to the true world picture of other cultures through semantics, however something remains valid nevertheless. At any rate, the semantic division of the world *is itself practice and worthy of analysis and “thick description.”* For a definitive statement of an early and positivistic stage of this type of research, see the collection of Stephen Tyler (1969).

<sup>37</sup> The alerts of Keesing (1987: 387) against relying on inadequate field knowledge of languages are even more to the point here, but what else can we do?

anything more than the “talk” of the ancient culture?<sup>38</sup> Recent work suggests that they do, but we must seriously nuance and qualify what precisely it is that they reveal. As Holland and Quinn put it, “culturally shared knowledge is organized into prototypical event sequences enacted in simplified worlds. That much of such cultural knowledge is presumed by language use is as significant a realization to anthropologists as to linguists. For the latter, these cultural models promise the key to linguistic usage; *for the former, linguistic usage provides the best available data for reconstruction of cultural models*” (Holland and Quinn 1987: 24, emphasis mine).

One way out of our aporia of biblical narrative which claims to be historiography but looks like fiction would be to regard this as a particular instance of a familiar ethnographic problem, one that could be defined as the gap between what a culture says about its practice and its observed practice. A classic instance of this in the literature is the “long-standing debate in social anthropology over the reported disparities between Nuer descriptions of their kinship system and Nuer kinship behavior ‘on the ground’” (Holland and Quinn 1987: 5–6). Now one way of resolving this debate in the literature is Holy’s which Holland and Quinn discuss. He argues for a solution based on Caws’s two types of native or folk models, “representational” and “operational.” “The former are indigenous models of their world that people can more or less articulate; the latter are indigenous models that guide behavior in given situations and that tend to be out of awareness. Representational models, from this view, are not necessarily operational nor are the latter necessarily representational; thus inconsistencies between what people say and what they do need not be cause for puzzlement” (Holland and Quinn 1987: 5–6). Following this reasoning, what we have in the case of biblical narrative is a similar situation where the Bible’s representational models (what they say) deny both

---

<sup>38</sup> “Early efforts sought to describe the semantic structure of lexical domains. If analysts could recover or reconstruct what one needed to know in order to label pieces and portions of the world correctly in the native’s own language, it was reasoned, then the resulting model would capture an important part of those people’s culturally constructed reality” (Holland and Quinn 1987: 14). But “The semantic structures recovered in these earliest analyses did provide insight into the organization of some domains of the lexicon. However, the organization of lexicon was soon recognized to offer only limited insight into the organization of cultural knowledge.” (Holland and Quinn 1987: 14).

at levels of semantic organization and of explicit representation the existence of a category like fiction or indeed literary art while their operational models (what they do) certainly presuppose such categories. This is a formalizable way of talking about the distinction between explicit and implicit poetics in literary theory.

I would like to take this distinction a step further and suggest that we need to historicize the very opposition of fiction and historiography. My claim in brief is that it is from the point of view of *our own* practices of reading that biblical narrative reads as fiction. That does not imply, in any way, that for the biblical culture itself, fiction is a relevant category, nor, for that matter, need we assume that historiography is a relevant category for the biblical narrator. Indeed, I would argue that the whole theoretical debate between Alter and Sternberg is nonessential, precisely because we cannot assume an ahistorical organization of cultural productions into the genres familiar from our own. In this way I hope to account for the evident fact that the practices of both critics are virtually identical in principle. Both read the Bible *as* didactic fiction. There are other genres and possible organizations of textual cultures than history : : fiction. Just to take an obvious example, in many cultures myth makes truth claims every bit as serious as those of historiography in ours, and indeed, disbelief in myths might well lead to excommunication or worse in some cultures, but that certainly does not define them as historiography.<sup>39</sup> On the

---

<sup>39</sup> Dell Hymes remarks in a letter of October 5, 1990: "I think it would be true to say that many American Indians heard performances of myths, and thought about them in between performances as both enacting a message and as pleasurable. In some groups some kinds of stories would be framed as not true, not necessarily true. Among the Nootka of British Columbia for example, what we typically call "myths" can be referred to in English as "fairy stories." They express truths about the world but whether they happened or not is not essential. What *are* true, and history, are the accounts (equally mythological in important part to us) of how the privileges of a lineage were acquired by an ancestor. Those are known to be true because they have been recited, exactly, from one generation to another."

The very fact that Prof. Hymes refers to different practices of reception of "myths" among different groups only proves my main point that genre is a set of culturally specific practices; however, I would continue to dissent from his characterization of the lineage accounts as history. Just as in the biblical case, the belief in the referentiality of the narrative does not constitute it as historiography, given my argument that historiography is a particular discursive practice developed in European culture for particular sociocultural functions. Even the very appeal to memory or oral tradition as authority and not documents is a fundamentally different practice, as is also the pointing out of a pillar of salt to validate the story of Lot's wife.



other hand, while myths are emphatically not fictions, certainly not madeup narratives for the production of pleasure, for us, the practices of reading fiction may be the only ones available for the reading of myths. We must accordingly make a sharp distinction between reading strategies and practices which we adopt vis-à-vis given texts from other cultures and the assumption that the rules and practices of those cultures were the same as ours. The evidence cited above suggests, therefore, that whatever pleasure biblical narrative may produce for us, when we read it for the aesthetic values that we find in it, producing pleasure was the farthest thing from the minds of the authors of that narrative.

This point can be honed by examining another claim of Alter's:

One should add that the very act of writing in one respect makes the writer more craftsman than communicator, for he is directed in the first instance not to his—necessarily, eventual—audience but to the medium of words, which has its own intricate allure, and which he works and reworks as a sculptor models his clay, to produce the pleasing curve, the intriguing texture, the satisfying symmetry. (Alter 1989: 79)

I dare suspect that Jeremiah would have been horrified at such a description of his practice, however much we may find “intriguing texture and satisfying symmetry,” in his rhetoric. Communication and not craft was his primary (if not only) aim, and any craft involved was only to serve that aim. An analogy may be helpful here. We in Metropolis read the statuary of Others in accord with the practices

---

Because I fear that I may still be misunderstood here, I want to make it absolutely clear that my purpose is *not* to privilege “Western” culture and its signifying practices over those of “others.” Quite the opposite, my point is to disrupt that privilege, making it clear that what others do with stories of their pasts is not failed (or even successful) historiography but a different practice of storytelling of the past. An example may make my point clearer. I recently attended the lectures of a colleague on Ancient History. In a review session, he asked the students what the beginning date of the course's purview was and the correct answer was 2500 B.C., because that is when the first *contemporaneous document attesting to a state occurs*. We have buildings and other material remains from people much earlier, of course, than 2500 B.C., but what we say about them is not historiography. We can easily see how culture-bound the practice of historiography is, and we do others no favor by seeing their practices as something like ours—but not quite. Once more, none of this has anything to do with the referential truth or falsity (historicity!) of events represented in any practice of telling the past. Non historiographical practices of communal memory may often be more “true” than the reconstructions of historians.

of our culture as art. We find genuine aesthetic value in precisely “the pleasing curve, the intriguing texture, the satisfying symmetry” of what was for that Other perhaps a god—sometimes an icon and producer of terror—directed certainly in the first instance to its audience for its function and not at all to the medium or to the beauty that we legitimately, nevertheless, find there. Indeed, it is not uncommon that the very statues that we place in museums were in their original cultural contexts normally hidden entirely from sight! Thus, reading the Bible as fictional art may indeed be the only way appropriate or available for many of us to read it, without requiring us, however, to assign that meaning to it in its original cultural context or contexts.

As Sweetser (1987: 49) has shown “fiction” in our culture is part of an intricately structured cultural model, in which such entities as jokes and white lies also have a place. What possible reason is there to assume that the model of this general area of culture in ancient Israel was anything like in ours? To be sure, cognitive anthropologists no longer assume radical discontinuity between human cultures in basics such as emotions, but in the details there certainly are significant differences (Keesing 1987: 374, 386). Thus the Rabbis *do* have a category that means something like “fiction,” that is, they have a term for narratives which are not referentially “true.” The term is “parable,” that is “*mashal*.” The concept of true versus false stories was, therefore, part of their sociomental world. But let us just imagine how different “fiction” would feel if the only fiction we knew of were *romans à thèse*, “authoritarian fictions,” in Susan Rubin Suleiman’s phraseology!

Both Alter and Sternberg read biblical narrative appropriately for our cultural context as if it were fiction. That is the only way we can read texts (I can hear somebody saying, “What do you mean ‘we’, white man?”) that tell us what went on in the hearts of men, women, and angels and report private conversations with all their psychological nuances. For the Talmud, however, it was precisely these features that “proved” Divine intervention in the authorship. I cannot, therefore, accept Sternberg’s claim that the Bible is “not just an artful work; not a work marked by some aesthetic property; not a work resorting to so-called literary devices; not a work that the interpreter may choose (or refuse) to consider from a literary viewpoint or, in that unlovely piece of jargon, as literature; but a literary work” (Sternberg 1985: 2). I believe that the semantic/ethnographic analysis performed here supports the view that reading and indeed literature are the historically

generated practices of a particular culture, and not the one in which the Bible was produced. Indeed, Alter's, "prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative" is valid, if when he says, "for describing" he means, "for us in our culture, given our practice of 'reading', to describe." I suggest then that by engaging in literary reading, that constructed (but not less valuable for that) practice of European culture, that precisely what we are doing is *reading the Bible as literature*.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TAKE THE BIBLE FOR EXAMPLE: MIDRASH AS LITERARY THEORY\*

All fiction is exemplary.

—MICHAEL RIFFATERRE

The nature of biblical narrative is hotly contested territory in recent critical writing. Robert Alter threw down a certain gauntlet when he wrote, “prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative,”<sup>1</sup> and the challenge was taken up by Meir Sternberg, who argued that the “narrative . . . illegitimizes all thought of fictionality on pain of excommunication.”<sup>2</sup> In a recent paper I have addressed the controversy between these two critics and argued that the very terms of their disagreement are based on an incomplete conception of literary history, for the organization of narratives into fictions and histories in the way that we know it is a production of a particular sociocultural moment—not the one in which the Bible was produced.<sup>3</sup> The notion I developed there was that the distinction we make between fiction and historiography is essentially one of reading practice; accepting the reliability of the “omniscient implied author” (not necessarily narrator, of course) and “suspension of disbelief” being two of the most reliable markers of a practice of reading a text as fiction. From this point of view, it is clear why Alter and Sternberg must disagree; on the one hand, ancient receivers of the Bible almost surely accepted the reliability of the omniscient implied author (God!), but on the

---

\* I wish to thank Robert Alter, Ken Frieden, Alexander Gelley, Chana Kronfeld, Mark Steiner, and Meir Sternberg for reading a draft of this essay and commenting on it. I have taken some of their advice—and ignored some, probably at my peril.

<sup>1</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Boyarin, “Placing Reading: Ancient Israel and Medieval Europe,” in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 10–37.

other hand they did not suspend disbelief. They believed, on pain of excommunication indeed. From the perspective of our reading practice, then, biblical narrative is suspended in an ambiguous position somewhere between fiction and historiography.

In this paper, I wish to approach the problem from another angle entirely, the angle of semiotic structures in narrative itself. When we consider other characteristics traditionally utilized to distinguish forms of narrative, we see that narrative, even in our cultural system, does not divide itself up so neatly into historiography and fiction. Historiography, as shown so elegantly by Hayden White in his several works, is as “artificial” in its narrative structures, its plotting, as fiction, and indeed very close to fiction in its semiotics. Therefore we are no longer prohibited from regarding a narrative text as historiography by the discovery of structured plotting, rhetorical artifice, linguistic play, and the like in that text, nor *a fortiori* are we compelled, as Alter argues we are, to regard a narrative as fiction by the fact that “virtually every utterance of biblical narrative reveals the presence of writers who relished the words and the materials of storytelling with which they worked, who delighted, because after all they were writers, in pleasing cadences and surprising deflections of syntax, in complex echoing effects among words, in the kind of speech they could fashion for the characters and how the self-same words could be ingeniously transformed as they were passed from narrator to character or from one character to another.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, fiction is clearly a carrier of vital truths for us, truths that we may not be excommunicated for disregarding but that often have other effects just as dire (or even more so). If anyone needs convincing of that, the wave of suicides among European youths after the publication of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* ought to do the job. Michael Riffaterre is the theoretician who has most sharply inquired into the seeming oxymoron of “fictional truth.” Riffaterre argues: “All literary genres are artifacts, but none more blatantly so than fiction. Its very name declares its artificiality, and yet it must somehow be true to hold the interest of its readers, to tell them about experiences at once imaginary and relevant to their own lives. The paradox of truth in fiction is the prob-

---

<sup>4</sup> Robert Alter, “Biblical Imperatives and Literary Play,” unpublished paper, n.d., pp. 9–10. I thank Prof. Alter for allowing me access to a prepublication copy of this paper.

lem for which I propose to seek a solution.”<sup>5</sup> So, in a sense, both Alter and Sternberg are right; the Bible is a kind of fiction that banishes all thought of fictionality on pain of excommunication. We have the paradox of “truth in fiction” with a vengeance here. I wish in this paper to explore a solution to this problem offered by some of the most ancient readers of the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbis<sup>6</sup> of the midrash and Talmud. These assiduous readers of the Bible made extensive use of the notion of exemplarity in their reading; indeed, the exemplum or parable was the privileged hermeneutic device. Although their discursive practices were, of course, entirely different from our Platonic-Aristotelian ones and many of their cultural assumptions were different, I think we can learn something about how exemplarity is related to historiography, truth, and fiction by studying their use and discussion of the parable as a hermeneutic form.<sup>7</sup>

In the Hebrew of the midrash and of the Talmud, the same words mean “example” and “parable.” The Rabbis actually use the word “dugma,” a normal word for “sample” or “example,” as another name for the *mashal*, or midrashic parable, that special kind of exemplary narrative that they deployed as a hermeneutic key for the understanding of the Torah. It is not insignificant that these two words derive from different lexical sources in Hebrew, “dugma” being of course a Greek-derived word while “*mashal*” is of Semitic origin. “Dugma,” from Greek *deigma* carries with it from its etymon more abstract senses of “pattern,” “model” as well as “sample” or “example,”

---

<sup>5</sup> Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. xii.

<sup>6</sup> This term when capitalized refers to the rabbinical authorities who produced the talmudic literature (which includes midrash). They were active in Palestine and Babylonia in the first four centuries of the Christian era, thus paralleling in time the Church Fathers.

<sup>7</sup> For the *mashal* (parable) as a hermeneutic form see Gerald L. Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 31. I agree completely and my discussion below will suggest further that for the Rabbis, fiction is par excellence an interpretative practice. If in our culture fiction is that which requires interpretation, for them fiction is that which interprets. On this see also Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially the chapters entitled “Interpreting in Ordinary Language: The *Mashal* as Intertext,” “The Sea Resists,” and “The Song of Songs: Lock or Key?” David Stern, “Rhetoric and Midrash: The Case of the *Mashal*,” *Prooftexts*, 1 (1981): 261–91, offers a very valuable analysis that is quite different from mine and perhaps corrective of it. See further my discussion of the *mashal* below.

while “*mashal*” has an original and basic sense of “likeness.”<sup>8</sup> We learn the partial equivalence of these two vocables from the following text:

*And not only that Kohellet was wise, he moreover taught knowledge to the people, and proved and researched, and formulated many meshalim [= parables] [Ecclesiastes 12:9]—“and proved” words of Torah, “and researched” words of Torah; he made handles<sup>9</sup> for the Torah. You will find that until Solomon existed, there was no *dugma*.<sup>10</sup>*

The last sentence in the midrash, “until Solomon existed there was no *dugma*” is a paraphrase of the last phrase in the verse, “formulated many *meshalim*.” It follows that the midrash has translated “*meshalim*” (the plural of “*mashal*”) by “*dugma*.” “*Dugma*,” it is clear, is a synonym for “*mashal*.” “Example” means “parable.”

Moreover, the categories of parable and of fiction are perfectly coterminous in the literary theory of the Rabbis. The consequence of all this is that fiction is inextricably bound up with exemplarity in rabbinic textual theory. The next citation makes this dramatically clear:

R. Eliezer says: the dead whom Ezekiel raised stood on their feet, uttered a song, and died. What song did they utter? God kills justly and resurrects mercifully. R. Yehoshua says: they uttered this song: God kills and resurrects, takes down to Sheol, and will raise up [I Samuel 2:6]. *R. Yehuda says: in reality it was a mashal [= parable and example]. R. Nehemiah said to him: If a mashal then why “in reality,” and if, “in reality,” then why a mashal?! But, indeed, he meant that it was really a mashal.* R. El’azar the son of R. Yosi Hagelili says: the dead whom Ezekiel raised went up to the Land of Israel, took wives and begat sons and daughters. R. Yehuda ben Beteira stood on his feet and said: I am one of their grandchildren, and these are the phylacteries which my grandfather left to me from them.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The two terms are used interchangeably in Hebrew in certain collocations. Thus, one can say either “*l’mashal*” or “*l’dugma*” to mean “for example,” but only “*dugma*” to mean “pattern” or “sample” and (in later Hebrew) only “*mashal*” to mean “parable.”

<sup>9</sup> The word for “handles” and the word “proved” come from the same root in Hebrew. “Handles” is being used in a sense very similar to that of the modern English colloquial phrase “I can’t get a handle on that idea,” i.e., a place of access.

<sup>10</sup> *Song of Songs Rabba*, ed. S. Dunsky (Jerusalem, 1980), p. 5. All translations of rabbinic texts in this essay are mine.

<sup>11</sup> Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 92 b. On this text, see also Raphael Loewe, “The ‘Plain’ Meaning of Scriptures in Early Jewish Exegesis,” *Papers of the Institute of Jewish Studies*, I (1964): 172–75.

This text draws a very strong contrast between parables and referential claims of truth. They are considered to be mutually exclusive opposites. This is indicated in the text in two ways: first of all by the self-contradiction that R. Nehemiah claims to find in R. Yehuda's statement that in reality the story of the Dry Bones is a parable and secondly by the attempt to contradict the parabolic status of the text by asserting its actual concrete referentiality—to the extent that there are “real” objects in the world that certify this. Something cannot be a parable and be real. If something is real then it cannot be a parable. The parable is thus coextensive with fiction. Indeed, it may be the only name that the Rabbis have for fiction, as opposed to lying, a category into which they obviously do not place parables. This same view of things is presupposed by other rabbinic statements as well, such as “Job never was created and never was, but it (the Book)/he (the man) is a parable.”

The claim of the Rabbis that all the exemplary is fiction provides an elegant counterpart to Riffaterre's apothegm that all fiction is exemplary. In any case, having established that the *mashal* is synonymous in rabbinic literary theory with fiction, we can see that at least for this culture, the problem of the referentiality of the fiction is crucially bound up with the notion of the example and its semantic-semiotic problematic. A good starting place for our analysis would seem to be then a study of the notion of the example itself. In my analysis, I shall make use of a paper of Nelson Goodman's published several years ago that draws important distinctions in the semantics of exemplification and in particular analyzes the way that exemplarity intersects with the problem of referentiality.<sup>12</sup> I shall claim an essential isomorphism between the conceptualization of this issue in the Rabbis and in Goodman.

Exemplification was one of the most significant modes of expression in rabbinic thought. They spent great efforts at determining for themselves what an example is and how it works or teaches, particularly in the privileged type of rabbinic discourse, interpretation. To be sure, they never use the abstract and systematic discursive modes favored in our philosophy, but rather speak (consistently with their

---

<sup>12</sup> Nelson Goodman, “Routes of Reference,” *Critical Inquiry*, 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 121–32.



whole stance) about examples in examples. As we shall see by closely analyzing several texts, they arrived at quite a complex understanding of exemplification in general and of its relation to the conundrums of fictional/parabolic reference:

*And command you the Israelites that they will bring olive oil [Exodus 27:20]. Your eyes are doves [Song of Songs 1:15]. Rabbi Yitzhaq said, God said to them, Your dugma is like that of a dove. One who wishes to buy wheat says to his associate, show me their dugma, you also your dugma is like that of a dove. How so? When Noah was in the ark what is written? And he sent the dove [Genesis 8:10], and the dove came to him in the evening [and behold, it was grasping an olive leaf in its mouth] [Genesis 8:11]. Said the Holy One to Israel, Just as the dove brought light into the world, also you who have been compared [nimšalt] to a dove, bring olive oil and light before me, for it says, And command you the Israelites that they will bring olive oil.<sup>13</sup>*

This is a complex and interesting text that justifies a somewhat lengthy analysis. In typical midrashic fashion, it uses a passage from the later Holy Writings to interpret a passage from the Five Books of Moses. This is a midrashic text of the type called “petiḥta,” the motive of which is to show how all of the Prophets and Holy Writings can be shown to be commentary on the Torah. Accordingly, R. Yitzhaq demonstrates here that the verse of Song of Songs is a commentary on a passage in Exodus.<sup>14</sup> As we shall see presently, the way that the Song of Songs is understood to interpret is by its being a mashal. This hermeneutic connection is adumbrated in the cited text by the focus upon one highly privileged instance of interpretive use of the Song, namely the metaphorical depiction of Israel as a dove. The key to the midrash is its opening move, which I cite here from its original source in the midrash on Song of Songs: “*Your eyes are doves* [Song of Songs 1:15]. Your dugma is like that of a dove.”<sup>15</sup> This hermeneutic assertion is based on an elaborate pun. The Hebrew word “‘ayin” (“eye”) also has the meaning “color.” From this sense derives a series

<sup>13</sup> *Tanhuma*, ed. S. Buber, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1964–65), 2:96.

<sup>14</sup> On this form, see Joseph Heinemann, “The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim: A Form-Critical Study,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, 22 (1971): 100–122; and David Stern, “Midrash and the Language of Exegesis,” in *Midrash and Literature*, ed. G. Hartman and S. Budick (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 105–27, just to give two citations of works in English.

<sup>15</sup> *Song of Songs Rabba*, p. 49.

of prepositions, such as “me‘ein” and “k‘ein,” which mean “according to the likeness of,” or “following the example of.”<sup>16</sup> From this there develops a midrashic topos by which verses that include the word “eye” can be glossed as having the sense of “dugma” as form or likeness, “figure” in both the sense of plastic form and the spiritual or moral significance.<sup>17</sup>

Thematizing the notion of example directly, the text of R. Yitzhaq constitutes a meta-midrash, a rare and precious explicit rabbinic comment on hermeneutics. The text depends for its effect on the fact that “dugma” is polysemous. In fact, I would suggest that the text plays with this polysemy deliberately, creating examples within examples, each of a slightly different type. This polysemy exploited by our

---

<sup>16</sup> This is paralleled in later Hebrew by the same semantic development of the Persian loan word “gaun,” “color,” which also forms a preposition “kegon,” meaning “according to the likeness of” and also “for example.” The great eleventh-century French Bible commentator Rashi already anticipated this semantic comparison in his gloss on this verse of Song of Songs. See also Sarah Kamin, “Dugma” in Rashi’s Commentary on the Song of Songs” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz*, 52 (1983): 48 n. 27 and p. 47, who cites similar use of Latin “color” as a synonym for “figura, exemplum, similitudo,” etc., in medieval Christian hermeneutics.

<sup>17</sup> Thus: “This is what the verse says, *God will not diminish the eye of the righteous* (Job 36:7). What does this mean? God does not take away from the righteous their *dugmaterin* [an alternate Greek form equivalent to “dugma”]. Know this, for Abraham begat Isaac in his likeness, for it says, ‘These are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham, Abraham begat Isaac.’ And Jacob begat Joseph in his likeness, for it says, ‘These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph’ it does not say, Reuben, Simeon, but only Joseph. And furthermore it says ‘For he is the son of his old age [*ben zequim*]’; the very form of his *ikonin* is he to him. And this is “*God will not diminish the eye of the righteous.*” (*Tanhuma*, 1:136. For those who may be using other editions, this midrash is found very near the end of the Book of Exodus.) The midrash wonders, why is it that when the generations of these two patriarchs are being recounted only one of their children is mentioned? The tacit answer is that the one who is mentioned is the one who was similar to his father, that is, the one who inherited the father’s dugma. We learn that the intention is to refer to the physical form from the following text, which says explicitly (by a typical midrashic pun on “zequim”) that the son had exactly the “ziv ikonin,” the son is the *eikōn* of the father, he has the physical *figura* of the father. The dugma of the father thus continues to exist, hence, God does not take away from the righteous their *dugmaterin* when they die. But we find “dugma” also as “figura” in the spiritual or moral sense in a parallel midrashic text: “*God will not diminish the eye of the righteous.* His dugma, Leah held onto the quality of praising God and confessing to Him (i.e., when she said, ‘This time will I praise God’), and therefore she had children who praised [God] . . . David—*Praise God for He is good* [Psalms 107:1]; Daniel—*To You my God I praise and sing* [Daniel 2:23].” The dugma in the first case is the appearance, the physical form, while in the second case it is the behavior, the character, a quality of the human being. The reward for being righteous is that one’s descendants are created in one’s likeness, pattern, or form.

midrash is a powerful key to the complexity of the notion of exemplarity and thus of the exemplarity of fiction as well.

In his initial move after “translating” *Your eyes are like doves* by “Your dugma is like that of a dove,” Rabbi Yitzhaq explains the meaning of “dugma” by exemplifying it with the little narrative of one who goes to the market to buy wheat and brings home a sample first.<sup>18</sup> The primary usage of “dugma” is thus that of “sample” in the sense of a small portion of a substance that serves as a way of communicating to others the properties of the substance, as, for instance, a small amount of colored wool that a dyer would carry about as an indication of the quality of his wares and work:

The tailor should not go out at the advent of the Sabbath with the needle in his garment, nor the carpenter with the splinter on his collar, nor the dyer with the dugma on his ear, nor the money changer with the dinar in his ear. (*Tosefta Shabbat*, I:8)

This text describes craftsmen whose custom is to advertise by carrying a small sign of their trade. The dyer would attach to his ear (or put in his ear) a small sample of dyed cloth, so that people would know what his work was, just as the money changer would advertise himself with a coin and the carpenter with a splinter. The dugma, here then, has two signifying functions. It serves as a conventional sign of the trade of its bearer but also as a sign of his ability and standards. If we compare it to the other two signs mentioned in the text, which are not called “dugma,” this point will become clearer. On the one hand, the dugma of the dyer functions like the needle of the tailor or the splinter of the carpenter. It tells people that the trade of this person is such and such. On the other hand, the dugma stands in a part-whole relationship to the dyer’s product and as such signifies directly the quality of his work. The word “dugma” here signifies a concrete portion of a mass (a “fusion” of all such similar objects) which through its characteristics manifests the characteristics of the entire mass. The mass which it signifies is just as concrete as the portion of the mass, as the dugma. In English we would use the word “sample” or “specimen” to convey this meaning. Dugma, then, clearly has the sense of “sample” or “example” as a portion or member of

---

<sup>18</sup> See also Kamin’s important discussion in her “‘Dugma’ in Rashi’s Commentary.”

a class chosen and pointed out to show the characteristics of the entire class.

When God addressed Israel with the metaphor *Your eyes are doves*, what He really meant, according to R. Yitzhaq, was the dugma of Israel is like that of a dove. In order to illustrate this point, the rabbi gives an example of the literary form “dugma,” that is to say, a dugma about dugma. The first dugma is very concrete indeed. It refers to the simplest usage of the word that I considered above, that of a sample of merchandise. This dugma of dugma (the dugma of the comparison of dugma to the sample of wheat) has its own parabolic application, namely, it *exemplifies* the type: parabolic signification. It is a dugma of the class “dugma” in *exactly* the same way that the dugma of the sample of wheat is a dugma of all of the wheat. Everything is equally concrete. The sample of wheat is as concrete as the silo full of wheat from which it was taken. Similarly, the example of the “wheat” is as concrete as the group (fusion—not class) of other instances of parabolic discourse to which it is being compared. Goodman too has discussed exactly this type of exemplification as its very prototypical form:

Exemplification is reference by a sample to a feature of it. A tailor’s swatch, in normal use, exemplifies its color, weave, and thickness, but not its size or shape; the note a concertmaster sounds before the performance exemplifies pitch but not timbre, duration, or loudness.

Exemplification, then, far from being a variety of denotation, runs in the opposite direction, not from label to what the label applies to but from something a label applies to back to the label (or the feature associated with that label). . . . Exemplification is not mere possession of a feature but requires also reference to that feature; such reference is what distinguishes the exemplified from the merely possessed features.<sup>19</sup>

Goodman thus gives as his most basic type of example precisely the type that R. Yitzhaq adduced as his, the sample used by the merchant or tradesman to show off his wares.

Following the self-reflexive exemplification of dugma, the relation of the dove to Israel is discussed as similar to the relation of a sample of wheat to all of the wheat, or of this particular dugma (= example) to the whole category of dugma (= exemplification). Israel’s dugma is a dove, just as the dugma of the wheat is the sample. This comparison

---

<sup>19</sup> Goodman, “Routes of Reference,” pp. 124–25.

is, however, considerably more complex. It is not nearly so straightforward as the one that compares the ratio of an example to the class “exemplification” with the ratio of a sample of wheat to the fusion “wheat,” for, after all, a dove is not a member of the fusion “Israel.” What we have here is what Goodman calls “complex reference.” The way that “Israel’s dugma is like a dove” works is most similar to the following case cited by Goodman:

I may answer your question about the color of my house by showing a sample rather than by uttering a predicate; or I may merely describe the location of the appropriate sample on a color card you have. In the latter case, the chain of reference runs down from a verbal label to an instance denoted and then up to another label (or feature) exemplified. And a picture of a bald eagle denotes a bird that may exemplify a label such as “bold and free” that in turn denotes and is exemplified by a given country.<sup>20</sup>

Note that this is almost precisely the way that “Israel’s dugma is like a dove” functions. The word-picture “dove” denotes a bird that exemplifies a label that in turn denotes and is exemplified by a given people, Israel. However, we must also recognize (as certainly Goodman does) that the exemplification of the label “bold and free” by a bald eagle—actual, depicted, or denoted—is a culturally determined or intertextual function. The process of interpretation by exemplification is thus a picking out of the feature to which the exemplification will refer. The phrase “your dugma is like a dove” means a feature that you possess is like a feature of a dove, and by pointing out that feature in the denotation, “dove,” that feature is referred to—exemplified. And what is that? Both the dove and Israel are light-bringers. The dove brought light to the world by bringing an olive branch, the concrete symbol of light, and Israel brings light to the world by bringing oil to the Temple.<sup>21</sup> It is important, however, to make clear that

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>21</sup> This dugma also contains perlocutionary force, as in a classic exemplum. It is not so much that Israel belongs to the class of lightbringers exemplified by the dove, but that Israel ought to belong to this class. And therefore, “command the children of Israel that they bring me pure olive oil!” On the perlocutionary force of the exemplum, see Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), pp. 25–54. In the way that I am analyzing the mashal and related forms here, the perlocutionary force is facultative and not necessary to the form. However, Kamin exaggerates when she says that dugma in the sense of “example to be followed” does not occur in classic rabbinic

the Rabbis are not thereby exhausting the description of a dove or *a fortiori* of Israel. There is no abstraction here (in either a nominalistic or a realistic sense) but a placing of a concrete entity beside another concrete entity in such a way that characteristics that are obscure in the one are revealed by association with those same characteristics in the other, where they are obvious or explicit. This possibility of exemplifying Israel by a dove, once established on conventional, cultural, intertextual grounds, can be (as we shall see) very productive of other exemplifications. In other words, the very process of reading by example produces knowledge. It is certainly illuminating to note once more how close this brings us to Goodman's descriptions:

Such correlative chains must be understood as schematic constructions, and *not by any means as providing literal translations for metaphors*. The transfer of "mouse" from mice to a man may not be via the label "timid" or any other specific predicate. Moreover, metaphorical transfer need not follow antecedently established coexemplifications of a feature or label, verbal or nonverbal; the metaphorical application itself may participate in effecting coexemplification by the mice and the man of some one or more of their common features; and just what is exemplified may be sought rather than found.<sup>22</sup>

---

sources ("‘Dugma’ in Rashi's Commentary," p. 49). A dugma as a sample or example can also become naturally an example to follow, someone whose actions or fate serve as an exemplum to others, teaching them some truth or leading them to a certain kind of opinion or behavior. We find this usage in the following midrashic text: "*But God was angry with me for your sakes and did not hear me, and He said to me: It is sufficient for you* [Deuteronomy 3:26]: He said to him, Moses, you serve as a dugma for the judges, that they should say: If indeed Moses (who was the wisest of the wise and the greatest of the great) God did not forgive him for having said, 'Hear now, ye rebels; are we to bring you forth water out of the rock!' [Numbers 20:11], and it was decreed that he would not enter the Land, those who delay and distort judgment, all the more so [*Sifre* Deuteronomy 29]." This text requires some background. At this point in Deuteronomy, Moses is addressing the People of Israel and summarizing the events of the past years. He has told them in the previous verses that he begged of God to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel, "but God was angry with me for your sakes and did not hear me." The midrash is attempting to explain what it means to say that God did not forgive Moses for the sake of the people. Their explanation is that Moses's punishment is to be exemplary for the people. The word for "sufficient" also means "great," so God is taken to mean in His address to Moses: Since you are great, if I punish you for the sin of bringing water improperly out of the rock, then they will know that your wisdom and greatness did not serve to grant you forgiveness for your sin, and they will say to themselves that they would certainly be punished for theirs.

The structure of this text as representation of a speech act is almost identical to the structure of the exemplum as described by Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions*.

<sup>22</sup> Goodman, "Routes of Reference," p. 128.

In the hermeneutics by example which rabbinic midrash practices, this becomes a doubly productive process, for once a certain *mashal* is established on the grounds of a given verse, that very metaphorical coexemplification is used precisely to seek that which is exemplified. The common midrashic questions “Why is the Torah compared to water?” and “Why is Israel compared to a dove?” are exact references to this process of search.

“Dugma” also conveys the meaning of the whole correlative chain or schematic construction that effects a coexemplification and points to common features between the denoted object and the example. We find this usage with reference to the unknowable essence of God Himself:

Tsofer Hana'mati said to Job: *Will you discover the extent of God's nature [hêqer]? . . . His measure is longer than the Universe [Job 11:7 and 9]. Who can research [yahqor] His dugma; but indeed, will you grasp the height of the heavens? [verse 8]. What is the meaning of will you grasp the height of the heavens? Are you able to describe the One who made the heavens and the earth? Even Moses, who arose to the firmament and received the Torah from hand to hand did not understand His form.*<sup>23</sup>

“Dugma” here obviously does not mean “example” or “sample” but something like “God’s essential form.” This emerges from the context, where it is clear that what is being talked about is the inability of humans to perceive or understand the essence of God. Even Moses, who was closer to God than any other human being, to whom God showed Himself, could not understand God’s dugma or describe Him.<sup>24</sup> The biblical Hebrew word *הֵקֵר* (*hêqer*), which I have translated “extent of God’s nature,” is glossed here by “dugma”;<sup>25</sup> so understanding “hêqer” may give us some insight into “dugma.”

The verb from which the biblical noun is derived means to delve, to search out, to explore. The noun, as the object of the activity of the verb, often connotes that which is deep, hidden, essential, and

<sup>23</sup> *The Midrash on Psalms*, ed. S. Buber (New York, 1947), p. 452.

<sup>24</sup> This text may very well be a polemic against those sects of mystical Jews whose religious life centered around attempts to see God, understand His nature, and describe it in terms of measurements. See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 116–17.

<sup>25</sup> “Finding His *hêqer*,” the biblical phrase, is resolved in the midrashic gloss into the verb from which *hêqer* is derived and “dugma” as its object. “Dugma,” therefore, must be held to have much of the semantic weight of *hêqer*, if not all.

unsearchable. Thus the sea is described in Job 38:16 as having no *hêqer*. The most significant text for our exploration here is, however, the following passage from Isaiah:

Unto whom will you compare Me, and to whom am I similar, says the Holiness. Raise up your eyes to the heavens and see Who created these. . . . Do you not know, have you not heard? The Eternal God, . . . His wisdom is unfathomable [has no *hêqer*]. (Isaiah 40:25–28)

The second quoted verse follows logically from the first. God's wisdom is unfathomable *because* there is no one to whom He can be compared, that is to say in rabbinic parlance, He has no *dugma*, that is, there is no other member of His class. It seems quite likely that this text of Isaiah is what lies behind the glossing of "*hêqer*" by "*dugma*" in the midrash. We thus disclose something of the significance of *dugma* itself. It is by placing an individual into a class that we can understand its nature. Or better, because this formulation almost inevitably leads us into Greek-style abstraction: by placing an individual beside others and denoting those others, we see what the features are that characterize that individual and understand them. God, in being *sui generis*, is thus beyond our understanding. "*Dugma*" is thus a denoted object that refers to a label or feature coexemplified between the object we wish to understand and the *dugma*. At the same time, however, it is also the exemplified label or feature itself. This explains, by the way, the vacillation between "your *dugma* is a dove," "your *dugma* is like a dove," and "your *dugma* is like that of a dove."

As in Rabbi Yitzhaq's discourse, moving from example as a denoted object to example as a denoted narrative raises the complexity of analysis geometrically. However, when we study the *mashal*, we will see a correspondence between the semantic complexity of the notion of example and the semiotic complexity of the functioning of the example narrative. A *mashal* is an explicitly fictional narrative that is placed beside a biblical narrative as a means of filling in its gaps. There is here, accordingly, both a fictional text and a textual representation of the "actual" events, standing in the relation of example and exemplified, as the dove stands to Israel. The figure of Israel as a dove became, in fact, one of the most productive sources of the *mashal*. One such text is found in *Song of Songs Rabba*, on the verse "My dove in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice" (Song of Songs 2:14):



The one of the house of R. Ishmael teaches: In the hour in which Israel went out from Egypt, to what were they similar? To a dove that ran away from a hawk, and entered the cleft of a rock and found there a nesting snake. She entered within, but could not go in, because of the snake; she could not go back, because of the hawk that was waiting outside. What did the dove do? She began to cry out and beat her wings, in order that the owner of the dovecote would hear and come to save her. That is how Israel appeared at the Sea. They could not go down into the Sea, for the Sea had not yet been split for them. They could not go back, for Pharaoh was coming near. What did they do? “They were mightily afraid, and the Children of Israel cried out unto the Lord” [Exodus 14:10] and immediately, “The Lord saved them on that day” [Exodus 14:30].<sup>26</sup>

With this text, we can begin to see the systemic ambiguity of the operation of the mashal within the hermeneutic practice of midrash. The text here rests on two common rabbinic assumptions—the identification of Israel with a dove, one of the sources of which we have seen above, and the identification of the entire Song of Songs as a dialogue between God and Israel at the time of the Crossing of the Red Sea.<sup>27</sup> What is going on in this text? First of all, the figurative utterance, “My dove in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice,” is being expanded into a full narrative, or rather it is being provided with a narrative context in which it can be read. What is the dove doing in the clefts of the rock? Who is addressing her? Why does he want to hear her voice, or why is it necessary that she make a sound? All of these questions are being answered by filling in the gaps of the narrative.<sup>28</sup> The dove is in the rock because she is afraid. But the rock is not a sufficient protection for her. The speaker is her master, and she must cry out so that he will save her. However, the claim is being made that this figure refers to a concrete situation in Israel’s history, the crisis situation at the shore of the Red Sea. In order that we experience that situation fully, that we understand the predicament of the People, why they cried out unto the Lord and why He answered them, the verse of Song of Songs is associated with it by means of the mashal or narrative figure. The way that this parable is linked to the

<sup>26</sup> *Song of Songs Rabba*, pp. 72–73.

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller discussion of this topos, see “The Song of Songs,” in my *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*.

<sup>28</sup> For this notion and terminology see Meir Sternberg, “Gaps, Ambiguities, and the Reading Process,” in his *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 186–229.

biblical story is identical to the way that the dove is linked to Israel in the metamidrash above.

This is an interpretation, then, not so much of a verse of Song of Songs as of a verse of Exodus. The Rabbis explicitly refer to the Holy Song as a *mashal*, which, as we have seen, is for them synonymous with fiction; and, moreover, they clearly refer to the hermeneutic function of the fictional text:

The rabbis say: Do not let this *mashal* be light in your eyes, for by means of this *mashal* one comes to comprehend the words of Torah. A “*mashal*” to a king who has lost a golden coin from his house or a precious pearl<sup>29</sup>—does he not find it by means of a wick worth a penny? Similarly, let not this “*mashal*” be light in your eyes, for by means of this “*mashal*” one comes to comprehend the words of Torah. Know that this is so, for Solomon, by means of this “*mashal*” [i.e., the *Song of Songs*], understood the exact meaning of the Torah. Rabbi Judah says: it is to teach you that everyone who teaches words of Torah to the many is privileged to have the Holy Spirit descend upon him.<sup>30</sup> From whom do we learn this? From Solomon, who because he taught words of Torah to the many was privileged to have the Holy Spirit descend upon him and utter three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.<sup>31</sup>

It follows that for the Rabbis, the Song of Songs is the parable that Solomon formulated in order that the people will understand the Torah. The fictional text interprets the “real” one by being put beside (*para-bole*) it and thus exemplifying some feature that is discovered as common to it and the “real” story (and thus present in the real story). Since in the *mashal* what is being referred to is a story, it is the meaning of the story that is the exemplified label or feature. The meaning of the events in Exodus is revealed by associating this text with another narrative. This placing of a fictional narrative beside a real one is the association of the concrete with the concrete—the fictional particular with the actual particular. The figures of the Song of Songs are made concrete by being identified with particular situations and characters from the Torah history. However, those situations and

---

<sup>29</sup> The pearl is yet another image for the hermetic Torah, that which was possessed but is now lost.

<sup>30</sup> Hence, the analogy between Solomon and the rabbis. Solomon is a sort of proto-rabbi for the midrash.

<sup>31</sup> The order of the books mentioned here deviates from both the chronological and canonical orders because this passage is an introduction to the midrash on *Song of Songs*, and its author wishes therefore to end his discourse by mentioning that book.

characters are also made more intelligible and concrete by being associated with the very homely figure of the dove, the dovecote, and the dove's master. This double concretization is achieved, however, by an exemplified label, the *dugma*, with respect to which the characteristics of the two concrete examples can be said to be alike. The text always explicitly or implicitly cites a specific feature or label under which the comparison of the two particulars is applicable, to which the exemplification refers.

However, as we have seen, the word “*dugma*” has a double meaning. In the case of a sample of wheat, “*dugma*” means the sample, but in the case of the dove and Israel, it means rather the exemplified feature or label (or even the potential set of such exemplified features or labels). Once more, that is why the text says there “Your *dugma* is like a dove,” and not “Your *dugma* is a dove.” Goodman remarks, “Exemplification is never fictive—the features or labels exemplified cannot be null or vacuous—for an exemplified feature is present in, and an exemplified label denotes, at least the sample itself.”<sup>32</sup> The example, however, can be fictive. A picture of a unicorn will function in precisely the same way as a picture of a bald eagle. So, as exemplified feature, the *mashal* is not (cannot) be fictional, but as sample it certainly can be and indeed *must* be fictional, because what it exemplifies is meaning, which is a construction. In the *mashal* structure, the fact that both the example and the exemplified are stories makes for some very intriguing ambiguity. When “*dugma*” is taken to mean “sample,” then the concrete story in the Torah, the “true” story, is a *dugma* of the category to which it belongs. However, when “*dugma*” is understood as a name for the category itself, then the metaphorical application, the fictional tale that effects the exemplification, is the *dugma*.<sup>33</sup> In the next text that we will read, we will see this doubleness or ambiguity explicitly thematized by the text itself:

---

<sup>32</sup> Goodman, “Routes of Reference,” p. 126.

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps it would be best to translate “*mashal*” as “exemplification,” that is, as a name for the entire syntagm and not either of its arguments. This may be supported by the fact that the early rabbinic literature that includes the texts being considered here has no separate word for the application of the parable. That word, “*nimšal*,” only developed much later in the history of the language. This ambiguity is often expressed and effaced in the critical literature by referring to the fictional tale as the “*mashal* proper.”

*And the angel of God, going before the Camp of Israel, moved and went behind them. And the Pillar of Cloud moved from before them and went behind them* [Exodus 14:19]. R. Yehuda said: This is a Scripture enriched from many places. He made of it a *mashal*; to what is the matter similar? To a king who was going on the way, and whose son had gone before him. Brigands came to kidnap him from in front. He took him from in front and placed him behind him. A wolf came behind him. He took him from behind and placed him in front. Brigands in front and the wolf in back, he (He)<sup>34</sup> took him and placed him in his (His) arms, for it says, "I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them on My arms" [Hosea 11:3].

The son began to suffer; he (He) took him on his shoulders, for it is said, "in the desert which you saw, where the Lord Your God carried you" [Deuteronomy 1:31]. The son began to suffer from the sun; he (He) spread on him His cloak, for it is said, "He has spread a cloud as a curtain" [Psalms 105:39]. He became hungry; he (He) fed him, for it is said, "Behold I send bread, like rain, from the sky" [Exodus 16:4]. He became thirsty; he (He) gave him drink, for it is said, "He brought streams out of the rock" [Psalms 78:16].<sup>35</sup>

A semiotic analysis of this text will reveal how complex the relations of exemplification are within it. Let us begin by looking more closely again at "mashal" itself. The term translates as "likeness" in English, a translation expanded as well by the phrase "to what is the matter similar?" in the introductory formula to the midrashic *mashal*. That which the *mashal* (fiction) is like is itself a narrative, namely, in this case, the story of God's tender treatment of the Israelites in the Wilderness. Now the biblical narrative certainly makes referential claims. It claims not only that these events could possibly have happened out there in the world, but that they certainly *did* happen.<sup>36</sup> The *mashal*, explicitly a fiction, makes no such claim in its discourse that the events did happen.

Let us see then what this text does. The narrative in the verse upon which R. Yehuda is commenting contains gaps. The motivation for the movement of the Angel of God, who was accustomed to go before

<sup>34</sup> For the interpretation of this orthography see below.

<sup>35</sup> *Mekilta De-rabbi Ishmael*, ed. J. Z. Lauterbach, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933), 1: 224–25. The text given here has been drawn from my new edition of the *Mekilta*. This text has been completely corrupted in current editions, both vulgate and critical, and may only be restored by recourse to the manuscripts.

<sup>36</sup> Whether or not we accept the designation of this narrative as historiography or as fiction, Sternberg certainly is correct that the narrative radically banishes all thought of its not being true.

the people, is not made clear. Moreover, there is a doubling in the verse. "And the Angel of God, going before the Camp of Israel, moved and went behind them. And the Pillar of Cloud moved from before them and went to a place behind them." The higher critics theorize a join between two sources, J and E, in the middle of this verse;<sup>37</sup> R. Yehuda, in contrast, puts in his story. The story, like much of midrash, is an explicit representation of the kind of activity of concretization of a text that readers must perform when encountering a gapped narrative. This paradoxical moving around first of angel then of pillar is explained as an instance of a paradigm of God's protective behavior toward the Israelites in the Wilderness, which is like the behavior of a father protecting his infant son. The story that R. Yehuda adds, which answers to the gapping in the verse, is built entirely out of concrete materials drawn from other parts of the biblical canon itself, as he himself avers by his statement "This is a Scripture enriched from many places." What then is the function of the *mashal*? It is a story and yet not a story; it is a kind of shadow or double of the "real" story, one that no one claims actually happened. As a literary structure it is a genre code, which enables and at the same time constrains the possibility of new narrative to fill in the gaps. As a hermeneutic structure, it is the uncovering of that code as the key to the significance of the narrative; that is, the *mashal* says in effect, This is not just something that happened, but something that happened and that means something specific. Our *mashal* text assigns the particular example, the concrete event, of the movement of the Pillar of Cloud and the Angel from before to behind the People to a class of such events, a paradigm. The *mashal* is both the description of that paradigm and the other examples that enable us to abduce this description.

Now, as I have suggested above, our midrashic text explicitly thematizes the ambiguity that I have been approaching asymptotically throughout this essay. Let us go back to the text and read it once more. R. Yehuda is interpreting the verse of Exodus 14:19. Doing so, he makes two moves that seem at first glance to be unrelated. He claims that the verse is only intelligible in the context of several other verses, and he claims that a *mashal* will interpret the verse. These two moves are, in fact, rigorously connected. However, this connection will

---

<sup>37</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), p. 220.

only fully appear through a consideration of the ambiguity that I am talking about. The other verses that will enrich or make intelligible our verse are other members of a paradigm, of the paradigm set: God's behavior toward the Israelites during the Desert Wanderings. The *mashal* is the paradigm set itself, the rubric under which all of the verses can be gathered together and which reveals them to be a paradigm of the behavior of a father toward his infant child. The instances of God's behavior toward the Israelites in the Wilderness are shown to be intelligible and coherent, because they are like the behavior of a father toward his infant. But notice: the Rabbis never attempt to state their categories as abstractions; their drive is always toward concretization and more concretization. Even the pattern or category to which all of the instances of God's behavior are assimilated and which explains them is a concrete story. The double meaning of "dugma" as "sample" and "paradigm" makes this operation possible. We could capture this double meaning by translating "He made of it a *mashal*" as "He made of it an example," which would mean both: R. Yehuda took this text and assigned it to a class as a sample-member of that class *and* R. Yehuda produced an exemplum that assigns the text significance as a model of the class.<sup>38</sup>

Strikingly enough, our *mashal* explicitly marks this signifying ambiguity. It begins as if to tell us a parabolic tale, which will then be decoded by an application. We expect to be told the entire story of the father and his son, and then to find something like: "Similarly, God led us through the wilderness. When we were threatened from behind, He moved behind us to protect us, as it says. . . . When we were threatened from in front, He moved in front of us. When we were troubled by the sun, He spread His cloud above us, as it says. . . . When we were hungry, He fed us, as it says, . . . and when we were thirsty, He gave us drink, as it says." But this is exactly what we do not have here. The parable begins telling us a story about a father and a son, but in each case, by citing the relevant verse having to do

---

<sup>38</sup> Late in the course of revising this paper I came across prototype semantic theory, as developed by Eleanor Rosch and others, which may provide a way of elegantly capturing both of these senses without resorting to polysemy. However, rather than attempt to integrate such analysis at the last moment, I prefer to leave it for a future study. For an excellent summary of work in this field, see George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

with God and Israel, it immediately signifies that there really is no such story at all. There are not two narratives here but only one, the story of God's treatment of infant Israel in the Wilderness; the other story exists only as a shadow double, as an abstract structural pattern behind this one, as it were. The parable no more signifies its application than a paradigm in grammar signifies the members of the paradigm; it does explain what they are doing together and how they are related to each other. I have tried to capture this ambiguity by my translation "he (He)." What creates this story, however, and assigns significance to our verse by making it a member of this paradigm (= *dugma*) is the other examples (= each a *dugma*) that R. Yehuda cites. One signifier is folded into the other here, thematizing the Möbius-strip-like interpenetration of parable and example, concrete and abstract in the parabolic system. As Louis Marin has argued, "The function of the parabolic narrative therefore appears through an ambiguity which gives it great practical efficacy: the parable designates in its fiction a real narrative (situation, position) that it assimilates to itself in the process of showing that this narrative is the revealing figure of one term of the code by which the parable was encoded into a fictive narrative."<sup>39</sup> The explanation of this ambiguity is that as code (*dugma*) the parable is more abstract than the "real narrative," but as "revealing figure" the "real narrative" is an example (*dugma*) of the code (or member of the paradigm) that the parable represents. R. Yehuda's *mashal* fits this description precisely. The verses R. Yehuda quotes in order to interpret the verse he addresses are the revealing figures of the code by which the parable was encoded into a fictive narrative. The double meaning of "figure" here, like the double meaning of "*dugma*," which it parallels, captures exactly the ambiguity encoded in our text by the slippage between the parable and its application. The "real" story is an example of the code by which the *mashal* was encoded into a fictive narrative, and by being so encoded, the *mashal* assimilates the "real" story to a cultural code and assigns it significance. The example may be fictive; the exemplification is not.

The *mashal* that I have just been discussing is actually quite atyp-

---

<sup>39</sup> Louis Marin, "On the Interpretation of Ordinary Language: A Parable of Pascal," in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. Josue Harari (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 246.

ical in form. In general, the mashal has precisely the unambiguous structure of parable followed by explicit application—that is, precisely the structure that I claim our text rejects. Accordingly, the question could be raised, and indeed has been raised: in what sense is it legitimate to use the atypical case as an illustrative dagma for a paradigm most of the members of which it does not exactly resemble? David Stern has raised this question with regard to my analysis. He prefers to see this text as an early mashal in which the form has simply not yet been regularized.<sup>40</sup> I agree with him; the difference between us is that on my understanding this “unregularized” form reveals the underlying semiotic undecidability that the later regularized form, with its strict textual and terminological distinction between “mashal” and “nimshal,” plasters over.

Apparently other readers have found the undecidability of this midrashic text disturbing as well. The printed texts of the midrash have smoothed out the form and regularized it so as to pin down the undecidability. Thus we find in the critical edition and translation of J.Z. Lauterbach:

*And the Angel of God . . . removed, etc.* R. Judah says: This is a verse rich in content, being echoed in many places. To give a parable, to what is this comparable? To a man who is walking on the road with his son walking in front of him. If robbers who might seek to capture the son come from in front, he takes him from before himself and puts him behind himself. If a wolf comes from behind, he takes his son from behind and puts him in front. If robbers come from in front and wolves from behind he takes the son up in his arms. When the son begins to suffer from the sun, his father spreads his cloak over him. When he is hungry he feeds him, when he is thirsty he gives him drink. *So did the Holy One, blessed be He, do, as it is said:* “And I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them upon My arms.” . . . When the son began to suffer from the sun, He spread His cloak over him, as it is said: “He spread a cloud for a screen.” (Italics added. The italicized passage was inserted by a later medieval editor of the text adopted by Lauterbach.)

This version of the text (which contradicts the evidence of all of the manuscripts) partially occults the very ambiguity that gives signifying

---

<sup>40</sup> See Stern’s response to my paper “Rhetoric and Interpretation: The Case of the Nimshal,” *Prooftexts*, 5, no. 3 (Sept. 1985): 270–76. The response appears there on pp. 276–80), and see esp. p. 280, n. 5.



power to the text. However, even in this version an ambiguity remains, as pointed out by Robert Johnston: “Another notable aspect of this item is the blurred distinction between *Bild* and *Sache* as worked out in the application. Sun, hunger and thirst are repeated as sun, hunger and thirst. More strikingly, the son is still ‘the son,’ and not Israel, as one might expect.”<sup>41</sup> On my reading this blurring is an uneradicated relic of the original ambiguity of reference at the very heart of the “mashal.”

This conception is, I would like to claim, a more than adequate understanding of the actual functioning of the midrashic parable. In all of the cases we have considered, the parable is a fiction that concretizes in its fiction a story with real referential claims. This is certainly true of the rabbinic examples we have read, where the biblical text is being designated and interpreted via the mashal, and the biblical narrative (except in the instances, like the “Dry Bones,” Job, or the Song of Songs, when it itself is read *as* a mashal) certainly makes strong referential claims, not only that the events could have happened but that they certainly did happen.<sup>42</sup> Why, then, must a mashal be a fiction? According to the rabbinic insight only a fiction can be an exemplary text, a text that carries significance. One understanding of this claim would be that only fiction can be exemplary because only it is the product of a signifying practice, while a “true” story would be meaningless in itself. The way to assign meaning to a “true” story is to assimilate it to a mashal, a code, of which it is then shown to be the revealing figure. An alternative understanding would be that the “true” story *does* have meaning but the meaning is not transparent by itself.<sup>43</sup> The function of the mashal in this formulation is heuristic in that the mashal picks out from the welter of facts that constitute the historiographical record those that are significant for perceiving the meaning of the narrative. (I rather suspect that the

---

<sup>41</sup> Robert Johnston, “Parabolic Interpretations Attributed to Tannaim” (Ph.D. diss., Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1977), p. 299.

<sup>42</sup> This description also fits the parable that Marin analyzes (see “On the Interpretation of Ordinary Language”), for there Pascal tells his parable in the context of a real colloquy with a young man, and it is this young man’s history (certainly “real”) that the parable designates, as Marin says explicitly.

<sup>43</sup> I am not claiming that these are notational variants; they involve a controversy about historiography that I simply do not need to get into here.

Rabbis themselves would prefer this latter formulation.) The movement of the Angel of God and the Pillar are by themselves facts without meaning or the meaning of which is opaque, as R. Yehuda explicitly remarks. They only become meaningful (or their meaning is only understood) when they are shown to be part of a pattern, examples of a class. “R. Yehuda said: This is a Scripture enriched from many places. He made of it a *mashal*” by associating it with the other (concrete) instances under the rubric of the *mashal*. Once more, the *mashal* works in two ways at the same time: by simplifying the structure of the biblical narrative it picks out the structurally significant elements, and by doing so it enables us to generalize from those elements. No wonder, then, that the Rabbis considered the *mashal* the royal road to the significance of Scripture, or in their own words: “Until Solomon invented the *mashal*, no one could understand Torah at all”; that is, until Solomon invented the form of the *mashal* as a means of understanding and formulating the underlying codes by which the biblical narrative was encoded as meaningful, the meaning was ungraspable. This interpretation of history through fiction is very similar to the interpretative truth that fiction-writing makes in our culture, not necessarily (but often enough) with regard to historiographical materials, but even more commonly with regard to quotidian reality. This is, after all, what Riffaterre meant when he said that all fiction is exemplary, and what the Rabbis meant when they said that all the exemplary is fiction.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> This may give us a different way of looking at another recent theoretical problem of fictional mimesis. Lubomir Doležel has analyzed two extant models for the logical relation of fictional objects and entities in the real world:

1. Fictional particular P/f represents actual particular P/a.
2. Fictional particular P/f represents actual universal U/a.

Doležel argues that neither of these models is adequate. The first fails whenever there is a fictional particular that corresponds to no actual particular, while the second (which he attributes to Erich Auerbach) does not account for the particulars of fiction at all. The perhaps unique feature of the rabbinic discourse we are considering is that it found a way, owing precisely to the productive double meaning of *dugma*, to make sense of narrative without positing a system of abstract universals. Their primary hermeneutic procedure was to gather disparate instances in the text into groups in which the various concrete instances reveal each other's meaning. For the Rabbis discourse is a matter not of propositions and universals in the first place but of particulars and of rules for their comparison. The operation of the intellect is the association of particulars with each other such that they illuminate each other. Mimesis is understood, then, not as representation at all but as a statement that:

The rabbinic interpretation of biblical narrative suggests, then, a way out of the dilemma posed by Alter and Sternberg. Historiography and fiction for the Rabbis are not alternative genres to one or the other of which biblical narrative must be assigned, but different semi-otic functions within the text. That is why it is possible for them to speak of the clearly historiographical narratives of the Torah as having a “*mashal*,” a term which always signifies fiction for them. Both the historiographical and the fictional functions of the biblical text make truth claims—one referring to external reality and one to the significance of the events. Interpretation of the historiography of the Bible is, for the Rabbis, precisely the discovery of those “*fictions*,” the *meshalim* that structure its discourse. Notice how close this brings us to Hayden White’s unsettling of the dichotomy between historiography and fiction, and in almost the same terms. Historical narratives are for White “*metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings.*” Writing history is the articulation “*of a complex of symbols which gives us directions for finding an icon of the structure of those events in our literary tradition.*”<sup>45</sup> Those icons are the *meshalim*. White has explicitly remarked on the function of the fictive in historiography:

A historical interpretation, like a poetic fiction, can be said to appeal to its readers as a plausible representation of the world by virtue of its implicit appeal to those “*pre-generic plot-structures*” or archetypal story forms that define the modalities of a given culture’s literary endowment. Historians, no less than poets, can be said to gain an “*explanatory effect*”—over and above whatever formal explanations they may offer of specific historical events—by building into their narratives patterns of meaning similar to those more explicitly provided by the literary art of the cultures to which they belong.<sup>46</sup>

---

Fictional particular P/f is like or analogous to actual particular P/a/, and thereby interpretive of it. [Lubomir Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 6–9. I see now that Doležel attributes the principle to Aristotle, not Auerbach.]

It is interesting to speculate whether this is reducible to Doležel’s own solution that: Actual source S/a represents (i.e. provides the representation) of fictional particular P/f/.

<sup>45</sup> Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 58.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

In this way the insights of both Sternberg and Alter can be preserved. History is “what happened”; fiction is the stories we denote (by telling them) in order to exemplify the labels that constitute the culturally constructed meaning of what happened. All fiction is, then, by definition, exemplary, as the Rabbis (and Riffaterre) have claimed.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE BARTERED WORD: MIDRASH AND SYMBOLIC ECONOMY

#### *Commentary Without Interpretation*

Midrash as commentary frequently focuses on the strictly phonetic or sonic aspect of a word; it seems to see meaning in “nothing,” in such incidentals as variants of spelling or even the forms of and decorations on letters, and not infrequently finds meanings in words that are the social equivalent of “personal ones.” Midrash most frequently (not always) does not proceed by paraphrase, by giving the “meaning” of a passage but rather by expanding the text via the production of more narrative on the same “ontological” level as the text itself. Extreme (and therefore most revealing) forms of midrash interpret that which, on our theories of language, ought to be “nothing”—parts of words, “meaningless” particles,<sup>1</sup> accidental spelling differences,<sup>2</sup> and even the decorations on letters.<sup>3</sup> It is precisely these features that have produced what might be called, “The midrash problem” (Boyarin, *Intertextuality*). As the great medieval Jewish literary theorist, Moses Maimonides, remarked of midrashic interpretation: “It cannot be reconciled with the words quoted.”

From the posture of western philosophy (including that of Jews),

---

<sup>1</sup> Aristotle writes explicitly that particles do not signify (Irwin 243).

<sup>2</sup> This is a technical term. In contemporary text criticism, spelling and punctuation are referred to as “accidentals.”

<sup>3</sup> This “extreme” form of midrash is associated with the dominant figure of early rabbinism, Rabbi Akiva and his school. Midrash, however, is not to be absolutely opposed to logocentrism or even allegory, as much that is genuinely midrash seems rather to slide in a certain continuum from this figure’s almost rigorous antiLogos into forms of interpretation much more familiar to us. Moreover, as Ineke Sluiter has pointed out to me, similar strategies can be found in certain Greek commentaries as well. My construction of oppositions here is, then, more a rhetorical strategy to expose and clarify certain cultural differences than an ascription of absolute otherness.

midrash can only appear as primitive.<sup>4</sup> Abraham Geiger, one of the greatest historians of Judaism of the nineteenth century, referred to the Rabbis as having ‘einen höchst getrübbten exegetischen Sinn.’<sup>5</sup> Another way to conceive this would be that the signifying practices that characterize midrash as commentary on the canonical and authoritative Scripture of Judaism are very similar to linguistic procedures that in other signifying systems (including later Judaism) would belong to practices such as homiletics, poetry, or language play, puns, and humor. This is so much the case, indeed, that later forms of Judaism itself interpreted the earlier practice as belonging to the realm of poetry, language play, or homily and not commentary.

I cite no less an authority than Maimonides. It would be no exaggeration to say that Maimonides occupies a place in a specific Jewish literary history and theory analogous to that of Aristotle in the discourse of European literature. Maimonides’s considerations on the nature of the Bible and the midrash are the *Poetics* of Judaism. Here is Maimonides describing midrash as a signifying practice:

... Aggadic [midrashic] interpretation, the method of which is well known to those who are acquainted with the style of our Sages. They use the text of the Bible only as a kind of poetical language, *and do not intend thereby to give an interpretation of the text*. As to the value of these midrashic interpretations, we meet with two different opinions. For some think that the midrash contains the real explanation of the text, whilst others, finding that it cannot be reconciled with the words quoted, reject and ridicule it. The former struggle and fight to prove and to confirm such interpretations according to their opinion, and to keep them as the real meaning of the text; they consider them in the same light as traditional laws. Neither of the two classes understood it, that our Sages employ biblical texts merely as poetical expressions, the meaning of which is clear to every reasonable reader. This style was general in ancient days; all adopted it in the same way as poets do (Maimonides 353–4).

---

<sup>4</sup> The form of signification that I am calling midrash, that is, midrashic reading in the period in which there was no other form of biblical commentary among rabbinic Jews is attested from approximately the beginning of the second century of the Christian era until sometime in the fifth. For the fate of midrash after this, see below. The issue here is thus not Judaism vs. anything else but only the practice of a very particular moment in Judaism.

<sup>5</sup> A. Geiger, *Wiss. Zeitschrift* V, p. 81, quoted in Heinemann 198.

Maimonides claims that in order to understand the midrash, we must first have an appropriate conception of what kind of speech it is. Is midrash commentary, homiletic, or perhaps fiction (= poetical expressions)? After rejecting views that propose that aggada is indeed commentary—either bad or good—Maimonides argues that it is poetry, i.e., in his terminology fiction, in this case, didactic fiction.

In his great modern work on the poetics of midrash, Isaak Heinemann argues against the position of Maimonides:

However: if the view which Maimonides rejected brought the aggada too close to the plain meaning, his answer [Maimonides's] does not take sufficiently into consideration the difference between the midrash and stories which are purely fictions. It is certainly correct that the *drash* gives greater freedom of movement to the personal character of the interpreter than does the plain sense, and the aggadic *drash* is “freer” than the halakic, which even Maimonides took seriously . . . , but not infrequently the darshanim cited logical proofs for their midrash and also rejected the interpretations of their colleagues; also the most serious controversies between the Sages of Israel and the sectarians and Christians were carried on with the methods of midrash (Heinemann 3).

Heinemann's argument means that midrash is encoded as biblical commentary and not mainly as poetry or homiletic—on its textual surface and in terms of its function within the system of signifying practices of the culture. One does not argue over the referential truth of fictions, nor does one engage in the most fateful controversies of a culture with conceits and quibbles. To take midrash as something else than serious commentary on Scripture is analogous to the error of taking ancient historiography as fiction, merely because the “facts” described do not jibe with our reading of documents.<sup>6</sup> Following Heinemann, then, an adequate understanding of midrash would be one in which it is comprehended within the system of signifying practices of which it is a part and not trivialized or reduced by being assimilated to poetry or homiletic.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> This point has been made elegantly and forcefully with regard to the Bible in Sternberg 24–5.

<sup>7</sup> This is why it is beside the point to suggest, as some interlocutors have done, that there is nothing unique in midrash; similar practices can be found in other cultures. The question is the place that those practices hold within the signifying systems of those other cultures. On the other hand, I wish it to be absolutely clear that I have nothing at stake in midrash being unique. Indeed, to the extent that the

Now, while I would agree that midrash does not intend to give an *interpretation* of the text, interpretation being understood here as a particular kind of commentary, it does certainly function as the most serious kind of reading and commentary on the most authoritative and holy text that Judaism knows. As Simon Goldhill has remarked, any practice of commentary implies a theory of language. The apparent eccentricity of midrash, its frequent seeming extreme incoherence from the point of view of what counts as commentary in our culture, has to be explained, therefore, via a theory of language. Language itself is embedded in whole systems of signifying practices.

These signifying practices through which rabbinic culture differs all involve a denial of platonistic splits between the material and the ideal. I wish, however, to avoid strenuously any imputation of some sort of special grace that was visited upon “the Jews,” or even some subgroup of the Jews, the Rabbis. Contemporary marxian approaches to historical explanation provide us with modes of thinking about cultural difference that avoid triumphalism and at the same time don’t push us in the direction of scientifistic, economistic reductionisms.

Marxian classicist, George Thomson has proposed a direction for thinking about this issue in remarking the novelty of the platonic revolution in consciousness (although carefully avoiding, correctly, assigning this revolution to the person of Plato himself): “As Plato says, the soul is by rights the ruler and master, the body its subject and its slave. This dichotomy of human nature, which through Parmenides and Plato became the basis of idealist philosophy, was something new in Greek thought. To the scientists of Miletos, as to the Achaean chiefs and to the primitive savage, the soul was simply that in virtue of which we breathe and move and live; and although, the laws of motion being imperfectly understood, no clear distinction was drawn between organic and inorganic matter, the basis of this conception is essentially materialist. The worlds of Milesian cosmology are described as gods because they move, but they are no the less material. Nowhere in Milesian philosophy, nor in the Homeric poems, is there anything that corresponds to this Orphic conception of the soul as generically different from the body, the one pure, the other corrupt, the one divine, the other earthly. So fundamental a revolution in human consciousness only becomes intelligible when it is related to a change equally profound in the constitution of human society” (Thomson, *Aeschylus* 147; Thomson, *Philosophers* 239). It is this revolution in consciousness that



enabled as well the idea that meaning is abstractable from the matter of text, that the words are bodies and the meanings, souls. The Rabbis, it could be said, maintained against all comers and against all odds, a consciousness more similar to that of the “scientists of Miletos [Thales and Anaximander]” than to that of Parmenides, Plato, and most of European thought in their wake.<sup>8</sup>

I am going to imagine here that midrash came about as the product of a happy accident, the confluence of a highly developed valorization of reading and commentary as the central religious and social practice of a group of people for whom the notions of abstraction and meaning which we associate so readily with interpretation had not developed or were being resisted, in part because such notions of meaning were not crystallized at other sites within the cultural system, most notably—dramatically—within the economic and anthropological domains.<sup>9</sup> Far from economic determinism, then, I will assume, following some of the “best” of recent marxian theory that the relations between economic signifying practices and others are not simply those of base and superstructure but exist in a much more complex relation of homology.<sup>10</sup> Money is surely one of the most fundamental of symbolic structures within a society, and, as such, can be expected to act upon other signifying practices and be acted on by them. As Jean-Joseph Goux has written, “I have gradually reached

---

explanatory model offered below is at all cogent, the expectation would be to find midrash-like practices in other cultures given certain sets of cultural conditions and structures. Thus, it would hardly surprise me to find midrash-like commentary in non-western cultures and even in Greek or Christian ones (earlier or later) that are not dominated by Logos theories of language and signification. Midrash is to be seen in this paper as a token of what commentary might look like in a world without Logos.

<sup>8</sup> See Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 5–6 for further elaboration of this point on the anthropological level.

<sup>9</sup> Cp. Thomson, *Philosophers* 100 on the unique set of circumstances that produced the biblical prophets.

<sup>10</sup> Goux himself interrupts what might be seen as a “vulgar” Marxist theory of economic base and superstructure by occasionally reversing the historical relations: “Shortly after Saussure had declared that linguistic values in contrast to economic values based on a standard had no foundation in nature, shortly after Wassily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian had abandoned the search for direct empirical reference in order to espouse pure painting, the economic system dispensed with the gold standard, with the evident result of generalized floating” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 113). As Shell has pointed out, Marx himself rejected the analogy between monetary and linguistic symbolization (Shell, *Economy* 4–5).

the conclusion that all processes of exchange and valuation encountered in economic practice set up mechanisms in relation to what I am inclined to term a *symbology*, which is in no way restricted to the economic domain. This symbology entails a system, a mode of symbolizing, which also applies to signifying processes in which are implicated the constitution of the subject, the use of language, the status of objects of desire—the various overlapping systems of the imaginary, the signifying, the real. It is not a matter, then, of ascribing to economic symbology an anterior or causal role” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 113). Marc Shell has also grasped this well: “Whether or not a writer mentioned money or was aware of its potentially subversive role in his thinking, the new forms of metaphorization or exchanges of meaning that accompanied the new forms of economic symbolization and production were changing the meaning of meaning itself” (Shell, *Money* 3–4).

#### *Reading in a “Barter” Economy*

Goux constructs a homology in the development of symbolic economies in four social registers, economic proper—i.e., the development of money—, linguistic/grammatological, the erotic, and the familial. The model for the history of the latter three economies is the marxian narrative of the first of these: “The general equivalent pertains first of all to money: what is in the beginning simply one commodity among many is placed in an exclusive position, set apart to serve as a unique measure of the values of all other commodities. Comparison (essential to equitable exchange) and the recognition of an abstract value despite perceptible difference institute not simply an equivalence *but a privileged, exclusive place, that of the measuring object*” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 3). Father, money, Logos, the Phallus are all such measuring objects that are excluded through privilege from the commodity system.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Marc Shell adds the tyrant to this list, the one who measures the rights and wrongs of others without himself being measured and whose innovation is also associated with the introduction of money (Shell, *Economy* 14–18). I am not sure whether anyone before has made the connection between the invisibility of the tyrant (Shell, *Economy* 31) and the veiling of the Phallus.

“Thus the accession of the father to the rank of privileged subject, controlling the conflict of identification; the elevation of the Phallus to the place of centralized standard of objects of drive<sup>12</sup> in Freudian and Lacanian doctrine, the privileged position of language as a phonic signifier potentially equivalent to all other signifiers through the operation of verbal expression all these appear to be promotions of a general equivalent. In each case, a hierarchy is instituted between an excluded, idealized element and the other elements, which measure their value in it.” And he concludes that “what had previously been analyzed separately as phallogocentrism (Freud, Lacan), as logocentrism (Derrida), and as the rule of exchange by the monetary medium (Marx), it was now possible to conceive as part of a unified process.” This thesis, at first seemingly strikingly arcane, is, I suggest, intuitively plausible in the extreme once we see the monetary economy as a signifying system. One does not have to be a “vulgar Marxist” to assume that the same modes of semiotic thought, choate or inchoate, operate at different points within a given cultural entity.<sup>13</sup>

The historical genesis of money (which is then analogically invoked to interpret the genesis of the Phallus and of the Logos), described by Marx in the beginning of *Capital* involves the following steps. In the first stage, the stage of primitive barter, commodities are declared identical to each other and thus of equal value for exchange purposes. In the second stage, “the extended form of value,” rather than a relationship of direct and immediate exchange, as in barter, being set up, the value of a given commodity is expressed in terms of its equivalent value in several other commodities. “The exchange value of *this single commodity* is expressed in the endless number of equations in which the use-values of all other commodities form its equivalents.” In the third phase, “the generalized form of value,” all commodities express their value in terms of one commodity. In the fourth and crucial stage, the stage of the “universal equivalent,” the privileged commodity is taken out of the realm of signified commodities entirely and set apart. “The commodity recognized as universal equivalent becomes, in its monopoly, more than just another commodity; this

---

<sup>12</sup> For a clear articulation of this notion see Goux, “The Phallus” 62.

<sup>13</sup> This formulation makes historical materialism seem much less reductive. See Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 72–3. See also Žižek 11 and especially his analysis of the work of Alfred Sohn-Rothel, there pp. 16–21.

commodity in a development parallel at every turn to the emergence of the Father [I shall return to this parallel below, DB]—becomes money, assuming the position first of a fetish, then of a symbol, of an idealized standard and measure of values” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 18).

“In short,” writes Goux, “the *Father* becomes the general equivalent of subjects, Language [= the Logos] the general equivalent of signs, and the *Phallus* the general equivalent of objects [of desire], in a way that is structurally and genetically homologous to the accession of a unique element (let us say *Gold*, for the sake of simplicity) to the rank of the general equivalent of products” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 4).<sup>14</sup>

It is absolutely not necessary, however, to accept the progressivist “hegelian” side of Marx’s narrative in order to adopt the historical picture itself. Goux’s description of the “unconscious” as the repressed modes of symbolization in each stage of “strata that ‘precede’ or ‘follow’ that period’s dominant level of fixation, *with the understanding that this precession or succession refers not to real history but to a structural phenomenon*” (76, emphasis added) precludes understandings of the process as being one of a “real” progress.<sup>15</sup> Goux, it must be acknowledged, does seem sometimes to perceive this development as a chronological, almost progressivist one:

Thus occurs the passage from mythology to philosophy. The use of coins, of alphabetic writing, or still more simply the use in all domains of standard units, of common measures based on reciprocal agreement: from this *ideal measure of values* could be derived all of Platonism, or rather one of the most enduring and essential strata of Platonism. It would be easy to discover the social source of the world of intelligible models, of essences, which only the concord (*homologia*) of minds enables us to perceive. As long as it was “by eye or by hand that they most often judged these nuggets, sticks, bars that were the forerunners of true money in Greece,” the Greeks could think with Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things.” But when the city minted and guaranteed the four-drachma silver coin stamped with the owl of Minerva, symbol of the city of Athens, all the Greeks could think with Plato that the measure of all things is not man but the deity. Moving from an individual approximation to an exact measure acknowledged by all,

---

<sup>14</sup> This is precisely the function of the Phallus, just as the function of money is to represent all value without regard to the substance of the valued object.

<sup>15</sup> See also Goux, *Oedipus Philosopher* 177–78.

they had no choice but to cross the boundary between opinion, however correct, and science—between image and concept (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 93).

As a historical schema, this formulation is impossible, bordering on the absurd. Protagoras was, after all, a dissenter from the common view, indeed almost a heretic, and not an archaizing savant.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it is hard to see that the notion of the deity as the measure of all things is not a much, much older concept and hardly confined to Athens. Coinage itself was at least a century or two older than the Athenian tetradrachm (Thomson, *Aeschylus* 79; Shell, *Economy* 66) and so was philosophy.<sup>17</sup> Heraclitus, before Plato, observed explicitly, “all things are exchanged for fire and fire for all things as goods are exchanged for gold and gold for goods” (Heraclitus B 90). One can only conclude (and there is evidence to support this) that Goux himself intends this as a sort of heuristic allegory, a structural, not a historical myth. A similar ambiguity attends Goux’s stunning account of the “link between *Phallus* and *Logos*.” On the one hand, Goux shows how this link developed historically, as the product of specifiable, and specifiably western historical processes of thought, but then, on the other, “it is only a patient conversation with the monster of the psyche which can unearth and show, without immediate certitude, the

---

<sup>16</sup> An obviously correct point emphatically made to me by Froma Zeitlin. On Protagoras, and this, his most famous apophthegm, see Thomson, *Philosophers* 317. Goux himself knows this very well too, as he remarks explicitly in a somewhat later work that Protagoras was driven out of Athens for impiety and that he was pointing to a new direction of thinking in western metaphysics (Goux, *Oedipus Philosopher* 114, 121). Rather than to assume that Goux has simply changed his mind, I prefer to interpret the earlier statement as I do presently. Ironically, according to Plato, Protagoras was the first to exchange money for teaching, Protagoras 349a.

<sup>17</sup> If not a millenium older and from the Near East, although Thomson himself argues that it was at Athens that coinage was particularly and early developed by Peisistratos and, “[a] century later, Sparta still had the appearance of a village; Athens was already a city” (Thomson, *Aeschylus* 84). See also: “One of the earliest coins so far discovered in the west is from Elea. It is an isolated specimen, and does not conform to the coin types used by the Pythagorean cities, but at least it suggests that Elea was not behind them in the development of trade; and Elea, too, was the cradle of a new philosophy” (Thomson, *Philosophers* 288). Thomson is, I think, however, clearly wrong in his description of II Isaiah as also “the product of the new mode of thinking brought into being by the social relations arising out of a monetary economy” (Thomson, *Philosophers* 297). Again I have to thank Froma Zeitlin, who sent me to Thomson, a highly consequential predecessor to Goux. Marc Shell, interestingly, discusses the Greeks’ own stories about the origination of coinage as being precisely about the ideological significance of money (Shell, *Economy* 11–12).

tenacious but now unconscious truth. It is here that psychoanalysis assumes its role as a discipline which, according to Lacan, reestablishes ‘the bridge linking modern man to the ancient myths’ (*Écrits: A Selection* 115)” (Goux, “The Phallus” 52). The status of this “truth” is highly ambiguous. As with this thesis with respect to the Phallus, here too, Goux seems not to be aiming at an accurate historical account, so much as reading back a later situation into an earlier one for its heuristic or rhetorical force. His narrative is more in the nature of a myth of origins than a realistic historical account, and thus also my own narrative in this text. This myth, which may bear very little resemblance to the historical “truth,” reveals something significant about the structure of platonized cultures. Goux’s myth of Greek culture will help me in constructing my counter-myth of rabbinic culture in which I will observe (or rather construct) similar homologies between signifying practices in the realm of money and commentary.

There is a qualitative difference in thought that seems to attend the Parmenidian/Platonic revolution and which is, thus, correlative to the standardization of the tetradrachm. At least one ancient text makes Goux’s point about the tetradrachm explicitly. Zeno, according to Diogenes Laertius, “used to say that the very exact expressions used by those who avoided solecisms were like the coins struck by Alexander: they were beautiful in appearance and well-rounded like the coins, but none the better on that account. Words of the opposite kind he would compare to the Attic tetradrachms, which, though struck carelessly and inartistically, nevertheless outweighed the ornate phrases” (Diogenes Laertius VII. 18) (Hicks 129).<sup>18</sup> The association of the tetradrachm with the split between abstract meaning and its concrete expression was accordingly already a topos in Antiquity. The motive (for me, at any rate) is not to construct a real historical account of Greek culture but rather to see in what ways rabbinic culture is different and seemingly unintelligible from the point of view of *our* (modernist) culture of interpretation, grown largely, as it is, out of neoplatonic roots. For a concise statement of this understanding of language, one need go no further than the French economist-linguist, Turgot, discussed by Shell: “Languages [speech and money] differ from nation

---

<sup>18</sup> See also Shell, *Economy* 38. I am grateful to Susan Shapiro who led me to these sources.

to nation, but are all identifiable with some common term. In the case of speech, this common term comprises natural things or our ideas of these things [Logos]. In the case of money, the common term is value” (Shell, *Economy* 4).

One genealogy of this commonplace of western thought about language would be Philo>Origen>Jerome>Augustine and thence into the mainstream of western philosophy and interpretation and onto Saussure and Lacan, *mutatis mutandis*.<sup>19</sup> Another stream would be the Hellenic<sup>20</sup> neoplatonic one with Plotinus as its center also feeding into Augustine.<sup>21</sup> Tracing these developments back to Plato’s Athens is rather more like tracing the tree back to the acorn than like describing the tree itself. To the extent that there were both in earlier and in later Christian hermeneutics, nonplatonized streams, one would expect them to be more similar to midrash in their strategies, just as platonized Judaism produces interpretation very similar in tenor to that of most Christians.

Interestingly, perhaps ironically, my account of midrash as a form of the “typically” Judaic renders that formation almost exactly opposite to the conventional ways of representing the Judaic within much contemporary discourse.<sup>22</sup> Thus Goux himself writes: “Both Freud and Marx, as I have said, aim to discover and translate the meaning of the hieroglyph (of the dream, of commodities), to formulate the underlying *law* conceptually. Now, it is no mere coincidence that this Judaic gesture, hatched in the crucible of ancestral theology, becomes at a certain point in the history of symbolic (in the western world, in the twentieth century) an amazingly fertile explanatory theory” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 122). Reproducing a characteristic error, Goux accepts modernist accounts of Judaism as somehow “the truth,” and

---

<sup>19</sup> For an elegant discussion of Augustine in Lacan in quite another context, see Barzilai. As Barzilai writes, “An analogous imperative to qualify, reassign, or erase the functions of the mother appears in the textual configurations of Augustine and Lacan” (Barzilai 213). As Barzilai notes there, Lacan explicitly wrote that “Augustine foreshadowed psychoanalysis.”

<sup>20</sup> I am adopting the older term “Hellene” to refer to those who are not Christians or Jews, rather than the pejorative “pagan,” or the imprecise “polytheist.” The term is not, I admit, entirely satisfactory, but seems to me better than either of the other alternatives.

<sup>21</sup> For Plotinus as a major influence on Augustine, see Russell O.S.A. 162.

<sup>22</sup> I wish to thank Susan Shapiro, who in an important response to an early presentation of this material, urged me to think more deeply about this issue (Shapiro).

thus inscribes Judaism as modernism. This is the error that conduces to references to Kant as “the Jewish philosopher.” In their desire to produce themselves as “the modern,” both Freud and such figures as Hermann Cohen, rewrite ancient Judaism itself (Boyarin, *Unheroic*), and then this meconnaissance, crucial in the production of modernity—and for reasons that have little or nothing to do with the “ancestral theology”—is accepted uncritically and reproduced by such theorists as Goux and even Derrida.<sup>23</sup> The desire to find in the ancestral theology the harbinger of modernity is a modernist myth to explain, as it were, the complex and prominent involvements of “Jews” in the production of modernity itself. The hermeneutic gestures of Freud and Marx, it could be argued, insofar as they are both fully inscribed within a topology of surface and depth, represent almost the very opposite of midrash, a form of commentary that remains with the surface by proliferating the surface.

The boundary between image and concept is the boundary that the early Rabbis did not cross. “Conceptually formulating the underlying law” is exactly the gesture that—from the point of view of the early Rabbis, *a fortiori* the Bible—is not a Judaic (but a Hellenic) gesture. Virtually all early rabbinic thought is expressed in narrative (aggada) and praxis (halakha). There is nothing equivalent in form and rhetoric to philosophy or to its Christian younger sibling, systematic theology. Midrashic commentary for the most part, resolutely refuses to provide an interpretation that we could recognize as such. Furthermore, while there was a theory (or at any rate, a practice) of

---

<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Goux accepts uncritically the account of Israel’s God as particularly characterized by “sublime invisibility” and builds much upon this, not realizing, once again, to what extent, here also, the “ancestral theology” has been constituted as a back-formation from modernity (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 138); see Boyarin, “The Eye in the Torah”; Boyarin, “Imaginary Converse.” Let us take just one highly salient example: Goux builds much on the notion that the Temple was imageless (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 146–47), and argues that this empty space is a representation of the female, but the very Holy of Holies itself contained an image of the cherubim (winged beasts, not *putti*), male and female, and, according to later tradition, copulating (Idel). Moreover, Goux’s notion, in the same place, that the representation of God as Father is a “retroactive Christian gesture” is simply astounding. Finally Goux makes much of a stereotyped characterization of Judaism as law and Christianity as faith, for the deconstruction of which, see *inter alia* (Boyarin, *Radical Jew*). Others of Goux’s comments on the difference between Judaism and Christianity seem to me more characteristically (for Goux) pertinent, insightful, fresh, and useful. Cf., e.g. Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 149–50.



signification—denotation—in midrash, there seems to have hardly been a theory of meaning at all.<sup>24</sup> This is the boundary that Levinas would come to refer to as the boundary between Hebrew and Greek, in at least one sense, the very constitution of “Hebraism vs. Hellenism.”

Overturing, as Goux himself does, the classical “vulgar” marxian notions whereby other practices are driven by the economic “base” and form its superstructure, I shall here be exploring the homologies between different aspects of the signifying system exemplary of early rabbinic culture and suggesting that point for point its subsystems are characterized by the absence of the concepts that animate our western (postneoplatonic) signifying practices.

There are very rich texts about money in early rabbinic literature that enable us to uncover homologies among their discourses about money, language, desire, and kinship.<sup>25</sup> A very sophisticated little narrative from the fourth-century Babylonian Talmud will begin to expose this discourse:

When Rabbi Eli‘ezer was arrested [by the Romans] for sectarianism, they took him up to the place of judgment [*gradus*].<sup>26</sup> The judge

---

<sup>24</sup> Signification has to do with denotation. Thus midrash will not infrequently designate one thing as another. This word refers to, denotes, this thing, but they do not generally seem to operate with any theory of meaning. But meaning, roughly speaking, involves: “what the learner grasps implicitly when he learns a word; what a competent speaker and hearer grasps but a non-speaker does not grasp; what two synonymous words share; what a word shares with its translation in another language. To be concerned with these aspects of a word is to be concerned with its meaning and with the concept it expresses” (Irwin 242). Now, obviously, in some sense the Rabbis, like all other human speakers, must have had tacit understanding of these factors; otherwise, it seems we could not speak at all. This does not preclude the possibility that the Rabbis, when they interpret texts, operate with a very different understanding of meaning or with none at all.

<sup>25</sup> It is important to emphasize at this point that virtually nothing can be said about the “real economy” or Roman Palestine based on this text. This point was particularly emphasized to me by Erich Gruen, Keith Hopkins, Sally Humphreys, and Shlomo Fischer (and see also the discussion of Susan Shapiro’s response below). As is frequently the case, Marc Shell has been here before me, fortunately leaving the details for lesser minds to work out. In his 1982 book, he wrote: “The Jewish rabbis came to protest against the information of legal thought by new monetary forms. Making the proposition that ‘All wares acquire each other’ the focus of a far-ranging debate about intellectual as well as material exchange, they elaborated conflicting interpretations of an *asimon*—a ‘current word’ that is not yet legally minted or definitely meaningful” (Shell, *Money* 2). See also Gibbs and Ochs, who take quite a different discursive tack. For traditional historical interpretations of this text, see Sperber 69–84. See also Kleiman.

<sup>26</sup> Lit. “the stairs leading up to the place of judgment,” this is one of the structures

[*hegemon*]<sup>27</sup> said to him: “An elder such as you, has dealing with these foolish things?!” He [Eli‘ezer] said: “I have trust in the J/judge.” The judge thought that he was speaking about him, but he was speaking about his Father in heaven. He [the judge] said: “Since you have declared your faith in me, you are free [*dimus*].”

When he came to his house, his disciples came to comfort him, but he was inconsolable. Rabbi Akiva said to him: “Allow me to say to you one of the things that you have taught me” [an honorific euphemism for the student teaching the teacher]. He said to him: “Say!” He said to him: “Rabbi, perhaps you heard some matter of sectarianism, and it gave you pleasure, and because of that you were arrested for sectarianism.” He said: “By heaven, you have reminded me. Once I was walking in the upper market of Sephorris, and one of the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene, a man by the name of Jacob of Kefar Sekania, met up with me. He said to me, ‘It is written in your Torah: “Do not bring the wages of a prostitute or the proceeds of a dog [to the house of your Lord]” (Deut. 23:19). What about using them to build a latrine for the High Priest?’ And I said nothing to him. And he told me that thus had taught Jesus his teacher: “It was gathered from the wages of a prostitute, and to the wages of a prostitute it will return [Micah 1:7]”—it comes from a place of filth, and to a place of filth it will return’ [i.e. for building a latrine one may use the proceeds of a prostitute], and the matter gave me pleasure, and for that I was arrested for sectarianism, since I had violated that which is written: Keep her ways far away from you!” [Proverbs 5:8].

As we shall see, this text makes palpable and almost explicit the homological linkage between coins and their value on the one hand and words (of Torah) and their interpretation on the other. At the same time, however, that this text helps me make the point about rabbinic culture that I seek, it also indicates the nuancing that is necessary in drawing the cultural distinctions that I endeavor to draw here. Rabbi Eli‘ezer has been arrested for sectarianism, i.e., on suspicion of Christianity, Christianity being in the third century an illegal religion, while Judaism was legal. The judge asks him what a Jewish elder, a sage, is doing delving into such *superstitio*, and he answers with the double-entendre: I have trust in the judge. Precisely because this is the conventional answer that one is supposed to give under such circumstances

---

of which the Mishna forbids Jews to participate in the building (Hayes). For the “gradus” as equivalent to the *catasta* of such texts as the Passion of Perpetua and other early Christian martyrologies, see Lieberman 69–71.

<sup>27</sup> I.e., provincial governor serving as judge.

in order to declare one's innocence and fealty to the imperial government, Rabbi Eli'ezer is set free, although the text troubles to reveal to us that he really intended that he has trust in the Judge of the Universe and precisely does not have trust in the judge of the Roman government.<sup>28</sup> Rabbi Eli'ezer, however, having been set free through this act of trickery, nevertheless is troubled. He wishes to know through what sin was he condemned to the fear and humiliation of a trial for heresy with its possibly very painful and dangerous consequences.

The basic theological question addressed is theodicy, a question that returns over and over in rabbinic literature: Why has God punished the apparently righteous? The commonplace rabbinic theological thought that answers this question is that somehow God's punishments fit the crimes—"measure for measure" in rabbinic parlance. When Rabbi Eli'ezer says in this text, "I have trust in the Judge," he fools the Roman hegemon, but not himself. He assumes that there cannot be any punishment without a crime and that the Divine Judge has found him wanting. Because he had been attracted and pleased by heresy in God's eyes, i.e., Christianity, therefore, the text tells us God allowed him to be arrested by the Romans for engaging in that very heresy. The Roman judge is, in a sense, only an unwitting avatar of God's judgment on earth. The acceptance of the judgment is indeed what releases Rabbi Eli'ezer. However, it is the precise nature of Rabbi Eli'ezer's "sin" that will interest me here, for it is in this identification that the point about the rabbinic discourse of money and its linkage with interpretation can be seen.

This association is thematized within the text through a powerful analogy between the substance of the discourse of the "Christian" and the outcome of enjoying that very discourse. The Christian proposes a lenient reading of the verse that prohibits the taking of the earnings of a prostitute to the Temple, namely that although such earnings are forbidden for holy purposes, for mundane—and even lowly—purposes like the building of a toilet for the High Priest, they are permitted. An entirely typical and formally impeccable midrashic justification for this conclusion is proposed by the Christian as well. Rabbi Eli'ezer "enjoys" this utterance, perhaps, for two reasons. First

---

<sup>28</sup> For a fuller reading of this text in its larger context, see Boyarin, "Virgin Rabbis: A Study in Fourth-Century Cultural Affinity and Difference."

of all, there is the sheer intellectual pleasure of a clever midrashic reading, one that, I emphasize, is in method identical to “kosher” midrash, and second, the result of this midrash would be increased funding for the Temple. The Rabbi is, however, punished for this enjoyment by the humiliation and fright of being arrested by the Romans for being a Christian, which he just barely escapes. The analogy seems clear: just as one may not take the hire of a prostitute for any purpose connected with holiness, so one may not take the “Torah” of a heretic for any purpose connected with holiness. The Rabbi identifies his own sin by quoting a verse from the book of Proverbs that itself speaks of a prostitute. The prostitute is understood, however, as a metaphor for nothing else but heresy. Just as the money, which is exactly identical in form and value whether it comes from the hire of a prostitute or from the wages of one who produces a holy object, is distinguished in quality because of its material origin, so also the word of Torah, identical in form and value whether it comes from a Rabbi or from Jesus, is distinguished in quality and invalidated because of its material origin, in the mouth of the “heretic” Christian. Although the substance of the words of Torah seems identical—just as the money itself is identical—, the source in “impurity” renders them unfit for holiness and punishable their acceptance.

A very important intertext for our story can be found towards the end of the chapter on Vespasian in Suetonius.<sup>29</sup> We find there the following report: “Titus complained of the tax which Vespasian had imposed on the contents of the city urinals. Vespasian handed him a coin which had been part of the first day’s proceeds: ‘Does it smell bad?’ he asked. And when Titus said ‘No,’ he went on: ‘Yet it comes from urine.’” (Suetonius 251). For the Rabbis, the coin indeed does stink, *pecunia olet*. We would say that the truth is the truth whatever its source, separating between the meaning of the utterance and its material origin, just as the value of the coin has nothing to do with where it came from. For the Rabbis, the material of the coin and the matter of the language itself are crucial and meaning/value is not abstracted from either. On the other hand, this same story indicates the nuancing and complication necessary for this cultural distinction

---

<sup>29</sup> I am very grateful to Chava Boyarin who called this vitally important parallel to my attention.

as well, for, obviously, the first part of the text does operate with an idea of meaning. Else, it would be impossible to indicate the gap between what Rabbi Eli'ezer said and what he meant, or between what he meant and what the Roman judge understood. Even a culture whose explicit theories of language and commentary are not logocentric, it seems, must needs operate with a tacit *logos*, in order for language to function at all.

A passage from the slightly earlier (mid second century) Mishna and its talmudic commentaries will help us thicken this rabbinic discourse about money and meaning. As Jacob Neusner has written of this passage: “[I]t makes a single point: there is no such thing as a market, . . . but the economy rather works through barter, that alone” (Neusner 79).<sup>30</sup> Note the precision of Neusner’s formulation here. The Mishna makes a point; it does not reflect a reality. Halakhic necessities (requirements of talmudic law) mandated that a determination be made of the relation of commodity to currency in certain circumstances, i.e., that a decision be made as to the very definition of currency versus commodity. A certain transitional phase in the conceptualization of money can thus be reconstructed from these halakhic discussions and determinations:

Gold acquires silver, but silver does not acquire gold. Copper acquires silver, but silver does not acquire copper. Bad coins acquire good coins, but good coins do not acquire bad coins . . . Commodities acquire coin, but coin does not acquire commodities. All commodities acquire each other. How does this work? If he has physically taken possession of the fruit but not given the money, he may not change his mind, but if he has not taken physical possession of the fruit and given the money, he may change his mind. Rabbi Simeon says: Whoever has the money in his hands has the power of decision. [Baba Metsi’a 44a]

This passage is from the Mishna, the rabbinic legal textbook codified in the first half of the third century of the Christian era, i.e., early in the “golden age” of midrash. The issue here is when is an actual

---

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, Neusner’s brilliant insight is marred by some errors of detail. Thus it is simply not the case that “the commodity of lesser value effects acquisition of the commodity of greater value” (Neusner 80). Indeed, this is directly contradicted by the Mishna’s statement (quoted by Neusner on the same page) that “All movables acquire each other.” This notwithstanding, Neusner has provided here the most perspicacious analysis of the Mishna’s economy as barter that I have yet seen.

transaction completed, i.e., when does it become irrevocable. This is particularly relevant, of course, when, for instance, the commodity in question has gotten destroyed in the meantime and we need to know whose property it was that is gone. The rule is that upon taking physical possession of the commodity, the buyer has completed the transaction which is now irrevocable, even if he has not yet paid the monetary price.<sup>31</sup> The question that the text raises, however, is the determination of what constitutes commodity and what money in any given transaction. [It is important to note that if *x* acquires *y*, this means that *x* is commodity and *y* is currency in that particular transaction, since it is taking possession of the commodity that acquires the currency.] The very fact of such a question being raised is indicative already of the incompleteness of the transition within the rabbinic discourse of symbolic economy to one in which currency is out of the system of use values entirely and functions as a universal mode of exchange. Purchase for precious metal is still considered here a sort of barter, although clearly various metals: gold, silver, copper are arrayed on a scale of abstraction with silver the most abstract and least commodity-like, while gold and copper seem to be more concrete than silver.

There is more, however, for the Talmud goes on to comment on this mishnaic passage:

Rabbi teaches to Rabbi Simeon the son of Rabbi: "Gold acquires silver." He said to him: "Rabbi. In your youth you taught us that silver acquires gold, and now you revert and teach us in your old age that gold acquires silver."

In his youth what did he think, and in his old age what did he think? In his youth, he thought that gold, which is valuable, is currency and silver which is less valuable is fruit, and the fruit acquires the currency. In his old age: silver which is "sharp" is coin, gold which is not sharp is fruit and fruit acquires coin.

The passage begins by reporting a narrative purportedly from the real-time of the Mishna, in fact a dialogue between the author of the Mishna and his son. The father, Rabbi Yehuda the Prince, known simply as Rabbi, cites a sentence from his own text. The son, however,

---

<sup>31</sup> Thus the rabbinic law of sale is the precise obverse of the Greek one, in which "[t]ransfer depended on payment, not on delivery" (Pringsheim 91). However, Rabbi Simeon seems already to assume something like the Greek legal position.

recalls that in earlier years the father had cited the text quite differently, in fact in the exact opposite from its current formulation. (Incidentally, the manuscript tradition records both forms of the text, some having one and some the other. The question was never quite resolved.) The controversy between Rabbi Yehuda as a youth and as an elder turns on the relative status of gold and silver as “currency” or as “fruit” vis-à-vis each other. Although it cannot be demonstrated here, it should be emphasized that it is gold and silver coins that are being spoken of here and not bullion.<sup>32</sup> Now the very fact that the exchange of coins of different types is considered a sale within which one of the items must be considered a commodity, as well as the fact that it is unclear which is the commodity and which the currency, indicates that the rabbinic symbolic economy was not (yet) in the “third phase, ‘the generalized form of value,’ [in which] all commodities express their value in terms of one commodity,” whatever the situation of the “real” economic system.<sup>33</sup> Nor certainly, was rabbinic economic discourse in “the fourth and crucial stage, the stage of the ‘universal equivalent.’” Further evidence for this conclusion is provided by the clear ambivalence that the Talmud manifests for the very definition of currency verse commodity. Is it the greater value of gold coins that defines them as currency or the greater fungibility (“sharpness”) of silver or even of copper coins that would define them as currency vis-à-vis gold? This question also remains unresolved.

The text, moreover, goes on:

Rav Ashi said: “It seems correct according to his youth, since it teaches that copper acquires silver. Were you to say that silver with respect to gold is fruit, therefore he teaches that copper acquires silver, for even though with reference to gold it is fruit, with reference to copper, it is money, but if you say that silver with reference to gold is money, then with reference to gold which is more valuable than it, you say it is money, with reference to copper, where it is valuable and it is sharp, do we even need to state this?” Yes, it would be necessary [to state it], because you might think that in a place where the *prutah* [the standard copper coin]

---

<sup>32</sup> Cf. the commentary of Rashi ad loc.

<sup>33</sup> Several Roman historians, including Erich Gruen, Keith Hopkins, and Sally Humphreys have indicated to me the improbability that the economic system of Roman Palestine was “really” so anomalous, vis-à-vis the rest of the Empire. One wonders, for all that, about differences between urban centers and rural backwaters.

is abundant, it is sharper than silver, and I would think that it is currency, therefore he teaches us that since there are places where they are not abundant, they are fruit.

Rav Ashi, a late amora, uses a very sophisticated argument to claim that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi's youthful opinion that gold is currency and silver is fruit is the correct one and therefore the correct text of the Mishna. His argument is that if we say that "silver acquires gold," which means, I remind, that silver is *commodity* and gold is *currency*, only then is it necessary for the Mishna to state, as it does, that "copper acquires silver." For since silver coin, on this version, is commodity with respect to gold coin, it would be necessary to inform us that it constitutes currency with respect to copper. However, were we to say that even gold coin is commodity with respect to silver coin, because silver is "sharp," i.e., more fungible, then clearly with respect to copper where it has two "advantages," both greater intrinsic value and fungibility, it would be obvious and therefore unnecessary to state that it is currency. This argument is answered, however, by stating that there are places where the *prutah*, i.e., the standard copper coin, is the most common coin, and we would think that in such places copper is always currency with respect to both silver and gold, therefore the Mishna teaches that even though with respect to gold, silver is currency and gold is commodity, similarly with respect to copper, we must nevertheless be informed separately that this is the case as well. The textual tradition that has gold as commodity and silver as currency is thus also demonstrated to be supportable and coherent.

Note that the sugya [the talmudic argument] remains unresolved. We simply do not know which of these metals is currency and which is commodity with respect to the others.

At this point another argument is suggested:

And also Rabbi Ḥiyya is of the opinion that gold is currency, for Rav Iqa borrowed dinars [the standard gold coin] from the daughter of Rabbi Ḥiyya. *Later on, the dinars became more expensive.* [The case] came before Rabbi Ḥiyya, who said to him: "Go and pay her good and full-weight dinars."

Now if you say that gold is currency, then it is fine, but if you say that it is fruit, is this not [borrowing] a bushel for a bushel which is forbidden?

No. Rav Iqa had dinars, and since he had dinars, it is similar to the case of one who says: "Lend me until my son comes or until I find the key."



By rabbinic law, one is not permitted to loan a commodity and to receive the same amount of the commodity in return, because if the price of the commodity has gone up that would constitute interest which is forbidden to Jews. Rabbi Ḥiyya's insistence that the debt be repaid coin for coin would them seem to indicate that gold coins are, for him, not commodity but currency and do not vary, therefore, in value. Commodities vary with respect to them. However, the assumption that golden coins, explicitly "dinars," can go up or down in value and thus constitute a commodity in this sense is upheld. The reason for the permission to refund full-weight coins in this case, in spite of the coin being "fruit," is a special one. When the borrower already has the "fruit" in question but simply has no access to his fruit for technical reasons, one can lend him fruit for fruit, since he will not gain or lose on the transaction and even if the value has gone up in the meantime, no interest is understood as having been earned. Finally, the talmudic text itself remains unresolved as to the question of whether or not even Rabbi Ḥiyya considered gold coins as currency or as commodity.

It thus seems apparent that we do not have here an economic theory which has passed to the stage of the "universal equivalent." Far from it. The Palestinian Rabbis seem entangled in their pecuniary theory in a complicated stage somewhere between the stage of "the extended form of value" and the "generalized form of value."<sup>34</sup> As Neusner has remarked of this talmudic passage, "I cannot imagine a more stunning or subtle way of denying the working of the money market and insisting upon barter as the 'true' means of effecting trade and therefore permitting exchange and acquisition" (Neusner 81). In another sense, this could be taken as a special instance of Thomson's general point about Palestinian (Israelite) society: "They were thus drawn from the beginning into the cross-currents of international trade, always in a subordinate capacity but with lasting effects on their social relations" (Thomson, *Philosophers* 98). Marx himself points out that it is not the very existence of coinage that indicates passage to the universal equivalent but that that itself is one of the possible functions of money (Marx 1: 148–9). Thus it is not the very existence of

---

<sup>34</sup> For a compelling analysis of the economic system of the Mishnah as a "distributive" (i.e., barter-like) rather than market economy, see Neusner 7–14.

coinage that is decisive but the function and understanding of coins that makes the crucial difference.<sup>35</sup>

I thus suggest that we consider midrash to be a mode of commentary which is discursively consistent with the discourse of money produced by the same Rabbis who produced midrash. Even more pointedly, perhaps, the demise of midrash within Jewish cultural history (towards the end of late antiquity) is coeval with certain shifts in discourse of money as well, thus providing dramatic affirmation/validation of Goux's general thesis. Susan Shapiro has made this point well by quoting a later passage in the talmudic text:

It has been stated: Rab and Levi—one maintains: Coins can effect a barter, the other rules that they cannot. Said R. Papa (fl. 4th century, Babylonia): What is his reason who maintains that a coin cannot effect a barter? Because his mind is set on the legend thereof, and the legend is liable to cancellation.

As Shapiro remarks, “R. Pappa claims that the reason a coin cannot effect a barter is because the recipient only focuses on the coinage, the stamp or legend that marks the value of the currency. It is, as such, not part of the barter economy, but part of an economy based on an external standard assigning value to money as currency. . . . This argument signifies a crisis in economic representation. It is important to note that it is not the giver who determines whether a coin may be used in *halifin*, but rather the recipient. And the recipient—according to R. Papa's interpretation, although others disagree—will be fetishistically fixated on the legend of the coin, on the value it is assigned in a primarily money economy” (Shapiro). In order to better understand the point here, one needs a bit more exegesis. The rabbinic practice known as *halifin* is equivalent to the form of contract-making known from Greek as the *symbolon*: “Some small article, such as a ring (*sphragis*), sufficiently specific to relate back to the original pact, was exchanged as a token of the agreement. . . . As a *symbolon*, the broken coin did not function as money” (Shell, *Economy* 33). The question that the Talmud asks is whether or not an unbroken coin can function as a *symbolon*, and suggests, in the name of Rav (or Levi), that it cannot. In Greece as well, there were those who thought that the new invention, the coin, played the same role as the *symbolon*,

---

<sup>35</sup> See also the discussion of Susan Shapiro's intervention in next section below.

but, as Shell has remarked, “[i]n fact, however, coins and *symbola* (and the economic classes whose interests they served) were quite different” (Shell, *Economy* 36). In thus explicitly resisting this economic transformation, the Rabbis were resisting the socio-cultural transformations that it entailed or that were homologous with it.

Shapiro, accordingly, goes on to suggest a crucial corollary to my hypothesis that the rabbinic symbolic economy as barter economy impinged on other forms of symbolic practice. She brilliantly hypothesizes that the ambivalence regarding money had to do precisely with its symbolic value, i.e., that it was precisely the proverbial “owl of Minerva”—i.e., the coin per se as symbol of Roman power and of the claims of the abstract universal—that “bothered” the Rabbis:

Focusing on the legend, therefore, may not only be a matter of the monetary value of the coin. It may also be an instance of idolatry, of carrying a deity’s sanctioned measurement of value in one’s hand. In the Roman context, the coins were stamped with figures, some of which were of deities, including representations of the Imperial cult. As I understand it the Jews were forbidden to mint their own coins and while various cities and localities in Palestine minted their own coins, they were produced by the Roman authority. Whether one considers all figures idolatrous or only those of deities, these coins raise the problem of both fetishism and idolatry, with the fascination and fixation on the image as constituting ultimate value. Is this, perhaps, also what is at stake in the equivocation between these two economies, barter and money based? Is the dugma, as I have explored here, a way of understanding not only midrashic exchange through barter, but to understand barter, then, through midrash? Our subject would be not only midrash in a barter economy, but the imagination of barter in a midrashic mode.<sup>36</sup>

Following Shapiro’s lead, we can begin to think of the resistance to Logos and Phallus that characterized early rabbinism as part and parcel of a resistance to the hegemony of the coin itself, and as an expression of resistance to the power and abstract universality of the Empire (Harl 52–70).<sup>37</sup> Neusner has referred to our specimen talmudic text

---

<sup>36</sup> Curiously, considering his other misprisions of Judaism, this seems a moment in which Goux’s characterizations of Judaism work well: “In denouncing the fetishism of money, Marx repeats a pattern quite comparable to the critique of idolatry that comprises the religious originality of Judaism” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 160). We must be careful, however, of fetishizing the very distinction between Judaism and idolatry. For a brilliant analysis of another Jewish response to the inscription of the Imperial cult on the coins of the Roman realm, see Shell, *Economy* 82–3.

<sup>37</sup> See also Brown 18.

as manifesting “the demonetization of money” (Neusner 81), i.e., an explicit moment of resistance.

Here, the homology between the coin and the discourse of the Phallus is also highly relevant (Boyarin, “Who Wrote the Dominant Fiction?”). It is the transcendent immateriality of the Phallus, and thus its separation from the penis, that constitutes its ability to project masculinity as the universal—as the Logos—and by doing so significantly enables male projects of domination, including especially “the terror of abstract universality” that is empire.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, as Sally Humphreys has emphasized (oral communication), the situation of the Rabbis as always living and working under conditions of imperial domination (colonization and diaspora) is certainly also highly relevant in understanding their resistance to universal equivalents and universals in general, including “the utopia of the neutral sex” (Goux, “Luce Irigaray”). This gives us a concrete way to conceive of the homologies between the discourse of money and other symbolic economies without reductive economism or a positivistic historicism which would assume that the Mishna gives us a “real picture” of economic conditions. As Shlomo Fischer has put it, “The point is that the normative representation of economic activity in Chazal [the Rabbis] is barter. This normative representation is the result of a political/cultural struggle.” Shapiro’s analysis thus provides us with another mode within which to think about the colonized rabbinic political condition as that which furnished the ground of their alternative consciousness.<sup>39</sup>

If Goux’s hypothesis is cogent, then we would expect in such a

---

<sup>38</sup> Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 207.

<sup>39</sup> I am not suggesting a politically privileged access to “truth” that is the ordained inheritance of the disadvantaged subject, gay, female, colonized, black, Jewish, but rather a condition of the possibility of access to such a position of understanding. Analogously, David Halperin writes that “The aim, rather, is to treat homosexuality as a position from which one *can* know, to treat it as a legitimate *condition* of knowledge. Homosexuality, according to this Foucauldian vision of *un gai savoir*, ‘a gay science,’ is not something to be got right but an eccentric positionality to be exploited and explored: a potentially privileged site for the criticism and analysis of cultural discourses” (Halperin 61). Once again, the project here is to deprivilege (detrumpalize) descriptions of rabbinic Jewish culture as different from the dominant culture of the West (which happens now to be highly unpopular) by referring to the material conditions of that difference rather than by seeming to ascribe an essentialist difference to Jewishness itself, a project doomed both to intellectual as well as ethical failure.

symbolic economy that neither Logos, nor Phallus, nor father would be active concepts. In early rabbinic discourse, we are not yet in the “*moment of general equivalent value form*” in which “all meaning is condensed in a few graphic signs of phonetic value, just as economic exchange-value appears to be reified in official currency” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 71). And indeed, this is the culture that produced midrash, that mode of reading a text which is not founded in a Logos, in which meaning is not derived from fixed and arbitrary associations between graphic signs of phonetic value and meanings, or even phonetic signs of phonemic value and meanings. This culture, moreover, does not symbolize male as transcendence, “the Phallus,” and, as I have argued elsewhere, does not develop the symbolic role of the father as form for the maternal matter.<sup>40</sup>

All of these idealities are, moreover, correlated with gender, owing to the very platonic binary opposition between form (the father, ideal, male) and matter (*mater*, the real, female), as expressed most exhaustively in the Platonic/Aristotelian myth that the mother provides all the matter for propagation and the father only the idea (hence “conception”).<sup>41</sup> As Plutarch has epitomized it:

The better and more divine nature consists of three parts: the conceptual, the material, and that which is formed from these, which the Greeks call the world. Plato is wont to give to the conceptual the name of *idea*, *example*, or *father*, and to the material the name of *mother* or *nurse*, or seat and *place of generation*, and to that which results from both the name of offspring or generation (Plutarch, *Moralia* V 5:135) = *Moralia* 373C.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> This may seem surprising to readers used to the dogma that it was precisely definitional for biblical “Judaism” that it represented the advance of the father over the mother. For arguments against this dogma, see Boyarin, “Imaginary Converse.”

<sup>41</sup> The way that this series of oppositions (again without the key connection to money) works its way out into modern philosophy, idealism, metaphysics as a structuring principle of gender can be most conveniently studied in Lloyd.

<sup>42</sup> For the meaning of “nurse” in this context, it seems not inappropriate to refer to the famous passage in the *Oresteia* in which Apollo argues, “It is not the mother who is the parent of the child, although she is so called; she is merely nursemaid to the newly planted fetus” (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 658–9). Thus, also “seat” and “place” of generation, as opposed to generatrix. For the best account of the relation between the “mythos” of Aeschylus and the Logos of the philosophers, as well as the clear semantic connections in Greek thinking between phallos, Logos, and father, see Zeitlin 107–12. This paper, published originally in 1978, has become the often unacknowledged origin of entire spheres of research, especially in the Anglo-American context.

Without subscribing to the frequently “racist” presuppositions of ethnopsychiatry, I would nevertheless claim that midrash (at least in its most extreme and therefore typical forms) does not operate with language understood as the realm of logic of the concept but with language as the realm of the logic of the image.<sup>43</sup>

No Phallus, no Logos. The very foundations of philosophy, as a specifically European practice (analogous, of course, but not identical to practices in other human cultures), are grounded in “bring[ing] together phallos and head . . . for the ending of the [*Oresteia*] is also concerned with a shift in modes and behavior, as it charts a progression from darkness to light, from obscurity to clarity. Representation of symbolic signs [symbolic here is not in the Lacanian sense, DB] perceived as a form of female activity gives way to the triumph of the male *Logos*. Representation and lyric incantation yield to dialectic and speech, and magic to science. Even more, this ‘turning away from the mother to the father,’ as Freud observed, ‘signifies victory of intellectuality over the senses’” (Zeitlin 111). Zeitlin proceeds to provide an extensive list of the ontological oppositions grounded in the primary opposition of male as Apollo and female as Erinyes that grow from this “turning” or “victory” (Zeitlin 112) and which are characteristic of Greek philosophy from some pre-Socratics to Plato and Aristotle. Freud, however, quite mistakenly assigned this “turning” to biblical culture.<sup>44</sup> Neither biblical nor early rabbinic culture, however,

---

<sup>43</sup> These are perhaps mappable onto Lacan’s Imaginary and Symbolic (counter-respectively). There is, of course, another interesting ambiguity here. If the Rabbis did not understand the Symbolic in that way, does this mean, then, that the Symbolic did not exist? Or to put this in other terms, if the rabbinic culture did not operate with a concept of the Phallus, does this mean that the Phallus was absent in their culture? This is exactly the ambiguity that my paper turns on.

<sup>44</sup> As Zeitlin remarks, “Freud’s view of the female as a mutilated male lies squarely within the Aristotelian doctrine of the woman as a ‘deformity in nature’” (Zeitlin 111, n. 49) and see continuation there. See also Boyarin, “Imaginary Converse.” Charles Shepherdson has contributed another valuable insight for this discussion: “Indeed, when Freud speaks of ‘the force of an idea’ in order to explain the basic distinction between psychoanalysis and organic medicine, every reader of Heidegger will note that this ambiguity characterizes a long philosophical tradition, and is internal to the very term *idea*: as many commentaries on Greek philosophy have pointed out, the classical term *eidōs* means both the ‘concept’ or ‘idea’ and something ‘seen’. Seeing and knowing are thus constitutively linked, and easily confused, but this should not conceal the fact that the logic of the concept has a very different structure from the logic of the image, understood as a supposedly immediate, ‘physiological’ perception. Where the image provides us with an illusion of immediacy and presence, . . . the

made this move toward idealism, toward what Goux has called, quite brilliantly, *paterialism*. Both remained as materialistic at least as the Milesian scientists. Biblical and rabbinic culture resists the abstraction of the male body and the veiling of the penis that produces the phallus, and forms, accordingly, a subdominant fiction within the cultural space of the dominant fiction.<sup>45</sup> This subdominant fiction is no less oppressive than the dominant (Boyarin, *Unheroic* 151–85).

No Logos, no Phallus: “But the truth psychoanalysis tells us about the logic of truth, and thus about philosophy, is ‘*that the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects*,’ that this model ‘is a *phallic* one, [which] shares the values promulgated by patriarchal society and culture, values inscribed in the philosophical corpus: property, production, order, form, unity, visibility . . . and erection.’”<sup>46</sup> Neither in hermeneutical strategies nor in the production of philosophical (as opposed to mythical) documents do the texts of the classical rabbinic period indicate the “passage” of which Goux speaks. No one would characterize early rabbinic culture as being one in which “order, form, and unity” are dominating values, and there is, as I have already emphasized, no philosophical body at all.

The identification of Logos with Phallus is not an artefact of a modern attack on the “west” (Goux, “The Phallus”). Neoplatonic texts are unabashed about this equation. Plutarch writes:

---

symbolic confronts us with a play of presence and absence, a function of negativity by which the purportedly ‘immediate’ reality (the ‘natural’ world) is restructured. This is the difficulty Lacan takes up with the concepts of the imaginary and the symbolic, thus rendering the ambiguity less of a mystery” (Shepherdson 166). The mysterious ambiguity, however, that this paper is dealing with is the historical origin of the logic of the concept.

<sup>45</sup> Once more, the advantages of this term are palpable in my opinion. By referring to rabbinic Jewish culture here as the “subdominant fiction,” I immediately disarm any reading of my work—finally, after much internal and external struggle—that would interpret the presentation of rabbinic gender “theory” as more “true” or less mystified than that of the dominant fiction. Also, by using the term subdominant fiction, as I do here, I clearly indicate that rabbinic Jewish culture is not separate from the cultures of which it is a part but forms a complexly related subculture, at the same time avoiding as well, the romanticism and claims for privilege that a term like *subaltern* (which I have used previously) would levy. Finally, the relation of the term subdominant fiction to the primary term from which it is derived allows as well for that culture also to be riven by conflict, local variation and shift, and resistance, as well as resistant individual subjects within itself.

<sup>46</sup> Chisholm 271 citing Irigaray 86/85.

And that is the reason why they make the older Hermae without hands, or feet, but with their private parts stiff, indicating figuratively that there is no need whatsoever of old men who are active by their body's use, if they keep their mind [or their power of reason, *Logos energon*], as it should be, active and fertile (Plutarch, *Moralia* X 10:153) = *Moralia* 797E.<sup>47</sup>

For Plutarch, as for the later Plotinus, it was so obvious that the stiff private parts of the Herm were not related to the "body's use" that he didn't even have to argue the point; he could assume that his readers would understand it implicitly. Plutarch doesn't need to tell us that the phallus is the logos or why this should be so; he can assume that we already understand this and then applies this assumption to the interpretation of the Hermae. In other words, Plutarch's rhetoric here suggests that this association had become virtually commonplace by his time. He may be innovating in his interpretation of the Hermae, but he can't be with respect to the meaning of the phallus, or his very comment would have been incoherent or even laughable to his readers. The stiff Phallus of the herm simply *is* the Logos (Plotinus 287)! This would be an absurd statement for a talmudic Rabbi (although, interestingly enough, quite possible in later Judaism).<sup>48</sup> Theories of signification are thus deeply imbricated with and implicated in theories of sexual difference.

No Logos, no Phallus, no father. The symbolic role of the father had also not been fully realized within rabbinic Judaism. As Pietro Pucci has well summed up a virtual topos: "The father comes into being not by sowing his seeds, but with the Logos: for only humans have a father, though animals are often begotten like humans. A father is a figure that, within the strategies of the Logos, acquires a set of meanings and functions. . . . In a word, he may be equated to a sort of transcendental signified" (Pucci 3). The father simply does not have that transcendental status in early Jewish culture.<sup>49</sup> Although the father

---

<sup>47</sup> See also Goux, "The Phallus" 49.

<sup>48</sup> Such as medieval and early modern kabbalism, as we learn well from the work of Elliot Wolfson. Interestingly enough, just as it seems the Phallus drops out of western philosophy, so fully veiled that it need not be named at all, it becomes central to the discourse of Jewish Neo-Platonism.

<sup>49</sup> God is, of course, a sort of transcendental signified in early Jewish culture, and it is not trivial, that Godhead is most often (but not only) imagined as a father. However, as Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has elegantly argued, the disproportion between divine and human father is as relevant as the homology (Eilberg-Schwartz).



had power over the mother, and is distinctly marked as more important socially, the difference between father and mother functions with respect to the child is not marked symbolically within rabbinic culture. Both have the same ontological status vis-à-vis the child; in short, the father-function is not removed from the system of “commodities” of kinship relations. As Goux, once more, has perspicaciously phrased it: “Western civilization is not patriarchal in the sense in which certain societies have been or still are patriarchal. It is pervaded by the abstraction of the Father” (Goux, *Oedipus Philosopher* 204). Among these “certain societies” is surely classical rabbinic Judaism, an ideal-type, in this sense, precisely of a patriarchy, because the father was not an abstraction. The abstract “father” in the western civilization is an exact parallel to the abstract phallus. The father for the Rabbis is not a transcendental signified (for all his power and privilege) but a physical genitor exactly like the mother, just as the penis in that culture (for all its socio-religious significance) is no less an organ and a part of a body than is the vulva. Rabbinic Judaism, I suggest, is not pervaded by the abstraction or the Name-of-the-Father; rabbinic Jewish society was undoubtedly pervaded by the power of fathers.

There is nowhere in rabbinic Judaism a suggestion that the father contributes the essence of the child, in any sense, neither in the Aristotelian “form” vs. “matter,” nor in the spirit vs. body that occurs in much of the surrounding cultures of rabbinic Judaism. It seems highly significant that nowhere in rabbinic literature is there a representation, for instance, that would have the body of the embryo supplied by the mother, while the spirit is provided by the father, nor, *a fortiori*, one in which the father supplies the form and the mother the raw matter.

Indeed, the official and explicit myth of conception in rabbinic texts is a partnership of three in that the father supplies the white parts of the body: bones, teeth, the white of the eye, brain matter; the mother the red parts: blood, muscle, hair, the pupil of the eye; and God supplies the intelligence, the spirit, the soul, eyesight, motion of the limbs, and the radiance of the face [Nidda 30a].<sup>50</sup> The Rabbis

---

<sup>50</sup> Goux writes, “What man brings to procreation is the *form* of the progeny; what woman brings is *matter*: so say all mythical discourses on procreation” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 212). Not quite all, it seems, although the fact that the Rabbis generally consider the child to resemble the father (Is this true only of the boy-child?) gives me

are thus closer to Hippocrates than to either Plato, Aristotle, or to the *Oresteia*, all of which impugn the significance of the mother as generatrix (Zeitlin 107–12; Hanson).<sup>51</sup> In other words, that which in Aristotle (and many other Greek cultural texts) was bestowed by the father is provided here by God. For rabbinic Judaism, the father and mother provide the matter, the white and the pupil of the eye, and only God provides spirit, the capacity of the eye to see. The father and the mother provide the muscle and sinew, only God provides the spirit, the active motor capacity. Both father's and mother's contributions to the child are equally corporeal within the rabbinic myth (the spirit comes from the *Shekhina*). I do not suggest, of course, that this has anything to do with "feminism" but it does, it seems, have everything to do with a different orientation towards the gendered body and its essentiality in the constitution of the human being, that is in the resistance to a platonic ideal self that is before and beyond the gendered body. Not surely feminism in any sense, but certainly materialism.

Isaak Heinemann himself described midrash, long before Derrida, as the "shattering of the Logos" (Heinemann). What is most striking and troubling about midrash is, indeed, its refusal to interpret words as signifiers that are paired with signifieds in any stable fashion. Classical midrash interprets the forms of letters, even decorative flourishes, grammatically required but semantically empty particles, and fragments of words (sometimes taking a part of a Hebrew word and reading it

---

pause. Strikingly, rabbinic ideas of conception seem very similar to those of the Trobriand islanders, as discussed by Goux following Malinowski. According to that authority, the role of the father as genitor is entirely denied and yet, the child is expected to resemble the father and not the mother (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 219). In Aristotle, on the other hand, the child can resemble either the father or the mother. These points require considerable further investigation.

<sup>51</sup> This point should make it clear, if it is not by now, that the issue here is not a generalized and essentialized binary opposition between Jewish and Greco-Roman culture but an exploration of the ways that certain themes came together in one dominant strand of the latter and were resisted in the former and the consequences of that resistance. Hanson's paper, among its many virtues, makes clear that an agricultural metaphor for the woman's body does not preclude notions of women's seed and equality in the formation of the embryo, for the Hippocratics use such metaphors for the woman's body, but abandon them, as it were, at the moment when the "farmer plants his seed" (Hanson 36–48). I would like to thank Prof. Hanson for her generosity in sharing unpublished work and texts and for very, very useful conversations on these topics over the last several years.

as Greek!). All these phenomena suggest an entirely different sensibility about the meaning of meaning from the logocentric one that drives western thought (including most Jewish thought from the earliest Middle Ages on).

Interpretation is the dominant mode of commentary in a culture within which value is expressed in terms of an abstract, universal, and in itself substance-free standard: the coin. By interpretation I mean virtually all of our methods of formal response to texts by which the text is taken to mean something, by which meaning is extractable from a text and presentable, even if incompletely and not exactly, in paraphrase. Even the most extremely antiparaphrastic of western interpretative methods, for instance the poem-interpretation of the New Critics, still is infinitely more paraphrastic than midrash, which simply refuses to take even the text as verbal icon, preferring almost to read each word, and sometimes each letter, and sometimes the shape of the letter or even its serifs, as a virtual icon in itself. One way to bring this point home would be to insist that even according to those who would argue that “a poem must not mean but be,” the poem remains at least partially translatable. With the modes of linguistic operation which are characteristic of early midrash in place, the text is simply untranslatable (something on the order of the untranslatability of *Finnegan’s Wake*). Too many of the features upon which midrash founds its meanings are simply artefacts of the materiality of the language in its Hebrew concreteness. Midrash is the dominant mode of commentary in a signifying economy without the “universal equivalent.” Famous by now is the moment in talmudic legend when God himself seeks to intervene in midrashic interpretation and is informed that he has no status whatever since the majority of the sages disagree with his interpretation. In commentary, at any rate, for the Rabbis, even the deity is not the measure of all things. The final sections of the paper will be an attempt to illustrate what such commentary looks like.

The hypothesis that I wish to offer here is, then, that early rabbinic culture, and particularly midrash as its emblematic mode of discourse and especially of commentary, is the (surely not unique) product of a particular set of historical circumstances, neither determined wholly by a “material” base nor the product of some kind of mystical special understanding either. The set of historical circumstances that produced midrash is, on this speculation, the product of a cultural situation

within which an intensive communal effort at the production of commentary took place within a discourse which understood itself to be a non-monetary economy, once again, Neusner's "demonetization," understood as a politico-symbolic practice and not a "real" historical situation. If allegory (interpretation) is the archetypal commentatorial mode of a monetary economy, then, I would suggest midrash is the typical commentatorial mode that corresponds to barter.<sup>52</sup> Like the presocratic Archilochus who in his metaphors "barterers without money" (Shell, *Economy* 55), early rabbinic interpretation, true midrash,<sup>53</sup> barterers without money, exchanges signification for signification, or places significations side by side, without positing a realm of abstract meaning.

In order to render this point clear (and to prepare as well for a later and related point), let me give an example: A certain analysand came to a colleague of mine, Dr. Michael Pokorny, and related a dream in which the adjective "talismanic" was used. The analyst interpreted this as a reference to the man's grandfather, "the talis man," i.e., the traditional Jew who wore the prayer-shawl, the talis. This dream text, if this is the mode of interpretation, is only intelligible in the English, and the Torah, according to the very similar methods of midrashic reading is only intelligible in Hebrew. If allegory is founded on the equivalence of concrete objects with an abstract measure of value and meaning, midrash is founded on the exchangeability of concrete objects, signs, directly one with another without passing through an abstract meta-language of meaning. To be sure, even barter ultimately involves logically the presumption of a "value" as a supersensible and immaterial substance in which the "use value" of one commodity is expressed as the value of another (Dolar 67-68). And ultimately, even midrash in its concreteness, in its production of narratives beside narratives and refusal of abstract meanings and paraphrases, is, of course, proposing in some sense meaning. However, just as in barter, the immaterial substance "value" seems to remain unexpressed, so also meaning in midrash. Just as in barter the equation

---

<sup>52</sup> Throughout this text, I am distinguishing between "commentary" as a purely formal structure of a text accompanying closely another text and "interpretation" which is a particular and singular mode of commentary, "one that requires the text or its figures 'to produce an identity.'" (Ronell 186 as quoted by Anidjar).

<sup>53</sup> This "true" is merely a term of convenience, not an ascription of essence.

“1 quarter ton of wheat = x of iron” just seems to be the equivalence of a concrete with a concrete, a material with a material entity, so also the values that are expressed when midrash puts narrative beside narrative. Perhaps, heuristically, we might argue that midrash is most like that Egyptian economy within which there were coins to measure the values of commodities but they were never exchanged. What were exchanged were the commodities themselves (Goux, *Oedipus Philosopher* 127).

“The privileged position of language as a phonic signifier potentially equivalent to all other signifiers through the operation of verbal expression,” as Goux so sharply has put it, represents the very foundation of any science of western interpretation. Language, according to this view, operates as a system of abstract signifiers in another ontological space, as it were, from the things that they signify with two results for hermeneutics. On the one hand, signifiers are paired in a reiterable way with particular signifieds (Saussure’s famous double-articulation) and, on the other hand, the pairing is arbitrary (the second great foundation of Saussure’s linguistics). The phonic sign is thus removed from the circulation of meanings, referents, in just the way that money is removed from the circulation of commodities and the Phallus from the circulation of bodies. This understanding of language is so foundational for our interpretative practices that it becomes almost impossible to think any other one.

Midrash can be plausibly interpreted as a system for reading texts within which it is not the case that “all meaning is condensed in a few graphic signs of phonetic value, just as economic exchange-value appears to be reified in official currency” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 71). If all of our methods of interpretation, whether suspicious or not, are finally founded on the assumption that a text can be “translated,” or paraphrased, that at least a great deal of its “meaning” can be expressed in other words, precisely because concrete language points to abstract meanings, midrash refuses such translatability entirely. The extended discussion of a particular, and highly privileged, form of midrash, the *meshal* will bear out this observation.

Dugma: *The Mashal vs. Interpretation*

Western hermeneutics is a hermeneutics of interpretation. One text is stated to mean another through the mediation of the Logos. The most obviously logocentric of hermeneutical modes is allegory *strictu sensu*, and the most often allegorized text in the western tradition is arguably The Song of Songs. The following text will accordingly effectively demonstrate the anti-allegorical cast of midrashic reading.<sup>54</sup> A further purpose of this analysis will be to show that commentary without the Logos can be as sophisticated and complex as anything that a logocentric western culture can offer. Precisely the obsession with reading combined with the relative social and economic “primitivity” opened the way for salient alternative modes of understanding to the paraphrastic ones that the Logos economy makes available:

*And command you the Israelites that they will bring olive oil [Exodus 27:20]. Your eyes are doves [Song of Songs 1:15]. Rabbi Yiṣḥaq said, God said to them, Your dugma is like that of a dove. One who wishes to buy wheat says to his associate, show me their dugma, you also: your dugma is like that of a dove. How so? When Noah was in the ark what is written? And he sent the dove [Genesis 8:10], and the dove came to him in the evening [and behold, it was grasping an olive leaf in its mouth] [Genesis 8:11]. Said the Holy One to Israel, just as the dove brought light into the world, also you who have been compared [nimšalti] to a dove, bring olive oil and light before me, for it says, And command you the Israelites that they will bring olive oil (Buber, Midrash Tanhuma 2:96).*

This is a complex and interesting text that justifies a somewhat lengthy analysis. In typical midrashic fashion, it uses a passage from the later Holy Writings to interpret a passage from the Five Books of Moses. This is a midrashic text of the type called “petiḥta,” the motive of which is to show how all of the Prophets and Holy Writings can be shown to be commentary on the Torah. Accordingly, R. Yiṣḥaq demonstrates here that the verse of Song of Songs is a commentary on a passage in Exodus. The way that The Song of Songs is understood to interpret is by its being a mashal, a parable or example.

In the Hebrew of the midrash and of the Talmud, the same words

---

<sup>54</sup> Some of the argument of the following paragraphs is taken from Boyarin, “Take the Bible for Example” where it served quite different purposes.

mean “example” and “parable,” and this is a point that is going to be of some importance to me later on in the argument. The Rabbis actually use the word “dugma,” a normal word for “sample” or “example,” as another name for the *mashal*, or midrashic parable, that special kind of exemplary narrative that they deployed as a hermeneutic key for the understanding of the Torah. It is not insignificant that these two words derive from different lexical sources in Hebrew, “dugma” being of course a Greek-derived word while “*mashal*” is of Semitic origin. “Dugma,” from Greek δέγμα carries with it from its etymon more abstract senses of “pattern,” “model” as well as “sample” or “example,” while “*mashal*” has an original and basic sense of “likeness.” We learn the partial equivalence of these two vocables from the following text:

And not only that Kohellet was wise, he moreover taught knowledge to the people, and proved and researched [*yaḥqor*], and formulated many *meshalim* [= parables; Ecclesiastes 12:9] “and proved” words of Torah, “and researched” words of Torah, he made handles for the Torah. You will find that until Solomon came forth, there was no *dugma* (Dunsky 5).

The last sentence in the midrash, “until Solomon existed there was no *dugma*” is a paraphrase of the last phrase in the verse, “formulated many *meshalim*.” It follows that the midrash has glossed “*meshalim*” by “*dugma*.” We will see, moreover, below that the verb “researched,” *HQR*, for the Rabbis, is also glossable by “*dugma*,” and means, something like to find an ad hoc (not universal) standard for comparison of a given object. “Dugma,” it is clear, is a synonym for “*mashal*.” “Example” becomes “parable.”

The Song of Songs is the parable that Solomon produced in order to make handles for the Torah. In contrast to an allegorical (logo-centric) culture of commentary within which the Song is figured as an enigma that needs to be solved, in midrash, it is the Torah which is enigma and the Song of Songs which provides the solution. The same midrash in the proem to Song of Songs Rabbah continues by giving a series of *meshalim* or *dugmot* (the plural of *dugma*) to explain “*dugma*”:

Rabbi Naḥman said two: It is like a great palace that has many doors, and anyone who goes into one would err from the way to the door. A sage came and hung a clue [of thread] on the doorway. And now,

everyone came in and went out by way of the door.<sup>55</sup> Similarly: Until Solomon came forth, no one could understand the words of Torah, but once Solomon came forth, everyone began to make sense of the Torah.

Rav Naḥman gave also another version: It was like a thicket of canes, and no one could enter it. A sage came and took a scythe and cleared [a path]. Everyone began to enter through the clearing. Similarly: Solomon.

Rabbi Yose said: Like a large basket full of fruit, and it had no *handle*, and it couldn't be carried. A sage came and made *handles* for it, and it began to be carried by its handles. Similarly: Until Solomon came forth, no one could understand the words of Torah, but once Solomon came forth, everyone began to make sense of the Torah.

Rabbi Shila said: Like a cauldron full of boiling water, and it had no handle with which to be carried. And someone came and made it a handle, and it could now be carried by its handle.

Rabbi Ḥanina said: Like a deep well full of water, and its water was cold and sweet and good, but no creature could drink from it. And someone came and attached a rope to a rope, a chain to a chain, and drew from it and drank. Everyone began to draw water from it and drink. Similarly: From word to word, from *meshal* to *meshal*, Solomon understood the secret of Torah, for it is written (Proverbs 1): "These are the *meshalim* of Solomon the son of David, King of Israel." By means of his *meshalim*, Solomon came to understand the words of Torah.

This is a remarkable series of *meshalim*, of *dugmot* for the activity of commentary itself. Either the text is a labyrinth which one enters and cannot exit from, without a thread of Ariadne, or it is a thicket that one cannot enter into at all. Either it is a basket of fruit that one cannot take advantage of, or even more ominously, a cauldron of boiling water that without handles might cause one to burn oneself or even kill oneself. The final *dugma* is, however, perhaps the richest of all. Exactly at the point where one would expect an image of surface and depth, such a figure is avoided. The Torah's language is not the well, and the meaning the water, but The Torah is the sweet water itself, in a well so deep that one cannot get the bucket down there at all without tying a rope to a rope. That is what Solomon did. He connected text to text via the medium of the *meshal*, and thus produced

---

<sup>55</sup> This usage is, according to Webster's Third International, the origin of the modern sense of "clue," as first the thread that enables one to find one's way and thence the thread of a narrative.



a rope long enough so that everyone can send down a bucket and come up with the sweet water of understanding of the Torah. The Song of Songs is the rope that provides the dugma that enables “everyone to make sense of the Torah.” Still we could imagine that the point of these images is that one goes down into the depths of the Torah and draws out from there, from below the surface, the meanings, but the actual practice of midrash, of dugma, of mashal, reveals clearly that this is not the point of the image.

The time has come to begin reading our actual example of dugma. “*Your eyes are doves* [Song of Songs 1:15]. Rabbi Yişhaq said, God said to them, Your dugma is like that of a dove.” The Song of Songs is the mashal, the parable, the dugma that Solomon formulated to “make handles for” the Torah. But the Song of Songs is hardly an interpretation or paraphrase of the Torah in any sense that is intelligible to western hermeneutics. Indeed, in the west (including later Judaism), the Song of Songs as allegory is the text that requires interpretation, not the text that provides the handles with which to read another text. This is the distance between allegory and mashal.

This hermeneutic relation is adumbrated in the cited text by the focus upon one highly privileged instance of an elucidatory use of the Song, namely the metaphorical depiction of Israel as a dove. The key to the midrash is its opening move, which I cite here from its original source in the midrash on Song of Songs: “*Your eyes are doves* [Song of Songs 1:15]. Your dugma is like that of a dove” (Dunsky 49). This hermeneutic assertion is based on an elaborate pun. The Hebrew word “ayin” [“eye”] also has the meaning “color.” From this sense derives a series of prepositions, such as “me‘ein” and “ke‘ein”, which mean “according to the likeness of; following the example of.” From this there develops a midrashic topos by which verses that include the word “eye” can be glossed as having the sense of “dugma” as form or likeness, “figure” in both the sense of plastic form and the spiritual or moral significance.

Thematizing the notion of example directly, the text of R. Yişhaq constitutes a meta-midrash, a rare and precious explicit rabbinic comment on hermeneutics. The text depends for its effect on the fact that “dugma” is polysemous. In fact, I would suggest that the text plays with this polysemy deliberately, creating examples within examples, each of a slightly different type.

In his initial move after “translating” *Your eyes are like doves* by “Your

dugma is like that of a dove,” Rabbi Yişhaq explains the meaning of “dugma” by exemplifying it with the little narrative of one who goes to the market to buy wheat and brings home a sample first. (Note that for this midrash itself, the generation of a parallel between economic and hermeneutic life seems an almost irresistible impulse.) The primary usage of “dugma” is thus that of “sample” in the sense of a small portion of a substance that serves as a way of communicating to others the properties of the substance, as, for instance, a small amount of colored wool that a dyer would carry about as an indication of the quality of his wares and work:

The tailor should not go out at the advent of the Sabbath with the needle in his garment, nor the carpenter with the splinter on his collar, nor the dyer with the *dugma* on his ear, nor the money changer with the dinar in his ear. [Tosefta Shabbat 1:8]

This text describes craftsmen whose custom is to advertise by carrying a small sign of their trade. The dyer would attach to his ear [or put in his ear] a small sample of dyed cloth, so that people would know what his work was, just as the money changer would advertise himself with a coin and the carpenter with a splinter. The *dugma*, here then, has two signifying functions. It serves as a conventional sign of the trade of its bearer but also as an iconic sign of his ability and standards. If we compare it to the other two signs mentioned in the text, which are not called “*dugma*,” the point will become clearer. On the one hand, the *dugma* of the dyer functions like the needle of the tailor or the splinter of the carpenter. It tells people that the trade of this person is such and such. On the other hand, the *dugma* stands in a part-whole relationship to the dyer’s product and as such signifies directly the quality of his work. The word “*dugma*” here signifies a concrete portion of a mass [a “fusion” of all such similar objects] which through its characteristics manifests the characteristics of the entire mass. The mass which it signifies is just as concrete as the portion of the mass, as the *dugma*. In English we would use the word “sample” or “specimen” to convey this meaning. *Dugma*, then, clearly has the sense of “sample” or “example” as a portion or member of a class chosen and pointed out to show the characteristics of the entire class. The operative figure here is, then, synecdoche.

When God addressed Israel with the metaphor *Your eyes are doves*, he was saying according to R. Yişhaq, that the *dugma* of Israel is like that of a dove. In order to illustrate this point, the rabbi gives an

example of the literary form “dugma,” that is to say, a dugma of dugma. The first dugma is very concrete indeed. It refers to the simplest usage of the word that I considered above, that of a sample of merchandise. This dugma of dugma [the dugma of the comparison of dugma to the sample of wheat] has its own parabolic application, namely, it *exemplifies* the type: parabolic signification. It is a dugma of the class “dugma” in *exactly* the same way that the dugma of the sample of wheat is a dugma of all the wheat. Everything is equally concrete. The sample of wheat is as concrete as the silo full of wheat from which it was taken. Similarly, the example of the “wheat” is as concrete as the group [fusion not class] of other instances of parabolic discourse to which it is being compared. Nelson Goodman has discussed exactly this type of exemplification as its very prototypical form:

Exemplification is reference by a sample to a feature of it. A tailor’s swatch, in normal use, exemplifies its color, weave, and thickness, but not its size or shape, the note a concertmaster sounds before the performance exemplifies pitch but not timber, duration, or loudness.

Exemplification, then, far from being a variety of denotation, runs in the opposite direction, not from label to what the label applies to but from something a label applies to back to the label [or the feature associated with that label]. . . . Exemplification is not mere possession of a feature but requires also reference to that feature; such reference is what distinguishes the exemplified from the merely possessed features (Goodman 124–5).

Goodman thus gives as his most basic type of example precisely the type that R. Yişhaq adduced as his, the sample used by the merchant or tradesman to show off his wares.

Following the self-reflexive exemplification of dugma, the relation of the dove to Israel is discussed as similar to the relation of a sample of wheat to all of the wheat, or of this particular dugma [= example] to the whole category of dugma [= exemplification]. Israel’s dugma is a dove, just as the dugma of the wheat is the sample. This comparison is, however, considerably more complex. It is not nearly so straightforward as the one that compares the ratio of an example to the class “exemplification” with the ratio of a sample of wheat to the fusion “wheat,” for, after all, a dove is not a member of the fusion “Israel” nor of the class “Israel.” What we have here is what Goodman calls “complex reference.” The way that “Israel’s dugma is like a dove” works is most similar to the following case cited by Goodman:

I may answer your question about the color of my house by showing a sample rather than by uttering a predicate; or I may merely describe the location of the appropriate sample on a color card you have. In the latter case, the chain of reference runs down from a verbal label to an instance denoted and then up to another label [or feature] exemplified. *And a picture of a bald eagle denotes a bird that may exemplify a label such as “bold and free” that in turn denotes and is exemplified by a given country.*<sup>56</sup>

Note that this is almost precisely the way that “Israel’s dugma is like a dove” functions. The word picture “dove” denotes a bird that exemplifies a label that in turn denotes and is exemplified by a given people, Israel. However, we must recognize (as certainly Goodman does) that the exemplification of the label “bold and free” by a bald eagle—actual, depicted, or denoted—is a culturally determined or intertextual function. The process of interpretation by exemplification is thus a picking out of the feature to which the exemplification will refer. The phrase “your dugma is like a dove” means a feature that you possess is like a feature of a dove, and by pointing to that feature in the denotation, “dove,” that feature is referred to—exemplified. And what is that? Both the dove and Israel are light-bringers. The dove brought light to the world by bringing an olive branch, the concrete symbol of light, and Israel brings light to the world by bringing oil to the Temple.<sup>57</sup> Thus finally, but in a very complex way, dove and Israel do stand to each other in a relation similar to the relation of the sample of wheat to the rest of the wheat. Israel and the dove are both members of the fusion, “light-bringers.”

It is important, however, to make clear that the Rabbis are not thereby exhausting the description of a dove or of Israel. There is no abstraction here (in either a nominalistic or a realist sense) but the placing of a concrete entity beside another concrete entity in such a way that characteristics that are obscure in the one are revealed by association with those same characteristics in the other, where they are obvious or explicit.<sup>58</sup> This possibility of exemplifying Israel by a

---

<sup>56</sup> Goodman 127, emphasis added.

<sup>57</sup> For the olive as a symbol of “light” in rabbinic dream interpretation, see Hasan-Rokem 110–15.

<sup>58</sup> Interestingly enough, Goux himself exemplifies this “midrashic” mode of interpretation at least once when he places Engels beside Freud and argues: “We have only to adhere as closely as possible to their respective discourses, deliberately but barely touching them together to match them, like the scattered pieces of a puzzle

dove, once established on conventional, cultural, intertextual grounds, can be (as will yet be seen) very productive of other exemplifications. In other words, the very process of reading by example produces (cultural) knowledge.

It is certainly illuminating to note once more how close this brings us to Goodman's descriptions:

Such correlative chains must be understood as schematic constructions, and *not by any means as providing literal translations for metaphors*. The transfer of "mouse" from mice to a man may not be via the label "timid" or any other specific predicate. Moreover, metaphorical transfer need not follow antecedently established coexemplifications of a feature or label, verbal or nonverbal; the metaphorical application itself may participate in effecting coexemplification by the mice and the man of some one or more of their common features; and just what is exemplified may be sought rather than found (Goodman 128).

This seems to me a near-perfect description of the hermeneutic process by which the midrash establishes that Israel's dugma is a dove and then seeks the answer to what this means. In the hermeneutics by example which rabbinic midrash practices, this becomes a doubly productive process, for once a certain mashal is established on the grounds of a given verse, that very metaphorical coexemplification is used precisely to seek that which is exemplified. The common midrashic questions: "Why is the Torah compared to water?" and "Why is Israel compared to a dove?" are exact object correlatives of this searching process.

"Dugma" also conveys the meaning of the whole correlative chain or schematic construction that effects a coexemplification and points to a common feature between the denoted object and the example. We find this usage with reference to the unknowable essence of God Himself:

Tsofar Hana'mati said to Job: *Will you discover the extent of God's nature [hêqer]? . . . His measure is longer than the Universe [Job 11:7 and 9]. Who can research [yahqor] his dugma, but indeed, will you grasp the height of the heavens? [verse 8]. What is the meaning of will you grasp the height of the heavens? Are you able to describe the One who made the heavens and the earth? Even Moses, who arose to the firmament and received*

---

needing simply juxtaposition in order to reveal a new shape" (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 215). This is almost exactly what "dugma" does.

the Torah from hand to hand did not understand his form (Buber, *The Midrash on Psalms* 452).

“Dugma” here obviously does not mean “example” or “sample” but something like “God’s essential form.” This emerges from the context, where it is clear that what is being talked about is the inability of humans to perceive or understand the essence of God. Even Moses, who was closer to God than any other human being, to whom God showed himself, could not understand God’s *dugma* or describe him. The biblical Hebrew word *hêqer*, which I have translated “extent of God’s nature,” is here again (as in the instance of Solomon above) glossed by “dugma;” so understanding *hêqer* may give us some insight into “dugma.”

The verb from which the biblical noun is derived means to delve, to search out, to explore. The noun, as the object of the activity of the verb, often connotes that which is deep, hidden, essential, and unsearchable. Thus the sea is described in Job 38:16 as having no *hêqer*. The most significant text for our exploration here is, however, the following passage from Isaiah:

Unto whom will you compare me, and to whom am I similar, says the Holiness. Raise up your eyes to the heavens and see who created these . . . Do you not know, have you not heard? The eternal God . . . His wisdom is unfathomable [has no *hêqer*] (Isaiah 40:25–28).

The second quoted verse follows logically from the first. God’s wisdom is unfathomable *because* there is no one to whom he can be compared, that is to say in rabbinic parlance, he has no *dugma*, no other member of his class, no standard with which to compare him. It seems quite likely that this text of Isaiah is what lies behind the glossing of “*hêqer*” by “dugma” in the midrash. The same verb, *yahqor* “research,” was used above to describe Solomon’s activity of teaching Torah to the people, and also glossed by “dugma” in the midrash. We thus disclose something of the significance of *dugma* itself. It is by placing an individual into a class that we can understand its nature. Or better, because this formulation almost inevitably leads us into a Logos, an abstract class or category: by placing an individual beside others and denoting those others, we see what the features are that characterize that individual and understand them.<sup>59</sup> Rather than the logic

---

<sup>59</sup> See Lacan alluding to Kant: “the rule of reason, the Vernunftregel, is always some Vergleichung, or equivalent” (Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts* 21).

of classes, what we need here is something like prototype (or family similarity) semantic theory, in which items are grouped owing to shared features, without their entering into an abstract pattern or class.<sup>60</sup> God, in being *sui generis*, is thus beyond our ken, although, somewhat paradoxically, it was precisely through the medium of the *mashal*—i.e., as opposed to theology—, that the Rabbis were able to evince something of God as they experienced and understood him.

“Dugma” is thus a denoted object that refers to a label or feature coexemplified between the object we wish to understand and the *dugma*. At the same time, however, it is also the exemplified label or feature itself. This explains, by the way, the vacillation between “your *dugma* is a dove,” “your *dugma* is like a dove,” and “your *dugma* is like that of a dove.” Putting this into Goux’s terms, we see here the logical equivalent of “the stage of primitive barter; commodities are declared identical to each other and thus of equal value for exchange purposes.” There is, for God, no such other commodity, but God is also not the measuring standard, the universal equivalent, by which other entities are measured and described. Were there, however, a notion of “universal equivalent,” then philosophy, i.e., theology would have existed and some possibility of description of God, even in negative terms, would have been conceivable.

What we learn here finally is that reading for the Rabbis consists not of translating or paraphrasing a text by its meaning but finding (or making) some other text to which it can be declared, *in some sense*, identical in value. Texts are bartered for other texts, as it were, and the *mashal*, which in its very semantics declares its equal value, is thus the prototype of *midrash*.

As in Rabbi Yiṣḥaq’s discourse, moving from example as a denoted object to example as a denoted narrative raises the complexity of analysis geometrically. However, when we read a *mashal*, we will see a correspondence between the semantic complexity of the notion of example and the semiotic complexity of the functioning of the example narrative. A *mashal* is an explicitly fictional narrative that is placed beside an obscure biblical narrative as a means of bringing light to its dark places, or, in modern literary terms, filling in gaps. Our very *dugma* here, a *dugma* of light-bringing, thus forms a perfect *dugma* for *dugma*. This description of commentary via the *dugma* as the

---

<sup>60</sup> I hope to develop this idea further in future versions of this project. See Lakoff.

illumination of obscure textual sites is, moreover, “native” to rabbinic texts themselves, as we shall presently see. As the dominant mode of early rabbinic reading, it thus provides a direct contrast with allegoresis. In allegory (interpretation), a story is taken to signify a set of meanings—it is dominated, therefore, by the Jakobsonian sign of metaphor; in midrash, a story is placed beside another story, and connections or analogies between the stories provide mutual illumination of understanding without paraphrase or translation into abstraction. Its dominant sign is, therefore, metonymy.

There is in the *mashal* both a fictional text and a textual representation of the “actual” events, standing in the relation of example and exemplified, as the dove stands to Israel. The figure of Israel as a dove became, in fact, one of the most productive sources of the *mashal*. One such text is found in *Song of Songs Rabba*, on the verse “My dove in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice” (Song of Songs 2:14):

The one of the house of R. Ishma‘el teaches: In the hour in which Israel went out from Egypt, to what were they similar? To a dove that ran away from a hawk, and entered the cleft of a rock and found there a nesting snake. She entered within, but could not go in, because of the snake; she could not go back, because of the hawk that was waiting outside. What did the dove do? She began to cry out and beat her wings, in order that the owner of the dovecote would hear and come to save her. That is how Israel appeared at the Sea. They could not go down into the Sea, for the Sea had not yet been split for them. They could not go back, for Pharaoh was coming near. What did they do? “They were mightily afraid, and the Children of Israel cried out unto the Lord” [Exodus 14:10], and immediately, “The Lord saved them on that day” [Exodus 14:30] (Dunsky 72–73).

The text here rests on two common rabbinic assumptions—the identification of Israel with a dove, one of the sources of which we have seen above, and the identification of the entire Song of Songs as a dialogue between God and Israel at the time of the Crossing of the Red Sea (Boyarin, *Intertextuality* 105–16). What is going on in this text? First of all, the figurative utterance, “My dove in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice,” is being expanded into a full narrative, or rather it is being provided with a narrative context in which it can be read. What is the dove doing in the clefts of the rock? Who is addressing her? Why does he want to hear her voice, or why is it necessary that she makes a sound? All of these questions are answered



by filling in the gaps of the narrative (Sternberg 186–229). The dove is in the rock because she is afraid. But the rock is not a sufficient protection for her. The speaker is her master, and she must cry out so that he will save her. However, the claim is also being made that this figure refers to a concrete situation in Israel's history, the crisis situation at the shore of the Red Sea. In order that we experience that situation fully, that we understand the predicament of the People, why they cried out unto the Lord and why he answered them, the verse of Song of Songs is associated with it by means of the *mashal* or narrative figure. The way that this parable is linked to the biblical story is identical to the way that the dove is linked to Israel in the meta-midrash above.

This is an interpretation, then, not so much of a verse of Song of Songs as of a verse of Exodus. The Rabbis explicitly refer to the Holy Song as a *mashal*, which is for them synonymous with fiction (Boyarin, "Take the Bible for Example" 30); and, moreover, they clearly refer to the hermeneutic function of the fictional text:

The rabbis say: Do not let this *mashal* be light in your eyes, for by means of this *mashal* one comes to comprehend the words of Torah. A *mashal* to a king who has lost a golden coin from his house or a precious pearl—does he not find it by means of a wick worth a penny? Similarly, let not this *mashal* be light in your eyes, for by means of this *mashal* one comes to comprehend the words of Torah. Know that this is so, for Solomon, by means of this *mashal* [i.e., The Song of Songs], understood the exact meaning of the Torah. Rabbi Yehuda says: it is to teach you that everyone who teaches words of Torah to the many is privileged to have the Holy Spirit descend upon him. From whom do we learn this? From Solomon, who because he taught words of Torah to the many was privileged to have the Holy Spirit descend upon him and utter three books, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.

It follows that for the Rabbis, the Song of Songs is the parable that Solomon formulated in order that the people will understand the Torah. Characteristically enough, and as we have seen, in order to explain the importance of the *mashal*, the Rabbis use a *mashal*. (There is, for them, no meta-language.) The fictional text of the king who has lost his pearl interprets the "real" one by being put beside [parable] it and thus exemplifying some feature that is discovered as common to it and the "real" story (and thus present in the real story). Since in the *mashal* what is being referred to is a story—the story of Solomon's revealing the meaning (not the interpretation but the

significance)—of the Torah via the Song of Songs, it is the meaning of the story in this sense that is the exemplified label or feature.

Similarly, the meaning of the events in Exodus is revealed by associating this text with another narrative, the fictional narrative of the Song of Songs, with its dove and dovecote. The placing of a fictional narrative beside a real one is the association of the concrete with the concrete—the fictional particular with the actual particular. The figures of the Song of Songs are made concrete by being identified with particular situations and characters from the Torah history. However, those situations and characters are also made more intelligible and concrete by being associated with the very homely figure of the dove, the dovecote, and the dove's master. This double concretization is achieved, however, by an exemplified label, the *dugma*, with respect to which the characteristics of the two concrete examples can be said to be alike. The text always explicitly or implicitly cites a specific feature or label under which the comparison of the two particulars is applicable, to which the exemplification refers.

However, as we have seen, the word “*dugma*” has a double meaning. In the case of a sample of wheat, “*dugma*” means the sample, but in the case of the dove and Israel, it means rather the exemplified feature or label (or even the potential set of such exemplified features or labels). Once more, that is why the text says there “Your *dugma* is like a dove,” and not “Your *dugma* is a dove.”

The *mashal* or *dugma* thus provides a very elegant *dugma* of midrash as a whole. If the dominant mode of interpretation is metaphor: This means something; the dominant mode of midrash is metonymy: This should be put aside this something else. The something else is always more concrete language, frequently another narrative, not a translation of arbitrary and fixed signs into an abstract plane of meaning. In a culture in which spirit is not privileged over flesh (Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*), the only way in which a text can be read is by the production of more text on the same ontological and logical level as the text that is being read. This is the distinctiveness of midrash.

### *Midrash as Misology*

Galit Hasan-Rokem points out in her new book on folk literature in Palestinian midrash: “The discourse of dream interpretation of [the

Rabbis] was connected with the dominant interpretative discourse that they employed, the commentary on the Bible and interpretation of written [texts]" (Hasan-Rokem 109). Hasan-Rokem cites there a very elegant example in which a dreamer dreams that his dead father commands him to go to Cappadocia. Upon ascertaining that the father had never been to that place, the dream interpreter suggests the following: "Count to the tenth beam in your father's house, and there you will find his treasure." And so it was, the treasure was in the *καππαδοκία*. *καππα* is the tenth letter of the Greek alphabet, and the relatively rare word "δοκός" means a roof or floor beam.<sup>61</sup> We see here a non-allegorical, non-interpretative reading practice at its epitome. As Hasan-Rokem has pointed out perspicaciously, rabbinic dream-interpretation practices (as indeed those of the ancient world in general, including such exemplary figures as Artemidorus) seem very similar to modern practices of the interpretation of dream-language, both psychoanalytic and cognitive. This example is strikingly like the "talismán" instance cited above. I would, therefore, argue that for the Rabbis, the reading of texts was not unlike the interpretation of dreams (Hasan-Rokem 116).<sup>62</sup> The point is not, as some theorists have claimed, that Freud was somehow influenced by midrash in the development of his interpretation of dreams, but rather that the Rabbis read texts in a dream-interpretation-like fashion (Handelman; Frieden; Hasan-Rokem 142). As Hasan-Rokem emphasizes, at least one text indicates that the same expertise and spiritual characteristics are requisite for successful dream interpretation and for successful Torah interpretation, or rather that intensive training in the reading of Torah renders one capable of interpreting dream-texts as well (Hasan-Rokem 118).

---

<sup>61</sup> Palestinian Talmud, Ma'aser Sheni, chapter 4. In the versions in the Palestinian midrash, *Eikha Rabba*, that Hasan-Rokem analyzes, the interpretation is included within the text itself, in two versions. In one version, *καππα* is interpreted as "twenty," because the letter *kaf* represents the number twenty in the Hebrew system of using letters as numbers, and *δοκί* read there as beam." In another version, found in other mss., *καππα* is interpreted as "beam," and *δοκία* is read as if it were *δεκα*! This is an example, similar to many exposed by my teacher, Prof. Saul Lieberman, in which rabbinic literature provides evidence for the everyday use in late antique Greek of a word that is otherwise only attested rarely in Greek literature. I have consulted with my colleague, Erich Gruen, on the distribution of the word.

<sup>62</sup> Some would claim, therefore, that midrash is literally dream interpretation, i.e., that the Rabbis considered the Torah to be oracles and read it as such. This constitutes, from my point of view, an ethnocentric begging of the question.

In other words, I would suggest that language itself was perceived by them in a non-logocentric, or perhaps better-stated, not yet fully logocentric modality. For the earliest Rabbis, both the language of dreams and the language of texts work through rebus, through puns, through the concrete forms of letters, through allusions to verses of the Bible, and all of the phenomena that Heinemann has referred to as “creative philology,” and that we can see are no philology at all but rather a sort of misology.<sup>63</sup>

A very elegant example of such misology can be offered from a classical midrash text, a text that has, moreover, important legal consequences, indeed potentially lethal consequences, since it involves the assessment of a verse that deals with capital punishment. It is striking how similar the midrashic understanding adopted in this highly serious context, both in origin (Scripture) and consequence, is to the example of rabbinic dream-interpretation just adduced. In this text, Rabbi Akiva argues with respect to a verse that includes as the object of capital punishment the plural feminine pronoun *’ethen*, that only one of the two female offenders is, in fact, to be executed. When objected to that the pronoun is plural, Rabbi Akiva’s response is that *hen* in Greek means “one”[!], exactly the sort of interpretation that we found above for Cappadocia and as far from a logocentric understanding of language as could be imagined. This is in a situation of the most serious religious endeavor imaginable, assessment of the law of Holy Scripture in a capital case.

It is precisely at this site that we mark the difference between midrash and the later logocentricity of Jewish signification practices, as Maimonides gives the absolute difference in meaning of a word that sounds the same in two languages (Hebrew and Arabic) as the basis and cause for a misunderstanding, while for Rabbi Akiva, this is the basis and cause for understanding. As Gil Anidjar has written of this exemplary moment in Maimonides, the Aristotelian par excellence of later rabbinic tradition: “The encounter between the two languages effectively sundered the word *’aba* [Hebrew: he wanted] or *’abâ* [Arabic: he refused]—which, according to the description that precedes, still

---

<sup>63</sup> It will be of great interest to observe if and to what extent such methods are used in the commentaries on texts outside of the rabbinic tradition and even in other Greek commentary traditions, but this is, up to a point, outside of the scope of this project.

qualify as “one word [*kalima*]”—from its signification, or, more accurately, it sundered its signification (*dalâla*) into two in *both languages*. It is, moreover, *one* word that goes in two directions at once establishing, or rather ungrounding, an incommensurable difference which is not, strictly speaking, discernible or knowable but must be read. This is however also covered over, as we saw, since the *dalâla* also marks the very knowledge of one’s ‘own’ language. It is that language “itself—assuming such self-identity is still possible—which gets in the way and interferes in the gravest manner, leading one to believe that one *knows* what one has said, or what one has heard. Accurately enough, then, Maimonides remains in the right when he asserts that no knowledge (one may want to say, no meaning, no signification) is exchanged in the process, since what has been communicated, if at all, is wrong” (Anidjar).<sup>64</sup> But, for Rabbi Akiva, what has been communicated through a meconnaissance of Hebrew as Greek is—right. It is exactly in the breakdown between languages that the earlier Rabbi marks the absence of the Logos.<sup>65</sup>

One could claim, however, at this point that there is not yet any evidence for a different understanding of language per se on the part of the Rabbis, that precisely the comparison between methods of dream-interpretation and Torah-interpretation suggests only a commonality in the understanding of mantic language. It would, accordingly, seemingly be easy to dismiss the thesis of this essay if one could claim that the Rabbis ascribed some special status to Divine language alone and that with respect to human language, their interpretative methods were identical to those of the “Greeks,” and ours. However, this does not seem to be the case. At least some Rabbis used dream-like, midrash-like methods for the application of *contracts* as well.<sup>66</sup> In other words, I am suggesting that at least for Rabbi Akiva and his school among the early rabbis, it is precisely the distinction between sacred signifier and language that has not appeared (or has been

---

<sup>64</sup> Anidjar also writes that, “[T]he analogy that Maimonides makes marks an epistemological break, though *not* an absolute break (assuming such would be possible), one which cannot but fundamentally alter the subsequent activity, the subsequent poetics and readings, of any midrashic text.” Exactly!

<sup>65</sup> No wonder, then, that Maimonides could only read midrash as a species of poetic or homiletic use of language and not as commentary.

<sup>66</sup> See for the nonce, Tosefta Ketuboth 4:9. This requires further elaboration.

resisted).<sup>67</sup> Goux describes the platonic revolution in language: “Meaning no longer appears, as the symbolist illusion of sacerdotal writing would have it, to be adherent in the signifying material; it exists apart from the sensuous element. A reification of meaning, in the form of a transcendentalized Logos, can then [but has not yet in Rabbi Akiva’s midrash, DB] take place” (Goux, *Symbolic Economies* 172). This reification is precisely what is absent in Rabbi Akiva’s midrash. Meaning still does appear there to be adherent in the sacerdotal signifying material. As Thomson has pointed out, “[P]uns [are] a universal characteristic of primitive speech, designed to invest it with a magical or mystical significance” (Thomson, *Philosophers* 132).<sup>68</sup> Lacan himself, interestingly enough, seems to have had some sense of this difference of rabbinic commentary. Certainly his repeated and famous (some would say notorious) interpretations of “Wo Es war, soll Ich werden” (Fink 46), represent a sort of midrash, in the strict sense, on this text, and Lacan himself referred to his commentary on Freud as “talmudic,” correctly insisting that he attached more importance to the letter of the text than to its *interpretation* (Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 58).

---

<sup>67</sup> It would not be inapposite, then, to emphasize that his opponent, Rabbi Ishma‘el and his school, insisted that the Torah has been given in human language.

<sup>68</sup> In this respect, midrash has some affinities with some of the most recent practices of literary criticism that take the “matter” of language very seriously indeed. This goes far beyond any facile comparisons of midrash to deconstruction which are in any case quite questionable, as argued most persuasively by Stern. For the high seriousness of wordplay in a context surprisingly not entirely unlike this one, see Parker 1–5.

*This page intentionally left blank*

PART TWO  
DIACRITICAL MARKS



*This page intentionally left blank*

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE POLITICS OF BIBLICAL NARRATOLOGY: READING THE BIBLE LIKE/AS A WOMAN

**Mieke Bal.** "The Bible as Literature: A Critical Escape." *Diacritics* 16.4 (1986): 71–79.

———. *Lethal Love: Feminist Readings of Biblical Love Stories*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.

**Meir Sternberg.** *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1985.

Feminist theory is divided within itself (not against itself) between a desire to reassert and reinsert the feminine into culture, to valorize femininity itself, and a seemingly opposite desire to deconstruct the binary opposition of masculine and feminine altogether as an artifact of patriarchy and male dominance. Feminist literary theory is similarly informed by a division between a thematic feminism, which seeks to restore the woman's voice or critique the woman's suppression within the texts of male literary culture, and what might be called a strategic feminism, which seeks a different understanding of reading altogether from the one that patriarchy has promoted. Both of these dichotomies and their intersection with each other prove very slippery when read closely. Reading Mieke Bal's "feminist readings" and her assault on Sternberg, I am drawn into these reflections; attendant upon them as well are all of the ambivalences of identification with both the agent and the patient of the attack.

Bal's feminist dispute with Sternberg turns on issues of authorship and authority. Near the beginning of his book, Sternberg makes the following argument for divine *implied* authorship of the Bible:

But, it may be objected, how does the narrator's claim to historicity accord with the incorporation of material not just undocumented but undocumentable: the hidden acts of God, the secret thoughts of all the participants, the abundant dialogue scenes? . . .

In the Bible's sociocultural context . . . truth claim and free access to information go together owing to a discourse mechanism so basic that no contemporary would need to look around for it—the appeal to divine inspiration. [32]

A similar argument had already been made in the Babylonian Talmud some 1500 years before Sternberg:

It has been taught: R. Eleazar said: Esther was composed under the inspiration of the holy spirit [or by the holy spirit, D.B.], as it says, *And Haman said in his heart* [Est. 6:6]. R. Akiva says: Esther was composed under the inspiration of the holy spirit, as it says, *And Esther obtained favour in the eyes of all that looked upon her* [2:15]. R. Meir says: Esther was composed under the inspiration of the holy spirit, as it says, And the thing became known to Mordecai [2:22]. R. Jose b. Durmaskith said: Esther was composed under the inspiration of the holy spirit, as it says, *But on the spoil they laid not their hands* [9:10]. Said Samuel: Had I been there, I would have given a proof superior to all, namely, that it says, *They confirmed and took upon them* [9:27], [which means] they confirmed above [in heaven] what they took upon themselves below. [*Babylonian, Talmud, Megillah 7a*]

To be sure, the talmudic text reverses the premises and conclusions of the syllogism. Sternberg's argument is: if the biblical narrator "knows" things that *he* ought not to know, and if I do not want to claim that he is creating the world of the text in his imagination, how does he know those things? The answer, of course, is that he knows them by divine inspiration. Therefore, it is possible to claim that biblical narrative is historiography and not fiction in genre. (To prevent any injustice to Sternberg at this point, I will make it clear that he is *not* claiming that the biblical narrative is true, but only that it claims to be true.) The talmudic argument is: if we assume, as we do, that the narrative is historiography and the narrator knows things that he ought not to know, then the text must be divinely inspired (or even divinely authored). The lines of reasoning seem almost identical to me. So are the propositions (premises and conclusions): the narrative is "true"; the narrator knows hidden things truly; only God can know hidden things truly; the narrator is, in some sense, God.

Now we have some fair knowledge of what the implications of this position might have been in the world of the Talmud. For the rabbis, who "believed" in God and accepted the values of the text as "true," it seems the assertion of both historiographical accuracy and divine inspiration were relatively unproblematic. What can it mean to make such claims in our world? For Bal, the answer to this question is basically simple: it turns narratology into theology. "Sternberg confuses 'narrative' with 'theology,' and that is a confusion iconic of the contents" ["Escape" 79]. In other words, by reading God as the

Implied Author of the biblical narrative, Bal claims, Sternberg is not producing a poetics at all but a theology. Now it seems clear to me that this characterization of Sternberg's discourse does not work. There is absolutely no consequence from the claim that God is the implied narrator of the Bible to a proposition that God indeed exists or that God, existing, is like this or like that, and only that type of proposition could make Sternberg's text into a theology.

Moreover, Sternberg explicitly denies that his claim is a claim about the world at all. In fact, his very argument for reading the Bible as historiography is based on the premise that the truth or falsity of the propositional content of the biblical text is irrelevant for determining whether it is fiction or history-writing. And he makes this statement precisely because he agrees with the common judgment of rational people that the biblical text is full of factual error [33].

But if as seekers for the truth, professional or amateur, we can take or leave the truth claim of inspiration, then as readers we simply must take it—just like any other biblical premise or convention, from the existence of God to the sense borne by specific words—or else invent our own text. . . . This leaves us all free to reject the Bible's inspiration as a principle of faith and, as scholars, to challenge its figures, statements, astronomy, chronology, even historiography. [33–34]

Now this can be read very easily as no more than a statement of the willing suspension of disbelief required of the reader of any work of fantastic fiction. I cannot really read *Frankenstein* if the constant thought that I have while reading it is why this author is claiming that such a creature can exist when I know that it cannot. Put this way, Sternberg's statement here is a rather innocent argument that we read the Bible with the same conventions of reading that we employ for prose fiction. "Must be accepted" would refer then only to the *willing* acceptance of those conventions. Bal, however, turns this innocuous requirement into something almost sinister. "Attributing to the narrator a divine power that 'must be accepted' is, also, circumscribing the position of the reader who cannot but submit, passively, to what the text states" ["Escape" 72]. The question that I wish to ask is, given that Sternberg's statement can be given a relatively innocent interpretation, what is it that motivates the threatening reading that Bal gives it? If Bal's dubbing of Sternberg's reading as theology is invalid, what is it that she is getting at; what is really disturbing in Sternberg's discourse?

My suggestion is that there is an unthematized contradiction within Sternberg's argument. As I have presented the "innocent" reading of Sternberg's claim about the narrator of the Bible, it has led me to the assertion that what he is calling for is the willing (and ironic) suspension of disbelief of the reader of fiction. However, paradoxically, the major thrust (metaphorical associations intended) of Sternberg's introduction is precisely the claim that the Bible is indeed historiography and not fiction. This argument is posed as a counterpoint to Robert Alter's postulate in his *Art of Biblical Narrative*, that "prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative" [23–24]. Sternberg's reasoning runs something like this. First, he claims that "history" and "fiction" as terms represent two different sets of oppositions: one on the level of "world" and one on the level of "word." On the level of world, history is "what really happened" and fiction is "the sphere of the imagined or invented." But in the realm of word, "each term may point to a different mode of representation or writing—'history' to re-creative and fiction to creative discourse" [24]. Now Sternberg takes the apparently reasonable next step and argues that:

The shift of meaning leads to a symbiosis of meaning, whereby history-writing is wedded to and fiction-writing opposed to factual truth. Now this double identification forms a category-mistake of the first order. For history-writing is not a record of fact—of what "really happened"—but a discourse that claims to be a record of fact. Nor is fiction-writing a tissue of free inventions but a discourse that claims freedom of invention. The antithesis lies not in the presence or absence of truth value but of the commitment to truth value. [25]

I was almost seduced by this argument. But in fact, it just doesn't work, not because its premises are wrong, but because they are right. Historiography and fiction are indeed not distinguished by whether or not the narrated events are judged by us to be true or not. Indeed, as Sternberg argues, were the opposite to be true, texts would change their generic status from year to year. Indeed, some texts might be both history and fiction in the same year—maybe in the same academic department. So far, so good. However, again as Sternberg himself points out, what makes a text historiography in the generic system of our culture is the fact that it obeys certain rules as to evidence and inference from evidence. Now, precisely one of the inadmissible types of evidence in our practice of writing and reading historiography is

divine knowledge. This is true, whether or not I, the reader, believe in God, exactly for the reason that Sternberg adduces, that the determination of fiction or nonfiction as genre is independent of my belief in the plausibility or truth of the text's claims. Sternberg obviously knows this. His claim would have to be then, and indeed it is, that historiography was defined differently in the culture of the Bible, and in the way that the biblical culture defined historiography, this text was historiography.

This is already, it seems to me, a substantially different proposition than, "Of course the narrative is historiographic, inevitably so considering its teleology and incredibly so considering its time and environment" [30]; that is, this latter claim seems to mean that the Bible is historiography by the conventions of our culture, which it isn't. Moreover, it is a proposition that is impossible to prove or disprove. Indeed, the text does seem to make strong thematized claims to be truthful. However, the strength of these claims does not in any way determine genre. Our literary system is full of texts—called novels—which claim to be a record of the actual historical truth, *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. Our practice of reading them as fiction, then, is in resistance to the truth claims that the text is making for itself, and our judgment of which texts to call fiction and which ones to call historiography a matter of conventions of reading, conventions of writing, and (sometimes) plausibility. None of these tests for historiography will work for the Bible.

We know virtually nothing and can know virtually nothing of the conventions of reading under which, for instance, the Book of Esther was produced. We know a little bit more about the conventions under which it was read in certain cultures, for example, the talmudic one. The Talmud itself, moreover, seems to have understood that its own reading conventions were, well, conventions. The passage quoted above continues by completely undermining its own arguments:

Raba said: All the proofs can be confuted except that of Samuel, which cannot be confuted. Against that of R. Eleazar it may be objected that it is reasonable to suppose that Haman would think so, because there was no one who was so high in the esteem of the king as he was, and that when he spoke at length, he was only expressing the thought concerning himself. . . . Against the proof of Samuel certainly no decisive objection can be brought. [25]

In other words, Raba argues that for all of the supposed “Divine” information of the narrator, we can substitute an assumption of inference based on the givens of the text, but Samuel’s argument has no refutation. Why? Because it is based on a purely arbitrary, constructed interpretation of the verse. “*They confirmed and took upon them* [9:27], [which means] they confirmed above [in heaven] what they took upon themselves below.” Since the narrator knows what was confirmed in heaven, He must be God. But the verse can easily be understood as referring to the Jews who confirmed what they took upon themselves, which is how Raba himself interprets it in another place [Shabbat 88a]! So, the only irrefutable proof that the narrator of Esther is divine and the text, therefore, is historiography (and not didactic legend) is an imposition from without, itself a construct of reading and not a foolproof implication from within the text itself.

As to conventions of writing, all that we can compare are conventions of writing history in the Bible’s time and those in our own. As for the Bible’s time, the claim is made that it is *sui generis*, so to what are we going to compare it? The mere fact that this text is meant to be taken seriously, even on pain of excommunication, does not qualify it as historiography, any more than the equally serious truth claims of myths qualify them as historiography. We certainly cannot assume an ahistorical organization of cultural productions into the familiar genres of our own time. There are other genres and possible organizations of textual cultures besides history-fiction. As for our own time and our conventions of writing-reading, Sternberg grants to Alter, and his own reading practice shows, that the Bible’s narrative reads like fiction. (The fact that much historiography is written like fiction does not obscure this argument.) All of his comparisons to various discursive strategies in texts closer to us in time and place are to fictional texts, and this is not accidental. In spite of the fact that the “narrative . . . illegitimizes all thought of fictionality on pain of excommunication,” *since it does not generally verify its narrative claims by referring to evidence, but in fact at nearly every moment presents its data as that of an omniscient narrator*, it belongs to the genre of fiction and not historiography. When we read ancient historiography, we may enjoy its style and wit and be fascinated to learn what people thought about the world once, but we do not ask ourselves to suspend disbelief—precisely what Sternberg suggests we must do in order to read the Bible well. Since the major discursive gesture that Sternberg finds, the omniscient

narrator, belongs in our literary system exclusively to fiction, I think that Alter is right when he asserts “prose fiction is the best general rubric for describing biblical narrative.” Again not implying any belief or disbelief in the Bible’s actual truth, just as Sternberg does, he brackets that issue and places *it* in the realm of theology.

What has all this to do with a consideration of the possibility of a feminist practice of biblical criticism? If my argument is cogent that Sternberg’s reasoning *and critical practice* contradict his strenuously asserted conclusions, one might be left almost unconsciously with the impression that those conclusions are playing some other function in his discourse than dispassionate meditating. He begins by claiming we must suspend disbelief in order to read this text, a move which, as I have claimed, places it generically as fiction, and then insists at length that the text is historiography. There is something at stake in this claim for Sternberg, and it seems to be the authority of the Bible, or at any rate, I can understand why someone would read him that way. In fact, this follows from his very argument. As I understand it, his argument is that if the biblical text is not historiography, then it could not have the authority that it evidently claims for itself. Sternberg, it seems, privileges historiographical texts over fiction as authority, as do most people in our culture. I suggest then, very tentatively, that what motivates his strong interest in defending the Bible as historiography is a perhaps unacknowledged desire to maintain the authority of the text in some sense or another. The merging of his reading of the Bible with the Bible itself, then, doubles the Bible’s authority with his own: “the foolproof composition” [Sternberg 51–56] which must logically produce a foolproof reader. Considering the history of such claims to mastery and the political force of such rhetoric, I can understand where Bal’s fury could come from.<sup>1</sup> The patriarchal domination is doubled here: on the one hand, Sternberg the critic dominates the text, and on the other, the text, as it were, dominates all *other* readers—

---

<sup>1</sup> Theoretically at least, one could question such a univocal reading of his intention, and as an actual reader of “Sternberg” and Sternberg I would. I would prefer to put him into Bal’s own category of “well-intended literary or scholarly readings,” which do “not escape the dominance of male interests” [2]. Moreover, as Bal herself indicates, Sternberg’s readings are often excitingly revealing and complex explorations of ambiguity, irony, and ambivalence in the narrative, and it would be more than a shame to lose sight of his contribution. The strong positive case for Sternberg’s reading has been made by me (and Bal) in other contexts.



the “fools” from whom the composition is proof. Sternberg’s theory of the foolproof narrator and the foolproof reader leaves no place for reading against the grain of the ideology of the text, no space for a resisting reading. Indeed, it leaves no space for an ideological critique of the cultures that have read the text in a certain way and no room for a suggestion that the text can be read differently and conserved as a source of tradition in the context of social change.

Bal’s critical program stands as antithesis to the theory of Sternberg which so infuriates her. As she says in the introduction to *Lethal Love* (not specifically with reference to Sternberg’s work):

The alternative readings that I will propose should not be considered as yet another, superior interpretation that overthrows all the others. My goal is rather to show, by the sheer possibility of a different reading, that “dominance” is, although present and in many ways obnoxious, not unproblematically established. It is the challenge rather than the winning that interests me. For it is not the sexist interpretation of the Bible as such that bothers me. It is the possibility of dominance itself, the attractiveness of coherence and authority in culture, that I see as the source, rather than the consequence of sexism. [3]

That is to say, it is the phallacy of mastery over the text which is the patriarchal and sexist gesture, and indeed the fallacy as well that the text masters its own materials and thus its readers. To that gesture of the dominant reading, Bal opposes a reading which is situated and contingent. That is to say, it accents both its own partiality and partialness. These are readings which take the woman’s part, but they are also readings which claim only to be part of the story. Both of these practices stand in opposition to patriarchy. The reading pays attention to different subject-positions encoded within the text—perhaps even “against the will” of the narrator or author—and to different subject-positions of readers as well. Neither the author nor any reader can fully comprehend or master the different subject-positions which any narrative must thematize. Bal’s readings, then, according to this theory, are less “complete” than Sternberg’s but much more responsive to different ideological options which the very process of reading makes possible.

As I have briefly described Bal’s reading, it is neither essentialist nor thematic in its feminism, but strategic; that is, it is the dispersal of authority both within the text and between the text and readers that is feminist in her practice. However, there is an unthematized

tension in *Lethal Love*, which tends, in my opinion, to undermine this undermining of authority by appealing to a sort of essential feminine (not feminist) counterauthority, the authority of the clitoris—the feminine answer to the phallus. The concept of “clitoral” reading, derived from Naomi Schor’s work, is a reading practice that pays close attention to “a different, small-scale aspect of representation in its narrative modes” [3]. At certain moments in her text, Bal seems to lose track of her project and fall into a mode of reading parallel to Sternberg’s in its drive to coherence and mastery.

This substitution of feminine for feminist reading shows itself most clearly in Bal’s chapter “Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow,” in which she analyzes the story of the creation of Eve. The simple textual fact that we must begin with is that the story of the creation of man and woman in Genesis is a deeply problematic text—from the point of view of narrative logic. The root of the problem is that there is not one story of the creation of man but two, and the two seem to contradict each other, precisely on the issue of the origin of the two sexes:

[27] And God created the earth-creature<sup>2</sup> in His image; in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them. [28] And God blessed them, and God said to them: Reproduce and fill the earth. . . . [Genesis 1:27–28]

This is the book of the Generations of Adam, on the day that God created Adam in the image of God He made him. [2] Male and female He created them, and He blessed them, and called their name Adam, on the day He created them. [Genesis 5:1–2]

[7] And God formed the earth-creature of dust from the earth and breathed in its nostrils the breath of life, and the earth-creature became a living being. [20] And the earth-creature gave names to all of the animals and the fowls of the air and all of the animals of the fields, but the earth-creature could not find any helper fitting for it. [21] And God caused a deep sleep to fall on the earth-creature, and it slept, and He took one of its ribs and closed the flesh beneath it. [22] And the Lord God constructed the rib which He had taken from the earth-creature into a woman and brought her to the earth-man.<sup>3</sup> [23] And the

---

<sup>2</sup> Following Bal, I do not translate “adam” as man, but as earth-creature (at this stage), both to reproduce the pun of its name: adam/adama (earth) and not to prejudice the question of its gender.

<sup>3</sup> Again, I am following Bal on this. It is true, of course, that if the earth-creature is sexually undifferentiated (in one way or another), only the production of a woman turns it into a man.

earth-man said, this time is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called wo-man, for from man was she taken. [Genesis 2:7 ff.]

In the first story it seems clear that the original creation of the species humanity included both sexes, while the second one is seemingly a narrative of an original male creature for whom a female was created out of his flesh. The solution of some modern textual critics is relatively simple. They claim that two contradictory stories have been combined in the text of the Bible: the first one belonging to a later stratum of more spiritual thinking, while the second is a folk tale of the creation of humanity, and that solves the problem. Whatever we choose to make of such strategies of reading, however, it is clear that ancient readers read the Bible as a single text, similar, therefore, to the reading strategies privileged in (for example) a Sternbergian poetics of narrative. Christian culture (and some of Jewish culture) has asserted the dominance of the story of Eve's supplementarity in creation over the egalitarian story in its drive to coherence.

Bal's reading of the text of Genesis is entirely different from the one of the Fathers almost universally assented to in European Christian culture. She notices that the first created earth-creature is not identified as to sex at all. We read his gender back into him (it is even very difficult to call him "it"), *because* the name "Adam" has been so firmly associated with a male creature [*Love* 114]. This creature is lonely, and God understands that in order for it not to be lonely, it needs another one which is of the same species, but different. It needs to be divided over-against itself in order to have a fit companion. "The animals are unfit and the different human being is not, because it is the tension between the *same* and the *different* that creates sexuality. The earth-being has to be severed, separated from part of itself, in order for the 'other half' of what will then be left to come into existence." As Bal remarks, this text, read in this way, shows "deep insight into the nature of sexuality" [115].<sup>4</sup> The separation itself is accomplished by the earth-creature being thrown into a state of deep sleep.

---

<sup>4</sup> I have some difficulty with her translation of 'ezer as "companion," however. It seems to be unsupported philologically. On the other hand, she is spot on when she says that the usual translations miss the point that God is often identified as an 'ezer to man, so a translation that somehow takes this 'ezer as a kind of servant is missing the point even more. It certainly means something like a partner in the endeavor of living.

Bal interprets what happens to it as a kind of giving birth.<sup>5</sup> Following this birth and the subsequent existence of a couple, not hierarchically emplaced but apparently equal, the institutions of sexuality, marriage, and parenthood—but not male dominance or woman hating—are all established:

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother  
and cleaves to his woman  
and they become one flesh

Patriarchy will be instituted indeed, not yet here but as a result of sin [127–28]. It is not a condition of the ontology of humanity that the male should dominate the female. The Fall on this reading initiates not sexuality or even marriage, but patriarchy; not sexuality but sexual shame. Patriarchy is a punishment of the woman for her sin, not a condition that God intended or established essentially and from the very beginning.

Bal emphasizes that her reading is an alternative to those modern readings which assume that the two accounts of the creation of humanity belong to two different sources which contradict each other. Most biblical scholars of the “higher” critical school seem to entertain a model of a mechanical redaction process in which the editor simply assembled as best he could the canonical materials at hand. Robert Alter improves on this by ascribing coherent purpose to this redactor, turning him into a narrator. As Bal sums up his reading:

Alter (1981:142–43),<sup>6</sup> for example, following the commonly accepted philological conclusions, distinguishes between the realistic (2:4b–25) and the theological (1–2:4a) versions of the creation. The editors, Alter claims, assumed that God created man and woman equal (Gen. 1) but, on the other hand, saw that in society there was not such equality. They therefore included the ‘sexist’ version of Genesis 2. Alter’s view seems plausible insofar as later interpretations have turned Gen. 2 into the sexist story it has become. The ‘equal rights’ version has, then, to be explained away. But its return in 5:1–2 makes the repression problematic. Alter’s defense of the paradoxical coherence of Genesis was, however, uncalled for. *The text as it stands does not contradict Genesis 1 at all.* [119; my emphasis]

---

<sup>5</sup> However, once again, I must assent to her interpretive sensitivity and dissent from her philology. The word *tsela*, commonly interpreted as “rib,” can indeed mean “side,” but I know of no evidence for interpreting it as a euphemism for “belly.”

<sup>6</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981).

Bal's interpretation allows us, as she claims, to read the account in chapter 2 as an elaboration of what is reported in telescopic form in Genesis 1. "Male and female created He them." She reads the account in chapters 1 and 5 as a later summation by "good readers" of their reading of the detailed story of chapter 2.

Now, even at first glance this reading appears to be precisely what Bal is rejecting, namely a push toward a better reading and more coherence and therefore, on her own account, a source of sexism. The very appeal to a "text as it stands" sounds more Sternbergian than Balian. Indeed here one could turn Bal's critical language against her. Of Phyllis Tribble, she writes, "Tribble, however, seems to believe genuinely in the positive reliability of her analysis and lets herself be hampered by it in her critical reach" ["Escape" 74], and perhaps, not surprisingly, it is this chapter which owes most to Tribble in its content as well [see, for instance, her *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* 72–144]. Indeed, Alter's reading is more in tune with Bal's theory than hers is, because it respects difference within the text.<sup>7</sup> There is one real crux in her reading which splits the text open. After the woman is differentiated from him, he refers to himself as having been an *'ish*, a term which certainly means a male human, even before the separation. This causes some difficulty for Bal, who answers

A first possibility would be that after allotropy, the change of physical properties within the same substance, the man retrospectively assumes that he always had this sexual identity. He focalizes his earlier version from his childhood state. Just as adults have no memories of their early childhood, during which they were not yet full subjects, let alone their prenatal life, the man understandably cannot imagine that he was once a nonsexual being. This need not make us angry at him, nor at the narrator who quotes his words in this way. [117]

---

<sup>7</sup> "It may make no logical sense to have Eve created after Adam and inferior to him when we have already been told that she was created at the same time and in the same manner as he, but it makes perfect sense as an account of the contradictory facts of woman's role in the post-edenic scheme of things. On the one hand, the writer is a member of a patriarchal society in which women have more limited legal privileges and institutional functions than do men, and where social convention clearly invites one to see woman as subsidiary to man. . . . On the other hand, our writer—one does not readily think of him as a bachelor—surely had a fund of personal observation to draw on which could lead him to conclude that woman, contrary to institutional definitions, could be a daunting adversary or worthy partner, quite man's equal in moral or psychological perspective, capable of exerting just as much power as he through her intelligent resourcefulness." [145–46]

I think that Bal's explanation, while showing a fine sympathy for the predicament of even the sexist narrator, is pushing too hard here for a coherence which just isn't there. This moment *does* introduce a consequential undecidability in the text, which is an important part of the explanation for the differing interpretation of the text as a whole given by traditional Christian readers (as opposed to midrash, which prefers a reading similar to Bal's).<sup>8</sup> It is thus an excellent illustration of Bal's point that the drive to coherence itself is an inevitably exclusionary practice, even when the master code, the authority underpinning the coherence, is feminism. The narrative of the creation of woman in Genesis has an important moment of ambiguity produced by the fact that there are two seemingly contradictory accounts in the text. On the one hand, a coherent reading of the two texts together produces an interpretation in which the first human was dual or non-sexed and the creation of woman is the division of two equals. This reading is strengthened by the coherence that it offers the final, redacted text as a narrative. On the other hand, a reading that emphasizes the simple interpretation of the second story clearly seems to imply that the first human was male and the female was produced as a supplement or afterthought. This reading is most clearly supported by the verse [2:23], "This one shall be called woman, for from man was this one taken." The midrashic rabbis chose the first course of reading; the church fathers the second. Taking seriously, as Bal does for other texts (most explicitly in her *Murder and Difference*), the tension between the two accounts allows us to have some feeling for and perhaps even insight into the ideological tensions of ancient Hebrew society, contributing exactly to Bal's strategy of opening texts up to difference.

I dare to think that adding this attention to a detail leads more fully to the kind of reading of this text that Bal has taught us to desire, not because it reinscribes patriarchal ideology or misogyny into the text, but because it exposes once more how chimerical textual coherence is when studied closely. What saves Bal from falling completely into her own trap is her relativizing of her reading strategy. As she remarks, "Coherence is not, in my view, an absolute ontological or structural literary category; on the contrary. I conceive it as a reading device

---

<sup>8</sup> See my forthcoming *Behold Israel According to the Flesh: On Anthropology and Sexuality in Late Antique Judaism*, *Yale Journal of Criticism* 5.2 (1992).

and subsequently as a device for the interpretation of editorial policy” [119]. Nevertheless, this interpretation, because of its attempt to explain away the moment of difference within the text, betrays Bal’s project of seeking an interpretive practice of nondominance.

I have singled out the one reading in Bal’s book that I find theoretically problematic because it gives me the opportunity precisely to emphasize what I find so important in her work in general, the thematizing of difference and not coherence as a feminist practice of reading. Bal’s readings are over and over again moving and revealing, because they do not make love to the text as a body, and because they are aware of the many human bodies, subjects, voices in the cultures that produce and consume (and reproduce) the texts. The difference that Bal reads is not located in textuality alone but is the very difference which constitutes culture and which magisterial reading practices, whether ancient or modern, repress.

Any human cultural product is overdetermined; it has multiple causes and multiple significations. There is, therefore, no theoretical possibility of a foolproof text. Any text can be understood in several ways, and, indeed, from the point of view of a given ideology, any text can be misunderstood. Misunderstanding is the ground of which understanding is the figure. Certainly, in order for a text to achieve the kind of artistic complexity and subtlety that we admire in much of biblical narrative, it must sacrifice any claim to the simplicity of significance that would enable it to be “foolproof.” Therefore, a theory of narrative that explicitly encodes the polysemy of narrative is superior, a priori, to one that insists on a single “correct” decoding, as do not only Sternberg but also many structuralist and even Marxist critics. Bal’s narratology with its study of other subject positions within the text than that of the “author,” namely the focalizers and speakers, is a powerful way of opening the text up to other ideological voices and empowering them. Furthermore, this is a reading practice that opens up the text not only to other voices *within* it but also to other voices *around* it as well—the voices of other readers. Bal explicitly thematizes a hermeneutic which “differentiates between empowering and intimidating interpretations. An unmodeled but seductive interpretation will be rhetorically powerful; students have no choice but to accept what seems appealing but is beyond their control. Modeled interpretations teach students not only what is interesting about the particular text but also how to deal with those things in other texts” [*Love* 15].

Bal's feminist interpretation is accordingly at its strongest when she is reading for the female subject-positions within the stories that she treats, that is, when her reading is politically and not essentialistically generated and formulated. Thus, for example, I find especially strong her chapter "One Woman, Many Men, and the Dialectic of Chronology," on the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar in Genesis 38 [*Love* 89–103]. There is not much profit in summarizing the text here, but I would like to point out the following elements of her reading which make it so valuable:

1. It raises explicitly the ideological motivation of the convention of unity itself, whether in the hands of "higher critics" or "new critics."

2. It attempts to ask about and answer both the "editorial policy," that is, the ideology of the text, as well as the "subsequent doubts about that policy": contestatory ideological positions. The chronological "misplacement" of this story in the middle of the Joseph cycle is neither treated as an editorial error, as by "higher critics," nor harmonized and naturalized by a purely thematic reading. Its very placement is a mark of difference, a displacement of the male genealogical progression from father to inheriting son. ". . . it can hold up a mirror to the story. In that mirror, the image is analogical within a specific chronology: what seemed to come first changes places; what seemed certain becomes problematic. And that precisely is the function of subversion" [103].

3. The analysis is built on the dialectic and tension between different reading strategies, and not the promotion of one of them, thus opening up the text's heterogeneity rather than foreclosing it. Formalist and thematic readings are both actualized in the interpretive work.

4. It shows—as Bal's readings often do—how the reception history of the text has closed off subject-positions and ideological voices within the text. (Bal brilliantly suggests that the use of the term "onanism" to mean masturbation and not *coitus interruptus* is an enactment of the erasure of the female subject-position that this text encodes [99].)

This is another way of getting at some of the issues that Bakhtin was raising about narrative fiction as well and the way that it almost inevitably encodes heteroglossia—the Bible is if anything more heteroglossic than even *The Brothers Karamazov*. It is not the choice of a perspective from which to read the text that makes a reading superior or inferior but the recognition that there are several such perspectives that makes a theory superior. Thus, reading the ideological



position of the “implied author” or “author’s meaning” is fine, and that is what Sternberg does so brilliantly, but we must also be alert to the possibilities of different readings, of different ideologies—counterideologies—which the text encodes or has tried to suppress, usually with only partial success. It is not so much, then, the necessity for criticism to “criticize ideologies” [“Escape” 76, citing Culler. Does a critic *always* have to be opposed to the ideology of any text?], but to show how any ideological production criticizes itself. Bal’s theory (if not always her practice) opts for a style of reading that not only allows the reader freedom to choose her strategy, but also provides for a much more nuanced understanding of the conflictual and dialogical richness of the field of the text. This opening up of the text is of special importance when the text has the authoritativeness that the Bible almost must have in our culture (at least till now) and creates possibilities other than just accepting the dominant ideology or rejecting the tradition entirely.

What then is feminist in this confluence of a nuanced narratology and a Bakhtinian heteroglossia? Bakhtin himself, after all, notoriously ignores the gender code or the female voice in the heteroglossia. Indeed, Bal’s very narratology, which provides the ground for her readings, was articulated outside of or prior to an explicit consideration of feminist issues in her own work.<sup>9</sup> What, then, is the continuity between such concepts as focalization and feminism? This question comes back to the dichotomies in feminist theory named at the beginning of my text. When Bal is not seduced by an essentialist feminism, it is then that her reading has the most potential (so it seems to me) as a liberating force. Her feminist reading is like her narratology, because they recreate reading as a site of resistance to the hegemony of any single thematization of the text (and particularly of the authoritative texts of a culture). This is feminist simply because the almost universal suppressed of culture is female. It is reading as a woman, but not like a woman, that is, from the political subject-position of woman oppressed and marginalized in a particular socio-sexual formation and not from a reified determination of how women read. This formulation is, I believe, very close to that of Diana Fuss in her

---

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, her *Narratology*, published in English in 1985 and in Dutch in 1980.

recent essay “Reading Like a Feminist.” Assertion of identification with women as an oppressed and marginalized subject-position within our culture does not in any way compromise the deconstruction of the sex-gender code. “Feminist” reading is privileged not because women are the only suppressed subject-position, but because that is the one that is nearly always there. Feminist readings, then, can model the ways that other suppressed subjects can “creep in, and rewrite themselves back into the history of ideology” [*Love* 132], including gays, blacks, and Jews into European culture and women and Palestinians into Jewish/Israeli culture. To me, this is a most moving and beautiful exemplum of how to tear down the master’s house without using the master’s tools.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> I wish to thank Ilana Pardes and Jonathan Boyarin for reading earlier drafts of this essay and being of great help.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE SUBVERSION OF THE JEWS: MOSES'S VEIL AND THE HERMENEUTICS OF SUPERSESSION

**Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly.** *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutics of the Cross.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992.

**Richard B. Hays.** *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul.* New Haven: Yale UP, 1989.

**Jill Robbins.** *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas.* Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.

Right to the present day, the same veil remains at the public reading of the Old Covenant unlifted, because it is in Christ that it is being annulled. Indeed, to the present, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. Whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is removed.

—2 Cor 3.14–16

Much of the cultural politics of “the West” is founded on hermeneutical issues. The question of the relation of “Judaism” to “Christianity” is a question of literary theory. Christianity is for Paul and all his followers simply the correct understanding of the Torah. Read properly, the Torah signified Christ; what was “annulled in Christ” is not the Old Covenant but the veil, which prevents those hearing it from understanding that in it is concealed the New Covenant, as in Augustine’s well-known formulation: “In the Old Testament there is a concealment of the New, in the New Testament there is a revelation of the Old” [qtd. in Robbins 2]. This should be read, I submit, as a gloss on Moses’s veil. In 2 Corinthians 3, perhaps more than any other text, lies whatever Pauline basis there is for a theology of supersession. The doctrine that the Christian Church (Greek Bible) is the new Israel (New Testament), which replaces and renders superfluous (or worse) the old (Testament) Israel (Hebrew Bible), has had frightening consequences in the history of Christian Europe. It is here that perhaps the best known of all of Paul’s hermeneutical maxims is found: “The Letter kills but the Spirit gives life”:

Are we beginning once more to recommend ourselves? Surely, we do not need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you,

do we? You yourselves are our letter, inscribed on our [var. your] hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are Christ's letter cared for by us, inscribed not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on tablets that are fleshy hearts. Such confidence before God as this we have through Christ. Not that we are of ourselves adequate, so that we evaluate anything as originating with ourselves. Rather, our adequacy is from God, who has enabled us to be adequate as ministers of a new covenant, not written but spiritual. For the letter kills but the Spirit gives life [ὅς και ηικανόσεν ηἴμασ διακο- νουσ καινῶσ διατηῦκῦσ ου γραμματοσ αλλα πνευματοσ το γαρ γραμμα αποκτεννει το δε πνευμα ζῶοποιει]. [2 Cor. 3.1–6]

## 1

In *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*—a book that all interested in the history of Western hermeneutics and its importance for literary theory will want to read—Richard Hays unsettles the opposition between two modes of interpreting the 2 Corinthians passage, which until now have been considered mutually exclusive. In the tradition of the Church, this verse has been understood from nearly the very beginning as denoting an opposition between literal and allegorical interpretation, with the literal that of the Jews and the figurative that of the Christians. Paul's point would be, then, that the Jews, who read literally, miss the point entirely—the point, that is, that their Bible is only the Old Testament in which the New one is concealed.

This reading has in recent years been called into question by Pauline scholars, who argue that the opposition is rather between a written text of any kind and the fleshy embodiment of Christian covenant in the actual community of the faithful. Hays refers to this embodiment as an Incarnation and remarks, “The traditional English translation of *gramma* as ‘letter,’ based in turn on the Vulgate’s *littera*, is an unfortunate one, . . . because it suggests that Paul is distinguishing between literal and spiritual modes of exegesis. This is the construal against which the advocates of a nonhermeneutical interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3 rightly object.” Hays goes on strikingly to remark,

Thus, the Christian tradition's reading of the letter-spirit dichotomy as an antithesis between the outward and the inward, the manifest and the latent, the body and the soul, turns out to be a dramatic misreading, indeed a complete inversion. For Paul, the Spirit is—scandalously—identified precisely with the outward and palpable, the particular human

community of the new covenant, putatively transformed by God's power so as to make Christ's message visible to all. The script, however, remains abstract and dead because it is not embodied. [130]

Hays balances this revisionary reading of Paul, however, by arguing very persuasively that whether or not the letter-Spirit opposition is in itself the index of a dichotomy of hermeneutical practices, Paul posits a hermeneutical shift from the reading of Moses to the experience of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> There has, after all, been a change in the status of Scripture. In other words, the hermeneutical and ethical moments are homologous to each other. I would further claim that the very notion of language as abstract and disembodied, that is, the very notion of the necessity for the word to become flesh, as it were, is already in itself an allegorical conception of language, paralleling the Platonic notions of a noncorporeal Godhead, which the Incarnation presupposes.<sup>2</sup>

Analysis of the continuation of the Pauline text will bring out this point more clearly:

Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letter on stone, took place with such glory that the Israelites could not bear to gaze at Moses's face, even though it was being annulled, will not the ministry of the Spirit be with greater glory? For if there is glory with the ministry of condemnation, how much more does the ministry of righteousness abound with glory. Indeed, what has had glory has not had glory, in this case, because of the glory which so far surpasses it. For if what was being annulled [το καταργουμενον] was with such glory, how much more the glory of that which endures!

Having, therefore, such a hope, we act with much boldness, and not like Moses when he used to put a veil over his face so the Israelites could not gaze at the end [= true meaning] of what was being annulled [καταργουμεν]. But their minds were hardened. Right up to the present day the same veil remains at the public reading of the old covenant—unlifted, because it is in Christ that it is being annulled [καταργειται]. Indeed, to the present, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. Whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is removed. Now “the Lord” is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, is freedom.

---

<sup>1</sup> “According to 2 Cor. 3.7–18, when God's Spirit-inscribed people encounter Scripture, a transformation occurs that is fundamentally hermeneutical in character” [131].

<sup>2</sup> In my article “The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic,” I argue that the Rabbis of the talmudic period generally did not believe in a wholly noncorporeal Godhead, so God could be present in the world without an Incarnation.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory, as from the Lord, the Spirit. [2 Cor. 3.7–18]

Paul, in fact, enacts the kind of reading that the Jews do *not* do at the same time that he talks about it. Whatever this passage is, it is not midrash, because it does not involve a close contact with the language of the verses of Exodus with which it deals; midrash is precisely characterized by its attention to the physical, material details of the actual language [Hays 132]. This is symbolic reading, whereby the events of the “Old Testament” signify realities in the present life of the Christian community.<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of the veil is exact. Midrash, the way the Jews read Moses, is a hermeneutics of opacity, while Paul’s allegorical/typological reading is a hermeneutics of transparency. Paul can boldly go where no Jew has gone before and reveal the true telos of the text because of the spiritual condition of his listeners, who, protected by the Spirit, need not fear death. Paul thus asserts that the veil that Moses put over his face symbolizes a veil that the Jews put over their hearts at the reading of the Law until the present day, because they do not expound it spiritually, which prevents them from perceiving the glory of the truth. Paul identifies the new readers of the Bible as “we all,” thus asserting the universalism of the Christian dispensation over-against the particularities of the Jewish reading of Moses.

Among the other virtues of Hays’s interpretation, it does not require that Paul depart from the obvious concrete sense of the veil in the Torah’s narrative in order to build his allegory. By contrast, Stephen Westerholm’s reading of this passage, in an otherwise generally convincing article, is weak. Westerholm resolutely denies any hermeneutical significance at all to the letter-spirit opposition in Paul and argues that the opposition refers *only* to two modes of serving God: one that was appropriate in the past and one that has replaced it in the Christian present. For him, then, the only function of the veil is that it prevents the Jews from seeing that the situation has changed. This, however, leaves the original veil on Moses’s face without significance, thereby explicitly contradicting or emptying of significance the typological

---

<sup>3</sup> In *A Radical Jew*, I argue that the typology/allegory opposition is not a valid one, thus my somewhat slippery language here.

relationship implied by the words “Right up to the present day *the same veil* remains at the public reading of the old covenant. . . . Indeed, to the present, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.” The only way that Westerholm’s reading makes sense, then, is if we revive a theory whereby the veil on Moses’s face was a fading glory, which signified the fading glory of the Old Covenant. There is, however, no textual or other warrant for reading the veil in this way, and it fails to explain the continued existence of the “same veil.”

Where Westerholm’s reading fails, Hays’s succeeds in making sense of the veil that was on Moses’s face, as well as the veil that now covers the “reading of Moses.” The veil, for Paul as in the Torah itself, was to prevent those who were unable to stand it from seeing the glory of Moses’s transformation. Paul’s allegorical reading is that until this day the Jews show themselves unable to stand the true meaning of the text in Christ and so still read it with a veil. Because their minds were hardened, they are prevented from perceiving the true meaning of the text, which is the glory, the spirit that transfigured Moses. That is, the reading of “Moses” prevents the Jews from seeing the glory of the Lord, and this is typologically/allegorically signified by the covering of Moses’s face when he gave the Law. The word is meant to point to the Spirit, which lies behind it (and always did), but the Jews remain at the level of the literal—literally—at the level of the letter, the concrete language, which of course epitomizes midrash, and this is the *gramma* that kills. Once more, in Hays’s excellent formulation,

For those who are fixated on the text as an end in itself, however, the text remains veiled. But those who turn to the Lord are enabled to see through the text to its telos, its true aim. For them, the veil is removed, so that they, like Moses, are transfigured by the glory of God into the image of Jesus Christ, to whom Moses and the Law had always, in veiled fashion pointed. . . . This means, ultimately, that Scripture becomes—in Paul’s reading—a metaphor, a vast trope that signifies and illuminates the gospel of Jesus Christ. And, since the character of this gospel is such that it must be written on human hearts rather than in texts, the community of the church becomes the place where the meaning of Israel’s Scripture is enfleshed. [137]<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> I think that Hays loses his way a bit on pages 142–43, where he needlessly complicates the discussion by arguing that Paul is suggesting a dissimile between himself (and other Christians) and Moses, because “Moses’ unveiled encounters with the Lord were intermittent, punctuated by times of withdrawal and veiling.” I see nothing in

This passage is thus typological and allegorical in its structure: that is, like the Spirit, which must be incarnated in the Corinthian community and which Paul calls a writing, language always consists of a spiritual meaning that is embodied in the material:

The telos of Moses' transitory covenant (which remained hidden from Israel in the wilderness) was the same thing as the true significance of Moses/Torah (which remained hidden from Paul's contemporaries in the synagogue). . . . The veiled telos is, if we must express it in a discursive proposition, the glory of God in Jesus Christ that makes itself visible in fleshy communities conformed to God's image. . . . All the elements are necessary to express the hermeneutical and ethical significations that are packed into his metaphor. [Hays 146]<sup>5</sup>

I think that Paul's argument is even more complex than this, however, for there are in fact four terms here, not two: Old Testament, its Jewish readers, Spirit, and "we all." The lesser glory, the Old Testament, is both revealed and annulled by the greater glory of the Spirit. As the sun reveals the moon during the night and conceals it by day, so the Spirit was reflected indirectly in the Old Testament which is now completely obscured by the greater light of the Spirit directly shining from the New. Even that lesser glory, Paul argues, lesser *because* it is transitory, was too much for the Jews to stand, and they had to be protected by a veil. Even more so is it the case that the glory that will not be annulled is too much for them to see, and they remain blinded to it by a veil. The very ministry chiseled in stone signifies and is replaced in history by the ministry of the Spirit, which

---

the passage which qualifies or discredits Moses's experience even with respect to Paul; rather, it is that of the Israelites to whom Moses turned and who would/could not see his glory which is being deprecated. Further, there is no difficulty occasioned by the veil being moved from over Moses's face to the hearts of the Israelites [pace Hays 145], because the veil always and only existed to prevent the Israelites from seeing that which they could not stand, and never to prevent Moses from seeing anything. I therefore find the turn in verse 16 less dramatic than Hays does [147].

<sup>5</sup> I should, to be honest, emphasize that Hays himself understands his interpretation to be one that contradicts the interpretation of "allegorical" for "spiritual" here. I remain convinced, however, that whatever the particular and spectacular nuances of Pauline thought and especially the brilliant concatenation of the hermeneutical and ethical levels, a "reader who turns to the Lord and finds the veil taken away" and thus "will return to the reading of Moses to discover that all of Scripture is a vast metaphorical witness to the lived reality of the new community in Christ" [151] is an allegorical reader, a reader for whom the meaning lies behind and enclosed in the text.



has been revealed in the New Testament. When Paul refers to the Old Covenant, he means both the historical covenant with the Jews and also their text. He thus implies *avant la lettre*, as it were, predicts or enacts, the coming into being of the New Testament, and the relation of these two is figured as that of letter which kills to the Spirit which gives life. Thus, the move of the modern readers of Paul, such as Hays, who deny the allegorical and supersessionist movement of Paul's text is ultimately not convincing. The supersessionism cannot be denied, because an enfleshed community was already and still living out the "Old" Covenant. It certainly had not remained an affair of mere words on stone. Since the glory of the spirit hidden within the text is what Moses's veil conceals and that hidden glory is the life of the Christian community, the Pauline structure is profoundly allegorical after all. The "letter" is not only the written word but certainly, as Paul says almost explicitly, the literal reading of "Moses" by the Jews. Augustine read Paul well: "In the Old Testament there is a concealment of the New, in the New Testament there is a revelation of the Old."

Paul explicitly foregrounds the spiritual method of study of the Torah, in implicit contrast to the veiled, carnal method of "the Jews," in a passage of 1 Corinthians:

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things are warnings to us, not to desire evil as they did. . . . Consider Israel according to the flesh; are not those who eat the sacrifices partners in the altar? [1 Cor. 10.1-5, 18]

The key to my understanding of this passage is the last verse, almost precisely because it is so understated in its form. "Consider Israel according to the flesh," I think, must be understood here as a hermeneutical term and nothing else. That is to say, while the phrase certainly includes all of the overtones that it does elsewhere—to wit, physical descent and overliteral understanding (and perhaps even "carnality" as a moral judgment)—Paul is here appealing to the Corinthians to consider the verse/practice in its literal sense, not to concern themselves with axiological judgments of the Jews! The Revised Standard

Version translates here simply, “Consider the practice of Israel,” which is really what Paul means. I thus disagree with Hays’s implied interpretation [96] that Paul refers here to “Israel according to the flesh” because he is discussing the Golden Calf episode. In 10.18, Paul is no longer referring explicitly to that story but rather to Israelite sacrifice in general. He wishes here to draw an analogy for his argument from that concrete, historical fact. Just as the literal Israelites—according to the flesh—are partners in the altar when they eat the sacrifices, so also are the figurative Israelites—according to the Spirit—when they eat the Eucharist, and they should behave accordingly. If, at this point, the text is understood allegorically the point of the analogy is lost. Paul calls to his Corinthian readers to take a look for the moment at the literal, concrete, and historical meaning of a particular textual moment.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, he insists on the literal meaning, *kata sarka*, of the verse, at least momentarily.

I think we learn much from this utterance. First of all, as earlier commentators have pointed out, the very positing of an “Israel according to the flesh” implies *necessarily* the existence of an “Israel according to the Spirit” as well. In the light of the resonance created by the reference to “Israel in the flesh” in verse 18, I think if we go back and interpret the references to spiritual food and drink in the previous verses, we understand them as hermeneutical utterances as well. Thus, the food and drink may literally have been spiritual in nature but they are also to be *understood* spiritually (that is typologically/allegorically) as signifying the food and drink of the present Christian ritual. The Israel of that story signifies the present Israel which is the church—not, I emphasize, an institutional church of, say, Hebrews, but the present Christian congregations characterized and defined by the inclusion of ethnic Gentiles into the Israel of God [Hays 86].<sup>7</sup> This interpretation is further dramatically strengthened by Paul’s explicitly hermeneutic statement that “the rock was Christ.” Once again, there has been much discussion of the exact mode of figurative inter-

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. also Schweizer in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [7.127]: “This expression carries with it an evaluation; this is the Israel which understands itself only in terms of descent. In the context, however, this is not the point at issue, and it is no accident that we do not find the antithesis *o Israel kata pneuma*.”

<sup>7</sup> Hays’s reading of this entire passage [91–102] is, as usual, impressively astute. Later I will discuss my explicit points of disagreement with it.

pretation that Paul is supposing here, but in any case, it is very telling that he uses the past tense: The rock was always Christ. Paul's "in-the-spirit" interpretation, whether typological or allegorical (or, as I claim, both at once), represents a dehistoricization of the text as well as an implicit claim that Christ is the always-existent Christ in heaven and not his temporary historical avatar on earth. Paul certainly held that the literal, historical meaning of the text was true—Consider Israel according to the flesh—but just as unquestionably that its significance was not to be located in its concrete historical moment but in that which it signified and which one way or another stops time and exits from history.

The Platonic preference for the immovable supersedes temporality, and this is the essence of allegory as I understand it. It is here that I part company from Hays. Having demonstrated that Paul interweaves his discourse here with a series of allusions to Deuteronomy 8 and 32, as well as Psalms 106, Hays reads the discourse as essentially midrash and even explicitly argues that "There is nothing distinctively Christian in the lessons that Paul draws from the Scripture that he cites here. Deuteronomy has already performed the imaginative act of turning the exodus into a paradigm for Israel's future experience; consequently, Paul's typological reading of the story is nothing other than a fresh performance within Israel's long-established poetic-theological tradition" [94]. Yes—and no. On the one hand, Hays is undoubtedly correct, Paul draws a lesson here from the concrete historical events that is not entirely dissimilar from the lesson that Deuteronomy wishes Jews to learn from the same story, "And you shall remember. . . ." Paul, however, supplements that hermeneutic of memory of historical events with claims that the historical events *already* figured the current situation; the food and drink were spiritual and the rock was Christ. As in so much of my reading of Paul, I see here a brilliant conflation of hermeneutical, cultural traditions, such that the "Platonic" moment of his spirituality is made wholly one with the biblical sensibility. Paul produces here, I suggest, as in much of his thought, an extraordinary synthesis between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaisms. On the one hand, Paul is not denying significance to the concrete, historical Israel, neither now nor a fortiori in the past. On the other hand, however, there is a strong implication that this Israel finds its true meaning and always did as a signifier of the community of faith which would include all humanity and not only the ethnic Israel. The story of Israel exists for two purposes: to prefigure and

figure the Israel of God and to teach that Israel of God how it should behave. Both of these moments are uncovered together in 1 Corinthians 10.

Which brings us again to the question of supersession. Hays denies that Pauline theology is supersessionist [98–102]. For Paul the Christian community stands in continuity with and not against the historical Israel. There has been, moreover, no rejection of Israel owing to their faults or flaws, as in some other New Testament theologies. Nor, finally, are the Christian believers free of either ethical or moral requirements or unsusceptible to sin (as the Corinthians apparently thought). Hays's reading then defangs Paul of his "anti-Semitism" without, however, as in the case of some modern liberal apologists for Paul, removing the teeth of Paul's critique.<sup>8</sup> I would argue, however (and here, I think, the different hermeneutical perspectives of a self-identified Jew and a self-identified Christian show up): If there has been no rejection of Israel, there has indeed been a supersession of the historical Israel's hermeneutic of self-understanding as a community constituted by physical genealogy and observances and the covenantal exclusiveness that such a self-understanding entails. The call to human Oneness constitutes a threat to Jewish (or any other) difference.

## 2

Paul's text, then, is certainly to be understood as a challenge to, if not an attack on, the understandings of the meaning of Torah in Pharisaic Judaism.<sup>9</sup> There one finds God in the letter itself, not in a turning

---

<sup>8</sup> I am referring to the work of Lloyd Gaston in particular, who argued that for Paul the Old Testament continued to be valid and soteriological for Jews, and the only function of Christ was to add the Gentiles to the picture. Gaston produced a spirited effort to argue for this "experimental" hermeneutic (his term) but ultimately fails to convince.

<sup>9</sup> The Pharisees were one group or sect of first-century Judaism. The later rabbinic Judaism traces its ancestry back to this group, and we have no reason to doubt that connection. It is, nevertheless, a serious mistake to read back from later rabbinic texts into the first century. Since Paul identifies himself as a former Pharisee, however, when we find congruence between Pauline and later rabbinic ideas, the Pauline evidence may be significant for establishing the Pharisaic provenance of the ideas, even if we may be somewhat skeptical of the report in Acts of his having been a student of the leading Pharisee—Rabban Gamliel.

away from or a looking behind the letter. Jews cannot, of course, be expected to assent to their self-understanding being annulled. Jill Robbins has produced what I think is the most eloquent modern Jewish response to the Christian hermeneutic of supersession of the “Old Testament”:

The Jews are related to the Old Testament book physically or carnally: they carry it; the Christians are related to it spiritually: they believe from it. This polemic against the “dead letter” (i.e., Jewish literalism), indeed the entire figural discourse, depends above all on suppressing the self-understanding of Judaic exegesis.

For the self-understanding of Jewish exegesis would give the lie to the figural assertion that the Old Testament discredits its own authority and transfers it to the New. It would disrupt the dyadic and hierarchical oppositions such as carnal and spiritual, literal and figurative, that structure every figural claim. It would make it possible to understand this religion of the book and its relation to the letter of language—otherwise. For if the book the Jews carry is not an Old Testament but a Hebrew Bible, then the figural discourse would collapse. But it cannot, as it were, suppress it enough. It cannot suppress the Judaic without leaving a trace, as when it inscribes it as outside. Christian hermeneutics is “itself” at every point traced by the self-understanding of Judaic exegesis, namely midrash. [12]

Robbins is thus (as I am) a postmodern Jewish respondent to the Christian hermeneutic of supersession. In Robbins’s book, the Jew as speaking subject writes back.

Jews have, of course, had access to public discourse in Europe since the early modern period, but generally only insofar as they were willing to speak as universal Europeans and not as Jews. (Take Spinoza as a paradigm for this.) This was, then, the modern equivalent of conversion to Christianity. (Interestingly enough, one of the ways that Jews have entered the cultural conversation in modernity has been to write about Paul, reclaiming him, as it were, as a heterodox Jew and thus repatriating the Jew into the heart of Christian culture. This project has been pursued in various political venues of modern Jewish culture from right-wing Zionism to left-wing anti-Zionism and reform Judaism. My own book on Paul, *A Radical Jew*, provides yet another version of that discourse.) Even now, the common liberal expression “too Jewish” continues that form of oppression, somewhat less obvious but just as obnoxious as the oppression of other subaltern groups.

Just as the ancient Rabbis simply refused to allow the letter to be purloined from them, so also we can refuse. We can refuse, however,

in discourse shared with others and not only in the private discourse of the Jews.<sup>10</sup> I am suggesting that the postmodern era has returned to us the option of refusing out loud, as it were, as equal cultural partners in a certain domain of discourse: the hermeneutical, precisely where Christian doctrine has, for two thousand years, most delegitimized us. I do not downgrade the achievement of predecessors from Abravanel to Rosenzweig if I argue that changed cultural conditions outside of them and partly caused by them have made it possible for the Jewish subaltern to speak.<sup>11</sup> Robbins's book is an enactment of the recovery of midrash in the contemporary critical tradition, that is, precisely of the revoicing of a silenced Jewish subject in the West.<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva has remarked on analogies between the marginality of women's discourse in our post-Enlightenment society and that of Jews:

Consequently, the specific character of women could only appear as non-essential or even non-existent to the totalizing and even totalitarian spirit of this ideology. We begin to see that this same egalitarian and in fact censuring treatment has been imposed, from Enlightenment Humanism through socialism, on religious specificities, and in particular, on Jews. [196]

In other words, in the best case, Jews could get on in enlightened society and culture only via a denial of the specificity of their Jewishness. Of course, actual conversion is only the most extreme form of that denial. I am suggesting that for some Jewish academicians the "recovery" of midrash is equivalent to what the emergence of feminist criticism has been for women in the academic world—a refusal to be simply swallowed up in a "humanism" and "universalism" that uni-

---

<sup>10</sup> Maria Damon has recently remarked to me how a modernist Gertrude Stein hides references to Jewishness in puns: Yet dish = Yiddish [personal communication].

<sup>11</sup> Our reluctance, nurtured by Benjamin, to see human history as progress, should not blind us to the occasional (and perhaps temporary) positive developments in the present as well, particularly insofar as those positive developments may have been generated partially in horrified response to Nazi genocide. The present has little enough for which to congratulate itself.

<sup>12</sup> Robbins's book was partly prefigured, as it were, by Susan Handelman's *The Slayers of Moses*, a book that reads curiously in some ways more like the defensive discourse of Jews engaged in a disputation than like the autonomous Jewish speaking subject of Robbins's discourse. Handelman's book has, however, empowered all of us and as a pioneer effort should not be simply dismissed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick's edited volume, *Midrash and Literature*, in which Robbins's essay on Kafka first appeared, was also a marker of this cultural shift.

versalistically encompass only the literature and culture of white, male Christian humans. That very living community, which Paul occludes by referring to the literal “Old Testament” as merely written on stone and not on the hearts of anyone, enters once more into the general cultural conversation, that is to say, as a subject of speech of contemporary *secular* culture. Accordingly, Robbins’s book moves from “Jewish” readings of Christian writers like Augustine and Petrarch to appropriations of Judaic culture in Jewish writers like Kafka and Levinas. Her work, then, attempts to undo the erasure of Jewish self-understanding that Christian supersessionism, even at its most benign, has done. It undoes the erasure of Jewish self-understanding while at the same time systematically putting into question the concepts of “self,” “understanding,” and “voice.” Thus the undoing of the erasure of Jewish self-understanding does not lead to a restoration of full presence (which would, in fact, have paradoxically replayed the very erasure that it sought to undo); rather, it respects the trace.

In her chapter on Levinas, Robbins most explicitly evokes a reversal of supersession, for Levinas is probably the most prominent “Western” philosopher to have explicitly and openly maintained an allegiance to rabbinic Judaism. I cannot even begin to summarize the brilliant argument of the chapter. I wish merely to cite its bottom line here. Pauline Christianity has been founded on a privileging of inner dispositions of the psyche over outer dispositions of the body. A behavior that is not completely informed by and generated by faith is dismissed in this tradition as mere “works” righteousness and in some Protestant traditions identified with sin itself. Levinas, by revoicing Jewish texts of themselves and from themselves, reverses this hierarchy [Robbins 102–13]. Doing before hearing becomes now the very ground of an ethics, a demand of a certain behavior toward the other that may otherwise be escaped:

Levinas writes that if doing the law before understanding is conceived as pure praxis as opposed to contemplation, it is “a movement in the night” (QLT, 78). But Levinas, attentive to the hierarchical oppositions—inside and outside, presence and absence, seeing and blindness—that organize the opposition Greek/Hebrew (and Christian/Hebrew as well), does not merely reverse the dyadic hierarchy (i.e., privilege the outside, nonseeing, absence). He reinscribes it so that the subordinated term is no longer the (dialectical) opposite of the first. Perhaps the adhesion to the law that precedes understanding is not merely external (i.e. a blind or infantile naiveté) but an adhesion which is anterior to the

internal adhesion that operates in the light of evidence (QLT, 82). [Robbins 113–14]<sup>13</sup>

A Jewish self-understanding of praxis, one that is informed by the Paulinian critique, thus takes its place as an answer/response to the Pauline challenge. As Robbins cites Derrida, in Levinas's work we find, "Not a community without light, not a blindfolded synagogue, but a community anterior to Platonic light" [Robbins 114]: "Here Derrida, following Levinas (who follows Rosenzweig), not only rereads but unreads an entire medieval iconography of the synagogue with its broken staff and its blindfold. That iconography is exegetical; it is based on the typological relationship between the two testaments" [114]. The blindfolded synagogue, however, not only harkens back to medieval iconography; it is also obviously an allusion to Moses's veil in 2 Corinthians, to the veil that to this day prevents the Jews from perceiving the true figurative glory of their text in Christ. By unread-ing that veil, Jews take their place on the stage of discourse and proclaim the Letter which gives us life. Praxis is not works-righteousness but good works, and "boasting" is not self-satisfied arrogance but confidence in the justness of a just God.

The Rabbis had not remained insensible to the threat to Jewish difference which Paul's allegorical/typological hermeneutics implied, although their response was not explicit. Almost as a direct counter to Paul's charge that Jewish commitment to the flesh, to the literal observance of circumcision in the flesh, constituted a veil that kept their eyes from the sight of God, the Rabbis developed a discourse by which it was *only* through the flesh that the sight of God could be achieved. Although this notion is found in many texts of the third century and later, when Pauline Christianity was inexorably becoming the hegemonic discourse of the Roman Empire in which most Jews lived, it perhaps finds its most striking expression in the following text:

It is written, "This, after my skin will have been peeled off, but from my flesh, I will see God" [Job 19.26]. Abraham said, after I circumcised myself many converts came to cleave to this sign. "But from my flesh, I will see God," for had I not done this [circumcised myself], on

---

<sup>13</sup> "QLT" refers to Levinas's *Quatre lectures talmudiques* (Paris: Minuit, 1968).



what account would the Holy Blessed One, have appeared to me? “And the Lord appeared to him.” [Genesis Rabbah 48.1 (Theodor and Albeck 479)]

This text can be adduced as an emblem of the difference between Paul’s spiritual reading as exemplified above from 1 Corinthians 10 and the “literal” reading of midrash. As Elliot Wolfson correctly observes, there are two hermeneutic moves being made simultaneously in this midrash [192–93]. The first involves interpretation of the sequence in Genesis 17.1–14, which is the description of Abraham’s circumcision, and Genesis 17.23 ff., which begins, “And The Lord appeared to Abraham in Elone Mamre.” The midrash, following its usual canons of interpretation, attributes strong causal nexus to these events following on one another. Had Abraham not circumcised himself, then God would not have appeared to him. This interpretation is splendidly confirmed by the Job verse. The Book of Job, together with the other Holy Writings, was considered by the Rabbis an exegetical text that has the function of interpreting (or guiding interpretation of) the Torah. In this case, the verse of Job, which refers to the peeling off of skin, is taken by a brilliant appropriation to refer to the peeling off of skin of circumcision, and the continuation of the verse that speaks of seeing God from one’s flesh is taken as a reference to the theophany at Elone Mamre. The reading of sequence of the Torah’s text is confirmed by the explicit causality that the Job text inscribes. Circumcision of the flesh—peeling of the skin—provides the vision of God.

As Elliot Wolfson remarks, this midrash constitutes an interpretation of circumcision which directly counters the Pauline one: “The emphasis on Abraham’s circumcision . . . can only be seen as a tacit rejection of the Christian position that circumcision of the flesh had been replaced by circumcision of the spirit (enacted in baptism)” [194]. It is, of course, this very moment of the refusal of allegorization on the part of the Rabbis, their explicit resistance to being allegorized, that so provoked the Fathers and Augustine in particular. Yet, from this passage, we see that the characterization of Rabbinic Judaism as being unconcerned with spiritual experience is unwarranted. Rather the body is seen as the vehicle of encounter with God. The physical act of circumcision *in the flesh*, which prepares the (male) Jew for sexual intercourse, is also that which prepares him for Divine

intercourse—for mystical vision of God.<sup>14</sup> The Rabbis countered Paul's charge that the literal is a veil that prevents vision by asserting that the literal is that which removes the veil and enables the vision of God.

## 3

For Paul, descent according to the flesh and circumcision in the flesh have been superseded by their spiritual signified, baptism in the spirit.<sup>15</sup> The flaw in the Jews who reject Christianity is that they refuse to accept the true meaning of their own Law and history, not that that Law and history are themselves rejected. "Supersession" can thus itself be understood in two ways. It means either that Israel has been contradicted and replaced by the church or that Israel has been "continued" and fulfilled in the church. What is common to the two is that after Christ there is no further positive role for Israel in the flesh. A hermeneutic theory such as Paul's, by which the literal Israel, literal history, literal circumcision, and literal genealogy are superseded by their allegorical, spiritual signifieds is not necessarily anti-Semitic or anti-Judaic. From the perspective of the first century, the contest between a Pauline allegorical Israel and a rabbinic hermeneutics of

---

<sup>14</sup> In my paper "This we know to be the carnal Israel: Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel" [493–97] I have discussed the gender politics of this issue.

<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, I think that Hays is too harsh with Erich Auerbach. Although Auerbach's view is overstated, there is, in my humble opinion, something to be said for the view that in Paul the "Old Testament" is a shadow of things to come. Hays remarks, "The telling detail in this extraordinary caricature of Paul is that Auerbach's key image of the Old Testament as 'shadow of things to come' is derived not from Paul but from Hebrews (Heb. 10:1), which he apparently regards as a Pauline Epistle!" [98]. Auerbach could certainly have derived this idea rather from Colossians 2.16–17, of which it might be much more legitimately claimed that it is either of Pauline origin or from very near disciples: *Mē oun tis humas krinetō en Brōsei kai en posei ē en merei heortēs ē neomēnias ē sabbatōn a estin skia tōn mellontōn to de sōma tou Khristou*. Therefore, let no one judge you as to eating or drinking or with regard to the feasts, or the New Moons or the Sabbaths, which are but a shadow of the coming things, but the body is of Christ. The reason, I suspect, that Hays, like Homer, nodded is that in his zeal to overturn a certain version of Paul as a supersessionist he went too far and thus inadvertently suppressed the fairly clear evidence for a different sort of supersessionism explicit in the deutero-Pauline school and, I think, adumbrated in Paul himself.

the concrete Israel is simply a legitimate cultural, hermeneutical, and political contestation. To put this in Hays's own words, "This astonishing event, completely unpredictable on the basis of the story's plot development, is nonetheless now seen as the supremely fitting narrative culmination, providing unforeseen closure to dangling narrative themes and demanding a reconfiguration of the *dianoia*, the reader's grasp of 'what the story is all about'" [100]. It must be seen as well, however, that those "readers" who hang onto the old configuration of the *dianoia* have indeed been superseded. From the point of view of a Jew the distinction becomes harder to make.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, I agree completely with Hays that Pauline typology does not allow for "one pole of the typological correlation [to] annihilate the other." To capture the subtleties of this point, another quotation from Hays will help:

Paul, for his part, is laboring to refute the charge—whether rhetorical or historical—that he, as a promulgator of a startling new teaching incorporating uncircumcised Gentiles into the people of God, has abandoned the ways of the God of Israel. . . . With such issues in the air, the citation of Ps. 44:22 whispers another disclaimer, this time sotto voce: by identifying himself and his Christian readers with the suffering Israel of the psalm, Paul evokes (metaleptically) the psalmist's denial of any charge of idolatrous defection. Fundamental to Paul's whole theological project is the claim that his gospel represents the authentic fulfillment of God's revelation to Israel. [60]

All true, but the ethnic Jew may still feel that her personal sufferings in past and present for being specifically Jewish and God's promise that they will be vindicated have nevertheless been abandoned. This is an elegant example, I think, of a perspective that can lead us to understand that even a Paul who bore no malice toward the Jews qua Jews could nevertheless produce a doctrine that would be experienced as inimical to them and by them/us.

It can be fairly said, moreover, that Hays's book leaves room for such a contestation to continue and to be both irenic and mutually fructifying for Jews and Christians, religious and secular. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly's *Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross*, on the other hand, a "Girardian" reading of Paul, restores the interpretation of Paul as maligner of Judaism with a vengeance. It does not do

---

<sup>16</sup> Auerbach becomes, then, much less caricaturelike.

so critically, moreover, but in full collaboration with such a project. A sequel in pseudo (post)modern terms of the most violent aspects of Christian discourse about Judaism, Hamerton-Kelly's book reads like a medieval *Tractatus adversus judaeos*, not only in content but in form as well. His explicit intent is to delegitimize Jewish—or any culture but Christian—as independent cultural alterities in favor of a Christian exceptionalism by which Paul represents the end to religion and the end to “cultural embeddedness.” The term is his and used by him as a pejorative. His book seeks to make a book like Jill Robbins's a theoretical impossibility, an expression ultimately of the same stiff-neckedness of the Jews of Paul's time that led them as well to refuse to see that Christian revelation supersedes and subsumes all other cultural practice.<sup>17</sup> Hamerton-Kelly ostensibly interprets Paul in such a way that his discourse does not constitute a delegitimation of Jews or Judaism:

---

<sup>17</sup> Girard himself also falls into supersessionist patterns of thought and expression. The following quotation is exemplary: *I think it is possible to show that only the texts of the Gospels manage to achieve what the Old Testament leaves incomplete [in the transumption of Sacred Violence into harmonious community]. These texts therefore serve as an extension of the Judaic bible, bringing to completion an enterprise that the Judaic bible did not take far enough, as Christian tradition has always maintained.* [158]

This is supersessionist because it refuses to recognize that there was/is another “extension of the Judaic bible,” which has also continued historical cultural processes that began within the biblical period. Insofar as Girard will refer to Christianity as “the religion which comes from God,” while Judaism (and everything else) is relegated to being “religion which comes from man,” he can hardly expect non-Christians to be very interested in his work [166], which is ultimately theologically based Christian apologetic triumphalism. However, nothing in Girard's writings, to the extent that I know them, prepares one for the virulence of Hamerton-Kelly's anti-Judaism, which is all his own. Just comparing Girard's account of the crucifixion as having been given “explicit or implicit assent” by “the crowd in Jerusalem, the Jewish religious authorities, the Roman political authorities, and even the disciples” [167] with Hamerton-Kelly's “the impulse to fulfill the Mosaic Law [that] made him [Paul] a persecutor and had killed Christ” [141] makes the disparity apparent.

On the other hand, Girard's text is sufficiently problematic on its own, at least in part because of the dialogical way (literally as a dialogue) that it is presented. Girard speaks of a founding murder that lies behind all culture—that is, it is constitutive of hominization, something hidden since the foundation of the world, while his interlocutor (Oughourlian) transmutes this into “cultural differentiation develops on the basis of the founding murder” [165; my emphasis], and Girard does not protest. It is thus easy to see how a personality dedicated to the erasure of difference and imposition of Christianity on all could find his (mistaken) point of origin in Girard. Girard's text hovers over the pit of a Christian triumphalism (and implicit anti-Semitism) but avoids it, while Hamerton-Kelly jumps right in.

For Paul the church is not another sect, but the community of the new creation. It is ontologically beyond the world of opposites, and so is not a rival religion to Judaism, but a new and inclusive community. It is possible to construe this claim as just another play in the game of sectarian rivalry. Unfortunately, Christians down through the ages have certainly read it as such and used it to justify themselves and delegitimize the Jews. Paul left himself open to such an interpretation, but he did not intend it. He would have been appalled to see the community of the end of time becoming another sect in time, subject to the delusions of sacred violence. [146]

Paul's discourse is on this account a discourse of inclusion, an attempt to break down the hierarchical barriers that exist between people. When Paul says, "our fathers were all under the cloud" [1 Cor. 1.1], precisely the import of this is the fathers of all of us, both gentile and Jewish. To the extent, however, that the new and inclusive community demands conformity to certain practices that contradict the practices of the historical Jews, even if those practices be only the confession of certain beliefs, then it is inevitably a rival religion and a delegitimization of the Jews and indeed all non-Christians. Hamerton-Kelly is wholly oblivious, however, to the fundamental contradiction built into the notion of such a community, namely the presumption that anyone who does not wish to join the new community of faith is under a cloud of a different sort. The very claim to be "ontologically beyond" itself constitutes rivalry.

It is not so much that Paul left himself open to misinterpretation here; the "misinterpretation" is almost a necessary consequence of such an idea. It is clear that this coercive "new and inclusive community" still excludes (and often violently) those who do not have faith in Christ. Hamerton-Kelly, moreover, reads Paul according to the best possible construal of the "intentions" of his discourse and not even its virtually ineluctable effects (how precisely Hamerton-Kelly claims to know the intention of Paul better than, for example, Justin Martyr did is itself fascinating!), while Judaism is read by him according to its alleged "actual" practice of killing dissenters. Thus Judaism is simply "the impulse to fulfill the Mosaic Law [that] made him [Paul] a persecutor and had killed Christ" [141].

Hamerton-Kelly is willing to grant that Paul's putative experience does "not take the whole range of the religion into account," but not apparently to consider that the doctrines of Jews that other Jews referred to as "Zealots" or "Knifers" were marginal and vigorously

opposed subcultures of Greco-Roman Judaism.<sup>18</sup> For Hamerton-Kelly, despite occasional pro forma disclaimers, these groups represent the true essence of Judaism. For as he says, “I have endorsed Paul’s attack on *Judaism*” [183; my emphasis]. To this should be contrasted Hays’s sober and balanced judgments:

Only a narrowly ethnocentric form of Judaism, Paul insists, would claim that God is the God of the Jews only or that Abraham is the progenitor of God’s people “according to the flesh,” that is by virtue of natural physical descent. For the purposes of his argument, Paul associates these (evidently false) notions with the (disputed) claim that Gentile Christians must come under the Law. Paul, speaking from within the Jewish tradition, contends that the Torah itself provides the warrant for a more inclusive theology that affirms that the one God is God of Gentiles as well as Jews and that Abraham is the forefather of more than those who happen to be his physical descendants. [55]

Paul, in this view, as in the view that I have promulgated in *A Radical Jew*, is indeed a Jewish cultural critic, calling Jews to ally themselves with the progressive understandings contained within their own tradition and to reject the practices of certain ethnocentric zealots. In fact, the notion that Gentiles are saved without conversion to Judaism is a doctrine held by many *within* ancient Judaism; indeed, what is new in Paul is rather the idea that all—Jews and Gentiles—must be justified in the *same* way, through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul dreamed of a day in which all distinctions between human beings productive of hierarchy would be erased and not one in which there was merely a place in God’s saving plan for all. These are the grounds of his critique of—not “attack on”—Judaism.

Hamerton-Kelly’s account of Judaism, as well as his account of Paul, thus teach us more about him and his ideology than about anything else. For the certainty of faith, we find here substituted a certainty borne of “the preunderstanding we [Hamerton-Kelly] bring to the text,” which is “well founded on the evidence not only of the texts it interprets but also on other evidence from the human sciences” [61]. For Hamerton-Kelly it is simply a fact that the Jews killed Christ,

---

<sup>18</sup> That is, the sort of violence that Hamerton-Kelly seems to wish to essentialize as “Jewish” per se did exist in certain extreme groups in the first century, but those very groups were marginalized by the terms of opprobrium assigned to them by other groups, including notably the Pharisees.

that their religion was a religion of Sacred Violence, and that God/Paul rejected the Jews because of the essential evil of their “way of life”: “The Law had created a way of life founded on sacred violence and the crucifixion of Christ is the logical outcome of such a way of life” [66, 71]. Hamerton-Kelly does not even present this characterization as Paul’s in order to criticize it but rather produces a discourse supported by “the evidence from the human sciences” [that is, Girard] which asserts its authority as a description of Judaism. He interprets Philippians 3.8, in which Paul refers to his former achievement as *sky-bala* [shit], as Paul’s characterization of “the Jewish way of life.” Hamerton-Kelly somewhat softens the translation to “refuse” and then asserts that this is “what the Law really is” [68]. He thus relies ultimately on the authority of both Paul and Girard (science) in support of his own political/theological agenda. When we read the Pauline passage in question, however, we find that Hamerton-Kelly’s interpretation of it is far from ineluctable. The passage reads:

Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ [*αλλα μενουγγε και ηγουμαι παντα ζεμιαν ειναι δια το ηθπερευηνον τες γνδσεδσ Κηριστου Ιεσου του κθριον μου δι ηον τα παντα εξεμιδτηεν και ηγουμαι σκθβαλα ηινα Κηριστον κερδεσδ*].

I think that a much more likely reading of this verse than Hamerton-Kelly’s is that Paul is precisely not referring to what his former life “really is,” but rather emphasizing that even though it was of value, he counts it now as dung in comparison to the excellency of the knowledge of Christ and in order that he may win such knowledge. In fact, the figure works only if that of which he is speaking is not “really dung.” It is not Paul here who is anti-Judaic, unless any disagreement or cultural critique is to be defined as anti-Judaic.

In fact I give Hamerton-Kelly much more credit than he does himself. He claims to have endorsed Paul’s attack on Judaism; I think he has created it. For example, Hamerton-Kelly writes: “The agent of my action in this situation is the sin ‘that dwells in me’; namely ‘in my flesh’ (*tout estin en to sarki mou*) (Rom. 7:18). In the light of my argument this might be paraphrased, ‘no good thing dwells in me, that is, in my culturally embedded (Jewish) self’” [147]. Even granting the undecidability of texts, the multivariate nature of hermeneutics, my own personal investments that lead me to read one way and not

another, I find it hard to imagine that anyone who is not already inclined toward his hatred of Judaism will find Hamerton-Kelly's paraphrase in Paul's language, and I think it unnecessary even to produce an alternative reading in this case. Hamerton-Kelly's affirmation of this proposition, whether or not it is Paul's, reveals that he still somehow manages to imagine that there is a self that is not culturally embedded. Paul says nothing so nefarious, but certainly does hold out the positive hope of a humanity which will not be differentiated by cultural specificities. Paul can be forgiven his naïveté. Hamerton-Kelly's ignorance of the critique of Universalism mounted in recent criticism is, however, intellectually and morally unforgivable. (His appropriation of "theory" seems to be limited to Girard and Girard alone.) In the wake of the horrors that have been perpetrated in the name of such visions of a humanity "not culturally embedded," Hamerton-Kelly's remark is simply inexcusable. If for Hamerton-Kelly "cultural embeddedness" is the sin that dwells in our flesh, then his politics will be a politics of the eradication of cultural embeddedness, which *we* know, by now, means the assimilation of all, willy-nilly, to the culture defined as *not* specific—that of White Christian European males.

The obvious charge that suggests itself is that Hamerton-Kelly is engaging in sacred violence and scapegoating of his own. He is certainly aware, although contemptuously dismissive, of this accusation. Indeed, he devotes an entire section of his book to "refuting" it:

If the solution to sacred violence is the renunciation of rivalry, and if faith can take different forms, each of them valid as long as they can be classified under the heading of agape, why have I endorsed Paul's attack on Judaism? Have I not been engaged in precisely the rivalrous behavior that I have been criticizing, rivalrously condemning rivalry?  
[183]

Hamerton-Kelly's answer is that, "Clearly, a religious system that kills innocent people 'righteously' has less rational and moral justification than one that cherishes all in love" [183], and it therefore follows, as the night follows the day, that "The sophistic taunt that Paul scapegoats Judaism is, therefore, unworthy of serious consideration" [184].<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> His rhetorical move reminds me of that of John Chrysostom, who in his violent attacks on Judaism pauses to remark, "I know that some will condemn me for



Indeed, such a “taunt” would be inappropriately directed at Paul, because Paul does not mount his critique of Judaism on such false grounds; it can well be directed, however, at Hamerton-Kelly, and it is more than a “sophistic taunt,” a formal contradiction. It is a damning charge that discredits entirely any pretense he has to a hermeneutic that claims to “escape mimetic violence into a new community of agapaic cooperation” [184].<sup>20</sup> The burden of Hamerton-Kelly’s book is that the Jews *really are* Christ-killers.<sup>21</sup> Now we do not know if “historically” there were *any* Jews involved in the killing of Christ, nor is there any reason to suppose that, even if there were, they represented the whole People or its religion. What we do know, however, is that millions of Jews have been killed in Europe, owing partly to this scape-goating slander.

Rabbinic Jews insisted: We will continue to exist corporeally, in our bodily practices, the practices that are our legacy from our carnal filiation and bodily history, and not be interpreted out of fleshly, historical existence, what Levinas refers to as “integral adherence”—the adherence of meaning within concrete action. And it worked. It is only owing to that resistance that the Jews still exist. Rather than the negatively loaded term “particularism,” we can easily rename this Jewish resistance with the positively marked “difference,” and, as such, it has indeed functioned as a model for the politics of difference of repressed people of color, women, and gays. However, as Foucault has made us only too aware, virtually any discursive practice can be liberatory or repressive, or worse. Colonizing almost his last words, “My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dan-

---

daring to say that the synagogue is no better than a theater;” but “I will not be deterred” [qtd. in Gager 119]. Such also is Hamerton-Kelly’s “courage,” vaunted in the blurbs on the dust jacket.

<sup>20</sup> Girard and Oughourlian have tried to guard against the sort of misreading that Hamerton-Kelly engages in on pages 174–75, where they explicitly refer to the transformation “of the universal revelation of the founding murder into a polemical denunciation of the Jewish religion”—precisely that which Hamerton-Kelly engages in and which Girard refers to as “a new form of violence, directed against a new scape-goat—the Jew.” Not only a bad reader of Paul, therefore, Hamerton-Kelly is also, owing to his anti-Semitic passion, a highly selective and superficial reader of Girard as well.

<sup>21</sup> He dismisses the challenge of modern Christian New Testament scholars to the simple veracity of the gospel accounts.

gerous" [Afterword 232].<sup>22</sup> Only specific analysis of specific historical situations reveals when a specific practice is which.

My thesis is that Judaism and Christianity as two different hermeneutic systems for reading the Bible generate two diametrically opposed forms of racism—and two diametrically opposed possibilities of antiracism.<sup>23</sup> The genius of Christianity is its concern for all of the Peoples of the world; the genius of Judaism is its ability to leave other people alone [see Shell]. This is grounded theologically in rabbinic Judaism in the notion that in order to achieve salvation, Jews are required to perform (or, better, to attempt to perform) the entire 613 commandments, while non-Jews are required to perform only seven commandments given to Noah which form a sort of natural, moral Law. Hamerton-Kelly is so bound up in Christian modes of thinking that he is unable to even imagine an alternative. Thus he writes, "These Jews would have understood that to refute the necessity for Mosaic observance in the case of gentiles undermines the authority of that observance across the board. If it is not necessary for some, it is not necessary for any" [187]. Wrong! Jewish theology understands the Jewish People to be priests performing a set of ritual acts on behalf of the entire world. While clearly the temptation to a certain arrogance is built into such a system, precisely the temptation to "Sacred Violence" that leads to forced conversion, whether by the sword, ridicule, or the Pound or deculturation in the name of the new human community, is not. Christianity is the system that proposes that there is something that is necessary for all: faith in Jesus Christ. The evils of the two systems are the precise obverse of these geniuses. These genii all too easily become demons. The insistence on difference can produce as well an indifference (or worse) toward Others. Jewish difference can indeed be dangerous, as the Palestinians know only too well, but Christian universalism has been even more dangerous, as Jews have been forced to demonstrate with their bodies.

Hamerton-Kelly's reading of Paul and mine converge in one important way. We both describe Paul as a critic of Jewish culture. Otherwise the politics of our two projects could not be more opposed. I see

---

<sup>22</sup> See also the more expansive articulation of this principle in Foucault, *An Introduction, The History of Sexuality* [101–02].

<sup>23</sup> This argument is one of the major themes of my book *A Radical Jew* and will, accordingly, be repeated and of course much expanded there.

Paul's critique of Jewish culture as motivated and generated by distress about Jewish emphasis on the significance of being a member of the tribe with all that entailed, and there is no doubt that this factor is central to biblical, postbiblical, and ultimately rabbinic Judaism, for good and/or for ill.<sup>24</sup> Hamerton-Kelly sees Paul as rejecting the inherent violence of a Judaism that killed an innocent man (Christ), which is simply a theologically based slander, since virtually everything we know about Jewish Law would have prevented Jews from killing Jesus.<sup>25</sup> There is, moreover, precious little even in Paul to support such a construction beyond one contested passage in 1 Thessalonians 2.15.<sup>26</sup> Hamerton-Kelly's understanding of 2 Corinthians 3.6 that the "Letter kills" means that the Law killed Christ is special pleading at its most spectacular [159]. Perhaps the most egregious moment in this book, however, is the following:

Paul's understanding of the link between the Jewish way of life, his own activity as a persecutor, and the death of Christ, also explains the culminating affirmation, "[God] made him who knew no sin to be a sin for us, in order that in him we might become the righteousness of God"

---

<sup>24</sup> W.D. Davies's *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* is a model of a cultural criticism that is not anti-Judaic. He does not apologize for Jewish "particularism" or condemn it as an essentialized exclusiveness or innate sense of superiority but explains it historically and marks both its "positive" and "negative" effects [61–68]. Davies anticipates as well my thesis that Paul's critique arose in an environment in which many Jews were increasingly feeling an "uneasy conscience." He well understands that Jewish isolation was a fence that preserved Jewish difference, and also that "a fence, while it preserves, also excludes. The Torah, which differentiated the Jew from others, also separated him from them." Criticism of Jewish culture, by Jews or non-Jews, is not anti-Semitic. Slander is. Some Jews and liberal Christians do not see this difference and regard all critique of Judaism as somehow causally contiguous with holocaust.

<sup>25</sup> Of course, I am not arguing for Jewish exceptionalism here. There have undoubtedly been as many Jewish murderers as anyone else. The Gospel claims, which are, of course, significantly later than Paul, that the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death are, however, simply implausible from the perspective of Jewish Law, as is the account of the stoning of Stephen in Acts 7. In order for the Sanhedrin to actually execute someone, so many implausible conditions had to be met that a Sanhedrin which condemned one person to death in seventy years was called derisively, "The Bloody Sanhedrin!"

<sup>26</sup> While I think that it is too easy an escape to suggest that this verse is not Pauline, its highly uncharacteristic nature suggests that it is not by any means a cornerstone of Paul's thought. Moreover, the fact that it seems to allude to the Destruction of the Temple, which certainly took place after the date of the letter, supports here the argument that at least some of the verse has been tampered with in the light of post-Pauline Christian thought.

(2 Cor. 5:21). The “sin” that God made him is Jewishness, elsewhere called “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3; cf. Gal. 4:4–5). [126; my emphasis]

Such an interpretation is an affront even more to Christianity than to Judaism. It is not difficult to expose the egregiousness of Hamerton-Kelly’s reading. The “sin” that God made Jesus is almost certainly a sin offering (in Hebrew the two words are identical), and Paul’s thought is perfectly coherent.<sup>27</sup>

My version of Paul commands that Jews pay attention: How do we wish to understand and address the apparent ethnocentric elements of our Judaism? Hamerton-Kelly’s account of Paul could be safely ignored as critique and indeed must be combated as a traditional libel of Jews and Judaism. Indeed, “one should not distort the interpretation of Christian origins in order to combat anti-Semitism” [Hamerton-Kelly 188], but neither should one use anti-Semitism to distort the interpretation of Christian origins.

When Hamerton-Kelly says: “Deception by sin, which is really self-deception, is, therefore, the hallmark of the Jewish religious life in its role as the paradigm of sacred violence that is the primitive essence of all religion” [148], his book roughly reminds us that we are not yet safely past the exceptionalism that has generated colonialist and imperialist Christianity, whereby all religions but Christianity are condemned as primitive, and Christianity is excepted from being a “religion” (a view that Hamerton-Kelly’s mentor, Girard, also apparently holds). This book will, I think, be most appropriately contextualized when we realize that it was published in the year that David Duke and Pat Buchanan became credible political figures.

Hamerton-Kelly defines the achievement of a hermeneutical endeavor by its “success in interpreting the signs of the tradition and the times,” and continues, “I have asked my questions in the light of my intuition of the answer, and I can point to the traces of violence on our common horizon to justify asking the questions I have asked. We can also invite the accuser to join the conversation” [184]. Richard Hays’s conversation is one that I wish to join. It is one that reopens the possibility for Jews (like Jill Robbins—and me) and Christians (as

---

<sup>27</sup> Although Paul’s christology is not generally expiatory, there certainly are several traces of such a theology of the cross in his writings.

well as others) to enter into Paul's conversation, without falsifying or blunting the critical force of Paul's discourse. Hamerton-Kelly's "conversation" is one that should be rejected as ignorant prejudice and ratification of an appalling history of the violent misreading of Paul and the violence directed against Jews and all of the other "primitive" peoples of the world.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ÉPATER L'EMBOURGEOISEMENT:  
FREUD, GENDER, AND THE (DE)COLONIZED PSYCHE

- John Murray Cuddihy.** *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity*. 1974. Boston: Beacon, 1987.
- Bram Dijkstra.** *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in fin-de-siècle Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986.
- Jay Geller.** "A Glance at the Nose: Freud's Inscription of the Other." *American Imago* 49.4 (1992): 427–44.
- . "(G)nos(c)ology: the Cultural Construction of the Other." *People of the Body: Jews and Judaism from an Embodied Perspective*. Ed. Howard Eilberg-Schwartz. Albany: SUNY P, 1992. 243–82.
- Sander L. Gilman.** *Freud, Race, and Gender*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Estelle Roith.** *The Riddle of Freud: Jewish Influences on his Theory of Female Sexuality*. London: Tavistock, 1987.

The truly psychotic, rather than merely neurotic, idealization of a supremely evolved white male and the concomitant assumption that somehow all others were "degenerate" had, as Freud was writing [*Civilization and Its Discontents*], begun to reap its most evil harvest. Even the most casual reader of the theoretical disquisitions of the later nineteenth-century exponents of the science of man must at once perceive the intimate correlation between their evolutionist conclusions and the scientific justification of patterns of "inherent" superiority and inferiority in the relations between the sexes, various races, and the different classes in society.

—BRAM DIJKSTRA, *Idols of Perversity*

*Is Love goyim naches? Cuddihy and Roith*

Long live war. Long live love. Let Sorrow be Banished from the Earth.

—GIUSEPPE VERDI, *The Sicilian Vespers*

John Murray Cuddihy's *The Ordeal of Civility* inaugurated the discourse this essay continues, a discourse that we might call cultural studies in Freud. The book presents the most curious combination imaginable of brilliant insight into the modern Jewish situation and offensive crudity in its characterization of traditional Judaism. It is not anti-Semitic

(as I thought on my first reading) but rather thoroughly neocolonialist. It grows out of a grudging but palpable adoration of Protestantism and capitalist imperialism and forms, in large part, an apology for them. We see where Cuddihy stands when he writes of *all* postcolonial peoples, “The values and life-style of the colonial power—or, for the indigenous minorities within a more general core culture, the meanings and beliefs of the ‘oppressive majority’—constitutes a status-wound to the normal narcissism of peoples and nations. The defense (apologia) against this ‘assault’ we call ideology” [171]. “Ideology,” *mirabile dictu*, is produced not by the oppressor (no scare quotes for me) to justify and naturalize oppression but by the oppressed in bad faith to justify and naturalize their stubborn and atavistic resistance to an oppressive modernity. Cuddihy fully accepts the Durkheimian notion that there are superior and inferior religions and cultures. Like Parsons, he therefore considers the structuralist—Lévi-Straussian—(and presumably poststructuralist) insistence on the commensurate value of all human cultures as a “regression” [160]. It is, then, almost beside the point that Judaism is *one* of the inferior ones. This is Orientalism in the most precise sense of the word.

Take the following case of Cuddihian analysis. In 1908 Freud wrote a letter to Karl Abraham in which he imparts that he had been in Berlin for twenty-four hours and been unable to see him and wishes him not to misunderstand this as a sign of disfavor. Cuddihy glosses this passage: “to make oneself accountable for one’s appearances before strangers is the first step to social modernization” [99]. Cuddihy apparently finds it impossible to imagine that an Eastern European Jew (which he alleges Freud to have been) would have had “native” traditions of thoughtfulness to draw on. The Galician Jew, as a member of a “primitive” culture, could not possibly have cared that an associate might have been hurt through a misunderstanding. What Cuddihy seems unable to imagine is that the conflict is not between the uncivil and the civil but between alternative and different civilities, that the cultures of the “East” and the past maintained their own civilities. At the risk of exaggeration or distortion (and perhaps offense), I would suggest that this is a peculiar consequence of the sociological (as opposed to anthropological) stance. Classical ethnography may have served the colonialist project *de facto*, but classical sociology seems best poised to justify it *de jure*, to the extent that it is still engaged in the Durkheimian, Weberian, Parsonian project of ranking cultures. It is

not surprising, then, that Parsons considers Lévi-Strauss a “regression.”

The Orientalist gaze at Jews (and Others) that marks Cuddihy’s work is delineated in a much more significant way when he uses it to reduce Jewish socialism to a response to an inner Jewish social problem:

German-Jewish socialism, in other words, in its deep-lying motivation nexus is a sumptuary socialism. It is tailor-made for a recently decolonized “new nation” indigenous to the West whose now-dispersed “nationals” have had neither time nor opportunity to internalize that system of informal restraints we are calling the Protestant Etiquette. Protestant interiority and internalization—in the triple form of an ethnic, an esthetic, and an etiquette—was the functional modernizing equivalent of what, for Catholics and Jews in the Middle Ages, had been a formally institutionalized set of legal restrictions on conspicuous consumption and behavior. (Jewry was in the nineteenth century existing from its Middle Ages.) Feudal sumptuary laws—external constraints—took the modernizing form of internal restraints of moderation on consumption, trade, and commercial practices. [5]

Aside from revealing his position vis-à-vis socialism here, Cuddihy manifests once more the bizarre combination of the acumen that makes his book so powerful and the grotesque appreciation of German bourgeois culture that makes it so repulsive (to me). On the one hand, it marks perhaps the first time that the Jews of modern central Europe were seen as a recently decolonized people, an analogy that has proven very fruitful indeed. But on the other hand, read carefully, it can be seen to encode the following propositions: “Protestant interiority and internalization”—read “faith”—was the functional equivalent of the medieval sumptuary laws of both Jews and Catholics—read “works.” Cuddihy’s two intellectual heroes are Talcott Parsons, whom Cuddihy himself identifies “as an intellectual descendant of Calvin” [9], and Max Weber, who was certainly an intellectual descendant of Luther!<sup>1</sup> I would suggest that the distinction between “ascribed” and “achieved” status upon which so much of Parsons’s theories are based is a recoding of the distinction between the Pauline descent according to the flesh and descent according to the spirit. This rather puts Cuddihy himself, as I imagine he would freely admit, into the ambivalent

---

<sup>1</sup> On Weber’s Protestant sociology of Judaism, see Abraham [passim, and especially 12n33]. For Weber on the place of Catholics in Protestant society, see passim, esp. 21, and for Weber on the Kulturkampf 61–63. This important book was brought to my attention by Martin Jay.



situation of the (de)colonized subject who perceives himself through the eyes of the colonizer, and the “ordeal of civility” is, at least in part, his own. One can be an Orientalist with respect to one’s own past as well.

The sumptuary laws, at least in their medieval Catholic (that is, state-ly) version, were laws that enforced class distinctions by restricting what could be worn by the members of different socioeconomic groups. Rather than seeing “Jewish socialism” as a protest *against* the capitalism that in fact expanded and exploited such economic gaps, Cuddihy sees it as the Jewish response to the Jews’ inability to internalize and make instinctive those forms of “internal restraints of moderation on consumption, trade, and commercial practices” that characterized such Protestant capitalists as, presumably, Henry Ford or John D. Rockefeller.<sup>2</sup> Is Cuddihy joking when he writes, “Not having undergone in his [Marx’s] upbringing the blessings of a properly installed Protestant Ethic, he would encounter and experience the informal sumptuary legislation of a Protestant Etiquette as a heteronomous tyranny” [128–29]?<sup>3</sup> And this ridiculous comment is made with respect to an early article of Marx’s protesting activities of the Prussian censors. What *would* count as tyranny on Cuddihy’s account? Marxism à la Cuddihy is just another mode of Jewish *embourgeoisement*! As he explicitly remarks, “The socialist ideology that comes out of German Jewry, from Marx to the young Walter Lippmann, is rooted in the ‘Jewish question’ which, for German Jewry generally has always turned on the matter of the public misbehavior of the Jews of Eastern Europe” [5].<sup>4</sup> Now it is interesting that in Jewish tradition there were

---

<sup>2</sup> I had originally written here I.G. Farben, because I think it makes the example much sharper, but realizing the potential for misunderstanding decided to weaken the rhetoric. I am not, of course, suggesting any complicity between Cuddihy’s discourse—much less Cuddihy—and genocide.

<sup>3</sup> My colleague Martin Jay suggests an ironic reading here, but it seems to me that such a reading would denude Cuddihy’s statement of any meaning. If Cuddihy thinks that the Prussian censorship was tyranny, then what is the point of this ironic statement? And if he doesn’t, then the statement is not ironic. Either way, it seems hard to escape the conclusion, particularly given the whole context, that Cuddihy takes seriously his description of the “Protestant Etiquette” as “informal sumptuary legislation.”

<sup>4</sup> Cuddihy himself seems finally (after more than 150 pages) to have been embarrassed by the vulgarity of his analysis. He writes, “beginning with particularist shame, it [Marxism] becomes in the end universalist and motivated by genuine passion for justice” [161n].

sumptuary laws that restricted the *rich* in their conspicuous consumption at weddings, funerals, and so forth, in order to render the differences between the classes less obnoxious. I am disturbed not by the claim that Jewish socialism is somehow a continuation of *these* sumptuary laws but rather by the implication that Protestantism achieved the same ends without legislation, while Jews had to be legalists about it. This Weberian stance on Judaism and Christianity seems rather a bizarre position to take for a man who declares himself glad to be a Catholic, and it is almost emblematic of the argument of the entire book with its consistent distinction between being “civil” and merely appearing so. Adapting Sartre, one could sum up Cuddihy’s argument as being another reflex of the anxious notion held by non-Jews that “behind [the Jew’s] feigned adaptability, there is concealed a deliberate and conscious attachment to the traditions of his race” [Sartre 100; see Abraham 24–25].

The point is that for Cuddihy the “Jewish Question” is entirely a question for Jews. “The intelligentsia ‘explains,’ ‘excuses,’ and ‘accounts’ for the otherwise offensive behavior of its people. All the ‘moves’ made in the long public discussion of the Jewish Emancipation problematic constitute, in the case of the detraditionalized intellectuals, an apologetic strategy” [Cuddihy 6]. Again, unpacking this claim yields the following proposition: Jews are not a problem for Europe, nor is Europe a problem for Jews. Only Jews are a problem for Jews.<sup>5</sup> The entire problem of emancipation is an internal Jewish one of modernization. Anti-Semitism is totally irrelevant, if it exists at all:

The fact that Jews in the West are a decolonized and modernizing people, an “underdeveloped people” traumatized—like all underdeveloped countries—by contact with the more modernized and hence “higher” nations of the West goes unrecognized for several reasons. First, because they have been a colony internal to the West; second, because decolonization has been gradual and continuous; third, because of the democratic manners of the West (only Max Weber called them a pariah people, i.e., a ritually segregated guest people); and fourth, because the modernization collision has been politicized and theologized by the

---

<sup>5</sup> It is certainly revealing that perhaps the only part of Marx of which Cuddihy approves is *On the Jewish Question*, of which he writes, “the anti-philosemitism of Marx’s essay ‘On the Jewish Question’ will be misread, when it appears in 1844, as unadulterated anti-Semitism” [150].

charge of “anti-Semitism” (as, in noncontiguous Western colonies, the charge of “imperialism” effectively obscures the real nature of the collision—namely, between modernizing and nonmodernized peoples). [47]

Here is the whole story of Cuddihy’s book: stunning insight on the one hand—the Jews as colonized and Emancipation as decolonization; on the other hand, the most malodorous opinions imaginable about Jews and other colonized peoples: (1) There is praise for the “democratic manners of the West” for its reticence in not calling a spade a spade. One might be tempted to read Cuddihy here in an ironic fashion, since, as Martin Jay points out to me, he, an Irish Catholic, ought to have resented English colonial control and *its* civilizing mission, but how, then, shall we read his claim that Anna O.’s reticence because “she wanted to be polite” is “a far cry from being polite” [42], something clearly only a truly civilized person (Protestant) is capable of? Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O.), like Freud in the Abraham incident, desires only to *appear* polite. She and he could not possibly be sincerely motivated here, as the Protestant would be by her “interiority and internationalization.”<sup>6</sup> (2) Cuddihy analyzes the “charge” of anti-Semitism (he calls it the charge of “anti-Semitism”) as a smoke-screen to hide the real deficiencies of the Jews; and, similarly, (3) presents a parallel “demystification” of the charge of imperialism. Even more than he intends to, Cuddihy demonstrates—in spite of his being at some profound level philo-Semitic<sup>7</sup>—how intimately related the discourse of anti-Semitism is to other discourses of colonialism.<sup>8</sup>

Freud’s behavior in the Abraham case is accounted for by Cuddihy as a kind of works righteousness, and a hypocritical one at that, reproducing the precise terms of Weber’s critique of “Ancient” Judaism.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cuddihy writes adoringly of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “There is unbearable pathos in the figure of Pastor Bonhoeffer as he prepares to die: ‘Called to conduct his last worship service in prison shortly before his execution,’ Peter Berger writes, Bonhoeffer ‘held back, for he did not want to offend his neighbor, a Soviet officer’” [238]. This is referred to by Cuddihy as the “rites of love,” but Bertha Pappenheim’s disinclination to offend her family or Freud’s to hurt the feelings of his friend is bad faith!

<sup>7</sup> For the connection between Weberian philo-Semitism and anti-Semitism, two seemingly opposite discourses, see Abraham [x–xi].

<sup>8</sup> As with Marxism, Cuddihy somewhat ameliorates this position more than a hundred pages later, when he manages to write, “Needless to say, colonialism, like anti-Semitism, has worked its ugly will on defenseless peoples” [178]. His value system remains unchanged, however. For Cuddihy, modernization is an unmitigated good, and the problems of postcolonial people would be exactly the same with or without the colonial history.

Cuddihy's Christian bias is revealed in quite traditional theological terms as well, when, for example, he ends up reviving the patristic charges of carnality against the Jews.

The late Susan Taubes noted that "the Old Testament has had the benefit of the most sublime spiritualization through centuries of Christian interpretation." Bourgeois-Christian love is just such a "spiritualization" of coarse sexuality. This literal level is the unspiritual level, it is the coarse, "given" Old Testament. It is like the id, understood "carnally" (*carnaliter*); but, as a "preparation" for the New Testament, it is read "spiritually" (*spiritualiter*). [74]

This analysis provides the basic term for Cuddihy's account of Freud's theories of sexuality which are summed up by his outrageous statement: "the id of the 'Yid' is hid under the lid of Western decorum (the 'superego')" [29]. Hid under the lid of this droll formulation is a doubly Orientalist fantasy: the Jews as Oriental and Eastern Europe itself as the Orient, the site of Dracula and his brethren: "Dracula may not officially have been one of those horrid inbred Jews everyone was worrying about at the time Stoker wrote his novel, but he came close, for he was very emphatically Eastern European, and hence, like du Maurier's 'filthy black Hebrew', Svengali (*Trilby* [du Maurier], 52), a creature who had crawled 'out of the mysterious East! The poisonous East—birthplace and home of an ill wind that blows nobody good'" [Dijkstra 343; see also 335].<sup>9</sup>

All of the theoretical problems of Cuddihy's bizarrely reified notions of Eastern European Jewish life show up in the following crucial thesis, in which Jews, like women, manage to be both crude animals and "puritans" at one and the same time:

Freud paid scant attention to sexual foreplay. It either maneuvered the partners toward orgasm, or it was perversion. To Freud's stultic puritanism, forepleasure—like courtship, essentially, or courtesy—was a form of roundaboutness, of euphemism. To play with sexual stimulation, to

---

<sup>9</sup> How delicious the irony that the "scientists" invoked by Stoker to confirm the criminality of the visage of Dracula the crypto-Jew [Dijkstra 343], namely, Lombroso and Nordau, were themselves Jews, a fact discreetly left unmentioned by Dijkstra. This irony, however, though delicious, was not rare. To the extent that Dijkstra's argument that Nazism was spawned by scientificized misogyny is convincing—and, by and large, it does convince me—Nordau and Lombroso are unwitting authors of their own people's genocide (as was, certainly and explicitly, Weinger). The irony becomes less and less palatable.

postpone the intense endpleasure of orgasm, was a form of *goyim naches*, of games *goyim* play, endlessly refining themselves. Freud had a choice here. If the rules of that game genuinely transformed the old coarse “fuck” into something “rare and strange,” then he, Freud was missing out on something. “They” were experiencing something he wasn’t. He, most of the time, bore a grudge against their claim. [70]

If there were any evidence for this as Freud’s affect—that is, that foreplay is “*goyim naches*”—then one would simply conclude that Freud was delusional. (If anything, it seems that the Freud of the “Three Essays” considers the impulse to endless foreplay one of those instinctual delights given up—not discovered—in the civilizing process. My reasoning is that if the “perversions” are a regression to infantile sexuality and if ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, then it would follow that primitives are more perverse.) Is there any evidence whatever that Austrian Gentiles engaged in more or different foreplay than Galician Jews did? Has Cuddihy made any attempt to learn anything at all about the prescriptions for foreplay that Jewish culture insists on, going back to the Talmud?<sup>10</sup> The term “*goyim naches*” refers to violent physical activity, such as dueling or wars, not to foreplay. I am prepared to grant Cuddihy that “*goyim*”—his vulgarism—invented romantic and courtly love, essentially misogynist formations,<sup>11</sup> but not that they invented foreplay. Thus, just for example, we find the following bit of talmudic advice to wives—a father is speaking to his daughter: “When he takes the pearl in one hand and the furnace in the other, show him the pearl and not the furnace, until you [pl.] are suffering, and then show it to him,” which Rashi forthrightly glosses: “When your husband is caressing you to get excited for intercourse, and he holds your breast in one hand, and your vulva in the other, give him access to your breast, in order that his passion will be great, and not quickly to your vulva, in order that his passion and affection will be great, and he will feel suffering, and then give him access to it”

---

<sup>10</sup> The Talmud even explicitly permits oral and anal intercourse between husbands and wives, acts that Freud would presumably regard as “perversions,” operating as he was, in part at least, on the teleological assumptions about sexuality that were current in his day. For the talmudic material and its ambivalences see Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* [109–22].

<sup>11</sup> See Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Inventions of Western Romantic Love*. See also Dijkstra [188] on the virulent misogyny of late nineteenth-century renditions of “chivalry.”

[Babylonian Talmud Shabbath 140b]. It is interesting to note the sexist shift in the axis of the discourse from the Talmud to Rashi—in the former the desire is mutual, in the latter only the husband’s is relevant—but it is certain that neither the Talmud nor this French Jewish contemporary of courtly lovers was ignorant or disdainful of foreplay or even of its “sweet suffering” [for other relevant texts, see Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 122–25]. To be sure, courtly love with its convention (honored in the breach, perhaps?) of chaste adultery would have seemed silly and immoral to both sets of Jews, as romantic notions of “love at first sight” did to their nineteenth-century descendants. The problem, once more, is not anti-Semitism but the uncritical assertion of the superiority of Western bourgeois civilization over that of the “primitives”—whoever those primitives might be and particularly in the overvaluation of “romantic love.” There is something truly grotesque in Cuddihy’s claim that “In bourgeois-Western lovemaking, foreplay—‘love play’—foreshortens the ritual of courtly love into the space-time requirements of the bourgeois bedroom,” from which it follows, according to him, that if “Freud and his psychoanalytical heirs make short shrift of the ‘rules’ of courtly love,” and Judaism has no patience for these rules either, then this adequately explains an alleged Freudian disdain for foreplay [72]! In fact, I would suggest that there is much in bourgeois (that is, post-Reformation) marriage (as opposed to its medieval Christian predecessors) that is similar to, and maybe even partly dependent on, talmudic marriage ideology as lived in medieval and early modern Judaism, including especially the valuation of foreplay, a practice entirely *unlike* the pseudocourtesies of courtly love.

This thesis of Cuddihy’s has had an afterlife in a work that goes even further in its valorization of romantic and courtly love and thus disparagement of traditional Judaism, which would have none of these. Thus, Estelle Roith writes:

The Freudian doctrine of sexuality can be seen to be of a more ancient lineage, since, to reiterate the central theme of this book, Freud’s first and lasting culture was Jewish. . . .

It can therefore be no coincidence that Freud came from a long tradition that viewed as bizarre, hypocritical, and ultimately unhealthy, the aesthetic exhilaration and ritualized longing that characterized the spirit of Christian bourgeois romantic love. John Murray Cuddihy in his book *The Ordeal of Civility* is one of very few writers not merely to observe but also to consider the implications of the crucial fact that the Freudian sexual doctrine had its origins in the encounter between two cultures

that differed radically in their sexual ideologies. Freud wrote that ‘the ascetic current in Christianity created psychological values for love which pagan antiquity was never able to confer on it’ (1912, SE 11:188), and while this statement might seem to us to strike a faint personal note to envy, the phenomena of romance, courtship, and, indeed, forepleasure depend, as Cuddihy persuasively argues, on the principle of delayed consummation which, in both the Freudian and Jewish doctrines, is consistently deplored. . . . [126–27]

I submit that there is not the slightest bit of evidence that in traditional Jewish culture delayed consummation is deplored, and I have cited evidence above that directly contradicts this absurd notion. The category error here involves simply identifying (as Cuddihy did) courtship with courtly love with foreplay—and courtly love with love, a series of identifications that simply accept in an uncontested fashion the self-evaluations and mystifications of European ideology. Roith continues by asserting the correctness of what is perhaps the most egregious moment in all of Cuddihy’s work:

Cuddihy quite rightly notes that courtship, like love, was seen from a traditional Jewish viewpoint as a Gentile refinement. He quotes Ernest van den Haag: “Love as ‘an aesthetic exhilaration and as a romantic feeling’ . . . never made much of a dent on Jewish attitudes towards the body or towards the opposite sex. Love as “sweet suffering” was too irrational. If you want her, get her.” [126–27]

The quotation from van den Haag cited by Cuddihy and then recited by Roith represents perhaps the silliest statement ever made about traditional Jewish culture. What on earth could “If you want her, get her” mean; hit her over the head with your club and drag her to your cave?<sup>12</sup> In traditional Jewish culture the process of finding

---

<sup>12</sup> Altogether, the idea of serious scholarly works turning to a vulgar popularization such as van den Haag’s as a major source of information on traditional Jewish culture is simply staggering. As an example of the level of this book, I quote the following: “Jewish girls are the world’s most boring women,” a friend of mine who is something of a Don Juan recently remarked to me. “They keep telling me that I’m not interested in their minds. They have a point. But when I tell them I’m interested in them as women, they burst into tears. Why don’t they want to be women? Why do they want to be less than a woman? That’s what mind is, only part of a woman.” [152]

The whole book—at least the chapter on sex—is basically one long, humorless JAP joke presented as pop sociology. Van den Haag’s values, in many ways like those of Cuddihy and Roith, are precisely the values anatomized (and anathematized) in

a spouse involved the efforts of a matchmaker who sought to discover a suitable pairing. Both members of the potential couple, after having met the “intended” or even “fated” one had the absolute right to refuse the match. God himself was understood in Jewish folklore to pick out appropriate partners for people even before birth; indeed, according to the Talmud this is what God does for a full third of his time. How, I ask, does such a pattern, only sketched out here, get translated into “If you want her, get her?” The important point, of course, is that what was seen from a traditional Jewish viewpoint as Gentile (and not as a refinement) was not love but *romance*.<sup>13</sup> This point is doubly significant when we pay attention to the gender politics of romance, especially its late nineteenth-century version. As Bram Dijkstra has made only too clear, much of the sexual imagining of Roith’s vaunted “Anglicism” in this period involved fantasies of women ripe and available for rape at any time, and this was typically expressed

---

Dijkstra’s book. Referring to the misogynist writers of the fin de-siècle, Dijkstra writes, “They discovered the glories of the ‘gratuitous act’ as evidence of their power” [204]. Van den Haag writes, “Like a river that is regulated to avoid floods or drying up, love and even sex, carefully and usefully regulated, lose their wild, spontaneous, impractical beauty” [149]. I suggest that this “impractical beauty” of which van den Haag speaks owes much to the “glories of the ‘gratuitous act.’”

<sup>13</sup> Roith’s critique of the androcentrism of traditional Judaism seems generally on the mark; women were extremely disenfranchised in traditional Jewish culture. She correctly observes, however, that “contrary to some feminist opinion, assumptions that women’s status has been generally lower in Judaism than in other religious and social systems, is without much foundation” [90]. But her apparent inability to read Hebrew sources in the original has occasionally led her disastrously off course. “The associations between women, sex, and sin can be clearly discerned in the powerful Talmudic edict kol be-ishah ervah—woman’s voice is an abomination—as well as in countless other warnings on the corrupting effect of the female and the dangers to male purity and piety of her presence” [92]. This conclusion is based on a gross mistranslation. “Ervah” does not mean “abomination.” It is simply a term for the nakedness of the genitals, male or female. A man is not allowed to pray in the presence of exposed genitals, male or female, his own or others’. What the Talmud is saying is that the female voice is so sexually stimulating to men that praying in the presence of a singing woman would be equivalent to praying in the presence of a naked one. There are, according to the Rabbis, places and times at which the exposure of the genitals is entirely appropriate, even praiseworthy, but prayer is not one of them. The text is undoubtedly sexist and androcentric, insofar as women are not discussed as subjects of desire or of prayer here at all. But it does not manifest the kind of misogyny, corrupting effects, or semi-demonic danger to piety or purity that Roith reads into it. Moreover, such representations and warnings of the “corrupting effect of the female” are rare, indeed nearly nonexistent, in talmudic culture, as I have argued at length in *Carnal Israel* [77–106].



in representations of primitives of one sort or another: cavemen, barbarians—Galician Jews?—whose cultures permitted such “free” sexual behavior [Dijkstra 109–18].<sup>14</sup> Particularly telling is Dijkstra’s summation of this ideology: “Many middle-class men dreamed of those simple times when the sight of a male was enough to make a woman cringe, *and when, if you wanted a woman, you simply reached out and took her*” [111; my emphasis]. Whose fantasies are being played out when van den Haag describes Eastern European traditional Jewish sexual ethics as “If you want her, get her,” and Cuddihy and then Roith repeat this nonsense? This seems an almost embarrassingly classical case of racist projection, whether from the Gentile’s or the “evolved” Western Jew’s pen.

In general, Roith’s book, like Cuddihy’s, is firmly ensconced within the Orientalist Whig tradition of perceiving Protestant culture as some sort of ideal to which humanity is progressing. This is manifest particularly in the following invidious comparison between “the rabbis” and John Donne: “Marriage ‘keeps us from sin,’ the rabbis said (Epstein 1967: 15), an attitude that was roundly condemned in Anglicism by the poet John Donne, who spoke of men using their wives ‘*in medicinam*’ (my emphasis, Szasz 1981: 108)” [Roith 129]. This extends even to approbation of the violent performances of European masculinity. Thus, she manages to write: “*Shtetl* values held that physical superiority was appropriate only for *goyim* but even the far more sophisticated Berlin Jews, according to Reik, regarded military honours cynically as ‘*Goyim Naches*’ (Reik 1962: 61)” [Roith 132]. Roith is at least more accurate than Cuddihy in her identification of “*goyim naches*.” Violence was not particularly highly regarded in traditional Jewish culture. What is remarkable, then, is her uncritical valorization of the opposing value-system of the Protestant bourgeoisie, who saw fighting (for example, dueling) as fundamental to manly honor. Thus she is surprised that “sophisticated” Berlin Jews are still “cynical” about military honors. Presumably she would not be so cynical. I would.

---

<sup>14</sup> Dijkstra’s exhaustive documentation of European fin-de-siècle images of women in both discourse and visual arts demonstrates eloquently the absence of any direct influence of Jewish gender ideologies on Freud’s theories of femininity. In further work, I plan to demonstrate, moreover, that premodern Jewish male fantasies bore little resemblance to those of the culture that produced Freud and Freud’s own fantasies.

In the light, then, of this astonishingly ethnocentric position, her account of Freud on sexuality and women is easily interpreted. If she has fully assimilated the ideology of war as manliness and sophistication, then it is not at all surprising that she has also fully assimilated the ideological mystification that romantic love (even courtly love) is somehow more respectful of women than are traditional cultures (nearly all) in which sexuality is understood to fulfill—not sublimate—physical desire and love to be the product of such mutual fulfillment and other joint effort and activity. It is only thus that she can arrive at such formulations as the following: “On the other hand, the Jewish sexual ethos has been described by Max Weber as being characterized by ‘the marked diminution of secular lyricism and especially of the erotic sublimation of sexuality’ (Weber 1964: 257), whose basis he finds in the ‘naturalism of the Jewish ethical treatment of sexuality.’ This I suggest, is closely related to the ancient Jewish perception of women as spiritually and intellectually inferior” [Roith 5]. My mother (to be sure, only one generation from the *shtetl* herself) always used to tell me that love is what happens after marriage. Is this indicative of her coarseness, or perhaps of an attitude of disparagement toward women on her part? Once more, Roith’s failure here is the inability to imagine other civilities, other cultural systems in which marriages are arranged by parents, as being just as worthy (and just as flawed) as “ours.”

Traditional Jewish culture may not have had room for romance (and was cynical about it when encountered in either its medieval or modern forms), but it was not cynical about love between married couples:

Our Rabbis have taught: One who loves his wife as he loves his own body and honors her more than he honors his body and raises his children in the upright fashion and marries them soon after sexual maturity, of him it is said, “And you shall know that your tent is at peace.” [Babylonian Talmud, Yevamoth 62b].

Roith’s thesis that Freud was influenced in his notions of female sexuality by Jewish culture is dependent on finding critical ways in which the culture is significantly different from the Christian culture that provides an alternative “source” for Freud’s thinking, and Roith completely fails at this task. Thus she writes: “Lacks correctly emphasizes, contrary to the theologians’ view, that the early events of *Genesis* have,

since the Christian era and its view of woman as temptress, also been associated by Jews at times with the Fall of Man (Lacks 1980: 93–7). We can see this in Isaac Bashevis Singer’s *The Family Moskat*, for example, where the attending doctor announces to the expectant mother, “The curse of Eve is upon you” [Roith 92]. This passage simply does not carry the evidential weight assigned to it by Roith. The “curse of Eve” is that she will have pain in bearing children, as the “curse of Adam” is his necessity to work hard to eat. This is explicit in Genesis and therefore denied by no traditional Judaism. The doctor here is merely speaking allusively (and euphemistically, *pace* Cuddihy) of the onset of labor. Note that I am not denying the sexism of the formation. There is nothing here, however, that constitutes the Hellenistic Jewish (and Christian) myth of woman as temptress and a cataclysmic Fall in Eden [Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 77–106]. Moreover, even if such notions are held “at times” by Jewish writers—I.B. Singer is hardly a sufficient source for generalization—this does not constitute a basis from which to constitute a description of Jewish culture in general, much less a foundation upon which to distinguish between Jewish and Christian culture, which is what Roith must do to make her thesis stick. My argument is not that if certain Jewish expressions are similar to Christianity then they are inauthentically Jewish but rather that they are certainly then not uniquely Jewish and, therefore, by the simplest canons of historical argumentation, cannot provide evidence for “Jewish influences on Freud’s theory of female sexuality.”<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the problem with Roith, as with Cuddihy, is that she treats Eastern European Judaism in perfect Orientalist tradition as a monolith, as a primitive, unchanging cultural entity.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, I insist

---

<sup>15</sup> This is in contrast to van den Haag, for instance, who writes, “The Jews have never accepted the Greek tradition of physical grace and beauty. Not only was that tradition alien; it was felt to be inconsistent with Jewish intellectual and moral values. Nor did the Jews ever accept the German cult of force, or the Roman cult of sex and cruelty. These ideals were irreconcilable with their own almost exclusively moral emphasis, though occasionally some Hellenistic ideas were at least temporarily fused with Judaic ones, ultimately to be repudiated in favor of the Jewish intellect and of Jewish ethics” [147], mobilizing images of an essential Jewish culture which can be contaminated by and purified of “influences” from outside. That is not the model of Jewish culture with which I work.

<sup>16</sup> Even worse, Cuddihy reifies all Jewry into a monolith. Thus, for him, “in the case of the Jews,” modernization was “an import situation” [179]. Some Western

once more, both Cuddihy and Roith are neocolonialists, for colonization, as Chandra Mohanty observes, “almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject” [52]

This assumption of homogeneity leads Roith into self-contradiction. In a paragraph that begins, “The adoption of masculine standards as the absolute norm is, of course, not restricted either to Freud or to Judaism. However, the linking of masculinity with the renunciation of wishes and obedience to the reality principle and their location at the root of all cultural endeavour, has a characteristically Mosaic ring to it.” And then continues a bit further on, “Ideal masculinity (although rarely achieved), is always associated with renunciation of submission to gods and to fathers as well as to the archaic libidinal strivings toward mothers. All intellectual, ethical, and spiritual achievements are associated with renunciation; it is renunciation that women, neurotics, and the religious are least capable of” [Roith 123]. There seems to me something fundamentally incoherent in this sentence. First of all, “renunciation of submission,” that is, presumably, independence and self-assertion, is hardly the same thing as renunciation of archaic libidinal strivings; indeed, they may often be opposites. This self-contradiction has its objective correlative in the inclusion of the “religious” in this list. Is it being claimed that by not being capable of renouncing their submission to gods and fathers, the religious are therefore incapable of spiritual achievements? Is the “Mosaic ring” to be found in the demand to *renounce* submission to the father god? In what sort of Judaism is such renunciation an ideal? None that I know of. If Freud demands of men, as he indeed does, that they renounce religion, which may include or even be constituted by a failure to renounce submission to the father, then he stands against Judaism—not with it. Moreover, if Cuddihy’s thesis is that the “id of the Yid was hid under the lid of Western decorum,” and Roith approves of Cuddihy, then how is it now that “it is renunciation of archaic libidinal strivings” that establishes the Freudian Jewish influence? I argue that the self-contradiction that we observe here in Roith is the

---

Jews, for example, in Italy, did, however, even have a Renaissance, and Jews were involved everywhere in western Europe in complicated ways in the invention of modernity.

product of the maintenance of her thesis that Freud was directly and primarily influenced by “Jewish” culture and that Jewish culture was a self-consistent monolith. Cuddihy’s thesis is simple: There is the (Y)id and the superego(y).<sup>17</sup> Its very simplicity constitutes both its coherence and its invalidity, but Roith cannot accept this. Both the id and the superego are Jewish for her, and it is this insistence that produces the fundamental incoherence that manifests itself in the surface contradictions of the above quotation. It simply cannot be that the same culture approved of immediate libidinal gratification—“If you want her, go get her”—and renunciation of libidinal strivings, at one and the same time, unless we assume a complex and contradictory culture, which this (like all others) was, but such an assumption would quite undermine the theories of both Cuddihy and Roith.<sup>18</sup>

There is no voice of the Eastern European Jew that speaks for herself here. Unimaginable to Cuddihy and Roith, perhaps, would be the notion that such Jewish “savages” could also provide a significant critique of the cultural and social patterns of their “evolved” Western brothers. I would close this section of my essay, then, with the following Eastern European yarn. God, on Yom Kippur, sends the Angel Gabriel to Earth to see what is going on. As it happens, it is the time for the prayer in which Jews sing, *inter alia*: “We are Your servants, and You are our Master. We are Your sheep, and You are our Shepherd. We are Your children, and You are our Father.” The somewhat dense angel, who only stays long enough to hear in each place one of these phrases (or perhaps, who has a very subtle sense of humor), reports back: “I was in London and there I found You have servants who dress like lords, and then I went to New York and discovered there that You have sheep as fat as pigs—but oh, what beautiful children You have in Berditchev!”<sup>19</sup> And there are other such stories, even stories in which Eastern European “primitives” mock Moses Mendelssohn’s enlightened disciples—those same disciples who were so discomfited by Solomon Maimon’s uncouth behavior when he first arrived at their

---

<sup>17</sup> My pun is no worse nor any more valid for Freud’s language than Cuddihy’s.

<sup>18</sup> That is to say, in Roith’s work it is implied but not thematized. What is thematized is a simple model of a univocal Jewish culture that “influenced” Freud. In Cuddihy, it is not even implied that Jewish culture might have had its own inner complexities and differentiations. It was too busy being tribal for that.

<sup>19</sup> As related to me by my wife’s late uncle Daniel Ben-Nahum, originally from Lithuania.

Salon. Certain Berlin Jews, having questions about faith, sent one of their number to Volozhin (the center of Lithuanian Jewish rationalist talmudism) to get answers. He returned after two years, and upon being asked if he had the answers, replied: No, but he had no more questions either. This anecdote, which I received through oral tradition, could be a double-edged sword. The context in which I heard it clearly read it as mocking the “Westerners.”

Eastern European Jews were as capable, it seems, of criticizing the *embourgeoisement* of their Western confreres as these were of looking with disdain at the Ostjude’s “coarseness!” Already then the Empire talked back. The real point that needs to be made is that nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewry were not a morally degenerate *people*, as Cuddihy seems to simply assume [passim]. Like any other human group, there were different forces and tendencies within this community—I am not proposing a *Fiddler on the Roof* idealization—and much misery and degradation, but this was also a time of the highest cultural creativity for Eastern European Jews, both in the rationalist wing of Lithuania and in the mystical-literary wing of Galicia, Hungary, and further East. Particularly telling is a comparison of the notions of modernity as the product of “differentiation,” which Cuddihy emphasizes following Parsons [10], and the racist social Darwinism of a Herbert Spencer, as discussed by Dijkstra [165–66 and 170 ff.]: “There is a clear correlation, for instance, between the notion that with the progress of evolution men and women had become more unlike and Herbert Spencer’s famous dictum, in *First Principles*, that ‘evolution is definable as a change from an incoherent homogeneity to a coherent heterogeneity’ (332)” [171].<sup>20</sup> Even if in 1974, Cuddihy conceivably could have been innocent of the implications of his own

---

<sup>20</sup> Note also the affinities with Otto Weininger—an association that I am sure would repel Cuddihy—for whom, according to Dijkstra, “Women [and Jews] were, in essence, human parasites. They could not live without men or without each other [Gemeinschaft]. In a sense they were interchangeable, undifferentiated beings, for the capacity to differentiate was a characteristic of the intellect, of genius. True genius yearned for true individualism and stood sternly and ruggedly alone . . . , all of which served to show that regressive, materialistic anti-individualistic political philosophies such as communism were basically the weak conceptions of benighted men who, like Karl Marx, were suffering from terminal cases of effeminacy” [219–20]. I do not, of course, mean to associate Cuddihy with Weininger’s misogyny, only to show how deeply problematic the ideas of social evolution and “differentiation” to which he subscribes truly are.

Social Darwinism, by 1987, when his book was republished and when he explicitly refuses to retract a single word, he certainly should not have been innocent. I could assure Cuddihy that Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin (and my grandmother) were just as capable of making differentiations—although to be sure different ones—as his modernized people are: “Differentiation on the level of the cultural system is the power to make *distinctions* between previously fused—*confused*—ideas, values, variables, concepts” [11; his emphasis].<sup>21</sup> Marx’s *On the Jewish Question* and Herzl’s disdain for these Jews are not to be read as accurate reflections of but as sickly, alienated disdain for these embarrassing others, a point I will make briefly in the last section of this paper. Volozhin was hardly a site strange to *theoria*, and that is, in a sense, my whole point.

*Freud and the Battle with Racism: Gilman and Geller*

In a series of quite stunning publications, two scholars, Sander Gilman and Jay Geller, have been pursuing closely related trains of thought regarding the question of how Freud’s analysis was materially generated out of the context of European anti-Semitism. The starting point of their view of the relation of psychoanalysis to “Jewishness” is perhaps best captured in the pithy quotation that Gilman provides from the work of Peter Homans, “Psychoanalysis emerged as the negative image, so to speak, of its Jewish surroundings” [71; qtd. in Gilman 4]. In other words, whatever the impression that Jewishness had made, somehow psychoanalysis defended against it by producing an opposite image point for point, as “a key to its wax impression.” Notice that this position is itself a negative impression of the Cuddihy-Roith notion that Freud was somehow directly representing Jewish gender/sex ideology in his positing of the id and in his descriptions of female sexuality; in a sense, the Gilman-Geller line of thought is the antithesis to that of Cuddihy-Roith (in this aspect, of course; in many

---

<sup>21</sup> In my work-in-progress, *Antiphallus: Jewishness as a Gender*, for which this essay is a prolegomenon, there will be a chapter entitled *Edelkeit*, in which I will argue that there was a “native” tradition of “civility” among Eastern European Jewish cultural elites. The ordeal was the product of conflict not between coarseness and civility but between two different cultures of gendering. Once more, I emphasize, Cuddihy is not anti-Semitic but neocolonialist in his ethos [see now: *Unheroic Conduct*].

other ways Cuddihy and Roith are very distinct from each other). If Cuddihy-Roith perceive Freud as very much implicated in traditional Jewish culture and covertly responding to or reflecting it, Gilman-Geller perceive his Jewishness as virtually only a reactive reflex to anti-Semitism. (By setting this up as a dialectic, I prefigure the third section of this paper, in which a “synthesis” will be proposed.)

Although the research pursued by Gilman and Geller has many facets, in this essay I will concentrate just on the nexus of race, sex, and gender that they uncover as a salient factor in the generation of “Freud.” The first key result of their research is the recognition of just how powerful the linkage of male Jews with women was in European culture.<sup>22</sup> An exemplary text is Jay Geller’s “A Glance at the Nose.” In this paper, Geller seeks to explain a parapraxis in one of Freud’s papers that has become a crux, namely, that when Freud is explaining the *Glanz* (shine) on the nose as a sexual fetish in a case history, he relates it to the English word *glance*, and not the Latin word for penis, *glans*, and this in spite of the fact that Freud himself theorizes that the fetish is a surrogate for the absent maternal penis. He ignores, moreover, a fact otherwise well known to him, namely, that noses are often a substitute for penises in popular culture and psychic substitutions [Geller, “Glance” 428–29].<sup>23</sup> A further difficulty with this passage is that the entire case of the “glance on the nose” is cited apparently gratuitously and not at all worked into the argument. Geller sets out to solve this crux by “uncovering feminizing metonyms of the male Jewish body by which the Central European social and scientific imagination constructed the Jew” [429–30]. This construction of the Jewish male body had a profound effect, according to Geller, on Freud’s self-image:

Freud’s fetishized discourse, like his discourse on fetishes, betrays as well a concern about sexual difference. His account of the bloody aftermath of Eckstein’s operation and his reworking of the event in his dream of Irma’s injection, in which he clearly identifies with his patient Irma, reveal that these scenes problematized his own gender identity. Indeed Freud (1985) notes that Eckstein wielded the maternal phallus when she

---

<sup>22</sup> Excellent work on this topic has been done also by Garber [233] in quite a different context.

<sup>23</sup> See also Sander L. Gilman, *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin De Siècle* [93–106].



said to him when he returned to the near-death scene he had earlier fled: “So this is the strong sex” (117 [8 March 1895]). Both Freud’s subsequent letters to Fliess and his dreams find him attempting to respond to this taunt and to refute its implications of unmaning. [“Glace” 436–37]

Moreover, when read fully, as Geller does in his “(G)nos(e)ology” essay, the dream of Irma’s injection reveals as well that Freud was concerned not only with his own problematic gender identity but with that of all (male) Jews [“(G)nos(e)ology” 264–65]. For Geller, “Freud found himself embedded in a matrix of social discourses that increasingly associated (male) Jews with women” [“Glace” 437]. Thus we find Geller’s dazzling conclusion:

In sum, the fetishized nose as the substitute for the circumcised penis belies that feminine-coded Jewish difference. On the one hand, Freud’s elision of odor and his failure to integrate his “most extraordinary case” into his argument may be an attempt to disavow the connection of Jews to the perverse sexuality and problematic gender identity which are constitutive of the notion of fetishism. On the other hand, his gratuitous example, like all fetishes, “remains a token of triumph over the threat of [Jewish difference] and a protection against it” (Freud 1927, 154). Freud’s nose leaves a trace of the inscription of ethnic—and gender—difference on the male Jewish body. [“Glace” 441]

Working from insights like these, both Geller’s and his own, Sander Gilman has produced a most extraordinary hypothesis to explain Freud’s gender theories, namely, that they are a defense against and displacement of statements about race. This is the leading argument of his *Freud, Race, and Gender*. The heart of the argument is contained in a section called “The Transmutation of the Rhetoric of Race into the Construction of Gender” [36–48], and since the question of gender is my theme here, it is on this section of the book that I will concentrate. Gilman’s major claim is encapsulated in the sentence “The rhetoric of race was excised from Freud’s scientific writing and appeared only in his construction of gender” [37]. Gilman is claiming that the key to femininity in Freud was molded via the “wax impression” of racial ideas about (male) Jews: “What Freud constructed in his image of the feminine was the absolute counterimage of the Jew” [47]. Freud both erases his racial specificity and effaces his anxiety about it by adopting in public the persona of the “neutral” scientist and the ideology that the mind has no race. The crux here is that Freud clearly held racial notions about the Jewish essence in private,

so that if his ideas about women are a displacement of secret thoughts and fears about Jewish men, then (putting the best construction on it—and why shouldn't we?) we have a case of persecution and the art of writing. "The language Freud used [in private] about the scientific unknowability of the core of what makes a Jewish male a male Jew was parallel to that which he used [in public] concerning the essence of the feminine" [37]. In perhaps the most stunning moment of the argument, Gilman claims that the use of the "Dark Continent" metaphor for female sexuality is specifically determined by the fact that Jews were considered blacks by European anti-Semites [38]. The bottom line is that "The Aryan is the 'healthy,' 'normal' baseline that determines the pathological difference of the male Jew. In Freud's discussion of the nature of the female body, the distinction between male Aryan and male Jew is repressed, to be inscribed on the body of the woman" [40]. Gilman has discovered that in Viennese parlance of Freud's time, *der Jude* was a usual slang term for the clitoris, most likely, as Gilman claims, because both the clitoris and the circumcised penis were read as truncated or reduced versions of the truly masculine organ. In other words, the Jew's penis was inscribed by the anti-Semitic racial discourse as female. Freud's reinscription of the clitoris as male, then, is a code or cipher for the reinscription of the circumcised penis as male, and thus of the Jewish man as male as well. Another way of saying this is that Freud, by erasing the essential, biological difference between male and female, as he does—contra popular opinion [Mitchell 8]—is erasing as well the biologized difference between Jew and Aryan. I submit that this is stunning stuff. It shows, moreover, how complicated cultural poetics is, for Freud's greatest insight, that sexual difference is made and not born, and also his darkest moment of gross misogyny are both made to rest ultimately on a base of self-defense against anti-Semitic hostilities.

There are, however, other crucial moments in which I am much less convinced by Gilman's arguments. Thus of Freud's dissociation of sexuality from procreation and the assumption of a pleasure principle, Gilman argues, "By eliminating reproduction as the goal of the sexual, Freud destroyed the argument that Jewish sexual practices (circumcision or endogamous marriage) were at the root of the pathology of the Jews" [42]. I don't get it. This seems to me to be almost totally a non sequitur. Whether or not reproduction is the telos of sexuality, sex nevertheless results often enough in babies, or perhaps it is

more appropriate to point out that in Freud's time, at any rate, babies came from nowhere else, so whatever pathologies were identified as common to Jews owing to sexual practices would still be in place. In its most compact form, Gilman's thesis is double: a claim that both Freud's ethnological writings and his writings on female sexuality are engendered by his concern for racism against Jews. In the ethnological texts (especially *Moses and Monotheism*, although to my recollection Gilman does not make this explicit), Freud

counters the charge of the special nature of the Jews by illustrating (using an ethnopsychological model) how the Jews, as a group, underwent the same Oedipal struggles as any other collective could have experienced. This view places the origin of Jewish difference in the past and understands it in terms of a universal model of experience. On the other hand, Freud explodes the charge of the inherent difference of the Jews by subsuming the qualities ascribed to the Jew and the Aryan into the female and the male. [43]

Another way of seeing and saying this is that Freud ends up in *Moses and Monotheism* masculinizing the Jews over against Christianity (in *Future of an Illusion*) as a defense against the anti-Semitic representation of Jews as female or feminized.<sup>24</sup> Gilman never presents a clear moral position or critique of these strategies of Freud's—which is not to claim (or even hint) that he assents to them. On the one hand, we should not forget that when the Moses book was written, the myth of the Jews as a degenerate third sex had already unleashed its murderous

---

<sup>24</sup> As Geller has brilliantly suggested, there is strong evidence within *Moses and Monotheism* to the effect that Freud's entire description of Judaism's advance in intellectuality through its insistence on the name-of-the-father over against the claims of the mother may be "a reaction formation—not by the ancient Hebrews against Egypt, but by Freud against the association of Jews with women made by his contemporaries" [Geller, "A Paleontological View of Freud's Study of Religion: Unearthing the Leitfossil Circumcision" 62]; see also the much tamer version of this claim in Robert [107–08]. In his recent *God's Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has provided some more dramatic confirmation for this reading of Freud's work. He shows that Freud draws back from a conclusion that seems ineluctable from his argument, namely that monotheism predicts representations of the male worshipper as feminized vis-à-vis the male God and as a fantasized erotic object for the male God, thus producing the tension that leads eventually to the abstraction—the unmaning, if you will—of the deity. Eilberg-Schwartz explains Freud's reluctance to come to this conclusion as a product of his fear that it would amount to representing Jewish men as feminized, thus playing into the hands of that representation of himself as Jewish male that he was trying so hard to avoid.

forces in Europe; on the other hand, we must now carefully separate out the politically (ethically) useful from the retrograde in Freud's responses to the condition of the Jews and the ways that it impinged on his theorization of male and female. In particular, we cannot ignore the ways in which his transmutation of race into gender was not in opposition to the prevailing winds of the *fin de siècle* but fully complicit with them [Dijkstra 167]. If Jewish men were women in Europe, all women were also Jewish and "Negro" as well, and Freud's "Dark Continent" begins to sound even more ominous. Race into gender and gender into race is a much wider (and more disturbing and dangerous) phenomenon than this text of Gilman's would let us see. Insofar as it did not affect only Jewish men, Freud's participation in it, in defense of himself as Jewish male according to Gilman's thesis, is much more profoundly disturbing than Gilman allows. It is ultimately complicitous with both the extreme misogyny that marked the period as well as colonialist racism, both of which are finally to be found in Freud's developmental theories and especially as encoded in his acceptance of the principle that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" [cf. Seshadri-Crooks]. Gilman is much too easy on Freud here.

Now one way that the negative aspect of Freud's *fin-de-siècle* thought can be redeemed is, it seems to me, by retrieving and transvaluing the delineation of male Jews as female, arguing that historically Jewish men were indeed differently gendered from the general European ideal. This enables us to see that Freud's elision of the borders between race and gender as well as his insistence that male and female are not fixed binaries (which Gilman reads as a further "desire to abandon them in a biology of race" [46]) need not only be negative strategies of displacement and scapegoating but can also be positive contributions to a new theorizing of race/gender systems, systems in which we read race and gender not as independent variables but as coimbricating and covarying exigencies of identity formation. This gives another sense to Fanon's famous *cri de coeur*, "At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man" [8], reading it in the same way as Hortense Spillers's "There is no such thing as a black woman." On this reading, there is no such thing as a Jewish man or woman either, since "man" and "woman" as we (all of us) understand them are products of the dominant cultural system.

In the third section of this paper, I will outline a new way of

approaching the question of the material base of Jewishness in the formation of the superstructure of psychoanalysis, one that I hope provides a combination of the best of the Cuddihy, Roith, and Gilman hypotheses while avoiding their pitfalls. It also adds, I trust, to the Geller position (which I accept in the main) by avoiding its “lachrymosity,” defined in Jewish historiography as the assumption that Jews were primarily or only victims and that their cultural productions are primarily or exclusively reactive in nature.

*A Synthesis: Freud and the (De)Colonized Psyche*<sup>25</sup>

In this final section of the paper I wish to propose another model for looking at the relationships between Freud’s ideas about femininity and his Jewish situation. I suggest that if we combine different elements from all of the above models with each other and use them to correct each other, we will come up with a much suppler and more useful way of describing these connections. From Cuddihy I adopt the idea of the Jew as postcolonial subject. My account (and especially evaluation) of postcoloniality could not, however, be more different from Cuddihy’s.

In order to understand Freud on both gender and sexuality we have to consider the material conditions of his life as postcolonial male, that is, as the subject who has come into contact with the dominating society and is partly free to act out a mediation of one sort or another between the “native” and the Metropolitan cultures. In other words, following the practice of certain critics (and obviously not others), I am using the term “postcolonial” here to refer to a particular type of cultural situation. These are the people who live “lives in between,” in Leo Spitzer’s (the younger’s) evocative term.<sup>26</sup> The reason

---

<sup>25</sup> Some of the following argument is taken from another paper of mine, entitled “A Sharp Practice: Little Hans’s Circumcision and the Subject of Colonialism.” In that version I also pursue an elaborate comparison between Freud’s and Fanon’s writings on gender and sexuality, which has been dropped for the present context. “What Does a Jew Want,” *Discourse* 19, 1997: 21–52.

<sup>26</sup> I prefer not to use the term “assimilation,” because of its implicit assumption that previously one could speak of an unassimilated, that is, pure cultural situation—on either side. In all but the most exceptional cases, it is now clear that cultures are always in contact to some degree or another and always changing in response to those contacts, thus always assimilating. This term, then, does not sufficiently evoke

for using this term is precisely because this cultural situation is generated par excellence by the political situation of postcoloniality, albeit not exclusively so. It should further be pointed out that the “post” in “postcolonial” refers to the psychological and cultural situation caused by colonization, including its effects during political decolonization, which does not imply, by any means, cultural decolonization [Nandy xi, xvi]. “Postcolonial” is, then, more like the anthropological term “postcontact” than like “postwar.” By using the term “postcolonial,” I do not mean to commodify a term that represents an extraordinarily vigorous critical discourse grounded in a certain political, historical situation, but rather to both acknowledge and enter into dialogue with that discourse through extension of the term to the significantly analogous Jewish situation in modern Europe. This move is perhaps parallel in an interesting fashion to the ways that the term “Diaspora” is being appropriated (in a fully positive sense) within postcolonial discourses.

The first step in the argument, then, is to assert that the Jews of premodern Europe are best described—for certain purposes—as a colonized people, as one of the internally colonized peoples of Europe. In “The Other within and the Other Without,” Jonathan Boyarin argues that Jewish existence in Europe bore significant analogies to the situation of colonized peoples outside of Europe. Thus the other Boyarin refers to “the contrast between Jewish carnality and Christian spirituality—one of the prime figures that will be carried forward into the thematics of colonialism [including Cuddihy’s!], with Christian remaining in place and ‘the savage’ being substituted for the Jew” [88]. A typical late nineteenth-century slur of the Jews is that they have no language at all, rendering Jews virtual Calibans, “reduced to the level of the beast” [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 215–16; cf. Greenblatt]. The analogy between “the Jew” and the colonized has also been actuated by Cixous in an explicit allusion to Fanon: “Me, too. The routine ‘our ancestors, the Gauls’ was pulled on me. But I was born in Algeria,

---

the particular cultural anxieties of the transition from colonial domination to emancipation. Furthermore, the term “assimilation” seems to imply a sort of stability in the “target culture” to which one is assimilating, whereas in reality, European culture at the time of Jewish Emancipation was more in flux than it was stable. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say (as Martin Jay has emphasized to me in a somewhat different context) that Jewish cultural activities played a role in the production of European modernity, just as we are coming to recognize more and more the crucial cultural role of colonialism and the colonies in producing European modernity. See also J. Boyarin [82].

and my ancestors lived in Spain, Morocco, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Germany” [Cixous and Clément 71].<sup>27</sup>

If the Jews of premodern Europe are a colonized people, then the Emancipation is a decolonization and like any other produces that cultural condition referred to as postcoloniality. The postcolonial situation can be defined (even within the period in which the colonies had not yet been “granted” political independence) as the situation of the migrant, of the hybrid subject whose cultural world is doubled. It is in this sense that I will be using the term here:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. [Fanon 18]

Any Jew wishing to escape his material and moral isolation was forced, whether he liked it or not, to learn a foreign language. [Anzieu 203]

Marthe Robert has eloquently delineated the situation of German Jewish intellectuals around the *fin de siècle*. She describes them as divided subjects, trying as hard as they can to wear German masks but inevitably revealing their Jewish skins. The harder such Jews tried to efface their Jewishness, the more rejected they were [Robert 17].

The success of this transformation is marked in great part through language: abandonment of Creole (Yiddish “Jargon”) for French (“High” German) with greater or lesser facility [Fanon 27–28; Hutton]. The internal hierarchy is created between the more “civilized” subject of the Antilles [Fanon 25–26] (Vienna, Berlin) and the still “native, uncivilized” subjects of Dahomey or the Congo (Vilna, Warsaw). Gilman evokes this moment eloquently:

In the eyes of the formerly Yiddish-speaking convert [who had described the Hebrew words in Yiddish as so deformed as to appear “Hottentot”!], Yiddish moved from being a language of a “nation within nations” to a language of the “barbarian.” But for the Jew, convert or not, these barbarians must be localized, like the Hottentot, in some remote geographic place to separate them from the image of the German Jew. Their locus is the East. [Jewish Self-Hatred 99]

---

<sup>27</sup> But see the [only partially fair] critique of Cixous in J. Boyarin [“Other Within,” 102–03]; I too will return to a discussion of Cixous, arguing that the distortions of her position are yet another effect of the colonized/postcolonial Jewish situation.

The German-speaking Jew who applies the stereotypes of the anti-Semite to the Yiddish-speaking “Ostjude,” including Freud’s teacher Theodor Billroth [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 219], forms almost an uncanny analogue to the “evolved” colonial subject with his contempt for his native place, people, language, and culture. The “Ostjude” was for the German-speaking Viennese Jew what the “Unto Whom”—“the ignorant, illiterate, pagan Africans . . . unto whom God swore in his wrath etc.”—were to a Europeanized Yoruba, such as Joseph May [Spitzer 42].

In general, the prescriptions for solving the “Jewish problem,” whether of “evolved” Jews or of anti-Semites, involved a version of the civilizing mission. Thus Walter Rathenau “sees as the sole cure the integration of the Jew into German education (*Bildung*)” [Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred* 223; Cuddihy 25; see also Spitzer 26; Berkowitz 2–3, 99]. Even more pointed are the ideas of another assimilated Jew who holds that “the Jew, like Nietzsche’s Superman, is progressing from a more primitive stage of development, characterized by religious identity, to a higher stage of development, characterized by the present identification with cultural qualities of the German community, to eventually emerge whole and complete” [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 225]. Gilman clearly notes the analogies between this situation and the discourse of colonialism: “By observing the Ostjude, says the Western Jew, we can learn where we have come from, just as Hegel uses the African black as the sign of the progress of European civilization” [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 253]. We can imagine the effect that such internalized representations would have had on the transplanted Freud whose mother spoke only Galician Yiddish all of her life [Hutton 11; contra Anzieu 204 and *passim*].

Although the (br)other Boyarin explicitly mobilizes the paradigm of the other within in order to interrupt the spatial figurations of some postcolonial discourses—the West and the rest—[“Other Within” 81–82],<sup>28</sup> the move of Freud’s family steadily westward, from Latvia

---

<sup>28</sup> A point I came to appreciate only after a seminar with Homi Bhabha at the School of Criticism and Theory in the summer of 1993, which inspired much of the thought in this essay. J. Boyarin is particularly useful on the problematics of identifying time and space as separate coordinates: “There are close genealogical links between the ‘Cartesian coordinates’ of space and time, and the discreet, sovereign state, both associated with European society since the Renaissance” [“Space, Time”]. This is not to trivialize the effects of either anti-Semitism or imperialism, à la Cuddihy.



and Galicia [Hutton 11], to Příbor (Freiberg) in Bohemia, and then in Freud's childhood to Vienna, can be read as a move through time from the colonial to the transitional postcolonial situation. Time and space here are not independent coordinates in a Cartesian system but strangely equivalent to or mappable onto each other. "We speak of distant times; we also think of long ago places, if not in so many words" [J. Boyarin, "Space, Time"; see also Dijkstra 343]. Galicia was, for Freud, a long-ago place. "Bildung" as a move through time into "modernity" is thus the functional equivalent of an imperialist move through space that imposes the Kantian European universal on all of the world [Lloyd 36].

It was in this context that the crisis of gender and sexuality was produced in Freud (as in Weininger). I am suggesting that the internalized self-contempt that the colonized male comes to feel for his disempowered situation—represented in the case of Jews by the affect surrounding circumcision—is a powerful force for the production of the twin diseases of misogyny and homophobia in the postcolonial situation, precisely because their situation has been misrecognized as feminized. The intrapsychic mechanism is a kind of splitting occasioned by the "move" from one subject position—that of the colonized—to another in which there is a partial identification with the colonizer. The subject begins to see himself with the eyes of his oppressor and thus to wish to abject that in himself which he now identifies as contemptible by projecting it onto women and gay men.

There is a remarkable passage in "Little Hans" in which I think Freud reveals willy-nilly (as it were) the connections between internalized anti-Semitism, the postcolonial situation of the Jews of fin-de-siècle Vienna, and misogyny:

I cannot interrupt the discussion so far as to demonstrate the typical character of the unconscious train of thought which I think there is here reason for attributing to little Hans. The castration complex is the deepest unconscious root of anti-semitism; for even in the nursery little boys hear that a Jew has something cut off his penis—a piece of his penis, they think—and this gives them the right to despise Jews. And there is no stronger unconscious root for the sense of superiority over women. Weininger (the young philosopher who, highly gifted but sexually deranged, committed suicide after producing his remarkable book *Geschlecht und Character* [1903]), in a chapter that attracted much attention, treated Jews and women with equal hostility and overwhelmed them with the same insults. Being a neurotic, Weininger was completely

under the sway of his infantile complexes; and from that standpoint what is common to Jews and women is their relation to the castration complex. [198–99]

This text could be interpreted to mean that the castration complex, in the sense of attribution of castration to women, is that which is “the unconscious root for the sense of superiority over women.” However, the text is also readable as meaning that hearing about circumcision is the unconscious root of misogyny, just as it is the root of anti-Semitism. Here (inadvertently, I think) Freud is suggesting the deepest unconscious root for his own (Jewish) misogyny, namely a Jewish male reaction to the accusation from outside of their own “castration” or “feminization.” The key to my reading is the occlusion of Little Hans’s Jewish identity in Freud’s account. I suggest that this occultation of the little boy’s identity is a cipher for Freud’s own attempt, through the theory of castration, to elude the psychic effect that his own circumcision had on him. For Gilman, Otto Weininger is cited by Freud as “an example of the problematic relationship of the Jew to his circumcised penis” [*Freud, Race, and Gender* 77], that is, as a sort of analysand. Thus, “Freud has evoked the Jewish ‘scientist’ Otto Weininger as an anti-Semite.” Gilman goes on to argue that

Weininger is like the little (non-Jewish) boy in the nursery who hears about the Jews cutting off penises, except that he, of course, knows that it is true. His hatred of the Jew is “infantile,” according to Freud, since it remains fixed at that moment in all children’s development when they learn about the possibility of castration. Jewish neurotics like Weininger focus on the negative difference of their bodies from ones that are “normal,” and use this difference, like their evocation of the bodies of women, to define themselves. [80]

This strikes me as altogether too benign a reading of Freud’s text (although by no means an impossible one). Where Gilman reads Freud’s Weininger as an analysand, I will read him as a fellow analyst. Another way of saying this would be that both Little Hans in Freud’s text and indeed Freud himself are like the little *non-Jewish* boy in the nursery.

How can this reading be validated over against Gilman’s suggestion that only Weininger is that little “non-Jewish” boy? It is the possession of the penis that is the unconscious root of misogyny, than which there is no stronger. Weininger treated women and Jews with equal hostility, because neither of them possesses the penis; they are both castrated “from the standpoint of the infantile complexes,” the

stage at which Weininger was fixated. So far, so good. This paraphrase supports Gilman's reading perfectly. Freud is an anatomist of anti-Semitism and of Jewish self-hatred as well. However, when we delve more deeply into the text, we will see that not all is nearly that smooth. The operative question is: What about Freud? Where is he in this picture? The key, again, is "Hans's" suppressed circumcision.

Freud argues that in the young boy, hearing about the circumcision of Jews would arouse fears of being castrated, just as knowing about women would arouse similar fears. These two parallel anxieties produce the twin affects of misogyny and anti-Semitism. As the castration complex is "resolved," or "dissolved," these unrealistic fears, one would think, ought to give way then to a "normal" (noninfantile) appreciation of the equality of women and Jews. However, on Freud's own account, the castration fantasy—the assumption that women have something missing and are inferior—remains the unconscious root of misogyny and clearly not only in infants, since Freud considers the sense of male superiority to be a given in adult males and not a marginal and pathological form. After all, it is the "repudiation of femininity that is the bedrock of psychoanalysis," in Freud's famous 1937 formulation. As Jessica Benjamin has put it, "We might hope that the boy's 'triumphant contempt' for women would dissipate as he grew up—but such contempt was hardly considered pathological" [160]. Similarly, as Freud projects it, the fantasy that Jews have something missing remains the unconscious fantasy that produces anti-Semitism in adults as well. Neither of these neuroses is ever completely resolved in adulthood. Now the Jewish boy, even more than the Gentile boy, obviously knows that something has been cut off his penis, which is not to say, of course, that I am in agreement with the concept that he would interpret this as a castration. Not only has he heard in the nursery about circumcision, it has undoubtedly been explained to him and, moreover, he has most likely attended circumcision ceremonies for other Jewish infants. This could very well have been the case for Little Hans—although, to be sure, he had a little sister and no brother—and almost certainly for Freud himself. Not only of Weininger but of Freud could we say that "he, of course, knows that it is true" that Jews have a piece of penis cut off. By occluding the fact of Hans's Jewishness, and by obscuring the role of his own here, Freud is hiding something. I would suggest that what he is hiding is a claim that Jewish knowledge of their own circumcision must inevitably produce

in the Jew a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the Gentile—and that Freud himself shares that sense of inferiority. We have here not only an anatomy of misogyny and of anti-Semitism—both read as near inevitabilities—but also of Jewish self-contempt, also read as a sort of inevitability. In other words, I am suggesting that Freud essentially *accepts* Weininger's argument, indeed that that is why Freud cites him here and not as an example of the pathology of anti-Semitism in Gentiles, for which he would be a rather strange example indeed. According to my reading, then, once again, Freud is more identified with than differentiated from Weininger. If indeed as Gilman claims, "Freud seems not to have responded to Weininger's self-hatred as the reflection of his identity crisis" [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 251], this would be, on my reading, a classic example of denial and defense. Hidden behind the figure of Weininger in Freud's note and even of the incognito Jew Little Hans is none other than Freud, "the specialist on the inner nature of the Jew" [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 242], and thus he, Freud, effectively reveals one strand of his own complex and conflictual "inner nature" as the "Jewish anti-Semite."<sup>29</sup>

I suggest that Freud, looking at his circumcised penis from the position of the "whole" man's gaze, recovers his "maleness," as this is defined within the dominant culture, by pathologizing his male and female enemies as "feminized." In other words, the very misogyny and homophobia of the colonizer that have been directed against the colonized become internalized, then projected out, and ultimately turned against women and gays. It is not I who have these despised characteristics; it is they! This move cannot but have effects on women and gays within the dominated group. I think the psychic mechanism here is clear enough. They demasculinize us; we will assert our value by abjecting everything that stinks of the effeminate, the female, the homosexual. Freud's self-described "overcoming [*Übermannung*]" (literally, *over-manning*) of his "homosexual cathexis" [qtd. in Jones 2:83] seems to me to be cut of the same psychic cloth as his psychic "bedrock" of the repudiation of femininity.

---

<sup>29</sup> See Gilman [*Jewish Self-Hatred* 268], where he writes, "Freud's scientific German, at least when he sits down to write his book on humor, is a language tainted by Weininger's anti-Semitism," a claim that seems to contradict his later argument that Freud pathologized and thus rejected Weininger's anti-Semitism. In 1986, it seems, Gilman was closer to the perspective on Freud that I am adopting here than he is in his latest work.

It is here that Gilman's and Geller's work must be mobilized, for Freud's insistence on the repudiation of femininity is best read, I would suggest, as the repudiation of that feminized position into which Jewish men are put by European culture. I have already mentioned Gilman's stunning citation of the clitoris as "the Jew" and its implications for Jewish self-imaging:

Thus the clitoris was seen as a "truncated penis." Within the turn-of-the-century understanding of sexual homology, this truncated penis was seen as an analogy not to the body of the idealized male, with his large, intact penis, but to the circumcised ("truncated") penis of the Jewish male. This is reflected in the popular fin de siècle Viennese view of the relationship between the body of the male Jew and the body of the woman. The clitoris was known in the Viennese slang of the time simply as the "Jew" (*Jud*). The phrase for female masturbation was "playing with the Jew." [*Freud, Race, and Gender* 38–39]

The Jew is a clitoris. He has no phallus. Freud's project can be described, at least in part, as getting the phallus for his male self/People.<sup>30</sup> Freud's now famous reaction to his father's story of having "passively" picked his hat up after it was knocked off by a Christian anti-Semite is certainly relevant here. Freud explicitly refers to this incident as an example of "unheroic conduct on the part of a big, strong man" [*SE* 4: 197]. In a perceptive interpretation, William J. McGrath argues that the hat in the story would have been understood by Freud as a symbol for the phallus, so "the knocking off of his father's hat could have directly symbolized to him the emasculation of Jakob Freud" [McGrath 64]. Here we have, I hypothesize, a (the?) source of the castration (circumcision?) complex and penis (foreskin) envy. What Gilman understands as the development of normal Jews who "overcome their anxiety about their own bodies by being made to understand that the real difference is not between their circumcised penises and those of uncircumcised males, but between themselves and castrated females" on this reading is precisely the root of the misogyny of the (de)colonized Jew, including that piece of psychoanalytic misogyny known as the castration complex/penis envy.

I am suggesting that the binary opposition phallus/castration conceals the circumcised penis. Both the "idealization of the phallus, whose

---

<sup>30</sup> As can Roith's, paradoxically, with her apparent valorization of the high regard for "military honors."

integrity is necessary for the edification of the entire psychoanalytical system" [Johnson 225] and the flight to Greek cultural models and metaphors signal the imbrication of this production in the affect of the colonized person. In psychoanalytical terms, the Oedipus complex is Freud's "family romance," in the exact sense of the term. He is fantasizing (unconsciously) that he is not the circumcised Schelomo, the son of Jakob, but the uncircumcised, phallic, and virile Greek Oedipus, the son of Laius [cf. Anzieu 195], just as earlier he had consciously fantasized that he was Hannibal, the son of the heroic Hamilcar, and not the son of his "unheroic" Jewish father.<sup>31</sup>

In my account of Roith's work above, I have discussed (and rejected) only one of its themes, namely the thesis of "direct" cultural influence, or adoption by Freud, of allegedly traditional Jewish ideologies of gender. There is another theme, however, that runs through her book, integrated only with difficulty with the first one, namely, that it was the conflict between traditional Jewish gendering and the gendering of the dominant culture that gave rise to the tensions that produced Freud's ideas. This "other" thesis in Roith is much closer to my own construction. Roith cites the views of Percy Cohen from personal interviews [79, 82] and then builds on them [85]. Thus where Roith writes that "the exilic Jew, because he lacked political autonomy and national rights to self-defense, felt himself to be seen as—and at some profound level to be—castrated" [88], I argue that this gaze of the Jew on "him"self is not a product of the exilic situation but of a misrecognition of Jewish cultural difference in the transition to the postcolonial situation. Jewish maleness, I suggest, was different, in part precisely in the rejection of such performances of masculinity as dueling and courtly love. What is perhaps most novel about my argument is my assertion that the Jewish pattern of male subjectivity was not just a reactive artifact of the "unnatural" situation of Diaspora Jews but a positive cultural product. It felt like a castration only when Jews began to look at themselves with the eyes of the dominant culture.

---

<sup>31</sup> In another essay, "Freud's Baby, Fliess's Maybe," I will discuss the particulars of this theory.

*Demystification or Reduction?*

I do not mean this suggestion to be reductive. In another place I have argued that Freud's account of sexual differentiation as *nonbiological* in its foundations is in some ways much more liberatory than, for instance, the account of Karen Horney, whereby people are born male and female. The castration complex thus represents a theoretical advance over naturalized views of sexual difference, which are also necessarily heteronormative in ways that Freud's theories allow us to avoid. The point, then, is certainly not to disqualify Freud's contribution by locating it in a particularly social circumstance. Rather, it would seem that the function of an argument such as this is to help contextualize those places where Freud's thesis seems incoherent, unnecessary, or otherwise unhelpful, that is, not its moments of insight but its moments of blindness. There seems to be a signal blindness in Freud's unwillingness to see any possibility for figuring sexual difference other than the phallus, which, as Lacan has *correctly* interpreted, is equivalent to the name-of-the-father. Why, I am asking, was a thinker who was in so many ways so willing and able to break the paradigms of his culture here seemingly unable to do so? As I have suggested above, Roith's thesis that he is directly reflecting Jewish gender ideology simply does not hold up (this point will be further developed throughout my current research). As Malcolm Bowie remarks (of Lacan, but the same point could be made of Freud), he shows a "monomaniacal refusal to grant signifying power to the female body"; "the drama of possession and privation, of absence and presence, of promise and threat, could be retained and perhaps even enhanced if the principals were breast, clitoris, vagina, and uterus." But Lacan himself, Bowie continues, "tirelessly suggests that any such transfer of symbolic power to the female would be heresy, and bring the Symbolic order itself to the verge of ruin" [Bowie 147]. Lacan's "monomania" is his own; Bowie's use of the term "heresy" is telling. What requires and enables a cultural explanation, however, is Freud's prior refusal. The description adopted here has, I think, the virtue of providing a technique for condemning the misogyny and homophobia that post-colonial male cultures often manifest without essentializing them in a racist fashion. We, "in theory," *must* find ways of thinking about gender domination that do not reinstate racist, colonialist cultural Darwinisms and also ways of thinking about anti-imperialism and

postcoloniality that do not reinstate gender domination and homophobia. Our daily political lives demand this move forward. The “consequences of theory” here are palpable.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Donald Pease, “Toward a Sociology of Literary Knowledge: Greenblatt, Colonialism, and the New Historicism,” describes the problem well, but has, I think, no solution to offer. Several theorists, Gayatri Spivak prominently among them, are actively working on this problem.



## CHAPTER NINE

### THE TALMUD MEETS CHURCH HISTORY

- Virginia Burrus.** *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of the Apocryphal Acts.* New York: Edwin Mellen, 1987.
- . “‘Equipped for Victory’: Ambrose and the Gendering of Orthodoxy.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4.4 (1996): 461–75.
- . *The Making Of A Heretic: Gender, Authority, And The Priscillianist Controversy.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1995.
- . “Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3.1 (1995): 25–46.
- . “Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10.1 (1994): 27–51.

[1] *Prologue: Morningside Heights, 1941—A Talmudist Meets a Church Historian*

In 1944, my teacher Saul Lieberman published a classic essay in which he treated talmudic martyrology in the context of patristic literature.<sup>1</sup> The article had been written under the inspiration of his meeting and friendship with Henri Gregoire, the great Belgian church historian, then a refugee from the Nazis in the Morningside Heights neighborhood in New York, where Lieberman, the great Lithuanian talmudist, had also found refuge and where the two met. Nearly a half-century later, this student of Lieberman’s met another church historian, Virginia Burrus, in Morningside Heights under happier circumstances, when both of us were participants at a conference on asceticism at Union Theological Seminary, and a similar intellectual interaction began. This paper represents some of the first fruits of that second encounter and aspires to modestly continue the enterprise begun by the first.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lieberman, “The Martyrs of Caesarea.” I plan to engage in a detailed reading of this article in another essay, tentatively entitled “‘The Martyrs of Caesarea’; or, Zionism and the Art of Writing.”

[2] *Intertextuality and Interdisciplinarity*

Averil Cameron has recently written:

The myth of early Christianity as the resort of the poor and underprivileged is precisely that, and a very convenient one it has been. It is a myth that rests, moreover, on the fallacy of an original Christianity uncontaminated by external influences; but its holders then have to explain how this “new” faith could make the leap to center stage. Thus, we have been told, “the naiveté of the early Christian speech came in the course of time to wed itself to the cultures of the world.” But while much of current New Testament scholarship is directed at the internal (that is, theological) articulation of the texts, there is also a perceptible trend towards a mode of interpretation that balances the external and internal factors operative in the literary texts. It is thus less a question of the degree of “influence” of Greco-Roman or Jewish literary or philosophical elements on early Christian writing than of their integral relationship. [37–38]

Judaism also (and Jewish scholarship) has had a stake in inscribing itself as pure and uncontaminated, for reasons that Philip Alexander has articulated: “The attempt to [lay down a norm for Judaism in the first century] barely conceals apologetic motives—in the case of Christianity a desire to prove that Christianity transcended or transformed Judaism, in the case of Jews a desire to suggest that Christianity was an alien form of Judaism which deviated from the true path” [3]. Indeed, the very distinctness of Judaism has been articulated by Jews as precisely its distance from a “syncretistic” Christianity whose defining feature is that it is somehow a composite of Judaism and Hellenism.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, in conversation with some of the work of Burrus, I wish to begin to suggest a few of the ways that study of the Talmud can be further enriched through the engagement of talmudic scholars with the recent sophisticated (and especially gender-oriented) work being done on early Christianity. Indeed, I will be hinting (and in future work explicitly arguing) that we have to begin seriously thinking about Judaeo-Christianity as a single cultural system: contentious, dialectical, polemical, and sometimes friendly, but—I hasten to add—not moralistic in the homogenized “family values” sense implied by

---

<sup>2</sup> I would like to acknowledge here the productive influence of Karen King’s work on the use of “syncretism” vis-à-vis Gnosticism in the construction of “authentic Christianity” in the development of my own thinking about the use of Christianity in the production of “authentic Judaism.”

the modern usage of this term. I put forth here, as a case in point, that the richest contexts for understanding the sets of cultural tensions that gave rise to a particular talmudic text are to be uncovered in contemporary patristic literature. From the point of view of a New Historicist approach to talmudic literature, this suggests that the relevant documentary and literary intertexts are much broader than those that I have proposed in earlier work, especially in the introduction to *Carnal Israel*, where I posited a wide-ranging collection of *Jewish* texts as the relevant intertext for Jewish cultural poetics. The difference between the analysis of the talmudic text as presented here and the version in my coauthored book *Powers of Diaspora*, written before my encounter with church history, is indicative of the shift in my reading strategies engendered by this meeting. In the talmudic texts that will be analyzed here, we find dramatized social contestation that is nearly identical to conflicts found in contemporary (ca. fourth century, to which the talmudic text can plausibly be assigned) patristic texts and documents. These contentions have been brought to the fore in the work of Virginia Burrus, especially in her recent book, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority and the Priscillianist Controversy*. Looking beyond the official doctrinal conflicts that orthodox heresiologists have identified as the reason for Priscillian's execution, Burrus "finds broader underlying social conflicts" being "negotiated through the 'talk' about Priscillian" [5]. Looking at the talmudic text with lenses burnished by her account of the Priscillianist fracas, I have found startlingly similar social conflicts being negotiated within the borders of a single extended passage of talmudic legendary narrative. Furthermore, close study of the textual analyses of this feminist scholar have enabled me to see other (gendered) patterns and meanings in the talmudic passage that neither I, nor others, appear to have seen before. In both late ancient Christianity and Judaism, ideal male identity was secured in part via cross-gender identification with female virgins. Affinities, it seems, run strong and deep. This essay, based essentially on a reading of the work of one scholar, is intended to serve as a *vade mecum* to the riches that are around to be uncovered when scholars of Talmud enter into conversation with the scholarship on early contemporary Christianity, and I dare say, the opposite will likely prove true as well.<sup>3</sup> In this early version of this study, I am

---

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, I am not claiming to be the first or the only talmudist to read or make

focusing broadly on the ways that the work of Burrus has stimulated my investigation of the Talmud in new directions, so this will be a kind of idiosyncratic review of her oeuvre to date, as well as the partial payment of an intellectual debt. This review is idiosyncratic in that it treats only those aspects of Burrus's work that have opened ways into the talmudic text, and indeed, into only one talmudic passage at that. In later avatars of the same study, a more synthetic approach to the presentation of the issues will be attempted: in particular, my forthcoming *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* will treat these issues and texts in much greater detail and in conversation with many more Christian texts and scholars of early Christianity, for which and whom the encounter with Burrus's work provided my own initial *vade mecum*.

### [2.1] Accommodation, Resistance, and the Hidden Transcript

The two key themes that Burrus identifies as having been active in the development of the Priscillian controversy are the contest between private and public as valorized loci for Christian worship and study and the question of accommodation to or alienation from Roman power.<sup>4</sup> "Heresies" were being defined (and heretics killed) in order to produce an orthodox Christianity controlled by bishops and conforming in its culture to the culture of the Empire. In the talmudic text that I will read in this paper, both of these themes are centrally contested, although they are inflected somewhat differently from the ways that they appear in Burrus's archive. The differences can be accounted for by attending to the different location of the rabbis of

---

use of patristic scholarship, but there is much, much more to be done in this field, as I hope this case study of the work of one historian of late ancient Christianity will make obvious. See especially Jacob Neusner, *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine: History, Messiah, Israel, and the Initial Confrontation*.

<sup>4</sup> It should be made clear that Burrus does not reify either of these sets of oppositions as "real" entities, and neither should we. These are, however, representations that are active in the texts and controversies of antiquity as terms of argumentation and self-fashioning, and likewise, I suggest, in the Talmud. They will be even more productive in further work on such oppositional figures as Rabbis Akiva and Eli'ezer, comparable to such figures as Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, that I intend to carry out in the future, *deo volente*. The important point to recognize here is that these cultural/political divides cut through the so-called religions as much as they cut between them.

Palestine and Parthian Babylonia with respect to both Roman culture and Roman power. Although we will see that some of the rabbis adopted strikingly accommodationist stances vis-à-vis the “Evil Kingdom,” none of them had been or ever could be simply and straightforwardly Romans, as were many of the bishops, and even many of the ascetic “monks” and scholars of the fourth century as well, for example such figures as Sulpicius Severus and Jerome—both high-class Roman citizens—as discussed by Burrus [*Making of a Heretic* 126–29]. As Kate Cooper has reminded us, following Alan Cameron: “In late fourth-century Rome, among the litterati ‘pagans’ and ‘Christians’ were first of all Romans” [89]. In contrast to figures such as these, the rabbis always belong to a linguistic minority and a dominated social and cultural entity within the Empire, no matter what their socioeconomic status within Jewish society. All the more striking, then, is the extent to which we find convergence between their concerns and the concerns that motivate, according to Burrus, the powerful conflicts within the Christian society of their days. Differences are less surprising.

## [2.2] Hidden Transcripts

In addition to the comparative horizon and analytical vista that Burrus’s work has afforded me, the other crucial interdisciplinary moment in this analysis of the talmudic text is the theoretical perspective of James C. Scott on the modes of discourse of colonized peoples. In his recent analysis of the modes of resistance of dominated populations, Scott argues eloquently against the notion of hegemony, claiming that the appearance of hegemony is only the “public script” which serves the purposes of both the colonizer and the colonized in situations of near-total domination: “In this respect, subordinate groups are complicitous in contributing to a sanitized official transcript, for that is one way they cover their tracks” [*Domination and the Arts of Resistance* 87]. It follows that what might appear to be accommodation to the culture of the dominating population might, in fact, be the very opposite. According to Scott, the discourses of dominated populations fall into four categories, the “public” within which they are actually working within the terms of the discourse of the dominators, the “hidden, offstage, where subordinates may gather outside the intimidating gaze of power” and “where a sharply dissonant political culture is possible.”

A third is the realm of the trickster tale within which the “hidden transcript” is encoded in a public one, and finally the speech of open rebellion. As Scott remarks, we rarely have access to the hidden transcript itself and most often must determine it from suspicious readings of the trickster material [*Domination* 18]. It seems that the talmudic discourse, however, gives us direct access to the “hidden transcript,” frequently thematizing the doubleness of its own trickster language. This literature, *composed in a language that the conquerors did not know*, provided a safe and private space within which to elaborate the transcript hidden away from the colonizer.<sup>5</sup>

A text from the Palestinian Talmud explicitly thematizes alienated strategies vs. accommodation (not, of course, collaboration) as the appropriate response to oppressive power:

They said to Rabbi Hiyya the Great: Rabbi Shim'on bar Yoḥai teaches, “You shall buy food from them [Edom = Rome] for money, and eat, and also buy water from them for money, and drink’ (Deut. 2:6). Just as water [is that] which has not been modified from its original state [lit. its creation], so also everything that has not been modified from its original state.” He rejoined to them: “But their liverwort, dried apricots, pickled vegetables, and parched corn are permitted.” All of the first three are not problematic because you can soak them in water and they return to their original state, but what about parched corn? Rabbi Yosi the son of Rabbi Bun in the name of Rav said, “Any food that can be eaten raw as it is, does not enter into the category of forbidden foods cooked by Gentiles, and one may use it raw for rituals that normally require cooked foods.” How, then, does Rabbi Hiyya the Great explain the verse: “You shall buy food from them for money, and eat”?—If you feed him, you have bought and defeated him, for if he is harsh with you, buy/defeat him with food, and if [that does] not [work], then defeat him with money.

They say: That is how Rabbi Yonatan behaved. When he saw a powerful personage come into his city, he used to send him expensive things. What did he think? If he comes to judge an orphan or a widow, we will find him propitious towards them. [*Yerushalmi Shabbat* 1:3; 3c]

Two different interpretations of the verse in Deuteronomy lead to two almost directly opposed practices vis-à-vis the Roman overlords (or

---

<sup>5</sup> This was less true in the Middle Ages, when for a variety of historical reasons, the Talmud became available to non-Jews, and a sort of delayed-reaction violent response was generated, producing finally a self-directed censorship of the Talmud on the part of early modern Jews.

perhaps vice versa), one of direct alienation and one of (seeming) accommodation. The verse itself is explicitly about Esau, who (through his alternative name, Edom) is always in rabbinic literature an eponym for Rome. Seeing the verse in its immediate context will illuminate the interpretative controversy and its political/cultural meanings: “And He commanded the people, saying, ‘You are passing within the border of the Children of Esau who dwell in Se‘ir, and they will be afraid of you, so be very careful. Do not provoke them, for I will not give you their land, not even to stand on, for I have given the Mount of Se‘ir to Esau as an inheritance. You shall buy food from them for money, and eat, and also buy water from them for money, and drink.” Rabbi Shim‘on bar Yoḥai, whose opposition to any rapprochement whatever with Rome was proverbial,<sup>6</sup> pulls the verse completely out of its context—well-respected midrashic practice—and accordingly reads it formalistically and technically as a limitation on the possible forms of interaction between Jews and Gentiles. You can only acquire certain types of foodstuffs from them, he says, those that have a characteristic of water, namely that they are unprocessed. One can see immediately that such a regulation would have two powerful effects, a restraint on trade between Jews and Gentiles, as well as a powerful chill on eating together or sharing food, commensality (in addition to the chill that the kosher rules already prescribe.)

Rabbi Ḥiyya, however, is quite opposed to this view, both politically and midrashically. His notion is that Jews may purchase any sort of foodstuff from Gentiles, as long as it is kosher, of course. The Talmud asks, then, how he would go about interpreting the same verse that Rabbi Shim‘on has read as strongly limiting commensality between Jews and Gentiles. Rabbi Ḥiyya develops a whole political philosophy of Jewish-Gentile interaction—actually of Jewish-Roman interaction—from this verse, a procedure justified by the fact that the verse actually does refer to the proper behavior of Israel toward the children of Esau, who via his “tribal” name, Edom, functions as the eponymous ancestor of Rome in rabbinic Jewish lore. The Bible explicitly says not to provoke them. An alternative to provoking them

---

<sup>6</sup> I use this term advisedly. I do not have to assume that these are *ipssissima verba* of the “real” Rabbi Shim‘on in order to mobilize what is said about him elsewhere in interpreting a passage attributed to him. The individual rabbis came to be personifications of particular ideological stances within the tradition, and we don’t have to know how “authentic” these personality sketches are in order to read them.

is also offered by the verse, which Rabbi Ḥiyya understands in a way that takes it out of its immediate biblical historical context and gives it new cultural power, namely as a suggestion to use gifts to turn their hearts favorably to their Jewish subjects. This is derived from the verse by typically clever midrashic punning, in addition to the mobilization of the foundational intertext: the story of the original Jacob and Esau. The phrase “buy food from them” can also, with only relatively modest stretching of the syntax—well within the bounds of midrashic practice—and none whatever of the lexicon, be read as “defeat them,” since the word “buy” and the word “defeat” are homonyms. The verse is thus read as: “With food, buy them, and [if that doesn’t work], break [defeat by suborning] them with money.” This is an obvious allusion to the situation within which the weak, “feminine” Jacob bought the favor of the “virile,” dominant Esau by giving him food. Baksheesh itself becomes institutionalized as a discursive practice of opposition to oppression. At additional points in this discussion, we will be observing how various “dishonest” practices, deceptions, are valorized by rabbinic and other colonized peoples, in direct opposition to the “manly” arts of violent resistance. As an Indian untouchable phrased it: “We must also tactfully disguise and hide, as necessary, our true aims and intentions from our social adversaries. To recommend it is not to encourage falsehood but only to be tactical in order to survive” [Scott, *Domination* 33; see also Ophir]. Rabbi Ḥiyya’s philosophy, then, is to follow the biblical injunction not to provoke authority by standing up to it but to attempt to oblige it, with the result that the authority will favor the entire people and act justly toward them. “Kill them with kindness” is the lesson. This “hidden transcript,” preserved before our eyes in the Talmud, provides an elegant demonstration of Scott’s argument that “What may look from above like the extraction of a required performance can easily look from below like the artful manipulation of deference and flattery to achieve its own ends” [Scott, *Domination* 34]. A neat comparison is afforded by the following injunction of an African American grandfather to his grandson in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*: “I want you to overcome ’em with yesses, undermine ’em with grins, agree ’em to death and destruction, let ’em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open. . . . Learn it to the young ’uns” [qtd. in Scott, *Domination* 133]. If flattery fails, says Rabbi Ḥiyya, then defeat them by bribing them. Thus the conclusion: “If he comes to judge an orphan or a widow, we will find him propitious towards them.”



## [2.3] The Trickster and the Martyr

If Esau is the legendary ancestor of Rome, Jacob, his brother, was the exemplary rabbinic male. It is important to emphasize to what extent Jacob (already in the Bible) is a virtual “trickster,” that figure of folklore all over the world who “represent[s] the weak, whose wit can at times achieve ambiguous victories against the power of the strong” [J. Boyarin]. Twice in his life, as described in the Bible, Jacob, the weak emblem of Israel, achieved victory, over Laban the ancestor of the Aramaeans and then—and much more relevant for later Jewish history—over Esau, the eponymous ancestor of Rome and thus of Christendom [Niditch 70–125]. These figures and their stories were, as we have seen, paradigmatic for Jewish (male) self-fashioning. The positive self-representation of Jewish maleness as “feminized” thus is overdetermined. On the one hand, it grows, as we have seen, from a valorization of certain types of activity over others and out of a need to define self over-against other. On the other hand, it develops as a response to the privation in a diaspora people of certain modes of power and the development of others as a compensation.

The Diaspora Jew is a trickster par excellence.<sup>7</sup> As David Biale has recently remarked in his magisterial study *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*: “The rabbis built a much more durable political system than had any of the earlier leaders, whether tribal elders, kings, or priests, who were only partially successful in confronting an imperial world and in maintaining some partial semblance of Jewish sovereignty” [11]. That social system enabled the continued existence of the Jews as a deterritorialized cultural entity for nearly two thousand

---

<sup>7</sup> This thinking has been much influenced by the work of my brother, Jonathan, with whom I am now writing a book tentatively entitled *Powers of Diaspora*, [Minneapolis: 2002] in which we will attempt to hook up the Jewish experience of diaspora with the situation of postcoloniality in the modern world and in particular to the use of “diaspora” as a mode of thinking about that situation.

Erich Gruen has reminded me of an excellent early version of a Jewish trickster tale with a hidden transcript. In III Maccabees 7:10–16, Jews who had remained steadfast in the faith trick their Ptolemaic masters into allowing them to execute those who had become apostates on the king’s orders, “using the clever argument that those who were disloyal to their own commandments could not be trusted to be loyal to the king. Hence those who had actually resisted the royal orders triumph over collaborators by posing as protectors of royal interest.” This is a typical, rather clever interpretation of the passage and quite a convincing one indeed. The best edition of the text is Hadas, ed. and trans., *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees* [80–82]. See also Charlesworth 2:528.

years. One of my underlying hypotheses is that part of the durability of the political, and thus cultural, system that the rabbis built was founded on antiphallic modes of resistance and the exercise of power, the use of the “weapons of the weak.”<sup>8</sup> I am not, of course, claiming that this strategy is unique to the rabbis. Edwards remarks that “Cicero warns against the slippery ways of Greeks and Asiatics, which are to be connected, he says, with their lack of political power (Ad Q. fr. 1.16). By implication, those who have been conquered behave like other dominated groups, women and slaves” [93]. What we learn from Jewish texts of late antiquity is that this was not only an accusation from without but a valorized representation from within at least one “dominated group.”<sup>9</sup> Such modes of resistance were, moreover, coded as feminized from within the Jewish cultural system. We need only think of the Book of Esther, the paradigm book of diaspora politics, to see that this is so [Niditch 126–45; Levine].

The text to be read in this essay consists of an extended talmudic narrative that thematizes the trickster figure in tales of witty escapes by rabbis from the threat of martyrdom for teaching Torah. At the same time, this material also provides us with the exact opposite model, that of the martyr, a rabbi who bravely goes to his death in order to publicly deny the authority of the Romans. These two figures of resistance are known from dominated populations all over the world, as James Scott has remarked: “Those who did assert themselves defiantly won themselves a place in black folklore—that of the ‘baaaad Nigger’—that is one of both admiration and fearful awe. Admiration, for having acted out the hidden transcript and fearful awe, for having often paid for it with their lives. . . . The more common folk hero of subordinate groups—blacks included—has historically been the trickster figure, who manages to outwit his adversary and escape unscathed” [*Domination* 41]. By the end of the narrative, however, a surprise awaits us, for the story leads us to a reading wherein the most powerful figure for the tricksterlike resistance of the Jewish People to the depravity that was “Rome” is a female virgin—in a brothel.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The term is again drawn from Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: The Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

<sup>9</sup> See Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*; “Jewish Masochism: Couvade, Castration, and Rabbis in Pain”; and “Homotopia: The Feminized Jewish Man and the Lives of Women in Late Antiquity.”

<sup>10</sup> This eloquent phrase has been borrowed from Rachel Adler, “The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah.”

[3] *The Virgin in the Brothel*

In Tractate ‘Avodah Zarah 16b–19b of the Babylonian Talmud, we find a complicated and fascinating discourse having to do with Roman power, different modes of cultural resistance to it, and issues of sexuality and gender. Unwinding the intricately interwoven halakhic and aggadic expression of this text will help us understand how gender and the situation of a subjugated male population are entangled within the cultural formation of talmudic Judaism. Reading this text with Burrus as cicerone will help us also to begin to sort out the similar and the dissimilar between the Jewish and Christian discourses of gender and resistance in late antiquity.<sup>11</sup>

The text opens with a discussion of the types of building projects that Jews may not engage in for or with Romans.<sup>12</sup> These all turn out to be edifices that are connected with the judging and execution of criminals and especially of seditious persons [see Hayes]. The Talmud condemns the complicity of Jews with Roman power, thematized, as we shall see, as “phallic,” and proposes either tricky or submissive ways of evading it. This halakhic context, the passage of the Mishna, sets the themes that will be elaborated in the Talmud’s much more complicated discursive forms. The talmudic text wanders and seemingly meanders. Its strategies of making meaning are not teleological as a philosophical or legal text would be but in some ways more like the strategies of a dream, in which the underlying thematics and meanings can be drawn out only by paying attention to repeating patterns, undertones, and overtones. As Laurie Davis has put it:

Though the Gemara written in response to this Mishnah may seem to venture far afield from what Jews may or may not build, what they may or may not sell, the real topic of this Mishnah concerns injustice: its immediate and obvious source in the oppressive government, how Jews might unwittingly collude in their own oppression and the oppression of others, and the alternative pulls of coercion and seduction which power exercises. Thus the many stories that ensue all concern the ways in which Jewish men are either coerced or seduced into wrong-doing, whether they resist and what the consequences of their actions are.

<sup>11</sup> For a much more extended and fine-grained analysis, see Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*.

<sup>12</sup> The text given here will be based on the excellent Spanish manuscript of Tractate ‘Avoda Zara in the collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Rabinowitz 15.

In other words, these are narratives that explicitly thematize the issues of hegemony, resistance, and transcripts, hidden and public, which are dealt with by both Burrus's historical work on Priscillian and Scott's theoretical work.

### [3.1] The Seductions of Jesus: Rabbi Eli'ezer and the Christian

Following the halakhic discussion, we immediately embark on the following narrative, in which the link between the architectural theme—Jews may not participate in building places of judgment—and the “moral” themes is immediately rendered visible:

When Rabbi Eli'ezer was arrested [by the Romans] for sectarianism, they took him up to the place of judgment [gradus].<sup>13</sup> The judge [hegemon]<sup>14</sup> said to him: “An elder such as you, has dealing with these foolish things?!” He [Eli'ezer] said: “I have trust in the J/judge.” The judge thought that he was speaking about him, but he was speaking about his Father in heaven. He [the judge] said: “Since you have declared your faith in me, you are free [*dimus*].”

When he came to his house, his disciples came to comfort him, but he was inconsolable. Rabbi Akiva said to him: “Allow me to say to you one of the things that you have taught me” [an honorific euphemism for the student teaching the teacher]. He said to him: “Say!” He said to him: “Rabbi, perhaps you heard some matter of sectarianism, and it gave you pleasure, and because of that you were arrested for sectarianism.” He said: “By heaven, you have reminded me. Once I was walking in the upper market of Sephorris, and one of the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene,<sup>15</sup> a man by the name of Jacob of Kefar Sekania, met up with me. He said to me, ‘It is written in your Torah: “Do not bring the wages of a prostitute or the proceeds of a dog [to the house of your Lord]” (Deut. 23:19). What about using them to build a latrine for the High Priest?’ And I said nothing to him. And he told me that thus had

<sup>13</sup> Lit., “the stairs leading up to the place of judgment,” one of the structures the Mishna forbids Jews to participate in building [see Hayes]. For the *gradus* as equivalent to the *catasta* of such texts as the Passion of Perpetua and other early Christian martyrologies, see Lieberman, *Texts and Studies* 69–71.

<sup>14</sup> A provincial governor serving as judge.

<sup>15</sup> The references to Jesus, found in both manuscripts, are deleted in the printed editions, as have nearly all such references since the first editions, owing to the Italian Jewish (self-)censors. In this way, the hidden transcript, which had threatened to become public owing to the wide distribution of printed Talmuds and increasing knowledge of its language and text by learned Christians (especially converts), was rendered hidden again, interestingly enough, this time from most Jews as well.

taught Jesus his teacher: “It was gathered from the wages of a prostitute, and to the wages of a prostitute it will return [Micah 1:7]”—it comes from a place of filth, and to a place of filth it will return’ [i.e., for building a latrine one may use the proceeds of a prostitute], and the matter gave me pleasure, and for that I was arrested for sectarianism, since I had violated that which is written: Keep her ways far away from you!” [*Proverbs* 5:8].

This complex little text compresses within its almost humorous form several weighty matters of rabbinic culture and ideology. Perhaps most relevant here is the political function of the double entendre [Scott, *Domination* 4]. This story exemplifies an almost literal thematization of the “public transcript”/“hidden transcript” typology as analyzed extensively by Scott. Dominated people, according to him, “make use of disguise, deception, and indirection while maintaining an outward impression, in power-laden situations, of willing, even enthusiastic consent” [Scott, *Domination* 17]. Our talmudic narrative seems designed to illustrate the hypothesis, in the way the narrative elegantly encapsulates the public and hidden transcripts into one ambiguous linguistic utterance. The text has a theological dimension as well, however.

The basic theological question addressed is theodicy, a question that returns over and over in rabbinic literature: Why has God punished the apparently righteous? As we shall see, this is one of the major subthemes of the entire text-sequence that we shall be following in this essay. The basic rabbinic theological thought that answers this question is that somehow God’s punishments fit the crimes—“measure for measure” in rabbinic parlance. When Rabbi Eli‘ezer says in this text, “I have trust in the Judge,” he fools the Roman hegemon, but not himself.<sup>16</sup> He assumes that there cannot be any punishment without a crime and that the Divine Judge has found him wanting. Because he had been attracted and pleased by heresy in God’s eyes, that is, Christianity, therefore, the text tells us God allowed him to be arrested by the Romans for engaging in that very heresy. The Roman judge is, in a sense, only an unwitting avatar of God’s judgment on earth. The acceptance of the judgment is indeed what releases Rabbi Eli‘ezer. This point will be returned to explicitly in a later episode of the legend cycle as well. In the context of the text

---

<sup>16</sup> The fact that the rabbi was using a fixed and conventional legal term does not weaken this interpretation at all. See Lieberman, *Texts and Studies* 76n136.

that I am discussing here, this momentous theological issue is inter-leaved and imbricated with other questions that the rabbis ask about themselves and their place in the world. This opening story sets all the themes that will be developed throughout the text: sex, heresy, and the threat of violence.<sup>17</sup> We will hardly be surprised to find gender prominently thematized in this context as well.

The strongest clue to this connection is the arbitrariness of the particular halakhic discussion between the rabbi and the Christian, for there is no special reason why it would be this specific issue that a disciple of Jesus would raise with a pharisee. The choice of an interlocution having to do with prostitution and the Temple must be laid at the door of the talmudic “author” of this legend, and its significance sought within the context of Jewish culture in general and on this talmudic passage in particular.<sup>18</sup> I would suggest that the Talmud is here adumbrating a theme that will become more and more explicit and insistent as the text continues, one that associates prostitution with both heresy and collaboration with Roman power. The connection would seem to be—beyond simple misogyny that will associate anything negative with female sexuality—that which is powerfully seductive, almost irresistible, but extremely dangerous at the same time. This association is thematized within the text through a powerful analogy between the substance of the discourse of the “Christian” and

---

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly enough, this episode has a parallel in Palestinian literature, namely in the midrash on Ecclesiastes, *Kohellet Rabba* 1. The context within which it is embedded, however, is entirely different there.

<sup>18</sup> This is patently the case, because in the parallel text, which is otherwise identical in every respect with the version in the Babylonian Talmud, the specifics of the conversation between R. Eli‘ezer and the Christian are not given, but only that “he said something heretical to me and I enjoyed it.” The point that the only flaw in Jesus’s Torah is its origin (the only thing wrong with Christianity is that it is not Judaism—to mime E.P. Sanders’s famous pronouncement on Paul) is exclusive to the later texts and not to the early Palestinian source, *Tosefta Hullin* 2:24. It is not necessarily Babylonian in origin, however, since it is found in the (relatively) late (fourth century) Palestinian midrash on Ecclesiastes. Claudia Setzer [159] clearly gets the point that the Torah of the Christian is very similar to rabbinic Torah, and the only thing wrong with it is its origin. See also Philip L. Culbertson [55–61], who goes so far as to consider this a possible lost teaching of Jesus. Lieberman [*Texts and Studies* 76–80] certainly demonstrates the “authenticity” of the details of the trial, as portrayed in the *Tosefta*, but nothing that he says would indicate the ascription of any historicity to the midrashic dialogue between R. Eli‘ezer and Ya‘qov, nor to the midrash of Jesus as a “lost saying.” I fail to understand why Culbertson claims that Jacob Neusner, in *Eli‘ezer Ben Hyrcanus* [199, 366], “repeatedly misses the point.” Neusner’s reading seems to me very close to being on target.

the outcome of enjoying that very discourse. The Christian proposes a lenient reading of the verse that prohibits the taking of the earnings of a prostitute to the Temple, namely that although such earnings are forbidden for holy purposes, for mundane—and even lowly—purposes like the building of a toilet for the High Priest, they are permitted.<sup>19</sup> A fairly typical midrashic justification for this conclusion is proposed by the Christian as well. Rabbi Eli‘ezer “enjoys” this utterance, perhaps, for two reasons. First of all, there is the sheer intellectual pleasure of a clever midrashic reading, one that, I emphasize, is in method identical to “kosher” midrash, and second, the result of this midrash would be increased funding for the Temple. The rabbi is, however, punished for this enjoyment by the humiliation and fright of being arrested by the Romans for being a Christian, which he just barely escapes. The analogy seems clear: just as one may not take the hire of a prostitute for any purpose connected with holiness, so one may not take the “Torah” of a heretic for any purpose connected with holiness. Although the substance of the words of Torah seem identical—just as the money itself is identical—the source in “impurity” renders them unfit for holiness and their acceptance punishable. Sectarianism is homologous with prostitution. Moreover, the seductiveness of the heretical interpretation matches formally what its content encodes as well, for there also, the temptation is to make use for holy purposes of that which originates in impurity, the harlot’s wage. When Rabbi Eli‘ezer indicts himself for having violated the precept to “Keep her ways far away from you!” both of these moments are comprehended. As Davis puts it, “in these stories, sexual temptation is the conflation of a variety of different cultural tensions.”<sup>20</sup> The verse refers literally to a “strange woman,” who will be, as we will see immediately, glossed as either a prostitute, a sect, or the government, that is, participation in or collaboration with it.

---

<sup>19</sup> Might we want to find here perhaps an echo of an early representation that Christianity is marked by a certain leniency toward prostitutes? See Loewe 70–71. In my aforementioned monograph, this point will be specified and elaborated.

<sup>20</sup> This is a metaphorization of what was a commonplace in their time and place: “The temptation to sensual indulgence, and the power of the sexually tempting to sway the judgment of those under their spell, served as a potent narrative emblem of the unpredictable factor of private interest in the action of public men” [Cooper 12].

The gendering of sectarian heresy, here Christianity, is supported by the fact that in the Proverbs verse that which one is enjoined to keep away from is “her ways.” The literal subject of the verse is the seductive “strange woman,” whose very lips drip honey but whose denouement is bitter. It is important to recognize here a major metaphorical shift. For the Prophets, the dominant metaphor is of a female Israel gone-a-whoring with myriad lovers, while here we find an Israel figured as a lustful male tempted sorely by a seductive female. This shift of metaphor of straying Israel from female to male is accomplished by repeatedly reading figures of sexual danger from Proverbs as if they were allegories for religious temptations and dangers. Foreign whores and seductive daughters are transformed, as we shall see below, into heresies and seductions of collaboration, thus rendering illicit their male partners, the errant Jews. At first glance, this claim may seem strange, since I and others have been arguing so strenuously that the rabbis see themselves as feminized [D. Boyarin, *Unheroic*]. However, on further reflection, there is no paradox here at all, for if the negative, abjected image of self is of the lustful male, the valorized image is precisely that of the virgin female.<sup>21</sup> By the time we reach the end of this text, we shall see that the female virgin is indeed a model for the rabbis, in much the same way, as Burrus has taught us, that she performed symbolically for contemporary Christians, such as Ambrose of Milan.<sup>22</sup> As we will see, through reading Burrus’s work, that contemporary of the rabbis also urges self-feminization as an antidote to the perceived evils of the male psyche. These interpretative suggestions and connections will become stronger as the text continues to develop these themes explicitly.

### [3.2] On Heresy, Whores, and the Government

The text continues directly with a halakhic passage that draws on the citation from Proverbs that was used in the story about Rabbi Eli‘ezer:

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the following comment by Virginia Burrus: “what is striking is the flexibility of the gendering of Ambrose’s discourse, represented as both transcendently masculine in relation to a monstrously carnal femininity and ascetically feminized in relation to a grotesquely carnal masculinity” [“‘Equipped for Victory’” 469].

<sup>22</sup> See discussion below of Ambrose and of Virginia Burrus, “Reading Agnes [25–46] and Burrus, “‘Equipped for Victory.’”



“Keep her ways far away from you, and do not come near to the opening of her door” [Proverbs 5:8]. It begins with a typical midrashic exploration of the precise referent of “her” in the verse:

“Keep her [the ‘Strange Woman’s’] ways far away from you!”—This [refers] to sectarianism. “And do not come near to the opening of her door”—This is the government.

There are those who say: “Keep her ways far away from you!”—This is sectarianism and the government. “And do not come near to the opening of her door”—This is the prostitute. How far [must one keep away from the prostitute’s door]? Rav Ḥisda said: “four cubits.”

From here until the end of the text, these three themes will be intertwined. Somehow, sectarian heresy, prostitution, and collaboration with Roman power have become associated in the cultural “unconscious” of rabbinic Judaism, no doubt at least in part simply because all three are seductive and dangerous. The seemingly literal reading, that one must be wary of the sexual attractions of the “strange woman,” is tacked on here almost as an afterthought. However, as we shall see, there are overtones to this nexus that go far beyond this rather obvious and trivial observation. The association of negative Jewish behavior with the lust of the male customer of the prostitute is crucial to the main theme of the text: the transformation of the chaste Jewish male—and indeed the Jewish People—into female virgin as the one most fit to resist such sexualized enticements.

There is a fascinating parallel in Ramakrishna’s exhortation to his disciples to “become woman,” in order to transcend their own sexual desire to be with women. “A man can change his nature by imitating another’s character. By transposing on to yourself the attributes of woman, you gradually destroy lust and the other sensual drives. You begin to behave like women” [Gospel 176, qtd. in Roy]. As Parama Roy remarks, “This feminine identification was quite compatible with a marked gynophobia [*sic*].” Alice Jardine also reminds us that Daniel Schreber’s desire to become woman was an attempt to transcend sexual desire. Schreber wrote: “when I speak of my duty to go deeper into voluptuous pleasures, I never mean by that sexual desires towards other human beings (women) and even less sexual commerce, but I imagine myself man and woman in one person in the process of making love to myself,” upon which Jardine comments, “The desire to be both woman and spirit . . . may be the only way to avoid becoming the *object* of the *Other’s* (female’s) desire” [98–99]. For

a slightly different take on this identification of male self with female, see for the ancient period Kate Cooper, who writes inter alia that “[i]f we assume for the sake of argument that wherever a woman is mentioned a man’s character is being judged—and along with it what he stands for—we can begin to see the rhetorical possibilities afforded by a female point of identification in a literature aimed at defending, or undermining, such sanctified Greco-Roman institutions as marriage, the family, and even the city itself” [9].<sup>23</sup> As in certain contemporary academic circles, but for different reasons, identification with women becomes a ploy in contests for power and prestige between men.

In the rabbinic text, the “foreign woman” of Proverbs, almost a perennial source of sexual excitement in many human cultures, becomes the primary metaphor for all that is exotic to Jews and thus alluring, whether political power or seductive foreign cults. Jews are faced with the dual temptations of collaboration with oppressors or of assimilation into the dominant cultural forms. Either of those seductive options provides an escape from the sometimes unbearable tensions of difference. They provide two means of being like all of the nations. On my reading it is precisely the allure of these two avenues of flight from the tensions of diasporized Jewish existence that is central to the text; these diversions are thematized as being similar to the forms of escape that sexual pleasure provides.

### [3.3] Breí Rabbi and the Baaaaaaad Jew

In this text, in which the paradigmatic case of heresy is Christianity, the continuation can be shown to thematize issues nearly identical to those at work in contemporary Christian constructions of orthodoxy and heresy, as presented by Burrus in her monograph on Priscillian: to wit, the issue of accommodation vs. resistance (Burrus’s “alienation”) and the closely related theme of the public vs. the private as valorized spaces for the religious life. To be sure, Carole Pateman has provided an extensive critique of the notion of public/private as a transhistorical dichotomy. Especially relevant is her discussion of the

---

<sup>23</sup> By a literature “defending,” Cooper refers to the Hellenistic novels and by a literature “undermining,” their Christian generic homologues, the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles*.

separation of production from the household and the development of the theory of a public/private separation [118–40]. But as Burrus has pointed out:

Indeed, as terms of “ordinary discourse” evoking “unreflectively held notions and concepts” that shape day-to-day lives, “public” and “private” may not appear in need of interpretation at all, but it is doubtful whether the dichotomous categories with which so many operate are in fact either as universal or as transparently “commonsensical” as is sometimes claimed. Indeed, I would suggest that the public-private distinction is most fruitfully applied to the study of the Priscillianist controversy precisely because it is an artifact of the very Mediterranean cultures that shaped the terms of the late-ancient controversy. [*Making of a Heretic* 7]

We will see that this point is exemplified clearly in the late-ancient Jewish text as well, and how the historical analysis helps to make sense of that text.

In the next section of the text, two paradigmatic stories of response to Roman power are presented with directly opposing ideologies. One will be an indirect echo of the story of Rabbi Eli‘ezer that we have encountered above, in which the potential martyr escapes through a kind of tricksterism, while in the other we have the model of the defiant martyr par excellence. The two figures are actually pitted against each other in the same story here, thus thematizing more directly the question of appropriate modes of resistance. The story of Rabbi Eli‘ezer that appeared in the beginning of the text provided only one option, but now the options are multiplied and confronted in the form of dialogue between the two rabbinic protagonists. Although there is no direct resolution in the text of the contention between “masculine” defiance and “feminine” avoidance, and it would be foolhardy and reductive to produce one, I shall try nevertheless to show how the text encodes deceptiveness and conniving as at least an honored alternative to defiance as a mode of survival in a colonized situation. I am not arguing that this is a text that opposes martyrdom *tout court*—martyrdom was too prestigious a cultural practice for that—but this text serves to significantly reduce the exemplarity of defiance leading to glorified death as the only possible response to oppression. Similarly, the text seems to valorize the “private” option over the “public” one, as we shall see. The final result of the text is, it seems, the propounding of a female, virgin ideal as the model for rabbinic male behavior and subjectivity.

The story opens:

Our rabbis have taught: When Rabbi El'azar the son of Perata and Rabbi Hanina the son of Teradyon were arrested for sectarianism, Rabbi El'azar the son of Perata said to Rabbi Hanina the son of Teradyon: "Happy art thou who has been arrested for only one thing. Woe unto me who has been arrested for five things." Rabbi Hanina the son of Teradyon said to him: "Happy art thou who has been arrested for five things and will be rescued. Woe unto me who has been arrested for one thing and will not be saved, for you busied yourself with Torah and with good deeds, while I only busied myself with Torah."—This is in accord with the view of Rav Huna who said that anyone who busies himself with Torah alone is as if he had no God. . . .

As in the case of Rabbi Eli'ezer with which the whole cycle opened, here also the rabbis are anxious about justifying God's punishment of apparently righteous men via their arrest by the Roman authorities. The notion, not by itself remarkable, that the oppressive empire is God's whip, raises the question of resistance to a high theological pitch (as we will see) at the same time that it reinstates a rather simple theodicy. The rabbis, like Job's friends, cannot stand the thought of a God who punishes without cause [D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality* 99]. In order, however, to both preserve the sense of Rabbi Hanina's blamelessness and yet at the same time justify God's actions toward him, the Talmud cites a text which indicates that on one occasion he was holding two types of public moneys and, confusing them, distributed the money intended for one purpose to the poor by mistake. For that lack of care in the administration of public money, he was arrested and martyred, and, moreover, it is this carelessness that justifies the judgment put in his own mouth that he had not engaged in good deeds.<sup>24</sup>

The text goes on with the details of the trials of the two prisoners:

They brought Rabbi El'azar the son of Perata. They asked him: "Why did you teach and why did you steal?" He answered them: "If book, no sword and if sword, no book! Since one must be absent, the other must as well."

Rabbi El'azar the son of Perata uses his wits to get himself out of trouble. He declares that there is a self-contradiction in the charges

---

<sup>24</sup> For a somewhat similar issue having to do with the misuse of public funds in a roughly contemporaneous Christian text, see Maier.

that they are accusing him of, for one cannot be both a scholar and a thief. Since, he says, the two accusations contradict each other, they cancel each other out. In effect, the rabbi is saying: either you are accusing me of acting like a “Jew” or you are accusing me of acting like a “Gentile.” But you can’t accuse me of both at the same time. In truth, of course, the rabbi is playing the trickster here, because his logic is totally inconsequential. Even were we to accept his premise that the book and the sword are absolutely incompatible, this would not be an argument that neither accusation is true; only that they can’t both be true. At the same time that it functions in the plot to establish Rabbi El’azar’s cleverness, his proverbial utterance announces a theme of the text. Torah is incompatible with the sword, thus repeating the theme established through the typology of Esau, the Roman, and Jacob, the Jew.<sup>25</sup> This was apparently a Christian topos as well, as we learn from a story of Eusebius, the fourth-century chronicler of Christian martyrdom (among other matters) in Palestine. According to this source, a certain Roman soldier confessed himself a Christian and was given several hours to reconsider his confession or be martyred. “Meanwhile the bishop of Caesarea, Theotecnus, took hold of him and brought him near the altar. He raised a little the soldier’s cloak and pointed to the sword, then pointed to the book of the gospels, and bade him choose between the two. The sword and the book are incompatible” [Lieberman, “The Martyrs of Caesarea” 445]. As we will see, honesty is not the issue in our talmudic story, for the rabbi is being disingenuous in the extreme here, and his dishonesty will be rewarded with a miracle. The point is rather to bring out, as in the Eusebian parallel, the essential opposition between the Torah and violence.

The Romans ask him then:

---

<sup>25</sup> Following Lieberman, “The Martyrs of Caesarea” 445. See also Mireille Hadas-Label, “Jacob et Esau ou Israël et Rome dans le Talmud et le Midrash.” Gerald Blidstein reads this text quite differently, arguing that just as Rabbi El’azar’s disclaimer of studying Torah was disingenuous, so was his claim of having been a “robber,” i.e., a violent rebel against the Romans, and he does have a point—if not an ineluctable one. Indeed, Blidstein speculates that the “good deeds” with which the rabbi busied himself were these acts of active rebellion [56–57]. I can no more disprove Blidstein’s reading than I can approve it. Different assumptions produce different hermeneutics.

Why do they call you Rabbi [Master]? He answered them: "I am the master of the weavers." They brought before him two spools of thread and asked him: "Which is the warp and which is the weft?" A miracle took place for him. A male bee came and sat on the weft and a female bee came and sat on the warp.

"And why did you not come to the House of Abidan [the local Pagan Temple]?" He said: "I am old, and I was afraid that you would trample me with your feet." They said to him; "Up until now how many old men have been trampled?" A miracle took place for him, and that very day an old man was trampled.

"Why did you release your slave to freedom?"<sup>26</sup>

"It never happened!"

One got up to testify against him [that he had released his slave]. Elijah came and appeared like one of them. He [the disguised Elijah] said to him [the potential witness]: "Since a miracle has happened for him in the other cases, a miracle will happen this time as well, and something bad will happen to you [lit. that man]."<sup>27</sup> That man [who was betraying him] did not pay attention and got up to tell them. A letter had been written to the House of Caesar. They sent it with him [the informer]. He threw him four hundred parasangs, so that he went and never came back.

This is obviously a highly comic, even carnivalesque (grotesque) story of resistance, a trickster tale par excellence. Rabbi El'azar the son of Perata repeatedly uses rhetorical methods involving "double meaning [and] ambiguous intentions," precisely those tactics that a Roman polemicist of the second Sophistic would deride as effeminate [Gleason 37]. In the typical fashion of the folk narrative, three miracles take place for our hero. In the first, after he has lied and declared himself the "rabbi" of the weavers, a professor of weaving, the Romans test him by showing him two spools of yarn and asking him to distinguish between the weft and the warp, that is, between the insertive and the receptive, the "male" and the "female" thread. A miracle happens: a male bee sits on the weft and a female bee on the warp, and the rabbi

---

<sup>26</sup> It is at least worth noting that in this Jewish representation, manumission was considered a sign of adherence to Torah and disloyalty to Roman authority. It is not entirely clear to me (in fact, it is quite obscure to me) what the historical background for this judgment could be. However, issues surrounding Galatians 2:28, 1 Corinthians 7, and Philemon seem not out of place in this matter.

<sup>27</sup> In talmudic style, negative predicates are nearly always put into third-person sentences in order to avoid, in a situation in which the text was read out loud, predicating them of the speaker or his interlocutors, so "that man" frequently has to be translated as "I" or "you."

is thus able to determine the difference and convince the Romans that he is, indeed, a weaver. In the next miracle, Rabbi El'azar informs the Romans that the reason he does not attend the pagan worship (that is the emperor worship) is because he is afraid of being trampled, and here as well a miracle takes place that convinces the Romans of the truth of his lie. Similarly, in the third case. Here a Jew is prepared to denounce the rabbi as having indeed freed his slave, which apparently in the world of the story was both illegal and a sure mark of adherence to Judaism, and through a highly improbable combination of circumstances and miracles, the denouncer is removed so far from the scene that he will never be heard of again. There is little doubt in my mind that we are in the realm of folk literature here, by which I do *not* mean a literature that is not of the rabbis themselves but rather to emphasize the close connections between the rabbinic class and the "folk."<sup>28</sup> The values of the story are clear as well. Any sort of deception is legitimate, as long as it gets you off the hook with the oppressor, because his rule is absolutely illegitimate. Our protagonist here is a veritable *Bref Rabbi*.

Following the comedy, the tragedy. Our next protagonist is anything but a trickster:

They brought Rabbi Ḥanina the son of Teradion, and said to him: "Why did you engage in Torah?" He said to them: "For thus the Lord my God has commanded me!"

They immediately sentenced him to burning, and his wife to execution [by the sword], and his daughter to sit in a prostitute's booth.

\* \* \*

When the three of them were being taken out, they justified their verdicts. He said, "The Rock, His action is blameless" [Deut. 32:4], and his wife said, "He is a God of faithfulness and there is no wickedness. He is righteous and true" [Deut. 32:4], and his daughter said, "Your judgment is great and Your perception is manifold, for Your eyes are open to all of the ways of human beings [to give each person according to his paths] and the fruit of his wickedness" [Jeremiah 32:19]. Rabbi said: "How great are these three saints, for at the moment of

---

<sup>28</sup> Galit Hasan-Rokem's *The Web of Life—Folklore in Rabbinic Literature: The Palestinian Aggadic Midrash Eikha Rabba*, in Hebrew, is very important in shifting this paradigm. This work, soon to be published in English, has had a profound effect on the way I understand the integration of so-called "folk" materials in rabbinic textuality. [See now *ibidem*, Stanford: 2002]

justifying of God's judgment, there occurred to them the three verses of justification of the judgment."

This is a paradigmatic martyr story: martyrdom is witness to the greater jurisdiction of God's power and justice, which supersedes that of mere temporal authority. Accordingly when this Rabbi is asked, "Why do you teach Torah?" he does not seek to evade an answer and thus culpability as his two predecessors in the text had done—both successfully—but defiantly admits to the "crime" and to the superiority of God's rule over him to that of the Roman ruler: "For thus the Lord my God has commanded me!" This admirable sentiment—analagous to the "Christianus sum" of the martyrs—is the precise antithesis to that of Rabbi Eli'ezer's duplicitous "I have trust in the J/judge." Now the text of Rabbi Ḥanina, which pits God's true justice over-against the false justice of the Roman court, is also obligated to show that God's justice is just. The issue of "justification of the verdict"—a ritual and theological term—in rabbinic Judaism is thus central to the concerns of the text. Note the several readings of Rabbi Eli'ezer's statement that are set in motion particularly in contrast to the univocity of Rabbi Ḥanina's statements. "I have trust in the judge," first, is obviously to be (mis)understood by the Roman himself as a statement of trust in him. Secondly, Rabbi Eli'ezer states that he trusts in the Judge of the Universe that he will not be abandoned in his hour of trial and will be rescued, which he in fact is. But in the light of the antithetical echo story of Rabbi Ḥanina, we might begin to wonder if Rabbi Eli'ezer's statement is, in fact, not a lie, not only with respect to the hegemon but with respect to the Hegemon as well, for by seeking to escape the judgment that the Roman wishes to impose on him, is he not also seeking to escape the judgment that God wishes to impose on him? In other words, to put it sharply, could we not say that Rabbi Eli'ezer confesses by this action that *neither* judge is trusted by him at all? At first glance, then, and given the presuppositions of our culture, we might very well understand that Rabbi Ḥanina's story is being presented as a hermeneutical key to reading the stories of both Rabbi Eli'ezer and the farce of Rabbi El'azar the son of Perata, and the latter two come off badly.

The text, however, immediately disables such a reading in the sequel:

Our [ancient] rabbis have taught: When Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma became ill, Rabbi Ḥanina the son of Teradion went to visit him. He said to him: "Ḥanina, my brother, Don't you know that this nation was



set to rule over us by Heaven, and it has destroyed His house, and burned His temple, and killed his saints, and destroyed his goodly things, and still it exists, and I have heard that you gather crowds together in public, with a Scroll of the Torah in your lap, and you sit and teach!”<sup>29</sup> He [Ḥanina] said to him, “From Heaven they will have mercy.” He [Yose] said to him, “I say logical things to you, and you answer me: ‘From Heaven they will have mercy!’ I will be surprised if they do not burn you and the Scroll of the Torah with you.”

This passage is highly intelligible in the terms of Scott’s analysis of the role of “hidden transcripts” and the social sites within which they are elaborated in dominated communities. As he shows, in order for seditious discourse to be formed, there have to be “autonomous social sites” either hidden from the eyes of the dominating population or hidden from their ears because of “linguistic codes impenetrable to outsiders” [*Domination* 127]. The study of Torah in general in sites such as the Bet Hamidrash, or even more in public “crowds,” would precisely provide such an arena, and it does not matter, according to Scott, exactly what the discourse is in that arena. Insofar as it maintained the possibility of a hidden transcript, of a place within which the dominated Jews could elaborate their true views of their Roman (and Sassanian) overlords, it would serve this function. This is even more the case, of course, when the content expressed in the study of Torah itself incorporated encoded or open contempt for the rulers, as it did, I suggest, frequently enough. The response of the “Romans,” namely their efforts to prohibit the study of Torah, and particularly in crowds, would indicate their understanding—or at any rate, the narrator’s understanding—of the role of such gatherings in the maintenance of the “hidden transcript.” At the same time, there is more than a hint here at a quietist theological position, exactly antithetical to that of a martyr. It is God who has sent the Romans to rule over the Jews, and the rebellious act of provocatively gathering crowds to study Torah in public is thus rebellion against God’s will, not only that of evil humanity. This is the Jewish analogy, therefore, to the early Christian practices of provocatively inviting martyrdom.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Davis makes the excellent point that Rabbi Ḥanina’s virtue, like that of his wife and daughter, was precisely about accepting God’s judgment, as articulated above, while here, paradoxically, his interlocutor claims that he has not sufficiently submitted himself to that very judgment [Davis, “Virgins”].

<sup>30</sup> For a vivid recent evocation of this moment in early Christianity, see Bowersock

The text sends us, it must be said, some ambivalent messages. Note the irony in the following incident:

They said: there did not pass many days until Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma died and all of the great of Rome went to bury him. On their way back, they found him [Rabbi Ḥanina] sitting and studying Torah and gathering congregations in public with the Scroll of the Torah placed in his lap. They wrapped him in the Scroll of the Torah and surrounded him with sticks of firewood and lit them and they brought wool swatches, soaked them in water, and placed them on his heart, in order that he not die quickly.

On the one hand, Rabbi Yose's prophecy that Rabbi Ḥanina would suffer greatly because of his provocative behavior came true exactly as predicted—the Scroll of the Torah is burned also—but on the other hand, it was in a sense Rabbi Yose's accommodating practice (his conformity to the public transcript) that occasioned the tragedy. Had he not been so accommodating, the "great of Rome" would have not been attending his funeral, and Rabbi Ḥanina would not have been arrested. This text simply will not settle down in one place and take sides on the issue of accommodation to vs. alienation from classical, Roman culture, the issue that, as Burrus has shown, was so crucial in the background of the Priscillianist controversy.

I can now go back and interpret a part of the narrative that I have left untouched until now. This passage will strongly support the interpretation that I have been giving and amplify its meanings as well. Immediately after describing the punishments of the three members of Rabbi Ḥanina's family, the text explains why God has allowed them to be so maltreated:

Him to burning, for he used to pronounce the Holy Name literally. How is it possible that he did such a thing?! For we have a tradition that Abba Shaul says that also one who pronounces the Holy Name literally has no place in the World to Come. He did it for the purpose of self-instruction, for as another tradition says: "Do not learn to do" [pronouncing God's name; Deut. 18:9], but you may learn in order to under-

---

1–5. In a future piece of the present research, I shall be dealing at some length with Bowersock's thesis in that book that martyrdom per se is a Christian practice, adopted by the Jews from them. Just to anticipate, I see rather—in keeping with the thesis of this essay—a shared cultural development among Jews and their "brothers according to the flesh," the early Christians.

stand and to teach.” [If that is the case], why was he punished? Because he used to pronounce the Holy Name literally in public, and it says “This is my eternal name” [Exodus 3:15], but the word “eternal” is spelt as if it meant “for hiding.”

And his wife for execution, because she did not censure him.

And his daughter to sit in a prostitute’s booth, for Rabbi Yoḥanan said: She was once walking among the great of Rome, and they said, “How beautiful are the steps of this maiden!” And she immediately became more careful about her steps. And this is what Resh Lakish has said: “The sin of my heels will ambush me” [*Psalms* 49:6]. The sins that a person steps out with his heels in this world will ambush him at the Judgment Day.

Exploration of the details of these explanations, seemingly arbitrary, will strengthen the reading of gendered meanings in this text. Rabbi Ḥanina himself was condemned for doing something in public that he should have done in private. The two explanations for his punishment, namely, the “realistic” one, that the Romans had arrested him for illegally teaching Torah in public, and the theodical one, that God had arrested him for revealing his name to the public, have to be read as comments upon each other. It was appropriate, indeed, for him to be pronouncing God’s name as it is written and with its vowels in order to instruct himself, but this activity needed to be carried out in private, *just as his study and teaching of Torah ought to have been in private, according to Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma*. God’s name was given for hiding, not for public exposure to the eyes of the hostile Romans. In other words, the text is proposing a homology between the reasons for Rabbi Ḥanina’s capture by the Romans at both the pragmatic and the theological levels. God has meant the teaching of Torah to be a private, internal activity for the Jewish People in a hostile world, a “hidden transcript,” and not a matter of provocation and defiance. Resistance, according to this view—which I hasten to emphasize is, of course, not the only one in the rabbinic tradition—consists of doing what we do without getting into trouble and using evasiveness in order to keep doing it. Interestingly enough, Rabbi Ḥanina in defying the Romans was behaving in a way culturally intelligible to the Romans—behaving like a “real man,” a muscle-Jew—while Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma, through deceptive, “womanish,” complicity with the Romans, *resisted* their cultural hegemony.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> See Brown on Ammianus’s admiration of Christian martyrs, because “they had

[4] *The Public and the Private: Gender and the Discourse of Martyrdom*

Rabbinic culture was originally formed at a moment of great ferment within Roman society, in the period known as the Second Sophistic (approximately the second century CE), when new gender paradigms were forming throughout the Empire, and Jews and Christians were playing important roles in such formations. Both early rabbinic Jews and early Christians performed resistance to the Roman imperial power structure through “gender-bending,” thus marking their own understanding that gender is implicated in the maintenance of political power. Thus various symbolic enactments of “femaleness,” as constructed within a particular system of genders—among them asceticism, submissiveness, retiring to private spaces, self-castration, and an analogously interpreted circumcision—were adopted variously by Christians or Jews as acts of resistance against the Roman culture of masculinist power wielding. This point is made by Burrus about early Christianity: “For men, the pursuit of Christian asceticism entailed the rejection of public life and therefore of the hierarchies of office and gender; in this respect, their opponents were not far off the mark when they insinuated that male ascetics were ‘feminized’ through their rejection of the most basic cultural expressions of male identity” [*Making of a Heretic* 14].

In addition to the question of gender and power vis-à-vis Rome, which is most actively mobilized by this text, there is perhaps another subtheme of public and private hovering under its surface, one that has to do with internal power relations within rabbinic society, relations we might wish to refer to as relations of class. In recent work, Cynthia Baker has argued persuasively that for the rabbis, the *Bet Hamidrash*, the Study House, functioned as private space in another sense, a sense internal to Jews and not only in the conflict between Jews and Romans, for the Study House is the quintessential place for the formation of rabbinic identity over-against Others who are Jews,

---

put their bodies ‘on the line’ by facing suffering and death” [65]. See also Barton: “[The Roman] looked for the contest when one proclaimed one’s Nomen or identity. The Romans, for instance, recognized that the man or woman who proclaimed *Christianus sum* or *Judaïos eimi* were doing so as challenges.” Rabbinic texts, on the other hand, counseled Jews to disguise themselves as non-Jews in order to avoid being martyred [Theodor and Albeck 984; see also Lieberman, “The Martyrs of Caesarea” 416, esp. 423].

the so-called ignorant, the *‘Am Ha’aretz* [see Baker, “Neighbor”]. According to talmudic texts analyzed by Baker, one who studies Torah in the presence of these Jewish Others is compared to one who has sexual intercourse with his bride in their presence, continuing a commonplace rabbinic metaphor of Torah study as the act of love, the Torah as bride for the rabbis, and the *privacy* that such a relationship connotes—as well as, of course, marking clearly once again the gender of those who have exclusive access to Torah. In addition, then, to provoking Rome, Rabbi Ḥanina may have been inviting the wrath of the other rabbis by convening congregations and teaching Torah in public spaces analogous to the synagogues (“congregations”) which were still, at this early time, under the control of the nonrabbinic parties among the Jews, or even worse, in the virtual equivalent of the marketplace, that site of “social intercourse at its most chaotic and uncertain, and therefore most dangerous” [Baker, “Bodies” 405]. This interpretation of Torah as virtually esoteric knowledge, almost as a mystery, is strongly supported by the doubling in the text, whereby convening of public congregations for the teaching of Torah is made analogous to the revealing of God’s Holy Name in public.

Crucial to my reading, however, is the fact that Rabbi Ḥanina’s own sin, the sin of public exposure of the Torah to the gaze of Others, whether Jewish or Roman, is then doubled by the sin of his daughter. She, like the Torah “bride” of her father, is also revealed in that same marketplace. Exposed to the predatory male gaze, ethnicized as both “Roman” and the province of the powerful males of Rome, she does not evade the gaze but seeks to enhance her object status further. Having thus rendered herself a sexual object, she is punished by being turned into a whore, the ultimate depersonalized sexual object. Although the text is couched in the form of a critique of the woman here, and that (unfair) judgment, that blaming of the victim if you will, ought not to be papered over in our reading, at the same time there is encoded here a critique of the male gaze itself. It is no accident that it is the important men of Rome who are represented at this moment; they are the proverbial (or stereotyped) “construction workers” for this text. As Rashi comments, citing the Proverbs verse, “[a] respectable king’s daughter remains indoors,” which is at one and the same time a “sexist” demand for a kind of purdah for women and, since the Daughter of the King is Israel herself, a comment also on the proper behavior of Jews in general. Through this doubling,

then, the approved practice for Jews is gendered feminine, while the behavior of the Romans is gendered masculine. The violence of their gaze is contiguous with the greater violence of their bloodshed, and the resistance of the Jew is to be veiled: “eternal” through being “in hiding,” as the double meaning of the verse implies. Remain indoors, as it were. Continue to live, continue to maintain Jewish practice, but do not behave in ways that draw attention to us or provoke the hostile intervention of the ruling powers. It is God who has sent them to rule. Thus the text ultimately endorses the view of Rabbi Yose the son of Kisma (and the practice of Rabbi El’azar ben Perata as well) but does not by any means entirely erase or delegitimize the way of Rabbi Ḥanina.

The end of the daughter’s story is once again highly illuminating. In her ultimate redemption, and via the mode in which she preserves herself, she will be installed, an archetypical female virgin, as a positively marked, valorized model for Jewish masculinity:

Beruria, the wife of Rabbi Me’ir was the daughter of Rabbi Ḥanina. She said to him: It is painful to me that my sister is sitting in a prostitute’s booth. He took a tarqeva of dinars and went, saying if she has done nothing wrong [i.e., if she is sexually innocent], there will be a miracle, and if not, there will be no miracle. He dressed up as a soldier and solicited her. She said: I am menstruating. He said: I can wait. She said: There are many here more beautiful than I. He said: I understand from this that she has done nothing wrong. He went to her guard: Give her to me! The guard said: I am afraid of the king. He [Me’ir] took the tarqeva of dinars, and gave it to him, and said: Take the tarqeva of dinars. Keep half and use half for bribing anyone who comes. He [the guard] said: What shall I do when they are gone? He [Me’ir] said: Say ‘God of Me’ir save me’ and you will be saved. He [guard] said: How do I know that this will be so? He [Me’ir] said: [Now you will see.] There came some dogs that eat people. He shouted to them, and they came to eat him. He said: ‘God of Me’ir save me,’ and they let him go. He let her go.

In contrast to a Roman heroine in such a situation—not to mention a Christian martyr—the daughter of Rabbi Ḥanina does not stand up to her oppressors and defend her chastity in a demonstrative way, which might have brought upon her their wrath and her death. Rather, she tricks her way out of the situation through lies and wiles (rather like the Three Billy Goats Gruff and the troll from European folklore). All that is necessary for God to perform miracles and for her to be saved is that she succeed at the task. The “dishonorable” means

are totally irrelevant. At the same time, however, the text is thematizing the vulnerability of the people without power. Without the miracle, they would be eaten alive by the “dogs.” And lest we think that the counsel of tricksterism is intended only for women, the text goes on to immediately disable such a reading:

The matter became known in the house of the king. They brought him [the guard] and crucified him. He said ‘God of Me’ir save me,’ and they took him down and asked: What was that? He told them: This is how the events took place. They wrote it on the gates of the city, and they engraved Rabbi Me’ir’s face on the gates of Rome and said: If a man who looks like this comes, arrest him! When Rabbi Me’ir came there, they wished to arrest him. He ran away from them and went into a whorehouse. Elijah came in the guise of a whore and embraced him. Some say that he put his hand in Gentile foods and tasted them. They [the Romans] said: God forbend! If that were Rabbi Me’ir he wouldn’t do such a thing. Because of these events [Rabbi Me’ir] ran away to Babylonia.

The most striking aspect of this sequence is, of course, the escape via entering into the whorehouse and disguising himself, once again, as a customer of the prostitutes. This time, however, it is not to test the chastity of someone else but to save his own skin. Just as it was considered by the Jewish text entirely proper for the young woman to pretend to acquiescence in prostitution in order to preserve her life, so is it entirely proper for Rabbi Me’ir to disguise himself and pretend to (or maybe actually) violate the Jewish law in order to keep himself alive, in accord with the principle that the commandments are given to live by and not to die by. Rabbi Me’ir runs away to Babylonia, a safer place for the study of Torah, and not so incidentally the place where this story was formulated. In the end, then, there is a perfect analogy between the male Rabbi and the young female Jew. The text culminates in a reprise of the association between the Roman government and its blandishments and dangers and the house of prostitution, and opens up to its final moral and nearly allegorical meanings: the Jewish People are figured no longer as a man, Jacob, even a feminized man, but as a woman.

As Laurie Davis has strikingly phrased it, “the rabbis see themselves as virgins in a brothel.”<sup>32</sup> Not accidentally, but still tellingly, in a text

---

<sup>32</sup> The allusion is to the wonderful essay by Rachel Adler that I have discussed elsewhere. See Daniel Boyarin, *Carnal Israel* 184–88.

which began with the representation of the Christian heresy as a beautiful prostitute who tempts the male Jewish People away from God, the rabbis seem very close to those Christian ascetics who at exactly the same period were also—as we shall see—using the female virgin as *their* most valorized exemplar. Another way of saying this would be to mark the gap between the explicit and implicit meanings of the rabbinic text. On the explicit level, the text is representing the purity of rabbinic culture, its efforts to remain entirely different and other from Christianity; however, at the same time, via its use of the figure of the female virgin to symbolize its valorized male self—the very self that resists Christianization—it is indicating, to us at least, the convergence of rabbinic culture with that of the Christians, or, perhaps better put, their common cultural history and development.

It is at least arguable that early in its history, much of Christianity represented a dramatic stance of alienation from the Empire and its culture. This alienation is represented in large part through “gender-bending” attacks on female subordination, such as the famous early story in which Jesus promises to make Mary male [see Meyer; also see note 33]. Early Christian texts frequently represent the possibility for a virilization or viriginization of the female martyr Perpetua or the apostle Thecla.<sup>33</sup> In the second century, we find Perpetua, who is marked as the Christian resister to the Roman culture of gender through her “ability to stare directly back into the faces of her persecutors, not with the elusive demeanour of a proper *matrona*,” which “broke with the normative body language in a way that signalled an aggressiveness that was not one of conventional femininity”; just before her was Blandina, whose “fortitude and endurance were compared to those of a victorious male athlete” [Shaw, “Passion of Perpetua” 4, 19]. In contrast to these second-century virile, masculinized martyrs,<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> See Castelli. While in earlier work, scholars read these representations as manifesting “genuine” spaces of autonomy for women in early Christian culture [see Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy*], more recently these same scholars have been inclined to see male representations of self via complex and contradictory identifications with female figures [see Burrus, “Reading Agnes”].

<sup>34</sup> Interestingly enough, as Burrus makes clear, the virginity of female martyrs was not yet crucial in the second century, although it would become so in the fourth century. The virginity per se of females, even female martyrs, is an issue primarily for men, not women. See her “Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity” on this telling point.



in the fourth century we have the trembling Agnes. Burrus shows through a sharp intertextual reading that the meaning of female martyrdom had been refocused by the fourth century by mobilizing the dominant Roman cultural model specifically for virtuous women, one that reinforced female passivity [“Reading Agnes”]. In other words, that which was once unambiguously countercultural and subversive with respect to Rome and its gendered hierarchies and representations had become highly ambiguous, almost fluid in its meanings. No longer the victorious, valorous, virilized gladiator, the virgin martyr was now modeled on such types of passive, female virtue as Lucretia or Polyxena. Burrus traces the discursive modes through which was achieved “the literary transformation of would-be ‘manly’ women—viragines—into femininely docile virgines” [“Reading Agnes” 26]. By the fourth century, the masculine discourse of the Church triumphant no longer wanted Mary to be made male.

One way of thinking of this shift is that when temporal power was becoming an increasingly important element of Christianity’s praxis, the gender hierarchy of male and female became an important symbolic structure for naturalizing that power, whereas before, the subversion of that hierarchy was a tool for neutralizing, denaturalizing imperial power. “Orthodox” Christianity was no longer involved in a subversion of all the hierarchies of empire, having become imperial itself. Pre-imperial Christianity thus provides an elegant example of the ways that political dominance and gender configure each other [see Shaw, “Body/Power/Identity” 285]. This does not mean that in the post-Constantinian period we find a simple reversal of that which obtained earlier. Not by any means. Christianity, for all its post-Constantine temporal success, did not simply identify itself with the empire. In fact, the negotiation of various postures with respect to Roman power was, as Burrus and others have shown [see Brown; Cameron], one of the crucial moments in the internal contestations that marked the Christian world, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries: “To state the thesis in general terms: post-Constantinian Christianity lays claim to the power of classical male speech; yet at the same time late ancient Christian discourse continues to locate itself in paradoxical relation to classical discourse through a stance of feminizing ascesis that renounces public speech” [Burrus, “Reading Agnes” 33]. This sort of paradoxical stance, not surprisingly, gives rise to extremely intricate and sometimes almost enigmatic narrative

representations. The very virgin martyrs whose femininity is being reinforced represent at the same time an ambiguity of gender that matches the ambiguities of identification with Rome manifested by such figures as Ambrose and Prudentius. In addition to the gross and obvious political change, which I have pointed to, Burrus emphasizes both the developments of mariology and the image of the orthodox church as *virgo intacta* assailed by heresies that gave further impetus to the fourth-century emphasis on (almost obsession with) the figure of the female virgin.<sup>35</sup>

For example, in Ambrose's *Concerning Virgins*, we find a stunningly complex moment of paradoxical gender identifications. In one crucial episode, Thecla, the apocryphal female associate of Paul, has entered the martyrological ring. She is precisely the proverbial Christian who has been thrown to the lions. As Ambrose structures his recounting of this episode, the lion "initially represents the sexual violence signalled by both the 'rage' of Thecla's would-be husband and the 'immodest eyes' of the male onlookers who gaze upon the spectacle of her nakedness" [Burrus, "Reading Agnes" 32]. The would-be martyr, Thecla, voluntarily presents to the lion her "vital parts," an obviously eroticized displacement of the offer of her sexual parts to her rejected fiancé. Male sexuality (and this is crucial) is figured as devouring of the woman, and the lion represents both the rapacity of a husband as well as that of the Empire.<sup>36</sup> This lion, however, undergoes a miraculous transformation (in addition to his pluralization, duly noted by Burrus):

Let, then, holy Mary instruct you in the discipline of life, and Thecla teach you how to be offered, for she, avoiding nuptial intercourse, and condemned through her husband's rage, changed even the disposition of wild beasts by their reverence for virginity. For being made ready for

---

<sup>35</sup> Burrus, "Word and Flesh" 36–41. Oddly enough, heresy is not only the male "rapist" of the ecclesiological virgin, but also frequently figured as an incontinent female, as Burrus points out there as well [see also Cohen].

<sup>36</sup> The rabbis also use the lion as a symbol for a violent male sexuality, saying that "the ignorant man is like the lion who tramples and then devours its prey," while the courting routine of the rooster is taken as a positive example of the husband who plays and dallies with and arouses his wife before intercourse. For the lion as an image of violent male sexuality in Roman literature, see the text of Martial cited by Richlin. For the persistence of the lion in this guise, see James Joyce's *Ulysses*, in which Bloom remarks, "the lion reek of all the male brutes that have possessed" a prostitute [409].

the wild beasts, when avoiding the gaze of men, she offered her vital parts to a fierce lion, caused those who had turned away their immodest looks to turn them back modestly. The beast was to be seen lying on the ground, licking her feet, showing without a sound that it could not injure the sacred body of the virgin. So the beast revered his prey, and forgetful of his own nature, put on that nature which men had lost. One could see, as it were, by some transfusion of nature, men clothed with savageness, goading the beast to cruelty, and the beast kissing the feet of the virgin, teaching them what was due from men. . . . They set an example of piety when reverencing the martyr; and gave a lesson in favor of charity when they did nothing but kiss the virgin's feet, with their eyes turned to the ground, as though through modesty, fearing that any male, even a beast, should see the virgin naked [*Ambrose de virg.* 2, 19–20]

The text is drawing an explicit analogy between the hunger of the male lion to eat the virgin's flesh and the lust of her husband to consummate the marriage. Even the lion, a mere beast is led to transform its beastly and violent maleness in the presence of the virgin martyr and by her example. Burrus sums up her reading of this passage by remarking that “the subjugating force of male sexual violence has not been defeated so much as sublimated. On one reading at least, the lion's averted, feminized gaze continues paradoxically to restrain the virgin; the very gesture of honoring her—indeed of freely mirroring her feminine subjugation—becomes itself the vehicle of her constraint” [“Reading Agnes” 33]. I would unpack this conclusion in the following manner. Even in the era of “imperial Christianity,” male sexuality, understood as “naturally” violent, was resisted. Because of its cultural construction within the dominant Roman formation to which most Christians had belonged [see Richlin], this resistance remained an important part of Christian male self-construction, but it could no longer accommodate such resistance through figurations of a female “achievement” of maleness. Gender hierarchy now had to be preserved, but not at the cost of reinstating an ideal of invasive phallic maleness. The point was precisely to “sublimate” it; subjugation was to be retained but without violence. This is the moment that Burrus quite dramatically refers to as “the veiling of the phallus.” A paradoxical relation of these men to their own male selves is paralleled in their paradoxical relation to classical discourse (figured as “male”) and even to Roman imperial power itself. It is through their stance of self-feminization that the church fathers (quite similar in this to both early rabbis and later rabbinic tradition [see D. Boyarin,

“Torah-Study”]) produce and maintain their discourses of subjugation of women. This is analogous, in Burrus’s subtle readings, of the ways that power and prestige were both subverted and maintained even by such ascetic figures as Sulpicius (*a fortiori* by bishops) through their rhetorics of seclusion, withdrawal, and “feminizing asceticism.”<sup>37</sup>

The female virgin remained a highly charged symbol, owing to her subversions of sexuality, but she functioned now most readily as an example for the male ascetic, as *virgo*, not *virago*. She is a figure no longer for the viragined female but rather for the feminized male, the male who upon perceiving her, like the lion, is inspired to—which is not to say that he achieves—a complete renunciation of his “naturally” violent, leonine, male sexuality. It is indeed telling that in the earlier version of the Thecla story, Thecla is protected by a female lion from the rage of the male lion, while in the fourth-century Ambrosian version, the female lion is gone, her place taken by a male lion who is himself transformed through the example of the virgin [Burrus, “Reading Agnes” 32]. The pluralization of the lions is, as Burrus remarks, significant of their transformation into an icon of the audience watching the martyrdom (and the audience reading the martyrology), at least insofar as these are male.

Burrus’s analysis of Ambrose proves strikingly productive for our understanding of the rabbinic text as well, for in both texts the female virgin as valorized symbol for the ideal male is being put forth. Indeed, the Ambrose text even includes a “virgin in a brothel,” a parallel that I will be analyzing elsewhere. For all this convergence, however, it is fascinating to observe possible lines of difference as well.

As a tentative hypothesis, I would offer the following: identification with the female virgin is a mode for both rabbis and church fathers of disidentification with a “Rome” whose power is stereotyped as a highly sexualized male. Both groups are engaged in complex, tangled, and ambivalent negotiations of self-fashioning in response to their attraction to and repulsion from that Rome. Each, however, occupies a different space within the economies of power and ethnic emplace-

---

<sup>37</sup> See Cooper for another extended exploration of the ways that figures of idealized women are used within late antique culture in the rhetorical struggles between men for prestige and power.

ment in the Empire. On the one hand, Christian writers, even as late as the fourth or fifth centuries, were frequently former Roman “pagans,” sons of power and prestige in imperial society and highly educated and identified with classical culture. Their renunciation of such identification and certain forms of power and prestige is thus both more dramatic (for being voluntary and “expensive”) and ambivalent than that of the rabbis who are always/already outsiders to a certain extent by virtue of birth into a minority ethnic and religious group and socialization into a different language and literary tradition. On the other hand, Christian culture with its powerful—but by no means ubiquitous—critique of marriage continued to represent a much more radical rejection of Roman cultural values than did that of the rabbis.

The rabbis also stand in a highly ambiguous position vis-à-vis their version of “Rome.” As we have seen, for them being male represents a species of danger, danger of being “seduced” into pursuing one of two prostitutes, heretical sectarianism, Christianity (becoming the dominant religion of the empire), or collaboration with Roman power.<sup>38</sup> Thus for them, too, the female virgin becomes symbolic of a virtual ego ideal. However, there are differences as well. The female virgin in the brothel, the valued model of rabbinic resistance is subtly different from the Christian model. She escapes her fate, not like the second-century Perpetua, nor even like the fourth-century Agnes, through open resistance, which ultimately cost her her life, but instead through the use of trickster methods, “feminine” wiles, thus escaping both fates, rape as well as death. If the paradigmatic virgin for the church fathers remains the virgin in the arena, the paradigmatic virgin for the rabbis is the virgin in the brothel, the one who manages through her wiles to preserve her virginity while staying alive, in order finally to become a virgin bride. For the church fathers (Ambrose and Prudentius), the primary issue in their symbolization of the virgin as their model is precisely her virginity—her literal continence interpreted as a model for male celibates. But rabbinic Judaism, for all its alienation from certain aspects of late classical culture, still strongly

---

<sup>38</sup> In a text that I have discussed elsewhere such collaboration is explicitly marked as becoming leonine [*Unheroic* 88], and “feminine” stealth is recommended as the antidote.

accepts and identifies with the pro-marriage and pro-natal ideologies that such contemporary texts as novels indicate. The rabbi's daughter cannot, therefore, die a virgin. Her virginity is being preserved, like the heroine of a novel such as *Leukippe*, whose behavior is reminiscent of that of Rabbi Me'ir, *for* her husband, not until death, while Thecla's is being preserved *from* her husband.

In her habitation of "private" indoor spaces, this talmudic virgin is the figure construed as most able to resist the "sexual" seductions of both sectarianism and accommodation to Roman power. To reprise: it is behaving as a male with respect to the "female" blandishments of heresy or collaboration that gets one into trouble; behaving as a "female" would get one out of it. In this form, the female virgin as ideal for the male is more like that other late ancient Christian figure of the virgin, not the virgin martyr but the virgin ascetic who becomes her inheritor from the fourth century on [see Elm]. As Burrus observes, Sulpicius Severus, a Gallic ascetic squarely contemporary with our talmudic text, explicitly remarks women and especially virginal women as his models for the ascetic life of retirement and withdrawal from public exposure and activity: "Sulpicius' special interest in virginal women is in large part attributable, I think, to the fact that it is women in general and virginal women in particular who traditionally model the life of complete retirement and avoidance of public exposure." Burrus concludes, quite strikingly, that "Sulpicius puts forth the radical suggestion that the male must indeed 'become female' through his ascetic renunciation of public life" ["Male Ascetic"] paralleling the rabbis' becoming female through their ascetic renunciations of intercourse within alluring Christianity or participation in the Roman State. As Burrus remarks, "Sulpicius presents the virgin as an ideal of which Martin acknowledges himself to fall short, compromised by his episcopal office and also, I would add, by his very maleness" ["Male Ascetic"]. Like our rabbis, the male must become female in order to escape the moral dangers of his masculine state. In our talmudic text, the rabbis are thus close, *mutatis mutandis*, in their use of this charged symbol to those ascetics (such as Sulpicius Severus) for whom the virgin was a model for a life of withdrawal from public exposure. *Mutatis mutandis*, for the withdrawal of a Roman aristocrat from the public cannot be identical to the withdrawal of Jewish sages. I find here, nevertheless, a remarkable example of sharp cul-

tural convergence, suggestive once more of the need for our researches in late antique culture to transcend the narrow lines of histories of particular religious groups.<sup>39</sup> So-called syncretism is not a marginal phenomenon in the formation even of monotheistic religions but the very heartland of their life and development.

---

<sup>39</sup> On Jewish martyrologies in midrashic texts from the talmudic period, Galit Hasan-Rokem has written, “[t]he intertextual connections that are expressed in these stories do not remain enclosed within the inner-Jewish, Hebrew, and rabbinic borders. In these stories are revealed also the connections with universes of discourse with which rabbinic literature carries out ambivalent, tense and even openly polemic relations” [135].

## LIST OF WORKS CITED

- Abelard, Peter. "Historia Calamitum." In *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*. Ed. and trans. Betty Radice, The Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1974: 57–108.
- Abraham, Gary A. *Max Weber and the Jewish Question: A Study of the Social Outlook of His Sociology*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1992.
- Adler, Rachel. "The Virgin in the Brothel and Other Anomalies: Character and Context in the Legend of Beruriah." *Tikkun* 3.6 (1988): 28+.
- Alexander, Philip S. "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism." *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*. Ed. James D.G. Dunn. Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1991. 1–25.
- Alter, Robert. *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- . *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone, 1989.
- . "Biblical Imperatives and Literary Play." In *The World of Biblical Literature*, New York: Basic Books, 1992: 25–47.
- Ambrose. *Concerning Virgins. St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*. Trans. H. De Romestin. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979.
- Anidjar, Gil. "At Our Place in al-Andalus": *Declinations of Context in Jewish Letters*. Dissertation (UC Berkeley), 1998, Photocopy.
- Anzieu, Didier. *Freud's Self-Analysis*. Trans. Peter Graham. Pref. M. Masud R. Khan. Paris: 1975. Madison, CT: International UP, 1986.
- Aristotle. *Poetics*. Trans. James Hutton. New York: W.W. Norton, 1982.
- Augustine. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Ed. and trans. John K. Ryan. New York: Doubleday, Image, 1960.
- Baker, Cynthia. "Bodies, Boundaries, and Domestic Politics in a Late Ancient Marketplace." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 26.3 (1996): 391–418.
- . "Neighbor at the Door or Enemy at the Gate? Notes toward a Rabbinic Topography of Self and Other." American Academy of Religion Convention. New Orleans, 1996.
- Bal, Mieke. *Murder and Difference*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988.
- . *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1985.
- Barton, Carlin A. "The 'Moment of Truth' in Ancient Rome: Honor and Embodiment in a Contest Culture." Unpublished essay, 1995.
- Barzilai, Shuli, "Augustine's Contexts: Lacan's Repetition of a Scene from the Confessions," in: *Literature and Theology* 11.2 (June 1997): 200–21.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. New York: Pantheon, 1988.
- Berkowitz, Michael. *Zionist Culture and West European Jewry before the First World War*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Biale, David. *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*. New York: Schocken, 1986.
- Blidstein, Gerald J. "Rabbis, Romans, and Martyrdom—Three Views." *Tradition* 21.3 (1984): 54–62.
- Bloch, R. Howard. *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991.
- Boitani, Piero. *English Medieval Narrative in the 13th & 14th Centuries*. Trans. Joan Krakover Hall. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Bowersock, Glen W. *Martyrdom and Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.



- Bowie, Malcolm. *Lacan*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991.
- Boyarin, Daniel. "The Politics of Biblical Narratology: Reading the Bible Like/as a Woman." *diacritics* 20 (Winter 1990): 31–42.
- . "‘An Imaginary and Desirable Converse’: Moses and Monotheism as Family Romance," in: *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book*. Biblical limits. London and New York: Routledge, 1997: 184–204.
- . *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture*. The New Historicism: studies in cultural poetics 25. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993.
- . "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic," in: *Critical Inquiry* 16 (Spring 1990): 532–50.
- . *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- . *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, Contraversions: critical studies in Jewish literature, culture, and society. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.
- . "Take the Bible for Example: Midrash as Literary Theory," in: Alexander Geley (ed.), *Unruly Examples: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Literature and Philosophy*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995: 27–47; 330–36.
- . *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man*, Contraversions: Studies in Jewish literature, culture, and society, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997.
- . "Virgin Rabbis: A Study in Fourth-Century Cultural Affinity and Difference." Unpublished paper.
- . "Who Wrote the Dominant Fiction?: On the History of the Early Phallus," in: Sharon Farmer/Carol Pasternack (edd.), *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, 1998. Forthcoming.
- . "'This we know to be the carnal Israel': Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel." *Critical Inquiry* 18.2 (1992): 474–506.
- . "A Sharp Practice: Little Han's Circumcision and the Subject of Colonialism." *Jews and Other Differences: The New Jewish Cultural Studies*. Ed. Boyarin, Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994 [never published in this form].
- . *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, forthcoming [2003].
- . "Homotopia: The Feminized Jewish Man and the Lives of Women in Late Antiquity." *differences* 7.2 (1995): 41–81.
- . "Jewish Masochism: Couvade, Castration, and Rabbis in Pain." *American Imago* 51.1 (1994): 3–36.
- . "Torah-Study and the Making of Jewish Gender." *The Feminist Companion to Biblical Approaches and Methodologies*. Ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, forthcoming.
- . "The Other Within and the Other Without" *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992: 77–98.
- . "Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory." *Space, Time, and the Politics of Memory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, in press.
- . *A Storyteller's Worlds: The Education of Shlomo Noble in Europe and America*. Foreword by Sander L. Gilman. New York: Holmes, 1994.
- and Daniel Boyarin. *Powers of Diaspora*. New York: Routledge, forthcoming [Minneapolis: U of Minn Press, 2003].
- Brown, Peter. *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.
- . *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Bruns, Gerald. "Midrash and Allegory." In *The Literary Guide to the Bible*. Ed. Robert

- Alter and Frank Kermode, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987: 625–546.
- Buber, Solomon (ed.), *The Midrash on Psalms*, New York, 1947.
- (ed.), *Midrash Tanhuma*, Jerusalem, 1964.
- Burrus, Virginia. “The Male Ascetic in Female Space: Alienated Strategies of Self-Definition in the Writings of Sulpicius Severus.” Society of Biblical Literature/American Academy of Religion. New Orleans, 1992.
- Cameron, Averil. *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1991.
- Castelli, Elizabeth A. “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity.” *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Ambiguity*. Ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub. New York: Routledge, 1991. 29–49.
- Charlesworth, James H. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1985. 2 vols.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Book of the Duchess*. Ed. Helen Phillips. Durham, England: Durham and St. Andrews Medieval Texts. 1986.
- Chisholm, Dianne, “Irigaray’s Hysteria,” in: Carolyn Burke/Naomi Schor/Margaret Whitford (edd.) *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought, Gender and Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994: 263–83.
- Cixous, Hélène, and Catherine Clément. *The Newly Born Woman*. Trans. Betsy Wing. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986.
- Cohen, Shaye J.D. “A Virgin Defiled: Some Rabbinic and Christian Views on the Origins of Heresy.” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36.1 (1980): 1–11.
- Cooper, Kate. *The Virgin and the Bride*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996.
- Culbertson, Philip L. *A Word Fitly Spoken: Contest, Transmission, and Adoption of the Parables of Jesus*. Albany: SUNY P, 1995.
- Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*. Vol. 1, *The Inferno*. Trans. Charles Singleton. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- . *The Divine Comedy*. Vol. 1, *The Inferno*. Trans. Mark Musa. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1984.
- Davies, W.D. *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*. 2nd ed. 1955. London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1965.
- Davis, Laurie. “Virgins in Brothels: A Different Feminist Reading of Beruriah.” Paper presented at Graduate Theological Union. Berkeley, 1994.
- Dearman, J. Andrew. “My Servants the Scribes: Composition and Context in Jeremiah 36.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (Fall 1990): 403–421.
- Derrida, Jacques. “Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German,” in: *New Literary History* 22.1 (Winter 1991): 39–96.
- Dolar, Mladen. “The Phrenology of Spirit,” in: Joan Copjec (ed.), *Supposing the Subject*, S 1, London: Verso, 1994: 64–83.
- Dronke, Peter. “Francesca and Héloïse. *Comparative Literature* 27 (Spring 1975): 113–135.
- du Maurier, George. *Trilby*. 1894. London: Everyman’s Library, 1969.
- Dunsky, Shimshon (ed.), *Song of Songs Rabbah*, Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1980.
- Edwards, Catherine. *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard. *God’s Phallus and Other Problems for Men and Monotheism*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.
- Elm, Susana. “*Virgins of God*”: *The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1994.
- Epstein, Isidore. *The Babylonian Talmud, Translated into English*. London: Soncino, 1935.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. Paris: 1952. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967.

- Fink, Bruce. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Fisch, Harold. *Poetry with a Purpose*. Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Foucault, Michel. Afterword. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. By Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.
- . *An Introduction*. Vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1980.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy: 'Little Hans.'" *Case Histories I: 'Dora' and 'Little Hans.'* 1909. Trans. James Strachey. Vol. 8 of Penguin Freud Library. Ed. Angela Richards. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990: 165–305.
- . *The Interpretation of Dreams*. 1900. Trans. James Strachey. New York: Discus Avon, 1965.
- . *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1957. [SE]
- Frieden, Ken. *Freud's Dream of Interpretation*, foreword by Harold Bloom, SUNY Series in Modern Jewish Literature and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Fuss, Diana. "Reading Like a Feminist." *differences* 1.2 (1989): 77–92.
- Gager, John. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1983.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Gaston, Lloyd. *Paul and the Torah*. Vancouver: U of British Columbia P, 1987.
- Geller, Jay. "A Paleontological View of Freud's Study of Religion: Unearthing the Leitfossil Circumcision." *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993): 49–70.
- Gibbs, Robert/Ochs, Peter. "The Semiotics of Money: Reflections on B. Talmud Perek Hazahav." Paper presented at AAR. Washington, D.C., 1993. Internet.
- Gilman, Sander L. *The Case of Sigmund Freud: Medicine and Identity at the Fin de Siècle*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993.
- . *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.
- Girard René. *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Collab. Jean-Michel Oughourlian and Guy Lefort. Trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1978.
- Gleason, Maud W. *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- Goldhill, Simon. "Wipe Your Glosses." *Aporemata* 3: 1998.
- Goodman, Nelson. "Routes of Reference," in: *Critical Inquiry* 8.1 (Autumn 1981): 121–32.
- Goux, Jean-Joseph. "Luce Irigaray Versus the Utopia of the Neutral Sex," in: Carolyn Burke/Naomi Schor/Margaret Whitford (edd.), *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, Gender and Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994: 175–90.
- . *Oedipus Philosopher* (Trans. Catherine Porter), Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- . "The Phallus: Masculine Identity and the 'Exchange of Women'" (Trans. Maria Amuchastegui, Caroline Benforado, Amy Hendrix, and Eleanor Kaufman), in: *Differences* 4.1 (Spring 1992): 40–75.
- . *Symbolic Economies: After Marx and Freud* (Trans. Jennifer Curtis Cage), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Greenblatt, Stephen J. "Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the

- Sixteenth Century." *Learning to Curse: Essays in Early Modern Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1990: 16–39.
- Gruen, Erich. E-mail to the author. 1997.
- Hadas, Moses, ed. and trans. *The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees*. 1953. New York: Ktav, 1976.
- Hadas-Label, Mireille. "Jacob et Esau ou Israël et Rome dans le Talmud et le Midrash." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 201 (1984): 369–92.
- Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Hampton, Timothy. "'Turkish Dogs': Rabelais, Erasmus, and the Rhetoric of Alterity." *Representations* 41 (1993): 58–82.
- Handelman, Susan. *The Slayers of Moses*, Albany: SUNY Press, 1982.
- Hanson, Ann Ellis. "Conception, Gestation, and the Origin of Female Nature in the Corpus Hippocraticum," in: *Helios* 19 (1992): 31–71.
- Harl, Kenneth. *Civic Coins and Civic Politics in the Roman East, A.D. 185–275*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987.
- Hartman, Geoffrey H., and Sanford Budick, eds. *Midrash and Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986.
- Hasan-Rokem, Galit. *The Web of Life Folklore in Rabbinic Literature: The Palestinian Aggadic Midrash Eikha Rabba*, (In Hebrew) Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1996.
- Hatcher, Anna and Mark Musa. "The Kiss: *Inferno* V and the Old French Prose *Lancelot*." *Comparative Literature* 20 (1968): 97–109.
- Hayes, Christine E. "Amoraic Interpretation and Halakhic Development: The Case of the Prohibited Basilica," in: *Journal for the Study of Judaism* xxvi.2 (1995): 156–67.
- Heinemann, Isaak. *Darxei Ha'agada*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1970. 1954.
- Hendrickson, G.L. "Ancient Reading," *The Classical Journal*. 25 (1929): 182–196.
- Hicks, D.A. (trans.), *Diogenes Laertius: Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Loeb Classics. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965. 2 vols. 1925.
- Holland, Dorothy, and Naomi Quinn, "Culture and Cognition; Introduction." In *Cultural Models in Language & Thought*. Ed. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987: 3–43.
- Homans, Peter. *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989.
- Hunter, Dianne, ed. *Seduction and Theory: Readings of Gender, Representation, and Rhetoric*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.
- Hutton, Christopher. "Freud and the Family Drama of Yiddish." *Studies in Yiddish Linguistics*. Ed. Paul Wexler. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1990. 9–22.
- Idel, Moshe. "Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah," in: David Kraemer (ed.), *The Jewish Family, Metaphor and Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989. 197–224.
- Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Trans. Gillian C. Gill), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Irwin, T.H. "Aristotle's Concept of Signification," in: Malcolm Schofield/Martha Craven Nussbaum (edd.), *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G.E.L. Owen*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 241–66.
- Isbell, Charles D. "II Kings 22:3–23:4 and Jer. 36: A Stylistic Comparison." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, 8 (1978): 33–45.
- Jardine, Alice A. *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985.
- Johnson, Barbara. "The Frame of Reference: Poe, Lacan, Derrida." *The Purloined Poe*. Ed. John P. Muller and William J. Richards. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987. 213–51.

- Jones, Ernest. *The Life and Work of Sigmund Freud*. 3 vols. New York: Basic, 1953–57.
- Joyce, James. *Ulysses*. 1914. New York: Random House, 1961.
- Keesing, Roger M. "Models, 'folk' and Cultural: Paradigms Regained." In *Cultural Models in Language & Thought*. Ed. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987: 369–393.
- Kleiman, Ephraim. "Bi-Metallism in Rabbi's Time: Two Variants of the Mishna 'Gold Acquires Silver'," (In Hebrew) in: *Zion* 38 (1973): 48–61.
- Knox, Bernard M.W. "Silent Reading in Antiquity." *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 9 (1968): 421–435.
- Kristeva, Julia. "Women's Time." *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986: 187–213.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), Dennis Porter (trans.), New York: Norton, 1992. Vol. VII of *Seminar*.
- . *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), Alan Sheridan (trans.), Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1979.
- Lakoff, George. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal About the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. 614 pp.
- Levine, Amy-Jill. "Diaspora as Metaphor: Bodies and Boundaries in the Book of Tobit." *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*. Ed. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan. Atlanta: Scholars, 1992: 105–18.
- Lieberman, Saul. *Texts and Studies*, New York: Ktav, 1974.
- . "The Martyrs of Caesarea." *Annuaire de l'institut de philologie et d'histoire orientales et slaves* 7 (1939–44): 395–446.
- . *Texts and Studies*. New York: Ktav, 1974.
- Lloyd, David. "Kant's Examples." *Representations* 28 (Fall 1989): 34–54.
- Lloyd, Genevieve. *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy*, Second ed. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
- Loewe, W.H., ed., *The Fragment of Talmud Babli Pesachim of the Ninth or Tenth Century in the University Library, Cambridge*. Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, 1879.
- Maier, Harry O. "Purity and Danger in Social Perspective." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1.3 (1993): 229–47.
- Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide for the Perplexed* (Trans. M. Friedländer), New York: Dover, 1956.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*. Introd. by Ernest Mandel, trans. Ben Fowkes, Vol. 1, The Marx Library. New York: Random House, 1977.
- Mazzotta, Giuseppe. *Dante: Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
- McGrath, William J. *Freud's Discovery of Psychoanalysis: The Politics of Hysteria*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986.
- Meschonnic, Henri. "Poetics and Politics: A Round Table." With Alex Derczansky, Olivier Mongin, and Paul Thibaud. *Now Literary History* 19 (Spring 1988): 453–467.
- Meyer, Michael W. "Making Mary Male: The Categories 'Male' and 'Female' in the Gospel of Thomas." *New Testament Studies* 31.4 (1985): 554–70.
- Mitchell, Juliet. "Introduction—I." *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école Freudienne*. By Jacques Lacan. New York: Norton, 1985: 1–26.
- Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.
- Nandy, Ashis. *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1983.
- Nell, Victor. *Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

- Neusner, Jacob. *The Economics of the Mishnah*, Chicago studies in the history of Judaism, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- . *Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus: The Tradition and the Man*. Leiden: Brill, 1973. 2 vols.
- . *Judaism and Christianity in the Age of Constantine: History, Messiah, Israel, and the Initial Confrontation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1987.
- Niditch, Susan. *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Noakes, Susan. *Timely Reading: Between Exegesis and Interpretation*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Ophir, Adi. "Victims Come First." Paper presented at Berman Center for Jewish Studies. Lehigh, PA, 1994.
- Parker, Patricia. *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Pateman, Carole. *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989.
- Pease, Donald. "Toward a Sociology of Literary Knowledge: Greenblatt, Colonialism, and the New Historicism." *Consequences of Theory*. Ed. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991: 108–53.
- Plotinus. *Enneads*. Trans. A.H. Armstrong, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. Vol. 5 of Enneads. Loeb Library.
- Plutarch. *Moralia V*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936.
- . *Moralia X*, trans. Harold North Fowler, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936.
- Poe, Elizabeth Wilson. *From Poetry to Prose in Old Provençal: The Emergence of the Vidas, the Razos, and the Razos de Trobar*. Birmingham, Ala.: Summa Publications, 1984.
- Pringsheim, Fritz. *The Greek Law of Sale*. Weimar, 1950.
- Pucci, Pietro. *Oedipus and the Fabrication of the Father: Oedipus Tyrannus in Modern Criticism and Philosophy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Rappaport, Roy A. "Liturgies and Lies." *International Yearbook for Sociology of Knowledge and Religion* 10 (1976): 75–104.
- Richlin, Amy. *The Garden of Priapus: Sexuality and Aggression in Roman Humor*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.
- Robbins, Jill. *Prodigal Son/Elder Brother*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Robert, Marthe. *From Oedipus to Moses: Freud's Jewish Identity*. Trans. Ralph Manheim. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976.
- Ronell, Avital. "Doing Kafka in *The Castle*," in: *Finitude's Score: Essays for the End of the Millennium*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.
- Roy, Parama. *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.
- Russell O.S.A., Robert. "The Role of Neoplatonism in St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*," in: H.J. Blumenthal/R.A. Markus (edd.), *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A.H. Armstrong*. London: Variorum, 1981, 160–70.
- Saenger, Paul. "Silent Reading: Its Impact on Late Medieval Script and Society." *Viator*, 13 (1982): 367–414.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. New York: Schocken, 1946.
- Schor, Naomi. *Breaking the Chain: Women, Theory and French Realist Fiction*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.
- Schutz, Alexander. "Were the *Vidas* and *Razos* Recited?" *Studies in Philology*, 36:565–570, 1939.
- Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.
- . *Weapons of the Weak: The Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1985.

- Seshadri-Crooks, Kalpana. "The Primitive as Analyst: Post-colonial Feminism's Access to Psychoanalysis." *Cultural Critique* (in press).
- Setzer, Claudia. *Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30–150 C.E.* Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994.
- Shapiro, Susan E. "Response to Daniel Boyarin." Paper presented at Conference on Textual Reasoning, Madison, NJ, 1997.
- Shaw, Brent D. "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4.3 (1996): 269–312.
- . "The Passion of Perpetua." *Past and Present* 139 (May 1993): 3–45.
- Shell, Marc. *The Economy of Literature*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- . *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. 1982.
- . "Marranos (Pigs), or from Coexistence to Toleration." *Critical Inquiry* 17.2 (1991): 306–36.
- Shepherdson, Charles. "The Role of Gender and the Imperative of Sex," in: Joan Copjec (ed.), *Supposing the Subject*, S 1. London: Verso, 1994: 158–84.
- Sperber, Daniel. *Roman Palestine 200–400: Money and Prices*, Bar Ilan Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Culture, Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1974.
- Spitzer, Leo. *Lives in Between: Assimilation and Marginality in Austria, Brazil, and West Africa, 1780–1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Stern, David. "Midrash and Indeterminacy." *Critical Inquiry* 15(1): 132–168, 1988.
- . "Midrash and Indeterminacy," in: *Critical Inquiry* 15.1 (Autumn 1988): 132–62.
- Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars* (trans. Robert Graves), captions, essays, picture research Sabine MacCormack, New York: Penguin Books, 1980.
- Sweetser, Eve E. "The Definition of a Lie. An Examination of Folk Models Underlying a Semantic Prototype." In *Cultural Models in Language & Thought*. Ed. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Theodor, Jehuda, and Hanoah Albeck, eds. *Genesis Rabbah*. Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1965.
- Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971.
- Thomson, George. *Aeschylus and Athens: A Study in the Social Origins of Drama*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973: 1941.
- . *The First Philosophers*. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1955. Vol. II of Studies in Ancient Greek Society.
- Trible, Phyllis. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978.
- Tyler, Stephen A. *Cognitive Anthropology*. New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1969.
- van den Haag, Ernest. *The Jewish Mystique*. New York: Stein & Day, 1969.
- Westerholm, Stephen. "Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics." *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 229–48.
- Winston, David. *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985.
- Wolfson, Elliot R. "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol." *History of Religions* 27.2 (1987): 189–215.
- Zeitlin, Froma. "The Dynamics of Misogyny: Myth and Mythmaking in Aeschylus's Oresteia," in: *Playing the Other; Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature. Women in culture and society*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996: 87–119.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Phronesis. London: Verso, 1989.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SOURCES

### Part One—Midrashic Sources

- Chapter 1 originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1990, pp. 532–50
- Chapter 2 originally published in *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 1992, pp. 474–506
- Chapter 3 originally published in *The Ethnography of Reading*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin, 1993, University of California Press, pp. 10–37
- Chapter 4 originally published in *Unruly Examples: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Alexander Gelley, 1995, Stanford University Press, pp. 27–47 and pp. 330–6
- Chapter 5 originally published in *Aporemata: Kritische Studien zur Philosophiegeschichte*, Volume 4, ed. Glenn W. Most, 2000, pp. 18–65

### Part Two—Diacritical Marks

- Chapter 6 originally published in *Diacritics* 20:2, Winter 1990, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 31–42
- Chapter 7 originally published in *Diacritics* 23:2, Summer 1993, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 16–35
- Chapter 8 originally published in *Diacritics* 24:1, Spring 1994, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 17–42
- Chapter 9 originally published in *Diacritics* 28:2, Summer 1998, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 52–80



## INDEX OF NAMES AND SUBJECTS

- A Radical Jew* (Boyarin), 194  
 Abelard, 74  
 Adam and Eve, allegory of, 27  
 Akiva, Rabbi, 114 n. 3  
 allegory/allegoresis  
   disembodiment of history in, 50–53  
   and God's corporeality, 19–21  
   in Gregory of Nyssa, 31–33  
   hermeneutic structure of, 50 n. 71  
   in Origen, 19–21, 34–35, 52–53  
   in Paul, 38–39, 45, 55–58, 185–190  
   in Philo, 27–31, 36–39  
 Alter, Robert, 59, 80–82, 89, 170, 177  
 Ambrose, 71 n. 16  
 anaphora, 6–8, 18  
 Anna O. (Bertha Pappenheim), 216  
 Anthropogeny, in Philo, 27–31  
 anti-Semitism/anti-Judaism, 56 n. 83,  
   200–209, 215–216, 238–239  
 Aristotle, and reading, 72–73  
*Art of Biblical Narrative* (Alter), 170  
 asceticism, 31–33  
 Ashi, Rav, 132–133  
 Astel, Ann, 34  
 Augustine  
   foreshadowed psychoanalysis, 124  
   n. 19  
   on New Testament, 190  
   and reading, 71–72  
*ayin*, 94–95  
 Bal, Mieke, 167–183  
 Barr, James, 5 n. 6, 6 n. 7  
 barter economy, 130–136  
 Baudissin, G.W.W., 5 n. 6  
 Bettelheim, Bruno, 49 n. 69  
 Bible, aesthetics and literary criticism  
   of. *See also specific books of*  
   Bal and Sternberg on narratology of,  
   167–183  
   critical approaches to, and cultural  
   moments, 81–88  
   heteroglossia in, 181–182  
   as Miqra, 60–61  
   reading of, as speech-act, 62–68  
 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 216 n. 6  
 Boone, James, 57 n. 83  
 Borgen, Peder, 25 nn. 4–5,  
   38 nn. 38–39, 39 n. 42, 54 n. 80  
 Boyarin, Daniel, 9 n. 13, 14 n. 22, 14  
   n. 24, 36 n. 28, 44 n. 54, 44 n. 56,  
   49 n. 66, 50 n. 70, 91 n. 7, 118 n. 8,  
   194  
 Boyarin, Jonathan, 72 n. 18, 230  
 Brown, Peter, 21 n. 33  
 Bruns, Gerald L., 30 n. 15, 70 n. 15,  
   91 n. 7  
 Bruns, J. Edgar, 26 n. 7  
*cansos*, 73  
 Caspary, Gerard E., 35 n. 24, 41 n. 46  
 castration complex, 238–243  
 Chadwick, Henry, 28 n. 4, 29 n. 8  
 Chaucer, 79  
 Christianity  
   Paul's theory of supersession of  
   Judaism, 185–209  
   works *vs.* faith in, 54 n. 81, 196–197  
 circumcision  
   dialogue of Justin and Trypho on,  
   40–42  
   and Freud's sexuality theories, 231  
   midrashic interpretation of, 194–196  
   Paul on, 38–39, 45  
   Philo on, 36–38  
   as root of anti-Semitism and  
   misogyny, 239–242  
   as sanctification of body, 43–50  
 Cistercians, 71 n. 16, 76  
 Cohen, Hermann, 125  
 colonialism/postcolonialism, and Jews,  
   212–221, 234–243  
 commandments, 207  
 corporeality  
   of God (*See* God, corporeality of)  
   of individuals, and race, 56–58  
 courtship, 219–221  
 Crouzel, Henri, 24 n. 1  
 Cuddihy, John Murray, 208–218  
 cultural anthropology, linguistic usage  
   and, 81–82  
 cultural embeddedness, 205

- Damon, Maria, 192 n. 10  
 Dante, 74–79  
 Davies, W.D., 208 n. 24  
 Dearman, J. Andrew, 60 n. 2  
 deixis, 6–8, 18  
 demonstrative pronouns, in midrash, 6–8  
 Deuteronomy, 63 n. 7  
 Dillon, John, 26 n. 7  
 Diogenes Laertius, 123  
 divine love, 51  
 dream interpretation, 159–174  
 “*drsh*” root, 70  
 dugma  
   about, 91–92  
   as “essential nature of,” 100–101  
   as “exemplification” or parabolic signification, 97–100, 104  
   perlocutionary force of, 98 n. 21  
   polysemy of, 95–96  
   as “sample,” 96–97, 104
- Eastern Europe, Jews in, 217–218, 224–225, 227, 228 n. 21  
*Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (Hays), 184–5  
 economy, rabbinic, 130–136  
 Egyptians, circumcised, 37  
 Eilberg-Schwartz, Howard, 36 n. 31, 47 n. 59, 48 n. 61, 49 n. 68, 232 n. 24  
 ethnocentrism, in Judaism, 209  
 Eucharist, 32  
 exemplification, 97–100, 104. *See also* dugma; *mashal* (midrashic parable)
- faith *vs.* works, 54 n. 81, 196–197  
 Farben, I.G., 214 n. 2  
 father, 141–144  
 feminist reading, of Bible, 167–183  
 fetishism, 229–230  
 fiction  
   Bible approached critically as, 81–88, 170  
   as exemplary, 111–113  
   fictional truth, 90–91  
   semiotic structure of, 90  
 Fischer, Shlomo, 126 n. 25, 137  
 foreplay, sexual, 217–221  
 form and matter, 138–139  
 Foucault, Michel, 206–207  
*Freud, Race, and Gender* (Gilman), 228–231
- Freud, Sigmund, 124–125  
   influence of Jewish culture on, 225–226  
   “Jewishness” of psychoanalysis of, 228  
   and postcolonial psyche, 234–243  
   and race, in gender theories, 230–234  
   as recently decolonized Jew, 211–215, 234–243  
   sexuality theories of, 217–219, 223–228
- Gaston, Lloyd, 25 n. 3, 193 n. 8  
 Geiger, Abraham, 57 n. 83, 115  
 Geller, Jay, 228–234  
 gender  
   Israel and circumcision, 46–49  
   and race, in Freud, 230–234  
 Genesis, readings of, 175–180  
*Genesis Rabbah*, 29 n. 13, 30 n. 14  
 Gilman, Sander L., 228–231  
 Girard, René, 197–198, 206 n. 20  
 “Glory,” 9  
 Gnosticism, 55 n. 81  
 God, corporeality of  
   allegoresis and, 19–21  
   in crossing of Red Sea, 8–13  
   God as warrior, 12  
   immateriality of, 4 n. 3  
   in *Mekilta deRabbi Ishmael*, 6–7  
   nature of, 4–6, 50 n. 70  
   in Psalms, 16–17  
   in Song of Songs, 12–15, 19–22  
 Goldhill, Simon, 117  
 Goldin, Judah, 11 n. 18  
 Goodman, Nelson, 93  
 Goshen-Gottstein, Alon, 50 n. 70  
 Gospels, 19  
 Goux, Jean-Joseph, 118 n. 10, 121, 122 n. 16, 125 n. 23, 136 n. 36  
 Gregory of Nyssa, 31–33, 47  
 Gruen, Erich, 126 n. 25, 132 n. 33
- Halperin, David, 137 n. 39  
 Hamerton-Kelly, Robert G., 200–209  
 Handelman, Susan, 195 n. 12  
 Harrison, Verna E.F., 32 n. 18  
 Hasan-Rokem, Galit, 159  
 Hays, Richard, 184, 185, 191, 203  
 Hebrew, Ancient, 80–82  
 Hecht, Richard D., 36 n. 32  
 Heinemann, Isaak, 116, 143

- Heinemann, Joseph, 94 n. 14  
 Hellenism, in Rabbinic Judaism, 5, 6,  
 25–26  
 Héloïse, 74  
 hêqer, 100–101  
 hermeneutics, and anthropology, 24  
 historiography  
   Bible approached as, 81–88  
   semiotic structure of, 90  
   Sternberg's assertion that Bible is,  
   167–169, 171–174  
 homosexuality, 137 n. 39  
 Hopkins, Keith, 126 n. 25, 132 n. 33  
 Horace, 71 n. 16  
 Humphreys, Sally, 126 n. 25, 132  
   n. 33, 137  
 Hymes, Dell, 66 n. 11, 85 n. 39  
  
 idolatry, 3  
 imperialism, capitalist, 212–221  
 incarnation, 33 n. 20  
*Inferno* (Dante), 74–79  
 Islam, circumcision in, 57 n. 83  
 Israel, of the spirit, in Paul, 55–58  
  
 Jaeger, Werner, 33 n. 19  
 Jay, Martin, 1, 214 n. 3  
 Jeremiah, 63 n. 7  
   aesthetic intentions in, 60 n. 2  
   reading in, 66–68  
 Jesus Christ, crucifixion of, 200–201,  
 208–209  
 Jews  
   marginality of discourse of, 194–195  
   as recently decolonized people,  
   213–221  
 John Chrysostom, 205 n. 19  
 Johnston, Robert, 110  
 Judah, 181  
 Judaism, Paul's theory of supersession  
   of, 185–209  
 Justin Martyr, on circumcision, 40–42  
  
 Kabbalah, 5 n. 5, 47 n. 60  
 Kamin, Sarah, 95 n. 16  
 Knight, Chris, 49 n. 67  
 Krieger, Murray, 10  
 Kristeva, Julia, 195  
 Kugel, James L., 30 n. 15  
  
 Lakoff, George, 107 n. 38  
 language  
   and corporeality, 27–31  
   as equivalent phonic signifier, 121,  
   123–124, 146  
   meaning, in Rabbinic writings,  
   128–146  
   non-logocentric modality in rabbinic  
   writings, 160–161  
 Lawson, R.P., 21  
*Lethal Love: Feminist Readings of Biblical  
 Love Stories* (Bal), 174–175, 180–181  
 Levinas, Emmanuel, 196–197  
 Lieberman, Saul, 14 n. 24  
 linguistics  
   and symbology, 116–119  
   and understanding world cultures,  
   83–84  
 Logos, and Phallus, 122, 137–145  
 love, 219–221  
 ludic reading, 74 n. 21  
  
 MacLennan, Robert, 40 n. 43  
 Maimonides, Moses, 4–5  
   on circumcision, 37 n. 37  
   on midrash, 114, 115–116, 162 n. 65  
 manna, 31–33  
 Marx, Karl, 134, 214, 215 n. 5  
*marshal* (midrashic parable), 11 n. 17,  
 87. *See also* dugma  
   ambiguity in application of  
   particular, 106–110  
   as assigning meaning to “true” story,  
   110–111  
   coextensive with fiction, 93  
   etymology, 91–92  
   as “exemplification,” 104 n. 33  
   hermeneutics of, in midrash,  
   102–103  
   unambiguous nature of, 109  
 Meeks, Wayne, 25, 25 n. 6  
*mehazzer*, 35 n. 26  
*Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, demonstrative  
 pronouns in, 6–7, 53  
 Merkabah Mysticism, 15 n. 25  
 Meschonnic, Henri, 60  
 midrash. *See also marshal* (midrashic  
 parable)  
   allegory in, 53 n. 78  
   as commentary without  
   interpretation, 114–119, 125–126,  
   144–146  
   as didactic fiction (poetry),  
   115–116  
   economies of value and language in,  
   126–137

- metonymy in, 159  
 as misology, 159–163  
 theory of meaning absent in,  
 126 n. 24
- Midrash and Literature* (Hartman and Budick), 195 n. 12
- Miles, John, 54 n. 81, 57 n. 83
- “Miqra,” 60–61, 65
- Mishna, economic system of,  
 130–136
- misogyny, 235–239
- Mitchell, W.J.T., 4
- money  
 genesis of, 120–121  
 value of, linked to interpretation of Torah, 126–129
- monotheism, 232
- Mopsik, Charles, 56 n. 83
- Moses, reading of, 187–188, 190
- Moses and Monotheism* (Freud), 232
- myths, 85–86
- Nell, Victor, 74 n. 21
- Neusner, Jacob, 130 n. 30, 136–137
- New Testament, 189–190
- Niditch, Susan, 15 n. 25
- Noakes, Susan, 76, 77
- ocular desire, 13, 14–16
- Old Testament, 189–190, 217
- On the Jewish Question* (Marx), 228
- Ordeal of Civility, The* (Cuddihy),  
 211–221
- Origen, allegoresis in, 19–21, 34–35,  
 52–53
- Oughourlian, Jean-Michel, 206 n. 20
- Pappenheim, Bertha (Anna O.), 216
- parable. *See also* mashal (midrashic parable)
- Parson, Talcott, 213
- paterialism, 140
- patriarchy, 177
- Paul  
 anti-Judaism of, 56 n. 83  
 on circumcision, 38–39, 45, 55–57  
 letter-spirit opposition in, 185–193  
 and Philo, 24–26
- Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Davies),  
 208 n. 24
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, 40 n. 43
- Phallus, 119, 121–122, 242–243
- Phallus and Logos, 137–145
- Pharisees, 193 n. 9
- Philo  
 affinities with Paul, 24–26  
 on Anthropogeny, 27–31  
 and circumcision, 36–39
- Plato/Platonism  
 and corporeality of God, 4 n. 3,  
 21  
 and development of symbolic economies, 119–123  
 on soul-body dichotomy, 117–118
- Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age, The* (Alter), 59
- Plotinus, 141
- Plutarch, 138, 141
- praxis, 197
- procreation, 141–144
- Prodigal Son/Elder Brother: Interpretation and Alterity in Augustine, Petrarch, Kafka, Levinas* (Robbins), 184
- Protagoras, 122 n. 16
- Protestantism, in Cuddihy, 212, 213
- Psalms, corporeality of God in, 16–17
- psychoanalysis, Freud’s, 228–234
- “qr” root, 62–64, 66, 68–69
- Rabbinic culture  
 procreation in, 141–144  
 as subdominant fiction, 140
- Rabbinic Judaism  
 corporeality of God in, 4–5  
 Hellenic influences on, 5, 6, 25–26  
 as subdominant fiction, 140
- Rashi, 95 n. 16
- reading. *See also* Bible, aesthetics and literary criticism of  
 affective identification in, 72  
 in ancient Israel, 60–62  
 connection with the erotic, 73–74,  
 79  
 Dante’s innovation and, 74–79  
 ludic reading, 74 n. 21  
 of Moses, 187–188  
 for pleasure, 59–60  
 in private spaces, in later Europe,  
 71–79  
 “qr” root, 62–64, 66, 68–69  
 in rabbinic literature, 68–70  
 as speech-act in biblical Hebrew,  
 62–68
- Red Sea, theophany at, 8–13

- Riddle of Freud, The: Jewish Influences on his Theory of Female Sexuality* (Roith), 220–228
- Riffaterre, Michael, 90, 91 n. 5, 93
- Robbins, Jill, 194–196
- Robert, Marthe, 236
- Roith, Estelle, 220–228, 243
- Roitman, Betty, 6 n. 9, 8 n. 11
- romance, 221–222
- Rowland, Christopher, 4 n. 2, 12 n. 19
- Ruether, Rosemary, 56 n. 83
- Sacred Violence: Paul's Hermeneutic of the Cross* (Hamerton-Kelly), 184, 200–203
- sacrifice, 191
- Saenger, Paul, 77
- Schor, Naomi, 172
- Segal, Alan F., 56 n. 83
- sexuality, 176–177, 217–28
- Shapiro, Susan, 124 n. 22, 135
- Shell, Marc, 119, 126 n. 25
- Singer, Isaac Bashevis, 224
- Slayers of Moses, The* (Handelman), 195 n. 12
- Sluiter, Ineke, 114 n. 3
- socialism, Jewish, 213–215
- Song of Songs
  - corporeality of God in, 12–15, 19–22, 34–39, 50–51
  - as parable of Exodus story, 94, 103, 148, 158
- Sorrows of Young Werther, The*, 90
- Spencer, Herbert, 227
- Stern, David, 94 n. 14
- Sternberg, Meir, 80–82, 89
  - and nature of biblical narrative, 167–183
- Stroumsa, Gedaliahu, 4 n. 3, 11 n. 18
- structuralism, 212
- Suleiman, Susan Rubin, 71 n. 21
- suspension of disbelief, 82, 89–90, 169–171
- symbolic economics, development of, 119–125
- symbology, in language, 116–119
- Talmud, 168–169, 218–219
- Temple, 125 n. 23
- theodicy, 127–129
- Thomson, George, 117, 118 n. 9
- Torah, revelation of, 5
- Trible, Phyllis, 178
- troubadours, 73
- Trypho, on circumcision, 40–42
- Urbach, Ephraim E., 19 n. 30, 34 n. 21, 52 n. 75
- van den Haag, Ernest, 220
- visions, of God, 3–6
  - eroticized, 45, 49–50
- Weber, Max, 213, 223
- Weininger, Otto, 227 n. 20, 238–240
- Westerholm, Stephen, 187–188
- White, Hayden, 93, 112 n. 45
- Whitman, Jon, 20 nn. 31–32, 35 n. 25
- Williamson, Ronald, 54
- Winston, David, 25 n. 2
- Wolfson, Elliot R., 36 n. 30, 44 n. 55, 47 n. 60, 198
- Wolfson, H.A., 54 n. 80
- women
  - Freud's theory of sexuality of, 217–219, 223–228
  - in Judaic culture, 220–222
  - origins of, 30–31, 175–180
- works vs. faith, 54 n. 81, 196–197
- writing, aims of, 86–87
- “*yn*” root, 68
- Zeitlin, Froma, 122 n. 16, 138 n. 42
- Zeno, 123

## INDEX OF SCRIPTURE AND ANCIENT SOURCES

### *Greek and Latin Works*

Aeschylus <i>Eumenides</i> 658–9	138	Justin Martyr <i>Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew</i>	40, 41, 42
Aristotle <i>Poetics</i> 4 26	73 73	Origen <i>The Song of Songs: Commentary and Homilies</i> p. 9 p. 61 p. 218	21 34 20
Augustine <i>Confessions</i> i: 13 iii: 2 viii: 12 <i>Tractatus adversos Judaeos</i>	72 72 78 24	Philo <i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i> 52:1 <i>On the Special Laws</i> 7:105 7:107	37 37 37
Cicero <i>Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem</i> 1:16	255	Plutarch <i>Moralia</i> V 5:135 X 10:153	138 138
Diogenes Laertius VII. 18 <i>The Epistle of Barnabas</i>  9:6	123  37	Suetonius <i>Vespasianus</i> 251	129
Heraclitus B 90	122		
Horace <i>Satires</i> 1.6 122–3	71		

### *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament*

Genesis	17:26	46
1	177	18:1
1:27–28	175	44, 46
2	177	2:7 ff.
5:1–2	175, 177	176
8:10	94, 147	17:23 ff.
8:11	94, 147	198
17:1	46	Exodus
17:1–14	44, 198	6:30
		12:12
		12:23
		36
		7
		47

14:10	102, 157	30:6	53
14:13	12, 51	40:25–28	101, 155
14:19	105	52:8	17
14:21	9	59:17	11
14:30	102, 160		
15:1	13, 51	Jeremiah	
15:2	8, 13, 14, 51	2:6	53
15:3	11	32:19	268
15:22	53	36:1–2	66
16:4	105	36:9–11	67
20:14	6, 13, 51	36:16–18	67
24:7	13, 51	36:21–25	67
24:7–11	5		
27:20	94, 147	Ezekiel	
33:20	17	16:6	48
		20:25	69
Leviticus			
9:6	45, 46	Hosea	
9:24	45	11:3	105
11:29	7	Micah	
Numbers		1:7	127
8:4	7		
20:11	99	Habbakuk	
		3:9	11
Deuteronomy		3:11	11
1:31	105		
3:26	99	Psalms	
4:11	22	18:11	11
4:35	35	35:2	11
5:25	13, 51	35:3	11
8	192	44:22	200
8:15	53	44:23	15
17:19	60, 64	45:4	11
23:19	127	48:15	16
32	192	77:17	8
32:4	268	78:16	105
		91:4	11
Joshua		105:1	18
5:4	45	105:39	105
		106	192
1 Samuel		107:1	95
2:6	92	114:3	9
		114:5	9
2 Samuel		114:7–8	9
22:15	11		
		Proverbs	
II Kings		5:8	127
19:5–7	65		
22:8 ff.	65	Job	
		11:7	100, 154
Isaiah		11:9	100, 154
25:10	17	19:26	44, 197

36:7	94	Ecclesiastes	
38:16	101, 155	12:9	92, 148
Song of Songs		Esther	
1:2	35	2:15	168
1:3	14, 15	2:22	168
1:10	22	6:6	168
1:15	94, 147, 150	9:10	168
2:14	13, 51, 101, 157	9:25	171
3:11	45	9:27	168, 172
5:9	15		
5:10–19	15	Daniel	
5:10 ff.	14	2:23	95

*New Testament*

Acts		Galatians	
11:1–10	57	3:28	47
		4:4–5	209
Romans		5:6	39
2:25–29	38	6:11–17	38
7:18	204	6:12–13	39
8:3	209		
1 Corinthians		Philippians	
10:1–5	190	3:2–3	38
10:18	24, 190	3:8	204
2 Corinthians		Colossians	
3:1–6	185	2:11	38
3:6	24, 208	2:16–17	199
3:7–18	186, 187	1 Thessalonians	
3:14–16	184	2:15	
5:21	209		

*Rabbinic Literature*

Babylonian Talmud		Shabbat	
‘Avodah Zarah		51a	54
16b–19b	256	88a	172
Megillah		Yevamoth	
7a	168	62b	223
32a	69		
Niddah		Midrash	
30a	142	Genesis Rabbah	
Sanhedrin		48:1	44, 198
42a	8	Mekilta deRabbi Ishmael	
92b	92	1:15–16	7
		1:224–25	105



1:227-28	9	p. 49	94
2:24	8	pp. 72-73	102
2:25-26	14	p. 73	13, 51
2:87-88	53	p. 152	16
2:266	6		
Sifre to Deuteronomy		Tanhuma	
29	99	1:136	95
		2:96	147
Mishnah		14	43
Baba Metsi'a			
44a	130	Tosefta	
		Hullin	
		2:24	259
Palestinian Talmud		Shabbat	
Ma'aser Sheni		1:8	150
4	160	1:8	96
Song of Songs Rabbah			
p. 42	22		