

**The Subject and the Other:
Construction of Gender and Identity in Genesis**

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Abstract

This study examines the construction of gendered and national identities in a selection of narratives in the book of Genesis. It distinguishes two processes of signification that run alongside each other, namely, the construction of the androcentric Subject that starts in the narrative of Genesis 2-3, and the emergence, in the stories of the patriarchs, of the ethnocentric Subject of Israel. In both cases, unified subjectivity is perceived in relation to and over against the Other, represented respectively as female and foreign identity. The study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, using the tools of semiotic analysis, narratology and psychoanalysis to uncover the presence and function of alterity, suppressed by the dominant discourse. The study highlights the contradiction inherent in the project of dominance, through which the Subject seeks to suppress the very difference it relies on for its signification. In the garden narrative (Genesis 2-3), this contradiction is reflected in Yahweh's double-edged discourse and in the ambiguous role woman and the serpent play in leading *hā'ādām* out of the garden. In the larger narrative cycles of Genesis 12-36, the dichotomy of the Self and the Other unfolds on more than one level, revealing itself in the Subject's conflicted attitude to Egypt as the seductive and threatening Other (the Abraham cycle) and to Haran as 'mother's land', a complex metaphor of the feminine (the Jacob cycle). The study identifies two conflicting voices or ideologies interacting in the Genesis narrative, the institutional and the individual, and demonstrates how the unified institutional discourse of the patriarchal Subject is continuously challenged and changed by the individual perspective in the narrative, represented by women, foreigners, and younger siblings.

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List of Abbreviations

BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907).
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation: A Journal of Contemporary Approaches</i>
BJRL	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BR	<i>Bible Review</i>
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
DCH	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (ed. David J. A. Clines; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993-2011).
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
GKC	W. Gesenius, <i>Hebrew Grammar</i> (ed. E. Kautzsch; trans. A. E. Cowley; 2 nd English edn; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).
ICC	International Critical Commentary
Int	<i>Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy</i>
JB	Jerusalem Bible
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOT SS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NAV	New Authorised Version
NIV	New International Version
NIB	<i>New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RelArts	<i>Religion and the Arts</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
StTh	<i>Studia Theologica</i>
TDOT	G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974-2012).
ThTo	<i>Theology Today</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

Introduction

The present study of subjectivity and its gender-related metaphors in Genesis is a predominantly synchronic or, borrowing the term of Mieke Bal, 'text-internal' exercise.¹ The gradual construction of the 'world of the text' with its intricately interrelated elements and its inner system of values leads to the emergence of a complex Subject, whose functioning lends itself to structural and psychological analysis. Looking at the text as a whole, I aim to examine the effects patriarchal structures have on the identity and the psyche of the Subject. By doing so, I do not oppose the socially oriented approach of biblical feminism that shows the patriarchal narrative as an instrument of sexual politics. However, the social and political functions of the biblical text lie outside the scope of this study, informed by the procedures of psycho-linguistic and semiotic analysis. Without disputing the ideological conditioning of the text, I shall examine the impact the patriarchal claim has on the functioning (and the dysfunction) of the narrative mind within the world of the text.

The question that will guide the present study is how the text accommodates and accounts for the social and political assumptions built into its texture. To a certain extent, the exercise will be deconstructive, allowing the reader to see the patriarchal argument deconstruct itself from within, through the semiotic structures of the very texts that are seen as ideological documents of patriarchy. I do not suggest that these compensatory structures reflect female-oriented or egalitarian concerns of the narrator. The biblical narrative is by and large a narrative of patriarchy. David Jobling attributes the occasional favourable light shone on femininity in the biblical narrative to 'the patriarchal mindset tying itself in knots trying to account for woman and femaleness in a way which *both* makes sense *and* supports patriarchal assumptions'.² Along similar lines, Bal speaks about traces of 'a *problematization* of man's priority and domination'

¹ Mieke Bal, 'Sexuality, Sin, And Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character', in Elizabeth Anne Castelli and Rosamond C. Rodman (eds.) *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2001), p. 154.

² David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible II* (JSOT SS, 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), p. 43.

that comes from the fundamental insecurity of the patriarchal claim.³ Reflecting a distorted view of reality, of the Self and the Other, the unified (male) subjectivity is vulnerable and in constant need of reaffirmation by the normative voice of the narrative. This vulnerability, this trauma of dominance along with the resilience of the repressed presents a considerable interest to this study of subjectivity.

In this study, I have drawn on a variety of approaches that include narratology, structuralist analysis, anthropology, literary criticism, and psychoanalysis, and am particularly indebted to the work of Mieke Bal, Cheryl Exum, Ellen van Wolde, Mark Brett, and Francis Landy.⁴ For the purposes of space, I shall limit my examination to a number of narratives foundational to the construction of the biblical model of gender: the garden narrative of Gn 2:4-3:24 (referred to in what follows as Genesis 2-3) and selected texts belonging to the narrative cycles of Abraham and Jacob in Gn 11:27-37:1.

Chapter 1 examines how the narrator of Genesis 2-3 constructs gendered subjectivity in relation to the human beings' discovery of the knowledge of good and bad. The emergence of the Subject and the Other is analysed both at the level of the gendered identities of man and woman, and in the relationship between humanity and the earth as its metaphorical counterpart. Particular attention in this chapter is given to Yahweh's ambiguous role in the process that leads the human couple out of the garden.

Chapters 2 looks at the emergence of the ethnocentric Subject in the narrative cycle of Abraham. It considers the central concept of the promised land as a metaphor of identity as well as a gendered reality in need of appropriation. Particular attention is given here to the recurrent pattern of separation, through which the Subject's identity is shaped by excluding what is perceived as different. The stories of Lot and Hagar are read in the context of Israel's conflicted attitude to Egypt as the seductive and threatening Other.

³Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 110; see also J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (JSOT SS, 163; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), pp. 9-10.

⁴Bal, *Lethal Love*; J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women*; 'Hagar en procès: The Abject in Search of Subjectivity', in Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleygh Cushing Stahlberg (eds.), *From the Margins I: Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives* (Bible in the Modern World; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009); *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (2d rev. edn; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012); Ellen van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2-3: A Semiotic Theory and Method of Analysis Applied to the Story of the Garden of Eden* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1989); *Words Become Worlds: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1-11* (Biblical Interpretation Series, 6; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000); Francis Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise: Identity and Difference in the Song of Songs* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983).

Chapter 3 examines the complex structure of the Jacob cycle. As a starting point, it employs the tools of Claude Levi-Strauss's structural analysis of myth to uncover a series of oppositions that underlie the narrative and contribute to its overall compositional and thematic symmetry. It then looks at the concept of mother's land as a foundational metaphor that conveys the transforming role of the Other in the formation of the patriarch's identity as Israel. Chapter 3 offers a close reading of the stories of the three matriarchs, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, and concludes with an examination of binary relational structures in the cycle.

Chapter 1

The Subject, Gender, and Knowledge in Genesis 2-3

Defining the Problem

A story of origins dealing with the creation of humankind and the institution of gender, the garden narrative in Genesis 2-3 perhaps more than any other biblical text has influenced social and religious perceptions of femininity in Western culture. Throughout the history of biblical reception, the creation of woman out of man and her subsequent disobedience to the will of Yahweh gave rise to many misconceptions, providing a particular frame for the interpretation of woman's position and identity. One of the most striking examples of such misconceptions is Paul's statement on the subordination of women in 1 Tim 2:11-14, which to a large extent has shaped the traditional exegesis of the narrative.⁵ Regarded in both Jewish and Christian interpretation as derivative in substance and subordinate in status with respect to man, the woman of the garden narrative has also been branded as a morally flawed being, responsible for the fall of man, the loss of paradise, and for bringing painful toil and death into the range of human experience.⁶

Feminist scholarship has demonstrated different approaches to the construction of gender in Genesis 2-3. The first wave of feminist critics with Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millett, while rejecting the Bible's ideological assumptions, agreed in essence with the traditional interpretations of the garden narrative, which for them was designed 'in order to blame all this world's discomfort on the female'.⁷ Later literary readings

⁵ See Bal, *Lethal Love*, pp. 109-12.

⁶ Phyllis Tribble lists eleven most common arguments for misogyny that are based on the narrative of Genesis 2-3 in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 72-73.

⁷ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Granada Publishing, 1969), p. 75. See also Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1949). Esther Fuchs' analysis takes the insights of Millett to a new level, identifying particular narrative strategies that serve the patriarchal agenda of biblical texts (see Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman* (JSOT SS, 310; Sheffield: Academic Press, 2000).

refused to take the text as a monolithic document of patriarchy. Phyllis Trible in her close literary analysis of Genesis 2-3 has argued that most misogynous ideas associated with the garden narrative are more a product of its later interpretation than of the biblical text itself.⁸ Trible claims Genesis 2 presents an egalitarian model of gender, which becomes corrupted by dominance and hierarchy only after the 'fall', in consequence of human disobedience.⁹ Following Trible, a number of scholars pointed to the inner tensions, gaps and inconsistencies of Genesis 2-3, stressing the complexity of the story and its unequivocal perspective on gender and hierarchy.¹⁰

Resisting the text as irredeemably patriarchal or affirming the positive elements in its portrayal of female subjectivity, early feminist interpretations of Genesis 2-3 often have not paid sufficient attention to the problematisation of divine authority in its relation to human freedom. However, the central transformation of the narrative, the transfer of knowledge to the humans, is far from being unequivocal, and lends itself to a range of interpretations. How one understands woman's role depends largely on whether one assesses the human ascent to knowledge as primarily an act of disobedience and a fall from grace or as a stage in the process of human maturation set up by God where gender is a fundamental feature of the evolving Subject.

Traditionally, the second creation account has been read as a story about the human 'fall' and its consequences, telling how the first human beings, by disobeying God, bring disharmony and chaos into the initially perfect universe.¹¹ In the new world order, the relationships between the earth, the human and the animal worlds as well as between the sexes are affected by dominance, and human existence becomes marred with pain, toil, and eventual death. At the centre of these negative and dramatic changes stands a human action, performed against God's explicit order.

What many feminist studies share with this traditional view is seeing Yahweh as a monolithic subject – the creator, lawgiver, and judge of the human beings, who

⁸ Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 72-143.

⁹ Phyllis Bird has argued along similar lines that the sexual equality in Genesis 2 is the 'prelude to its negation in Genesis 3' (see Phyllis Bird, 'Genesis 1-3 as a Source for a Contemporary Theology of Sexuality', *Ex Auditu* 3 [1987], p. 39).

¹⁰ Bal, *Lethal Love*, pp. 104-30; van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds*, pp. 13-31; Brett, *Genesis*, pp. 29-35; Anne Lapidus Lerner, *Eternally Eve: Images of Eve in the Hebrew Bible, Midrash, and Modern Jewish Poetry* (Waltham MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007); Reuven Kimelman, 'The Seduction of Eve and the Exegetical Politics of Gender', in *BibInt* 4 (1996), pp. 1-39.

¹¹ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 193; see also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Dallas TX: Word Books, 1994), p. 90. Hermann Gunkel understands the narrative as an aetiology that first describes the 'golden age' of humanity and then gives an answer to the basic question 'why are we not there?' (Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* [trans. Mark E. Biddle; Macon GA: Mercer University Press, 1997], p. 33).

epitomises the patriarchal values of power and dominance. In relation to such a God, woman plays a counter, rebellious role, transgressing his command and bringing about man's fall from grace. But is Yahweh himself free from ambiguity? After all, the very fact of disobedience undermines and destabilises his absolute authority, exposes the weakness of his rigid hierarchical position. In looking at the construction of gender in Genesis 2-3 it is crucial to decode and demystify the character of God, subjecting him, as Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn emphasise, to the same kind of critical scrutiny as all the other characters.¹²

Turning one's attention to Yahweh reveals the inconsistency of his behaviour and poses a range of questions. Why should Yahweh, the creator who in 1:31 was entirely satisfied with the exceeding goodness of all that he had made, set out issuing prohibitions and punishing his creatures for disobedience? If Yahweh wants to protect *hā'ādām* from death, why does he plant the tree of knowledge, associated with death, in full view of the human being? Since *all* the trees in the garden are functional in satisfying the needs of *hā'ādām* ('every tree pleasant to the sight and good to eat', 2:9), what is the function of the only tree the fruit of which is not to be eaten? The tree of knowledge represents the symbolic boundaries of the garden, points to its finality, and yet, remarkably, Yahweh places it, spatially, in the centre of the garden, and, symbolically, at the centre of his discourse. Does Yahweh have any purpose for it other than to lead the humans out of the garden? And does the garden itself have any purpose other than to produce this tree and, with it, create the possibility for the human beings to choose and to act?

Various scholars have observed the ambiguity of God's actions in Genesis 2-3. Looking from different perspectives, James Barr and Terje Stordalen both suggest that God has ulterior motives in prohibiting knowledge. For Barr, both eternal life and knowledge are exclusively divine attributes, and the texts of 2:17 and 3:22 show Yahweh's reluctance to share those attributes with his creatures.¹³ Stordalen, on the other hand, places the divine-human confrontation within the context of a spatial opposition inside and outside, the garden and the land. For him, the overall programme of Genesis 2-3, to provide a human being to till the land, contradicts Yahweh's primary concern as a private landowner to have *hā'ādām* 'to keep and till the garden'. In this

¹² Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 19.

¹³ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 14.

view, God forbids the knowledge of good and bad because it can show the humans the way out of the garden.¹⁴ In both cases, the function of Yahweh's order is seen as preventative.

In his recent detailed study of Genesis 2-3, Tryggve Mettinger draws attention to the crucial role that Yahweh plays in the human transgression. Mettinger defines the subject of the Eden narrative as 'the divine test of obedience to the commandment'.¹⁵ In his view, by forbidding the tree of knowledge God provokes the human beings, or tests them in a similar way as he does in 22:1-19 and Job 1-2. In so doing, he aims ultimately to assert his authority. Similarly, Walter Brueggemann understands Yahweh's prohibition as an exercise of authority.¹⁶ Seeing the prohibition as provocative raises in its turn the question of the ambiguity of Yahweh as a moral subject. Norman Whybray pays particular attention to the lack of consistency and moral integrity in Yahweh's actions in the garden narrative, putting it alongside a number of biblical texts, including 18:22-33, Job 1-2, Ex 32:7-14 and Nm 11, 14:11-25.¹⁷

All the above approaches share their emphasis on Yahweh's motivation. The way one interprets the main transformations of the narrative - the institution of gender, the acquisition of knowledge, and the expulsion from paradise - depends on how one understands Yahweh's intentions; in other words, whether by prohibiting knowledge he seeks to protect the humans or to provoke their disobedience. But, perhaps, these possibilities do not have to be mutually exclusive. Could Yahweh's subjectivity be composed of contradictory strands, making his intentions more complex than what either model appears to suggest? If this suggestion were valid, the story's underlying tension would shift from the conflict between the human and the divine to the tension between Yahweh's own conflicting perspectives. Uncovering this tension by means of narrative and structural analysis might lead to a different understanding of the garden narrative and of the way it constructs subjectivity and gender.

¹⁴ Terje Stordalen, 'Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2-3 Reconsidered', *JSOT* 53 (1992), pp. 3-25. See also Edward L. Greenstein, 'God's Golem: The Creation of Humanity in Genesis 2', in Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman (eds.), *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 219-39.

¹⁵ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative: A Literary and Religio-historical Study of Genesis 2-3* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007), p. 64.

¹⁶ 'What counts is the fact of the prohibition, the authority of the one who speaks and the unqualified expectation of obedience' (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* [Interpretation; Atlanta GA: John Knox Press, 1982], p. 46).

¹⁷ R. Norman Whybray, 'The Immorality of God: Reflections on Some Passages in Genesis, Exodus and Numbers', *JSOT* 72 (1996), pp. 89-120.

The Overture: To Eat or Not to Eat

The narrative starts with a description of the earth, lifeless and uncultivated, with no rain to water it and no human to till it (2:5). This situation of lack defines a need that guides Yahweh's first creative action: in 2:7 he forms a human, 'ādām, from the dust of the earth, ^ʾdāmah. With a breath of life from Yahweh, hā'ādām becomes hay nepesh, a living being. At this stage, hā'ādām is a generic term referring, in the words of Mieke Bal, to an earth-creature with 'no name, no sex, and no activity'.¹⁸

The use of the Hebrew word hā'ādām requires clarification. It has been widely recognised that hā'ādām is non-gendered term that is used collectively for 'humanity' and individually for 'human being'.¹⁹ Brett maintains that the generic term 'ādām is made specific by the use of the definite article ('the human') and as such can refer to a particular man.²⁰ As a narrative subject, hā'ādām remains ungendered until the creation of woman in 2:22. Susan Lanser has criticised this view from the perspective of speech-act theory. For her, the grammatically masculine form of hā'ādām defines the way the reader perceives the character as male by inference.²¹ Lanser's argument is made from a reader-centred perspective that incorporates inferred meanings in the process of signification. Though this approach is justified, it lies outside the text-centred structural method adopted in this study. In what follows I shall therefore adopt the view of Tribble

¹⁸ See Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 112.

¹⁹ See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 80, 97-98; Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 81-82; Robert Alter (trans. and com.), *Genesis* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 5. James Barr's argument that hā'ādām is essentially a male term that can only include women collectively when they appear together with men has been convincingly opposed by David J. A. Clines (see James Barr, 'One Man, or All Humanity? A Question in the Anthropology of Genesis 1', in Athalya Brenner and Jan Willem van Henten (eds.), *Recycling Biblical Figures: Papers Read at a NOSTER Colloquium in Amsterdam 12-13 May 1997* (Studies in Theology and Religion, 1; Leiderdorp: Deo Publishing, 1999), pp. 3-21; David J. A. Clines, 'אָדָם, the Hebrew for "Human, Humanity": A Response to James Barr', *VT* 53 (2003), pp. 297-310; see also Johannes C. de Moor, 'The First Human Being a Male? A Response to Professor Barr', in Brenner and Henten (eds.), *Recycling Biblical Figures*, pp. 22-27).

²⁰ Brett, *Genesis*, p. 149 n. 19.

²¹ Susan S. Lanser, '(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2-3', in Hugh C. White (ed.), *Speech Act Theory and Biblical Criticism* (Semeia, 41; Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 72. A similar argument has been advanced by Barr, Jobling, and Ronald A. Simkins, who see the phrase hā'ādām w' 'išō in 2:25; 3:8, 21 as a proof that hā'ādām is semantically equivalent to 'man' and therefore is used as a gendered term from the start (see Barr, 'One Man, or All Humanity?', pp. 11-12; Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, p. 41; Ronald A. Simkins, 'Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth', in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], p. 40 n. 30). For a counterargument, see Clines, 'אָדָם, the Hebrew for "Human, Humanity"', pp. 302-4.

and Bal, refraining from the use of masculine pronouns to refer to *hā'ādām* before the creation of gender.

Next, Yahweh plants a garden in Eden, and there he places the new human creature (2:8). So far it would appear that the garden is planted for the sake of *hā'ādām*, and is subsequently filled with trees to satisfy human needs ('all trees pleasant to the sight and good to eat', 2:9). In return, *hā'ādām* receives the task 'to till (*'ābad*) and keep the garden' (2:15). The verb *'ābad*, which usually means 'to serve', places the human on a lower structural plane in relation to the garden. The use of *'ābad* reminds the reader about the initial need ('there was no human to till the earth', v. 5), and suggests its partial fulfilment. In fact, the garden represents an ideal situation, where all the initially lacking elements have been supplied. The garden is watered by the river that flows out of Eden (2:10), and now it has a human to till it. Consequently, in contrast to the barren earth of v. 5 ('no shrub..., no plant...'), the garden is now filled with vegetation (cf. 'every tree', v. 9). The state of the earth outside the garden is not specified; moreover, it is not clear whether there is an 'outside' at all since the boundaries of the garden will not be established until the end of the narrative (3:23-24). However, in serving and keeping the garden, *hā'ādām* clearly falls short of reaching a direct relationship with the earth. The programme '*ādām* to serve *ādāmah*' remains unfulfilled, leaving a background tension for all that is going to happen in the narrative.

The description of the plentiful and harmonious existence in the garden is disrupted with Yahweh's discourse. In 2:16-17 Yahweh addresses *hā'ādām* for the first time, allowing the human to eat from any tree of the garden, except the tree of knowledge. His speech is composed of four verbal clauses based on just two verbs: *'kl*, 'to eat', and *mwt*, 'to die'. Together, they form a sequence that ultimately links the idea of eating with the possibility (or certainty) of death:

'ākōl tō'kēl, 'you shall certainly eat' 2:16

lo' tō'kal, 'you shall not eat' 2:17

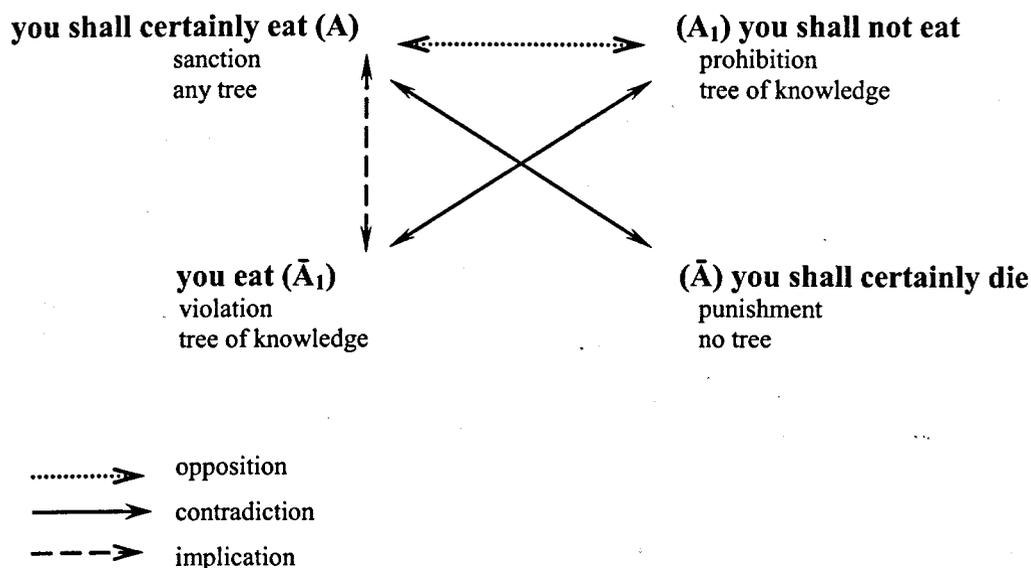
'ākāl kā, 'you eat'

mōt tāmūt, 'you shall certainly die'

In this sequence, the expressions *'ākōl tō'kēl* and *mōt tāmūt* stand out due to their grammatical uniformity (the infinitive construct plus the imperfect), as well as their parallel syntactic position at the end of a clause. Being compositionally parallel,

they appear to form an antithesis, which contrasts eating to dying. This antithesis could be presented as an incomplete semiotic square:

Fig. 1



In the logic of Yahweh's speech, a sanction (A) is followed by a prohibition or non-sanction (A_1), which is in its turn followed by its hypothetical violation (\bar{A}_1) and the punishment (\bar{A}). Though the command appears straightforward, its semiotic structure is contradictory, consisting of a series of semantically opposing statements. To begin with, Yahweh's second proposition 'you shall not eat' (A_1) opposes and to a point negates the indiscriminate and unconditional sanction 'you shall certainly eat' (A) that refers to all the trees in the garden. Then, in its turn, the prohibition A_1 is negated by its violation 'you eat' (\bar{A}_1). The logic of this double reversal brings the narrative back to its starting point. As a result, the transgression \bar{A}_1 not only echoes the sanction A but also appears to be structurally implied by it (the dashed vertical line). A similar relation of implication exists between the respective objects of the action, i.e. the 'tree of knowledge' and 'all the trees of the garden'. In this way, eating of the forbidden tree is structurally implied in Yahweh's initial dietary sanction. While the positive sanction (eating of any tree) introduces a wider range of possibilities in the relations between the human being and the garden, the prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge emphasises one specific course of action within that range, narrowing focus to a particular tree. The forbidden action becomes the only possible action.

The semiotic analysis uncovers the ambiguity at the basis of Yahweh's commandment. The contradiction between the direct meaning of his speech and the meaning implied by its semiotic structures creates a tension that will from now on dominate the narrative (in 3:1 the serpent will exploit this tension, asking woman what it was that God *really* said). While, at one level, Yahweh imposes a taboo on the tree of knowledge apparently with the view to protect human life, at another level, he intends the earth-creature to experience knowledge and death, and provides it with the tree as a means to achieve that goal. While the motives behind this double-edged discourse are not yet clear, its immediate impact is the loss of simplicity in the relationship between the creator and the earth-creature.

It is at this point that Yahweh decides that *hā'ādām* is not self-sufficient and needs a partner.

Yahweh and the Institution of Gender (2:18-22)

hā'ādām in Need of a Helper

In 2:18 Yahweh says that 'it is not good that *hā'ādām* should be alone', and decides to 'make for him a helper matching him'. This statement shows no apparent links with the preceding text of 2:16-17. I would suggest, however, that the context of the prohibition directly influences Yahweh's assessment of *hā'ādām* in v. 18. In order to understand the logic behind this apparent digression, it is necessary to look closely at the formulation of v. 18.

Here Yahweh describes the lonely state of the earth-creature as 'not good'. This is the first time a negative judgment appears in the narrative, in stark contrast to the absolute goodness of creation in the first creation account. In Genesis 1, Yahweh sees the universe and its constituents as *tōb*, 'good', that is, complete and fit for its purpose (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). In contrast, the state of the earth-creature in 2:18 is *lō'-tōb*.²² What is it that makes human aloneness 'not good' in Yahweh's eyes? Here one

²² It should be noted, however, that *'ādām* in Genesis 1 is never directly described as *tōb*. In Gn 1:25 God approves of the land animals made on the sixth day, but does not do the same for humans, and his general appreciation of 'everything that he had made' in Gn 1:31 does not quite compensate for the omission. It is difficult to determine whether humanity, created in the image and likeness of God and appointed to subdue the earth and rule over its creatures, stands here above all judgment, or whether this detail anticipates the human being as *lō'-tōb* in Genesis 2. Whatever the answer may be at this stage, the

should avoid reading into the text God's underlying concern for human social needs. Yahweh's words do not convey the point of view of the human being, for he is speaking to himself, without consulting or addressing *hā'ādām*. Since Yahweh does not say that being alone is not good *for* the human, it would appear that *hā'ādām*'s state of being alone in itself contradicts Yahweh's overall design. So what exactly is it that makes the earth-creature *lō'-tôḥ*?

It must be noted that the Hebrew term *l'bad* does not necessarily stand for loneliness. As Anne Lerner observes, most of the 158 occurrences of the term in the Hebrew Bible stress singularity rather than loneliness.²³ Edward Greenstein, followed by Lerner, looks at the use of the term in a number of other contexts.²⁴ In Ex 18:17-18 Jethro says that it is 'not good' for Moses to be the sole judge over the Israelites, since the task is too heavy and he cannot do it by himself (*l'bad*). Jethro then recommends that Moses appoints officials to help him, 'leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens' (Ex 18:21). Similarly, in Num 11:14 and Deut 1:9, 12 Moses says that he cannot carry the burden of his people's problems by himself (*l'bad*), and asks the Israelites to choose tribe leaders. In all these cases the term *l'bad* is used in relation to a task or function one cannot perform by oneself, without help. It is arguable that Yahweh in 2:18 is also assessing *hā'ādām* with regard to a particular task, and concludes that the latter cannot manage it alone. In this case, the following solution – creating a helper for the human creature – would carry the pragmatic connotation of sharing its task, and not of alleviating its loneliness.

The phrase *'ezer k'negdô* is often translated as 'helper, suitable for him' (2:18).²⁵ The term *k'negdô*, a prepositional form of *neged*, 'in front of, in sight of', communicates the idea of facing and, therefore, opposing the subject.²⁶ As such, it anticipates the creation of gender in 2:21-22 that shall 'split' *hā'ādām* into two. As Bal remarks, the use of *k'negdô* offers a deep insight into the nature of sexuality, which, being a form of binary relationship, is shaped by the 'tension between the *same* and the *different*' (italics M.B.). In order to create this tension the earth-creature needs to be faced with a part of itself, which explains why the animals later in the narrative will not

narrator's reluctance to present *hā'ādām* as *tôḥ* in Genesis 1:26-28 is semiotically consistent with Yahweh's assessment in Gn 2:18.

²³ Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 67.

²⁴ Greenstein, 'God's Golem', p. 237; Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 67.

²⁵ So in NIV, NIB, NAU (cf. the RSV's 'helper fit for him'). Tribble criticises this common translation for its sexist implications and suggests instead 'a companion corresponding to it' (Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 89-90). Bal takes the same view in *Lethal Love*, p. 115.

²⁶ BDB, p. 617; *DCH* V, pp. 603-604.

be accepted as suitable helpers (2:19-20).²⁷ In 2:18, the term *k^enegdô* introduces binarity as a characteristic opposite to *l^ebad* – the singular state of the earth-creature that has just been considered ‘not good’. By implication, one might perceive the new, binary state intended for *hā’ādām* as ‘good’, or as that which, in the eyes of Yahweh, fits the purpose of the human existence in the garden.

The use of the word ‘ezer, ‘help, helper’, in 2:18 is more problematic. In the Hebrew Bible this term often has the connotation of help received in mortal danger, of action that delivers from death.²⁸ Taking this meaning further, van Wolde sees ‘ezer as a prerequisite for life.²⁹ In most cases, the term signifies divine assistance, or serves as a direct metaphor for God as saviour.³⁰ However, in 2:18 none of these connotations of ‘ezer is obvious, neither is its literal meaning of ‘help’. Indeed, what kind of help does *hā’ādām* need at this stage in the narrative? Yahweh puts the human into the garden ‘to till it and to keep it’ (2:15), but since Yahweh has already filled the garden with trees and arranged their irrigation, this task seems to be taking care of itself.³¹ The following narrative does not offer much clarification. Woman, who will assume the role of helper, will not be given the task of looking after the garden, and neither will she share *hā’ādām*’s lot of toiling on the earth in 3:17-19. It would therefore appear that the term ‘ezer is not related to woman’s role within the world order that emerges at the end of Genesis 3.³² Clines, on the other hand, convincingly argues that the nature of woman’s help will only become clear in 3:16, where she will be assigned the role of bearing children.³³ At this stage, however, this task is not announced. Is this really what Yahweh has in mind? The difficulty with the interpretation of ‘ezer has led some

²⁷ See Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 115.

²⁸ See the analysis by Jean-Louis Ska, “‘Je vais lui faire un allié qui soit son homologue” (Gen 2,18): À propos du terme ‘ezer – “aide””, *Biblica* 65 (1984), pp. 233-38.

²⁹ van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, p. 177.

³⁰ Cf. Ex 18:4; Dt 33:7, 26, 29; Ps 33:20; 115:9-11; 121:2; 124:8; 146:5. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 68, also mentions the three prophetic passages where the term is used of military aid (Is 30:5; Ez 12:14; Hos 13:9).

³¹ Here I disagree with Greenstein who contends that *hā’ādām* himself is created as a helper to maintain and till the garden for Yahweh (see Greenstein, ‘God’s Golem’, pp. 232-35). On this subject, see also Stordalen, ‘Man, Soil, Garden’, pp. 3-25.

³² Unless, of course, one understands the term in its most general sense as mutual assistance. Thus, following F. Delitzsh, Westermann says: ‘The man is created by God in such a way that he needs the help of a partner; hence mutual help is an essential part of human existence’ (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 227). However, this broad interpretation locates a referential point outside the story, in the world of the reader’s general experience, and is not supported by the narrative itself.

³³ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 27-40.

interpreters to suppress it altogether, using in their translations the word ‘companion’ instead of ‘helper’.³⁴

In my opinion, the semantic connotation of help is crucial, because it holds an important clue to the understanding of Yahweh’s motives as well as the overall logic of the narrative. While woman is not portrayed as *hā’ādām*’s helper in the distribution of roles in 3:16-19, she undoubtedly assists him at another level. For the only time when woman takes the initiative and acts, eating of the forbidden tree in 3:6, is also the time when she *helps* her husband to do the same: ‘she ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate’. This moment stands at the centre of the plot, with the sequence ‘ate-gave-ate’ as its main transformation. From the perspective of the overall plot, woman’s structural role is to make sure that both she and *hā’ādām* eat of the tree of knowledge. Could this be the help that Yahweh speaks about in 2:18? ³⁵ If this is so, Yahweh’s internal monologue should reveal his real intention, namely, that his prohibition should be broken. In this case, the interpretation should turn its focus to the contradictory character of Yahweh’s communication.

Notably, the two successive speeches of Yahweh in 2:16-17 and 2:18 are very different in character. In the first speech, addressed to *hā’ādām*, Yahweh builds his discourse on an antithesis, issuing a sanction ‘to eat’ together with a prohibition ‘not to eat’. As I have already indicated, the interplay between the sanction and the prohibition results in ambiguity, producing an unspoken, subliminal inversion of the explicit command. The mode of communication between Yahweh and *hā’ādām* suggests multiple meanings, and is characterised, in the words of van Wolde, by ‘the semantic openness or the possibility for change’.³⁶ But being semantically open, it is also semantically selective, drawing attention to one particular meaning, and is, therefore, highly provocative.

In 2:18, the tone of Yahweh’s communication changes. Crucially, here he speaks not to *hā’ādām*, but to himself about *hā’ādām*, hiding his reasoning from the human (cf. the change in pronominal suffixes referring to *hā’ādām* from the second person in vv. 16-17 to the third person in v. 18). Although Yahweh does not refer to the

³⁴ Tribble and Bal both opt for the translation ‘companion’, albeit for opposite reasons. Tribble rejects the word ‘help’, since for her it presupposes superiority of *hā’ādām* over the new creature, and therefore goes against the idea of equality implied by *k’negdō* (Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 88-90). Bal, on her part, suggests that the translation ‘help’ trivialises the meaning of Hebrew *‘ezer*, which is associated with divine assistance (Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 115).

³⁵ To preserve this interpretative possibility, it seems important to translate *‘ezer* as ‘help’ or ‘helper’ rather than ‘companion’ or ‘partner’.

³⁶ van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, p 137.

prohibition that he has just issued, his speech is inevitably placed in its context. It looks as if, having just established the parameters of human existence with the knowledge of good and evil as its inverted, repressed goal, Yahweh draws back and takes a look at the earth-creature, as if to assess its aptitude for knowledge and for decoding the divine double-talk. The result is disappointing: *hā'ādām* in his singular state is *lō'-tōb*, i.e. 'insufficient' or 'inadequate', and therefore, in need of assistance. Therefore, it would appear that from the start *hā'ādām* is distanced from Yahweh's inner perspective, and not allowed to understand the full meaning of his orders. By assessing the ungendered being as *lō'-tōb*, Yahweh puts it in a context of suspicion. On the other hand, the figure of 'helper' from the onset is endowed with a constructive role in Yahweh's overall design. The new creature should be more than a companion, a perfect counterpart for *hā'ādām*, its purpose is to give knowledge to the human being. The inner contradiction of this role is that, despite its crucial importance, 'ēzer exists for the sake of *hā'ādām* and not for its own, is functional rather than ontological. Ignorant of Yahweh's real intentions, *hā'ādām* is still at the centre of Yahweh's concerns.

The Making of the Animals and Woman

The process of finding a helper takes two stages. To begin with, Yahweh creates out of the earth 'every animal of the field and every bird of the sky' (2:19) and brings them to the human being to be named. The animals, however, do not match Yahweh's image of 'ēzer *k^enegdō*, for they are not complementary to the human (2:20). For the first time Yahweh appears to have failed to create what he intended.³⁷ This unusual instance of trial and error in Yahweh's otherwise purposeful activity poses a problem that could be addressed at two levels.

On the one hand, as Wenham points out, the creation of the animals as part of Yahweh's search for a helper heightens the narrative suspense.³⁸ As a result, when woman finally appears, she is perceived as the culmination in the process of creation, its final stage that completes the world of Genesis 2. On the other hand, in creating the animals, Yahweh has a specific agenda. Despite their apparent inaptitude to be proper

³⁷ Umberto Cassuto points out the contrast between this failure and the rest of Yahweh's successful acts of creation (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis I: From Adam to Noah* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), p. 128.

³⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 68.

companions for *hā'ādām*, they will be indirectly linked to the function of 'ezer in the following episode. In 3:1-7 the serpent, the wisest of all the animals, persuades woman to eat from the forbidden tree. By helping woman – the 'helper' of *hā'ādām* – the serpent plays a crucial role in the human attainment of knowledge. The compositional choice of placing the creation of the animals alongside that of woman and relating them both to the notion of help endows them with a shared function that will lead in the end to a shared punishment (3:15). Towards the end of the garden narrative, this association will be linguistically reinforced through the wordplay between woman's name 'Eve', *ḥawwāh*, and the word for 'animal,' *ḥayyāh*, both of which stem from the same verb 'to live'.³⁹

When Yahweh finally comes to creating woman, he uses as his material not the earth, but the earth-creature. Having put it to sleep, he removes one of its ribs and shapes it into a woman. The narrator seems to emphasise the unconscious state of the human, using two different terms to describe it: *tardēmāh*, 'deep sleep', and *yāšēn*, 'to sleep' (2:21). Tribble has argued that Yahweh does it to 'anaesthetise' *hā'ādām* before the subsequent surgical procedure.⁴⁰ However, it seems more plausible that the deep sleep is meant to prevent cognition, or conscious witnessing on the part of the human.⁴¹ A similar usage is found in 1 Sam 26:12. The narrative here describes how no one notices – sees or knows – when David removes a spear and a jug of water from beside the sleeping Saul, 'because they were all asleep (*yāšēn*), for a deep sleep (*tardēmāh*) from Yahweh had fallen on them'. Here Yahweh intends to make Saul's companions unaware of what has happened. If this is also the case in 2:21, and *hā'ādām* is put to sleep to be kept from witnessing the forthcoming inner separation, what is Yahweh seeking to achieve by that? Is Yahweh intentionally concealing from *hā'ādām* the origin of woman and her essential, organic unity with the original earth-creature? From the jubilant speech in 2:23 one could assume the opposite, since here man seems perfectly aware of where woman has come from. In that case, what is it that is missed during the unconscious state of *hā'ādām*?

Following Bal, one could understand the deep sleep of the human being as a marker of discontinuity in the permanence of the Subject, as the death of the old,

³⁹ Wenham in *Genesis 1-15*, p. 68 observes the parallel, but uses it to emphasise the fact of the inadequacy of the animals, who *despite* their name cannot become partners for the human being.

⁴⁰ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 95.

⁴¹ Westermann here quotes J. G. Herder, A. Dillmann, and J. G. Thomson, who relate the sleep of *hā'ādām* to the philosophical idea that 'the man ought not to be a witness of the work of creation' (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 230).

singular, non-gendered creature and the birth of the new, differentiated *hā'ādām*.⁴² This interpretation is structurally valid, yet it needs to be qualified. Crucially, it does not take into account the way *hā'ādām* is constructed after the event. For the narrator seems to insist on the continuity of the character, calling the new, differentiated creature the same name, *hā'ādām*. This would be consistent with the character's self-perception: having missed the process of internal separation, the human creature should continue to perceive itself as the same being, essentially unchanged. On the other hand, the narrative does not mention *hā'ādām*'s transition back to consciousness. With no waking up moment, there is a slight uncertainty as to whether the entire scene of 2:21-24 might not be seen as one continuous dream of *hā'ādām* that is never consciously acknowledged. At a semiotic level, the deep sleep of *hā'ādām* marks the beginning of a story of a deeply ambivalent Subject, which is simultaneously permanent and discontinued, transformed and left unchanged by the creation of gender.

Yahweh makes woman from *'aḥaṭ mišsal'ōtāw*, traditionally translated as 'one of his ribs' (2:21). This translation proved to be particularly attractive from the perspective of human anatomy, because a rib, being one of many, might be considered an expendable body part. Beginning with Paul and the rabbis of late antiquity, Jewish and Christian interpreters used this narrative feature to justify the patriarchal view on gender, presenting woman as 'derivative in substance and second in sequence'.⁴³ In recent decades this view, however, has been challenged.⁴⁴ While it has become normative to translate *šēla'* as 'rib' in modern Hebrew, in the Hebrew Bible this meaning is not well attested. In fact, the scene of the creation of woman appears to provide the only example of such a usage, while, in all of the thirty-eight occurrences of *šēla'* outside 2:21-22, it denotes 'side' or 'side room' and is used in the descriptions of sacred architecture. To read *šēla'* as 'side' would also be consistent with the LXX translation of 2:21 (*pleurōn*, or 'side') as well as with some early rabbinic interpretations.⁴⁵ Heinz-Josef Fabry argues that, given its semantic singularity in the biblical text, the reading of *šēla'* as 'rib' in 2:21-22 is unlikely to be correct.⁴⁶

The term 'side' seems particularly appropriate to describe the institution of gender because of its connotation of duality. This connotation is certainly present whenever *šēla'* is mentioned as part of sacred buildings. The tabernacle (Ex 25:12, 14;

⁴² Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 115.

⁴³ Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Heinz-Josef Fabry, '*tsela*', *TDOT* XII, pp. 400-5.

⁴⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* 8:1.

⁴⁶ Fabry, '*tsela*', *TDOT* XII, pp. 400-5.

26:20, 26, 27, 35; 37:3, 5), the temple of Solomon (1 Kgs 6:5, 8, 15, 16, 34), and the temple in Ezekiel's vision (Ez 41:5-9, 11, 26) are all constructed symmetrically, with the emphasis on their opposite sides, *šēnē šēlā'im*. The associated verb *šāla'*, 'to limp', also has a semantic link to symmetry, albeit in its opposite form, as an upset balance between the two sides. Given this dual connotation of *šēla'*, the expression '*aḥat miššal'ōtāw*' in 2:21 could be taken to mean 'one of his (two) sides'.

And so, instead of woman's subordinate status, the concept of *šēlā'* might point to the basic binarity, and therefore, to the equality of sexual differentiation.⁴⁷ Reuven Kimelman advocates a non-sexist reading of the scene, stressing that 'male and female are coeval in the primordial earthling' as its two sides.⁴⁸ Made from one side, or one half, of *hā'ādām*, woman stands in structural opposition to the remaining, other side, becomes *k'negdô*, 'as opposite to him' and thus fulfils Yahweh's purpose (2:18). However, the symmetry between the two is only a conjecture that should not be overstated. Here the use of the term '*eḥad*', 'one', is notable. Outside 2:21, whenever '*eḥad*' is used in conjunction with *šēla'*, it is always followed by *šēnī*, 'second' or 'other', which indicates a clear opposition 'one side : the other side' (cf. Ex 26:26-27; 37:3). However, in this case the other side is not named. This could be seen as the beginning of a structural discrepancy in the narrator's treatment of gender: out of the two presumably equal parts, only one undergoes separation and is acknowledged as a part, while the other retains the appearance of a whole. Yahweh's action of separating one side of the human being is therefore iconic, the first in the long sequence of transactions that will construct woman as a bearer of difference, and man as the bearer of unity.

Next, Yahweh offers a different treatment to each of the sides of *hā'ādām*. In order to substitute for the missing side, Yahweh adds *bāsār*, 'flesh', to what is left of the human being.⁴⁹ Yahweh's gesture has important semiotic repercussions for the construction of the Subject. First, as the substance that replaces the 'woman' side of *hā'ādām*, flesh is structurally dissociated from female reality. It alludes to the idea not of maleness, but of being-without-female, of a residual entity defined by the absence of one side. At another level, *bāsār* in 2:21 serves to imitate wholeness. By replacing the

⁴⁷ This supports the idea of 'anthropology of equality' that Bird applies to the image of male – female creation in Gn 1:27 (Phyllis Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them": Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation', *HTR* 74 [1981], p. 151).

⁴⁸ Kimelman, 'The Seduction of Eve', pp. 14-15.

⁴⁹ The term *bāsār* appears here for the first time, one of the four occurrences found in the narrative of the creation of woman (Gn 2:21, 23, 23, 24). Before Gn 6:3, the term is used exclusively in the context of sexual differentiation.

missing side of *hā'ādām* with flesh, Yahweh 'patches' him up, preserving an appearance of the former, ungendered being. But who is the viewer, for whom this appearance of continuity is intended? Neither Yahweh, who knows the old *hā'ādām*, nor woman, who does not know what existed before her, need the original being to be 'mended'. The only character for whom this apparent wholeness is meaningful is *hā'ādām*, who is, on his awakening, to make sense of his new self. For him, permanence of appearance implies permanence of being. It lays ground for a claim of precedence: being on the inside only a half of his former self, the new being perceives his appearance as that of the same, old *hā'ādām*.

In contrast to this apparently unchanged, unified identity, the removed side of *hā'ādām* is further changed, 'fashioned' or 'built' into woman. The action of 'building' in v. 22 structurally opposes that of 'replacing' in v. 21, inasmuch as it creates a new, different identity instead of imitating the old one. Thus the physical construction of woman's body and the semiotic construction of her subjectivity both imply her difference from *hā'ādām*. While the concept of man has not yet emerged, the concept of woman is already established, both for Yahweh and for the reader.

'And He Brought Her to *hā'ādām*'

Having created woman, Yahweh brings her back to *hā'ādām* (2:22). This brief statement carries powerful repercussions for the power dynamics of the account, not only by what it says but also by what it holds back. The phrase *way^ebi'ehā 'el-hā'ādām*, forms a clear parallel with 2:19b, where God, having formed the animals from the earth, brings them to *hā'ādām* (*wayyābē' 'el-hā'ādām*) 'to see what he would call them'. Notably, in the case of the animals, Yahweh has a clearly stated purpose (to see what they are named), while there is no such purpose mentioned for woman. This leads Tribble to conclude that woman 'does not fit the pattern of dominion' that characterises the relationships of the earth-creature to the animals, as well as to the earth and the plants.⁵⁰ Yet the distinction here is not so clear-cut. In itself, the fact of woman being brought to *hā'ādām* entails the latter's semiotic superiority. Like the animals before her, woman is subjected to the human being as a reality in need of interpretation. What is

⁵⁰ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 97.

different now is that *hā'ādām* names woman of his own accord and not following Yahweh's wish.

What is it then that Yahweh is seeking to achieve by bringing woman back to *hā'ādām*? In 2:19 Yahweh showed the animals to the human being in order to see, *lir'ōt*, what the latter would call them, which implies that until then they had not been properly differentiated, or named. Having given the human being the freedom to name his (Yahweh's) creatures, Yahweh himself becomes an observer who follows the events in order to find out their outcome. The naming of the animals clearly has an objective impact on the newly created world; in a way, it continues the process of its differentiation and structuring ('and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name'). Woman, however, has been fully differentiated from the onset, and came on stage bearing her generic name ('and Yahweh God built the side... into a woman [*'iššāh*]', 2:22). The naming speech of *hā'ādām* ('she shall be called *'iššāh*, 2:23) will not impart any new qualities to woman or communicate anything new about her to Yahweh or the reader. From a semiotic point of view, woman will remain untouched and unaltered by meeting her counterpart. On the one hand, she is totally objectified by Yahweh and *hā'ādām*; on the other hand, as an object she resists change, is immutable, while her mere presence effects a deep transformation on *hā'ādām*. Presumably, this is what Yahweh meant all along. By bringing woman back to man, he does not need to see what she would be called, neither does he expect anything to be done to her. Instead, Yahweh allows *hā'ādām* to see *'iššāh* and to work out his own identity as a function of hers. If there is, therefore, any new identity emerging from the naming speech of 2:23-24, it should be that of man and not of woman.

To summarise, in 2:22 as elsewhere in the garden narrative, Yahweh's attitude is ambiguous. On the one hand, by bringing woman to *hā'ādām*, he hands over to man the power to recognise and to interpret female reality. This initial attribution of speech to man is emblematic of the Hebrew narrative, where the reader is constantly invited to share the male perspective on the female Other. On the other hand, Yahweh offers no comment or endorsement to the naming speech (cf. 2:19b). In fact, he does not even linger around to see whether or not woman is recognised as the needed helper, he goes off stage until after the transgression (3:8). Yahweh's silence makes the naming speech of 2:23-24 an expression of *hā'ādām*'s own, subjective view. As for Yahweh, his task is completed: having created woman and brought her to *hā'ādām*, Yahweh has set up all the conditions necessary for what he intends to happen.

hā'ādām and the Interpretation of Gender (2:23-24)

The Emergence of Man

At the heart of *hā'ādām's* interpretation of gender lies the naming phrase: 'she shall be called woman (*'iššāh*) for out of man (*'iš*) she was taken' (2:23). According to *hā'ādām*, woman derives her particular name and identity from man. The generic similarity between the two is expressed linguistically through the assonance of *'iš* and *'iššāh*. However, the use of the gendered term *'iš* in this aetiology is problematic. Until this moment, there has been no mention of *'iš* in the narrative, and yet *hā'ādām* refers to 'man' as an existing, familiar reality that mediates for him the new reality of woman. In the same aetiological formula he points to the identity of *'iš*: by saying 'out of *'iš* she was taken', *hā'ādām* clearly refers to 2:22, where Yahweh fashioned into woman 'the side that he has taken from *hā'ādām*'. The two parallel actions of 'taking from' fuse together *'iš* and *hā'ādām* and put both of them at the origin of woman. In making woman derive from *'iš*, the Subject formulates his own structural ambiguity: he keeps the name of the ungendered earth-creature, yet formally identifies himself as male. As Lerner observes, 'the real naming that occurs here is the *adam's* naming himself *ish*, man'.⁵¹ Bal offers a psychoanalytical explanation of the confused identity of *hā'ādām*, who for her 'focalises his earlier version from his actual state'. Having no memories of his ungendered existence, man here imagines that he has always been a sexual being. Bal ironically calls this character '*hā'ādām* the Second', implying that the original name 'is definitely lost to its previous meaning'.⁵² Bal's reading, however, seems to undermine the ambiguity that is central to the semiotic construction of *hā'ādām*.

It is possible, as Bal points out, to understand the words 'taken from' in the sense of separation.⁵³ Bal stresses that this interpretation of the origin of the sexes is consistent with the model of creation in Genesis 1, where God creates by separating different substances from each other (the light from the darkness, the waters below from

⁵¹ Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 133.

⁵² Bal, *Lethal Love*, pp. 116-17.

⁵³ 'Out of *hā'ādām* Yahweh made *'iššā* and *'iš* by separating the one from the other' (Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 117).

the waters above, dry land from sea).⁵⁴ That woman is taken from or out of man could therefore refer to the inner differentiation of *hā'ādām*, the separation between his two sides that leads to the emergence of gender. However, one should not overstate the similarities between the processes of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 1, the separation between the cosmic elements does not impose any hierarchy of value or status. Here the order of the elements could be reversed: the separation of the light from the darkness implies the separation of the darkness from the light. On the contrary, the separation of woman from man in 2:23 could not be reversed, since it has an asymmetric connotation of provenance. *hā'ādām* draws the sexual and linguistic identity of *'iššāh* from *'iš*, sees her as his derivative, and not the other way around. The concept of male subjectivity, introduced by the earth-creature that has already lost its female component, comes on stage endowed with a higher semiotic position. And yet, paradoxically, it depends on the already existing female identity. If there is anything that defines the male subject at this stage, it is his claim of precedence over the being that was created first.

From One's Flesh to 'One Flesh'

In establishing the sexual identities of woman and man, the speech of *hā'ādām* in 2:23-24 stresses the unity of the two gendered beings. It starts with a declaration of the common nature of man and woman ('this is, this time, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh') and concludes with an achievement of their final union ('they become one flesh'). Biblical scholars have often read this text within the social and theological context of kinship, covenant, and marriage.⁵⁵ Westermann sees in it a declaration of 'personal community of man and woman', Tribble, a rare statement of gender equality.⁵⁶ A similar view on the text is presented in an extensive article by N. P. Bratsiotis in

⁵⁴ van Wolde in particular stresses the idea of separation as central to the process of creation in Genesis 1. In her linguistic and textual analysis of the usage of the verb *bārā'* in the first creation account, she concludes that the verb denotes the action of separation and not of creation, as commonly believed (van Wolde, 'Why the Verb ברא Does Not Mean "to Create" in Genesis 1.1-2.4a', *JSOT* 34 [2009], pp. 3-23).

⁵⁵ Thus, Gerhard von Rad describes the woman in Genesis 2 as a bride (*Genesis: A Commentary* [trans. John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961], p. 84); Wenham sees Gn 2:24 as a reference to marriage as a kinship relation (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 71). See also Cassuto, *Genesis I*, pp. 136-37; Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Commentary: Genesis. The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 23.

⁵⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 232; Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 99.

TDOT, in which he relates 2:23-24 to God's institution of marriage as an equal partnership between man and woman.⁵⁷

More recently, this understanding has met with objections from a number of feminist scholars.⁵⁸ Meyers, in particular, has opposed the idea of reading social institutions into the literary and archetypal setting of the garden story. Interpreting 2:23-24 from the perspective of love and marriage seems to lead away from the text's central process of establishing narrative identities. Moreover, one could hardly effectively apply the idea of partnership and equality to a text that does not include woman's view. The speech conveys *hā'ādām's* perspective on woman and *his* interpretation of unity. His vision of gender is therefore essentially biased. I suggest that this bias is consistent with the structurally ambiguous identity of *hā'ādām* and might be seen as its expression. In other words, to understand better *what* is being said, one should look at *who* is speaking.

So who exactly is naming woman in 2:23-24? The word *hā'ādām* here should be denoting a different kind of creature, since in 2:21-22 the original *hā'ādām* has lost one side. In its place, the incomplete, lacking body of the human being receives a different substance, 'flesh', which preserves the appearance of former totality. The semiotic implications of this procedure come to the fore when *hā'ādām* attempts to make sense of female reality. Remarkably, the prevailing notion in his speech is that of flesh. The term *bāsār*, used three times in the space of two verses, seems to encapsulate the Subject's attitude towards the gendered Other, marking the starting point of sexual differentiation ('flesh of my flesh') as well as its outcome ('one flesh'). Seen as *hā'ādām's* preferred metaphor, *bāsār* can have several connotations.

In its most literal sense, the term *bāsār* signifies flesh as animal and/or human musculature, body as a whole, and, by extension, all living things, and emphasises the physical, bodily aspect of living creatures.⁵⁹ In 2:22-23, this first layer of meaning points to the physical nature of woman's unity with man, both in her physical derivation from him, and in the consummation of their union implied by the phrase, 'they become one flesh'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ N. P. Bratsiotis, '*ish, isah*', *TDOT I*, pp. 222-35.

⁵⁸ See Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 110; Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them", p. 155; Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁹ *DCH II*, p. 277; *BDB*, p. 142.

⁶⁰ Brett reads the idea of being 'one flesh' as the celebration of an intimacy (Brett, *Genesis*, p. 31). See also N. P. Bratsiotis, '*ish, isah*', *TDOT I*, pp. 227-28.

At another level, used as part of the kinship formula 'x is y's flesh', the term describes a relationship between brothers and, by extension, between any blood-relatives (cf. 29:14; 37:27; Lv 18:6; 25:49; Jg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12, 13; 1 Ch 11:1).⁶¹ *hā'ādām's* speech, according to Bal, holds this precise connotation, stressing the common origin of man and woman as the son and daughter of *hā'ādām*, and their ensuing equality as siblings.⁶²

Overlying these general interpretations of the term 'flesh' is the particular perspective of *hā'ādām* in 2:22-23. Coming from the male subject whose body is partially made of flesh (2:21), the emphasis on *bāsār* communicates more than mere physicality. On the one hand, the 'flesh', which emerged not as a thing in itself but as a replacement and a compensation for what later becomes woman, is a continuous reminder of the missing side and, as such, connotes lack, desire and longing. This longing for the lost wholeness moves man to 'cling' to his wife, so that the two become 'one flesh'. On the other hand, flesh also points to the act of concealment, of hiding physical signs of lack, by which Yahweh imitates the totality and therefore, the permanence of *hā'ādām*. The notion of flesh in the speech is therefore loaded with double symbolism. It alludes to a range of contradictory motives that form the basis of male subjectivity in the narrative: it speaks simultaneously of longing and its denial, of an experience of separation and a claim of totality. By calling woman 'flesh of his flesh', *hā'ādām* commits a structural error, since *bāsār* as a signifier is exclusive to the semiotic construction of a male body. The unity of flesh is therefore a unity on man's terms, *bāsār 'eḥād* being a supposedly 'common' denominator, but that in which woman has no signifier of her own. Semiotically, the Subject's vision of wholeness is achieved by subsuming, that is, annihilating, woman as the Other. Consequently, the formula 'two become one' communicates an idea of the unity based on suppression of the heterogenous. Man in this picture carries all the unity, and woman, all the difference.

Elsewhere in Genesis, the expression 'x is y's flesh' displays similar ambiguity. In 29:14 Jacob's uncle Laban welcomes his nephew in Haran, saying 'you are my bone and my flesh'. Here Laban refers to the ties of kinship that unite the two men, but his subsequent exploitative attitude towards Jacob gives his words a double edge, turning them into a statement of bondage: 'you are my flesh' = 'you are mine'. This position of

⁶¹ DCH II, p. 277 gives 'relative' as one of the meanings of *bāsār*. Cf. BDB, p. 142.

⁶² Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 116. See also Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 99; Walter Brueggemann, 'Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Gen. 2, 23a)', *CBQ* 32 (1970), pp. 532-42.

Laban becomes particularly clear in the parting scene, when Laban attributes to himself Jacob's family and possessions, saying, 'the daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine' (31:43). The words 'you are my flesh' in this context acquire a connotation of dominance, of encroachment on the identity of the Other.

An example of a similar usage is found in the story of Joseph. In 37:27 Judah persuades his brothers not to kill Joseph but to sell him instead to the Ishmaelites, arguing that he is their brother, their own flesh. Here too, the phrase 'he is our flesh' expresses a deeply ambiguous stance of Judah: by alluding to the ties of kinship, he apparently seeks to save his brother's life, yet at the same time, he symbolically eliminates Joseph, removes him from the stage by selling him into slavery to a foreign land. Judah's entire argument about the humane disposal of Joseph has a connotation of personal gain ('what profit is it if we kill our brother', 37:26). Joseph is not annihilated; rather, his identity is taken up, subsumed by his brothers in the form of its symbolic equivalent - twenty pieces of silver. For Judah, as well as for Laban, the unity of flesh is underscored by a claim of totality, achieved by taking over the Other.

To conclude, the concept of flesh appears to be central both to the semiotic construction of a male body (2:21-22) and to the formation of the point of view of the male subject (2:23-24). As Lois Bueler remarks, along similar lines, 'she is created out of his body so that he may simultaneously enjoy both identity with and primacy over her, for she makes possible the distinct, male, progenitive, dominant human figure Adam becomes'.⁶³ In this sense, the creation and naming of woman lays the ground for what will become a prevalent vision of gender in the biblical narrative.

How does this perspective of the male subject fit in with the overall plot, and in particular, with Yahweh's design? By bringing woman to *hā'ādām*, Yahweh invites man to recognise and assess her as his Other and thus to answer the question whether or not she constitutes 'ezer *k^enegdō*, a 'helper matching him'. As van Wolde rightly observes, man pays no attention to the *ēzer* aspect of woman – which is not surprising, for Yahweh has not told him about it – yet he seems to recognise her other aspect, that of matching or corresponding, *k^enegdō*.⁶⁴ He takes the idea of correspondence too far, however, seeing the new creature not so much as his partner, but rather as *part* of himself. As a result, his stance is to subsume and dominate woman's subjectivity. Ironically, he himself seems to disappear in the process, his own subjectivity exhausted

⁶³ Lois E. Bueler, *The Tested Woman Plot* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2001), p. 17.

⁶⁴ van Wolde, *Words Become Worlds*, p. 19.

by his striving towards appropriation, since from the moment woman is created, he has no preoccupations other than 'clinging to his wife'. One could see this pattern of appropriation as part of Yahweh's ruse. In order that his double play could work, man should regard woman as 'flesh of his flesh'. Only in that case will woman's action at the critical moment be repeated by man without thinking ('and she ate, and she also gave to her husband with her, and he ate', 3:6). The woman's role here is deeply dichotomous: it is central to the main transformation of the narrative, yet peripheral to the Subject and so has to be undermined. The perfect partner (or the perfect part?) of *hā'ādām*, woman is also a perfect instrument for Yahweh. The naming speech of *hā'ādām* in 2:23-24 therefore implies Yahweh's success: he has now found the helper needed for the drama of the human acquisition of knowledge to unfold.

The Human Beings and Knowledge (2:25-3:6)

The Subversion of Yahweh's Voice

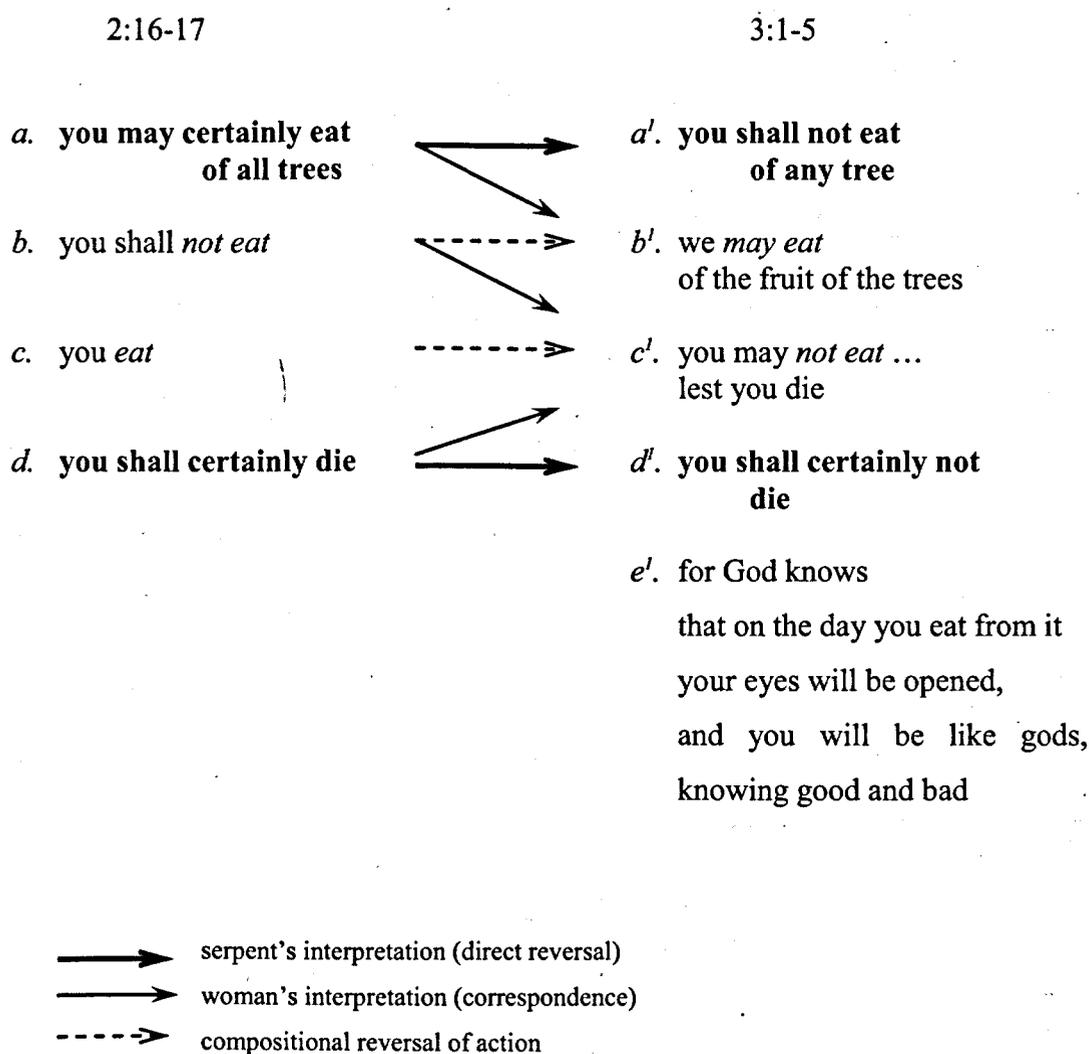
Following the naming of woman, the narrative describes the new couple as 'naked (*ārūmmîm*) and not ashamed' (2:25). This detail stresses their state of unity. Being naked, the human beings are exposed to each other's sight, yet they are not conscious of their exposure, that is, they cannot see their differences imposed by gender and therefore do not feel shame. By implication, their personal or gender boundaries do not yet exist. For *hā'ādām*, this is consistent with his understanding of woman as his own flesh; for woman, who has yet no voice of her own, this merely reflects his vision.

At this point, the serpent comes on stage, described as the wisest of the animals (3:1). The word *ārūm*, 'shrewd, wise' plays directly on *ārôm*, 'naked', suggesting a link between the couple's yet unrecognised distinctions, exposed by nakedness, and the role the serpent is going to play in their transformation. Notably, the serpent is the wisest 'of all the animals of the field (*mikkōl ḥayyat ḥaśśādeh*) which Yahweh God had made'. The text here makes a clear allusion to 'all the animals of the field', *kōl ḥayyat ḥaśśādeh*, created in 2:19. Being the wisest of all of them, the serpent serves as their collective representation, an animal *par excellence*. And since Yahweh conceives of the animals as potential 'helpers' for *hā'ādām*, the serpent too is structurally linked to the idea of 'help' and to the figure of the actual 'helper' – woman. Therefore it seems fitting

that the serpent should address woman searching for the meaning of God's prohibition, leaving *hā'ādām* out of the picture.

In 3:1 the serpent asks woman to interpret what God *really* said, but its question is loaded, for it already contains an apparently false answer.⁶⁵ Suddenly, it becomes possible to understand otherwise, and the ambiguity of God's communication is brought to the fore. In her reply, woman reformulates the official version of Yahweh's order, which is then, once again, contradicted by the serpent.⁶⁶

Fig. 2



⁶⁵ Speiser points out that the serpent's opening remark is better read as a false statement than as a question (E.A. Speiser, *Genesis* [Anchor Bible, 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964], p. 23).

⁶⁶ Although woman's account is essentially faithful to Yahweh's words in 2:16-17, it deviates from them in details (see the discussion below).

By putting the two verbal sequences next to each other one can observe an interesting compositional arrangement. The serpent's words frame woman's interpretation with a direct reversal of Yahweh's explicit meaning ($a-a'$ and $d-d'$). Although woman's account in itself corresponds to Yahweh's speech ($a-b'$ and $b-c'$), the serpent's initial address (a') shifts her sequence by one position, so that woman's words compositionally come to contradict the words of Yahweh ($b-b'$ and $c-c'$). In this way, the composition of the narrative presupposes a shift in woman's position from conforming to Yahweh's authoritative voice to opposing it, and highlights the serpent's role in effecting this change. The last statement of the serpent, e' , stands by itself, concluding the dialogue. It presents an alternative interpretation of Yahweh's motives that challenges not only the meaning but also the very validity of his law.

Due to its subversive interpretation of Yahweh's command and the consequences it has for the humans, the serpent has traditionally been blamed for humanity's fall, being seen as a tempter of humanity, an evil force that corrupts the relation between the humans and their creator. It is in this capacity of the 'deceiver' who acts against God's will that both the New Testament and the rabbinical writings associate the serpent with Satan. Westermann has opposed this inference on theological grounds, stating that in the Yahwist's view, the serpent could not oppose God's will, being itself one of God's creatures.⁶⁷ I suggest that the same applies on textual grounds. Until now, the narrative has presented Yahweh's role as purposeful in every detail. Even when his motives are not revealed, they can be inferred, constructed from his internal monologue and his actions and appear to follow a certain logic. By stressing Yahweh as the creator of the serpent in the verse where the serpent questions Yahweh's words, the text suggests that this questioning is somehow related to Yahweh's purpose. Moreover, since the same verse says that Yahweh has created the serpent as wise, it seems that an exercise of this wisdom – the serpent's subversion of Yahweh's words – might be exactly what Yahweh expects from it.

A psychological and symbolic analysis by Francis Landy attaches to the character of the serpent a connotation of rebellion, of the power of chaos that overthrows the established order. For him, the role of the serpent is 'to introduce the plurality of meaning, the intrinsic ambiguity, and hence deceptiveness of the world'.⁶⁸ Such a reading, however, should be qualified. While the subversive character of the serpent is hardly disputable, it is not the serpent who introduces ambiguity or

⁶⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 322-27; similarly Cassuto, *Genesis I*, p. 142.

⁶⁸ Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 232.

deceptiveness into the story. Rather, by virtue of being wise it sees beyond the established order and perceives its underlying ambiguity and plurality of meaning. The serpent not only distinguishes between the opposite meanings, but reverses Yahweh's pattern of repression, uncovering the meaning that has been hidden. What it tells woman is therefore not a lie but a secret: 'You shall certainly not die! For God knows that on the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and bad' (3:4-5).

The following narrative will prove most of these predictions to be accurate. First, the humans do not die on the day they eat of the tree. Although the concept of death is formulated in 3:19 as part of Yahweh's punishment, *hā'ādām* will live to see his numerous descendants and will die at the ripe old age of nine hundred and thirty (5:5). In her turn, woman's death will never be mentioned. Second, the eyes of woman and man indeed are opened as they see each other's nakedness (3:7). Third, in 3:22 Yahweh admits that, having eaten of the forbidden tree, *hā'ādām* became like him (lit. 'like one of us, knowing good and bad'). But if the serpent is right about the consequences of disobedience, then it must have been Yahweh who misguided the human by his death warning in 2:17. The logic of the narrative upholds the subversive interpretation of the serpent and renders problematic Yahweh's authoritative command. The serpent ceases to be a disruptive and scheming enemy; instead, it seems to be rising out of the deeper layers of the narrative, invested with a superior knowledge of its moving forces. Knowing what God knows and revealing it to the humans, the serpent brings to the surface the other, repressed side of Yahweh, which arguably constitutes his real agenda. Similarly, for Landy, the serpent 'symbolises a side of God (the tempter; good-and-evil) he refuses to recognize'.⁶⁹ In this, the serpent functions as Yahweh's Shadow.

It would, however, be a mistake to consider Yahweh's repression as something unconscious. The deity is in control of the serpent – his own creature – having made it the wisest of all the other helpers and therefore fit for his purpose. The serpent's rebellion against God – a fruitful motif in the history of reception – could be seen as a premeditated part of Yahweh's ploy and an expression of his inner dichotomy. Dissociating from his Shadow, he simultaneously puts it to his service. In her insightful analysis, Bal has given a semiotic ground to the serpent's subversive unity with Yahweh. In relation to the central action of the myth, the deity, the serpent, and the tree

⁶⁹ Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 238.

share the actantial position of the *destinateur*: 'the tree as a source of temptation, the serpent as the actual tempter, and God as the prohibitor of the action'.⁷⁰ Despite their opposite points of view and the contrast in their narrative status, the deity and the serpent are structurally related by their collaboration. With respect to the transformation – the passing on of knowledge to the humans – one cannot function without the other.

Woman and the Tree

As a character, woman stands at the centre of most of the contradictions of the narrative. She is united with *hā'ādām* as well as distanced from him, is part of the Subject as well as the Other. She is created to be the 'ezer, 'helper', of *hā'ādām*, but her 'help' leads to his expulsion from Eden. The narrative makes her responsible for bringing death into human existence, yet at the end of it she receives the name *hawwāh*, 'life'. In the context of Yahweh's law, her actions are impulsive and irresponsible, while from the perspective of knowledge they appear purposeful and consistent. This ambiguity of woman's position comes from her semiotic association with knowledge. Although she plays a central role in Yahweh's hidden plan to give knowledge to the humans, like the plan itself, she is never openly acknowledged. From this perspective, the disavowal of woman and its patriarchal implications stem from Yahweh's apparent repression of knowledge.

But what about woman's own point of view? Created in the 'shadow' of the forbidden tree, does she know about the role she has to play? Though the text does not record any communication between her and Yahweh, in 3:2-3 she gives the serpent her account of Yahweh's commandment. Clearly, woman knows about the forbidden tree and its link to death. However, her version of 2:16-17 is slightly different. She exaggerates the strictness of the taboo, saying that God has forbidden not only to eat but also to touch the fruit of the tree. More crucially, she identifies the forbidden tree not as the tree of the knowledge of good and bad but as 'the tree in the middle of the garden'. In this, she contradicts 2:9, which placed in the middle of the garden the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge alongside it. Which of the two trees is woman talking about? Is it possible that she would subsequently eat of the tree of life, the real 'tree in the middle'?

⁷⁰ Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 124.

The narrative remains remarkably vague on this point. In fact, despite its focus on the acquisition of knowledge, Genesis 3 never explicitly names the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. Its identity is always inferred from the context, presented differently by different characters: ‘any tree of the garden’ (serpent, v. 1), ‘the tree in the middle of the garden’ (woman, v. 3), ‘the tree from which I commanded you not to eat’ (Yahweh, vv. 11, 17), or simply ‘the tree’ (narrator, v. 6). The different angle each character has on the forbidden tree points to its underlying instability as a semiotic object. Each description simultaneously emphasises the tree as a sign and leads away from it as a concrete reality. The serpent ironically speaks of ‘any tree in the garden’, which questions the positive relation of any particular tree to God’s prohibition. Yahweh, on the contrary, emphasises one particular tree, yet avoids calling it by name, defining it by the taboo he imposed on it (3:11, 17). Woman, in her speech, constructs the forbidden tree as something she might have heard of but has never experienced. She thinks it brings death, but this knowledge is clearly not first hand. She locates it in the middle of the garden, but she must have never come close to it, otherwise she would have seen the other tree growing there (cf. 2:9). How does she recognise the forbidden tree, or else how does it happen to be right in front of her when the dialogue is over? What is it that gives concrete reality to this shifting object which is simultaneously a non-tree and all the trees, which brings death as well as imparts God’s knowledge of good and bad, and which might even be confused with the tree of life?

It seems that in the midst of all these varied and contradictory descriptions, the tree in question only becomes the tree of the knowledge of good and bad when woman experiences it as such. The instability of verbal communication causes her to move to direct experience, and her experience invests the unstable object with concrete and positive meaning: in 3:6a she looks at the tree and sees that it is ‘good for food, delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one understand’.

Woman looks at the tree because looking, as opposed to eating or touching, is not forbidden. At another level, looking is emphasised because it serves to activate the mechanism of desire that drives the central transformation. From the onset of the garden narrative, looking has been linked with desire. In 2:9 Yahweh plants the trees that are ‘attractive to look at (*nehmād lmar’eh*) and good for food’. The appearance of the trees is meant to arouse desire (the root *hmd* means ‘to desire, delight in’), to entice one to eat of their fruit. However, *hā’ādām*, for whose benefit the trees are planted, is only related to the alimentary aspect of the trees (cf. 2:16-17). The visual aspect of reality seems to

be lost on him, and so in 3:6b, he eats of the forbidden tree without looking, and, apparently, without thinking. The forbidden tree arouses in him no desire, and he eats of it, as he will confess in 3:12, only because it has been offered to him by woman, whom God gave him and whom he regards as ‘flesh of his flesh’ and an extension of himself.

From this angle, woman provides a missing link, a connection between the Subject, incapable of vision and desire, and therefore, of reflection and choice, and the value object. She looks at the tree and sees it as desirable. One might note that the order in which woman perceives different characteristics of the tree reverses that of 2:9. There, the narrator constructed looking as a precondition of eating. By contrast, for woman in 3:6, the food aspect of the tree is its first and most apparent feature that leads to the delights of seeing and knowing. The tree is not only ‘good for food’ (*tôḥ lʿma^akāl*), it is also ‘a desire to the eyes (*ta^avāh lāʿênayim*)’, and ‘desirable to make one wise (*nehmād lʿhaskīl*)’ (2:6). It is interesting that the language of desire is not applied to the alimentary properties of the tree: woman sees it as *tôḥ lʿma^akāl* and not *nehmād lʿma^akāl*. She feels no desire to eat, but will eat in order to see and to know.⁷¹ Looking/seeing and knowing/understanding are therefore emphasised as the ultimate motives for woman’s action. It is notable that the same structural pattern ‘eating → seeing → knowing’ could be found in the serpent’s vision of events (3:5) as well as in the description of the actual transformation in 3:6b-7:

Fig. 3

	<i>eating</i>	<i>seeing</i>	<i>knowing</i>
3: 5	when you <i>eat</i> of it	your <i>eyes</i> shall be opened	you will be like gods, <i>knowing</i> good and bad
3:6a	good for <i>food</i>	delight to the <i>eyes</i>	desirable to make one <i>wise</i>
3:6b-7	she <i>ate</i> ...and he <i>ate</i>	the <i>eyes</i> of both of them were opened	they <i>knew</i> that they were naked

⁷¹ Kimelman stresses this anticipated gain from eating, which makes the tree first appeal to the palate and then to the eye (‘The Seduction of Eve’, p.8).

Now that she has seen the tree for herself, whose point of view does woman come to share? Apparently, her vision of the tree disproves Yahweh's warning, for nothing in what she has seen points to death. Instead, she sees that the tree gives understanding. The verb *śakal*, 'to be wise, understand' echoes both the serpent's own wisdom (*ārōm*) and its allusion to God's knowledge of good and bad (*yādā*), all of which seems to indicate that the serpent was right. Yet the use of the *hiphil* form of *śakal* 'to make one wise' also points to woman's uncertainty and her own search for meaning. In 3:6 she faces the discord between the authoritative voice of Yahweh and the subversive voice of the serpent and tries to make sense of the fragmented, contradictory world in front of her. Doing so, she invests 'the tree', a semiotically unstable object, with a new function and thus completes its construction. Arguably, her desire for understanding turns the tree she is looking at into the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The act of seeing in 3:6 stands out as the only instance of direct sensory experience in the garden narrative. Here the narrator uses zero-focalisation, inviting the reader to look at the tree with woman. Unlike what she has heard – words with their double meaning – what she sees resists doubt and equivocality. Bal speaks of the strong connotation of truth that characterises the Hebrew verb 'to see': 'to see is to have insight into what really is, behind false appearances or incomplete information'.⁷² In woman's eyes, and, therefore, in truth, the value of the tree is unquestionable, for it offers sustenance, beauty, and understanding (the verb *śakal* could also connote success and prosperity). This positive evaluation both anticipates and justifies woman's next move.

Compared to the gradual build up of suspense around the taboo object, the culmination of the narrative is brief: 'she took of the fruit of the tree and ate, and gave also to her husband with her, and he ate' (3:6b). Walsh has demonstrated how the metre and the sonic composition of v. 6 emphasise the final word *wayyō'kal*, 'and he ate' and makes it the centre of the entire narrative structure.⁷³ Thus, despite woman's leading role, it is the male subject's breaking of the prohibition that is presented as the climax of all the semiotic transactions of Genesis 2-3. In the verbal sequence 'she ate... she gave... and he ate', woman's action of giving the fruit to man stands between the two symmetrical instances of eating and shows woman's primary role as a mediator. And this mediation is the last thing she does. Never again will the narrator focalise on her

⁷² Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 122.

⁷³ Jerome Walsh, 'Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach', *JBL* 96 (1977), p. 166.

experience or even allow her to act independently. Created to be a helper suitable to *hā'ādām*, she has now fulfilled her task.

It is notable that man reappears on stage as emphatically linked to woman ('*her* husband with *her*'). For Cassuto, this use of pronominal constructions stresses woman's leading role in the action.⁷⁴ Lerner draws attention to the similar wording in 3:16, where woman is punished by desire for 'her husband', and interprets this linguistic link as an indication of a bond between woman and man.⁷⁵ There is yet another way to look at the expression 'with her', since it might signify that man has been *with* woman all along, as *her* extension, and therefore must have heard her conversation with the serpent. The implications that man's likely awareness of the preceding dialogue might have for his motives are, however, hidden from view. The same narrative strategy that makes woman a conscious subject, responsible for breaking Yahweh's law, denies man the possibility of making a conscious choice and with it, to take responsibility for his actions, shifting the blame onto woman.

'They Knew That They Were Naked' (3:7)

Once woman and man had eaten of the tree, 'the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked' (3:7). In the context of the serpent's ambitious promise ('you shall become like God, knowing good and bad'), this newly acquired knowledge appears thoroughly inadequate. Scholars have often pointed out the contrast between the significant expectation attached to the forbidden tree and the questionable benefit that it brings to the humans. Cassuto describes the knowledge of nakedness as a bitter disappointment, a 'wretched and grieving realisation'.⁷⁶ Similarly, Lerner holds that the knowledge of nakedness 'can hardly be what woman had imagined as divine knowledge when she took that risk'.⁷⁷ Tribble interprets the knowledge of nakedness as the opposite to what the serpent promised to woman. In her opinion, what the humans acquire through their disobedience is, ironically, not the divine knowledge, but the knowledge of 'their helplessness, insecurity, and defencelessness'.⁷⁸ The

⁷⁴ Cassuto, *Genesis I*, pp. 147-48.

⁷⁵ Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, pp. 95, 112, 198 n. 52.

⁷⁶ Cassuto, *Genesis I*, p. 148.

⁷⁷ Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 105-6.

⁷⁸ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 114; see also Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), p. 84.

humans, led by a desire to become godlike, become instead deficient and vulnerable, feeling ashamed of each other (3:7; cf. 2:25) and afraid of Yahweh (3:10). The irony of this transformation reflects the general scepticism towards knowledge that characterises the leading plot. However, in this instance as elsewhere in the garden narrative, a different reading is possible.

One should remark, to begin with, that the consequences of transgression in Genesis 2-3 are not clearly defined. We have already observed how the narrative destabilises any attempt to identify the forbidden tree. The definition of its properties is similarly unstable. In fact, almost every character (except *hā'ādām*) has a different idea of what the tree does to the one who eats from it. According to Yahweh's authoritative voice, eating of the tree of knowledge brings death to *hā'ādām* (2:17), the idea with which woman initially agrees (3:3). The serpent contradicts both woman and Yahweh ('you will certainly not die'), and offers an alternative view ('you shall become like God', 3:5). This is followed by the narrator's description of the actual event (3:7) and Yahweh's assessment of what has happened (3:22). The last three statements in vv. 5, 7, and 22, display significant parallels:

Fig. 4

serpent (v. 5)	1a your eyes will be opened	1b and you will be like God	1c knowing good and bad
narrator (v. 7)	2a the eyes of both of them were opened	—	2c and they knew that they were naked
Yahweh (v. 22)	—	3b the man has become like one of us	3c knowing good and bad

The serpent's prediction in 1a is confirmed by the narrator's report in 2a, which states, 'the eyes of both of them were opened' (v. 7). The rest of the serpent's speech is strikingly similar to that of Yahweh in v. 22. Speaking respectively before and after the transgression, the serpent and Yahweh agree that it makes the humans become like God, 'knowing good and bad' (1b1c – 3b3c). Under the double weight of this assessment, the discovery of nakedness in 2c becomes less ironic. The implications of the parallels between vv. 5, 7, and 22 are twofold. They suggest, first, that through the discovery of

nakedness the human beings have come to know good and bad, and second, that by virtue of knowing good and bad they have indeed become like God. There is no clear confirmation of this in the text, and so 2b remains an ellipse that the reader can fill in on the basis of the existing parallels.

Two Kinds of Knowledge

With regard to the first suggestion, how could one explain the analogy drawn between the knowledge of nakedness and the knowledge of good and bad? The connection is not obvious, since the idea of physical exposure could not be easily translated into the terms of moral discernment indicated by the phrase 'good and bad'. I would argue that the two notions are united by their semiotic structure; namely, that as an object of knowing, the nakedness of man and woman is shaped by the same fundamental principle of binarity as the idea of good and bad.

On the one hand, the knowledge of good and bad could be understood as a capacity to make distinctions, to differentiate between the opposite phenomena that form empirical reality. According to van Wolde, the knowledge of good and bad 'denotes a discriminating power, a knowledge based on experience which comprises everything, both persons and objects, and this is represented by the two halves of the merism: good and bad'.⁷⁹ Here the formula 'good and bad' embraces not only the categories of moral choice, but primarily the whole world perceived as a unity of opposites, or, in the words of Dominic Crossan, as a 'disjunctive totality'.⁸⁰ Understood cosmologically, God's knowledge of good and bad resonates with the process of creation in Genesis 1. There God established the world order by progressively manifesting distinctions and setting boundaries between the opposites; for example, between heaven and earth, light and darkness, dry land and sea. In the context of Genesis 1, God's knowledge of good and bad reflects the discriminating power of God as creator.

On the other hand, the knowledge of being naked that man and woman obtain in 3:7 implies an experience of physical distinctions imposed by gender. The couple make for themselves *h^agōrōt*, coverings, which suggests that it is their sexual difference that

⁷⁹ van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, p. 195.

⁸⁰ John Dominic Crossan, 'Response to White: Felix Culpa and Foenix Culprit', *Semeia* 18 (1980), p. 110.

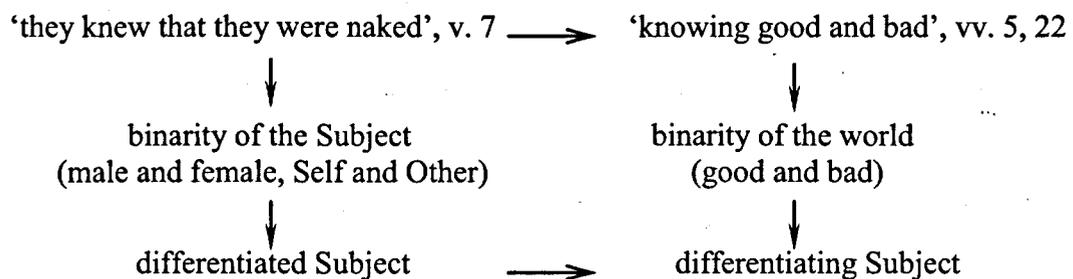
they have discovered and are trying to hide. In his structural interpretation, Edmund Leach identifies the forbidden knowledge with the knowledge of sexual differentiation.⁸¹ Like the knowledge of good and bad, the knowledge of gender has a strong binary connotation. It is strengthened by the dual form *šēnêhem*, 'both of them', used in conjunction with *'êrummîm/ 'rûmmîm*, 'naked', both at the beginning and at the end of the scene (2:25; 3:7). Here the notion of nakedness appears to be structurally related to the dual state of the Subject as man and woman. Notably, the closer the couple come to realising their nakedness, the stronger is the dual connotation in the way they are presented. In 2:25, the two of them are not yet aware of their gender. Here the term *šēnêhem* is used alongside the asymmetrical unity '*hā'ādām* and his wife', pointing to duality as a potential that is not yet fully realised. The asymmetry disappears at the moment of eating, when the two become *'iššāh* and *'išah*, woman and her man (3:6). Finally, when their eyes are open in 3:7, the couple are described simply as *šēnêhem*. It seems that the knowledge of gender takes away all the social and psychological preconceptions, making the 'two of them' a pair of equal yet distinct binary counterparts.

Here sight plays a central role as a mediator between knowing and not knowing. The entire transformation has to do with the opening of the eyes of the humans ('their eyes were opened and they knew'). In contrast to Eve's seeing in v. 6, in v. 7 sight becomes a faculty of a binary subject, which makes it reciprocal. In 3:7 the couple do not become any more naked than they were in 2:25, but once their eyes have been opened, each of them can see the nakedness of the other and therefore, in turn, becomes seen. Man and woman are now *exposed* to each other's gaze, and both of them, to that of Yahweh. The emergence of the Other as the subject of seeing leads to the fundamental exposure and vulnerability of the Self, manifested in the feelings of shame and fear (3:7b, 10). The negative mood associated with exposure contrasts the feelings of joy and satisfaction that *hā'ādām* experienced when he first saw woman. His speech in 2:23-24 was a celebration of totality, where man is the only subject of looking, and therefore is figuratively 'unexposed'. From this point of view, the sense of insecurity that comes with the transgression reflects the existential anxiety of the Subject who loses totality and, with it, the monopoly on vision.

⁸¹ See Edmund Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 14. Many interpreters have seen the discovery of nakedness as an allusion to sex and procreation. For an overview of the main trends in the interpretation of 'the knowledge of good and bad', see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 242-45. Westermann considers it untenable to restrict the knowledge acquired by the humans to sexual knowledge.

The narrative therefore operates with two kinds of knowledge that demonstrate binarity on different levels. While the discriminatory knowledge of good and bad concerns the relation of the Subject to the knowable world, the knowledge of gender is directed back towards the Subject and represents his/her self-awareness as a unity of oppositions. Both the serpent and Yahweh interpret this self-knowledge as the knowledge of good and bad (vv. 5, 22), which links the notions of being differentiated and being able to differentiate.

Fig. 5



By knowing their distinct sexual identities, man and woman become able to experience distinctions in creation, thereby acquiring an understanding of the world order – the knowledge of good and bad. As a metaphor, nakedness communicates binarity as the fundamental principle of the knowing Subject. To know the world as differentiated, the Subject needs to realise his/her own differentiation, experiencing an inner tension between wholeness and fragmentation, between sameness and difference, between the Self and the Other. The epistemological process starts when man and woman direct their gaze at each other and see the pattern of creation reveal itself in their gender.

On this point, I disagree with Jobling, who interprets the newly acquired knowledge as the ‘knowledge of the conditions of existence “outside”’, of which sexual differentiation is only one aspect.⁸² Jobling’s otherwise attractive structuralist model asserts the priority of the knowable world over the knowing Subject. For him, the world ‘outside’ the garden, characterised by differentiation, coexists with the world ‘inside’, characterised by unity. By learning to differentiate between good and bad, the Subject

⁸² Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 31-32.

becomes associated with the world 'outside' and assumes its binary characteristics. However, the garden narrative presents little evidence to support such a reading. Unlike Genesis 1, where the world, structured by oppositions, preceded the creation of binary humanity and therefore was posited as primary, Genesis 2-3 focuses primarily on the construction of the knowing and experiencing Subject. Here the outside world – *hā'ādāmāh*, which *hā'ādām* is to serve – of itself is not binary. In fact, one cannot presume the existence of 'outside' at all until the moment when Yahweh sets the boundaries of the garden; that is, until the expulsion of *hā'ādām* (3:23-24). Here the world 'outside' emerges as a domain of the differentiated Subject and therefore itself is perceived as differentiated. Jobling's argument could therefore be reversed: instead of being an aspect of the outside world that the Subject acquires together with knowledge, sexual differentiation is a fundamental feature of binary subjectivity that allows it to discriminate between good and bad, and, by doing so, to shape the world of human experience.

Knowledge and the Image of God

Despite their opposite views on the tree as the source of death, the serpent and Yahweh agree that eating of the forbidden tree makes the humans like **lōhīm*, knowing good and bad (3:5, 22). The narrator puts a double emphasis on the idea that the power of discrimination is a divine quality and that by sharing it the woman and man become godlike. The notion of becoming like God forms a distinguishable semantic parallel with 1:26-27, where *hā'ādām* is created in the image of **lōhīm*. Intertextually, this parallelism with Genesis 2-3 allows us to interpret God's image in Genesis 1 in terms of discriminatory power. The entire garden narrative may thus be seen as an elaborate account of how God created the humans in his own image and likeness. Bal asserts a similar link with the creation of humankind in Genesis 1, saying that Genesis 2-3 is 'a specified narration of what events are included in the idea that "God created them male and female"'.⁸³ Seeing the second creation account as an elaboration of the first, the entire model of the 'fall' becomes untenable. Instead of being a curse, a sign of disobedience, knowledge emerges as an aspect of Yahweh's own nature that he shares with the human couple, thereby creating them 'in his image and likeness'.

⁸³ Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 119.

The idea of *rapprochement* between divine and human subjectivity in the two creation accounts has a particular semiotic ground. Notably, both Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 link the concept of image/likeness of God to the ideas of gender and differentiation. In the garden narrative, man and woman become godlike through their knowledge of gender, through seeing themselves as naked, 'male and female'. Similarly, 1:27 places the image of God alongside the notion of gender: 'God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created it; male and female he created them'. Critics have often pointed to semantic and structural correspondences between these three clauses. Karl Barth was the first to interpret the *imago Dei* in terms of relationality that is introduced by the phrase 'male and female'.⁸⁴ Developing Barth's idea, Tribble sees this phrase as a metaphor, pointing to God's image in humanity, a vehicle for communicating a different level of meaning. In her opinion, 'to describe male and female... is to perceive the image of God'.⁸⁵ Tribble, van Wolde, and more recently Paul Niskanen substantiate this argument pointing to the parallel composition of 1:27. They argue that the phrases 'in his image', 'in the image of God', and 'male and female' function as three parts of a narrative structure, where each successive part runs parallel to the previous one, clarifying and developing its meaning. The composition of the verse, therefore, presents 'male and female' as an explanation of 'the image of God'.⁸⁶

The meaning of the *imago Dei* in 1:27 with respect to the sexual differentiation of 'ādām has been the subject of a vast and complex discussion. Critics have strongly opposed the idea that God's image in 1:27 could be related to the creation of humankind as 'male and female' on historical-literary grounds. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins refutes the possibility of the Priestly writer ascribing to God 'any quality corresponding to sexuality or sexual differentiation'.⁸⁷ Phyllis Bird formulated what has become known as the 'historical-critical consensus', seeing the *imago Dei* in the context of dominion (1:26-27b), separate from the ideas of sexual distinction and reproduction (1:27c-28).⁸⁸ This consensus, however, cannot account for the striking parallelism that

⁸⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. Harold Knight *et al.*; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1960), pp. 183-84.

⁸⁵ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 20.

⁸⁶ See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 17; van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, pp. 198-99; Paul Niskanen, 'The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of אדם in the Image of אלהים', *JBL* 128 (2009), p. 428.

⁸⁷ Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Historical-Critical and Feminist Readings of Genesis 1:26-28', in Roger Brooks and John J. Collins (eds.), *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament? Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity* (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity, 5; Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 197-99; see also James Barr, 'The Image of God in the Book of Genesis: A Study in Terminology', *BJRL* 51 (1968), pp. 11-26; 'Man and Nature: The Ecological Controversy and the Old Testament', *BJRL* 55 (1972), pp. 9-32.

⁸⁸ Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them'", pp. 129-59.

holds 1:27b and 1:27c together. Human dominion over the earth and its creatures seems to be a function that is associated with the image of God and derives from it, while sexual binarity appears to point to the inner differentiation of God himself.

The grammar of 1:26-27 seems to substantiate this view. Here both the creator and his creature are characterised by flexibility of number. The unmarked plural and the singular are both used here, first, in relation to **lōhîm*, and then, in relation to *'ādām*. Niskanen remarks on that: 'אלהים speaks as many and acts as one in creating אדם, who is simultaneously one and many'.⁸⁹ By comparison, Genesis 2-3 also displays flexible number. To begin with, *hā'ādām* exists here as a singular subject (cf. *ʾbaddô*, 2:18), and so does Yahweh. Duality (*šēnêhem* 'both of them') first appears in 2:25, after the creation of woman. Later, in 3:1-7, knowledge is each time attributed to human subjectivity in the unmarked plural form. Strikingly, the unmarked plural is also applied to God as the subject of knowledge: 'you shall be like **lōhîm*, knowing (*yōd'ê*, pl.) good and bad' (3:5); 'the man has become like one of us (*mimmennû*, pl.), knowing good and bad' (3:22). The grammatically plural term **lōhîm*, which usually has singular meaning, takes a plural verb (v. 5) and a plural pronoun (v. 22) in both instances related to knowledge. Like 1:26-27, the garden narrative constructs both God and *hā'ādām* as 'one and many'; however, here the plurality and inner differentiation of the Subject is correlated with his/her power to discriminate.

Constructing God in Human Likeness

The concept of the divine-human likeness that appears in the two creation accounts has repercussions not only for the human but also, potentially, for the divine subjectivity. If God assumes a grammatically plural form only when he shares his knowledge with the humans, making them godlike (Genesis 3), does this indicate that divine subjectivity, too, is transformed in the process? Could the arrival of a binary Subject capable of differentiation make Yahweh see himself and act as many? After all, Yahweh was not plural before the transgression, neither was he described as 'knowing good and bad'. Although he plants the tree of knowledge in 2:9, it functions there not as *his* attribute, but as a possibility intended for the *humans*. God's knowledge seems to be actualised only when it comes to be shared with the humans.

⁸⁹ Niskanen, 'The Poetics of Adam', p. 426.

The narrative presents God as the subject of knowledge on two different occasions, both times in relation to human knowing. First, in 3:5 the serpent describes **lōhîm* as knowing good and evil. The verse is composed symmetrically as a chiasmus that places two kinds of God’s knowledge at the beginning and the end of the transformation:

<i>yōdēa’</i> (sing.) <i>*lōhîm kî</i> <i>^akāl^ekem... w^enipq^ehû ‘ênêkem</i>	<i>yōd^e ‘ê</i> (pl.) <i>tôb wārā’</i> <i>kē’lōhîm</i> <i>wih^eyîtem</i>
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At the centre of the chiasmus is the moment when the human couple eat of the tree and have their eyes opened. This transformation bridges the opposition between the omniscience of a singular transcendent creator (*yōdēa’ *lōhîm*) and the discriminatory knowledge of the plural God (**lōhîm yōd^e ‘ê tôb wārā’*). Semiotically, the structure implies that the human transformation brings changes both to the subject of divine knowledge (**lōhîm*) and to its object. On the day the eyes of the humans are open, God is transformed from the ‘God who *knows*’ into the ‘gods who *know good and bad*’.

Second, Yahweh confirms the truth of the serpent’s statement in 3:22: ‘*hā’ādām* has become like one of us (pl.) knowing good and bad’. Speaking to himself as *yhwh *lōhîm*, God admits both his differentiation (plurality) and his knowledge of good and bad. This confession presents a very different image of Yahweh: in contrast to the authoritative lawgiver of Genesis 2, the new, plural *yhwh *lōhîm* is vulnerable and feels the need to protect himself from human freedom. The story brings a loss of totality to God as well as to humans. Bal describes this as a semiotic process of creating God in human likeness. In her view, woman realises the transformation of the transcendent God of Genesis 1 into an antropomorphic character who strolls in the shade of the garden, shows anger and fear, and engages in dialogues and confrontations with the humans.⁹⁰ From this angle, the transfer of meaning between the divine and human realms becomes mutual. As Fewell and Gunn point out, by gaining God’s knowledge, the humans lead God out of paradise.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 125.

⁹¹ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 37

Nakedness and Wisdom

Like all the significant concepts and structures in the garden narrative, the human knowledge of nakedness is dichotomous on many levels. It presupposes the sexual binarity (male-female) and duality of the Subject (Self-Other), and signifies an awareness of the fundamental binarity of the world, shaped by oppositions (good-bad). Finally, it brings together the characteristics of the two non-human characters in the story, God and the serpent.

While the narrative identifies the human knowledge of nakedness with God's knowledge (3:5, 22), it also links it linguistically to the wisdom of the serpent. This occurs through the wordplay 'ārôm/'ārûm. The two instances of 'ārôm, 'naked', form an *inclusio* for the entire scene of transgression: at the beginning 'the man and his wife were both naked ('rûmmîm)' (2:25); at the end '[both of them] knew that they were naked ('êrummîm)' (3:7). Within this *inclusio*, the protagonists become conscious of their nakedness helped by the serpent who is 'ārûm, 'wise'. As Landy points out, the serpent mediates between the concepts of nakedness and shrewdness: the humans, who at the beginning are naked, become shrewd because of the serpent's interference. The reverse is also true: the animals, represented by the serpent, start as being shrewd and end up being symbolically naked, stripped of their skins to clothe the humans (3:21).⁹²

The serpent's wisdom is an iconic quality that makes it imminently suitable to transfer and distribute God's knowledge. Its wisdom is never directly identified with the knowledge of good and bad – that is, after all, God's prerogative – but seems to be an insight into the nature and the purpose of things, an understanding of the way life works. It serves to reveal what is hidden, manifesting the secret thoughts of Yahweh ('for God *knows* that...'). The three kinds of knowledge are interposed: by *knowing* that they are naked woman and man become not only like God, who *knows* good and bad (*wayyēd'û*, v. 7; cf. *yōd'ê*, v. 5), but also like the serpent, who *knows* what God knows ('êrummîm, v. 7; cf. 'ārûm, v. 1). The dichotomy of sharing the likeness of both Yahweh and the serpent fits in with the idea of Yahweh's double subjectivity: if the serpent is a manifestation of the repressed side of God, then becoming like God also means becoming like the serpent.

⁹² Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, pp. 228-45. For an analysis of the multiple meanings created by the wordplay 'ārôm/'ārûm see Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, pp. 90-91; van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, pp. 165-66.

There is yet another aspect to the knowledge of nakedness, which is its iconic correspondence to the overall symbolism of the story. In Genesis 2-3 human beings *uncover* the hidden reality of knowledge. Their own nakedness or being *uncovered* runs semantically parallel to this process, which exposes the meaning behind Yahweh's authoritative voice. Symbolically, their exposure is also that of Yahweh. The serpent, being 'ārûm, leads the human couple to uncover, make 'ārôm, the world of possibilities secretly intended for them by Yahweh.

Yet the newly discovered knowledge has a sense of illicitness about it. The prohibition still holds, and thus the exposure – symbolic as well as physical – is a violation that upsets the existing order and therefore needs to be rectified or compensated for. And so the couple perform a gesture that is semantically opposite to exposure: they cover themselves with ḥ^agōrōt, coverings, made from the leaves of a fig tree. In the context of 2:25, this means that they are ashamed, bōš. Having discovered their distinctions, woman and man instantly feel the need to hide them from each other. Yet the fig leaves do not take away their nakedness, for in the following verse they still need to hide from Yahweh 'among the trees of the garden' (3:8), and in 3:10 man admits that he is naked, 'ērôm. The problem of nakedness seems to be resolved only at the closure of the narrative in 3:21, when Yahweh clothes the humans in garments of skin. However, even here the way of concealing nakedness – the skins – remains deeply ambiguous. The Hebrew term 'ôr, 'skin', is semantically related to 'ērôm, 'naked',⁹³ and its use brings in the connotations of the wordplay 'ārôm/'ārûm. The skins must have been taken from the animals and so, metaphorically, from the wisest of them – the serpent ('ôr - 'ārûm). At the end of the story, Yahweh 'clothes' the humans in their knowledge, which carries the signs both of their nakedness and of the serpent's wisdom. The garments of skin simultaneously cover the external signs of their gender and reveal their fundamental binarity. Having become like God and like the serpent, man and woman will leave the garden being simultaneously covered and naked, united and differentiated, one and two.

⁹³ Both words come from the root 'wr, which denotes being laid bare or stripped of outer layers (see BDB, pp. 735-36; DCH VI, pp. 316-17).

The Subject on Trial (3:8-13)

On the surface, Yahweh's interrogation of the couple in 3:9-13 has all the appearance of a court hearing, in which Yahweh takes on the role of prosecutor.⁹⁴ His questions seem to aim at a 'reconstruction' of the crime, from looking at its evidence (the fact that the couple have hidden themselves as well as *hā'ādām*'s awareness of being naked, vv. 9, 11a), to establishing the actual transgression (man and woman's eating of the forbidden tree, vv. 11b, 13a) and naming the accomplices (woman and the serpent, vv. 12, 13b). And yet despite this clear legalistic framework, Yahweh's questions seem rhetorical, as if Yahweh already knew what the answers were and was merely asking the couple to acknowledge their transformation and make sense of it. The reader has come across a similar instance earlier. In 2:22 Yahweh brought woman to *hā'ādām* not to see *what* the latter would call her, but to prompt man to formulate his view of the Other. Similarly, interrogating the couple in 3:9-13, Yahweh gives the humans an opportunity to re-establish their relationship with him and with each other. From this perspective, it is interesting to examine the different tactics Yahweh shows in addressing man and woman.

Significantly, from the beginning Yahweh is looking only for man and not for woman (v. 9). The question *'ayyekkāh*, 'Where are you?', is addressed to *hā'ādām* (with the masculine singular ending), creating an ambiguity with respect to woman's presence. Is God looking for man because he is concerned only about him and not woman, or, alternatively, because woman has not been hiding from him? Both possibilities hold. Although the previous verse suggests that man and his wife have hidden together, their action is described with the masculine singular verb *wayyithabbē*, 'and he hid' (v. 8). Grammatically, the verb agrees with the proximate subject (*wayyithabbē' hā'ādām w^e'ištō*), a feature commonly attested in the Hebrew Bible.⁹⁵ However, this irregularity has also an iconic function, marginalising woman, who has until now played the main role in the episode.⁹⁶ She has been excluded from the conversation that follows between Yahweh and *hā'ādām* (vv. 9-12), but reappears in v. 13 to reply to Yahweh's question as if she has always been there (similar to man's complementary position in 3:6). This invisible presence is one of the signs of woman's

⁹⁴ See Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, p. 25.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Gn 9:23; 11:29; 24:61; 31:14; 33:7; Nm 12:1; 2 Sam 12:2; Am 8:13.

⁹⁶ See Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 106.

compromised subjectivity in the aftermath of the transgression. When her function has been fulfilled, she recedes into the shadows, becoming simultaneously present and absent, included and excluded, man's counterpart as well as a mere *part* of man.

Woman's invisibility also signals a return to the framework of the leading plot, centred on the relationship between Yahweh and *hā'ādām*. In Genesis 2 that relationship was characterised by God's absolute authority and *hā'ādām*'s automatic obedience. Man there was a non-autonomous, passive recipient of whatever God had done, said to, or given him. In this context, the fact that Yahweh in 3:9 does not know where *hā'ādām* is indicates a sudden change in their relationship. For the first time Yahweh addresses *hā'ādām* as an autonomous subject, capable of response. According to Joel Burnett, the rhetorical function of the phrase 'where are you?' is to emphasise the absence of the object or person in question.⁹⁷ What matters for the speaker is not 'where' the required object is, but the fact that it is not 'here' (in 1 Sam 26:16 David asks that question knowing exactly where to find the required objects since he himself has removed them). Pointing to *hā'ādām*'s absence in relation to Yahweh, the spatial term *'ayyēh* becomes a relational metaphor that connotes separation.

Prompted by Yahweh, *hā'ādām* gives the reason for his breaking away ('I heard your voice in the garden and was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself', v. 10). The words *wā'irā' kī- 'ērōm 'ānōkī* run as a close syntactic parallel to the report of the couple's transformation in v. 7: *wayyēd'ū kī 'ērūmmim hem*, 'they knew that they were naked'. The parallel draws attention to a shift from the binary subject (*hem* [*š'nehem*], v. 7) to the individual male point of view (*'ānōkī*, v. 10) that entails a change in the connotation of nakedness. In v. 7 *'ērūmmim* signified sexual distinctions of man and woman and their exposure to each other. In v. 10, *'ērōm* loses its gender connotation and indicates an exposure of the singular, implicitly male subject to the authority of Yahweh. These parallels signify the emergence of boundaries at two different levels: between male and female, and between human and divine subjectivity. In both cases, the Subject is compelled to hide his/her nakedness from the Other: with the fig leaves (v. 7) or among the trees of the garden (v. 8). However, in the presence of Yahweh nakedness becomes a source of guilt and a sign of vulnerability.⁹⁸ Facing each other, woman and man simply *knew* their nakedness; facing Yahweh, *hā'ādām* is *afraid* of it.

⁹⁷ See Joel S. Burnett, 'The Question of Divine Absence in Israelite and West Semitic Religion', *CBQ* 67 (2005), p. 215.

⁹⁸ Tribble maintains that the cause of man's fear is knowledge of nakedness and not the presence of God (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 118). However, since man becomes afraid of being naked only in the presence of Yahweh, the link between the two is not entirely absent.

Yahweh's next question is directed at the source of man's knowledge: 'Who told you that you were naked?' (3:11a). Notably, the phrase *kî 'êrôm 'attāh* follows the syntactic structure used in the previous statements of nakedness (*kî 'êrummim hem*, 3:7; *kî-'êrôm 'ānōkî*, 3:10). It seems significant that the personal pronouns *hem*, *'ānōkî*, and *'attāh* first appear in the narrative in conjunction with *'êrôm/'êrummim*. This might support the idea, expressed previously, that in Genesis 2-3 the awareness of nakedness is fundamental to the construction of personal boundaries. By asking, 'Who told you...?', Yahweh implies that man should not have been able to see his nakedness for himself. In order to know oneself as naked, or distinct, man needs the point of reference – the reality he is distinct from – to be placed outside him. In this sense, Yahweh posits the looking Other as the source of man's knowledge. At one level, *mî* seems to point to woman, who has given the fruit to her husband, and who is the only character in the story who knows that man is naked (3:7).⁹⁹ At another level, the Other from whom *hā'ādām* has tried to hide his nakedness, whose presence has induced man's fear, and who is looking at man *now*, is Yahweh himself. If the knowledge of nakedness comes from the Other, then by asking, 'Who told you?' Yahweh is ultimately pointing at his own role in communicating knowledge to man. Perhaps, this is why he does not wait for a reply and moves on to the next question.

In 3:11b Yahweh finally voices his main concern: 'Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' He alludes to his prohibition of 2:16-17, speaking as a prosecutor who names the crime and seeks to locate responsibility. Yet this ominous reference to his law does not quite ring true. First, it casts doubt on the accuracy of Yahweh's death warning in 2:17. In fact, Yahweh himself must not have meant it literally, otherwise he would have known, from seeing man alive, that the prohibition had not been broken. Instead, Yahweh admits not only that man can disobey him but also that man can do so and stay alive. Second, the fact that Yahweh relates man's new autonomy to his eating of the forbidden tree means that Yahweh has known all along about the consequences of disobedience, but withheld them from *hā'ādām*. With 3:11b, the integrity of Yahweh the lawgiver breaks down, exposing the double meaning at the heart of his law.

Once again, Yahweh's question is rhetorical. Through it, Yahweh makes *hā'ādām* admit his disobedience and hence, his autonomy. This is reflected in the syntactic structure of the question, where the emphasis on the tree, mentioned at the

⁹⁹ One should bear in mind that woman fulfils the role of the Other only as part of the dual subject, which includes man, and not independently.

beginning of the sentence, gives way to the tension between 'not to eat' and 'eat', and ultimately, between 'I' and 'you'. Here I agree with Tribble, for whom the significance of the tree in v. 11 pertains to disobedience rather than to the specific content of man's knowledge.¹⁰⁰

The re-shaping of Yahweh's relationship with man culminates in the next verse, where *hā'ādām* confirms that he has broken God's command. Yet in doing so he does not accept sole responsibility and blames woman and Yahweh as the ultimate cause of his disobedience: 'Woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate' (3:12). Man's fear of being naked or 'exposed' makes him try and 'cover' his own action, presenting it as an unavoidable result of the others' interference. This reveals significant changes in *hā'ādām*'s subjectivity. He is no longer the exuberant and expansive Self that in 2:23-24 saw woman as his own extension. Now, after the transgression, *hā'ādām* sees her as a heterogeneous reality imposed on him by Yahweh, and himself, as a victim of her (and Yahweh's) actions.

It is ironic that man's weak attempt to shift the blame onto others is also an accurate account of what has happened. Indeed, it was woman who led man to eat of the tree, and it was Yahweh who had installed her as man's helper. In man's view, woman and Yahweh perform the same action towards him (*nāṭattāh 'immādi; nāṭ nāh-lī*, 'gave me'), and his only move is to eat, that is, to accept that which he is given. With the shame and the fear of being naked comes the sense of the Other's imposing presence, of which the Subject perceives himself a victim. What he rightly confesses is that his action was determined entirely by forces outside his control. Unwittingly, man recapitulates the entire mechanism of the shadow plot, from the institution of gender to the acquisition of knowledge, and by doing so, confirms that Yahweh's plan has succeeded.

The short interrogation of woman in 3:13 is strikingly different from the questioning of *hā'ādām*, for Yahweh is neither looking for her, nor inquiring about her nakedness. Asking, *mah-zō'ī 'āsīt*, 'What is this that you have done?', he treats woman as if she were still partly invisible, equating her subjectivity with her role in the transformation of man. Once again, Yahweh's question appears rhetorical, for he already knows from man *what* she has done. However, since man has withheld the fact that woman too ate of the forbidden fruit before giving it to him, Yahweh's question is

¹⁰⁰ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, pp. 118-19.

not entirely pointless. Inasmuch as it is seeking to verify man's accusation, it also gives woman a chance to fill in the blanks with her own account.

It is more difficult to access woman's point of view precisely because of her 'invisibility' during the previous discussion. Was she there when *hā'ādām* spoke to Yahweh about her? If so, is she feeling resentful of her partner's betrayal? Similarly, does she now realise that she has been used, objectified by Yahweh, who gave her to man in the same way as one might pass on an object, a fruit of a tree? These questions remain open, adding to the ambiguity of woman's position. Saying to Yahweh, 'The serpent deceived me and I ate', she does not show any knowledge of the previous dialogue, and does not mention that she gave of the fruit to man – the action of which man has just accused her. In fact, her version of the event does not include man at all. For Tribble, by ignoring man, woman indicates her separation from him, their unity of one flesh having been split apart by the disobedience.¹⁰¹ Another way of looking at it is to suppose that woman's sharing of the fruit with man was an involuntary response, inherent in her role of 'helper', a part which Yahweh intended her to play from the start. The fact that she misses out her act of mediating when speaking to the deity means that she does not consider it to be the subject of *mah-zō't* 'āsīt and an offence against Yahweh.

The only action that woman admits to is eating. In doing so, she follows the pattern of man's confession, blaming another for what she has done: 'The serpent deceived me and I ate'. However, in her case, the accusation does not quite ring true. The reader knows that though woman was provoked by the serpent's subversive remarks, she did not eat until she had examined the tree for herself. Ultimately, it was her own experience and desire of understanding that made her break the divine command. Moreover, the serpent's role could hardly be described as deception. Woman can see that two of the serpent's predictions – 'you shall certainly not die' (3:4) and 'your eyes will be opened' (3:5; cf. 3:7) – were accurate. The fact that she and man are still alive suggests that the deceiver was not the serpent, but Yahweh with his death warning. What, in that case, makes woman say that the serpent has deceived her?

The semantic range of the Hebrew verb *nāsā'*, 'to beguile, seduce, mislead, deceive', allows a nuanced interpretation of woman's point of view. On the one hand, she indicates that the serpent lured her into disobedience. Unlike man, who receives the forbidden knowledge simply because it comes from woman, woman needs to be

¹⁰¹ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 120.

persuaded. The mechanism of her disobedience is rational and involves a change in her understanding of God. For what the serpent reveals to her is a God who knows good and bad and who therefore accommodates contradictory perspectives. This God has lost his totality, splitting into two halves – the one that creates and issues orders, and the one that possesses hidden knowledge. It is the desire to be like this other God who knows – the desire of understanding – that draws woman to the tree. From this angle, the serpent beguiles woman by showing her the seductiveness of knowledge.

On the other hand, the verb *nāsā*’ connotes a false deal, a deception. Saying that the serpent has deceived her, woman might imply not only that she has been seduced but also simply that the serpent has lied to her and that she did not become ‘like gods who know good and bad’. If this is the case, her statement might be read as an assessment of her position with respect to knowledge. This poses the question whether woman, seen as separate from man, really becomes the subject of divine knowledge of good and bad.

As we have seen, the narrator uses the couple’s awareness of being naked as an iconic sign of their knowledge of good and bad. This iconic knowledge is first associated with man and woman together (‘they knew that they were naked’, 3:7), then only with *hā’ādām*, both in his own and in Yahweh’s speech (‘I was afraid because I was naked’, 3:10; ‘who told you that you were naked?’ 3:11). Finally, at the end of the narrative, Yahweh admits that *hā’ādām* has acquired the divine knowledge of good and bad (‘*hā’ādām* has become like one of us, knowing good and bad’, 3:22). Strikingly, at no point does the narrator refer to woman’s own, individual knowledge or awareness. In 3:7 the unmarked plural of *wayyēd’û*, ‘they knew’, conceals her subjectivity. Unlike man, woman does not declare her nakedness to Yahweh. It is ironic that woman, who brings knowledge to *hā’ādām* and who herself explicitly desires understanding (cf. 3:6), does not seem to benefit from the consequences of her actions and does not come to possess knowledge of her own accord.

Outside the garden narrative, the Hebrew Bible displays a similar trend of dissociating woman from knowledge. Linguistically, the verb *yd’* is usually attributed to a male subject. Man has the ability to know in all its different forms, whether it is cognitive, spiritual, sexual knowledge, or practical skills. The omniscient God, being grammatically male, epitomises the power of knowledge: he knows good and bad (3:5), he knows the heart and the thoughts of human beings (1Kg 8:39; Ho 5:3; Ps 139:4; Jb 11:11); he knows the ways of the righteous (18:19; Dt 34:10; Jer 1:5; Ps 1:6; 37:18). In

parallel to God who knows good and bad, man's ability to know is regarded as a virtue, a quality of an active and mature subject. On the other hand, the absence of knowledge in man is a negative characteristic, usually indicating deficient motivation and lack of responsibility. Thus, Cain renounces responsibility for his brother ('I do not know,' 4:9); Jacob admits his ignorance ('God was in this place I did not know', 28:16), while Lot and Judah are oblivious of the identity of their sexual partners ('for he did not know', 19:33, 35; 38:16).

Unlike man, woman in the Hebrew Bible is very rarely ascribed the faculty of knowledge. On the few occasions when the verb *yd'* is applied to a feminine subject, it typically denotes sexual knowledge or intercourse, and is presented as a vice or a deficiency. In 19:8 Lot's testimony that his daughters have *not* known a man implies their higher value. In Nm 31:17-18, 35, Moses commands the Israelites to kill every Midianite woman who 'has known man', and to spare the 32,000 women who 'have not known man'. The massacre of the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead in Jg 21:11-12 follows the same pattern. Similarly, the fact that Jephthah's daughter in Jg 11:39 'knew no man' is a merit which makes her death more lamentable for the narrator. In what concerns woman's carnal knowledge of man, *not* to know is an unquestionable virtue.

The disjunction between feminine subjectivity and the verb *yd'* in the biblical text is not limited to the sphere of sexual experience. Whenever *yd'* is used in the sense of awareness and discrimination, it is predicated to a woman by a negative grammatical construction. Thus, the foolish woman in the Proverbs 'does not know anything' (Pr 9:13), and Hosea's unfaithful wife does not know who provides her with food and wine (Hos 2:10). Even the prudent wife of the Proverbs, the most likely female figure to be credited with knowledge, is never characterised by *yd'*. With woman's sexual knowledge regarded as an anti-value, and her cognitive capacity mentioned only to be denied to her, the Hebrew Bible systematically dissociates woman from the ability to discriminate and experience.

In the context of the garden narrative, this tendency of 'gendering' the ability to know has important implications. Woman, after all, appears to be right when she says that the serpent has deceived her. By giving knowledge and experience to humanity, she has succeeded in doing what Yahweh expected of her, yet her own subjectivity remains invisible. By herself, she does not become like God who knows. Without knowledge and boundaries of her own, she cannot assert her nakedness in front of Yahweh. That would mean coming out of the shadows, being seen, becoming the Subject. Structurally,

she is confined to the figure of the Other, the one in relation to whom the Subject draws his boundaries and whose role is to *give*, be it knowledge, identity, or a fruit of a tree.

The Final Balance: Judgment and Expulsion (3:14-24)

Following his interrogation, Yahweh pronounces a judgment on the serpent, woman, and man (3:14-19). This judgment, together with the expulsion of *hā'ādām* (3:22-24), gives resolution to the narrative. The scene follows the legalistic logic of crime and punishment. First, Yahweh explicitly states the crime: 'because... you have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, "You shall not eat from it"' (3:17; cf. 'because you have done this', v. 14). Next, he announces the destinies of the serpent, woman, and man, which are all marked by adversity, pain, and domination and therefore appear as punishments. Speaking as a judge, Yahweh sentences, one after another, all the participants of the shadow plot for the roles they played in the breaking of his commandment.¹⁰²

At the same time, Yahweh's position as a judge is compromised by his own involvement in the human 'fall'. It would be narratologically inconsistent to think that he punishes the protagonists for playing the parts he has assigned to them in his drama. Alternatively, could his sentences be another instance of double communication and therefore only appear to be punitive? Is Yahweh radically changing the status of his creatures, or is he only stating the fact, presenting the new order as a logical outcome of knowing good and bad? In Tribble's opinion, Yahweh does not prescribe punishment, but describes the consequences the serpent and the human couple have already brought upon themselves.¹⁰³ Similarly, Bal interprets Yahweh's punishment as an 'explicit spelling out of the consequences of the human option, as another representation of the reality of human life'.¹⁰⁴ One might argue that Yahweh's judgment simultaneously acknowledges the new order of life brought about by the transgression (shadow plot), and condemns human disobedience to his command (leading plot). Yahweh, a master of

¹⁰² Here I disagree with Westermann, who maintains that the punishments of Gn 3:14-19, being a later addition to the narrative, 'have no direct relationship with the offence'. Westermann holds that in the original plan of the narrative the only punishment for human disobedience was their expulsion from the garden (see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 256-57).

¹⁰³ Tribble presents these consequences as chaos and living death, 'the disintegration that results when limits are exceeded', a view that appears simplistic given the inherent ambiguity of the text (Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 123; see also Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 95-122).

¹⁰⁴ Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 125.

ambiguity, who in Genesis 2 sets in motion the two opposing plots, at the end of Genesis 3 establishes their final balance, turning, as Fewell and Gunn observe, 'natural consequences into divinely controlled repercussions'.¹⁰⁵ The construction of gender is thus achieved. In 3:14-19 woman and man stop being characters and become archetypal roles, bearers of features, the validity of which, it is implied, transcends the world of the narrative.

The Serpent's Curse (vv. 14-15)

Of all the characters of Genesis 2-3 taking part in the offence, Yahweh first addresses the serpent. Notably, Yahweh judges it following woman's testimony, without questioning the serpent itself. Bal holds that by not asking the serpent what it has done, Yahweh limits its position as a character, treating it as a speechless animal.¹⁰⁶ Another way to understand this omission would be to link it to the absence of the crime as such: unlike woman and man, the serpent did not *eat* of the tree (cf. 3:6, 12, 13), and therefore has, strictly speaking, nothing to confess. Yet an ellipse like this could also indicate Yahweh's own problematic stance vis-à-vis the serpent. If the serpent fulfilled Yahweh's secret plan by inciting the desire of knowledge in woman, it is hardly surprising that Yahweh should avoid bringing it to the surface. According to Fewell and Gunn, God does not interrogate the serpent because he does not want the cycle of blame to come to rest on himself with the counter question, 'Why did you put that tree in the garden?'¹⁰⁷ By treating the serpent as speechless, Yahweh silences his own shadow voice. His explicit, authoritative perspective – prohibiting knowledge – on the surface remains unchallenged.

In the absence of proper confession, Yahweh himself formulates the serpent's charge in v. 14 in a way that is remarkably elusive: *kî 'āsītā zō'ṭ*, 'because you have done this'. *zō'ṭ* here might correspond to woman's accusation in v. 13 ('the serpent deceived me and I ate'), but it could also be used intentionally, as a reference to something that only Yahweh and the serpent know and do not name - a sign of

¹⁰⁵ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁶ Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 126. Along similar lines, Cassuto interprets this omission as a statement of the inferiority of the serpent vis-à-vis Yahweh, consistent with the general attitude of the Torah rejecting the mythological image of the serpent or primordial monster rising against the creator (see Cassuto, *Genesis I*, pp. 158-59).

¹⁰⁷ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, pp. 33-34.

intimacy, of a secret pact between Yahweh's Self and his Shadow. The outer layer of meaning in this double communication is negative: in punishment for its non-stated guilt, the serpent is cursed. But the term *'ārūr*, 'cursed,' has its own contextual depth. The serpent becomes 'cursed more than any beast and any wild animal' in a clear echo of 3:1, where it was 'wiser than any wild animal Yahweh God has made'. The words *'ārūr* and *'ārūm*, 'wise', are linked by their superlative form as well as by assonance, and the assonance also brings in *'ērōm*, 'naked'. Linguistically, the curse recapitulates the entire shadow plot, pointing simultaneously to the serpent's wisdom and to the human knowledge of nakedness, which this wisdom has brought about.¹⁰⁸ In this context, the serpent's curse could be interpreted in two ways. Seen as a punishment, the curse commits the serpent to the lowest structural position: brought down to the level of the ground, it has to walk on its belly and eat dust. Leviticus interprets this position as a permanent sign of abomination ('whatever walks on its belly... is detestable' (Lv 11:42); elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible the metaphor of licking dust describes the state of conquered enemies (Ps 72:9; Is 49:23; Mic 7:17). Yet on the other hand, the physical closeness to the earth gives the serpent's wisdom a new connotation, pointing to its chthonic character. Landy points out that, like the serpent's chthonic wisdom, 'the fruit and thus the temptation of the tree is the product of the earth'.¹⁰⁹ One could state that the serpent is wise, or discerning, *because* of its closeness to the earth, the source of wisdom and the substance and origin of all differentiated life forms. Eating dust, *'āpār*, is a sign of this, as it manifests a renewal of the serpent's symbolic function. The word *'āpār* here is reminiscent of *'āpār min-hā^adāmāh*, 'dust from the earth' – the undifferentiated and lifeless matter from which *hā'ādām* was created in 2:7. It also anticipates *hā'ādām*'s return to dust in 3:19. The serpent's digesting or transforming of the dust symbolically unites the beginning and end states of *hā'ādām* and points to the central role the serpent plays in the transformation of the Subject.

The serpent's curse also involves a broken relationship, or enmity, *'ēbāh*, between the two accomplices, the serpent and woman. Woman's offspring will crush (*šwṗ*) the serpent's head, and the serpent, in return, will strike (*šwṗ*) them on the heel (3:15). The rare verb *šwṗ* is difficult to translate, and its meaning is usually seen as parallel to a similar root *š'p*, 'crave, desire', which is occasionally translated as 'crush' (Jer 14:6, Am 2:7). Most commentators interpret *šwṗ* in 3:15 as 'crush, tread upon' in

¹⁰⁸ The chain of associated constructs will be extended further in Gn 3:17. Here Yahweh curses the earth (*'ārūrāh hā'ādāmāh*, Gn 3:17) which creates a link between the earth and the serpent.

¹⁰⁹ Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 255.

illustration of the enmity between the two characters.¹¹⁰ Following this translation, the entire speech is often interpreted as an etiological narrative explaining the present-day relation between humans and snakes. There is, however, a case for a different reading of 3:15. Given that the prevalent meaning of *š'p* is 'desire', the antagonistic relation between woman and the serpent might connote, paradoxically, their drive toward each other. One possible way of dealing with the semantic ambiguity of *šwṗ* has been suggested by Cassuto. For him, woman's offspring 'crushes' the serpent, while the serpent 'craves' the woman's seed.¹¹¹ There is, however, no textual support for attaching different meanings to the actions of woman and the serpent. Given the narrator's particular attention to parallel composition, one might argue that the two actions are symmetrical, despite their being aimed at different parts of the opponent's body, and equally contain aspects of both attack and desire.

The concepts of *r'ōš*, 'head', and *'āqēb*, 'heel' bring additional symbolism to the curse of the serpent. Both Hebrew terms are semantically polyvalent, and connote respectively the ideas of top and bottom, beginning and end, front and rear.¹¹² On the one hand, the images of head and heel imply a vertical hierarchy. Walking on its belly, the serpent occupies a horizontal plane closest to the ground, while woman's offspring walk on their feet (cf. 'heel'), holding an upright, vertical position. As the serpent uses its head/mouth to strike at woman's heel, she uses her foot/heel to strike the serpent's head.¹¹³ It is as if the strikes were exchanged simultaneously, wounding both characters and tying them together. Yet the use of *'āqēb*, 'heel', could indicate a more complex symbolic transaction. Through its semantic association with 'rear', *'āqēb* connotes hiddenness and subversion of the normal order of things. The patriarchal narratives of Genesis will use these symbolic implications of the 'heel' to construct the name and identity of Jacob, the supplanting brother (*ya'qōb* literally means 'takes by the heel' or 'deceives', cf. 25:26, 27:36). The account of the birth of Esau and Jacob in 25:25-26 is particularly interesting in this respect, since, like 3:15, it displays the semantic opposition *r'š* : *'qb*. Esau is born first, *ri'šôn*, and is therefore associated with *r'š*. Jacob, in his turn, is linked to *'qb*, since he comes out after Esau, grasping his brother's heel. The brothers' respective positions at birth determine the dynamics of their future

¹¹⁰ Westermann offers a brief overview of scholarly opinion on the subject in *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 259-60; see also Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, p. 80.

¹¹¹ Cassuto, *Genesis I*, p. 161.

¹¹² BDB, pp. 784, 910-11; *DCH VI*, pp. 540-42.

¹¹³ Early Christian commentators beginning with Irenaeus saw Gn 3:15 as the first messianic prophecy, or *Protoevangelium*, with its image of the Virgin Mary crushing the head of the serpent.

relationship, at the centre of which lies Jacob's deception or taking 'by the heel'. In the conflict between woman and the serpent in 3:15, the fact that the serpent strikes woman on the heel seems to parallel the eponymous action of Jacob. In this context, the manner of the serpent's attack in 3:15 might signify its subversive role in the dialogue with woman in 3:1-5, which she later described to Yahweh as deception (3:13).

It is difficult to understand the meaning of woman's gesture towards the serpent in the context of their previous interaction. It seems nevertheless significant that Yahweh presents the two characters being involved in a symmetrical relationship, simultaneously mirroring (*šwp/šwp*) and contrasting each other (*'āqēb/r'ōš*). Their subversive interaction in 3:1-5 is a creative space where new meaning and knowledge is born, it is also the space where Yahweh reveals his other side. Woman and the serpent are cross-determined in their shared role of 'helper' and in the dialogical character of their communication. The association between the two will also be implicit in the linguistic link between *havvāh* and the Aramaic word for snake, *hiwyā*, when woman receives her proper name in 3:20.

Woman and Gender Roles (v. 16)

Unlike the sentence upon the serpent, the punishment of woman at first seems unrelated to her offence. Abruptly, without a *kī* clause, Yahweh assigns to her the task of reproduction and emphasises the suffering it brings: 'I will greatly multiply your toil and your conceptions, in pain you will give birth to children' (3:16a).¹¹⁴ The pain that taints the life-giving power of woman is twice conveyed by the same root *'šb* (*'iṣṣābôn*, *eṣeb*, 'pain, toil'). It is notable that neither *'iṣṣābôn* nor *eṣeb* is commonly used in the Hebrew Bible to describe the pain of childbirth. In prophetic literature, for example, a variety of terms convey woman's suffering in labour, such as *hūl*, 'to writhe (in pain)' (cf. Is 26:17, 18; 45:10; 54:1; 66:7, 8; Mi 4:10; Je 4:31; 6:24), *hēbel*, 'pain, pangs' (Is 13:8) and *šir*, 'distress' (Is 21:3). The non-specific term *'iṣṣābôn* will reappear in 3:17, where it will characterise the subsistence of *hā'ādām*. It would appear that woman's suffering, though linked to procreation, is rooted in the general adversity of the human condition after transgression, and is the only thing she shares with man.

¹¹⁴ As Trible argues, Yahweh makes no charge against woman because he has already charged her during the interrogation, for his question, 'What is this you have done?' implies her guilt (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 126).

Two conclusions could be drawn here. On the one hand, the punitive vocabulary conveys Yahweh's judgmental, negative attitude to knowledge, consistent with the leading plot, and yet on the other hand, by choosing non-specific terms to describe woman's suffering, the narrator introduces a semiotic distance between punishment (*'āṣab*) and procreation (*hārāh, yālad*). Hence, though tainted with pain, woman's childbearing in itself is not a punishment, but a logical consequence of her transformation. Her role, gendered and specific, stems from the couple's discovery of nakedness in 3:7. The knowledge of sexual differentiation translates into the task of life-giving. One observes here a remarkable structural discrepancy: in v. 7, it was 'the two of them' who shared the knowledge of gender, and yet this knowledge, binary by nature, translates into the task of life-giving only for woman. Gender and the creative function it implies become woman's exclusive prerogative. The other side of this transaction is that man is dissociated from fertility and life-giving. The new structure of life lacks the concept of father.¹¹⁵ *hā'ādām* corroborates this in 3:20, naming his wife 'the mother of all living', without any reference to himself as father. With respect to the creative power of the female, the male functions only as its product, i.e. a son (*tēl' dī bānīm*, lit. 'you will bear sons'), the idea that Eve will assert in 4:1, saying, 'I have created a man ('iš) with Yahweh'. In this respect, the garden narrative contravenes the idea of patriarchal succession, which elsewhere in Genesis allocates the life-giving function to men (5:3-32; Genesis 10; 11:10-26).

An interesting compositional detail of v. 16 is that it starts with the grammatical construction infinitive absolute + imperfect of the *hiphil* form of *rābāh*, 'become great, increase'. Altogether in the garden narrative, this construction is used four times (2:16, 17; 3:4, 16). With its emphatic character, it seems to mark important stages in the progression of the plot.

<i>'ākōl tōk'ēl</i> ,	'you shall surely eat', 2:16
<i>mōt tamūt</i> ,	'you shall surely die', 2:17
<i>lō'-mōt l' mutūn</i>	'you shall surely not die', 3:4
<i>harbāh 'arbeh</i>	'I shall greatly increase', 3:16

The sequence captures the multivocality that lies at the heart of the story. The concepts 'eat' and 'die' in the first two phrases oppose the concepts 'not die' and 'increase' in the second two. The sequence ends with Yahweh's authoritative 'I shall greatly increase' that is also semantically ambiguous. The negative context of

¹¹⁵ The word *'āb*, 'father', is used once in Gn 2:24, where the phrase 'his father and his mother' points to man's origins rather than his own 'fathering'.

punishment – the increase of suffering – is juxtaposed here to the semantically positive idea of increase as reproduction, reminiscent of the task to ‘be fruitful and multiply (*r^ebû*)’ humankind received in the first creation account. The two voices of Yahweh come together in his address to woman in a way that fulfils the blessing of 1:28. The narrative’s (and Yahweh’s) self-subversive logic reveals dying as non-dying, and the eating of the forbidden fruit as a way to the divinely ordained increase of humankind.

The two statements at the centre of the sequence - Yahweh’s *môt tamût* (2:17) and the serpent’s *lō’-môt l^emutûn* (3:4) - are directly opposite and represent two contradictory perspectives on knowledge. However, these statements are not grammatically uniform, which opens a gap for interpretation. While Yahweh addresses the human being in its singular state (*tamût*, 2nd pers. sing.), the serpent speaks of both woman and man (*lō’-môt l^emutûn*, 2nd pers. pl.). Yahweh’s warning could be accurate in the sense that knowledge is incompatible with a singular, undifferentiated subject, for whom the act of discernment would constitute symbolic ‘death’. Semiotically, the singular *hā’ādām* faces either stagnation (lack of knowledge) or death (transformation), which explains why Yahweh considers its singular state, *l^ebad*, as ‘not good’ (2:18). Consequently, he creates woman in order to ensure that the Subject, by becoming plural, is capable of both knowing and living. This is precisely what the serpent says in 3:4. Its words ‘you shall certainly not die’ do not contradict Yahweh’s earlier statement, since they are applied to a different Subject. If Yahweh is right, so is the serpent: to the binary Subject, the attainment of knowledge signifies experience and growth, the opposite of death and stagnation.

The full implication of this argument becomes clear in 3:16. The semiotic process to which the serpent refers opposes death to the differentiation and discernment that are embodied by woman and achieved through her. The same semiotic process now gives woman the ultimate responsibility for the continuation of life. Her structural role of ‘helper’, who has brought knowledge and life to the sterile, stagnant and undifferentiated *hā’ādām*, is now epitomised in her ‘greatly increased’ conceptions and her childbirth.¹¹⁶ Hence, *hā’ādām* recognises woman as the source of life for all when he, following Yahweh’s speech, names her *hawwāh*, ‘mother of all living’ (3:20). However, alongside the universal aspect of *hawwāh*, woman is also specifically

¹¹⁶ Clines argues that child-bearing is the *only* help which woman provides. In the narrative, he states, she ‘exists for the procreation of children. This is what Eve does to help’ (Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 36). I only partly agree with this statement. Above, I have aimed to demonstrate that woman’s help is first and foremost to give to *hā’ādām* the knowledge of good and bad. Her procreation is an expression of this primal function.

established as a source of renewal and reinstatement for male subjectivity. Through her births of sons, foretold in 3:16 and actualised in 4:1, 2, 25, 'iṣ is reborn. In this, woman's position as man's helper receives a new meaning: through her man not only acquires divine knowledge, but is continually brought to life and therefore symbolically escapes death.

Following the description of woman's pregnancies, Yahweh moves on to establish sexual roles for both woman and man: 'your desire shall be for your husband ('iṣ), and he shall rule over you'. It introduces a radically new dynamic into the relationship of the primal pair, being, as Bird has stated, 'the Bible's first statement of hierarchy within the species'.¹¹⁷ One of the most direct statements of patriarchy,¹¹⁸ 3:16b has exercised enormous influence over social and cultural perceptions of gender, endorsing gender inequality by the authority of a divine decree.¹¹⁹ Although the androcentric message of this text seems obvious, some aspects of it stand in tension with the rest of the narrative and therefore warrant our attention.

The first difficulty concerns the human, gendered as 'iṣ. In 3:16, as elsewhere in Genesis 2-3, his presence is problematic. Yahweh uses 'iṣ as a semiotic object needed to formulate woman's destiny (notably, it is woman, and not the gendered 'iṣ, who is instructed about the male rule). Of all the aspects of subjectivity in the narrative, his is the least established and acknowledged. 'iṣ is not linked, like 'ādām, to the earth, or like 'iṣṣāh, to the serpent, and is never specifically named or directly addressed by anyone. His only companion is woman: of the four times 'iṣ is found in Genesis 2-3, each time it appears in connection with 'iṣṣāh (2:23, 24; 3:6, 16). Both literally and semiotically, he is woman's creation, her 'son' (3:16; cf. 4:1). As a character, 'iṣ has proved to be weak and unmotivated, while 'iṣṣāh has shown initiative and independent judgment. Yet, paradoxically, Yahweh gives this weak and schematic male subject unequivocal ascendancy over woman.

The rise to power of 'iṣ in 3:16 is less surprising if one considers that a linguistic convention underlying biblical narrative regards male subjectivity as primary. Here, as Fewell and Gunn indicate, 'values associated with being a "man" (or "masculine",

¹¹⁷ Bird, 'Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh', *ThTo* 50 (1994), p. 527.

¹¹⁸ Meyers sees it as 'perhaps the most problematic in all the Hebrew Bible from a feminist perspective' (Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, p. 113).

¹¹⁹ Tribble disputes this evaluation, saying that 'male supremacy is neither a divine right nor a male prerogative'. Instead, she sees both male supremacy and female subordination as signs of the unresolved tension, in which man and woman have to live as a result of their disobedience (Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 128). Although this point is valid, it remains unclear why man's transgression leads to his superior position.

“male”) are assumed to be a neutral standard or the norm, and are unmarked, while values associated with “woman” (or “feminine”, “female”) are negative, abnormal, inessential – in short, inferior – and are marked’.¹²⁰ It is because of his primary position that *’iš* does not have to be specifically established – he is the Subject ‘pre-existent’ in *hā’ādām* and central to the implied reader’s point of view – whereas *’iššāh*, the Other, has to be characterised, named and renamed to reflect the Subject’s changing perception. It is therefore only through an act of defining woman’s place, in other words, of ruling over her, that the primary Subject can establish and maintain his own identity. For Bal, ‘self is defined by exclusion of what is perceived as other’.¹²¹ The ambiguous identity of *’iš* – superfluous and passive yet endowed, disproportionately, with power and authority – reflects the basic paradox of the patriarchal mind, defined by the same female reality that it is rejecting.

Narratologically speaking, the idea of the patriarchal rule of *’iš* over *’iššāh* is consistent with an attitude toward woman that *hā’ādām* has demonstrated from onset. As we have previously observed, in 2:23-24 *hā’ādām* sees woman as part of himself, flesh of his flesh. Later in 3:12, interrogated by Yahweh, he blames woman for his own actions, projecting his guilt onto her and dissociating himself from both. Whether man is moved by love or by fear, he shows an egocentric attitude, denying woman autonomy and thus negating her as a subject. It would appear that the relationship of dominance, *mšl*, of man over woman in 3:16 epitomises this perspective of the Self which, in its expansion, takes over the subjectivity of the Other. Perhaps one of the reasons why *’iš* is not told about his superior role is because he has been living it out all along. Benno Jacob comes to a similar conclusion about woman’s position. He argues that woman’s role as man’s helper, established before her creation, presupposes both her subordination and the dominating position of man. By proclaiming man’s rule in 3:16, Yahweh does not effect any real change, but endorses the gender hierarchy already at work.¹²²

The second difficulty concerns woman’s desire that binds her to man (*’šūqāh*). Scholars have commonly interpreted the meaning of *’šūqāh* in 3:16 as sexual desire. Their readings range from ‘lust’ (Everett Fox) and ‘apparently unbridled sexual desire’ (Lerner) to sexual and loving desire (Brenner) or longing for sexual intimacy (Terence

¹²⁰ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 17.

¹²¹ See Bal, ‘Introduction’, in Mieke Bal (ed.), *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women’s Lives in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT SS, 81; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), p. 15.

¹²² Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis* (trans. Israel I. Jacob and Walter Jacob; Jersey City: Ktav, 2007), p. 30.

Fretheim).¹²³ For Tribble, woman's sexual desire expresses her yearning for the original unity of male and female as one flesh (cf. 2:23-24), the unity that has been disrupted by disobedience.¹²⁴ It is often argued that Yahweh introduces woman's sexual desire in order to perpetuate procreation. Meyers links the institution of desire in 3:16 to women's social-economic function of replenishing the community by repeated childbearing. Having procreation as her primary role, woman needs desire to compensate for the risks of pregnancy and birth.¹²⁵ In this way, the pains of childbirth do not preclude her from further sexual relationship with her husband, to whom she feels relentlessly attracted. From this perspective, woman appears totally objectified, used as a tool of procreation, bound to man both socially, by his domination, and emotionally, by her own desire. Even more than man's rule, woman's desire for man epitomises the patriarchal ideal.¹²⁶

And yet it does not quite ring true. Unlike the concept of *mšl* that reverberates with the male perspective throughout the narrative, the desire woman feels in 3:16 is inconsistent with her previous characterisation. On the one hand, the reader knows woman as the one who desires. *šûqāh* in 3:16 shows semantic continuity with *ta^awāh*, 'desire', and *hāmad*, 'to delight in', which communicated woman's desire of seeing and understanding in 3:6 (cf. also the possible reading of *šûp* in 3:15 as 'desire'). Woman's desire for knowledge is her key characteristic on which the entire narrative is hinged, the feature that enables her to 'help' *hā'ādām*. Yet on the other hand, at no point in the story has woman desired *man* in any of his guises, either as *hā'ādām* or as 'iš. She has never addressed him and, apart from giving him the fruit to eat, she has not related to him at all. While *hā'ādām* is oriented towards woman from the moment he sees her (2:23-24), she appears to all but ignore her partner. One might ask why woman, whose interests and desires belonged elsewhere before 3:16, should start feeling desire for man now, just after he has betrayed her to Yahweh (3:12)? If anything, the couple's knowledge of nakedness gave rise to the feelings of shame and fear, not those of desire, making the overall mood of the narrative cold and non-affective.

¹²³ Everett Fox (trans. and comment.), *The Five Books of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. A New Translation with Introduction, Commentary, and Notes* (Schocken Bible, 1; New York: Schocken, 1995), p. 23; Lerner, *Eternally Eve*, p. 112; Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 21; Terence E. Fretheim, 'The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,' *NIB* I, p. 363.

¹²⁴ Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, p. 128.

¹²⁵ Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 116-117.

¹²⁶ From a different angle, Bal sees the reversed order in which woman's desire for man is placed in Gn 3:16 after her labour as an indication that the relationships of desire and domination are judged 'less important, perhaps less fatal, than the pain of labor'. Seen this way, the process of life-giving appears to be fundamental to woman's nature and emphasised over sexual relations (*Lethal Love*, p. 126).

Another interpretative possibility regarding woman's role in 3:16 has been suggested by Joel Lohr. In a recent article, he questions the reading of *šûqāh* as sexual desire.¹²⁷ In his view, this term, found only three times in the Hebrew Bible (3:16; 4:7; Sg 7:11), connotes the idea of 'return' and is therefore synonymous to *šûbāh*. A number of early textual witnesses interpret *šûqāh* in 3:16 as 'turning' or 'return': such is the translation of LXX (*apostrophē*),¹²⁸ the Old Latin (*conversio*), the Peshitta, and the Ethiopian version of Jubilees (*meqbā*, 'place of refuge' or 'place of return', Jub 3:24). Among the examples of the early Hebrew usage of the term, Lohr quotes the non-biblical *Rule of the Community* (1QS 11:21–22). First, it alludes to the creation of the human being out of dust, and then describes human longing (*šûqāh*) for dust. The meaning 'return' seems more appropriate here, especially in the context of the human return (*šûbāh*) to dust in 3:19. All of the remaining six occurrences of the term in the Qumran manuscripts likewise suggest a nuanced meaning of 'return'. Accordingly, Lohr understands *šûqāh* as a movement 'to an appropriate or natural place, almost as if part of the genetic makeup of the one (or thing) returning'.¹²⁹ Woman's *šûqāh* in 3:16 might therefore signify her return to man as her origin in a movement that reverses the creation of woman from 'iš (2:23; cf. 2:21–22). For Lohr, this return has a sense of finality, and may signify a fulfilment of woman's mission with respect to man. Indeed, woman's role as helper for *hā'ādām* is now completed on both levels: as a provider of knowledge, she has brought about his transformation, and as a provider of sons, she is given the task of assuring his continuous existence. Her function is set, and there is no need, from the narrator's point of view, to construct her character any further. Outside this function, she has no life or identity. With the non-sexual reading of *šûqāh*, female subjectivity is subordinated or 'returned' to man not because of her intrinsic desire or need of him but due to her predetermined narrative and social role. Contextual repercussions of such a reading become clear when one compares woman's 'return' to her husband to man's return to the earth, announced in 3:19.

¹²⁷ Joel H. Lohr, 'Sexual Desire? Eve, Genesis 3:16, and חשוקה', *JBL* 130 (2011), pp. 227–46.

¹²⁸ The LXX seems to be reading *šûbāh* for *šûqāh* in Gn 4:7 (*apostrophē*, 'return') and in Sg 7:11 (*epistrophē*, 'turning, conversion'). V. P. Hamilton observes this in *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 201.

¹²⁹ Lohr, 'Sexual Desire?' p. 246.

hā'ādām and hā'^adāmāh (vv. 17-19)

In contrast to the gender-specific destiny of woman, man's sentence in 3:17-19 seems to be gender-neutral. It describes the general processes of human subsistence and death, marked with the same pain as woman's labour: 'in toil (*iṣṣābôn*) you shall eat of it [the earth]', 'by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the earth'. Van Wolde suggests that Yahweh's words in 3:17b-19 'also bear on woman and so on man in general'.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, Yahweh clearly treats woman and *hā'ādām* as separate subjects (cf. 'because you have listened to the voice of your wife'). This upholds the ambiguous status of *hā'ādām*: as a general human being, he is placed above gender, and yet remains grammatically and structurally male. Woman, on the other hand, is removed from this 'general' destiny of humanity. Instead, she is mentioned here as a mediator of man's destiny, in echo of her original role of helper. Having conceived woman with a particular task in mind, Yahweh now recapitulates the role she played before discharging her of her duty. If this is correct, then the result of her intervention - the sentence of *hā'ādām* - should reveal what Yahweh really wanted to happen all along, the idea that underlies his creation of humankind and gender.

So what happens to man as a result of woman's 'help'? Once again, Yahweh declares a curse, but man, unlike the serpent in 3:14, is not cursed directly. In an unexpected twist, the earth, *hā'^adāmāh*, is punished in place of *hā'ādām* ('cursed is the earth on your account', 3:19). Why should the earth, which did not play any part in man's transgression, take on man's punishment? The following text provides an immediate explanation, describing how the earth's curse has a knock-on effect on man's mode of subsistence. The curse affects the fertility of the earth, which will from now on produce for him 'thorns and thistles'. The abundant provision of the garden, where man could simply 'take' his food of the trees (3:6), gives way to the meagre subsistence on the grass of the field, obtained by painful toiling.¹³¹ It would appear that Yahweh's real target is not the earth, but man, who bears the consequences of the earth's reduced fertility.

hā'^adāmāh is, however, more than a mere instrument of Yahweh's judgment. The notion of the earth has a semiotic depth that one cannot access without going back

¹³⁰ van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, p. 182.

¹³¹ Notably, the sentence of man, as well as his guilt, is dominated by the concept of eating: the verb '*ākal*' is used here five times in the space of three verses.

to the narrative of the creation of *hā'ādām* in 2:5-7. In 2:5 the earth is a cosmic element which pre-exists humanity, and yet, without human services, its state is incomplete. The earth (*'ereš*) is lifeless, with no vegetation on it, because there is 'no *'ādām* to serve *hā'ādāmāh*'.¹³² Even before the earth-creature is brought to life, the narrator determines its particular relationship with the earth, in which the latter has a higher semiotic status. It is in order to fulfil the earth's need that Yahweh fashions *hā'ādām* from the dust of *hā'ādāmāh* (2:7). The obvious linguistic association between the two terms marks their semantic correspondence. On the one hand, *hā'ādām*, the one who tills, or serves, the soil, is united by function to *hā'ādāmāh* as the arable land. On the other hand, *hā'ādām* is an 'earth-creature', a being of the same substance with *hā'ādāmāh*, united to it by nature. For Westermann, this double correspondence 'attests that human beings and earth belong together, that the earth is there for humanity and human beings are there to populate it, Is 45:18'.¹³³ It also implies that the ability to till the land presupposes the Subject's consubstantiality with it. Only as an 'earth-creature' can the human being serve the earth.

Strikingly, both aspects of the earth-human relationship outlined in 2:5-7 reappear in the scene of the judgment of *hā'ādām* (3:17-19). First, it is crucial that at the end of the narrative, man finally fulfils his role in relation to the earth. Vegetation serves as a link between the two, ensuring their mutual dependence: *hā'ādām* eats the plants that the earth yields for him, giving the earth his service (toil) in exchange (3:17-19).¹³⁴ The vocabulary of 3:18 clearly echoes that of 2:5 (cf. *šāmaḥ*, 'sprout', and *'ēšeḥ haššādeh*, 'grass of the field'), but in contrast to the initial situation, which described the lack of grass and of sprouting, both concepts emerge as part of the new structure of life. Retrospectively, the garden *appears* as a transitional domain where a direct relationship with the earth is not possible. While subsistence in the garden is mediated and regulated by Yahweh, who sprouts (*šāmaḥ*) fruit trees from the earth (2:9), and issues dietary rules, subsistence outside the garden is mediated by the earth itself, which now can finally sprout vegetation. In 3:17-19 Yahweh relinquishes his responsibility for feeding man, making the earth his direct source of food and his metaphorical 'master'. At the closure of the episode, when Yahweh sends *hā'ādām* 'out of the garden of Eden to

¹³² According to Brett, the verb *'bd* in all these cases should be taken in its more common meaning 'to serve', as opposed to 'till' or 'work', which are used in most English translations of Genesis 2:5, 15; 3:23 (*Genesis*, p. 30).

¹³³ Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, p. 206.

¹³⁴ See van Wolde, 'Facing the Earth: Primaevial History in a New Perspective', in Philip R. Davies and David J.A. Clines (eds.), *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* (JSOT SS, 257; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 30.

serve the earth from which he was taken' (3:23), *hā^adāmāh* appears to have taken Yahweh's place in more than one respect.

Second, Yahweh's judgment in 3:17-19 also refers to the human being's origin as an 'earth-creature'. For Devora Steinmetz, the curse of the earth in 3:17 connotes its organic unity with man: 'Earth could be cursed through Adam's sin because earth (*'adamah*) and Adam were of the same substance'.¹³⁵ Earth is the undifferentiated substance of all created life forms (humans, plants, and animals); it is also that which human beings return to in the end ('till you return to the earth, for from it you were taken', v. 19). Both at the beginning and at the end of his life, *hā'ādām* merges with *hā^adāmāh*, assuming a state marked by the absence of form, differentiation, and boundaries. This state corresponds to the earth's initial 'lifeless' condition, symbolised by the notion of dust. Just as the lifeless earth – dust – became the raw material of humanity ('for you are dust'), so the human being, in death, returns to its primordial unity with the earth ('to dust you shall return', v. 19). Arguably, the perfect symmetry between the beginning and the end situations suggests that the dominant idea here is not the end of human life, but human unity with the earth.

It is noteworthy that despite the clear connotation of death in vv. 18-19 Yahweh does not mention the verb *mūt*, 'to die' in his judgment of *hā'ādām*. This has interesting implications with regard to Yahweh's death warning in 2:17. Was Yahweh accurate in his prediction *môt tāmūt*, 'you will certainly die'? Here, as elsewhere, the text is ambiguous. On the lexical level it seems to emphasise not the death of *hā'ādām*, but his life, *hayyīm*. The semantic sequence *yôm – 'ākal – mūt*, present in the prohibition (cf. 'on the day you eat from it you shall certainly die', 2:17) is replaced with the sequence *'ākal – yôm – hayyīm* ('in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life', 3:17). In the last balance, instead of the certain and immediate death that *hā'ādām* should have experienced on the day he knew good and bad, he is given a lifetime of toiling on the earth that culminates in his return to earth as his origin.

As the above analysis suggests, the narrator of Genesis 2-3 translates the linguistic association between *'ādām* and *^adāmāh* into a relationship of both provenance and interdependence. On the one hand, the earth is presented as the ultimate foundation of human existence; on the other hand, it requires human service in order to produce life. The theme 'man versus earth' links the beginning and the end of the narrative, and the change in human status vis-à-vis the earth constitutes the main

¹³⁵ Devora Steinmetz, 'Vineyard, Farm, and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of the Primeval History', *JBL* 113 (1994), p. 196.

transformation of the story. From this perspective, the entire narrative structure of prohibition-disobedience-punishment appears to be constructed with the purpose of bringing the human being closer to the earth. Similarly, Jobling's structural analysis of Genesis 2-3 defines the main narrative programme of Genesis 2-3 not as 'creation and fall', but as 'a man to till the earth'.¹³⁶ I disagree, however, with Jobling's assessment of Yahweh as a villain who unsuccessfully tries to stop man from tilling the earth by prohibiting knowledge. In my view, Yahweh's motives are more complex. Plotting on two levels, Yahweh simultaneously orchestrates the 'fall' of *hā'ādām* and distances himself from it. Repressed by the narrator and Yahweh himself, the programme that brings man to serve the earth is, nevertheless, what Yahweh really wants. Accordingly, the judgment of *hā'ādām* in 3:17-19 demonstrates a success, rather than failure, of Yahweh's plans.

If this is correct, and Yahweh's ultimate goal in Genesis 2-3 is to establish a relationship between humankind and the earth, then the thrust of the narrative moves from the moral to the cosmological domain. At the centre of it is not human transgression, but Yahweh's progressive creation, in which *hā'ādām* and the earth come to occupy the precise places in the world order that Yahweh designed for them from the start. Paul Ricoeur, who takes the opposite view, reading the 'Adamic myth' as an irruption of the irrational into the perfect and complete universe of Genesis 1, pinpoints the 'either - or' choice required in approaching the narrative. For him, 'the idea of a "fall" of man becomes fully developed only in a cosmology from which any creation-drama has been eliminated'.¹³⁷ In my opinion, the opposite is also true: since one cannot eliminate Yahweh's crucial involvement from the drama of human disobedience, the idea of 'fall' loses its grounds. From this angle, what Ricoeur has seen as an irrational human choice disrupting the perfect creation, could be treated instead as part of the ongoing process of creation, through which Yahweh continues to organise the elements of the cosmic order and their relationships.

¹³⁶ Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 21-29.

¹³⁷ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (trans. Emerson Buchanan; New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 172. See also Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, p. 81.

Gender Relationships and the World Order in Genesis 2-3

In the new structure of life described in 3:14-19, the relationship between man and earth (*hā'ādām* - *hā'^adāmāh*) displays a striking similarity to that between man and woman (*'iš* - *'iššāh*). Various degrees of that similarity have been observed in biblical scholarship. Francis Landy, for instance, states that in Genesis 2-3 man's 'relationship with woman is a precise parallel to that with the earth'.¹³⁸ In her detailed semiotic study of Genesis 2-3, van Wolde analyses different levels of correspondence between earth, man, and woman.¹³⁹ To begin with, *'iš* shows the same phonetic resemblance to *'iššāh* as *'ādām* does to *'^adāmāh*. Next, at a grammatical level, the feminine ending *-āh* found in both *'iššāh* and *'^adāmāh* points to a certain semantic analogy. Van Wolde interprets the morpheme *-āh* as an iconic sign of the life-giving function that woman and earth have in common. The third, sememic level of correspondence exists between the pairs *'ādām* - *'^adāmāh* and *'iš* - *'iššāh*. The two pairs demonstrate, each in its turn, a relation of interdependence. The earth brings forth *hā'ādām* (2:7) and is the source of his sustenance (3:18), while woman is destined to bear sons and therefore, implicitly, brings forth *'iš* (3:16; cf. 4:1). Neither woman nor earth can produce life without their partners, *'iš* and *'ādām*, who are respectively assigned the tasks of ruling over *'iššāh* (3:16) and tilling (serving) *'^adāmāh* (3:17-17). For van Wolde, these tasks display constructive, governing involvement of the male character with respect to his partner, which she defines as management. The relations of interdependence between the two pairs could be summarised in the following formula:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{'ādām} : \text{'^adāmāh} \\ \hline \text{'iš} : \text{'iššāh} \end{array} = \text{management} : \text{giving life}$$

Imaging the earth in its life-giving aspect as a mother figure is recognised across different cultural contexts: from Gaia, the goddess of the earth of Greek mythology to the earth as the universal mother in Native American creation myths. In Sumerian

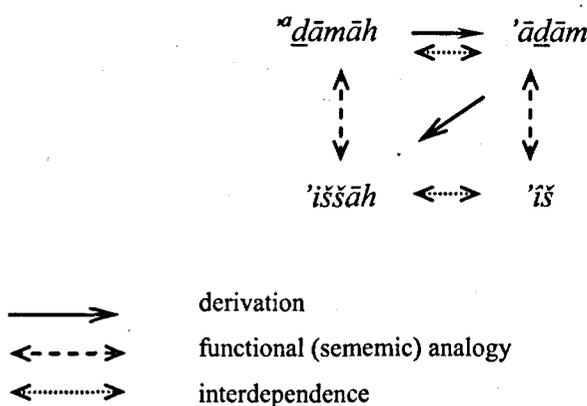
¹³⁸ Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 255. See also Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT SS, 10; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), p. 75.

¹³⁹ van Wolde, *A Semiotic Analysis*, pp. 183-86.

mythology, the Mother Goddess is known as Ki, the earth, who, having espoused An, the sky god, gives birth to all the other gods and the vegetation and takes part in the creation of man. In the biblical myth of creation, the attribution of gender characteristics to the earth is more subtle than in other traditions. The earth in Genesis 2-3 is gendered through semantic associations between narrative elements rather than through clear taxonomy. The narrator constructs the earth as a 'metaphorical female' by making its relationship with humanity structurally parallel to that between woman and man. This process hinges on the 'split personality' of *hā'ādām*: being a figure of generalised humanity, standing for both male and female, *hā'ādām* is also a particular male character in the story. On the one hand, his subjectivity is defined by a disavowal of gender, and yet, on the other hand, it is reaffirmed as male in his relation to the earth. Similarly, the female reality, whether it is subsumed in the general definition of humankind or excluded from it, survives as a projection in the image of the metaphorical female - the earth. Because of this structural discrepancy, as Brueggemann has stated, 'the natural partner of man is "*ādāmā*", not "*iššā*".'¹⁴⁰

In addition to the sememic parallels demonstrated by van Wolde, earth, *hā'ādām*, and woman are united by a hierarchy of provenance. They correspond to the three progressive stages of creation/differentiation of the Subject that took place in Genesis 2. There, in the first instance, Yahweh fashions a human from the dust of the earth, differentiating it from its larger environment (*ādāmāh* → *'ādām*). In the next stage, woman was created from a side of *hā'ādām* (*'ādām* → *'iššāh*). The following diagram modifies van Wolde's formula in a way that takes account of the derivative links between its elements:

Fig. 6



¹⁴⁰ Brueggemann, 'Of the Same Flesh and Bone', p.538.

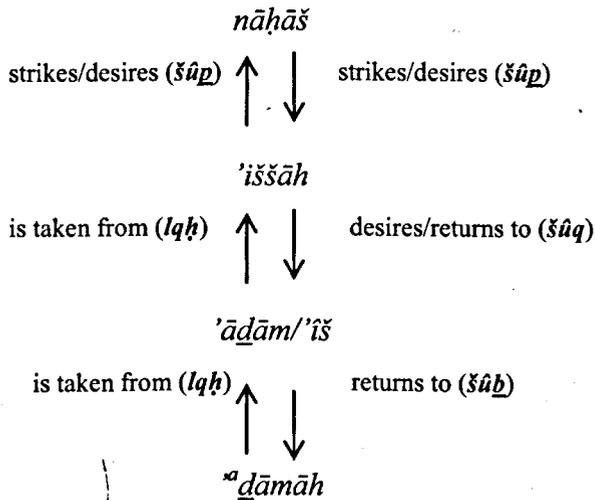
In the hierarchy of creation in Genesis 2, the earth is the origin of humanity, and woman, its most differentiated form. Notably, each successive element of the progression ${}^a d\bar{a}m\bar{a}h \rightarrow 'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m \rightarrow 'i\check{s}\bar{s}\bar{a}h$ fulfils a particular purpose with respect to its predecessor. Thus, $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$ has to till (serve) the earth to make it fertile, and woman has to be $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$'s helper. As I have argued above, woman's intervention or 'help' creates the conditions that enable man to serve the earth. In this, the entire progression is directed back towards the earth.

This idea is finalised in Genesis 3:16-19, where the hierarchy of creation is traced back to its beginning. Here the woman's destiny is placed in the context of her relationship with her husband, whereas the lot of $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$ is defined by his association with the earth. Like woman's labour with its toil ($'i\check{s}\bar{s}\bar{a}b\bar{o}n$), the relationship between $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$ and $h\bar{a}'{}^a d\bar{a}m\bar{a}h$ is tainted with pain: 'in toil ($'i\check{s}\bar{s}\bar{a}b\bar{o}n$) you shall eat of it', 3:17). If, as Lohr has argued, $'\check{s}\bar{u}q\bar{a}h$ in 3:16 means 'return' and is used in parallel to $\check{s}\bar{u}b$ in 3:19, then, structurally, both woman and $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$ perform the same movement, going back to where they have come from: $'i\check{s}\bar{s}\bar{a}h$ to $'i\check{s}$, and $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$ to $h\bar{a}'{}^a d\bar{a}m\bar{a}h$. Given its narrative association with $'i\check{s}$, $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$ becomes a link in a progression $'i\check{s}\bar{s}\bar{a}h \rightarrow h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m \rightarrow h\bar{a}'{}^a d\bar{a}m\bar{a}h$ that brings together woman and the earth. At the end of Genesis 3, Yahweh's creation has gone full circle, returning more differentiated forms of subjectivity back to their previous, less complex forms. The earth features at the end of this circle in its primal, lifeless state of dust ('for you are dust and to dust you shall return', 3:19).

A problem that complicates the chiasmic relationship between earth, man, and woman in vv. 16-19 is the serpent's function. Defined by its closeness to the earth and by its enmity towards woman, the serpent's role does not fit into the pattern 'derivation vs. return'. Still, the serpent relates in one way or another to each of the participants of the new cosmic order. Being a creature of the earth like $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$, the serpent remains closely related to it. Like the earth, the serpent is cursed, and the curse closes up the distance between them, almost merging them together, for now the serpent has to walk on its belly and eat dust (of the earth). Similarly, the dust that the serpent consumes links it to $h\bar{a}'a\bar{d}\bar{a}m$, and to his origin and destiny as an 'earth-creature' (cf. 3:19). Yet most graphic of all is the serpent's relation to woman (3:15). Due to the semantic uncertainty of the verb $\check{s}\bar{u}p$, their mutual enmity is highly ambiguous: they either simultaneously attack each other, or are drawn to each other by desire.

Notably, the verbs *šûp* (twice in v. 15), *šûq* (v. 16), and *šûb* (twice in v. 19), used respectively in the sentences of the serpent, woman, and man, are linked by both alliteration and assonance. The striking repetition of sound draws attention to these three actions and suggests a certain degree of continuity between them. This has implications for how one understands the overall semiotic order constructed by the narrator of Genesis 2-3:

Fig. 7



In this model, the serpent stands at the top of the functional hierarchy. By introducing duality of meaning into human experience, it acts as a refractor, turning the semiotic chain *ʾādamāh* → *'ādām* → *'iššāh* back onto itself. This role is not limited to the dialogue in the garden: it is perpetual, applied to *zāra*, the progeny of both woman and the serpent. In the cosmic order that Yahweh announces at the end of Genesis 3, the subversive wisdom of the serpent is the force that turns the wheel of creation, makes it an ongoing process, returning woman to man, and man to earth, so that the cycle can start all over again.

The naming of woman in 3:20 could offer additional support to the above interpretation. Here the narrator's gloss derives woman's name *ḥawwāh* from the root *ḥayyāh*, 'to live', describing her as the 'mother of all living'. Sarna sees the name *ḥawwāh* as an archaic form of *ḥayyāh*, 'living' (fem. sing.), and interprets it in the context of 3:20 as 'living thing, i.e. life personified, or propagator of life'.¹⁴¹ In a

¹⁴¹ Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 29.

narrow sense, this name simply designates woman's reproductive function, her responsibility for the continuation of life, established in 3:16. Compared to the first, generic naming of *'iššāh* in 2:23, *ḥawwāh* is a proper name and reflects man's understanding of the identity of woman, who is from now on, in the words of Bal, imprisoned in motherhood.¹⁴² However, looking at the place 3:20 occupies in the composition of the scene, one might adopt a wider perspective on woman's name. Although man learns about woman's reproductive role in v. 16, he delays naming her 'mother of all living' until he has received his own judgment in vv. 17-19, the judgment that introduces death and return to dust as an inevitable part of his experience. This presents the proclamation of life in the naming speech of *hā'ādām* as a counterbalance to the death penalty he received in the previous verse. Though man clearly needs to wait for Yahweh to finish his speech before any naming could be done, it is difficult to avoid looking at man's discourse as a reaction to the entire series of judgments, or as a sort of digest. Seen in this way, the name of *ḥawwāh* not only points to woman's life-giving in 3:16 but also plays on the general idea of life renewed through the cyclic rhythm of creation and return that underlies all the sentences in 3:14-19. The words *'ēm kol-ḥāy*, 'mother of all living' support this universal connotation.

If the above argument is valid, man's naming of woman puts her at the centre of the new cosmic order as the epitome of life and renewal. The existential threat to the subjectivity of *hā'ādām* – the threat of annihilation associated with the unity of *hā'ādām* and *hā'^adāmāh* in 3:19 – is made less urgent through *ḥāwwah*. Being a universal mother, she is also the personal saviour of *hā'ādām*, the one who redeems him from dust and restores, over and over again, his transient identity. In that respect, the structural role of *ḥāwwah* parallels that of Yahweh in 2:7, where he differentiated *hā'ādām* from the earth by breathing into him the breath of life (*ḥayyīm*) and making him a living being (*nepeš ḥayyāh*). Bal understands this structural similarity as a 'functional analogy between the two creative forces'. For her, woman's role as the climax of creation and as the future creator of 'all living' may be signified in the phonetic resemblance between her name and the name of Yahweh. Accordingly, the phoneme HW that characterises the creators is opposed to the phoneme DM that characterises the creatures.¹⁴³ The semantic ground for the rapprochement between the two names lies in the concept of life, with the sequence *yhw*, *ḥayyīm*, *ḥayyāh* (2:7) reflected in the sequence *ḥāwwah*, *ḥāy* (3:20).

¹⁴² Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 128.

¹⁴³ Bal, *Lethal Love*, p. 129.

This cross-determination of concepts and characters becomes even more complex when one observes a linguistic link between *ḥavvāh* and the serpent. The Aramaic word for snake, *ḥiwyā*, resembles the Hebrew *ḥayyāh*, 'to live' (cf. also the Arabic *ḥayyatun*, 'serpent').¹⁴⁴ In *Bereshith Rabbah*, this association between the two is used to bolster a negative evaluation of woman. Here, Rabbi Aha describes *ḥāwwah* as Adam's serpent, i.e. seducer.¹⁴⁵ However, it is the concept of life and not that of seduction that forms the semantic basis for their relationship. In various cultural traditions, the image of the snake shedding its skin has been interpreted as a symbol of the renewal of life. In the Hebrew myth, the serpent's role is similar: by introducing death as a means of renewal, the serpent, paradoxically, ensures the continuity of life. For woman and the serpent, 'life' is a shared signifier.

It would appear that towards the end of Genesis 2-3 the narrative establishes a chain of semantic correspondences between the characters of woman, Yahweh, and the serpent on the one hand, and the concept of life on the other. Having used the serpent to instigate, and woman, to actualise his shadow plot, Yahweh succeeds in establishing a new structure of life. At the centre of this structure lies a relationship between *hā'ādām* and *hā'dāmāh*, the desired outcome of Yahweh's plotting. Structurally, in their reciprocal relationship both man and the earth absorb each other, as man incorporates the earth through eating and the earth incorporates man through death. While this unity is achieved through the narrative mediation, or 'help', of woman and the serpent, it is also constantly disrupted by their symbolic function. For it is only through the medium of woman, the creator of new life and the semiotic bearer of difference, and of the serpent as the agent of subversion and change, that man and the earth can remain differentiated, and their relationship renewed. Woman and the serpent keep the process going. As such, their role is indispensable.

Concluding Observations

In view of this long examination of Genesis 2-3, how could one account for its profound ambiguity and its double narrative structure? Why should Yahweh speak with two voices, and why should his real intentions be communicated in a repressed, implicit

¹⁴⁴ Cassuto, *Genesis I*, pp. 170-71.

¹⁴⁵ *Genesis Rabbah* 20:11; 22:2.

way, in an almost exact contradiction of his pronouncements? At a diachronic level, one might see here an example of what Brett calls the 'intentional hybridity' of the Genesis narrative and defines more specifically as the technique of juxtaposing alternative points of view, used by the final editors in order to undermine the dominant voices and ideologies.¹⁴⁶ From the perspective of gender, 'intentional hybridity' simultaneously establishes and puts in question the decreed dominance of 'iš.

This diachronic explanation could not account, however, for the extent of cross-determination that exists between the two alternative plots. Ambiguity here seems to be not only an editorial technique but also a key principle that guides the construction of subjectivity at every stage of the narrative. According to this principle, Yahweh emerges as a contradictory, composite character who occupies simultaneously the centre and the margins of the narrative world. As the central figure, he has absolute power and authority, and exercises them through the acts of creating (*'āśāh, yāšar*) and decreeing (*šāwāh*). This centre sets out boundaries and embodies the concepts of justice and judgment. In this sense, Yahweh of Genesis 2-3 is akin to the transcendent creator of Genesis 1 who, in Landy's words, is 'rational, determined, and uninvolved'.¹⁴⁷

On the other hand, the same Yahweh introduces the seeds of subversion into the world by planting the tree of the knowledge of good and bad alongside the tree of life. The centre of the garden, occupied by the two trees, is split from the beginning. Seeing it as the symbolic centre that epitomises Yahweh's own identity, the concepts of Life and Knowledge convey the union of dualities that only Yahweh can possess. His knowledge of good and bad constitutes his other side, his Shadow that is pushed out to the margins. However, it is this repressed knowledge that motivates Yahweh's further creation. By judging human singularity as *lō'-tōb*, Yahweh also acknowledges the deficiency of his own totality-based discourse. Creating gender, Yahweh expresses and shares his own duality. The new world order that comes as a result of Yahweh's marginal, shadow plot, accommodates the dualities of male and female, good and evil, life and knowledge.

In this respect, the resolution of Genesis 2-3 shows some interesting dynamics. Here, following the success of his shadow plot, Yahweh's leading position is weakened. He finds himself vulnerable, afraid that the new, evolved human might now eat of the tree of life and live forever (3:22). Although this idea is structurally impossible – by getting to know good and bad, the human beings have entered the cycle of birth and

¹⁴⁶ Brett, *Genesis*, p. 32.

¹⁴⁷ Landy, *Paradoxes of Paradise*, p. 260.

death and so, by definition, have lost immortality – Yahweh’s fear is not without significance. It prompts Yahweh to redraw the boundaries and to return to his central discourse, expelling *hā’ādām* from the garden and placing the cherubim to guard the tree of life. Yet is he left unaffected? The tree of knowledge, the symbol of Yahweh’s repressed, marginal identity, seems to have disappeared from the text and from the garden. Could this signify the end of ambiguity in Yahweh’s discourse? Is the garden now freed from distinctions, with only the tree of life in the centre? And where is Eve at the crucial moment when the boundaries are drawn?

I would argue that the absence of woman in the closing scene of 3:22-24 marks a change in the narrator’s attitude that moves the narrative balance towards the central, dominant discourse. The fact that woman does not explicitly leave the garden has potential semiotic implications. By leaving her out of the picture, the narrator conceals the mediating and transforming function of gender in the new world order, which from now on will be presented as a gender-neutral relationship between man and the earth. To an extent, woman as an acting, thinking subject *is* left behind, her significance confined to the garden narrative and its shadow plot. The immediately following 4:1, where Eve is celebrated as a creative, life-giving force within humanity, is an exception that confirms the rule, for it is also the last time Eve is mentioned in Genesis and the Hebrew Bible. While *hā’ādām* is banished from the garden, *hawwāh* is banished from the subsequent history of humankind. Female reality in the cosmological myths of Genesis 4-11 exists only as a conjecture, an occasional generic reference to wives and daughters in the context of male genealogies (4:17, 19-23; 6:1-4). To complete her banishment, woman is deprived not only of name and presence but also of the life-giving function that she has been associated with in the garden. Instead of the ‘mother of all living’, it is *’ādām* and his descendants that go on regenerating themselves through the lengthy *tôl’dōt* (Genesis 5; 10; 11:10-26). For Mary Daly, this ‘multiplication of males’ is part of the narrative strategy that denies female reality in the cosmic order.¹⁴⁸ This strategy is ratified by Yahweh, who in the flood narrative transfers the blessing to ‘be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth’ from the unity of male and female (1:27-28) to the males across their generations (9:1; cf. 9:7). By the end of the cosmological accounts of Genesis 1-11, Yahweh seems to have no further use for gender. The ambiguous God who knows good and bad has remained in Eden, giving way to the God of the patriarchs.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 37-38.

Chapter 2

The Subject, the Other, and the Land in the Abraham Cycle

The Matriarchal Succession

Following the cosmological myths of Genesis 1-11, the stories of Genesis 12-50 communicate a myth of ethnogenesis that traces the origin of Israel back to the chosen line of forefathers. The subject matter of these narratives, formally presented as *tôlēdôt*, 'generations' of Terah, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob (11:27; 25:19; 36:1, 9; 37:2), ultimately lies in the account of a patrilineal descent: Abraham is succeeded by Isaac, Isaac is succeeded by Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons become the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. This account of succession is complicated by the tensions between the patriarchal Subject and his opponents. The destabilising presence of the Other is constantly acknowledged and expressed by the narrative through the figures of the other brothers – Lot, Ishmael, and Esau – who have to be removed from the land and cut off from the identity of Israel, giving origin to the neighbouring nations. Needless to say this central plot does not include female characters. The promise that structures the patriarchal narratives concerns only male succession, and women find their way into the story mainly as mothers that produce (male) heirs and ascertain the right descent. This function is as crucial for the construction of the patriarchal identity as it is undermined by the patriarchal strategies of the narrator. The tension that arises from the reluctance of the narrative consciousness to acknowledge woman's role in procreation finds its perhaps clearest expression in the image of the sterile mother.¹⁴⁹

Strikingly, the narrative dynamic of Genesis 12-50 starts not with God's promise, but with a contradiction associated with a female character.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, the very

¹⁴⁹ In her analysis of the theme of sterile matriarch in the patriarchal narratives, Cheryl Exum argues that presenting the matriarchs as sterile is a strategy used by the narrator in order to undermine their significance (*Fragmented Women*, pp. 120-36).

¹⁵⁰ According to Westermann, the call of Abraham 'follows immediately on 11:30', being not a beginning, but part of the extended unit 11:27-12:9 (*Genesis 12-36* [trans. John J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1985], p. 148).

appearance of a female character at the beginning of the patriarchal stories is in itself a surprise. From the story of Adam and Eve up to the *tôlédôt* of Terah (11:27-32), the biblical text has dealt exclusively with men. The genealogies of Adam (5:1-32) and of Shem, Ham, and Japhet (10:1-32; 11:10-26) completely omit women's names.¹⁵¹ In those rare cases when women receive a mention, their presence in the narrative is only nominal, deprived of any subjectivity.¹⁵²

The situation changes with Sarah. Even before she assumes a meaningful narrative presence, the name of Sarai has been reiterated alongside that of Abram¹⁵³ and the reader has been informed about her sterility (11:29, 30, 31; 12:5). The fact that the first woman to be mentioned by name is a sterile wife becomes an obstacle, which stops the smooth flow of male genealogies. Sarah is the wife who is not able to fulfil the function, which so many other women, concealed behind the *toledoth*, invisibly fulfilled before her. The reader who, since Eve, has been invited to take female fertility for granted, comes here to a startling realisation that a woman is required for the line (and life) to continue. Sarah's deficiency makes her visible, and by doing so, reveals a narrative in need of female subjectivity.

Similarly to Sarah, the next two matriarchs will be marked by the same flaw. Jacob's mother Rebekah is originally sterile (25:26); so is Rachel, mother of Joseph (29:31). For the three generations of matriarchs, sterility seems to be a precondition of their import: to become significant in the narrative, a woman has to lose, even if only temporarily, what men assigned to her as her *raison d'être*.

From the point of view of social representation within the narrative, sterility of the matriarchs undermines the patriarchal establishment. Both Abraham and Isaac attempt to choose the right wives for their sons, driven with the single concern for the continuance of their line (24:2-9; 28:1-5) but in both cases the narrative resists that concern by making the chosen wives unable to produce offspring.

¹⁵¹ Exum holds that omitting women's names in genealogies is one of the strategies used by patriarchy in order to 'affirm the paternal claim to offspring' (*Fragmented Women*, p. 111).

¹⁵² Like that of Adah and Zillah, the wives of Lamech, and Zillah's daughter Naamah (4:19-24). In the story of the flood, the wives of Noah and his sons are only mentioned in parallel with all animals, birds and creatures taken by pairs, male and female, into the ark (7:7,13; 8:16,18). The daughters mentioned among the descendants of Shem belong to the category of nameless 'other sons and daughters' (11:11,13,15,17,19,21,23,25).

¹⁵³ Henceforth, the names of Sarah and Abraham will be used to designate the characters, who in the biblical text are called Sarai and Abram until Genesis 17.

What is the narrative function of the recurrent motif of the sterility of the mother?¹⁵⁴ It seems that the issue of sterility allows a woman's perspective to enter the story, and signals from the outset the radical difference of that perspective. Those women, who are marked with sterility, resist generalisation, they become, to various degrees, real and distinctive narrative presences, engaging and remarkable characters not because of, but despite their being mothers.¹⁵⁵

It is interesting that all three sterile matriarchs – Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel – have fuller characterisation and are distinguished by the narrative long before they become mothers. They are all depicted as beautiful women (12:11; 24:16; 29:17); Rebekah and Rachel, moreover, are loved by their husbands (25:67; 29:18, cf. 29:20, 30). Why is it so? It is obvious that they do not need to be so closely focused on in order to produce offspring. In the narrative shaped by a need to perpetuate the father, all that is required from the 'right wife' is to come from the right lineage, the lineage of Abraham. The contrast with Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob, is instructive. She makes her appearance in the story as an impostor bride, and her primary narrative function is that of bearing children. Unlike her predecessor Rebekah, and her rival sister Rachel, she conforms much more to what the institution of patriarchy requires of a woman.

Though they formally serve the purposes of patriarchy by producing offspring and securing the purity of the line, the matriarchs acquire subjectivity of their own whenever they show resistance to the structures of dominance and authority. Sterility, laughter, deceit, theft, and sacrilege are the responses women give to the world of men's power. And these responses count, they produce consequences, they are part of the narrative strategy that accepts them as valid without moral evaluation. These women's weapon and their power lie in alterity.

We are dealing with a situation where authority, that is, power institutionalised by society, rests with the patriarchs, but where the women (matriarchs) exercise considerable personal influence over the course of events.¹⁵⁶ Significantly, most of their

¹⁵⁴ Alter includes the motif of the birth of the hero to his barren mother among other biblical type-scenes. (Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981], p. 51).

¹⁵⁵ Exum sees this distinctiveness of the matriarchs as a sign of their ambiguous status and the problem they present for the narrator. As real characters, 'they resist any simple narrative resolution that would confine them entirely to the mother's place, which in the case of the genealogies means being absent, not being remembered' (*Fragmented Women*, p. 112).

¹⁵⁶ The anthropological distinction between authority and power has been successfully adopted in biblical studies of gender (see Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, pp. 40-44, 181-87; Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 136-140; Fewell and Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 73; for a bibliography of earlier studies see Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 29 n. 22).

verbal exchanges with their men consist in their giving orders, instructions or advice, always using the grammatical imperative, while we have no instances of the patriarchs addressing their wives in a similar way. Could such a persistent use of the imperative by the female characters within the family point to some other kind of authority the matriarchs are endowed with? Or, alternatively, is it a narrative way of making their voices heard?

According to Abraham in 20:12, Sarah is his half-sister, the daughter of his father Terah, but not of his mother.¹⁵⁷ Nothing is known about Sarah's (or Abraham's!) mother. Sarah, the first matriarch, does not succeed anyone but rather she herself starts a matriarchal succession, constituted by women with names, intentions, and roles to play. That succession is structurally different from the patrilineal succession from Abraham or, for that matter, from any other genealogy in Genesis in that it is not lineal, and instead is constructed by a repeated narrative pattern.¹⁵⁸

On the one hand, the matriarchs as 'right' wives are chosen from the lineage of Abraham in Haran. Thus, Rebekah is the daughter of Abraham's nephew Bethuel; Leah and Rachel are daughters of Bethuel's son Laban. Insisting on the wife from the same kin, the patriarchal narratives accept the importance of both father and mother for the purity of descent. The matriarch is a woman included in the making of the nation.

On the other hand, the matriarchs succeed each other 'narratively' rather than genealogically. The narrator never mentions the succession of the matriarchs, instead, their stories follow one another, witnessing to their continuous presence. That presence is so crucial that whenever one of them is about to leave the stage the 'successor' has already been or will soon be appointed. Such is the case with Rebekah, whose wooing and marriage to Isaac come immediately after the death of his mother Sarah. Rebekah effectively replaces the mother for her husband: Isaac takes her 'into his mother Sarah's

¹⁵⁷ In the larger context of the cycle, Abraham's claim in 20:12 appears unsupported, and has been regarded as a lie by Clines (*What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 76). Unlike Nahor's wife Milcah, who is introduced in 11:29 as a daughter of Haran, Sarah appears in the same verse without a genealogical reference. Nina Rulon-Miller considers the absence of Sarah's genealogy in 11:29 a deliberate omission that highlights the ambiguity of Sarah's position of wife-sister in Genesis 12 and 20 ('Hagar: A Woman with an Attitude', in Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines [eds.], *The World of Genesis: Persons, Places, Perspectives* [JSOT SS, 257; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], p. 68). For Exum, who reads the scene from a psychoanalytic-literary perspective, the key issue is not the truthfulness of the patriarch, but the fact that the brother-sister relationship is imagined by the narrative consciousness (*Fragmented Women*, p. 167).

¹⁵⁸ I need to emphasise that my point here is entirely narratological. From an anthropological point of view, which I shall refer to later in the study, the succession of mothers in the patriarchal narratives results from the institution of matrilineal marriage and serves the idea of endogamy underlying the self-understanding of the Israelite community. For a presentation of the discussion on the patterns of marriage and descent displayed in the patriarchal narratives, see Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 114-15.

tent', and his love for Rebekah comforts him 'after his mother's death' (24:67). It is noteworthy that it is only after the new matriarch, Rebekah, has been successfully installed in Sarah's place that Abraham takes a new wife and has children by her (25:1-6).

Twice in the narrative the new matriarch is chosen by a complex betrothal procedure. In the case of Rebekah, Isaac is represented by Abraham's servant Eliezer; in the case of Rachel, by the bridegroom Jacob himself. Significantly, both women are recognised as the chosen brides when visiting a well: the type-scene 'meeting at the well' is a sort of a narrative ritual that serves to prepare the woman for a change of status. As in the case of Rebekah (24:4), kinship between bride and groom is stressed here as well. Isaac tells Jacob: 'take a wife for yourself there from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother', 28:2, and when Jacob meets her at the well in Haran, he perceives her to have that very quality of a bride: 'Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother' (29:10).¹⁵⁹ At the same time, once Jacob has met his destined bride, his mother's matriarchal role comes to an end. This change is signalled by repeated references to Jacob's mother at the beginning of the scene (29:10, 10, 10, 12, 13), and by her complete disappearance from the moment when Jacob meets Rachel onwards.

The three matriarchs who form this succession, Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, are singled out by their beauty, initial sterility and the power they exercise over their husbands. In addition, Rebekah and Rachel are both betrothed by the well and subsequently loved by their husbands. Hagar and Leah, the other wives of Abraham and Jacob, do not share these characteristics. As I shall show below, the narrator uses them, each one in a different way, to introduce rivalry into the construction of female subjectivity and, by doing so, foregrounds the 'right' mother (Sarah and Rachel). Yet, for all the emphasis and subversive characterisation that the matriarchs receive, they never divert from their purpose of giving birth to chosen sons and ensuring their succession.¹⁶⁰ In her detailed analysis of the role of the matriarchs in Genesis 12-35, Exum has stressed the incomplete and fragmented nature of their stories, which are 'no

¹⁵⁹ The triple repetition of the formula 'Laban, his mother's brother' in v. 10 stresses the fact that Jacob has reached the place where he was commissioned to go both by his mother (27:43) and by his father (28:2).

¹⁶⁰ Hagar, who subverts her role of mother when she abandons Ishmael in the desert (21:15-16), is the only exception here (see below for an analysis of Hagar's role).

more than parts of the larger and more coherent stories of their husbands and sons'.¹⁶¹ The matriarchs' alterity and their very presence in the narrative are put to the service of the narrator's main agenda, that is, the construction of the patriarchal and ethnocentric Subject. They add complexity and credibility to the acts of succession, in which the younger sons Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, favoured by the narrative, become one after another the protagonists of the national myth.

Because of its subordinate character, the matriarchal succession comes to an end together with that of the patriarchs. Jacob, the last patriarch to receive the promise (35:10-12), is also the last one to pass on the patriarchal blessing to his sons (Genesis 49). The narrative construction of Israel's identity is completed with the birth of the twelve sons of Jacob, the eponymous ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. With the patriarchal succession ended, there is no longer any role to play for powerful mothers in the structure of the narrative. There will be, therefore, no matriarchs in the story of Joseph, whose Egyptian wife Asenath, 'daughter of Potiphera, priest of On', receives but a fleeting mention, necessary to explain the birth of Joseph's sons, and never becomes a character in her own right (41:45, 50).

The Call of Abraham and the Land (12:1-3)

The call of Abraham marks the beginning of a new kind of discourse in the account of the generations of Shem and Terah. In 12:1 Yahweh tells Abraham to leave his land, his kindred, and his father's house and go to the land, which Yahweh promises to show to him. The divine command implies a radical departure from the present identity of Abraham son of Terah, conveyed through the markers of 'land', 'relatives', 'father's house', towards a new identity, signified by the land that is, for now, only a vision. The immediate context suggests that the land Abraham has to leave is Haran, where Abraham is staying at the moment of the call (12:4), and the destination is Canaan, where Abraham will go in response to the divine command (12:5). Yahweh's speech, however, does not name either of the two lands and its references to Abraham's relatives and father's house are not as clear as they seem. What is, in any case, the land of Abraham? Haran could hardly be considered as such, since 11:31 presents the

¹⁶¹ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 96.

family's stay in Haran as a temporary stopover on the way from Ur to Canaan, the journey started by the father of Abraham, Terah. Mentioned in conjunction with his kindred and his father's house, understood as lineage,¹⁶² the phrase 'your land' in 12:1 seems to denote Abraham's native land, the land of his father, that is, Ur of the Chaldeans. In this case, as Fewell and Gunn have pointed out, it is ironic that Yahweh tells Abraham to leave his native land, which he has already done, and go to the land that had been his destination from the beginning.¹⁶³ Brett notes along similar lines that Abraham's journey to Canaan is his father's initiative, and by undertaking it, Abraham demonstrates less his split from his father than he shows his continuity with him.¹⁶⁴

Along with the idea of Abraham's land, the narrative destabilises the concepts *bêt hā'āb*, 'father's house', and *mōledet*, 'kindred, relatives'. It appears significant that Yahweh's call comes immediately after the death of Abraham's father Terah has been announced (11:32), and although Terah's life-span of 205 years suggests that he should still be alive at the time of Abraham's departure (cf. 11:26, 32; 12:4), the reader's immediate perception is that Terah is no longer there. This makes Abraham's separation from the 'empty' house of his father much less radical than Yahweh seems to suggest. In addition, Abraham's obedience to Yahweh's command, which has traditionally been deemed unquestionable, appears less certain given the number of relatives and the amount of possessions that he takes with him when he leaves Haran. In fact, Abraham seems to directly disobey Yahweh's command to leave his kindred behind by taking with him not only his wife Sarah but also his nephew Lot, along with all their possessions they have amassed and all the slaves they have acquired in Haran.¹⁶⁵ Resisting a simplistic or literal interpretation, Yahweh's command stands in tension with its narrative context, destabilising the identity of the Subject.

Sarah's sterility, announced in 11:30, is another indicator of the Subject's instability. Her lack unveils the dysfunctional dynamics of the male genealogies by pointing directly at the absence of the Mother. The father's house or lineage is tainted with (Sarah's) sterility. From a structural perspective, the metaphor of the father's land carries a connotation of emptiness: deprived of the fertility of the Mother, it holds in

¹⁶² The father's house, *bêt hā'āb*, could signify not only a family home but also a more general idea of family or lineage. In either case, the meaning of Yahweh's command is affected by the preceding reference to the death of Terah.

¹⁶³ Fewell and Gunn, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 91.

¹⁶⁴ Brett, *Genesis*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁶⁵ Lyle Eslinger sees the repeated use of pronominal suffixes ('with *him*', '*his* wife', '*his* nephew', '*their* possessions', '*their* people', 12:4-5) in the description of Abraham's departure as an indication that Abraham is not cutting off his old identity but carries it with him: 'Abram's social bridges are portable, not burnt' ('Prehistory in the Call to Abraham', *BibInt* 14 (2006), pp. 196-97; the citation on p. 197).

itself no potential, no possibility of growth. This quality of emptiness and stagnation is accentuated by the announced deaths of Haran (11:28) and Terah (11:32). In this light, it is ironic that Abraham comes on stage under the name Abram, meaning 'exalted father'. At the beginning of his journey, at the start of the patriarchal succession, the Mother is sterile and the Father is dead.

The structurally unstable and semantically empty concept of 'father's land' is contrasted in Yahweh's speech to another concept of the land, the land to which Abraham is sent. The description of the destination is strikingly non-specific, referring to the patriarch's future experience of seeing or being shown the land (*hā'āreṣ ʾāšer ʾr'ekā*) rather than a geographic location or a direction in space. In a way, Abraham's destination is constructed around him as a potential of his self-realisation (cf. *lek-likā*, lit. 'go to/for yourself', 12:1).¹⁶⁶ As a metaphor of a new identity, or 'name' (12:2), this land is tantamount to Abraham's becoming a 'great nation' and an epitome of God's blessing for 'all the families of the earth' (12:3).¹⁶⁷ At this stage, the promise of nationhood is succinct but it introduces the theme of exceeding fertility and numerous descendants that will be reiterated throughout the Abraham narrative. Metaphorically, the promised land seems to oppose the land of the Father in the same way as fertility and growth oppose sterility and stagnation.

From the perspective of gender, one might see the beginning of the patriarchal narratives as the point where the suppression of the feminine at the level of subjectivity, apparent in the preceding genealogies, begins to hinder the further development of the story. The proper story of the patriarchs, the story of 'filling the earth', can happen only when the female reality finds its way through the metaphorical aberrations and is acknowledged by the narrative consciousness. In a way, the whole idea of Abraham

¹⁶⁶ This Hebrew form, called the 'ethical dative', is used with personal pronouns in order to emphasise the significance of the verb for a particular subject (see GKC, §119s). T. Muraoka describes this usage as having 'an effect of focusing on the subject', creating 'the impression on the part of the speaker or author that the subject establishes his own identity, recovering or finding his own place by determinedly dissociating himself from his familiar surroundings' ('On the So-called *dativus ethicus* in Hebrew', *JTS* 29 (1978), pp. 495-98); see also *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew* (Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, 1985), p. 121-22.

¹⁶⁷ Here I follow the reading of R. W. L. Moberly, who, following a number of others, has argued that Gn 12:3b refers not to Abraham's mediating God's blessing to the nations, but to the nations using the name of Abraham as a synonym of blessedness. For Moberly, 'the concern is not to "save" or "reconcile" other nations. It is to establish Israel in their midst, a people where the reality of God's presence may be acknowledged by others' (*The Bible, Theology and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus* [Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000], p. 126; see also Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, pp. 175-76; Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* [London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1977], p. 177). For a detailed presentation of the discussion on Gn 12:3, see Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), pp. 176-90.

leaving the father's land could be seen as a search for the absent Mother, for the suppressed and stagnant aspect of the Subject's identity, for that without which the Subject is lifeless. With its interplay of the concepts of land and fertility, Yahweh's promise seems to hold an opening, a possibility of achieving a new balance between male and female subjectivity.

The Land as 'Own' and 'Foreign'

In the myth of the national origin of Israel related in Genesis 12-36, the concept of the land is loaded with the connotation of identity. The link between the two is expected: nations commonly derive their name and distinctiveness from the lands they occupy (e.g. the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Edomites, the Ammonites, and the Moabites of the biblical text). In the case of the patriarchs, the connection is more complicated and works the other way round. Their story has to show their entitlement to the land that is originally not their own, so that, as a result, it is a narrative of the nation that eventually gives a name and an identity to the land of Israel. Unlike the lands of other peoples, the promised land of the patriarchs is not positively defined as a spatial category, but is shaped primarily by their experience. Starting off as a non-entity, a potential, a promise without a proper name, this land grows together with the patriarchs as their journey progresses, its identity becoming a function of theirs. This is shown in the numerous instances of the patriarchs naming places after their experiences, and will become epitomised in the naming of Israel.¹⁶⁸ At a certain level, one could see here the identity of the land constructed as a narrative projection of the patriarch's Self. The internal dynamics of the patriarch's psyche leaves an imprint on the land that is an object of appropriation but simultaneously a metaphor of the very identity of the Subject.

The process of symbolically appropriating the land begins with Abraham's arrival in Canaan in 12:5-6. Compositionally, the narrator contrasts the movement *to* the land to the experience of being *in* the land: the expression *ar^ešāh k^ena'an*, 'to the land of Canaan', used twice in v. 5, sets off the double occurrence of *bā'āreš*, 'in the land', in the following v. 6:

¹⁶⁸ Cf. 16:14; 19:22; 21:31; 22:14; 26:20, 21, 22, 33; 28:19; 31:47-49; 32:2, 28, 30; 33:17; 35:7-8, 15.

12:5...they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,
12:6 Abram travelled in the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the
Canaanites were in the land.

It is interesting that the word *kēna'an*, which is used twice to indicate the direction of Abraham's journey, is not used after his arrival with the expression *bā'āreš*. This more general expression invites the reader to look at the land from the inside, as an enclosed space that contains, holds phenomena within its boundaries. Having found himself in this space, the patriarch experiences it not as Canaan, but as 'the land', and thus, presumably, recognises it as the land of Yahweh's promise. He begins by appropriating it symbolically by building altars while passing through the land (*bā'āreš*) from the north (Shechem, 12:6-7) to the south (Bethel and on towards the Negeb, 12:8-9). The narrator, however, makes apparent the ambiguity of Abraham's status in the land, which is already 'filled' with the indigenous people ('the Canaanites were then in the land', v. 6). The juxtaposition of Abraham and 'the Canaanites' within one land suggests a tension, a possible rivalry between the two parties. Having found himself 'in the land', the patriarch has to establish his identity vis-à-vis the people whose claim to the land precedes his own.

At this point Yahweh promises to Abraham, 'To your offspring I will give this land' (12:7). In Yahweh's speech, the land is an object, an externalised item of ownership, devoid of its content (the inhabitants). In the language of the promise, the land appears as empty, 'formless and void', an experiential space that is yet to be shaped by Abraham's wanderings (cf. the emphasis on the physical expanse of the land in Yahweh's utterances in 13:14, 17). Brett finds it ironic that the promise of the land is announced 'at a site that was probably sacred to the original owners of the land' and, figuratively, in their presence (12:6b).¹⁶⁹ Though a conflict seems inevitable, the narrator omits any notion of rivalry between Abraham's progeny and the Canaanites. This ambiguity will persist throughout the Abraham narrative, where Yahweh will repeatedly affirm his promise of the land to the patriarch (13:14-15; 13:17; 15:7; 15:13, 16; 15:18; 17:8; 22:17) amidst reminders that the land is already inhabited, and thus belongs to someone else (cf. 13:7; 15:18-21).

In fact, the narrator never questions the prior entitlement of the indigenous groups to the land. As a national myth, the Genesis narrative contradicts the 'ideology

¹⁶⁹ As Brett convincingly argues, the terebinth of Moreh, mentioned alongside 'the Canaanites' in v. 5, might be referring to a local cult of sacred trees and, if so, reinforces the 'Canaanite' presence (Brett, *Genesis*, p. 51).

of dispossession' permeating the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua.¹⁷⁰ The presence of the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hittites, and the Philistines is less problematic for the narrator of Genesis than it is for the patriarch himself. Despite Abraham's wariness of the locals in 12:12 and 20:11, the narrative often shows them doing their utmost in order to accommodate Abraham and his descendants and win their favour. They are portrayed as symbolic donors, not only beneficial, but crucial for the survival of Abraham's clan (Pharaoh in 12:10-20; Abimelech king of the Philistines in Genesis 20, cf. 26:6-11; Melchizedek king of Salem in 14:18-20; Ephron the Hittite in 23:3-18). Structurally, they are part of the land, so much so that the land is treated according to their righteousness. The story of Sodom, where the land is obliterated for the sins of and *together with* its inhabitants (19:24-25, 28), stands in direct contrast to the idea presented in Deuteronomy that the wickedness of the indigenous peoples should be punished by their being 'driven away' from their land (Dt 9:4-5).

Instead of developing a strong ideology of national identity with clear distinctions between 'own' and 'foreign', 'inside' and 'outside', the Genesis myth focuses on the patriarch's relationship with the land. In this relationship, the land together with its inhabitants is seen as an immediate experiential horizon, a space that needs to be 'filled' with a new meaning in a process of constructing the identity of the Subject. The lack of a clear distinction between 'own' and 'foreign' is reflected in the absence of clear territorial demarcation of the promised land. On the one hand, in 17:8 Yahweh identifies it as 'the land of Canaan', and his promises concerning 'this land' implicitly point to Canaan (12:7; 13:14-17; 15:18). On the other hand, Yahweh rarely defines the land geographically, and instead relates it to the immediate experience of the patriarch ('the land that I will show you', 12:1; 'all the land that you see', 13:15; 'walk about the land', 13:17), or simply uses a demonstrative pronoun (*'eres hazzō'ē*, 'this land', 12:7; 15:7, 18; cf. 26:3-4). On the one occasion when Yahweh promises to give to Abraham the land of Canaan, the word 'Canaan' follows the description 'the land of your sojournings' (17:8). However, the area where Abraham sojourns extends far beyond Canaan into Egypt and Gerar (12:10; 20:1; 21:23; 21:34; cf. 26:3). As Clines observes, 'the patriarchal narratives take place outside the promised land almost as much as inside it'.¹⁷¹ If all the territories where Abraham and his descendants will be staying are included in the promise, a much wider picture of the promised land emerges.

¹⁷⁰ The fact that Abraham worships Yahweh by the terebinth (12:7; cf. 13:18), also hints at the coexistence of cultic practices specifically forbidden by Dt 16:21 (see Brett, *Genesis*, p. 51).

¹⁷¹ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 49.

This picture is supported by 15:18-21, where Yahweh promises to hand over to Abraham's descendants the territory stretching 'from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates'. Since, as Brett points out, this 'inflated' image of the promised land has no relation to the historic boundaries of Israel, it blurs the distinctions even further. For Brett, the patriarchal narratives show little evidence to support seeing Egypt and Gerar as foreign lands, a feature that is more expressive of the ideological concerns of Deuteronomistic redactors.¹⁷²

A similar situation is found in 26:1-6, where Yahweh extends the Abrahamic promise to Isaac. The scene focuses on the concept of the land (the root *'rṣ* is used six times in 26:1-4), yet looks at it from two different angles. On the one hand, the territory where Isaac seeks refuge from famine is specified as the land of the Philistines ('Isaac went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines, to Gerar', v. 1). On the other hand, while Isaac is in the land that belongs to the others (cf. 15:18-21), Yahweh tells him to settle 'in this land' and promises to give 'all these lands' to him and to his descendants (vv. 3-4). The resulting suspense is centred on the question how Isaac will interpret the promise, in other words, where he is going to reside:

'... do not go down to Egypt,
 settle in the *land* that I shall tell you (v. 2).
 Reside as an alien in this *land*...
 for to you and to your seed I shall give all these *lands*... (v. 3).
 For to your seed I shall give all these *lands*...
 and in your seed all the nations of the *earth* will be blessed' (v. 4).

 And Isaac stayed in Gerar. (v. 6)

While the limits of the land (*'eres*) in Yahweh's speech are not specific and clearly expanding (cf. 'this land' - 'these lands' - 'the earth'), they are unequivocally linked to the patriarch's immediate experience. The logic of vv. 2-6 seems to suggest that Gerar *is* (or at least is *part of*) the land of the promise. The Philistines who inhabit it play the same role as the Canaanites in 12:6: their background presence as part of the land does not interfere with the patriarch's universal claim.

While, on the one hand, the lands of Abraham's wanderings all seem to be equally included in the promise, on the other hand, they all seem to be equally foreign to him. The term *nēkār*, 'foreigner' mentioned twice in the account of the covenant of circumcision, indicates a person who is not 'of the seed' of the patriarch (17:12, 27), and therefore suggests at that stage everybody except Ishmael. Strictly speaking, the

¹⁷² Brett, *Genesis*, p. 57.

only foreigner here is the patriarch himself, a figure of a 'wandering Aramean' (Dt 26:5), whose claim to identity and to the land is based on his personal relationship with the deity, unfamiliar to the locals. Not only does Abraham reside in Egypt and Gerar as an alien (12:10; 20:1; 21:34), but he also remains an alien while living in Canaan, which he himself declares during the negotiations with the Hittites: 'I am a stranger (*gēr*) and a sojourner (*tôšāb*) among you' (23:4). The text of 35:27 also uses the verb *gūr*, 'to sojourn', to describe the residence of Abraham and Isaac in the Canaanite area of Hebron (35:27).

One might conclude that the promised land in Genesis is not a pre-determined, specific territory, but an emergent, fluid idea that takes shape via the Subject's experience. It is defined by Abraham's sojournings ('*ereš m^egureykā*, 17:8), but is not made his possession. The few instances when actual purchases of the land take place (21:22-34; 23; 33:19-20) make a weak foundation for the idea of legal ownership.¹⁷³ To the patriarchs, tied to it by Yahweh's promise, the land remains an existential horizon rather than an object of appropriation or conquest.

The Gendering of the Land

From the moment of Abraham's call, the divine promise of the land appears in the narrative alongside the themes of numerous descendants and of the lasting relationship between the patriarch and Yahweh.¹⁷⁴ Clines finds that the thematic element of the land occupies a subsidiary role in Genesis, compared to its dominant role in Numbers and Deuteronomy.¹⁷⁵ This undoubtedly is the case if the land is regarded as a specific territorial entity and an object of ownership. At the level of symbolic representation, however, the land concept plays a pivotal part in the patriarchal stories in Genesis. Here the patriarch's unstable, developing subjectivity is constructed in direct relationship with the equally unstable and fluid reality of the land. If the narrative programme of Genesis 2-3 can be described as 'human being to serve the earth', the narrative programme of Genesis 12-36 is 'the patriarch in the land'.

¹⁷³ Joseph Blenkinsopp points this out in *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 101-2.

¹⁷⁴ For an exhaustive presentation of the three elements of the promise see Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*.

¹⁷⁵ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, p. 49.

From the perspective of the promise, the land associated with the patriarch receives universal connotations, becomes limitless in parallel to the equally unlimited expansion of the Subject. With Abraham (and later Jacob) positioned in the centre, this land stretches out 'to north, and south, and east, and west' (13:14; cf. 28). Even a more specific description of the land in 15:18-21 expresses a similar idea. Here Yahweh promises to give to Abraham's descendants the land 'from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates' – the entire expanse of the Fertile Crescent, the inhabited universe of the ancient Near East – and completes the picture with a substantial list of the nations whose territories are to pass over to Abraham's descendants. The expansion of the land is paralleled by an equally universal multiplication of Abraham's offspring: his descendants are going to be countless 'like the dust of the earth' (13:16), and like the stars in the sky (15:5), he will be made 'exceedingly fruitful' and will become 'nations' (17:6). Both concepts – the land and the progeny that is going to inhabit it – in the language of the promise acquire a cosmic significance. The reader finds another instance of such an expansion in 26:2-4, where the sequence 'this land – these lands – the earth' parallels the transfer of the blessing to 'all the nations of the earth' through Isaac's innumerable seed. Not only is the patriarch to achieve and channel a blessing for all humanity, but in a way he becomes a *figure* of humanity, and as such is invited to populate or fill not only the land but also, figuratively, the whole earth (*hā'āreṣ*). In this respect, Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs echoes the original blessing of humankind to 'be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth [*hā'āreṣ*]' (1:28). From God's point of view, the ultimate purpose of the Subject in both cases is to expand to the limits of the earth.

Described in universal, cosmological terms, the relationships 'humankind – earth' and 'patriarch – land' arguably carry gender connotations. On the one hand, the active subject of the relationship is male (implicitly, as humankind, *hā'ādām*; actually, as the patriarch). The male subject is ascribed the quality of excessive fertility, of self-propagation (cf. 'I will make you exceedingly [*bim'ōd m'ōd*] fruitful', 17:6). This misattribution of fertility stems from the same narrative attitude that underlies the genealogies of Genesis, where the female role in procreation is taken over by men's 'begettings'. On the other hand, the land, signified by a grammatically feminine noun *hā'āreṣ*, plays the role that structurally corresponds to the lexical construction *n^eqēbāh*, 'female'. Athalya Brenner has drawn attention to the etiology of the term *n^eqēbāh*, derived from a root denoting 'hole' or 'orifice'; in this joint biological and social

representation, a 'female' can be conceived of as an opening that requires to be filled.¹⁷⁶ Ilona Rashkow sees this etiological connotation as an essential expression of biblical views on female sexuality, suggesting that 'throughout the Hebrew Bible the biblical female is treated as a "hole" or "cavity"'.¹⁷⁷ The idea of the earth being a receptacle to be filled by the multiplying humankind of 1:28 fits well within this understanding of the feminine, pointing to what Philip Davies describes as 'the gendering of the earth (whether ^a*dāmā* or *'ereṣ*) as female'.¹⁷⁸

The idea of the patriarch's innumerable descendants filling the land follows the structural blueprint of 1:28. The narrator draws particular attention to the patriarch's staying or moving about *in* the land (overall, the words *bā'āreṣ* and *b^e'āreṣ* are used 33 times in relation to the patriarchs in Genesis 12-36). The image of the land as a receptacle holding the Subject within its borders is particularly graphic in 13:6, where the land literally cannot 'carry' the symbolic weight of Abraham and Lot staying together. Another example of symbolic gendering is found in 26:12, where Isaac sows 'in that land', and reaps a hundredfold. Elsewhere in the stories of the patriarchs, the root *zr'*, 'to sow', refers to the patriarch's offspring or 'seed', and plays a central role in the affirmation of male fertility. In 26:12 the narrator reinforces this idea by making the land play a gendered role of receiving the symbolic 'seed' of the patriarch; *hā'āreṣ* is also gendered in the way its own fruitfulness, implied in the dramatic harvest, is not clearly acknowledged, and is projected instead onto the patriarch's action of 'reaping a hundredfold'. Semiotically, *hā'āreṣ* provides 'room' for the realisation of the exceeding fertility of the male subject, who sows and reaps 'in the land'. The same idea is voiced by the patriarch himself in the naming of the well in 26:22. Here Isaac names a well 'Rehoboth', saying, 'Now Yahweh has made room (*rḥb*, lit. 'made wide') for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land'. With the patriarch, simultaneously virile and fruitful, and the land with its repressed fertility, seen as a vehicle for the multiplication of the male 'seed', the relationship between the Subject and the land in 26:12, 22 takes on structural characteristics of the model of male procreation in Genesis.

At this point in the analysis, it is possible to distinguish two levels of the narrative representation of the feminine in Genesis 12-36. On the one hand, the narratives of the patriarchs present female characters – the wives and daughters of the

¹⁷⁶ Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷⁷ Ilona N. Rashkow, *Taboo or not Taboo: Sexuality and Family in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), p. 37.

¹⁷⁸ Philip R. Davies, 'Genesis and the Gendered World', in Davies and Clines (eds.), *The World of Genesis*, pp. 7-15 (9).

patriarchs – whose narrative identity is invariably shaped by their ability or inability to produce male heirs and bring about a right succession. Like woman in Genesis 2-3, the matriarchs are constructed in relation to their task and not the patriarch. On the other hand, Yahweh's voice in the narrative foregrounds the relationship of the patriarch to the land in a way that is structurally reminiscent of the male-female relationship. The land concept is constantly referred to, placed at the top of the Subject's agenda. It is a symbolic and creative 'space' that he has to experience; it is also an object that he will eventually appropriate and fill with his own meaning and identity.¹⁷⁹ The land's expanse, or 'wideness' (*rḥb*) complements the patriarch's 'weight' (*kbd*) and is a necessary condition of his fruitfulness (26:22). While the matriarchs are 'completed' through their bearing sons, the patriarch and his 'seed' are 'completed' through their relationship with the land. In this sense, the link between the patriarch and the land in Genesis 12-36 is reminiscent of the pairing of *hā'ādām* and *hā'dāmāh* as male and female in Genesis 2-3. It is possible to interpret this pairing as a result of the Subject's unifying discourse that is structured by repression of female reality at the level of characters. In this light, positing the land as the patriarch's metaphorical counterpart might be seen as a compensation for his refusal to see a real counterpart in woman.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ The related ideas of the land's being objectified and gendered as feminine have been widely discussed in postcolonial studies. Anne McClintock has argued that, in the colonial discourse, the 'myth of the virgin land is also the myth of the empty land, involving both a gender and a racial dispossession' (*Imperial Leather* [London: Taylor and Francis, 1995], p. 30; see also Paul Hjartarson, "'Virgin Land', the Settler-invader Subject, and Cultural Nationalism: Gendered Landscape in the Cultural Construction of Canadian National Identity", in Lorraine Dowler, Josephine Carubia and Bonj Szczygiel [eds.], *Gender and Landscape: Renegotiating Morality and Space* [London: Taylor and Francis, 2005], pp. 203-20). Similarly, Renée Dickinson speaks about feminisation of the land in modernist novels, which make 'the land (and, by association, women's bodies) an empty, abject lack that must need filling, conquering, and containing' (*Female Embodiment and Subjectivity in the Modernist Novel: The Corporeum of Virginia Woolf and Olive Moore* [London: Taylor and Francis, 2009], p. 8).

¹⁸⁰ Other instances of the land's being gendered as feminine in the Hebrew Bible are found in prophetic literature and the Song of Songs. The metaphorical figure of the wife in Hosea 2 has been interpreted as the land of Israel (see Brad E. Kelle, *Hosea 2: Metaphor and Rhetoric in Historical Perspective* [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005], pp. 83-86; Francis Landy, *Hosea* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], p. 37). The garden landscape in the Song of Songs becomes a metaphor of the woman's body (Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 59; Kenneth I. Helphand, "'My Garden, My Sister, My Bride': The Garden of 'The Song of Songs'", in Dowler, Carubia and Szczygiel [eds.], *Gender and Landscape*, pp. 254-68).

The Wife-Sister Ruse: Appropriation of Fertility

The patriarch-land relationship starts off on a negative note, for Abraham initially experiences the land of Canaan as sterile. In 12:10 the narrator twice reports a famine (*rā'āb*) in conjunction with the land:

There was a famine in the land, and Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land (12:10).

Structurally, the land of the patriarch is perceived as 'empty' or 'lacking', whereas the land of Egypt is presented as a refuge, a place where the patriarch goes looking for resources to counteract and 'fill up' the emptiness of the land where he lives. One could see in this 'empty' condition of the famine an indication of the deficient state of the patriarch's identity vis-à-vis the feminine. In both its representations as a female character (Sarah) and as a metaphorical female (the land), the feminine subject withdraws its fertility from the patriarch. At the onset of the narrative, the Other is not integrated, which poses a problem for the Subject and his promised status, since becoming a 'great nation' depends on fertility of both woman and the land.¹⁸¹

On the whole, the patriarchal narratives present a series of three parallel accounts, which all describe a temporary sojourn of the patriarchs (Abraham and Isaac) in the lands of Egypt and Gerar and feature the so called wife-sister motif (12:10-20; 20; 26:1-33). Twice in those episodes the patriarchal family moves to another land because of famine (12:10; 26:1). In the wife-sister type-scene, the patriarch presents his wife to the locals as his sister, fearing that his life otherwise would be in danger from rival men. The king of the land takes her in his house (or just contemplates this possibility, 26:1-33), but when the truth comes out, the wife is returned, and the patriarch is offered a rich compensation.

Until the late 80s the three parallel accounts were examined in the scholarly literature from the diachronic point of view, as a result of combining materials from different sources or variant traditions.¹⁸² More recent synchronic studies look at the role this recurrent narrative pattern or type-scene plays in the overall story of the patriarchs, highlighting the ideological agenda and psychological tensions that underlie the

¹⁸¹ Talia Sutskovner makes a similar argument in her semiotic analysis of Ruth, where the markers of fertility and sterility are shared by both the woman (Naomi, Ruth) and the land (Moab, Bethlehem) ('The Themes of Land and Fertility in the Book of Ruth', *JSOT* 34 [2010], pp. 283-94).

¹⁸² For a brief overview of this approach see Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 148-49, 152-53.

construction of the characters.¹⁸³ In the following analysis I shall adopt a similar approach attempting to establish the structural and psychological implications the wife-sister ruse has for the formation of patriarchal identity.

At the centre of the type-scene lies a misrepresentation, a lie of the patriarch about his wife. Misrepresentation of a character is not uncommon in the patriarchal narratives: Jacob poses as Esau, Laban passes off Leah as Rachel, Tamar pretends to be a prostitute, and Joseph hides his real identity from his brothers. In most cases, the whole masquerade serves to achieve a certain pragmatic objective that is linked to the desirable status of the one whose identity is being assumed, and that in one way or another is going to benefit the person behind the ruse. Similarly, in the wife-sister type-scene, what is falsified here is not the identity of Sarah and Rebekah as such, but their status vis-à-vis their respective husbands. From the semiotic point of view, the episode is not about the matriarch in question, but about the *patriarch's* conception of her function and of its pragmatic value with respect to himself.¹⁸⁴

Instead of a closed unit, 'husband-wife', the patriarch presents his relationship to the matriarch as an open unit, 'brother-sister'. Considered from the perspective of kinship structures, the latter model presupposes the act of giving the woman away. A brother can be a dispenser of the bride alongside her father (cf. 24:55), and in the absence of the father, as it is in Sarah's case, becomes solely responsible for arranging her marriage. This leads us to the question of the patriarch's intention, which is essential for understanding the scene. Is he really concerned about his safety, or else, is he actively arranging the removal of Sarah from his house? As a wife and possession of the patriarch, Sarah is disowned; as a sister, she becomes a thing for another and an object of exchange, and is immediately recognised as such and taken away.¹⁸⁵ There is no doubt in the patriarch's mind as to the value of that object. Abraham is certain that Sarah will be desired by the Egyptians ('I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance', 12:11; cf. Isaac's analogous 'the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance', 26:7). While the beauty of the wife is regarded as semiotically negative, presenting an existential threat to the

¹⁸³ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?* pp. 67-84; Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 148-69; Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, pp. 118-50. See also Ann Marmesh, 'Anti-Covenant', in Bal (ed.), *Anti-Covenant*, pp. 48-54. Robert Alter examines the narrative function of type-scenes in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 55-78.

¹⁸⁴ The old scholarly designation of the wife-sister theme as 'the Endangered Ancestress' has been rightly refuted by Clines and Exum, who emphasise the patriarch's interests as central to the narrative (cf. Clines, 'The Ancestor in Danger: But Not the Same Danger', in *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, pp. 67-84; Exum, 'Who Is Afraid of "The Endangered Ancestress"', in *Fragmented Women*, pp. 148-69).

¹⁸⁵ In Genesis 26 the wife, Rebekah, is not taken away, but the narrative revolves around that possibility.

patriarch, the beauty of the sister is a positive category, a currency to trade and a potential source of well-being.¹⁸⁶

Though the narrator is reticent about the role of the husband in the actual removal of the wife from his house, it is implied that he consents to it. Ann Marmesh suggests that because Abraham and Isaac do not condemn the wife abduction, 'they are complicit in breaking the taboo'.¹⁸⁷ In my view, their complicity goes much further since they appear to have devised the whole scheme for personal gain. To make it worse, the patriarch cannot even be sure that his wife will ever be returned to him. Initiating the exchange, he does not anticipate that the truth would come out, neither can he expect that the foreign ruler would prove to be righteous and refuse to keep his wife, for it is the patriarch's belief that 'there is no fear of God in this place' (20:11). As far as the patriarch is concerned, he might be losing his wife forever. But may be this is really what he wants.

Looking at the patriarch's behaviour from a psychoanalytic-literary perspective, Exum regards it as an expression of man's ambiguous attitude to woman's sexuality, which he both fears and desires, and which he feels compelled to expose to another man as a means to work out his unconscious fantasies.¹⁸⁸ The conflicting psychological drives of fear and desire could also be applied to the patriarch's dysfunctional relationship to the feminine at a more general level. By repeatedly disowning his wife he might be expressing his fear of the feminine as the Other, and his unconscious wish to dispose of her. Structurally, he does it by constructing the feared Other as part of Self, that is, as his sibling, a projection and an extension of his own subjectivity. The misrepresentation of the wife might be seen, at the level of the narrative psyche, as a symptom of a deep-seated dysfunction of the Subject, incapable of binary relationship. His irrational fear of death by the hands of 'the men of the place' might therefore be a projection of an entirely different fear, the fear of alterity, manifested in a wife and suppressed in a sister. The danger may not be coming from murderous and godless rivals as the patriarch suggests, it may not even be coming from outside at all. As Clines observes, the danger is all in the patriarch's mind.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ The example of Tamar, Ammon's beautiful sister, is different in this respect, for in 2 Sam 13:1-22 there is no male rival involved to pose danger for the male subject. Tamar's beauty, being a temptation to Ammon, does not endanger anybody but herself.

¹⁸⁷ Marmesh, 'Anti-Covenant,' p. 50.

¹⁸⁸ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 157-69.

¹⁸⁹ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 68. Exum develops this point at length, adding psychoanalytic depth to the characters who serve as 'vehicles for the narrative neurosis' (*Fragmented Women*, pp. 157-59).

The patriarch's perspective is therefore characterised by the following structural correspondences:

wife = Other = death : sister = Self = life/well-being

Exum speaks of the wife-sister ruse as a possible example of incest fantasy, arising from a desire of unity with the other, from a 'narcissistic striving toward completeness or wholeness'.¹⁹⁰ The unified identity is achieved through disavowing the other (wife) and constructing her as part of self (sister). One finds a similar example of imaging wife as sibling in the designation 'flesh of my flesh', attached by *hā'ādām* to the newly created woman (2:23-24).¹⁹¹ In both cases, the male subject constructs a patriarchal ideal of a wife who is also, literally or metaphorically, 'flesh of his flesh' and therefore, an extension of his identity. Whether or not Sarah is really Abraham's sister as it is claimed in 20:12, the wife-sister motif functions as a potent symbol of patrilineal endogamy – the preferential kinship structure of the patriarchal narratives where men choose wives from their father's lineage in order to protect the identity and inheritance of the clan from outsiders.¹⁹²

This brings us to the dynamics of identity and assimilation that underlie the story of Israel's origin. Following Exum's approach of treating the characters in the story as split-off parts of the narrative psyche,¹⁹³ the figure of the wife might be seen as an aspect of the Subject's consciousness that is engaged in and affected by the processes of assimilation. The patriarch's fear for his life and well-being might be expressing the narrative concern about the identity of Israel vis-à-vis the people of the land. The Other inherent in conjugality is perceived as an unstable element threatening the androcentric and ethnocentric identity of the Subject and is therefore expelled. The ultimate horror for Abraham is that he, the male bearer of identity, would be killed, while his female Other would live, presumably, assimilated, among the people of the land (Abraham takes it for granted that Sarah should be equally horrified at the idea, 12:12). Time after time the Subject plays out his 'death by assimilation' fantasy, and each time, the ruler of the land is imagined to prevent the assimilation and restore the matriarch to her original

¹⁹⁰ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 167.

¹⁹¹ See the analysis of the speech of *hā'ādām* in Chapter 1.

¹⁹² See Naomi A. Steinberg, 'Alliance or Descent?', *JSOT* 51 (1991), pp. 52-53; *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis: A Household Economics Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 10-14; Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 107-10; Exum, 'Hagar en procès', p. 4 n. 12.

¹⁹³ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 155.

position. By the end of each account, the threat is neutralised, the Other, integrated, and the patriarch has reaffirmed his identity and gained in material wealth.

At this point, one might ask why this affirmation of identity by manipulating female subjectivity needs to be repeated over and over again. Exum considers the function of repetition in the text from the perspective of psychoanalysis, where the repetition compulsion is seen as a symptom of a deep-seated neurosis. Applying this idea to the wife-sister sequence, Exum argues that repeating the story offers a 'semiotic cure for the neurosis by working over a particularly difficult problem until it is resolved'.¹⁹⁴ In what sense, then, can we speak of the Subject being cured by the ruse? What does the narrative psyche achieve by each enactment of the wife-sister motif? Noting the changes in the narrative pattern from one episode to the next might provide an insight into the nature of the semiotic cure they effect. It would appear that, while the male subject remains unaffected, the changes each time concern the representation of the feminine in its two forms, that is, the wife and the land.

The sequence of the three episodes shows a progression in the woman's changing family status. In the first episode, Sarah is a sterile wife, the state that, according to Clines, makes her expendable.¹⁹⁵ This state has changed by the time the family comes to stay in Gerar in Genesis 20:1. In 17:16, 21 and 18:10, 14 Yahweh announces to Abraham that Sarah will give birth to a son, the heir to the promise, and the combined chronological references in 17:21, 18:10, and 21:2 suggest that Sarah must be pregnant with Isaac at the time when she is taken into Abimelech's house.¹⁹⁶ In this context, Abraham's actions are not only morally reprehensible, they also pose a direct threat to the birth of the promised heir. This might be the reason why the information about Sarah's pregnancy is suppressed in Genesis 20. By doing so, the narrator avoids casting doubt over the purity of Isaac's descent. For the same reason, the narrator stresses the righteousness of Abimelech, who does not approach Sarah sexually.

In the third episode, the matriarch comes on stage having already fulfilled her family role. The preceding narrative tells us of Rebekah's giving birth to the twins Esau and Jacob (25:21-26), and of their growing up (25:27), and the context of Genesis 27 implies that, at the time when Isaac and Rebekah stay in Gerar, both sons must be still

¹⁹⁴ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 154-55.

¹⁹⁵ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁶ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, pp. 75-76; Peter D. Miscall, *The Workings of Old Testament Narrative* (Semeia Studies, 12; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 32.

living with their parents. Once again, the account of the patriarch's ruse suppresses the crucial information about the woman's status, since the presence of the twins would have made it impossible for Isaac to claim that Rebekah was his sister.

Exum sees the suppression of the fertility of these women as one of the disturbing problems exposed by a contextual reading of the three episodes.¹⁹⁷ Since, following her reading, man's unconscious fantasies revolve around woman's sexuality, not her fertility, the theme of motherhood might be seen as an impediment to the realisation of these fantasies. One might also argue that the mother represents here the essential otherness of the feminine subject, the feature that the patriarch is trying to obfuscate in his wife by calling her his sister. The 'mother' aspect of the matriarch therefore has to be taken out of the picture. And yet the narrator acknowledges, albeit indirectly, the growing mother status of the wife by gradually reducing the degree of her exposure to outsiders. Thus, in Genesis 12, the sterile Sarah is taken into Pharaoh's house 'as a wife', which implies that she has a sexual relationship with the ruler; however, in Genesis 20, Sarah, who has received the promise of a son and may already be pregnant, is taken into the house of Abimelech but is protected by Yahweh from sexual contact. Here the narrator stresses her complete vindication before her people that includes the price of a thousand shekels of silver paid by the ruler to acquit her of all guilt (20:16). In Genesis 26, Rebekah the mother is not taken at all, and, instead, the patriarch himself openly enjoys sexual intimacy with her in 26:8.

The last scene is particularly interesting because it employs a pun on the patriarch's name *yishāq*: here Isaac is described as 'caressing [*m'ṣahēq*] his wife Rebekah'. The sexual connotation, which the verb *ṣhq*, 'to laugh', normally lacks,¹⁹⁸ in 26:8 is indicated by the reaction of the king, who interprets Isaac's action as a sign of conjugality. However, since the direct meaning of the term is uncertain, its implicit play on Isaac's name acquires more weight. From a semiotic perspective, in 26:8 Isaac acts out his identity. And since the use of the particle *'et* suggests a transitive meaning, Isaac's gesture might be read as a symbolic projection of his identity onto Rebekah, or literally, as making her 'Isaac'. The gendered Other becomes, literally, the 'image and likeness' of the Subject, and her integration is witnessed and, therefore, confirmed by a male outsider, Abimelech. By the end of the series, in which the patriarch repeatedly treats his wife as his sibling and his own flesh, unified model of subjectivity is achieved,

¹⁹⁷ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 152-53.

¹⁹⁸ BDB, p. 850.

in which woman's motherhood is simultaneously realised and hidden from view, and her threatening difference is subsumed, integrated in the Subject's identity.¹⁹⁹

In parallel with the wife's growing fertility and integration in the wife-sister sequence, there is also a progressive increase in the fruitfulness of the land and in the extent of the patriarch's association with it. At the beginning of the first episode, the patriarch's land is sterile, like his wife, and both cases of sterility receive double emphasis ('there was famine in the land', 'the famine was severe in the land', 12:10; cf. 'Sarai was barren; she had no children', 11:30). Egypt, by contrast, is presented as a land of plenty, where the family finds refuge from the famine. As a territorial and symbolic entity, Egypt has clear boundaries, which the narrator stresses when Abraham arrives in Egypt (12:10, 11, 14) and departs from it (13:1), making it clear that Egypt is not the promised land and the patriarch can associate with it only temporarily. In this 'other' land, Abraham receives from Pharaoh a symbolic equivalent of his wife – the gift of sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels (12:16) – which he takes back to the land of Canaan after he has been expelled from Egypt (12:19). The previous 'empty' condition of the patriarch's land is thus counteracted, the land being filled with the semiotic 'weight', provided by Egypt. At the lexical level, this is apparent from the parallel between the former 'heaviness' of the famine (*kābēd hārā'āb*, 12:10) and the 'heaviness' of the wealth that characterises the patriarch on his return (*w^e'abrām kābēd m^e'ōd*, 13:2). Below I shall attempt to show how this 'weight' of Egypt gives rise to the narrative strands of Lot and Hagar and thus becomes a key narrative factor in the construction of the Other.

In the second episode, the patriarch sojourns in Gerar, in the land of the Philistines (20:1). Situated half-way to Egypt, on the southern borders of Canaan, Gerar is simultaneously distanced from Egypt and reminiscent of it.²⁰⁰ Here the degree of 'wife-exposure' is reduced, but the degree of compensation increases, so that it now includes not only sheep and cattle and male and female slaves (20:14) but also a thousand shekels of silver (20:16). But, most importantly, instead of being expelled, the patriarch is now allowed to settle freely in the land ('My land is before you; settle

¹⁹⁹ Analysing the progression from a different angle, Fuchs sees in it a gradual decline in the degree of threat that the idea of woman's adultery poses to the institution of patriarchal marriage. With each episode, the threat becomes less and less real, which shows that the final goal of the narrative is 'the reinstatement of the proper conjugal relationship, namely the wife's re-inclosure within the control of her proper husband'. That this is the desired outcome for the narrator is evident from the increased wealth that accompanies the restoration of the wife to the patriarch (Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, pp. 122-23).

²⁰⁰ The association between Egypt and the Philistines is first introduced in the genealogy of Ham, where Egypt (*mišrāyim*) is said to be the father of Casluhim, the ancestor of the Philistines (Gn 10:13-14).

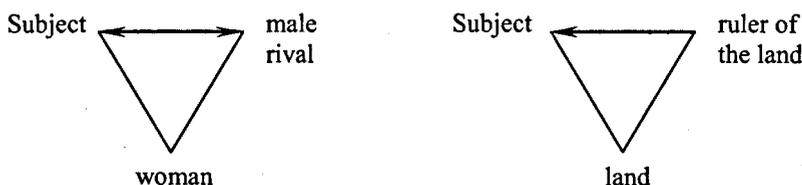
wherever you like', 20:15). Here, for the first time, the locals sanction Abraham's sojourn in the land, which until now has only been based on Yahweh's instructions.

In the last episode, the relationship between the patriarch and the land reaches its highest point, becoming fruitful. Once again, there is a famine in Canaan, and Isaac goes to Gerar, the land of the Philistines. Egypt features in 26:2, but only as a reminder of Abraham's previous journey and an occasion for a taboo. This time the wife, who is now the mother of Esau and Jacob, is not taken, and so there is no compensation, but the patriarch becomes 'very wealthy' afterwards, when he sows in the land of the Philistines and reaps a hundredfold (26:12-14). The source of wealth here is not the ruler of the land – the Other in its rival, masculine representation – but the land in its feminine aspect of bearing crops. Both the matriarch and the land have now become productive. The life-giving aspects of the feminine that the patriarch was lacking at the beginning of the series – the fertility of the wife, the productivity of the land, and the apparently endless resources of water in the wells that he digs (26:18-25) – have now become realised and symbolically appropriated.

In the light of the above observations, one might see the whole wife-sister series as a gradual construction of the patriarchal Subject in his relationship with the land. The ruse brings no immediate change in the position of the wife, who is consistently restored to her husband. By contrast, every time the patriarch hands over his wife to the other man, his position vis-à-vis the land improves, as he either receives a concession to settle in the land or acquires more of its wealth. Central to this process is the figure of the local ruler (Pharaoh, Abimelek), who represents the people living in the land and with whom the patriarch has to negotiate his right to settle. The ruler, who possesses the land, stands in structural parallel to the patriarch, who possesses his wife. Like the right to the woman, the right to the land is contested by the male Subject and the (equally male) ruler. The fact that Abraham and Isaac decline their ownership of the woman might imply, in the context of the rivalry over the land, that they invite their rivals to do the same with their property, that is, to renounce, if only partially, their ownership of the land, making the land and its wealth available to the patriarchs. The desire for the woman that the patriarch ascribes to his rival might be a projection of the Subject's own desire for the land. The triangular relationship between the patriarch, the woman, and the male rival thus reflects the implicit tensions within the triangular relationship

between the patriarch, the land, and its inhabitants.²⁰¹ The matriarch functions here as a symbolic object, the entitlement to which reflects and indirectly brings about the entitlement to the land.

Fig. 8



What is, in the end, the object of the patriarch's desire? Is it directed at the woman, whom he subsumes as his sister-wife, or at the land, the symbolic space that belongs to others and where he looks to find 'room' for himself? I suggest that the symbolic transaction in which the wife is offered to the local ruler is related at another level to the dynamic of identity that is central to the collective psyche. What the patriarch imagines as a danger to his life might represent a different kind of danger, namely, the threat that settling among outsiders poses to the identity of the community through both antagonism and assimilation. Significantly, as the series ends, the land releases its abundant crops and water resources to the patriarch and *not* the Philistines (26:12-14, 18-22, 32-33). When Isaac names one of the wells 'Rehoboth', his naming speech not only states his separation from the locals but also proclaims that a long sought-after association with the land has been achieved: 'Now Yahweh has made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land' (26:22).

There is one last, important observation to be made regarding a contextual reading of the series. It is notable that each wife-sister episode is followed by an account of conflict or separation between the male rivals or brothers within the clan. The narratives of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13, Isaac and Ishmael in Genesis 21, Jacob and Esau in Genesis 27 describe how one of the two brothers in each successful generation is removed from the chosen line and, eventually, from the land. The strategy of placing these 'brother' narratives immediately after the wife-sister episodes seems to work in support of the unified identity of the Subject: in the first movement, the

²⁰¹ Here I draw on Exum's application of the Girardian model of triangular desire to the wife-sister narratives (*Fragmented Women*, pp. 163-65).

patriarch *subsumes* the female Other and appropriates her fertility; in the second movement, he *excludes* his male Other, his rival brother, from the possibility of shared identity. By the end of the sequence, the boundaries of the andro- and ethnocentric Subject have been triply re-established.

What Is Lot's Place?

At the beginning of the cycle, Lot is an insignificant figure who shadows Abraham without playing any part in the unfolding events. And yet, insignificant as it would appear, Lot's presence is remarkably persistent. He comes on stage almost simultaneously with Abraham (11:27) and follows his movements from Ur to Haran (11:31), from Haran to Canaan (12:5). He also, presumably, accompanies the patriarch during his stay in Egypt (cf. 13:1). That Lot holds particular importance for the narrative becomes clear in 12:1-5, where Abraham takes his nephew with him to Canaan despite Yahweh's order to leave his kindred behind. Laurence Turner has found Abraham's action in Genesis 12:4-5 'inherently contradictory', amounting to Abraham's disobeying Yahweh's will.²⁰² What makes Lot so important that Abraham, who shows model obedience to Yahweh in all other respects, disregards God's order concerning his nephew?

Commentators largely agree that Abraham takes Lot with him to Canaan because at that point Abraham considers Lot to be his only heir.²⁰³ Since Sarah has been declared barren in Genesis 11:30, Lot, the son of Abraham's deceased brother Haran and the sole grandson of Terah, is the only relative who can continue the lineage. If Abraham sees Lot as his heir or even 'surrogate son' (Turner), then he might believe

²⁰² Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), p. 62; cf. also Davies, *Whose Bible Is It Anyway?* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), p. 97; William John Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis: Canonical Praxis and the Sodom Narrative* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). For a detailed analysis see also Andrew G. Vaughn, 'And Lot Went with Him: Abraham's Disobedience in Genesis 12:1-4a', in Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (eds.), *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), pp. 111-24.

²⁰³ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, p. 62; *Genesis* (2nd edn; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), p. 59; 'Lot as Jekyll and Hyde: A Reading of Genesis 18-19' in David J. A. Clines, Stephen E. Fowl and Stanley E. Porter, *The Bible in Three Dimensions: Essays in Celebration of Forty Years of Biblical Studies in the University of Sheffield* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), p. 86; Brett, *Genesis*, p. 56; Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, pp. 69-73; Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, pp. 48-52; Larry R. Helyer, 'The Separation of Abram and Lot: Its Significance in the Patriarchal Narratives', *JSOT* 26 (1983), p. 82; Nachman Levine, 'Sarah/Sodom: Birth, Destruction, and Synchronic Transaction', *JSOT* 31 (2006), p. 140.

that Yahweh intends to make him a great nation through Lot. Similarly, Clines argues that in the first wife-sister story (12:10-20) the narrator projects onto Lot the role of possible successor of the childless Abraham, of one through whom the promise can still find its way, diverted though it might be, towards fulfilment. For Clines, barren Sarah becomes expendable in Egypt because of the implicit presence of Lot.²⁰⁴

The same logic has been attributed to Abraham in 13:8-9, where he offers Lot the choice to occupy the land of Canaan to the left (the north) or to the right (the south) of Bethel. Joseph Blenkinsopp maintains that by offering to share the land with his nephew, Abraham treats him as his presumptive heir.²⁰⁵ Later in the cycle, Abraham shows remarkable commitment to his nephew's welfare. In Genesis 14 Abraham starts a military campaign to rescue Lot who has been taken captive by foreign kings, and in 18:20-33 he bargains with Yahweh, trying to spare Lot's city Sodom from looming destruction. For John Lyons, this special association between Abraham and his nephew can be understood only in terms of Lot's position as Abraham's heir.²⁰⁶ Lou Silberman summarises this view, seeing the Lot strand in the narrative as the 'teasing motif of the presumed heir', which serves to forward the plot, building up the tension between Yahweh's promise and the lack of the conditions, necessary for its fulfilment.²⁰⁷

It is not possible, however, to interpret all of the Lot material in terms of his status as Abraham's heir. Early in the cycle, Lot places himself outside the promised land: in Genesis 13 he chooses to dwell to the east of Canaan, in Sodom.²⁰⁸ If Lot has ever had a claim to inherit the land of Canaan, now he must have relinquished it. Yahweh himself indicates this when he waits until Lot has left before showing the promised land to Abraham (13:14-17). Abraham, for his part, in his conversations with Yahweh will never name Lot, thinking that first Eliezer of Damascus ('one born in my house', 15:2), and then his son Ishmael (17:18) would inherit after him. Yet losing the claim to the land does not diminish the interest Lot presents to the narrator. A large portion of the narrative – chapters 14 and 19 – is dedicated to the description of what happens to Lot after his separation from Abraham. Lot's story becomes a lengthy sideline or, in the words of Silberman, a diversionary or retarding novella that appears

²⁰⁴ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 69.

²⁰⁵ Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, p. 101. See also Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis*, p. 132; Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, p. 67; *Genesis*, p. 63.

²⁰⁶ Lyons, *Canon and Exegesis*, p. 132.

²⁰⁷ See Lou H. Silberman 'Listening to the Text', *JBL* 102 (1983), p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Clines considers the valley of the Jordan to be 'unquestionably a part of the land', meaning the land of Yahweh's promise (Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 72). I would argue that the internal geography of Genesis 13 separates Canaan from the valley where Lot chooses to settle (cf. 13:12).

to have no bearing on the main plot.²⁰⁹

If the idea of Lot as a possible descendant of Abraham does not justify this elaborate story, could there be another explanation? The etiology that concludes the Lot story (19:30-38) links it to the historic consciousness of Israel, tracing the ancestry of Moab and Ammon back to Abraham. Clines sees this episode as the first sign that the Abrahamic promise of becoming 'a multitude of nations' is beginning to be fulfilled (17:4; cf. 12:2). For him, this fact in itself justifies the narrator's attention to Lot.²¹⁰ Brett expresses a similar opinion, reading the incest episode as 'an extravagant fulfilment of the promise'.²¹¹ This being so, Abraham's deep engagement with his nephew suggests that Lot's function in the narrative might be more immediate, having a direct bearing on the identity of the patriarch himself.

As a starting point for re-examining Lot's place, I suggest going back to the genealogical data in 11:27-32. In the account of the generations of Terah, the three sons of Terah – Abraham, Nahor and Haran – feature alongside his grandson Lot, the son of Haran. Although a similar genealogical formula presenting three or more successive generations at once could be found elsewhere (4:18; 10:7; 24), the mention of Lot stands out in the strictly formulaic sequence of Genesis 11. What follows is even more specific: Lot's father Haran dies in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his birth (11:28). From a narratological point of view, Haran's story is cancelled out, reverted to its beginning, and his place passes on to Lot. By standing in his father's place as one of the heirs of Terah, Lot acquires a parity of status with Abraham and Nahor. The following narrative juxtaposes Abraham and Lot as the two male members of the family whom Terah takes with him to Haran: 'Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife' (11:31).²¹² With Sarah sterile, and Nahor absent, Lot is, indeed, the most likely

²⁰⁹ Silberman, 'Listening to the Text', p. 20.

²¹⁰ Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?*, p. 73.

²¹¹ Brett, *Genesis*, p. 69.

²¹² It is notable that Nahor and his wife are not mentioned as part of the group leaving for Canaan. They will also be absent at Terah's arrival in Haran, at the time of his death and at the moment of Abraham's call. Never getting a chance to act and become a character in his own right, Nahor will reappear later as the originator of the clan that will provide brides for Abraham's descendants (22:20-24; 29:5). By then Nahor will have settled in Aram (cf. "Aram-naharaim, the city of Nahor", 24:10) as will his son Bethuel (cf. "go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, 28:2, cf. 28:5), and the place of the residence of Nahor's clan will be further specified as Haran (cf. 27:43; 29:4-5), the town where Abraham's journey started. This suggests that Nahor might have after all travelled with Terah in 11:31, but was left unmentioned. By leaving Nahor out, the text emphasises the connection between Abraham and Lot, the two male members of the family who would make it to Canaan.

candidate to continue the lineage. However, the lineage Lot represents is that of Terah and not of Abraham.

Arguably, this distinction holds for the rest of the Abraham cycle. Put from the start in the position of Abraham's brother, Lot never comes to represent the line of Abraham, but features alongside him as his equal and potential rival. This becomes most apparent in the scene of their separation in Genesis 13. Here Lot matches Abraham in wealth and, arguably, in status. The two of them have brought abundant possessions from Egypt: Abraham is now 'very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold' (13:2), and so is Lot, who has flocks and herds and tents (13:5). Their parity of status leads them to separate, as the land cannot 'carry' both of them living together (13:6), the detail that parallels the account of the separation of another pair of brothers, Jacob and Esau (36:7). And so Abraham, calling Lot his brother (13:8), suggests that they go their opposite ways – the proposition that amounts to splitting the land in half ('if you take the left hand, I will go to the right; if you take the right hand, I will go to the left', 13:9). Contrary to the above mentioned conclusion of Blenkinsopp and Turner, this offer makes better sense if Lot is seen not as an heir – an heir does not come into possession of the land until the death of the predecessor, in which case the land is left undivided – but as a brother, equal in status to Abraham. Such is the view of Steinmetz, who sees Lot as Abraham's surrogate brother and competitor.²¹³ That Lot does not take Abraham's offer to take the land either to the right (south) or to the left (north) of Bethel, and instead moves eastwards (*miqqedem*), links him to the motif, recurrent in Genesis, of 'the eastward movements of the dispossessed'.²¹⁴ This motif features displaced brothers, who have to leave in order to free the space for the chosen heir. Fitting into this pattern are Cain, who moves to the east of Eden (4:16), the sons of Abraham's concubines sent by their father to the east country (25:6), and Esau, who settles to the southeast of Canaan, in Seir (36:8). The spatial marker 'east' brings in the connotation of both otherness and rivalry, associated in the historic consciousness of Israel with the peoples dwelling east of Canaan (cf. the expression 'sons of the east' that designates the tribes hostile to Israel in Judg 6:3, 33).

Playing the role of Abraham's surrogate brother, Lot is also constructed as the patriarch's structural shadow. This is indicated in Genesis 18-19, where Lot's story runs parallel to that of Abraham, forming an antithesis to it. One after the other, both men are

²¹³ Devora Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict, and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), p. 90.

²¹⁴ Turner, *Genesis*, p. 62.

visited by Yahweh's messengers and both show hospitality to them. In Abraham's case, the positive encounter leads to the announcement of the miraculous birth of the true heir to his aged and barren wife Sarah. Lot, in his turn, also welcomes the messengers, but his hospitality is compromised by the attack of the Sodomites, and he himself has to be rescued and led by the hand out of the doomed city. Unlike Abraham's strand with its positive promise of a descendant and an assertion of his wife's fertility, Lot's story ends on a low note. His wife turns into a pillar of salt when she looks back at the perishing Sodom, his house and possessions are lost and his land is destroyed. Although the episode concludes with an account of the births of Lot's sons (cf. the announcement of a birth of a son to Sarah in 18:10, 14), it is overshadowed by incest. Lot ends up living in isolation in a cave with his two daughters and fathers their children, the eponymous ancestors of Moab and Ammon, the two neighbouring nations hostile to Israel (19:30-38).

Why does the narrative of the promise need Lot, a passive and weak shadow of Abraham, who is besieged by disasters and constantly needs rescue and assistance? One possible way to understand the relationship between Abraham and Lot would be to see it as a mediator for the deeper tensions surrounding the issues of identity and the land. In the following analysis I propose that the significance of Lot in the Abraham narrative arises in the context of Israel's ambivalent attitude to Egypt. The figure of Lot – and of Hagar later in the cycle – will be seen as a narrative outlet for disposing of the symbolic 'weight' of wealth and fertility, carried by Abraham out of Egypt, and purging its 'contamination'. To be able to proceed with this argument, it is necessary to consider briefly the unique place Egypt occupies in the narrative of Israel's origin.

Egypt plays a special role in the construction of Israel's national identity on more than one level.²¹⁵ In the patriarchal narratives, Egypt appears as a place of refuge, the country that provides vital resources and assures the survival of the chosen line. The narrative memory of Israel endows Egypt with a connotation of prosperity and fertility. The narrator stresses that after Jacob's family had settled in the region of Goshen in Egypt, 'they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied exceedingly' (47:27). The same theme continues into the book of Exodus, which states that during their four hundred years of sojourn in Egypt the Israelites were 'fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them' (Ex

²¹⁵ Pieter de Boer stresses the ambivalence of the biblical image of Egypt in his article 'Egypt in the Old Testament: Some Aspects of an Ambivalent Assessment' (see Pieter de Boer, *Selected Studies in Old Testament Exegesis* (ed. C. van Duin ; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), pp. 152-67).

1:7). The original blessing 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth' (1:28) is realised in Egypt in the way it is not realised anywhere else. In this process of 'filling the land' the Israelites form their identity, becoming 'a great, powerful, and numerous nation' (Dt 26:5). Diana Lipton follows the *Passover Haggadah* in her conclusion that Israel as a nation becomes 'distinguishable' in Egypt.²¹⁶ In Num 22:5, 11 this powerful imprint on Israel's identity is acknowledged when the king of Moab describes the Israelites as 'a people who came out of Egypt'.

Notwithstanding its positive connotations, Egypt is also portrayed in the Hebrew Bible as the place of captivity and oppression, the exodus from which is seen as liberation and the single most powerful factor in the formation of Israel's self-image (Dt 26:6-8). The prophetic writings associate Egypt with moral and religious corruption, the origin of Israel's religious 'whoredom' (Hos 2:15; Ezek 23:27). In her incisive interpretation of the portrayal of Egypt in Exodus, Lipton suggests that this ambivalence originates in the Israelite resistance to the powerful attraction exerted by Egypt and to the ensuing threat of assimilation.²¹⁷ For her, the danger of Egypt lies not in its oppressive treatment of the Israelites, but in being 'the apex of the seductive other'.²¹⁸

The thriving civilisation along the Nile, with its developed irrigation and agriculture, represents everything the promised land is not. In contrast to Canaan, 'a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven', Egypt is likened to a 'garden of vegetation' (Dt 11:10-11), an image reverberating with the garden of Eden in the Hebrew creation myth. The desert experience following the exodus is marked by longing for Egypt and its abundance of grain, figs, vines, pomegranates, and drinking water (Num 20:5; 21:5), its pots of meat and its bread (Ex 16:3). In their search for a land and identity of their own, the Israelites constantly need to confront the desire to go back (Num 11:20; 14:2) and to reaffirm their distance from the lost paradise of Egypt.

At the beginning of the patriarchal narratives, the image of Egypt exerts a similar appeal. For Abraham, it has become the source of material abundance, profusion of wealth. Later in the narrative, it will also give him his first son Ishmael through Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian slave (16:15). To pinpoint the contrast between 'before' and 'after', the narrator makes Abraham return to Bethel and build an altar once again where he made an altar 'at the beginning' (13:3-4; cf. 12:8). With this, Abraham has come

²¹⁶ Diana Lipton, *Longing for Egypt and Other Unexpected Biblical Tales* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), p. 15, n. 17.

²¹⁷ Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, pp. 13-49.

²¹⁸ Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, p. 14.

round a full circle, having appropriated along the way the physical and symbolic blessings of Egypt.

It is at this point that Abraham's 'brother' Lot comes into focus. Like Abraham, Lot also possesses 'flocks and herds and tents' that have arguably come from Egypt (13:5). This abundance of wealth makes it impossible for the two to stay together (cf. the double negation of the phrase *lāšebeṭ yaḥdāw*, 'dwelling together', 13:6). The problem has to do with the land, which literally cannot 'carry' them (*nāsā*) with their flocks and herds. This leads to a territorial conflict between Abraham's and Lot's herdsmen (13:7-8). To resolve the conflict, Abraham suggests separating, allowing Lot to choose his part of the 'whole land' to the north or south of Bethel. Lot, however, looks beyond the hill country of Canaan to the east and chooses to settle in the Jordan valley (13:10).

A few observations must be made with respect to Lot's choice. First, the description of the valley carries clear allusions to the garden of Eden. Like the garden, watered (*šqh*) by the river flowing out of Eden in 2:10, the valley of the Jordan is 'well watered (*šqh*) everywhere' and is compared to the 'garden of Yahweh'. The reference to Eden is also supported by the eastern location of the valley (13:11; cf. 'Yahweh God planted a garden in Eden, in the east', 2:8). Looking to the east, Lot might also be reminded of his native Mesopotamia (cf. 'Ur of the Chaldeans', 11:28), the area associated with Eden.

Second, the Jordan valley is reminiscent of another image of paradise. It is compared to the land of Egypt, which Lot and Abraham have just come back from and whose riches weigh so heavily on them that they have to separate. The joint image of Eden and Egypt functions as a metaphor of plenty that contrasts with the ideas of famine and sterility that the narrator has so far associated with the hill country of Canaan. The opposition between Canaan and Egypt is also maintained in the contrast between Abraham's nomadic lifestyle and Lot's settling 'in the cities of the plain' (13:12). The land that Lot chooses is everything Canaan is not. An urban culture that has developed in a fertile river valley, it carries an imprint of the seductive Other that is Egypt.

Third, the enticing images of both Eden and Egypt also bring in a context of suspicion. Eden and the east carry the negative connotations of judgment and expulsion, with the image of the cherubim with the flaming sword guarding the way to the tree of life at the east of the garden (3:23-24). It is also the direction of the land Yahweh

ordered Abraham to leave at the beginning of his journey. On the other hand, along with its bountiful qualities, Egypt is also associated with perceived threat to the life and honour of the patriarch as well as his expulsion (12:10-20).²¹⁹ Notably, the text of 13:10 shares a common thematic thread with both the Eden narrative and the story of Abraham's stay in Egypt, for each of them communicates an experience of enticement. Like woman looking at the tree in the garden (3:6), and like the Egyptians who see the beauty of Sarah (12:12, 14-15), Lot looks at the land and is drawn to what he sees.²²⁰ The object of looking is seductive. It is also compromised, as the narrator hurries to indicate in parenthesis, telling the reader about the looming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the iniquities of the Sodomites (13:10, 13). The lush and seductive image of the valley in the east, so closely resembling both Eden and Egypt, is tainted by the wickedness of its inhabitants and an expectation of judgment. The paradise of Egypt is no sooner regained than it is renounced.

The narrator upholds the context of suspicion by putting the reference to Egypt next to the place-name Zoar, one of the key words in the Lot story. On the whole the root *š'r*, 'be small, insignificant', is reiterated here thirteen times, of which nine occurrences refer to the town Zoar to the south-east of Canaan. Zoar is the place where Lot initially seeks refuge from the destruction of Sodom, attaching particular importance to its small size, or 'insignificance' (19:20-23). The repeated allusions to Zoar toward the end of the Lot narrative seem to fit in with the general sense of decline that characterises the story. In 13:10 the reference to Zoar might hint at the impending loss of significance, attached to the potent symbols of the 'garden of Yahweh' and the 'land of Egypt'.

In this light, one might see Lot's story as a narrative mechanism that neutralises or negates the significance of the seductive Other. The semiotic 'fullness' of the foreign land (Egypt), which is at one level used to nourish the patriarchal Subject, is at another level put under suspicion, problematised by its narrative association with Sodom. From a psychoanalytical point of view, the tension between the beneficial and threatening aspects of the Other is resolved in terms of projection, whereby the narrator projects Abraham's compromising association with Egypt onto the figure of his surrogate brother Lot and disavows this association through Lot's demise.

²¹⁹ See Turner, *Genesis*, p. 62.

²²⁰ Steinmetz notes that being enticed is a characteristic that Lot shares with the Egyptians, who 'follow what they see, but what they see leads them to misperceive what they should do' (*From Father to Son*, p. 80). I would resist, however, interpreting experiences of desire and enticement as a mark of moral failure.

In studies of the Lot narrative, there has been a tendency to picture Lot in ethical-theological opposition to Abraham. The fact that Lot chooses to move out of the hill country of Canaan into the fertile valley of the Jordan has been interpreted as an error of judgment, an act of self-interest that makes him lose his place in the chosen lineage.²²¹ In this traditional understanding, as Turner puts it, Genesis 13 communicates 'the final rupture between godly Abraham and his hedonist nephew'.²²² Fretheim and Steinmetz both speak about Lot's flawed perception, a disjunction between the way he sees the land and the negative context in which the land is presented to the reader.²²³ Even Lot's hospitality to the divine messengers in 19:1-3 has attracted opposing views. E. Speiser and Sharon Jeansonne in particular have emphasised that Lot's welcome is inferior compared to that shown by Abraham in 18:1-5. In the context of Abraham's intercession for the righteous of Sodom in 18:22-33, Lot's failure to protect his guests might appear as a lack of righteousness, since Yahweh will not spare Sodom for his sake.²²⁴ In a different vein, Jeansonne and John Skinner have questioned Lot's righteous character with respect to his outrageous treatment of his daughters, whom he offers to the mob for rape in order to protect his guests.²²⁵

These readings share the assumption that Lot's fate results from his own moral failure. In my opinion, Lot's integrity is irrelevant for the narrator, who contrasts the righteousness of Abraham (18:19) with the wickedness of the Sodomites (13:13; 18:20-21; 19:4-11, 13). Linked to the sin of its inhabitants, the fate of Sodom is predetermined and does not depend on Lot's actions. Remarkable in this respect is the scene of intercession in 18:22-33, where Abraham tries to persuade Yahweh to spare Sodom. It is surprising that Abraham, who in Genesis 14 sprang to the rescue of his nephew, now does not plead for Lot or even mention him. Instead, he focuses on Sodom as a whole, hypothesising on the number of righteous people sufficient to stop the destruction of the city. Yet his intercession stops at the minimum of ten, which makes it impossible to

²²¹ Helyer, 'The Separation of Abram and Lot', p. 86; G. W. Coats, 'Lot: A Foil in the Abraham Saga', in J. T. Butler *et al.* (eds.), *Understanding the Word: Essays in Honour of Bernhard Anderson* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), p. 127.

²²² Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, p. 69. While he too contrasts Lot and Abraham, Turner nevertheless disagrees with the scholarly consensus that, by moving eastwards, Lot loses his right to the promised land. For Turner, the plain of the Jordan is arguably included in the land promised to Abraham after the separation (pp. 67-68).

²²³ Terence E. Fretheim, *Abraham: Trials of Family and Faith* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), p. 67; Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, p. 80.

²²⁴ Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 138-39, 143; Sharon Pace Jeansonne, 'The Characterisation of Lot in Genesis', *BTB* 18 (1988), p. 126. At the opposite end of the controversy is T. Desmond Alexander, who sees Lot consistently pictured as righteous (T. Desmond Alexander, 'Lot's Hospitality: A Clue to His Righteousness', *JBL* 104 [1985], p. 290).

²²⁵ Jeansonne, 'The Characterisation of Lot in Genesis', pp. 31-32; Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 307.

know whether or not Lot is found among the righteous. For even if Lot and all his relatives were righteous, that would only make six people in total and Sodom would still be doomed. It seems that by not letting Abraham go below the number of ten righteous, the narrative avoids the necessity of judging Lot either way. Lot's actions in Genesis 19 are not portrayed as intrinsically wrong or right. Instead, they clearly demonstrate his non-belonging with the Sodomites. The narrator takes pains to separate Lot from the wicked city.²²⁶ The fact that Lot remains an outsider at every stage of the narrative suggests that the unfolding drama is centred not on Lot, but on the fate of Sodom, the land where he has chosen to settle.

The assumption about the primary importance of Sodom over Lot receives support from the fact that Abraham shows no concern for Lot following the destruction of the city. In 19:28 Abraham looks toward 'all the land of the valley' and sees 'the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace', yet he does not question the fate of his 'brother'. Does this reticence mean that he presumes Lot has perished together with Sodom? Or could it mean, alternatively, that Abraham has seen all he needed to see, that is, that the land Lot had once chosen has been wiped out? Strikingly, the picture of devastation that Abraham sees stands in clear antithesis to the description of the valley as seen by Lot in 13:10.

Fig. 9

13:10
 Lot lifted up his eyes
 and he saw
all the valley of the Jordan
well-watered everywhere
 before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah
 like the garden of Yahweh
 like the land of Egypt

19:28
 Abraham looked down
 and he saw, and behold,
all the land of the valley
the smoke of the land
 toward Sodom and Gomorrah
 like the smoke of a furnace

The antithetic parallelism between the two verses suggests that the movement that started with the separation of Lot is now completed. The very essence of the land's former appeal is negated, as the irrigated valley turns into its opposition, a burnt

²²⁶ Lot is a resident alien (*ger*, 19:9) in Sodom, and the narrative presents a number of spatial indications of his separate status. At the beginning, he is positioned at the gateway to the city (19:1) and later argues with the Sodomites at the entrance to his house, after which he takes refuge behind a closed door; at the end, he escapes from Sodom and goes to the hills, separating himself from the inhabitants of the plain.

wasteland, an aftermath of destruction that reminds the reader of Yahweh's undoing of creation by the flood.²²⁷ Where Lot once saw the lush paradise of Egypt, Abraham finds a smoking furnace. Egypt, that came on stage as the land of plenty, bestowing on the patriarch its 'heavy' riches (13:2), is thus disposed of, having been condemned and punished, its wickedness as exceeding as its wealth (cf. *m^e'ōd*, 13:2, 13). From this angle, the story of Sodom appears to be a warning against turning back to Egypt (cf. 'you must not go that way again', Dt 17:15-16), a symbolic antidote to the yearnings, embedded in the historic consciousness of the Israelites.

Robert Letellier draws attention to the pronounced dark symbolism of the Sodom account.²²⁸ In contrast to the divine visitation of Abraham in Mamre that takes place at midday (18:1), the divine messengers enter Sodom at nightfall (19:1), and the confrontation between Lot and the Sodomites takes place during the night. The sun rises only after Lot and his family have been physically removed from Sodom and reached Zoar (19:23). Letellier recognises here some elements of the folk motif that Jung describes as the 'night journey', where the hero undergoes a transformation by descending into the underworld or inside a mythical beast. Using the nocturnal symbolism is clearly part of the narrator's strategy, yet this motif in the Lot narrative is nuanced by the absence of a positive hero and of clear transformation. Although the sunrise sees Lot come out of Sodom, he almost immediately hides himself in the darkness of the cave, where, instead of positive transformation, he experiences further regression and the confusion of status. This is not surprising if one accepts that the character of Lot functions as a projection of Abraham's identity. Arguably, in the larger context of the cycle, the real subject of the 'night journey' of Sodom is the patriarch himself. For the narrator, the real purpose behind the cosmic obliteration of Sodom is not to punish the wicked, but symbolically to dispose of the land that has become 'the apex of the seductive other'.²²⁹ By first demonising the inhabitants of the other land and then wiping that land out altogether, the narrative advocates both the absolute righteousness of the patriarch and the unrivalled value of the land that has been promised to him.

²²⁷ On the parallels between the destruction of Sodom and the devastation of the flood see Robert Alter, 'Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative', in Jonathan Goldberg (ed.), *Reclaiming Sodom* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 35.

²²⁸ Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Day in Mamre, Night in Sodom: Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), pp. 223-24.

²²⁹ See above, p. 107 n. 218.

From a semiotic point of view, Lot mediates re-structuring of the narrative psyche, representing the part of it that, having fallen for the seductive Other, is then committed to destruction. It appears significant that, having survived the catastrophe, Lot is nevertheless decidedly ruined. As far as he is Abraham's projection, he remains alive (a fact stressed in 19:29), yet he is reduced first to 'insignificance' (Zoar) and then to seclusion in a cave. The angels lead Lot out of Sodom stripped of all his possessions, the 'flocks and herds and tents', which once made Abraham seek separation from him (13:5). The fruitful valley that once embodied for him the paradise of Egypt is now irretrievably lost, so cut off from the Subject that even looking back at it imparts death. It seems logical that Abraham should 'forget' about Lot toward the end of the story. With Lot, the patriarch cuts off the part of himself that is susceptible of turning back to Egypt. Having mediated the Subject's dissociation from the 'other' land, Lot has fulfilled his role and is pushed out to the dark recesses of both the narrative world and the Subject's consciousness.

'There Is No Man in the Land': Distortion of Gender in Lot's Story

It might be argued that the mechanism of projection underlying the character Lot upsets the balance of gender in the narrative. Having projected its hidden yearnings for the Other onto the figure of Abraham's nephew, the narrative consciousness finds psychological release by constructing his land, Sodom, as the 'other' land – an anti-world, where boundaries are blurred and hierarchies reversed, the place of sterility, sexual violence, incest, and destruction. Letellier holds that practically every scene in Genesis 19 revolves around sexuality.²³⁰ To qualify this remark, I would add that sexuality and gender are not the narrator's primary concern, but serve to signify the inverted structure of subjectivity associated with Sodom.

The first notable feature that distinguishes the presentation of gender in Genesis 19 is its lack of normative patriarchal characters. The weak and passive Lot hardly cuts a convincing figure as a patriarch. At the beginning of the episode he has daughters and no sons and is, therefore, genealogically 'sterile', with no chance of preserving his lineage. He has no power to protect his guests or authority to persuade his prospective

²³⁰ Letellier, *Day in Mamre*, p. 252.

sons-in-law to join him. In 19:14, his words appear to them as laughable (*m^eṣahēq*), as did the announcement of childbearing to Sarah in 18:12.²³¹ He has to be led out of Sodom by hand, and loses his wife along the way. After the destruction of the valley, he settles in a cave, is made drunk by his daughters, has sex with them, and becomes the father of his own grandchildren.

Male subjectivity is further destabilised by the references, direct or implicit, to illicit forms of sexual intercourse, condemned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, that is, homosexuality and incest (Lv 18:6-7, 22; 20:13). It should be noted that, despite the long tradition of interpretation that associated the 'exceeding wickedness' of the Sodomites with practice of homosexuality, the allusion to it in the text is not clearcut. On the one hand, the Sodomites' demand to 'know' Lot's guests (19:5) implies a threat of homosexual violence. Among its other meanings, the verb *yādā'* denotes sexual intercourse performed by a male subject, and it is this meaning that Lot seems to corroborate when he offers his two virgin daughters to the crowd, presumably, to be 'known' in the place of his male guests.

On the other hand, the verb *yādā'* may be used here in the sense of intellectual knowledge. As Lyn Bechtel points out, the men of Sodom may simply want to know what the two strangers are doing in the city (after all, the latter threaten the very existence of their community). Alternatively, they may intend to 'know' Lot's guests sexually, in which case, Bechtel argues, the issue is not their homosexual orientation, but their desire to establish dominance through rape.²³² Van Wolde maintains that while the Sodomites' want to know whether the strangers represent a threat to the community, Lot interprets their demand in a sexual sense, and this interpretation is confirmed by the narrator.²³³ Although the position of the Sodomites remains ambiguous, Lot's response gives it a particular angle. The reader will find a similarly ambiguous usage of *yādā'* at the end of the narrative, where the phrase *lō'-yāda'* indicates Lot's absence of awareness while playing, at the same time, on his passive sexual role in the incest episode (19:33, 35).²³⁴

²³¹ Nachman Levine sees the two instances of laughing as part of the complex opposition drawn in Genesis 18 and 19 between the themes of birth and destruction ('Sarah/Sodom', p. 132).

²³² Lyn M. Bechtel, 'A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1-11' in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis*, pp. 117-120.

²³³ van Wolde, 'Outcry, Knowledge, and Judgment in Genesis 18-19', in Diana Lipton (ed.), *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah: Essays in Memory of Ron Pirson* (Ancient Israel and Its Literature, 11; Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), p. 96.

²³⁴ For further bibliography on the subject of *yādā'* in the Sodom narrative see Exum, 'Lot and His Daughters', in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, p. 140.

It is because the sexual connotation of the attack is retained in Lot's discourse that the implications of homosexual rape for the Subject should be examined. In recent scholarship the Sodomites' demand has been linked to their wish to dishonour Lot's male visitors by treating them sexually as women.²³⁵ Directed at the male subject (the guests and Lot himself), the Sodomites' threat carries the ideas of symbolic emasculation and sterility through homosexual rape and is therefore abhorrent to patriarchal consciousness, of which Lot is a spokesperson. The implied loss of masculinity is regarded as a far greater evil for the Subject than a heterosexual rape of Lot's virgin daughters.²³⁶ This is illustrated on a lexical level in the dialogue in 19:7-9. Here Lot asks the Sodomites not to act wickedly (*rā'a*), and offers his two daughters for them to do instead 'what is good (*tôb*)' in their eyes. In reply, the men of Sodom threaten to deal with Lot worse (*rā'a*) than they would have dealt with his guests. The verb *rā'a*, 'to be (do) bad' is used twice to characterise prospective homosexual violence, while the word *tôb*, 'good' is associated with heterosexual rape. Lot's offer could thus be seen semiotically as an attempt to counteract the reversal of gender hierarchy intended by his fellow citizens. The underlying assumption that the loss of masculinity is a greater evil makes the narrator (and generations of later commentators) ignore the abhorrence of the father's offering his young daughters to the violent mob.²³⁷ There is, however, an indication of narrative judgment on Lot's disposal of his daughters' sexuality in the incest scene, where the daughters assume control over the sexuality of their father (19:30-38).²³⁸

From the point of view of the patriarchal Subject, in Genesis 19 the male sexual drive as an expression of dominance is turned onto itself, introspected in both its homosexual and incestuous guises. Linked to a state of weak or compromised

²³⁵ Nathan MacDonald, 'Hospitality and Hostility: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of 2 Samuel 10 (and Vice Versa)', in Lipton (ed.), *Universalism and Particularism*, p. 184.

²³⁶ Letellier, *Day in Mamre*, p. 252.

²³⁷ For an overview of the commentators who either ignore Lot's offering of his daughters or find it mitigated by the demands of hospitality, see Rashkow, 'Daddy-Dearest and the "Invisible Spirit of Wine"', in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis*, pp. 100-2. On a different note, Bechtel suggests that Lot makes his offer 'in confidence that its incongruity and inappropriateness will stop the action and prevent further aggression' (Bechtel, 'A Feminist Reading', p. 124).

²³⁸ Brett considers the narrative in 19:30-35 an example of poetic justice, 'a fitting fate for someone willing to bargain away his daughters' sexuality' (*Genesis*, p. 68). Similarly, Weston W. Fields holds that in the incest scene Lot is 'punished measure for measure' for his earlier treatment of his daughters (Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative* (JSOT SS, 231; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 124). See also Letellier, *Day in Mamre*, p. 187. In her psychoanalytic-literary reading of Genesis 19, Exum sees the episode of 19:1-29 as a first, unsuccessful attempt of the narrative unconscious to fantasise about the father's sexual relations with his daughters, 'a prelude to the version in vv. 30-38, in which the fantasy is narratively realised' (Exum, 'Lot and His Daughters', in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, p. 140).

masculinity, this introspection might be seen as a symbolic castration of the Subject resulting from Lot's association with the 'other' land. The 'wicked' world of Sodom represents the realm of the Other, which carries the ultimate danger for the patriarchal consciousness and finds its expression in the images of threatened masculinity. Ironically, although Sodom is crowded with men, it represents the land where male subjectivity is rendered powerless or absent, the idea that Lot's elder daughter encapsulates in her belief that 'there is no man in the land'. Through Lot's demise, the narrator demonstrates the perils of falling for the Other.

This idea provides an interpretative clue for understanding how the feminine subject is constructed. On the one hand, male introspection makes woman as sexual counterpart redundant, which is demonstrated in the fate of Lot's wife – a fleeting character, whose only action in the story is to look back at Sodom before turning into a pillar of salt. The petrified figure of Lot's wife is thus united with the dead land, becomes part of it. In this, the wife and the land – manifestations of the gendered Other – are both committed to death, freeing the space for the realisation of the Subject's incestuous drive.

Lot's daughters, on the other hand, are regarded as part of the Self and thus allow introspection. Accordingly, they have a more lasting presence and role in the narrative. Their position is ambiguous: by virtue of being daughters and not sons, they represent the Subject's symbolic sterility but also carry a potential for its cure. In the narrative that lacks regular male subjectivity, their function is to re-establish gender hierarchy and restore the status of the male protagonist. The task to produce male heirs for Lot (v. 32) underlies their desire for a heterosexual relationship that they describe as 'the way of the whole earth' (v. 31). Yet, despite their 'normative' sexuality, from their first appearance onwards they are withdrawn from a sexual relationship with men. They first appear as virgins (they 'have not known man ['iš]'); next, they are rejected by the men (^ʿ*nāšīm*) of Sodom; later, their prospective husbands fail to follow them; and in the final episode, Lot's daughters are cut off from all society and live without a chance to find male partners ('there is no man ['iš] in the land', v. 31). This dissociation allows feminine subjectivity to be imagined as part of the Subject: the fact that they have not known and cannot know man means that they are still 'flesh of the flesh' of their father. It is in this context that the last scene of incest in 19:30-38 appears.

The loss of masculinity that has been associated with the anti-world of Sodom here comes to its climax. Lot ends up living in a cave, which, as Rashkow points out,

holds a sexual connotation both linguistically, through its association with nakedness, exposure, and genitals (e.g. *m^e‘ārāh*, ‘cave’; *‘erwāh*, ‘genitals’; *‘eryāh* ‘nakedness’; *‘arār*, ‘to lay bare, to strip’), and psychoanalytically, in its reference to the subconscious with its suppressed desires.²³⁹ Symbolic of the womb, the cave becomes the space where the male Subject is rendered unconscious.²⁴⁰ Here Lot is twice described as ‘not knowing’ (‘he did not know when she lay down or when she arose’, vv. 33, 35). The negative form of the verb *yādā*‘, ‘to know’, further compromises Lot’s masculinity, symbolically distancing Lot from the male function of sexual ‘knowledge’. As Lot’s daughters get him drunk and then take turns to sleep with him in order to conceive, the man is placed in a lower hierarchical position, structurally becomes female. Accordingly, 19:30-38 reverses the established sexual roles in favour of the female characters: the daughters ‘go into’ (*bō*‘) and ‘lie with’ (*šākab* ‘im) their father, performing the actions that in a sexual context are usually ascribed to men.²⁴¹

Perhaps more than any other story in Genesis, the narrative of Genesis 19 lends itself to psychoanalytical interpretation that can account for its unresolved tensions, inversions, and inconsistencies. Scholars have explored the psychoanalytic implications of the way the narrator ascribes male functions to the daughters. Analysing the incest scene in 19:30-38, Robert Polhemus formulates the ‘Lot complex’ as complementary to the Oedipus complex in that it reveals male subconscious projections with respect to younger women that is the power to dispose of their sexuality within the legitimate father-daughter relationship as well as the subconscious desire to relate to them incestuously as sexual partners.²⁴² Exum’s detailed analysis demonstrates how the father’s repressed sexual desire, directed at his daughters, governs the events in the narrative, creating the conditions for the incestuous relationship while shifting the blame to the daughters.²⁴³ Along similar lines, Rashkow holds that Lot acts out his repressed fantasies under the influence of alcohol.²⁴⁴

The reversal of the sexual roles effects a symbolic cure to the sterile Subject, since sons are born as a result of it, but leaves ‘the father’s seed’ tainted with alterity.

²³⁹ Rashkow, ‘Daddy Dearest’, p. 102; *Taboo or not Taboo*, p. 107.

²⁴⁰ See Letellier, *Day in Mamre*, p. 252.

²⁴¹ Brenner points out that the case of Lot’s daughters in 19:30-38 is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where the expression *šākab* ‘im is used with a clear inversion of positions into female subject and male object (*The Intercourse of Knowledge*, p. 24). See also Esther Marie Menn, *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 98.

²⁴² Robert M. Polhemus, *Lot’s Daughters: Sex, Redemption, and Women’s Quest for Authority* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-47.

²⁴³ Exum, ‘Lot and His Daughters’, pp. 133-59.

²⁴⁴ Rashkow, ‘Daddy Dearest’, pp. 98-106.

The story ends with the births of Moab and Ammon, the ancestors of two neighbouring nations hostile to Israel and excluded from its congregation (Dt 23:3-4). In the final transaction, the narrative consciousness translates the symbolic death of the male Subject that the patriarchal consciousness associated with the 'other' land, into the birth of foreign identity. With this, the mechanism of projection is completed. The paradise of Egypt has gone up with smoke and the part of Israel's collective psyche that had been fascinated with Egypt has now become expelled, exteriorised in the image of other, less significant and attractive national identities.

Hagar's Story: Subjectivity and Dominance

The proposition that starts off the dynamics of the Hagar story is Sarah's wish to be 'built up' through her slave. In the Hebrew Bible the expression *'ibbāneh mimmennāh*, 'I shall be built up through her' is twice attributed to childless wives – Sarah and Rachel – who use their servants as surrogate mothers in order to create a family (16:2; 30:3). Sarah's premise seems clear: by acquiring a child through her slave, she means to establish, 'build up' her own status. Her inability to give an heir to Abraham has posed a threat to the realisation of Abraham's identity as a father of a great nation (12:2). The tension between Yahweh's promise and Sarah's barrenness has now reached its highest point, since in the previous chapter Abraham complains to Yahweh about being childless and in reply is promised offspring as countless as the stars (15:4-5). Since the problem is not the sterility of Abraham, but, emphatically, that of his wife (11:30; 16:1), everything hinges on Sarah. Sarah's first words as a character reflect this overriding concern of the narrative: she can only picture herself being built up by providing Abraham with an heir. In this respect, as Exum argues, Sarah becomes an accomplice of the narrator, deriving her motivation from the androcentric agenda of the text.²⁴⁵

Another significant detail introduced in 16:1 is Hagar's Egyptian origin. Since the narrative of Lot (13:10), Egypt has been mentioned only once in the scene immediately preceding Genesis 16, where Abraham's seed was promised the lands of the surrounding nations that stretch from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates (15:18-21). It is hardly fortuitous that the narrative following this promise will focus on the tensions

²⁴⁵ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 165 n. 33.

between the first matriarch and an Egyptian woman slave: the issues at stake are not only to do with Sarah's sterility but also (or even primarily?) with the establishing of Israel's dominance with respect to the Other. Sarah's desire to be 'built up' receives here another, national connotation.

Sarah thus is posited as the one on whom both Abraham's progeny and his dominance depends, and, in this capacity, she holds authority over the patriarch himself. First, she orders Abraham to have sexual intercourse with her slave (v. 2). Next, she gives Hagar to Abraham as a wife (v. 3).²⁴⁶ The text of v. 3 highlights the structural implications of Sarah's exchange. It presents a clear family hierarchy, composed of two sets of relationships: Sarah/Abraham ('Sarah, Abram's wife'), and Hagar/Sarah ('Hagar the Egyptian, her slave'). Sarah mediates the two relationships, restructuring them so that Hagar is now put in a relationship with Abraham. In this relationship Hagar loses her name and origin, and appears simply as a role ('as a wife').

By giving Hagar to Abraham as a wife, Sarah raises the status of her slave to her own and at the same time suspends her own conjugal relationship with Abraham. Hagar in her role as a wife of Abraham contrasts Sarah whose status as his wife was undermined in 12:10-20. Intertextually, the account of Abraham, handing Sarah over to an Egyptian ruler 'as a wife' is echoed when Sarah gives her Egyptian slave 'as a wife' to her husband. A closer look at the two texts allows one to see the structural similarities between Sarah's transaction and Abraham's ruse:

Fig. 10

Structural elements	12:10-20	16:1-6
dispenser of wife-object	Abraham	Sarah
wife-object	Sarah	Hagar
hierarchical relationship relinquished	husband-wife	mistress-slave
parallel relationship assumed	brother-sister	first wife – second wife
dispenser's self-concern	'it may go well with me because of you'	'I shall be built up through her'
receiver of wife-object	Pharaoh	Abraham
Yahweh intervenes to re-establish the original hierarchy	Pharaoh is punished with plagues	Hagar is told to submit to her mistress
receiver returns wife-object	'here is your wife'	'your <i>slave</i> is in your power'

²⁴⁶ Abraham will obey Sarah's order only after Sarah has given him Hagar as a wife (vv. 3-4). It is interesting, however, that Sarah's command in v. 2 emphasises only the sexual relationship and omits the notion of marriage.

Scholars have commented on the similar positions that Abraham and Sarah respectively occupy in the two episodes.²⁴⁷ Tribble has pointed out that Sarah shows the same attitude towards Hagar in Canaan as that which Abraham had towards Sarah in Egypt: she treats her slave as 'the object of use for the desires of others'.²⁴⁸ In both cases, the dispenser of the wife-object exploits her qualities of beauty (Sarah) and fertility (Hagar), and intends to derive personal benefit from the exchange. In both cases, the wife-object is returned to the original 'owner'. However, each transaction has a very different outcome for the initiator of exchange. While the *wife-sister* ruse works for Abraham, making him *kābēd m'e'ōd*, 'exceedingly heavy' with possessions (13:2), Sarah does not seem to benefit from her exploiting of Hagar. When Hagar conceives according to Sarah's plan, Sarah, instead of being 'built up', becomes 'light' (*wattēqal*) in the eyes of her former slave (16:4, 5). The verb *qll* stands in semantic contrast to the 'heaviness' of Abraham. At the same time, it plays on the connotation of lightness or emptiness associated with Sarah as a barren woman, contrasting her to Hagar, who is now pregnant and therefore semiotically 'full'.

A question that arises immediately is why the kind of exchange that was so profitable for the patriarch does not work for Sarah. One might find a clue in the ambiguity of Sarah's position, split between that of wife-object in the first story and that of wife-dispenser in the second. Although she can affirm her subjectivity with respect to Hagar, she remains a woman, subordinated to her husband, and her exchange 'builds up' him and not her, giving him his first child while leaving her 'empty'. As far as the needs of patriarchy are concerned, Sarah can be vindicated only by bearing her own child.

But the decisive factor in Sarah's failure to build up her family through her slave is Hagar's rise to subjectivity. It is first postulated in her origin (*mišrīt*, 'Egyptian', 16:1, 3) and in her name, both of which connote her difference. The derivation of the name *hāgār* is uncertain, but, as Jeansonne has observed, phonetically it echoes *gēr*, the Hebrew word for 'foreigner' or 'stranger'.²⁴⁹ Rulon-Miller sees Hagar as a personification of Egypt, a character who represents 'the foreign land' for the Israelites

²⁴⁷ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 45; Amy-Jill Levine, 'Settling at Beer-Lahai-Roi', in Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito (eds.), *Daughters of Abraham: Feminist Thought in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001), pp. 21-22.

²⁴⁸ Phyllis Tribble, 'Ominous Beginnings for a Promise of a Blessing', in Phyllis Tribble and Letti M. Russel (eds.), *Hagar, Sarah, and Their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), p. 38.

²⁴⁹ Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife*, p. 11.

and their narrators.²⁵⁰ Above, looking at the separation of Lot in Genesis 13, I have examined the significance of Egypt for the construction of Israel's identity. Now, in 16:1, by detailing that Hagar is an Egyptian slave (*šiphāh*), the text reminds the reader of the female slaves (*šēpāhōt*), received by Abraham in Egypt as part of Pharaoh's payment for Sarah (12:16) and thus supports the image of Hagar as a substitute for her mistress. Yet Hagar's association with Egypt makes her a problematic substitute. And very quickly, only three verses down from her first appearance, Hagar sees herself as different from Sarah: 'when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became slight in her eyes' (16:4, cf. 16:5). Together with her conception, Hagar acquires, if not a voice yet, at least a point of view. Tribble observes how words of sight, connoting understanding ('she saw', 'in her eyes'), begin and end the sentence, encircling the opposition between Hagar and her mistress.²⁵¹ Looking at her situation, Hagar distinguishes between its two opposing agents: herself, pregnant and 'heavy', and her mistress, sterile and 'light'. This discernment stops her from being subsumed, amalgamated into the exploitative structure that ignores her subjectivity and threatens her parental rights.²⁵² At the beginning of the story, Hagar affirms herself as a subject and a proper mother of her child and, by doing so, refuses to 'build up' Sarah.²⁵³

In this, she is also different from Bilhah and Zilpah, the other two women in Genesis who occupy the position of servant-made-wife. Bilhah and Zilpah come on stage as surrogate mothers and their only actions are to conceive and bear Jacob's children on behalf of his two wives (30:1-13). There everything goes according to plan: through their childbearing, Bilhah and Zilpah help to build up the status positions of their mistresses and their sons are accepted into the lineage (30:6, 8, 11, 13).²⁵⁴ Afterwards they will remain in the family as a background presence, and will never become subjects in their own right.

²⁵⁰ Rulon-Miller, 'Hagar', p. 62.

²⁵¹ Tribble, 'Ominous Beginnings', p. 39.

²⁵² Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 94-95.

²⁵³ Here I disagree with Phyllis Tribble who argues that Hagar's stance in 16:4 reorders her relationship with Sarah, making it equal (Phyllis Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], p. 12). While the relationship indeed is reordered, in Hagar's view it is based on another form of inequality - the unequal status of the two women with respect to reproduction. The hierarchy of status is replaced here with a hierarchy of fertility.

²⁵⁴ For Exum, the fact that Hagar's son Ishmael is not integrated into Israel, whereas the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah are included among the ancestors of the twelve tribes, may reflect 'different valuations of Israel's relationship with Mesopotamia and with Egypt in the tradition' (*Fragmented Women*, p. 131 n. 65).

It is notable that, in affirming her subjectivity against that of her mistress, Hagar never rebels against Abraham, who is the ultimate, though undeclared beneficiary of Sarah's scheme. The narrator's strategy is to limit the conflict to that between the two women, contrasting them to each other. Likewise, Abraham refuses to deal with Hagar even when Sarah tries to bring him into the dispute, and instead hands her, reinstated as a slave, back to Sarah. Once she has her power back, Sarah retaliates. Her harsh treatment of Hagar is described by the verb *'nh*, which along with the idea of afflicting signifies humbling or forcing submission on one's opponent. Once again, the relative status positions between the two women are shifted: the mistress, who has been humiliated by her slave, now regains her standing by oppressing her rival. For a moment, the story seems to have returned to the initial situation. However, Hagar, who is now characterised by self-awareness as well as fertility, cannot fit into the old hierarchy. She runs away into the desert.

One might expect that Hagar's flight should have implications for her relationship with Abraham. When she runs away from her mistress, she removes the child she is carrying from Abraham's house, leaving him without the prospect of becoming a father. Yet the patriarch is apparently unconcerned about what happens to his future child. Pregnancy in the patriarchal narratives is an exclusively female domain, a state over which the husband has no responsibility (is that why Abraham will not hesitate before handing the pregnant Sarah over to Abimelech in Genesis 20?). In Genesis 16 Hagar is constructed vis-à-vis Sarah and not Abraham, and Yahweh endorses it when he sends her back to her mistress, and not to her husband (16:9).

The message that Hagar receives from Yahweh is double-edged. On the one hand, she is addressed as 'Hagar, Sarai's slave', and in no equivocal terms is ordered to go back to her mistress and submit, or, literally, 'be oppressed', 'under her hand' (16:9). The root *'nh*, 'to oppress, afflict', echoes Sarah's earlier mistreatment of her slave (16:6). Yahweh, like Abraham before him, reaffirms Sarah's power and places Hagar back in the lower hierarchical position. Sarah's superiority is thus upheld by the two providers of woman's status, Abraham and Yahweh. One might read this 'building up' of status as an answer the narrative gives to Sarah's initial wish to be 'built up': by being opposed to Hagar as the Other, Sarah too becomes part of the Subject, receiving a place in the structure of dominance that lies at the basis of the patriarchal narratives.

On the other hand, along with ordering her to submit, the angel promises Hagar exceeding fertility, and a son, whose name *yīšmā'ē'l*, 'God hears', would forever

remind her of the suffering she had from the hand of Sarah ('for Yahweh has heard your affliction [*ni*'], 16:11). Tribble notes the irony of the naming speech, in which 'the comforting name attends affliction'.²⁵⁵ Sending Hagar back to the situation of oppression, Yahweh simultaneously suggests that he has paid heed to her being oppressed! The fact that both parts of Yahweh's message are hinged on the root *nh* makes it central to Yahweh's perspective against the root *šm* 'to hear', used only in the naming speech (v. 11). Stressing Sarah's dominance over her slave, the double use of *nh* problematises Yahweh's compassion for Hagar.²⁵⁶

The two parts of Yahweh's message appear less contradictory in the context of the main narrative programme centred on the emergent identity of Israel. From this perspective, the divine revelation concerning Ishmael is not motivated by Yahweh's compassion for Hagar or her future child but serves the construction of the ethnocentric Subject by establishing its national Other.²⁵⁷ The characters Abraham separates from need to be recognised as personifications of the nations that surround the historical Israel.²⁵⁸ Therefore, the narrator uses the human drama of Hagar, exploited as a woman and oppressed as a slave, as a blueprint for Israel's domination. To make Hagar's expulsion worthwhile, she should be expelled having first given birth to a nation that has its submission to Israel imprinted in its name and identity. And for that, she has to return and submit to her mistress.

That might be why Ishmael, an heir, needs to be sent away only once. Like other instances of the separation of rival brothers (Lot and Esau), Ishmael's departure is definitive and allows no return. Hagar, on the contrary, has to be separated in two stages, both times ending up in a wilderness, both times given a message of reassurance by Yahweh. Exum, following Meir Sternberg, treats this double expulsion of Hagar as a sign of the difficulties the narrator has with justifying her removal from Abraham's

²⁵⁵ Tribble, 'Ominous Beginnings', p. 41.

²⁵⁶ Brett holds an opposite view. For him, the fact that a slave woman receives a promise of uncountable seed and of a son who will become a nation (16:10-11) undermines the dominant ideology of 16:8-9 (*Genesis*, p. 59).

²⁵⁷ One could recognise the same logic in 21:12-13, where Yahweh comforts Abraham, who is upset about Sarah's order to expell Ishmael, by promising him that Ishmael will become a nation. Here Yahweh explicitly states that Ishmael owes his future status to Abraham. Exum notes that the promise in 21:12-13 is not given 'for the sake of the victims but because Ishmael is Abraham's offspring'. The idea of Ishmael's nationhood thus functions as a kind of compensation that 'makes the reader feel better' about the expulsion ('Hagar *en procès*', pp. 8-9).

²⁵⁸ I propose that the same reasoning underlies Yahweh's sparing of Lot that happens, admittedly, for the sake of Abraham (19:29). It is in the interests of the Subject to have Lot survive the fall of Sodom, since, following his rescue, Lot becomes the father of the ancestors of Moab and Ammon. The identity of the hostile nations is thus controlled by the narrative, being simultaneously traced back to the Subject and definitively separated from him.

household. Like other stories that exhibit patterns of repetition, the repeated theme of expulsion in the story of Hagar functions 'as a textual working out of a particular problem or concern, repeated because the problem is not so easy to resolve'.²⁵⁹

It might be added that the two instances of separation in Genesis 16 and 21 communicate two different levels of dissociation. In Genesis 16, the threatening Other (Hagar) is forced out, expelled with respect to the feminine part of Israel's self (Sarah). It seems that Sarah as Israel cannot access her own fertility (birth of Isaac in 21:1-2) without first establishing her supremacy. In the Hagar episodes, Sarah mirrors patriarchal structures of dominance: she has a voice (or authority to give orders, 16:2; 21:12) and a hand (as power over her rival, 16:6, 9), but little subjectivity. Elsewhere in the cycle, Sarah has little to show for being an independent character, being either used by Abraham as an object of trade in the wife-sister episodes, or paired with the patriarch in his encounters with Yahweh. Like Abraham, the father of a multitude of nations (17:5), Sarah is renamed as the one who will give rise to nations (17:15-16); like Abraham, she is too old to have children (18:11-12), and, like him, she laughs at the prospect of having a son in old age (17:17; 18:12-15).²⁶⁰ The only occasion when Sarah acts on her own, without 'doubling' Abraham, is found in her oppressive treatment of Hagar and Ishmael. Yet even in this she implicitly represents the interests of the patriarchal Subject.

Because Sarah is only a projection of Abraham's needs, the process of separation needs to happen at the level of the male subject. Hagar has to return because Ishmael has to be born in Abraham's household and named by Abraham to be expelled 'properly', enabling the narrative consciousness to affirm Isaac, the 'right' successor, over against the son of the Egyptian slave. Unlike the separation in Genesis 16 with its emphasis on the 'female' issue of conception, the expulsion in Genesis 21 is centred on the 'male' issue of inheritance. As soon as her own son Isaac is born and weaned, Sarah sees the son of Hagar the Egyptian as *m^ešahēq*, 'laughing' (v. 9). As a pun on the name 'Isaac', *m^ešahēq* implies that, by his laughter, Ishmael indicates his equality to Isaac, a hint that Sarah interprets as a threat to Isaac's status and inheritance.²⁶¹ It is this threat

²⁵⁹ Exum, 'Hagar *en procès*', pp. 5-6 n 16.

²⁶⁰ Even Sarah's internal monologue that accompanies her laughter places her next to Abraham: 'After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old too?' (18:12).

²⁶¹ Jo Ann Hackett, 'Rehabilitating Hagar: Fragments of an Epic Pattern', in Peggy L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 20-21; Exum, 'The Accusing Look: The Abjection of Hagar in Art', in *RelArts* 11(2007), p. 149 nn. 17, 18; McKinlay, *Reframing Her*, p. 131.

that makes her require Abraham to expel 'this slave with her son' (v. 10).²⁶² For Abraham, however, this demand appears exceedingly evil 'because of his son' (21:11). The gender positions of the husband and wife are thus transposed: Sarah is schematised as a bearer of the patriarchal concerns about status, power, and heritage, whereas Abraham is concerned about descent ('his son'), a role usually attributed to the matriarchs. Abraham is also allowed to form attachments and show feelings. He grieves for his son, listens to Yahweh's reassurance, and gives Hagar water and bread for the journey (v. 14).²⁶³ His involvement, however, does not diminish the brutality of his final gesture, communicated by the verb *šlh*, 'to throw'.²⁶⁴ No matter how much the narrator tries to exculpate the patriarch, in the end, he is the one who performs the expulsion.

Significantly, in both episodes, neither Sarah nor Abraham regards Hagar as a subject. They never mention Hagar's name, referring to her as either *šiphāh* (16:1, 2, 3, 5, 6) or *'amah* (21:10), both of which mean 'servant' or 'slave'. In Abraham's household, as Exum notes, Hagar is never spoken to, but 'spoken about and acted upon'.²⁶⁵ Yahweh is the only character who addresses her by name, and on the two occasions that he does it, Hagar is found outside Abraham's house, in the wilderness (16:8; 21:17). Judith McKinlay sees the wilderness as the space 'between', for while it is 'markedly not the space of Sarai and Abraham, it is also not Egypt'.²⁶⁶ In the first episode, the position 'between' is indicated geographically in the reference to Shur, the area south of Canaan, in the direction of Egypt (16:7). When Hagar first breaks away from Sarah's household and from Abraham's promised lineage, she places herself in the semantically empty space where a new identity can be formed. In this space she receives a promise of an identity of her own, and this space she goes back to when she is finally separated from the identity of Israel (21:14). The desert is for her a place where she becomes, however briefly, a subject.

²⁶² Brett observes that the purely economic terms used to justify the driving away of Hagar in 21:10 reflect the politics of dispossession that guides the divorces of foreign women in Ezra and Nehemiah (*Genesis*, pp. 60-61).

²⁶³ According to Exum, Sarah and Abraham's contrasting attitudes are part of 'an ideology that uses the matriarchs to carry out disagreeable but necessary deeds for Israel to fulfill its destiny, thereby allowing the patriarchs to appear in a better light' ('The Accusing Look', p. 149 n. 19).

²⁶⁴ Exum draws attention to the use of *šlh* in the Hebrew Bible, stressing that whenever 'people who are still alive are the object of *šlh*, they are thrown out or thrown down to their deaths' ('Hagar *en procès*', pp. 12-13).

²⁶⁵ Exum, 'Hagar *en procès*', p. 7.

²⁶⁶ Judith E. McKinlay, *Reframing Her: Biblical Women in Postcolonial Focus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2004), p. 131.

It is significant that, in the wilderness, the angel of Yahweh finds her by a water source, a symbolic reference to life in an arid and sterile environment. The Hebrew word for 'spring', *'ayin*, is a homonym that also means 'eye', and has been used repeatedly in the previous verses to indicate Hagar's and Sarah's points of view (vv. 4, 5, 6). Here *'ayin* functions as a pun that plays on the role of sight in the construction of Hagar's character. By describing the site where Yahweh addresses Hagar, it also anticipates Hagar's perception of Yahweh as 'the God who sees me' (16:13). Here Hagar holds a unique position. Not only is she the only woman in Genesis, apart Rebekah, to receive a theophany but she is also the only character in the Bible to ever name God. What does she mean by this name? Though the Hebrew of her speech is unclear ('I have seen after (*'ah^arê*) who sees me'), its structure anticipates another theophany, the one that Sarah furtively receives in 18:10: 'and Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him (*'ah^arâw*)'. The manner in which the two women receive a promise reinforces the contrast between them. Sarah, who has been associated with voice and speaking (16:2; 21:12), can only *overhear* God promising her a son, since, being behind the door, she cannot see him; whereas Hagar, who is capable of seeing (16:4, 5), *sees* the God who has promised her countless descendants, and, moreover, names him as the one who *sees* her. The word *'ah^arê* in 16:13, though difficult to translate, qualifies Hagar's experience so as to remove the possibility of her seeing God's face (Ex 33:20). But, even in this qualified way, Hagar's naming speech sounds triumphant, for in it she posits herself as a subject of seeing in parallel to El Roi, the God who sees.²⁶⁷

The second time Hagar finds herself in the desert, she is there with Ishmael, having been driven out of Abraham's household. Unable, this time, to find a water source, she leaves (lit. *šlh*, 'throws') Ishmael under a bush and sits down away from him, not wanting 'to see the boy die' (21:16). Exum interprets this desperate gesture as Hagar's second attempt, after her fleeing from Sarah in 16:6, to separate herself from Israel. Using Julia Kristeva's terminology, Exum describes Hagar's distancing from Ishmael as abjection, a process whereby the Subject asserts its boundaries by expelling or abjecting a part of itself that is perceived as threatening. Just like Israel (Abraham) abjected or 'threw out' Hagar and Ishmael in 21:14, Hagar now abjects 'what still connects her to Israel – the child – by casting the child away, throwing him under a bush'. To reinforce Hagar's emotional distancing from Ishmael, the narrator of 21:14-20

²⁶⁷ Rulon-Miller, 'Hagar', p. 77.

never describes him as Hagar's son and consistently uses the impersonal terms 'the child' or 'the boy'.²⁶⁸ In her abjection of Ishmael, Hagar claims boundaries of her own, and therefore, subjectivity.

Hagar's rise to subjectivity is, however, short-lived. In another theophany, God orders Hagar to lift up the boy and hold him by the hand (21:18), which echoes his earlier order: 'Go back to your mistress and submit under her hand' (16:9). Once again, Hagar has to suppress her abjection of Israel and, instead, serve its interests, this time, by ensuring the survival of Israel's Other, without whom the project of dominance is impossible. For, despite his exclusivity, Abraham cannot take all the space. The Subject needs his Other to remain there, in the shadow (and as a shadow) of Israel's superior identity. Ishmael's ambivalent presence therefore endures even after the expulsion. On the one hand, as a son of Abraham, Ishmael retains a degree of association with Israel: he becomes the father of twelve princes in parallel to the twelve tribes; Isaac and Ishmael together bury Abraham (25:9); later, Esau marries the daughter of Ishmael when he needs to choose a wife from the parentage of Abraham (28:6-9). On the other hand, as the son of Hagar the Egyptian, he lives on 'in the face of all his brothers' as a conflicted presence, 'his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him' (16:12). His status as the national Other is reinforced when his mother takes him a wife from Egypt. This is the last thing she does. Having served the function to assure both the similarity and the difference of Israel's Other, Hagar now disappears from stage and from Israel's narrative.

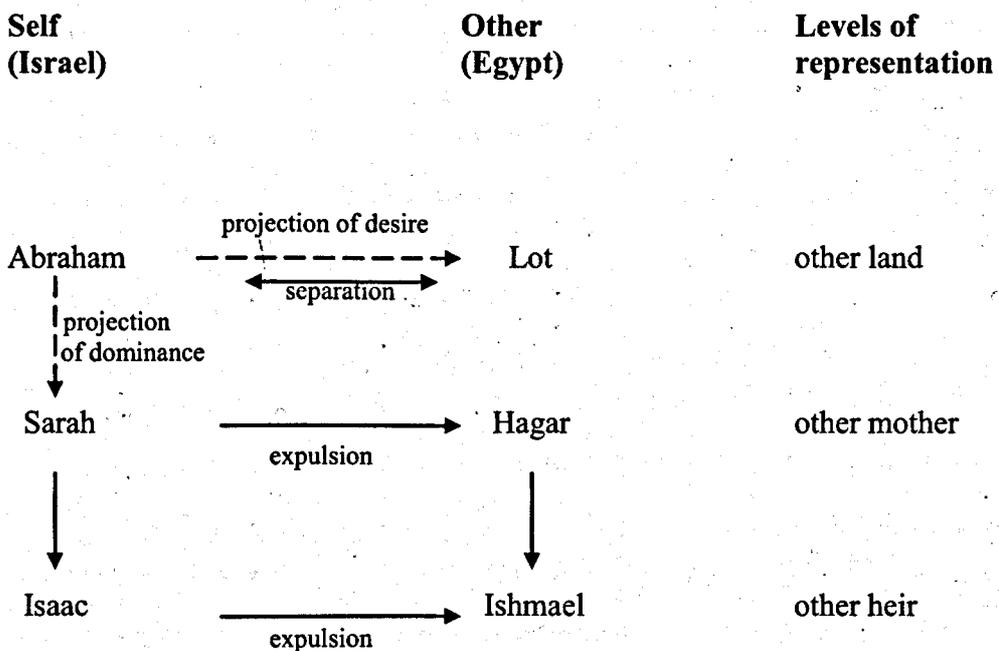
In the larger context of the Abraham cycle, the expulsion of Hagar serves to exclude Egypt from Israel's self-identity in a movement that is parallel to the one effected by the separation of Lot. Above, I have argued that the 'weight' of Egypt, represented by the flocks, herds, and slaves that Abraham brings with him to Canaan (cf. 12:16; 13:2) becomes a key semiotic factor that springboards the construction of the Other at the level of both the female character and the land. At the level of the land, the wealth of Egypt leads to the separation of Lot, Abraham's surrogate brother. At the level of the female subject, Egypt is represented by Sarah's slave Hagar, who brings to the patriarch simultaneously a blessing of fertility and a threat of assimilation. From the point of view of Israel's identity, both Lot and Hagar are flawed through their association with Egypt.

²⁶⁸ Exum, 'Hagar *en procès*', pp. 11-12.

It is notable that, unlike the separation between the two male protagonists in the Lot story, the expulsion of Hagar involves both Abraham and Sarah and happens at Sarah's initiative. From a psychoanalytic point of view, Sarah, like Lot, carries, projected upon her, the aspects of the narrative psyche that the Subject finds difficult to admit. While Lot is needed to channel the Subject's repressed desire for the land of Egypt, Sarah serves as a projection of the Subject's dominant, oppressive attitude towards Egypt as 'nations'.

Fig. 11

Transactions between Self and Other in the Abraham cycle



The two cases of projection hold interesting implications for the understanding of gender in the narrative. Through the workings out of the Lot narrative, the Subject renounces the unwanted aspect of the Self, his underlying weakness of desiring the Other. As a result, in the narrative of Sodom the male protagonist loses power and masculinity, which leads to a reversal of the normative gender model. In the case of Sarah, by contrast, the 'male' function of dominance is projected onto female subsectivity, which increases Sarah's power both over Hagar and over Abraham. The

fact that, like desire, dominance too has to be projected, indicates that the Subject finds it problematic. Thus Sarah as a character pays the price, becoming an uncomfortable or even 'exceedingly evil' (21:11) presence for the Subject himself. In the end, *desire* for Egypt is disavowed through Lot's demise, whereas *dominance* over Egypt is sanctioned and incorporated into Israel's consciousness ('whatever Sarah says to you, listen to her', 21:12). It is ironic that with this divine authorisation of her voice, Sarah is reduced to silence. As soon as the dominance over Ishmael has been established, she disappears as a character. Strikingly, having protected the interests of her son so fiercely in Genesis 21, Sarah is absent when he is nearly killed by his father (Genesis 22). The last time she appears on stage is when she dies (23:1-2). Like in Lot's case, repression here follows projection, and Sarah, in the end, is repressed as a narrative subject. Her role in the formation of the Subject receives, however, full institutional approval, which is indicated, in the account of her burial, by the reference to Abraham's mourning and the large amount of narrative space given to the purchase of the land for her tomb (23:3-20).

Removing the threatening aspects of alterity (other land, other mother, other heir), the patriarch builds the concept of identity on what is not contaminated by the Other. Israel, like Sarah, is emphatically not 'built up' through Egypt. The only safe ground for Israel's emergent Self is found in the paradox and transcendence of Yahweh's promise, which is not dependent on human will or natural condition. Signified by Abraham's and Sarah's laughter (17:17; 18:12, 13, 15), this paradox becomes a constituent of Israel's national identity through the name of their son, *yīshāq*, 'he laughed' (17:19). As a mark of discontinuity, Abraham's laughter stresses that the birth of the right successor is not logically derived from any previously accumulated meanings, agencies, or identities. Having come out of nothing, Israel's descent is totally 'uncontaminated', and, therefore, totally separate or 'holy'.²⁶⁹

The birth of Isaac, 'the child of laughter', and the expulsion of the other heir, establish the boundaries of the exclusivist national identity. And as soon as it is established, the 'uncontaminated' Self of Israel is brought to trial in the story of the near sacrifice of Isaac in 22:1-19. The unified identity, symbolised by the 'only son', is threatened to be absorbed back into its source, Yahweh or the ultimate Other, while all

²⁶⁹ As Brett points out, the expulsion of Hagar and her son can be read as a paradigm of holiness, suggested by Ezra 9:1-2 with its insistence on endogamy and the need to send away foreign women. The ideology of holiness or exclusivism is, however, undercut by the text, which, despite the exclusion of Hagar and Ishmael from Israel, presents them as 'effectively equal recipients of divine grace' (*Genesis*, pp. 76-77).

the other forms of alterity have been suppressed.²⁷⁰ Psychologically, Yahweh's command to sacrifice Isaac reflects the perceived threat of annihilation associated with God as the Other, as well as posits the Other as the source of renewed identity. There is, however, another side to the drama of Genesis 22. According to Nancy Jay, this narrative restores Isaac, whose interests until now have been represented by his mother, to patrilineal descent. Through the symbolic transaction of sacrifice, Isaac 'receives his life not by birth from his mother but from the hand of his father as directed by God'.²⁷¹ The totalising discourse is thus reaffirmed in the absence, literal and symbolic, of the mother, when God spares Isaac and renews the promise of countless descendants to Abraham (22:12, 16-18). The exclusivity of this discourse is, however, problematised, since Abraham's trial bears striking similarities to the preceding story of Hagar: leaving early in the morning, 21:14; 22:3; exposure of the son, 21:15; 22:9; divine intervention and promise of nationhood, 21:17-18; 22:12, 16-18; the motif of seeing in the naming of God and of the place, 16:13-14; 22:14; reference to Beersheba, 21:14; 22:19.²⁷² The patriarch's earlier treatment of the other mother is echoed in his own trial, which might be seen as another example of poetic justice or inner-biblical critique.²⁷³ A similar process is apparent in the multiple parallels between the the story of Hagar and the experience of the Israelites of Exodus, which reverses the respective positions of Israel and Egypt with respect to oppression, expulsion, and desert wandering.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Brett stresses the ambivalence of God's command in 22:2, describing it as 'a chilling display of exclusivist ideology, tortuously trying to cover up the reality of the one excluded' (*Genesis*, p. 73). By saying, 'Take now your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac', God entirely dismisses the existence of Abraham's elder son Ishmael, whom God himself has called 'Abraham's seed' (21:13), and for whom the patriarch has shown fatherly feelings (21:11). In Brett's view, by making the near sacrifice of Isaac follow the expulsion of Ishmael, the final editors subvert the exclusivism of the covenant in 17:18-22 (p. 75).

²⁷¹ Nancy Jay, 'Sacrifice, Descent and the Patriarchs', *VT* 38 (1988), p. 60. On constructing patrilineal descent through sacrifice see also Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 118-120.

²⁷² The parallels between the expulsion of Ishmael in Genesis 21 and the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 have been examined in S. Nikaido, 'Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study', *VT* 51 (2001), pp. 221-29; Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT; Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 104-10; Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, pp. 34-35 n. 71; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 181. Curt Leviant presents a detailed analysis of the textual parallels in 'Parallel Lives: The Trials and Traumas of Isaac and Ishmael', *BR* 15 (1999), pp. 20-25, 47.

²⁷³ Exum, 'The Accusing Look', p. 148 n. 15.

²⁷⁴ Tribble has observed multiple parallels between Hagar's experience in the wilderness and the wanderings of the Israelites in Exodus. For her, it is ironic that, going through an experience similar to the oppression as Israel in Egypt, Hagar is not rescued by Yahweh, who in her case identifies with the oppressors (Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, p. 22). For a detailed comparison of the two stories, see Thomas B. Dozeman, 'The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story', *JBL* 117 (1998), pp. 28-43.

Chapter 3

The Mothers and the Mother's Land in the Jacob Narrative

(25:19-37:1)

Binary Structures in the Jacob Narrative

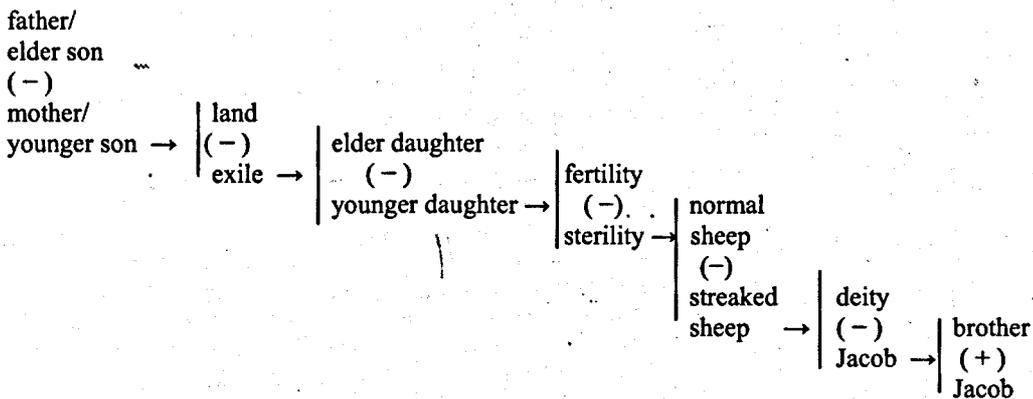
As a continuation of the myth of national origin that started with the story of Abraham, the Jacob narrative too deals with issues of identity. Jacob's story as the eponymous ancestor of the nation carries a particular symbolic value, for out of it is born the identity of Israel as the one who strives with God and with people (32:28). It presents one of the finest biblical examples of a developed and well-balanced plot, where the protagonist moves through various conflicts and their resolutions to the final possession of the land of his fathers. In the narrative, Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, helps her younger son Jacob steal his elder brother Esau's blessing. Fearing his brother's vengeance, Jacob has to flee to Haran, his mother's place. God appears to him on the way and promises him the land and Abrahamic succession. In Haran, Jacob serves his uncle Laban in return for marrying his daughters Rachel and Leah. During his twenty-year-long exile, twelve children are born to his wives and Jacob gains considerable wealth. On the way back, he fights a divine adversary who blesses him with the new name of Israel, after which Jacob finally makes peace with his brother and returns to his father's house in Canaan.

Even the most superficial examination of the Jacob narrative shows a clear presence here of binary structures. The story displays a fundamental tension between the patriarch and his opponents – Esau, Laban, the 'man' at Peniel – whom he has to overcome, by ruse or by force, in order to obtain a value object, be it blessing, land, wives, or property. The conflict between the two brothers, the rivalry between the two sisters, the fight with a deity, and the flight-return pattern of the overall plot are all binary mythic motifs familiar in comparative studies. A more detailed analysis of the

text uncovers a network of carefully balanced elements that stand in opposition to each other. Arguably, the structural tensions that shape the myth on different levels all stem from the initial opposition between Father and Mother.

In the definition of Lévi-Strauss, myth provides a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction.²⁷⁵ His method breaks down elements of myth into pairs of opposites, which are resolved through mediators only to be further broken down into new pairs of opposites. This generates a spiral progression, which only ends when the *signified*, or the complex idea behind the myth is exhausted. The Jacob story offers a striking example of such a progression.

Fig. 12



The father-mother dichotomy is reflected in the differentiation between the elder and younger sons, and as such is carried through all the divergences of the plot. It is finally resolved in the reconciliation scene, where the concept of the brother finally comes to replace the hierarchical notions of the younger or older sons. What unifies this prolonged sequence of related oppositions is its overall subversive character. From one level on to another, a tension is created between the existing system of reference and its opposite; that is, between the normal, accepted, or superior, on the one hand, and the irregular, impossible and subordinate, on the other. And the mediation between them consistently inverts the institutional order, for each time the narrative chooses to develop the element that represents a subordinate group or position. Therefore the

²⁷⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology I* (trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf; New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 229.

coalition of Rebekah and her younger son wins over the patriarchal authority and the right of primogeniture, and this initial impulse sets off a chain reaction of similar subversions: the blessed son goes into exile, the younger daughter is preferred to the elder, the unloved wife is fertile while the loved wife is sterile, the abnormally coloured herd animals produce most offspring, and, finally, Jacob holds his own against God. The minus sign at each stage of this progression stands for a negative or contrasting relationship between the opposites with the exception of the last stage – the reconciliation that resolves the initial tension of the story.

The elements of most of these oppositions are grouped around two narrative strands, which correspond to the institutional and the individual perspectives in the story. The institutional group includes the elements of father, older sibling, blessing, fertility, promised land, whereas the individual trend operates with the concepts of mother, younger sibling, non-blessing, sterility, love, and exile. These two groups represent two value systems: one that represents the interests of patriarchy, in which the primary values are patrilineal descent, father's authority over the household, and the first-born's right, and the other that is revealed whenever the characters subvert institutional norms and display complex motivation, feelings and inner growth. Set within an institutional framework, the narrative, like the deity itself, favours those characters who defy the institution and display complex motivation, feelings and inner growth.

Jacob's mother Rebekah and his wife Rachel represent the individual perspective in the narrative, and so, for the most of the cycle, does Jacob. As we saw above, authority here rests with the patriarch, while the woman/younger sibling has the power to influence the course of events.²⁷⁶ Mary Douglas describes a similar model in the myth of Asdiwal as a paradox between male dominance and male dependence on female help.²⁷⁷ Lévi-Strauss translates this dynamic into the language of kinship structures, defining it as a contradiction between patrilocal residence and matrilineal marriage.²⁷⁸ Both approaches are applicable in the case of the Jacob myth. Indeed, the fundamental binarity between Father and Mother manifests itself on different levels and to a certain extent accounts for the elegant concentric composition of the narrative.

²⁷⁶ Fewell and Gunn stress the difference between Isaac's authority and Rebekah's power in *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 73.

²⁷⁷ Mary Douglas, *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 163.

²⁷⁸ Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The story of Asdiwal', trans. N. Mann, in E. Leach (ed.), *The Structural Study of Myth and Totemism* (London: Tavistock, 1967), pp. 1-47.

Fig. 13

<i>Structural levels</i>	<i>25:19-28:22</i>	<i>29:1-31:55</i>	<i>32:1-37:1</i>
<i>Compositional</i>	Jacob-Esau	Jacob-Laban	Jacob-Esau
<i>Configurational</i>	Subject gains	Subject loses and gains	Subject renounces
<i>Geographical</i>	Canaan	Haran	Canaan
<i>Social</i>	patrilocal residence	matrilineal marriage	patrilocal residence
<i>Metaphorical</i>	father's land	mother's land	father's land

At the level of *composition*, the cycle consists of two extended narratives: the tale of Jacob's conflict with Esau that takes place in Canaan, the land of their father (25:19-28:22; 32:1-35:22), and the story of the hero's dealings with his uncle Laban in Haran, the land of Jacob's mother (29:1-31:55). Comparing the two narrative strands, Michael Fishbane points out the elaborate technique of symmetry that links them together, making the central narrative of the births of Jacob's children in 29:31-30:24 counterpoint the surrounding tale of Esau.²⁷⁹ This happens through the symmetrical inversion of the episode of the stolen blessing in Genesis 27, where the elder brother is replaced with the younger, by Genesis 29, where the younger sister is replaced with the first-born.²⁸⁰

The *configuration* of the cycle supports the compositional polarity of the two narrative strands. Four major transformations of the Subject take place in the course of Jacob's journey, and each of them changes the power balance in the world of the story. The overall plot unfolds as a series or chain of reversed situations, where the hero's success alternates with defeat or relinquishing of power:

²⁷⁹ Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), p. 55.

²⁸⁰ Yair Zakovitch describes this instance of symmetrical inversion as an 'expression of an "eye for an eye" punishment' ('Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible', *BibInt* 1 [1993], p. 140).

Esau – Jacob : Jacob – Laban : Laban – Jacob : Jacob – Esau

First, in Genesis 27 Rebekah replaces her first-born son Esau with his younger brother Jacob. As a result Jacob receives his father's blessing, which was meant for the first-born (*Subject gains*). Next, in Genesis 29 Jacob is deceived by Laban, who replaces his younger daughter with the first-born; this action symbolically inverts the episode of the stolen blessing (*Subject loses*). Next, Laban's deception by which he robs Jacob of his wages is reversed when Jacob takes all Laban's flocks as his wage (*Subject gains*).²⁸¹ Finally, these flocks that now belong to Jacob are shared with Esau in what the narrative presents as a symbolic returning of the blessing. In 32:13-16 Jacob selects from his herds a gift for Esau and later offers it to him saying, 'Take now my blessing' (33:11). The giving back of the stolen blessing marks the end of the series of symbolic inversions of the narrative and resolves the main complication of the plot (*Subject renounces*).²⁸²

It is clear from the above sequence that the Jacob-Laban episode represents the central stage in the development of the plot. In the broadest terms it illustrates Lévy-Strauss's definition of myth as a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction. Through a mechanism of inversions this episode puts the hero in a position to resolve the main contradiction and thus serves to redress the disturbed balance within the narrative world. This role has, nevertheless, to be qualified, for although the story of Genesis 29-31 develops all the conditions necessary for a resolution, the resolution itself happens outside the episode, back in the Jacob-Esau story.

On the *geographical* plane, the compositional polarity between the narrative strands of Jacob-Esau and Jacob-Laban is reflected as a tension between Canaan, the promised land, and Mesopotamia, the land of exile. This tension is mediated by the hero's journey from Beersheba to Haran and back that results in the treaty between Jacob and his uncle Laban (31:44-54). This treaty resolves the opposition between insider and outsider, between native and foreign, and validates the geographical boundary between Canaan and northwest Mesopotamia.

At the level of *social structures*, the Jacob narrative exhibits a tension between patrilocal residence and matrilineal marriage. Although the beginning and the end of the

²⁸¹ The preceding story of the 'red pottage' and the birthright in Genesis 25:29-34 does not constitute a separate transformation with respect to the power balance: it feeds into the episode of the stolen blessing, strengthening Jacob's position in it (27:36).

²⁸² In his analysis of the compositional symmetries in the Jacob cycle, Fishbane emphasises the reversal of the main contradiction achieved in Genesis 33 (*Text and Texture*, pp. 42, 52).

cycle see the hero reside in the land of his father, for most of the story he stays with his mother's family in Haran. This tension is reflected in the territorial taboo concerning the return of the heir to the ancestral land (cf. the earlier episode of the wooing of Rebekah, where Abraham prohibits his son Isaac from entering Haran, 24:6, 9). In the case of Jacob this taboo is overruled by his mother's authority. The mediation here takes place through the moving of the wives and children from their native land to the land of Jacob's father that signifies a return to patrilocality.

The world of the narrative, constructed around the archetypes of Father and Mother, maintains a more or less clear division between their respective spheres. At the **metaphorical** level, all the structural tensions mentioned above contribute to a construction of one all-inclusive opposition between *father's* and *mother's land*.²⁸³

Father's Land vs. Mother's Land

The structural distinction between *father's* and *mother's land* seems to be emphasized in the narrative. Canaan, the father's land, is a positive reality, the land of promise, the paramount symbol of God's blessing. The connection with this land puts the hero in the wider context of Abrahamic succession, and thus denotes the unity and permanence of patriarchal history. The narrative repeatedly associates this land with Jacob, first as the realm of his immediate experience ('the land you are lying on', 28:13), then as the land of his fathers (31:3), his native land (31:13), and later simply as 'his land' (32:9). In Jacob's vision at Bethel this land and the house of his father are indicated as his final destination, the ultimate goal of his journey 'there and back'. From a structuralist point of view, this land is the object that the Subject has to come to possess if his narrative programme is to be successful. Therefore, although Jacob will remain in the narrative until 49:33, as a Subject he is acquitted in 37:1 with the achievement of his goal, 'And Jacob lived in the land of his father's journeys, the land of Canaan'.

²⁸³ Exum discusses the tension between father-identified Canaan and mother-identified Haran in terms of opposition between patrilineal descent and uxorilocal residence (*Fragmented Women*, p. 113-18). While the proper wife must come from Haran, the husband may not live uxorilocally – with the wife's family – 'because it would take the rightful heir out of the land promised to his lineage (loss of residence) but also because such an arrangement could result in Abraham's lineage being swallowed up by the woman's family (loss of descent)' (p. 114). The narrative therefore resolves the issue of descent and residence in favour of the husband.

At the opposite pole from the father's land stands Haran in Paddan-Aram, the land of Jacob's mother. Here, the connection with Rebekah is not merely implicit; Jacob comes to be in Haran precisely on her account. It is Rebekah who initiates and organises the removal of her favourite son from the father's house and his sojourn with her relatives. Jacob's exile in Haran is both an indirect consequence of her trick with the blessing and a direct implementation of her wish for him to take a wife from among her family. Both through narrative causality and by association, Haran for Jacob is the *mother's place*.

This role of mother's land is attributed to Haran elsewhere in the patriarchal narratives. In the stories of Abraham and Isaac this land has the function of providing future mothers: Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel all come from Haran, and even Sarah, the first matriarch, who like Abraham comes from Ur in Mesopotamia, is brought to Haran and stays there before the family moves to Canaan (11:31). The fact that Abraham comes from there too does not necessarily contradict the symbolic association with the Mother: for all that the reader knows, Mesopotamia is the birthplace, the origin, the cradle of the patriarchal lineage – the motherland.

Compared to the clear and positive symbolism of *father's land*, the metaphor of *mother's land* is much more ambivalent and displays multiple characteristics. On the one hand, the narrative shows it as a negative reality, a land of bondage and exile, the taboo land that Jacob's father was never allowed to enter (24:6-8). It brings Jacob a twenty-year-long servitude in the house of his uncle. Describing the hardship of his service to Laban, Jacob says, 'the heat consumed me by day, and the frost by night, and sleep fled from my eyes' (31:40). The land of Jacob's mother is a symbolic punishment for his misdeeds, for here Jacob the deceiver is deceived 'ten times' by Laban (31:7). At the level of the overall plot this negative connotation of the *mother's land* metaphor serves to express and balance out the tensions of Jacob's story outside Haran. In this its function is expiatory.

On the other hand, during his exile Jacob is blessed in all other respects, as his family and his possessions grow in abundance. Fertility is a dominant feature of this land where women come from. One is reminded here of the patriarchal blessing the hero received back in Canaan; there the father's promise of 'earth's richness and abundance of grain and wine' (27:28) was only a potential that comes to realisation in Haran. Jacob himself describes his post-Haran situation as that of fulfilment: 'God has been gracious to me and I have all I need' (33:11). Moreover, Jacob's wealth acquired in the mother's

land plays an important part in resolving the main conflict of the narrative, the hero's conflict with his brother: in 33:11 Jacob symbolically returns the stolen blessing by sharing his possessions with Esau. The metaphor of *mother's land* is therefore simultaneously experienced by the Subject as two contrasting realities, as punishment and exile as well as fruitfulness and fulfilment.

This ambiguous symbolism of *mother's land* is further amplified when Paddan-Aram, the destination of Jacob's flight, is described as 'the land of the sons of the east' (29:1, cf. Num 23:7). This description is problematic from the point of view of the geography of the region, but as Robert Sacks comments, the specific geographical location of the land 'may not be as important as its ambiguous character', which arises from the symbolism of the term *qerem*, 'east'.²⁸⁴ As we saw above in Chapter 1, the concept of the east carries two sets of connotations. On the one hand, from the onset of the Genesis narrative, east is named as the location of the garden of Eden: 'Yahweh God had planted a garden in Eden, in the east' (2:8). The obvious feminine symbolism of the garden, with the four rivers flowing from it and the tree of life in its midst, is consistent with the fertility aspect of the mother's land. By placing Haran in the east, the narrator adds to it a connotation of life-giving. On the other hand, as Martin Hauge observes, in the wider context of Genesis the movement toward the east is repeatedly associated with the losing party, the outcasts, the exiles, so that the land of the east comes to symbolise defeat and separation from the promise.²⁸⁵ Thus, the cherubim are placed 'in the east of the garden of Eden' after *hā'ādām* is driven out of it in 3:24; later, the east becomes the 'land of wandering' of Cain and his descendants (4:16), the location of the tower of Babel (11:2); the direction Lot goes on the way to Sodom (13:11), and the place to which Abraham sends away his sons born after Isaac (25:6). Stephen Sherwood points out the irony of Jacob's situation, where he, the victor in the conflict with his brother, must travel to the east, the land of exile and defeat.²⁸⁶

It seems that the tension between the negative and positive connotations of *mother's land* in the Jacob narrative reflects the ambivalent role the narrator ascribes to the feminine. Borrowing the wordplay Exum uses in *Fragmented Women*, *mother's*

²⁸⁴ Robert Sacks, 'The Lion and the Ass: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 25-30)', *Int* 10 (1982), p. 304.

²⁸⁵ Martin R. Hauge, 'The Struggles of the Blessed in Estrangement', *StTh* 29 (1975), p. 15.

²⁸⁶ Stephen K. Sherwood, '*Had God Not Been on My Side*': *An Examination of the Narrative Technique of the Story of Jacob and Laban Genesis 29,1-32,2* (European University Studies, series 23, vol. 400; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 34.

place stands for *other's* place.²⁸⁷ Her land is a realm of alterity, of symbolic inversions, of the intuitive, the unconscious, and the fertile. This is shown in a number of concepts or narrative elements that are found almost exclusively in the Haran episode. These elements include fertility, meeting at the well, sexual relations, use of herbs, night, dreaming, idols and divination.

The theme of *fertility* underlies the Haran episode. The long account of Jacob's wives giving birth to his twelve children, unparalleled in the Bible, receives a particular emphasis, since it stands at the compositional centre of the episode and the entire cycle (29:31-30:24). Fertility (or the lack of it) is emphasised here as the main aspect of characterisation of Jacob's wives; it is at stake in Rachel's rivalry with Leah and in her conflict with Jacob (30:1-2); a conferral of fertility is implied in the purchase of mandrakes (30:14-16). Significantly, most instances of child-bearing in the cycle are found in the Haran episode, with the exception of the births of Jacob and Esau at the beginning of the cycle (25:21-26) and the birth of Benjamin that happens in the transition between the two lands (35:16-18).

The same theme of fertility is central in the story of Jacob's sheep-breeding in 30:25-43. What allows Jacob to get the upper hand over Laban is his control of animal fertility. It is hard to determine how exactly, in the narrator's view, Jacob's herdsmanship brings about the desired result, for his techniques could be regarded as the practice of magic as much as traditional skills based on experience. There is disagreement among scholars as to the nature of Jacob's procedures. Thomas Thompson, among others, defines them as 'imitative magic'.²⁸⁸ In contrast, Bruce Vawter suggests that Jacob's methods were quite scientific for their time, considering a 'notion of how prenatal influences can be transmitted to fetal life'.²⁸⁹ Claus Westermann expresses a middle view, regarding Jacob's artifice as a sign of an 'earlier transition from magical to scientific thinking'.²⁹⁰ However, compared to his trickery back in Canaan, where the reader was made fully aware of the rational mechanism of the deception, the procedure of Jacob's appropriation of Laban's flocks engages the natural forces of reproduction.

Meeting at the well. This recurrent motif in the biblical narrative that has become known as the 'betrothal type-scene', describes a situation, where the hero, or his

²⁸⁷ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 94-147.

²⁸⁸ Thomas L. Thompson, 'Conflict Themes in the Jacob Narratives', *Semeia* 15 (1979), p. 19.

²⁸⁹ Vawter, *On Genesis*, p. 332.

²⁹⁰ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 483.

envoy, meets his future bride at a well in a foreign land (24:10-61; 29:1-20; Ex. 2:15b-21). As Robert Alter points out, the well is a recognised symbol of fertility and generally a female symbol, while the foreign land could be serving as a 'geographical correlative for the sheer female otherness of the prospective wife'.²⁹¹ Significantly, the first thing that Jacob does in the land of his mother is draw water from the well; this action symbolises an opening of the land's stored fertility, made possible by overcoming an obstacle (rolling off a stone in 29:10).

Sexual relations. With such a strong emphasis on fertility it is not surprising that six out of the seven references to sexual relations in the Jacob cycle belong to the Haran episode (29:23, 30; 30:4, 15, 16, 16). The only reference to sex outside Haran, found at the end of Jacob's return journey to Canaan, concerns the illegitimate, incestuous relationship of Reuben and Bilhah (35:22). Legitimate sexual relations, that is, sexual expression in the service of procreation, are therefore limited to the mother's land.

Mandrakes. In the middle of the child-bearing race between Jacob's wives, Rachel acquires a plant from Leah that is possibly meant to cure her sterility (30:14-16). This mysterious plant derives its name from the root *dwd*, which has a connotation of physical love; the plant has been associated with the mandrake because of the latter's well-known aphrodisiac properties. While the text throws little light on the exact use of the plant, there is little doubt that possession of the mandrakes is considered to confer fertility.

Night. It is notable that the account of Jacob's stay in Canaan contains no mention of night time.²⁹² By comparison, in the story of Jacob's exile in Haran the term *laylāh*, 'night' appears seven times (30:15, 16; 31:24, 29, 39, 40, 42, 54), and is also implied in 29:23-25. At night Laban deceives Jacob, exchanging his daughters, at night Leah receives Jacob, having purchased him for mandrakes, at night God speaks to Laban in a dream. In addition, the theophanies of Bethel and Peniel that frame the Haran episode both take place by night (28:11; 32:23). Through these repeated allusions to the night, the realm of the Other acquires some of the Jungian symbolism of the 'night journey' of the hero, which was mentioned above in connection with the Sodom narrative. It is interesting that the previous time that events took place in Haran, in the episode of the wooing of Rebekah in Genesis 24, the narrator makes it imperative for

²⁹¹ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, p. 52.

²⁹² The only exception is found in Genesis 26:24, where God appears to Isaac the night he returns from Gerar. Although the episode belongs to the Jacob cycle, this instance is not directly related to Jacob, who is not mentioned in the entire chapter.

Abraham's servant to spend the night in the house of Rebekah's mother (the word 'night' is mentioned here three times, 24:23, 25, 54).

Dreams. The Jacob narrative presents dreaming as a numinous experience, a communication from the deity that puts the immediate situation of the hero in the context of the promise. The first dream that Jacob has at Bethel, on the way to Haran, renews for him the Abrahamic promise and emphasises his future return to the father's house. In the second dream, while he is still in Haran, God explicitly orders him to return ('leave this land and return to the land of your fathers and to your kin', 31:3; cf. 31:13). The text limits Jacob's kin (*mōledet*) to the immediate family back in Canaan, and thus excludes the mother's side of the family from Jacob's kinship.²⁹³ It is interesting that in the language of Jacob's visions Haran is qualified only in a negative way, as a state of separation from the father's land, a finite and transitory stage of Jacob's journey there and back (at Bethel, Haran is not mentioned at all, being concealed by the broad term *hadderek hazzeh*, 'this journey', 28:20). In terms of God's promise, the opposition of Canaan and Haran becomes a dichotomy of sacred and profane.²⁹⁴

Apart from Jacob, Laban is the only other person whose dream is recounted in the narrative ('God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Take care not to speak to Jacob either good or bad"', 31:24; cf. 31:29). Here the communication from God has an entirely different character: this dream conveys the idea of separation, setting a limit to further interaction between Laban, the bearer of the mother's lineage, and Jacob. It is interesting that at this point Laban is called an Aramean (*'āramī*), which not only stresses his foreignness but also emphasises his connection with Rebekah (in 25:20 the word *'ārām* was used three times to introduce Rebekah, 'daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean'). At the end of Jacob's stay in the mother's land, the text highlights the increasing alienation of his mother's brother as a foreigner. Jacob's and Laban's dreams, which present the only setting for God's communications in the mother's land, serve the same purpose: they facilitate the hero's return to Canaan and sever his links with the mother's lineage.

²⁹³ Herbert Haag regards the primary meaning of *mōledet* as 'place of birth, native land' and not 'kindred' as such (*'mōledet*', *TDOT* XIII, p. 165). In this case, God's order in 31:3 should be understood as 'return to the country of your fathers and of your birth'. However, the use of the preposition *l-* in *l'mōladtekā* suggests that the reading as 'kindred' is at least as legitimate.

²⁹⁴ Fishbane makes this observation in 'Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen 25:19-35:22)', *JJS* 26 (1975), p. 36.

Idols. The foreign character of the mother's land is further emphasised by the idea of its religious alterity. Laban's idols or household gods (*ʿrapîm*), which are called in 35:2, 4 'foreign gods', receive a particularly subversive meaning in the narrative, because they become an instrument of a feminine quest for power. Rachel, the favourite wife of Jacob, steals her father's idols, and later in an attempt to hide them, sits on the *ʿrapîm*, further undermining her father's authority by doing so (31:33-35).²⁹⁵ The *ʿrapîm* belong to the inferior reality of the mother's land, and the narrator clearly shows the superiority of the God of Jacob's fathers over the gods of Laban in the final dispute between Jacob and Laban. The difference in the presentation of the two sides of the dispute is striking: the short designations of Laban's idols ('my gods', 31:30, 'your gods', 31:32) stand out against the elaborate formulas describing the God of Jacob ('the God of your father', 31:29; 'the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac', 31:42; 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father', 31:53). In this dispute the God of Jacob's fathers wins, and so Jacob may leave his mother's land, but an element of alterity lingers with him and his family: the *ʿrapîm*, which Rachel stole from Laban, stay in her possession until the end of their journey, when all the 'foreign gods' are destroyed at Bethel (35:2-4). Only then Jacob can reaffirm his fidelity to the God of his fathers.

Divination. It is likely that household gods or *ʿrapîm* were used for the purpose of divination (cf. the references to *ʿrapîm* as an object of divination in Ezekiel 21:26; Zechariah 10:2). In 30:27 Laban learns through divination that God has blessed him because of Jacob. This detail seems to imply that the idols that are supposedly used for divination are subordinate to the higher deity who alone can issue blessings.

When we consider the above features of the Haran episode, it would appear that the narrator, presenting a male, institutional, rational perspective, grouped them together as signifiers of alterity, constructing thereby a complex, if biased, metaphor of the feminine. The mother's land is much more than a spatial element of the narrative; it is the *locus* and in a broad sense the *symbol* of its main transformation. This is a shadowland where Jacob, the male hero, a bearer of the patriarchal promise, or the conscious Self, has to be enslaved, subdued, allowing the *other* side of reality to manifest itself. Jacob's exile resembles a mythic journey to the 'other side', which effects a transformation, endowing the hero with a new identity. In this way the contradiction between Father and Mother, the main contradiction of the cycle is

²⁹⁵ See the discussion of this incident in 'The Father's Gods and the "Way of Women"' below.

mediated: Jacob is separated from his father and the promise, and can only come back when he has matured enough to become Israel in the exile of his mother's land. The narrator signals the gradual relinquishing of the mother's influence at the end of Jacob's journey. To begin with, the Subject distances himself from religious alterity when the foreign gods are disposed of in Shechem (35:2-4). Next, Rebekah's nurse Deborah dies and is buried in Bethel (35:8). This seemingly superfluous detail serves to mark the final departure of Jacob's mother, for Rebekah will never be mentioned again after 35:8. Finally, Rachel, the younger wife of Jacob who continues Rebekah's strand in the narrative, dies in childbirth before the family reaches the home of Jacob's father (35:16-20).

The Jacob narrative establishes boundaries, moving from what is potential and undefined to what is defined and structured. It is a myth of national origin, and the boundaries it establishes are those of national identity. The mother's land plays a crucial role in this process. The three successive patriarchs who live in Canaan are the only ones whom the narrative memory associates with God (cf. 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'), and this association lays the foundations of the myth. But in order to initiate the dynamics of national identity, the myth seems to require the feminine, the Other, and therefore it introduces Haran, the realm of the mother. Along similar lines, Exum has observed that the father in the narrative is a source of unity, whereas the mother is the source of difference, whose function is 'to differentiate Israel from (some of) the surrounding peoples'.²⁹⁶ It is significant that none of the forefathers of Israel becomes an eponymous representation of a nation while staying in the promised land of Canaan; the collective representation appears only in the name of Israel given to Jacob on the way from Haran. The new name reflects the struggles of the Subject on both sides of the 'looking glass': Jacob is called *yīsrā'ēl* as the one who 'has striven (*šārāh*) with God and with men (*nāšīm*), and has prevailed' (Gn 32:29) This phrase summarises a narrative transformation, which incorporates the metaphors of both the father's and the mother's land and of which the otherness of the Mother is an unacknowledged prerequisite.²⁹⁷ The narrative status of Jacob on his return is loaded with the connotation of national identity, and so is the status of his children; one could argue that their special

²⁹⁶ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 145.

²⁹⁷ The male identity of both *lōhīm* and *nāšīm* as Jacob's opponents in the naming speech appears significant. Women never rise to the status of opponent in the patriarchal narratives, functioning as mediators in the transformation of the male Subject, and are, therefore, never acknowledged. The mediation of the Mother (or the Other) is, in Jacob's case, accepted only implicitly, in the fact that his struggles against men, initiated by his mother and resolved in the mother's land, are ratified in his new identity as Israel.

role as the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel is related to their being born in Haran, the realm of the Mother.

Rebekah's Mission

Large space in the Jacob cycle is occupied by stories centred on women's role in the construction of the house of Israel. As elsewhere in the patriarchal narratives, their primary function is to be mothers to the male heirs of the promise. And yet the stories of the three matriarchs, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, show more complexity and ambivalence than what the stereotyped role of mother requires.

Complications arise at the very beginning of the cycle, first threatening the birth of Jacob (the initial infertility of Rebekah, 25:21), and then compromising his position as a possible successor to Isaac (the status of younger son, 25:26). Jacob is born second, grabbing the heel of his brother, and this gesture to which Jacob owes his name *ya^aqōb*, epitomises his future stance towards his adversaries. But at the beginning this stance is innate, without much sign of deliberation on Jacob's part. Next, in 25:29-34 Jacob deliberately reverses the birth order, buying his brother's birthright for a bowl of red pottage. Here, once again, the younger brother is motivated by the basic desire to take the place of the other; in this sense his exchange is not much different from the initial clutching of the heel.

Something radically different happens in Genesis 27, where a new agent comes on stage, Rebekah, the mother of the two sons, whose actions from the beginning stand out as purposeful and intelligent. In the world of the story, Rebekah is the only character who knows what the readers know about God's plan for Jacob, and this is not without a reason. From the outset, Rebekah is characterised by self-awareness. When Isaac prays to God for Rebekah, who is sterile, his prayer is answered, and Rebekah conceives (25:21). Her pregnancy is difficult, as the children struggle together in her womb, and so Rebekah, too, turns to Yahweh. But unlike Isaac with his straightforward demand (*'ātar*), Rebekah moves beyond the objective to the interpretative level, searching (*dārās*) for the meaning of her experience. She asks God, 'If this is so, why is this me (*lāmmāh zeh 'ānōkī*)?' (25:22). The explanation comes at once, putting Rebekah's pregnancy in the context of the promise: she is a matriarch who will give birth to two

nations; what is more, she is told which one of her two sons will be the direct bearer of the promise.

The words of Rebekah in v. 22 deserve closer attention. The Hebrew text is uncertain, and most translations conceal its juxtaposition of the words *zeh*, 'this', and *'ānōkî*, 'I'.²⁹⁸ In Rebekah's question, the use of the personal pronoun *'ānōkî* in its full form, instead of the suffixed form *lî*, 'to me' (cf. 27:46), seems to put an additional stress on Rebekah herself. Could it be that her question 'why?' concerns primarily that 'I', that is, herself and her role as a subject, and not the things happening *to* her (*zeh*, the babies jostling)? Could it mean 'why is it *I* and what am *I* to be in relation to this?'

If this were the case, the answer that she gets from God would have far more serious consequences. The translation 'why is *this* happening to me?' implies that Rebekah seeks a divine oracle to know why her babies are fighting inside her; so she learns about their different destinies, which do not seem to have much to do with her. But if we accept the emphasis on *'ānōkî* and translate the phrase as 'why is this *I*', Rebekah appears to be asking about her role in the situation and the answer she receives tells her what *she* is to do. Since the oracle twice refers to Rebekah as the origin of the two nations (*b'biṭnēk*, 'in your womb' and *mimmē'ayik*, 'from within you'), could it imply her participation in their formation? If so, Rebekah is expected not only to give birth to her twins but also to ensure that 'the older will serve the younger'. It seems that the text of 25:22-23 allows both readings, giving Rebekah an unparalleled role in the narrative. Being endowed with the knowledge of forthcoming events, she now also has the responsibility for bringing them about.

The situation is even more unusual since, in the patriarchal narratives, it is normally the father who receives the revelation: God's promise is reiterated on different occasions to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Hagar, Sarah's Egyptian maid, is the only other woman in Genesis who, like Rebekah, receives a revelation from God concerning her child (16:8-12; cf. 21:17-18).²⁹⁹ The narrative function of that particular revelation is to bring Hagar back to Abraham in order to ensure the future rivalry between his two sons and to emphasise through it the final election of Isaac. Hagar's knowledge of her son's

²⁹⁸ Cf. 'If it is to be this way, why do I live?' (NRSV); 'Why is this happening to me?' (NIV); 'If this is the way of it, why go on living?' (JB).

²⁹⁹ A woman also receives the revelation in the birth account of Samson, Judges 13, and here, too, one might ask 'why?'. On the positive role of Samson's mother, see Exum, 'Promise and Fulfilment: Narrative Art in Judges 13', *JBL* 99 (1980), pp. 43-59; and on the patriarchal interests served by this portrayal, see Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp. 63-68.

destiny neither strengthens her position nor influences the following events; on the contrary, her stance afterwards is that of submission, as the theophany requires (16:9).

Rebekah holds a unique position in relation to the other matriarchs, first, because in addition to the normative task of bearing the child of the promise, she also becomes a participant in the revelation, and second, because as the only wife of Isaac, she has no female rivals to her authority (cf. Sarah and Hagar; Rachel and Leah), and, in an interesting twist of the plot, it is her husband who becomes her real opponent. Both these features contribute to the transformation of her task in the narrative from static motherhood, the role she is expected to play, into a dynamic role of the originator of action.

It is only to be expected that in the world of the patriarchal narratives, so heavily dominated by the issue of succession, the rivalry between Rebekah and Isaac arises over their children. The first hint of discord in the family is given in 25:28: Isaac loves Esau for his tasty game, and Rebekah loves Jacob. The text has been reticent about Isaac since his pleading for a child in 25:21, and there are no indications that he knows anything about the oracle. A reader of the Bible is accustomed to the situation where a male character receives a revelation and acts on it, having neither consulted nor informed his female partner (cf. the stories of the call of Abraham in Genesis 12 and of his near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22). In Genesis 24 the familiar pattern is reversed: here Rebekah, the mother, loves Jacob, knowing all along that he is the child of the promise, while the father, Isaac, remains in the dark.³⁰⁰

'Remaining in the dark' is a precise metaphor to portray the position of ageing Isaac.³⁰¹ He is old and frail, and his eyes are now 'too weak to see' (27:1). And his physical blindness is paralleled by his moral and intellectual benightedness. Is it his blindness that keeps him from realising that his favourite son Esau is no longer worthy of his status (cf. 25:29-34; 26:34-35)? What is there left of a patriarch in a man whose love can be traded for *ṣayid b'pîw* (lit. 'game in his mouth')?³⁰² Only the authority of paterfamilias, but that authority is quite enough for him to designate his favourite son as

³⁰⁰ Jeansonne holds a similar opinion, looking at Rebekah's feelings for Jacob in the context of the oracle in which his destiny has been revealed (*The Women of Genesis*, p. 63).

³⁰¹ Exum notes the two aspects of Isaac's blindness, physical and metaphorical, in *Fragmented Women*, p. 140.

³⁰² Jay suggests reading Isaac's taste for game in sacrificial terms. Since the Bible presents game, as opposed to domestic animals, as non-sacrificial meat (Dt 12:15), Isaac's preference for game might be read as his refusal to sacrifice, 'central to his loss of control of his line of descent' ('Sacrifice, Descent and the Patriarchs', pp. 62-63).

his successor. And it is precisely this indiscriminate institutional authority that Rebekah sets out to challenge.

As is often the case with rivals, Rebekah has everything that Isaac lacks and vice versa. Clever and strong-willed, she is the one who sees and who knows; her position is that of clarity and insight. On the other hand, her social status is inferior, and she cannot openly contradict the will of her husband. But are there not some advantages to that inferiority? Does not being a woman, which means being unnoticed in the house, make it easier for Rebekah to overhear the men talk (27:5) and thus strengthen her position of knowledge even further? The binary opposition between the two sides in the conflict unfolds, contrasting the individual with the institutional, a visionary with a visionless, a woman with a man.³⁰³

Christine Allen observes, along similar lines, that Rebekah is brought into relief by her contrast with wary and apathetic Isaac. Since the narrative presents Isaac as falling far short of an ideal patriarchal figure, Rebekah takes over what should be his functions, becoming 'the necessary link between Abraham and Jacob'.³⁰⁴ Putting this suggestion in the context of patriarchal conventions, Nelly Furman comments that Rebekah's action 'ultimately disturbs the exclusively male genealogical lineage'.³⁰⁵ Rebekah's compelling presence overshadows the entire story of Isaac, beginning from her wooing in Genesis 24, and leaves him only a limited role to play in establishing the succession.

The contrast between Rebekah and Isaac extends at another level to the structural division between the inside and the outside, presented through the different occupations of Rebekah's sons. The two brothers belong to opposite realms: Esau, a hunter, is out in the fields, whereas Jacob, who stays in the tents, is in a position to cook meals (25:29) and look after the cattle.³⁰⁶ On the whole, Jacob's character does not seem to fit a dominant 'male' model. Is it because his affinities lie with his mother? In any case, Rebekah and Jacob together represent the irregular other side, the inferior, the

³⁰³ It is ironic that the development of the conflict completely bypasses Isaac, who will eventually become aware of its outcome (Jacob getting the blessing) but not of its driving forces. The reader is invited to see the story from Rebekah's perspective, whereas Isaac's perspective is virtually absent.

³⁰⁴ Christine Garside Allen, "On Me Be the Curse, My Son!" in Martin J. Buss (ed.) *Encounter with the Text. Form and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 168-69.

³⁰⁵ Nelly Furman, 'His Story versus Her Story: Male Genealogy and Female Strategy in the Jacob Cycle', in Adela Yarbro Collins (ed.), *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), p. 114.

³⁰⁶ Here the text constructs an opposition between wild game, associated with the world 'outside', to which Esau belongs to, and cattle or domesticated animals, which belong to the cultivated world 'inside', the shared domain of Jacob and Rebekah.

internal, and the non-institutional. And the dominant patriarchal pair of Isaac and Esau displays a need of that which this other side provides (cf. Isaac's love of food and Esau's hunger in 25:30, 32).

The strength of Rebekah's position in the plot of knowledge gives her a transforming power in the plot of action. In the story of the stolen blessing, she is not only the author, the mastermind behind the events but also the principal authority who gives orders and fully controls the situation. When she gives instructions to Jacob, her words sound overpowering: 'Obey me (*š^ema' b^eqōlî*) and do as I command you' (27:8), and again, 'Obey me (*š^ema' b^eqōlî*)', 27:13. Rebekah's mediation of Yahweh's will concerning the child of promise is comparable with that of Sarah. In 21:12 God says to Abraham, 'Listen to whatever Sarah tells you (*š^ema' b^eqolah*), because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned'. In both cases the mother plays the leading role in assuring the succession of the 'right' son.

The distribution of roles between the mother and the son reflects Rebekah's central position: in the preparations for the identity trick, Jacob is only his mother's instrument. Their interests coincide in that they both want to win the blessing for Jacob, but they show different degrees of engagement in the action. Jacob is afraid to be found out and needs considerable encouragement. Rebekah, on the other hand, is absolutely determined and assumes full responsibility for deceiving her blind husband ('My son, let the curse fall on me', 27:13). What is the source of such a strong resolve? From Rebekah's point of view, Isaac *has* to be deceived and give his blessing to Jacob so that the oracle starts to fall into place. Later in the narrative, Jacob too will gain insight into his own destiny, but at this stage only Rebekah is aware of God's plan for her son and so is solely responsible for carrying it out.

To effect the transformation, Rebekah manipulates the objects of her realm, the household. She prepares the 'tasty food', *maṭ'ammîm*, that Isaac loves so much, not from wild game, but from young goats from the flock. She dresses Jacob in the clothes of Esau, which she had 'in the house' and covers his hands and his neck with goatskins to make Jacob resemble his hairy brother.³⁰⁷ In all these preparations Rebekah aims to

³⁰⁷ Furman draws attention to the symbolism of women's actions when they use men's garments for their own personal ends. She groups together Rebekah, Potiphar's wife, and Tamar as the women who 'use pieces of attire – which are the symbolic markers of the father-son relationship – to reinscribe themselves in the patriarchal system'. Furman points out that men in Genesis treat garments as a means of communication between men, while for women, 'garments function as communicative devices between

deceive Isaac's senses, and in all of them she succeeds. The dish that Jacob brings to Isaac tastes like the food, normally brought by Esau, and, as Isaac himself admits, Jacob smells and feels like his elder brother. In fact, the only part of the disguise that does not fool Isaac is the voice of Jacob, which Rebekah could not change but over which, in Isaac's case, the taste takes priority. For it is the taste for Isaac that is the decisive factor in allocating his love and blessing. Through this emphasis on the senses, the two opponents, Rebekah and Isaac, are contrasted even further: the mother's knowledge comes from a superior source, a theophany, and results from her own search for meaning, whereas the father is limited to sensory perception.³⁰⁸

It is striking how well calculated and rational are all Rebekah's actions. In this whole dramatic episode, she never displays any emotions. When the truth is discovered, both the deceived father and Esau will tremble and cry, but Rebekah will simply not be there. In fact, had she been more 'human', had she had any remorse, any feeling for her frail husband, any compassion for her cheated son, her whole mission would have failed. And because her narrative identity must coincide with her mission, it is not possible for her to display such feelings.

The closure of the episode in 27:41-46 is the last we see of Rebekah. Having won Isaac's blessing for the son of promise, she now removes him from the father's land, ordering him to flee from Esau's revenge to her brother's family in Haran (vv. 42-45). Her seemingly straightforward motives become less clear when, in the next verse, speaking to Isaac, she suggests that Jacob should get himself a wife from her parentage in Haran.

Rebekah's statement in 27:46 should be assessed against the report about the exogamous marriages of Esau and the ensuing displeasure of his parents in Gn 26:34-35, where the narrator emphasised the origin of Esau's wives, 'Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite'. This emphasis is developed in Gn 27:46, where Rebekah expresses in powerful terms her aversion to Hittite women: 'If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?' Like the narrator in 26:34, Rebekah uses the word *hēt*, Heth, twice in her speech, adding to it an obviously derogatory designation *b^enōt*

the sexes' ('His Story versus Her Story', p. 114). Seen in this light, Rebekah's ruse not only serves Yahweh's purpose but also reinscribes her as a subject into the exclusive father-son relationship.

³⁰⁸ Dennis Sylva speaks about Isaac's being 'led astray by the sensory focus of his life not only in how he treats his sons but also in his ability to discriminate them' ('The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch: Genesis 27:1-40', *JSOT* 32 [2008], p. 271).

hā'ārez, 'women [daughters] of the land'. As previously in 25:22, Rebekah's statement can be read as a value judgment. The expression 'what good is life for me if...' implies an either-or situation, in which the two sides of the balance – Rebekah's life and the right wife (or wives) for Jacob – are symbolically equalised. Does this mean that she sees the purpose of her life in establishing the right succession based on endogamous marriage? The fact that, until now, she has been concerned with securing descent through the 'right' son, supports her role as the one in charge of succession. However, since in the patriarchal household she has no authority to perform her role openly, she resorts to double communication.

Rebekah shows remarkable mastery of communication. She did not say a word to Jacob about the daughters of Laban: as far as Jacob knows, his mother is providing him with a refuge from Esau. To Isaac, on the other hand, Rebekah says nothing about protecting Jacob from Esau's revenge. It is understandable, since Isaac himself has enough reason to feel vengeful towards his younger son. Her speech, however, allows her to get a sanction from the patriarch for what she has already ordered to happen, and she does it creating the illusion that he has all the agency. Brett calls Rebekah's speech in 27:46 'an extraordinary successful case of indirect communication'.³⁰⁹ But what is her own point of view? Is she, as Brett suggests, exploiting Isaac's dislike of Esau's Hittite wives in order to get his permission for Jacob's flight?³¹⁰ Or is her primary motive obtaining the wife for Jacob from her own parentage? The whole of chapter 27, where Rebekah manipulates everyone including Jacob, does not offer any insight into what she really thinks or wants. She is the trickster, the puppeteer of the story, the one who plays on communication, upsetting and redressing the balance of power to suit her hidden motives. In a trickster story, any particular action, which in itself can be elusive and ambiguous, serves the story as a whole. Rebekah's communication is deeply ambiguous because it serves the multiple causality of the narrative. Offering different versions of events to different people, Rebekah does not lie, but apportion information, deciding who needs to know what in order for the plot to go the way that it should. In this sense, she is a perfect instrument of the narrator whose double agenda includes reversing the right of primogeniture (25:23) and assuring continued descent through the 'right' mother.

³⁰⁹ See Brett, *Genesis*, p. 89. Turner describes Rebekah as a master of deception, able to 'orchestrate events and yet remain undetected' (*Genesis*, p. 122).

³¹⁰ For Jeansonne, Rebekah in 27:46 not only avoids potential conflict but also 'prompts Isaac to give Jacob an additional blessing' (*The Women of Genesis*, p. 68).

Rebekah's speech in 27:46 allows the reader to reconsider the logic of Genesis 27, taking for a possible starting point not only Rebekah's love of Jacob but also the implicit taboo on exogamous marriage that she appears to observe. According to that taboo, even before his blessing was stolen, Esau had already excluded himself from the succession by marrying outside the parentage of Abraham. By orchestrating the events that lead to Jacob's being blessed, Rebekah thus shapes the chosen line of succession according to the pattern established by Abraham. Her ambiguous actions are therefore implicitly sanctioned in the narrative, because they serve the best interests of patriarchy.³¹¹ Following Rebekah's instigation, Isaac forbids Jacob to marry outside the family and sends him off to look for a bride among his mother's kin: 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Go now to Paddan-Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father; and take a wife for yourself from there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother' (Gn 28:1-2). This statement echoes Abraham's order issued earlier in Genesis: 'you shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I live, but you will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac' (Gn 24:2-4). The story seems to be repeating itself, but the change from 'my country' and 'my kindred' to '*your mother's* father' and '*your mother's* brother' (emphasis mine) signals an important shift of perspective between Abraham and Isaac. Although it is true that Haran is not Isaac's land in the sense in which it is the land of Abraham and therefore he cannot call it 'my country', by referring twice to Jacob's mother Isaac seems to admit Rebekah's superior role in establishing succession, while removing himself from all agency.

Thus Rebekah completes her task, ensuring the purity of the lineage continued through her younger son and simultaneously saving him from his brother's vengeance. There is nothing more she can do for Jacob, and he will have to face his destiny and mature to become Israel. Her narrative function fulfilled, Rebekah disappears from the narrative, and her name from now on will be mentioned mainly in connection with her brother, Laban.

³¹¹ The importance of endogamy in the construction of patriarchal identity in Genesis has been acknowledged in scholarly literature. Jay has described endogamous marriage as a solution to the problem that descent from women poses to the patriarchal mindset. For her, 'marriage between members of the same patrilineage ensures the offspring's patrilineage membership even if it is figured through the mother' ('Sacrifice, Descent and the Patriarchs', p. 56). See also Naomi Steinberg, 'Alliance or Descent?', pp. 45-55; *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, pp. 10-14. Exum discusses the ideological function of endogamy in the patriarchal narratives in *Fragmented Women*, pp. 107-20.

It seems unusual that the death of such an important character is not mentioned in the text, especially since the death and the burial place of her nurse Deborah is reported in 35:8 (cf. also the extended account of the death and burial of Sarah in 23:1-20, and the story of the death of Rachel in 35:16-20). Could it be an implicit reprisal of the man-dominated world of the text on the woman who dared to challenge its structures? Having demonstrated the hidden power that a woman's position holds in the world of patriarchal narrative, Rebekah, like Eve before her, gets her narrative punishment by being denied closure.³¹²

Rachel as the 'Right' Bride

As was shown in the above analysis of matriarchal succession, the narrative introduces Rachel as a proper matriarch, in a set piece 'meeting by the well'. Next, the reader learns that Rachel is a beautiful woman, like Sarah and Rebekah before her, but her beauty receives a double emphasis, for she is described as 'beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance' (29:17). In fact, even the information that she is the younger daughter of Laban seems to be in her favour, since the narrative so far has been privileging the younger siblings over the first-born (Isaac, Jacob). Therefore, for the reader it is only fitting that Jacob should love Rachel.

In 29:20 the narrative indicates indirectly its further support of Jacob's choice. Jacob serves seven years for Rachel, but because of his love for her they seem to him *k'e Yamim 'hadim*, 'like a few days'. Strikingly, Rebecca used the same expression when she commissioned Jacob to go to stay with her brother: 'stay with him for a few days' (27:44). Thus, the seven years of service that was the original bride-price of Rachel seem to be sanctioned by Jacob's mother. From that perspective, Jacob would have to be released from service after that period, marry Rachel, and return home with his wife. But the Jacob stories are never woven with one thread. While the individual theme in the narrative seems to sanction the choice of Rachel, the institutional opposes it with its usual argument of power, in this case, paternal. From the outset, the narrator makes Rachel subordinated to her father (29:6, 10). She comes on stage as a shepherd, tending

³¹² See Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 107.

the flocks of her father (29:9),³¹³ and the first thing she does after her meeting with Jacob is to run and tell her father about the newcomer (cf. Rebekah, who in a similar situation 'ran and told the house of her mother', 24:28). Whereas Laban exercises equal power over both of his daughters, Rachel, the younger daughter, demonstrates particular submission to her father.

When Laban interferes with her fortunes and substitutes her sister for her in marriage, Rachel remains silent. We do not know whether or not she loves Jacob, whether or not she feels resentful toward her father; in fact, her feelings do not play any role at the moment. At the beginning of her married life, Rachel is still found enwrapped in her father's power: she stays in the realm of Laban together with Jacob, who is bound by Laban's deception to serve another seven years, and the inferior status of Laban's younger daughter is projected onto her marriage when she becomes Jacob's second wife.

But Jacob's love for Rachel keeps singling her out as a narrative resistance to the patriarchal norm. The narrator reminds us that Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah (29:30), and that fact inverts once again the sisters' hierarchy: whenever in the text his wives act together, Rachel's name comes first (31:4, 14; cf. 33:2, 6-7). The reference to love points to the presence of an alterity in the story, of something that repudiates rules and customs and leads to the unexpected. From 29:30-31 it follows that Jacob's love is the indirect cause of Rachel's sterility; conversely, Leah's fertility compensates for her being 'unloved' (29:31).

Rachel's 'otherness' in many ways reflects the characterisation of Jacob himself. As a younger sister, *q^etannah*, her position with regard to institutions is inferior; like Jacob, she strives to achieve institutional recognition, which in both cases involves 'wrestling' with the brother or sister.

³¹³ Later in the cycle the transferral of the flocks from Laban to Jacob parallels the father's loss of power over his daughters. Jacob starts preparations for the transfer of his wives from the house of their father as soon as he has acquired the wealth (lit. 'the weight') of Laban (30:43; 31:1). In 31:4 Jacob calls Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field to discuss their separation from Laban. The fact that Rachel first appears with her father's sheep might be interpreted as a sign of her father's power.

Leah and the Institutional

In contrast to Rachel, Leah does not receive any introduction and first appears in the narrative quite unexpectedly, as *hagg^edōlāh*, the older daughter of Laban. It appears significant that she is presented as Laban's daughter rather than Rachel's sister (29:16). Further in the story, Leah will come to represent the power of her father and the establishment in her relationships with her husband and her sister. Her appearance is much less emphasised than that of Rachel ('weak eyes' as opposed to Rachel's beauty of form and appearance, 29:17);³¹⁴ indeed, for the purposes of the narrator, she does not need to be a beauty, for in the only two narrative instances when her husband encounters her, she is covered by darkness (29:23; 30:16).

In the wedding-night scene, Leah is used as Laban's instrument ('and he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob', 29:23). Silently and passively, she becomes a substitute for Rachel. The tension arises here between her presence for Jacob, that is only too real ('and see, she was Leah'), and her continuing absence as a character, a subject, an intention. If Rachel is objectified, Leah is a hundred times more so. She is used not only by Laban, she is 'used' by the narrator as an epitomised birthright that serves to recall ironically the story of Jacob's conflict with his brother. In the wedding of Jacob, the plot of Genesis 27 is inverted: the first-born, *b^ekīrāh*, substituted here for the younger sister, becomes an instrument of poetic justice, a kind of narrative punishment that Jacob receives for substituting his own *b^ekôr*, Esau.³¹⁵ To be an instrument of punishment for her husband - what a pitiable role for the wife to assume from the very first day of marriage!

Therefore, it is not surprising that Leah is hated by her husband (29:31, 33): for him she will forever be a reminder of his own misdeeds. Similarly, her sister will become her enemy, jealous of the institutional precedence Leah takes over her. But what about Leah herself? A pawn of her father and an instrument of the narrative strategy, how does she see herself and the others? Looking for an answer, we might be helped by the fact that the only characterisation the text gives of Leah is that her eyes

³¹⁴ Because another possible meaning of *raḳ*, 'weak', is 'tender', this detail of Leah's appearance might also be mentioned to her advantage. Fewell and Gunn offer an attractive interpretation of v. 17a, deducing from it Leah's ability to look rather than to be looked at, and therefore her capability of affection and love (see *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 78). However, there is no semantic evidence to support this view, since the Hebrew word seems to have a connotation of delicate and undeveloped rather than affective.

³¹⁵ See Brett, *Genesis*, pp. 89, 92.

are weak (29:17). The only other occurrence of the word 'eyes' in the Jacob cycle is in 27:1, where the eyes of Isaac are reported to be too weak to see.³¹⁶ In my reading of Genesis 27 above, I attempted to demonstrate how the physical faculty of seeing was symbolic of the character's mental and spiritual abilities. Like his dimmed eyes, Isaac's point of view in the episode is defective too and is, therefore, inferior to that of Rebekah. Similarly, could the reference to Leah's eyes as weak not only refer to her appearance but also connote some deficiency in her point of view?³¹⁷ If so, the descriptions of Leah and Rachel in 29:17 cease being parallel, presenting one sister in terms of her perception, and the other in terms of her appearance. This, however, would not be the first instance of the narrator's juxtaposing qualitatively different characteristics: in the account of the birth of Jacob and Esau, the description of Esau's appearance (red and hairy) was followed by the description of Jacob's action at birth (clutching his brother's heel), which gave an insight into Jacob's character and had lasting repercussions for the development of the plot (25:25-26).

Whether or not the above argument is valid and Leah's 'weak' eyes reflect her lack of discernment, she does seem to misjudge her situation when she is finally put into focus. God grants Leah abundant fertility, which the narrator interprets as compensation for being unloved (29:31), as does Leah herself (29:32, 33). But Leah goes further: not accepting God's gift of fertility for what it is, she expects that the sons she gives to her husband will change his attitude to her, and will finally bring about his love. This point of view is shown in her naming speeches, which reveal, in the words of Ilana Pardes, 'more about the character of the name-giver than the recipient'.³¹⁸ The irony here is powerful: naming her sons, Leah makes happy announcements that contradict her real situation ('for my husband will love me now', 29:32; 'what good fortune!', 30:11; 'happy am I!', 30:13). But in the succession of her son's names, the reader can see the gradual decline of Leah's expectations: with her second son she sees that she is still hated (29:33), with the third she expects only her husband's attachment rather than love (29:33), with the fourth son the reference to her husband disappears (29:35). Naming her sixth son near the end of her long marathon, she will simply hope for her husband to

³¹⁶ The Hebrew text uses a different word for 'weak' in each case. In 27:1, the root *khh* communicates the idea of growing dim, faint, dull (BDB, p. 462), whereas the root *rkk* in 29:17 means 'to be soft, delicate, weak' with the implication of being undeveloped (BDB, pp. 939-40).

³¹⁷ Turner considers a possible parallel between Leah and Isaac in *Genesis*, p. 128.

³¹⁸ Ilana Pardes, 'Beyond Genesis 3: The Politics of Maternal Naming', in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, p. 176.

honour her (30:20).³¹⁹ And after bearing next a daughter who does not serve as an occasion to express any feelings, Leah disappears as a subject.

The failure of Leah's narrative programme seems to be caused by its inner contradiction. On the one hand, it is impossible for Jacob to love her: he 'hates' her for what she represents for him as much as for the fact that she is there at all, having taken Rachel's place in Laban's identity trick. But once she has taken Rachel's place, Leah is striving for what she expects should come with it, that is, Jacob's love.

There can be no resolution to this deadlock, for seeking her husband's favour is the only intention that the narrator allows Leah to have. She is a flat character, whose identity coincides with the role given to her by others. Even the intervention of God strengthens the position of Leah not as lover, but as mother, and thus reinscribes her into the institutional role that patriarchy wants her to play. And when her son's mandrakes put her in a position of advantage, it allows her not to win her husband's love, but to hire him from Rachel, reintroducing her father's perspective of bondage (*škr*), that originally made her Jacob's wife (30:16).

The Twists of God

Rachel and Leah seem to be true rivals; each possesses what the other lacks. Rachel has her husband's love but is sterile, and Leah is unloved but exceedingly fertile. Fewell and Gunn stress the essential un-wholeness of the sisters, presented 'only as parts, as though neither were complete in herself'.³²⁰ Each one desperately wants for herself what the other has. Yet their respective attitudes in that rivalry are not symmetrical. While Leah is preoccupied with Jacob, Rachel seems to be very conscious of Leah: she is envious of her sister (30:1), and she interprets her quest for sons as *naptûlê 'lôhîm*, 'struggles of God' with Leah (30:8). Since the *hapax legomenon* *naptûlîm* means literally 'twists',³²¹ it could imply a forceful exchange of places or identities. Rachel's primary motive in striving for fertility might be a desire of the institutional status associated with Leah as fertile wife ('so that I, me too, can build up [a family]', 30:3). 'Building' a family (*bānāh*) entails a symbolic 'building up' of the

³¹⁹ Exum observes this in *Fragmented Women*, p. 142.

³²⁰ Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise*, p. 78.

³²¹ BDB, p. 836.

female subject, and it is this status-related advantage that Rachel appears to seek (cf. Sarah's similar desire to be 'built up' in 16:2). Structurally, the struggle between Rachel and Leah inverts the rivalry between Sarah and Hagar, which, though shaped by the same hierarchy 'husband – first wife – second wife', associates the first, 'institutional' wife with sterility, while making the second wife fertile.

Jan Fokkelman offers a plausible explanation of the expression *naptûlê *lôhîm* as an example of an objective genitive, in which case *naptûlê *lôhîm* should be translated not with a superlative, as in most versions ('mighty wrestlings') but as 'wrestlings for God'.³²² In this case Rachel would be seen as fighting with her sister for God's favour, demonstrated in the 'opening of the womb' and the restoration of status.

The fact that it is Rachel who actively fights with her sister and not *vice versa* could be seen as a reaction to Leah's usurpation of her place in 29:23-26. Although at the time Laban's substitution of Leah for Rachel on the wedding night is described solely in terms of its impact on Jacob, the replacement of the bride by her elder sister necessarily has consequences for their respective status as wives. Leah takes her status of *b^ekîrâh*, the first-born, into the marriage when she becomes the first wife. Although unwanted by Jacob, she still has her rights protected by the power of the establishment that Laban represents, since Jacob has to complete a bridal week with her before taking Rachel as his second wife (29:27-28). Not only is she the first wife and a first-born daughter, Leah also bears Jacob his first son, Reuben, and then five more sons and a daughter. Thus she more than fulfils her institutional duty. From the point of view of patriarchy, Leah is an exemplary and honourable matriarch. It is therefore not surprising that the institutional perspective of the narrative should favour Leah over Rachel. In the accounts of Jacob's descendants, the names of Leah and her sons will always be mentioned before the names of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin (35:23-26; 46:8-25; cf. also 49:2-27).³²³ Near the end of Genesis, in 49:31, the narrative will signal its approbation of Leah by mentioning that she, unlike Rachel, is buried together with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah in the ancestral tomb of Abraham near Mamre, which will eventually become the resting place of Jacob himself (50:13).

³²² Jan P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1975), p. 135.

³²³ The order in which the sons of Jacob are born is relevant here only to an extent, as each account displays a different sequence.

By contrast, Rachel's married life is shaped by her loss of status. Having been introduced as the 'right' bride in Genesis 29, Rachel is pushed out to an inferior position when Leah takes her place on the night of the wedding. And God's intervention reinforces that status quo: the God who opens and closes wombs (see 29:31; 30:17, 22; cf. 21:1-2; 25:21) makes Rachel sterile. It is striking to see how, time after time, Rachel is objectified: loved by Jacob for her beauty, traded by her father for material gain, Rachel is kept by God from having children as if in punishment for being favoured by her husband. The narrative is reticent about Rachel's own feelings for Jacob. While Leah strives for Jacob's love, Rachel appears indifferent and easily gives him up in exchange for the mandrakes of Leah's son (30:15). In 'the struggles of Elohim', which unfold between her and her sister, at stake for Rachel is never her husband but rather having sons as a means to restore her status as the 'right' wife and matriarch, the status that her sister has usurped.

The text of 30:1 offers the only instance when the reader accesses Rachel's point of view: 'when Rachel saw that she did not bear Jacob any children, she became envious of her sister'. The contrasting description of Hagar in Gn 16:4 ('when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became slight in her eyes') is structured by the same concern over status in a hierarchical relationship. In both cases, the status position is directly related to fertility, and in both cases, it is the sterile matriarch who complains to her husband. Rachel thus blames Jacob for her sterility: 'Give me children/sons, or I die!' This angry and seemingly displaced outburst parallels Sarah's speech in 16:5, where she blames Abraham for Hagar's contempt. In Sarah's case, her husband responds to her need by restoring her power over Hagar ('Your maid is in your hand,' 16:6). Rachel, on the other hand, does not receive satisfaction from her husband. On the contrary, Jacob, whose 'anger burned against Rachel', 30:2, admits that he is powerless to help her and redirects her to God. Ignored by Jacob, Rachel's death threat becomes suspended, casting a shadow over her entire narrative programme, since, ironically, she will die as soon as her wish to have sons is fulfilled (35:16-20).

Rachel's wish to be 'built up' as matriarch leads to her using a substitute mother, her servant Bilhah, in a move analogous to Sarah's use of Hagar in 16:1-4. But, unlike Sarah who comes to resent Hagar's fertility, Rachel interprets Bilhah's childbearing as her own victory in the wrestlings with her sister (30:8). Leah follows suit and gives her servant Zilpah to Jacob to bear children on her behalf (30:9). Between them, Bilhah and Zilpah give birth to four of Jacob's sons. Functioning as surrogate mothers for their

mistresses, they are used as instruments of their rivalry and are totally controlled by them. Significantly, they do not have their own voices, not even for naming their children. Even though between them they provide four of the fathers of the tribes of Israel, this does not have an impact on their status, for it is their mistresses who are 'built up' through them. Unlike Hagar, they remain in the family along with their sons, but will be referred to as servants, not wives (33:1, 2, 6).

The *dūdā'im* of Reuben (30:14-16)

In the middle of Rachel's wrestlings with Leah, an enigmatic exchange takes place between the two sisters. Reuben brings some plants, *dūdā'im*, from the harvested field. The text sheds no light on this rare term that is not used anywhere else in Genesis. The Hebrew word *dūdā'im* comes from the root *dwd*, 'to love, caress', and since the Septuagint translation in the third century BCE it has been understood as 'mandrakes', the plant that was believed to arouse sexual desire and cure infertility.³²⁴ Westermann also calls them 'love-apples'.³²⁵ Commentators agree that the plant *dūdā'im* is an aphrodisiac as well as a remedy for sterility, which means that both sisters would be interested in having it: Leah to attract Jacob; Rachel, to conceive.³²⁶ But is it that easy? The text appears to pose more questions than it answers.

The first problem is the use of *dūdā'im*. This mysterious value object causes a verbal dispute between Jacob's wives, in which Rachel asks Leah to share them with her, and Leah wants to keep them for herself. The plant has to combine two properties for the mandrake hypothesis to work; namely, it has to both excite passion and bring about fertility, but this would only explain why both sisters need the plant, and not the outcome of the exchange, for Rachel will stay sterile, whereas Leah will have three more successive pregnancies (seemingly, without the help of the plant).

³²⁴ See BDB, p.188; *DCH* II, p. 424.

³²⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 475.

³²⁶ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 475; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50* (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word Books, 1994), pp. 246-47. This traditional interpretation was supported by the studies of Mircea Eliade (see 'La mandragore et les mythes de la "naissance miraculeuse"', *Zalmoxis* 3 [1942], pp. 1-48; *Patterns in Comparative Religion* [trans. R. Sheed; London: Sheed and Ward, 1979], pp. 314-18; see also Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament: A Comparative Study with Chapters from Sir James G. Frazer's Folklore in the Old Testament* [New York: Harper and Row, 1969], p. 200). For a bibliography of earlier literature on mandrakes, see Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 469.

Second, what is the role of Reuben in this scene? Since the text refers to him repeatedly throughout this episode, is there some special significance attached to this character? Could the mention of Reuben, the first-born of Jacob, reintroduce the institutional perspective into the dispute and thus reinforce Leah's position of advantage? Or does he symbolize for Rachel those *bānîm* that she wishes for so badly?

The attribution of medicinal properties to *dûdā'im* presupposes that the plant and its qualities should be well known to the intended audience, who would easily see the attraction of it for the characters. This reading is based on information that is not communicated by the text but has to be inferred by the reader. The value object that changes hands in 30:14-16 is almost ephemeral and the only insight into its nature is obtained from its etymology and its context, both of which point to its erotic connotation.

The other most common forms of the verb *dwd* in the Hebrew Bible are *dôd*, 'beloved' and *dôdîm*, 'love, caresses'. Fokkelman points out that the alliteration of *dûdā'im* with *dôdîm* enhances the parallelism of the sisters' exchange as the plant is exchanged for 'a right to Jacob's 'caresses'.³²⁷ The form *dûdā'im*, however, is extremely rare in the Hebrew Bible: apart from its five occurrences in 30:14-16, it is attested once more in the Song of Songs (7:14). This only other occurrence of the rare term deserves a closer look.

In Sg 7:14 the term is characterised by fragrance with no mention of its other properties: 'the mandrakes give forth fragrance'. It is presumed to denote a fragrant flowering plant, identical to the mandrakes in Gn 30:14-16. However, like other images of the garden in the Song of Songs, the meaning of *dûdā'im* is open to double interpretation. Exum speaks of the double significance of the plant imagery in relation to the pleasure garden of Sg 4:13, 'which is both the woman's body and the place for lovemaking'.³²⁸ In Sg 7:1-10 the woman is admired by her lover, who uses the images of vineyard, palm tree and its fruit to describe metaphorically the beauty of her body. Here the images of the garden are the medium through which the text communicates the sensuousness and the intensity of the lover's desire. In this respect, the response of the woman in Sg 7:11-14 is different, for the metaphors she uses are less transparent, alluding rather than describing, and pointing to the fulfilment of her lover's desire. In

³²⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, p. 136.

³²⁸ Cheryl J. Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), p. 241.

Sg 7:12-13 she invites her lover to go out in the fields to see whether the vine and pomegranates are in blossom (cf. Sg 6:11). Here, the blossoming garden presents a perfect setting, and a precondition for the lovers' imaginary encounter, for, at the peak of its splendour, it prefigures the consummation of their love. Semantically there is a correspondence between the buds opening on the vines (*pittah*, 7:13), the woman opening her door to her lover in 5:2, 5, 6 (*pth*) and the doors (*p^etāhênû*, "our openings", 7:14) where she has stored 'all the delicacies' for him.³²⁹ This interplay of projected meanings that creates an association between the garden and the woman is also present in 7:13-14: the woman's call reaches its climax when she promises to *give* her love (*šām 'ettēn 'et-dōday lāk*), and her words are immediately reflected in the image of the mandrakes *giving* off their fragrance (*dūdā'im naf'nu-rêah*). As Exum notes, 'the mandrakes, in giving their fragrance for the lovers' pleasure, mirror and participate in the woman's gift of love'.³³⁰

Along with the other sensory images of the garden, the mandrakes thus participate in the unfolding and fulfilment of the drama of desire. They receive an even stronger connotation of physical love due to the extensive use of the root *dwd* in the woman's speech (*dōdî*, "my lover," 7:10, 11, 12, 14; *dōdāy*, "my love", 7:13). With such density of related vocabulary, the use of the term *dūdā'im* could hardly be accidental. The apparent chiasmus "I will *give my love*" : "*love-flowers give*" (vv.13b-14a), further supports the parallelism between the images of the garden and of physical love. The term *dūdā'im*, while denoting a fragrant plant, is loaded with erotic connotations, arising from its context.

Some scholars have argued on linguistic grounds that the word *dūdā'im* could simply be synonymous with *dōdîm*, 'caresses'.³³¹ The 'delicacies' stored at the door, mentioned later in v. 14, are most likely referring to a similar concept; in fact, the entire verse seems to unfold the meaning of v. 13b as it portrays the pleasures that are waiting to be released in the love-giving of the woman. With the lack of further characterisation, it is possible to say that the text allows a double reading of the term *dūdā'im*, as a flowering plant as well as an aspect of physical love.

³²⁹ Exum mentions a possibility of a sexual allusion in 7:13 and 5:2-6 (*Song of Songs*, p. 242).

³³⁰ Exum, *Song of Songs*, p. 242.

³³¹ According to the linguistic analysis of A. Fitzgerald, the Hebrew word *yd*, 'hand', that is often used as a euphemism for genitals, could be possibly related to *dūdā'im* through the verb *ydd/wdd*, 'to love' ('Hebrew *yd* = "Love" and "Beloved"', *CBQ* 29 [1967], pp. 368-74).

Given the highly metaphorical use of the term *dūdā'im* in Song 7, could it also be used as a metaphor in Gn 30:14-16? The term *dūdā'im* is structurally associated with Reuben, the first-born of Leah. It is used either in conjunction with the name of Reuben or with a reference to him (*dūdā'ē b^enēk*, vv. 14, 15; *dūdā'ē b^enī*, vv. 15, 16). This reiteration suggests some kind of special link between Reuben and the mysterious plant. If Reuben has given it to his mother, why is it still considered to be his? Also, when Leah responds to Rachel in v. 15, she mentions her husband (*'išī*) in parallel with her son's mandrakes (*dūdā'ē b^enī*), making the two realities comparable and an exchange possible. Thus Rachel allows Leah to have Jacob, even if it is just for one night, and for Leah the consequences are significant: three more pregnancies one after the other. Rachel, however, disappears from the stage, presumably in possession of the object of her desire. Her actual receiving of the *dūdā'im* is not reported, neither is the effect of using them. The narrative strategy in the episode seems to emphasise the Leah line whereas the Rachel line is suppressed. But is it enough to say that Reuben's mandrakes, with their five occurrences within three verses, are introduced only as a bait for Rachel, to make Leah benefit from the trade? The object that holds such obvious significance in the world of the narrative is partly veiled from the reader's view.

One possible explanation for the vague description of the exchange has been put forward by Seth Kunin, who considers the episode to be an incest story, sharing the same motif with the other Reuben episode in 35:22. Seeing incest as an ultimate structural expression of endogamy, favoured by Hebrew mythology, Kunin suggests that the son's offering mandrakes to his mother may represent an incestuous relationship between the two.³³² Though it is mythologically acceptable, incest is culturally problematic, which could explain the vagueness that characterises the entire episode.

The word *dūdā'im* in this case, just as in Sg 7:14, would refer to physical love. Stephen Sherwood mentions among possible readings of *dūdā'im* 'love making', which in this case would be attributed to Reuben.³³³ But is Reuben old enough for this suggestion to work? If one follows the account of the pregnancies of Jacob's wives and concubines and allows one year for each birth, it seems that at the time of the mandrake

³³² Seth Daniel Kunin, *The Logic of Incest: A Structuralist Analysis of Hebrew Mythology* (JSOT SS, 185; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 123-25. Kunin's argument stops short of including Rachel as part of the incest model.

³³³ See Sherwood, 'Had God Not Been on My Side', p. 165.

episode Reuben can be only a child. Westermann, for instance, assumes that Reuben in 30:14-16 is about six years old,³³⁴ as does Fokkelman, referring to the boy as 'a little chap'.³³⁵ It is necessary to note here the narrator's underlying concern to locate all the twelve pregnancies and births within the seven years that Jacob is serving his uncle for Rachel (cf. 29:30; 30:25; 31:41). This concern leads one to postulate that the process of childbearing that involved all four women was incessant. Hard to envisage as it is, even this conveyer-belt idea of how the ancestors of the Israelite tribes came into being does not make it possible to squeeze the twelve births into seven years. Leah, for her part, needs at least nine years in order to produce seven children of her own, have a period of infertility, and allow her servant Zilpah to have two sons on her behalf. Wenham suggests an even longer period, spacing out the pregnancies at two-year intervals.³³⁶ Thus the time span of seven years for the births of Jacob's children can only be considered emblematic, with no strict chronological accuracy. If one were to relax the tempo of childbearing in the story, the age of Reuben would become less of a problem.

The incest theory seems to fit the context of the episode, tying up some loose ends in its interpretation. Importantly, the bringing of the mandrakes to Leah does not necessarily point to the mother-son type of incest, as Kunin sees it; it could just symbolise Leah's authority over her son's sexual faculties. If this were the case, the exchange between the sisters should be reassessed. It is possible that Rachel, who failed to obtain children by Jacob, is now trying to use Reuben as a surrogate father, for she is striving to have a child by any means (cf. Rachel's initiative in 30:3, where she sets up her servant Bilhah as a surrogate mother). Leah's angry response also makes sense, for she sees in Rachel's demand a greed for men; indeed, the whole trade now becomes more understandable, seen as a swapping of the two men's sexual services. The episode highlights the powerful position of the matriarchs in the matters of family building: Jacob, who has already renounced his responsibility for Rachel's bearing children in 30:2, is now used as a mere pawn, letting his women decide with whom he and his first-born should sleep.

Seen from this angle, the episode brings to completion the underlying theme of the 'wrestlings' between the two sisters. In the dispute, Rachel's position is one of need. On the other side of the dispute stands Leah with her first-born son, *b^ekîrāh* and *b^ekôr*,

³³⁴ Westermann., *Genesis 12-36*, p.475.

³³⁵ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, p. 136.

³³⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 246.

in possession of all that Rachel lacks and strives for: a fertile mother whose power has increased even more, now that she can dispense her son's newly acquired fertility. From that position of power comes a response that treats Rachel as a thief: 'Was it not enough that you took away my husband?' (v.15). Leah's point of view is clear: Jacob is *her* husband by right, not Rachel's, and the present situation is a result of Rachel's 'theft', or her taking away what is not hers. Significantly, Rachel does not object to this accusation. Saying, 'he may lie with you', Rachel does not mention Jacob's name, neither does she call him 'my husband' as Leah does; thus, literally, she agrees to relinquish the husband of Leah, accepting the blame for having taken what was not hers.

The incest model provides the characters with the motives that are consistent with their actions and characterisation throughout the story. Here, as elsewhere in the account of the confrontation between the sisters, Leah gets the upper hand no matter what Rachel tries. Thus, when Rachel uses a surrogate mother, Leah copies her with much the same effect (two sons born from each woman's servant, 30:3-13), but still outdoes Rachel, having had four sons of her own to begin with. In the same way, now that Rachel 'buys' Reuben in the hope of getting pregnant, Leah effectively 'hires' her husband and ends up having two more sons and a daughter. The birth of Joseph to Rachel that occurs at the end of this procreation marathon, may take away her disgrace, as she sees it (30:22-24), but does not diminish Leah's outright victory.

Who is Who in Jacob's Family?

If one reads the episode of 30:14-16 as an incest story, one needs to take account of the problem that such a reading creates with regard to the legitimacy of Rachel's children. That is to say, according to the interpretation of the *dûdā'im*, discussed above, Joseph or both Joseph and Benjamin could have been the sons of Reuben as substitute father. Is it plausible though to assume that Jacob would first allow his son to have sex with his beloved wife, the self-same action that he will later in Bilhah's case see as an abomination (35:22), and then consider the children born as a result as his own and even favour them above the others (Gn 37:3; 44:20)? Far-fetched as this suggestion may appear, the narrative seems to allow for such a possibility.

The most important key to it is found in 30:1-2, where Jacob replies to Rachel's plea for children, 'Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?' It is common in the biblical narratives to portray God as the sole source of fertility. Sarah, Rebekah, Manoah's wife (Judges 13) and Hannah (1 Samuel 1) are all initially sterile and owe their miraculous pregnancies to God. Likewise, in the Jacob story Leah's superabundant fertility results from God's 'opening her womb' (29:31) and listening to her (30:17). Later in the narrative, Rachel herself is able to have a child thanks only to God's triple action of remembering her, listening to her and 'opening her womb' (30:22), a role that she admits when, after the birth of Joseph, she says, 'God has taken away my disgrace' (30:23). It is notable that in the scenes where God intervenes in order to make a sterile wife conceive, the husband is present too and is typically portrayed as helpless (Isaac is an exception in that he prays for Rebekah in 25:21, and Yahweh makes her conceive in answer to his prayer). From this point of view, Rachel's demand is misplaced, which makes Jacob's retort entirely logical.

Another reason why Rachel's view might appear unreasonable is that, at the time when Rachel addresses her husband in 30:1, Jacob has already fathered four sons, which is an objective proof of his virility. Jacob is a potent father, which means that Rachel cannot blame him for her sterility. Clearly, it is Rachel who is at fault, the one from whom 'the fruit of the womb' is withdrawn. Jacob therefore appears justified in declining his responsibility with respect to making Rachel pregnant. Elsewhere in the Bible, sterility is blamed on the woman, whose husband has already got children by other wives (cf. Gn 17:17-18; 1 Sam 1:1-2). According to Fuchs, this pattern reflects the way in which patriarchy redefines procreation, giving the father the 'prerogative of owning his sons, without however bearing responsibility for their absence'.³³⁷

On the other hand, could Jacob's strong reaction, described as burning anger, arise if Jacob himself were entirely blameless? The pronoun *'ānōkī*, though used ironically to deny his involvement, nevertheless draws attention to the character Jacob. Behind his shifting of the responsibility to God, and of the blame to Rachel, the narrator cannot conceal Jacob's frustration and self-diminishment ('Am I in the place of God...?') in the face of his failure to impregnate his beloved wife. Jacob's aloof response to Rachel's plea reflects both his physical inability and his unwillingness to

³³⁷ Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, p. 54.

share her point of view.³³⁸ Why would Jacob not pray to God for the sterile wife he loves, as his father did for Rebekah in 25:21? Hidden beneath his anger is Jacob's personal deficiency as Rachel's husband.

This masked deficiency is not fortuitous. The preceding narrative tells us that Jacob's love for Rachel is the real reason why she is sterile. It is his feelings that create the initial differentiation between his wives, and bring about God's counterbalancing allocation of fertility. The whole network of relationships in Jacob's polygamous marriage is thus determined by the husband's preference for one of the wives at the expense of the other. In its turn, the institutional framework of the story refutes this exposure of feelings by opening the womb of the unloved wife and leaving the loved one sterile (29:31). In this way, the narrative presents two value systems: one that validates individual choices, feelings and intentions, and the other, which serves the interests of patriarchal power, and where the primary values are purity of patrilineal descent and fertility. In the case of Jacob's wives, the latter system is superimposed onto the former. God's institutional response is triggered by Jacob's individual choice in such a way as to demonstrate that God's gift of fertility is incompatible with the experience or expression of love. Jacob thus cannot father Rachel's children so long as he loves her, for it is his love that makes her sterile in the first place. Similarly, Leah by definition cannot win her husband's love by bearing him more children, for she is only fertile on account of being unloved. It is obvious therefore that Jacob, as the cause of Rachel's misfortune, is not able to answer her plea because by loving her he renders himself symbolically sterile, dissociated from the institutional power associated with fertility.

The issue of biblical men's being implicated in the sterility of their wives has been recognised by scholars. Comparing the examples of 18:12, 30:2 and 1 Sam 1:8, Bal notes that in situations where a deity "closes the womb" of the woman... the husband is powerless and acknowledges this'. Bal interprets the opposition between 'the powerful deity and the powerless men' in terms of sexual potency and suggests that relegating to the deity the power to open and close wombs is a narrative strategy aimed

³³⁸ Fuchs makes a similar observation concerning Jacob's attitude, although she draws from it different conclusions. She notes that Jacob's response in 30:2 'implies both that he has no control over and no responsibility for Rachel's barrenness' (see Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, p. 154). Fuchs puts this attitude down not to the character's own motives but to the narrator's intention to undermine the husband's role in order to free him from responsibility for his wives' tragic experiences. Accordingly, the narrator presents Rachel's demand as an 'irrational and morally invalid complaint of the barren wife', which contrasts Jacob's reasonable and pious response (pp. 154-55).

at concealing the impotence of the husbands.³³⁹ Rulon-Miller develops Bal's insight, interpreting the sterility of Sarah as a result of Abraham's inability or unwillingness to respond to her sexually. For Rulon-Miller, Sarah's laughter in 18:12 arises not from her disbelief in her ability to procreate in old age, but from being surprised that now that she is old, she could have the pleasure (*'ednāh*) she has been denied before.³⁴⁰

Rachel's quest to become a mother and matriarch is marked from the outset by Jacob's renunciation. After their angry exchange in 30:1-2, Rachel's motherhood becomes a matter to be settled between God and her. However, given that God is usually accessible to a married woman through her husband,³⁴¹ Rachel can rely only on her own ingenuity. But does being left to her own devices mean that Rachel is authorised to do as she sees fit? It certainly seems so when she uses her servant Bilhah as a surrogate mother (30:3-8). When Bilhah bears two sons on her behalf, Rachel rather hastily interprets it as a sign of God's favour and victory over her sister (30:6, 8). Yet her triumph over Leah is short-lived, for although Bilhah bears two sons, Dan and Naphtali, who are included in the list of Israel's ancestors, they add to their father's credit, while Rachel herself remains sterile and without status. In this context it seems possible that Rachel would start looking for a surrogate not for herself, but for her husband, in which case Reuben, Jacob's first-born son, would be the best candidate. Given Rachel's limited options, intercourse with Reuben is the only expedient that would allow her to have children within her husband's direct lineage.

This motivation may answer the question of the legitimacy of Rachel's children. If the *dūdā'im* really do symbolise Reuben's procreative abilities, then the incestuous relationship between Reuben and Rachel would serve the institutional purpose of acquiring offspring of pure descent. The Hebrew Bible has other instances of culturally problematic sexual encounters that serve the ends of patriarchy. Lot's two daughters preserve their 'father's seed' through incest in 19:30-38; likewise, Tamar in Genesis 38 seduces Judah, her father-in-law, in order for the patrilineal descent to continue. In this context, observing cultural prohibitions could become a lesser priority, and the sexual

³³⁹ Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 73. Later in the book, Bal argues that the very insistence on the woman's sterility in the biblical narrative 'addresses, as in an attempt to repress, the opposite possibility – that the men are impotent' (p. 266 n. 10).

³⁴⁰ Rulon-Miller, 'Hagar', pp. 69-72. See also Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis*, pp. 23-24; Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*, p. 73.

³⁴¹ The case of Rebekah in 25:22-23 is an exception only to a point, for she inquires of God about the meaning of her experience rather than imploring him to grant her wish, which is the prerogative of Isaac in 25:21.

relationship between Rachel and her husband's first-born son could become an acceptable, if veiled, way for Rachel to be included in the ranks of the matriarchs.

If Jacob's angry reply in 30:2 has potential repercussions for the interpretation of the *dūdā'im* episode, so does Rachel's demand in 30:1. She commands Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die!' and the subsequent story shows that it is not an empty threat. The fact that Rachel will die prematurely creates a paradox in the light of 30:1, for she will die, a mother of two sons. In a certain way this paradox can be resolved if one were to assume that Jacob did *not* in the end give Rachel what she had asked for. In this case, the failure of Jacob to give her children would cast a shadow over Rachel's married life, making forever futile her attempts to overcome her sister and leading, indirectly, to her death. It would be this pain of her destiny being unfulfilled that she will inscribe so hauntingly in the name of her last son: *ben-'ōnî*, 'the son of my sorrow' (35:18).

In this elaborate interplay of power and desire, what is the part of Reuben, the original owner of the *dūdā'im*? On the one hand, Jacob's first-born is a flat character, whose only significance in the narrative comes from his association with the *dūdā'im*. On the other hand, this very association singles him out among his brothers, making his presence linger on stage. After the episode of 30:14-16, Reuben will reappear in 35:22 where he is reported to have had sexual relations with Bilhah, his father's wife of secondary rank and Rachel's chosen substitute. The narrative here is remarkably brief, and seemingly disrupts the context. As Frederick Greenspahn points out, there is neither motivation for Reuben's action here nor any immediate consequences or condemnation of his behaviour, nothing like the parallel episode in 2 Sam 16:21-22, where Absalom's incest with David's wives of secondary rank is performed in an explicit attempt to displace his father.³⁴² Reuben's motives appear to be self-evident, without any power-related connotations. Nevertheless, at a closer look, the text of 35:22 sheds more light on Reuben's narrative role. The event almost immediately follows the death of Rachel in 35:19-20. It seems rather that the narrator reports the incest with Bilhah at this precise moment to hint at Reuben's association with Rachel. In other words, after the death of her mistress, Bilhah once again replaces Rachel as a 'substitute', only this time it is Jacob's son who initiates the substitution.

³⁴² Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.122.

On this occasion, however, the narrative does not suppress the negative judgement on incest. The deed that was at least implicitly justified for Rachel is not at all acceptable in the case of her servant, for she was *able* to have and indeed had had children by Jacob. A sexual encounter that is not intended for lawful procreation cannot be sanctioned within the institutional framework, which is represented here by Jacob-Israel: 'and Israel heard of it' (Gn 35:22). There is a striking contrast between the narrative attitudes towards the two instances of incest. In the first case, Rachel is the conscious instigator of the incest, which is subsequently hushed up; in the second case, Bilhah is a voiceless and passive substitute for her mistress, and the initiative belongs entirely to Reuben, whose transgression is brought to light and brings upon him severe consequences. Thus, when old Jacob confers his last blessing on his sons, he will accuse Reuben of defiling his father's bed (Gn 49:3-4) and thus give him an anti-blessing: 'you shall excel no more'.

The institutional reaction to Reuben's transgression is further developed by the Chronicler who states that Reuben lost his birthright 'because he polluted his father's couch' (1 Chr 5:1). Here, the narrator refers to the tradition expressed in Gn 49:4, repeating almost word for word Jacob's formulation of Reuben's guilt. Given that the incident with Bilhah is the only explicit account of incest in the Jacob cycle, one presumes that this is what both Gn 49:4 and 1 Chr 5:1 refer to. Thus, it looks as though the non-sanctioned incest with Bilhah is what loses the first-born his father's favour (Genesis), and what costs him the primacy over his brothers (Chronicles), his *b^ekôrah* passed on to the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh.³⁴³

On the other hand, both Genesis and Chronicles allow the possibility that incest with Rachel, though not acknowledged by the narrator, is also implicitly counted against Reuben. The clause about defiling his father's bed in Gn 49:4 uses the word *miškāb*, 'bed', in the plural; similarly, in 1 Chr 5:1-2 the word *yātsū'a*, 'bed, couch', is used in the plural. One could argue that this usage implies multiple occasions on which Reuben transgressed the incest law of Lev 18:6-10. But it is not unthinkable that the narrator literally means different beds, the bed of Rachel as well as the bed of Bilhah. If this were the case, and the Chronicler's reading of the Reuben story in Genesis took

³⁴³This removal of Reuben's birthright is not as clear-cut in Genesis as it is in the book of Chronicles. Greenspahn stresses that the text of Genesis is not aware of Reuben's right of primogeniture being transferred to Joseph's sons, rather it presents their elevated status as a result of their having been adopted by Jacob: 'Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simon are', Gn 48:5 (*When Brothers Dwell Together*, p.121).

account of the double incest, then Reuben could be seen here as the physical father of Joseph, which would make the transferral of the birthright from Reuben to Joseph's sons perfectly justified.

Scholars have expressed different views about the role of the *dūdā'im* in the birth of Joseph. God's intervention and Rachel's ensuing childbirth in Gn 30:22 are usually treated as unrelated to her efforts to conceive. Exum states that Rachel's attempt to use aphrodisiacs has no impact on her conception because of the time gap between 30:14-16 and 30:22, and concludes generally that the narrator 'regards female fecundity as due solely to divine intervention'.³⁴⁴ Westermann, on the contrary, holds that Rachel's storyline is interrupted in 30:17 so that Leah could have a son, and is resumed later in v. 22; despite this time lapse, 'the narrative traces Joseph's birth back to them [love-apples]'.³⁴⁵ In my view, the narrative allows both possibilities, and Yahweh's involvement might be seen as a ratification of Rachel's exchange in an instance of what Yairah Amit has described as 'dual causality'.³⁴⁶

Two Perspectives on Gn 29:31-30:24

Much as the above reading may resemble an exercise in deduction appropriate to a detective story, one cannot deny that many elements of 29:31-30:24 present a challenge to interpretation. The text bears witness to a structural tension between the two conflicting narrative attitudes that are found elsewhere in the Jacob narrative, the institutional and the individual. These two attitudes overlap in the story of the contest between Rachel and Leah, presenting different levels of narrative causality or configuration. It is worth considering each configurative strand more closely.

From the institutional perspective, the main point of the contest between Jacob's wives is to produce the twelve fathers of the Israelite tribes, and the rivalry between Rachel and Leah is a perfect means of escalating the process of child-bearing.³⁴⁷ Within this process women present themselves as acting subjects, entitled to

³⁴⁴ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, pp.123-4; for a similar view see also Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 248.

³⁴⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, p. 476.

³⁴⁶ Yairah Amit, 'The Dual Causality Principle and Its Effects on Biblical Literature', *VT* 37 (1987), pp. 385-400.

³⁴⁷ For a presentation of patriarchal strategies in conjugal narratives see Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, pp. 116-76.

manipulate all available means to ensure the patrilineal continuity that leads, in the case of Leah and Rachel, to a profusion of offspring, the outcome privileged by patriarchy. This is congruous with the social conventions operating in the world of the narrative, for despite the central importance of patrilineal descent, all the responsibility for producing and bringing up offspring lies with mothers. Exum holds a similar view when she considers the domestic sphere as one place where women can exercise authority of their own, seeing the 'hiring' of Jacob by Leah in 30:14-16 as an instance where such authority is demonstrated.³⁴⁸ In fact, the entire account of the contest between Rachel and Leah gives one an impression of women's indisputable rule in Jacob's household, where only the names of Leah's children betray the husband's superior position. Fuchs sees in it a patriarchal strategy, which minimises to the point of passivity the role of the husband in matters of procreation, although, in the end, it is he and not his wives who is perpetuated through the ensuing lineage. By setting the women up against each other, the narrator 'incriminates the victims of the contest rather than the husband, who is in the final analysis the cause of their mutual rivalry'.³⁴⁹ In this way the institution exploits the women, making them engage in a fight that has no winners, and in which their conformity to the patriarchal stereotype is to be their only reward.

Jacob, however, does not entirely fit into this institutional scheme. Though the overall ideology of the narrator makes him the ultimate beneficiary in the domestic conflict, his individual goals as a character seem to be directed elsewhere. The time during which his wives wrestle, building up his house, is, from his point of view, the extra time he serves Laban for Rachel. From what the narrative lets us know, the desire to have the 'right' wife – the wife whose betrothal is modelled on that of his mother – and to obtain a son by her remains at the top of Jacob's personal agenda. This is also implied in the fact that the birth of Joseph is followed by Jacob's 'giving notice' to Laban in 30:25, as if all Jacob waited for in Haran was for Rachel to have a child. That the rest of Jacob's children are born on the way to achieving this goal results not from Jacob's immediate choices, but from the dysfunctional, bigamous character of his marriage. For it is through the presence of Leah in the family that the institution stages its continuous reprisal on Jacob, and through it Jacob becomes invested with a role he has not sought. This is why neither Leah nor Bilhah and Zilpah, no matter how productive they might be, could fulfil Jacob's need of progeny.

³⁴⁸ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 137.

³⁴⁹ Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, p. 154.

The individual motivation in the narrative conflicts with its institutional goals in such a way that Jacob is not able to father the desired descendant until the formation of the house of Israel is complete. Even then, as has been argued above, it is possible that Jacob fathers Joseph only through the mediation of his first-born son Reuben. As for Rachel, she is the one who is responsible for ensuring that the favoured descent can take place. Like Rebekah and Sarah before her, Rachel is an agent of matrilineal succession, through which the chosen lineage is reckoned. And though, from the point of view of patriarchy, all the sons of Jacob are equally incorporated into the house of Israel, Jacob's individual preference for Rachel's first-born son will still be acknowledged, forming a complication in another extended narrative ('Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he had been born to him in his old age', 37:3). In the subsequent story of Genesis 37-50, a considerable narrative space is devoted to Joseph, where he will play the special role of preserving the entire clan. In this way, the narrative validates the individual perspective centred on Jacob's love. A trace of institutional disapproval remains in the fact that in Israel's collective memory Joseph will be replaced by his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who instead of their father will be assigned places in the tribal structure of the nation (1 Chr 7:14-29).

The Father's Gods and the 'Way of Women'

In keeping with the rules of patriarchy, the daughters of Laban never confront their father while they are still in his house. The position of Jacob, their husband, is compromised because of his enslavement and Laban remains the real head of the household. When Jacob receives God's command to return to the land of his fathers, he takes Rachel and Leah 'into the field where his flock was' (31:4). That is, he takes them out of their father's house into the open plain, which is temporarily 'his', since his flocks are grazing there. One might see here a parallel between Jacob's flock, which he has already 'removed' from Laban's possession, and his wives, whom he is yet to remove from their father's household. It is significant that Jacob seeks his wives' consent in making a transition. While they remain in Haran, Rachel and Leah represent the mother's lineage that is yet to be absorbed into the patrilineal identity of the Subject. But in 3:15 Jacob's wives see themselves as already separated from their father, which

suits the interests of the Subject ('Does he [Laban] not regard us as foreigners?', 31:15). For Exum, their speech signifies the passing over of the women and their children from their father's control to that of the husband, and through it, a denial of the importance of matrilineal descent.³⁵⁰ To achieve this transition would also complete Jacob's task set by Isaac in Gn 28:2, namely, acquiring a wife from the family of Jacob's mother and the parentage of Abraham, whose descendants would be his rightful successors in his father's land.

After the joint decision to leave Haran, Jacob and his family set off for Canaan, the land of his father (Gn 31:17-18). But the situation is not yet resolved, for they are not free to go without a formal settlement. Thus the text straightaway indicates the dubious character of their departure by linking it to a double act of theft in 31:19-20.

Rachel reinforces her breaking free from her father's house by stealing his household idols, *ʿrāpīm* (Gn 31:19). The text also reports that Laban is not in the house at the time. Here, as Fuchs rightly remarks, the two clauses that make up v. 19 disrupt the flow of the narrative, focused otherwise on Jacob's flight: 'Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods'. In this syntactic combination of Laban and Rachel, Fuchs sees a parallel between them as deceivers, the daughter having inherited her father's fundamental characteristic.³⁵¹ Apart from this metaphoric association, the link between the two clauses, according to Fuchs, is simply circumstantial, the report about Laban's absence in v. 19 explaining how it was possible for Rachel to steal the idols.³⁵² I would object to Fuchs's reading of Laban in 31:19 as a deceiver, parallel to Rachel. In this instance, the text focuses on Laban as *paterfamilias*, a head of the household whose authority is challenged by the two parallel acts of theft described in vv. 19 and 20. Rachel's theft anticipates the analogous action of Jacob, and it is to him, not Laban, that she is paralleled as a deceiver: while Rachel stole (*tignōb*) her father's gods, Jacob 'stole (*yignōb*) the heart of Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away' (v. 20).³⁵³ In fact, the clause about Laban's absence in v. 19 seems to relate to both acts of stealing. The stylistic presentation of Laban in both cases

³⁵⁰ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 117.

³⁵¹ Fuchs, "'For I Have the Way of Women": Deception, Gender, and Ideology in Biblical Narrative', in J. Cheryl Exum and Johanna W. H. Bos (eds.) *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power* (Semeia, 42; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), p. 71.

³⁵² Fuchs, "'For I Have the Way of Women'", p. 71.

³⁵³ Fishbane points out the parallelism between the two acts of stealing and suggests that 'in this theft of the objects of family blessing Jacob, the trickster... has married his match' ('Composition and Structure', p. 31).

seems to indicate the scope of each conflict. The fact that Rachel's opponent is 'her father' suggests that the object of her quest belongs within the limits of the household, whereas in Jacob's case, his adversary is described formally as 'Laban the Aramean', which stresses Jacob's impending separation from his uncle and introduces a 'national' dimension into their dispute. The wife and her husband each seem to have their own individual contest with Laban, and, following the order of their presentation, the wife's quest takes precedence.

So what is the nature of Rachel's quest and what are her motives in stealing Laban's idols? It appears that Rachel's characterisation throughout the narrative provides some important clues as to her station vis-à-vis her father. From the moment when Rachel first appears on stage (29:9-10), the narrative puts a particular emphasis on the link between her and her father. First, the shepherds introduce her to Jacob as Laban's daughter (29:6). In fact, the announcement of Rachel's approach is linked to the report about Laban's well-being, as if it were its proof or demonstration: 'He is well (*šālôm*), and see, here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep'. This syntactic link puts Rachel in the position of an agent or representative of her father, the one epitomising his welfare and in charge of his flocks. It is in her capacity as representing Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob kisses Rachel in v. 11, and it is this role that she plays when she runs to inform her father of Jacob's arrival. The association of Rachel with the flock, reflected in her name (*rāhēl*, 'ewe') and in her characterisation as *rō'āh*, 'shepherd' (29:9) also points to her special function in her father's household. At this stage, nothing indicates Rachel's inferior status as the younger daughter; her representational function is not limited or qualified, for the narrator here withholds all information about Leah or indeed about the sons of Laban, mentioned in passing in 31:1.

This initial clue to Rachel's identity is fully exploited in the next scene, where Laban tricks Jacob into servitude, using Rachel as bait (29:14-30). Here Rachel is a means to further her father's goals, that is, increasing his flocks or, in the words of 29:6, his well-being. Her function of shepherd is relinquished, for it is now taken over by Jacob. From being her father's daughter she becomes her husband's wife; on the other hand, she still lives under her father's roof, and her husband is enslaved to her father. Laban remains the main patriarchal authority over Jacob's household for as long as the

family lives in Haran. The double theft symbolises the separating from that authority of those who have been bound by it the most.

As in the case of the *dūdā'im*, the exact function of the *ḥrāpîm* is not clear. The Hebrew word *ḥrāpîm* is usually translated as 'household gods', understood to be figures of the deities protecting a family and worshipped by it.³⁵⁴ Karel van der Toorn also suggests a possibility that these sacred figurines were associated with ancestral cults.³⁵⁵ As images of the ancestors, they would represent the family's origins; they would be honoured and consulted in divination. This last function of the *ḥrāpîm* is attested in the Hebrew Bible: in the Deuteronomist's condemnation of idolatry in 1 Sam 15:23, the use of household gods is put together with the practice of divination; likewise, the religious reform of Josiah eradicates mediums together with *ḥrāpîm* and idols as their sacred objects (2 Kg 23:24). However, the narrative of Rachel's theft and deception (Gn 31:19, 33-35) does not mention her intending to consult the figurines about the future; in fact, the text is silent as regards Rachel's motivation.³⁵⁶

The reader has already encountered a similar case of Rachel's motives being suppressed in the *dūdā'im* narrative (30:14-16). Fuchs argues that this reticence in relation to Rachel's motives results from the narrator's underlying strategy of representing negatively women whose actions do not accord with the purposes of patriarchy. One part of this negative approach is the narrator's discriminating treatment of male and female deception, which creates the impression that deceptiveness is a feature common to women. Comparing the literary presentations of Jacob, Laban and Rachel, all of whom deceive their opponents in the course of one narrative, Fuchs recognises three major strategies unique to the story of Rachel's theft: suppressed motivation of the character, suspended authorial judgment, and the absence of closure.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ For a discussion of different views on the significance of the *ḥrāpîm* see Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, pp. 273-74.

³⁵⁵ See Karel van der Toorn, 'The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence', *CBQ* 52 (1990), pp. 203-22.

³⁵⁶ Zakovitch ('Through the Looking Glass', p. 141) maintains that the *ḥrāpîm* are used for divination on the basis of textual evidence from outside Genesis (Ezek 21:26; Zech 10:2) as well as following the parallelism between Rachel's theft and the staged theft of Joseph's goblet in Genesis 44. In the Joseph narrative, the goblet is explicitly used for divination (44:5, 15). Exum mentions divination as a possible explanation of Rachel's motives, though admits that if, in taking the idols, Rachel intended to prevent Laban from divining the family's route of escape, her plan fails, for Laban still manages to find them (*Fragmented Women*, pp. 134-35).

³⁵⁷ Fuchs, "For I Have the Way of Women", p.70.

There appears to be room for discussion regarding whether or not all clues to Rachel's motivation have been suppressed. The larger context of the episode suggests two possible interpretations. First, in removing the sacred and symbolic objects from her father's house, she might be driven by the wish to retaliate against her father who deprived her of her rightful status as Jacob's only wife. Second, more practically, the *ʿrāpîm* could represent patriarchal blessing and inheritance.³⁵⁸ The fact that Leah does not participate in the theft makes it more specific to Rachel's situation, against Steinberg's suggestion that, by stealing the *ʿrāpîm*, Rachel is 'settling Laban's debt for her and Leah'.³⁵⁹ Rachel's action in Gn 31:19 must be set in the context of what the reader already knows about her motivation, which has been to achieve precedence over Leah through her son(s). In this light, Nancy Jay's view that Rachel here seeks to establish the proper matrilineal descent through Joseph appears most plausible.³⁶⁰ The image of Rachel who wants to possess 'her father's gods' to ensure the precedence of her first-born son Joseph over his elder half-brothers fits well into the theme of rivalry over succession that underlies all the narratives of the patriarchs and parallels, in particular, Jacob's stealing of the blessing from his brother Esau in Genesis 27. In the absence of the male head of the household, Rachel, the younger daughter and the second wife, one with the least entitlement to any institutional succession, simultaneously challenges patriarchal authority and claims power and status for herself and her son.

When Laban apprehends Jacob and his family in their flight and starts searching for the idols, Rachel sits on them, and refuses to rise in front of her father, saying that 'the way of women' is upon her (31:35). The expression *derek nāšîm* is usually understood as a euphemism for menstruation, which Rachel supposedly lies about in order to hide her theft. Whether or not Rachel is really menstruating is not, however, crucial. In either case, the ritual impurity she refers to is not the *real* reason for her not to be able to rise in front of Laban. What is important here, as Exum observes, is that Rachel 'uses male fear or respect for a uniquely female condition to gain power over a

³⁵⁸ Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 56. The evidence from the archives of Nuzi supports the idea that *ʿrāpîm* symbolised family status and normally belonged to the paterfamilias (see Sarna, *Understanding Genesis: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), p. 201).

³⁵⁹ Steinberg, *Kinship and Marriage in Genesis*, p. 107.

³⁶⁰ Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 106-7.

man'.³⁶¹ From this perspective, Rachel's words communicate a powerful statement of womanhood and a disregard for patriarchal authority.

Reading 'the way of the women' as menstruation is not, however, the only possible interpretation. Rachel's statement has many levels of meaning. For Fewell and Gunn, 'the way of women' refers to motherhood, which patriarchy constructs as an ultimate mark of Otherness. By saying that she 'can no longer show deference to her father', Rachel might be suggesting that she now has other, more important loyalties, that is her new loyalties as mother, the loyalties she demonstrates by stealing the idols as a status symbol for her son.³⁶²

Along similar lines, Jacqueline Lapsley distinguishes many voices in Rachel's speech. She reveals the hidden polemic of the statement, which on the surface refers to the codes of ritual purity, but at a deeper level communicates Rachel's resistance against the patriarchal structures. *derek nāšîm*, which is an unusual way to denote a woman's period in the Hebrew Bible, receives an additional meaning in the patriarchal context of Rachel's utterance. In that context, as Lapsley points out, 'the way of women' is invariably perceived as 'not the way of men', or as the way of the Other, and by associating herself with it, Rachel challenges the structures of (male) power that deny her fulfilment of her ambitions.³⁶³ By saying that the way of women is upon her, Rachel indicates her 'unofficial, unsanctioned means of getting justice': having been excluded from inheritance, she steals it.³⁶⁴ Rachel's deception, which Fuchs interprets as part of the androcentric strategy condemning women, is seen by Lapsley as a sign of female resistance and critique.

There is yet another level of meaning that potentially undermines the subversive character of Rachel's speech. Saying that she cannot rise (*qûm*) in front of her father, she might also be pointing to the fact that, in the male-dominated world of the patriarchal narrative, 'the way of women' cannot achieve the same status as, or rise up to, 'the way of men'. The dichotomy of Rachel's narrative position as one who strives for subjectivity and self-expression but is destined to failure, one who can steal the inheritance but cannot use it for herself, makes the irony underlying her speech even more poignant.

³⁶¹ Exum, *Fragmented Women*, p. 138.

³⁶² Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, p. 79.

³⁶³ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, 'The Voice of Rachel: Resistance and Polyphony in Genesis 31.14-35', in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis*, pp. 238-42.

³⁶⁴ Lapsley, 'The Voice of Rachel', p. 243.

Equally ironic is the death penalty that Jacob issues in 31:32, saying to Laban, 'the one with whom you find your gods shall not live'. It is not clear whether Rachel heard Jacob speak, but the reader's understanding of the story is affected by the hinted equation between the *ʿrāpīm* and death. The fact that they are not found with Rachel does not take away the allusion to death any more than Rachel's giving birth to sons does with respect to her statement in 30:1. Whether she herself weighs her life against fertility ('give me children or I'll die!', 30:1), or has her life balanced against her father's idols (31:32), each time the narrative announces an implicit failure in her quest. That failure will become apparent with Rachel's premature death in 35:16-20. This brings to the fore the tragic determinism of her situation. Rachel is condemned whatever she tries, despite her beauty, resourcefulness, and strength, and despite her being one of the most real and distinct characters among all the cast of the Jacob story. Or, perhaps, it is because of her striking individuality that the favourite wife of Jacob does not survive to the end: this story can have only one hero. Rachel's destiny is inscribed within her narrative function, which is to be an agent of the narrative judgement on Jacob, and, although she can raise her voice in front of her husband (30:1), she cannot emancipate herself from her secondary position. Too strong a character to keep a quiet existence behind the scenes like Leah, Rachel has to die so that Jacob may complete his own journey.

Accordingly, with her last breath, she names the child *ben-ʿōnī*, 'son of my sorrow' (35:18). Through that name she recapitulates, together with the pain of childbirth that is killing her, her tragic story. A striking parallel arises between this last utterance and her first words in 30:1, addressed to Jacob. There, Rachel wanted children to the point of death; here, she has her wish granted, but she dies nevertheless. Rachel's narrative programme, like that of Leah before her, ends in a failure, and Rachel protests it through the name of her son.

But Rachel is not allowed to inscribe her sorrow in the patriarchal history. Jacob renames the son with a more suitable name, *binyāmīn*, 'son of the right hand', thus overriding the expression of Rachel's immediate and personal experience with a general, schematic name that alludes to power and masculinity. Here, as in 30:1-2, Jacob denies Rachel the right to communicate her own perspective.

Forms of Binary Relationships in the Jacob Narrative

The structural tension between Father and Mother that permeates the Jacob narrative translates itself at the level of specific male and female characters. Here the patriarchs control all the initial and final situations, and the function of the feminine is to mediate, to effect transformations without ever participating in the final balance of power. This principle is clearly demonstrated by looking at the patterns of relationships in the story, and in particular, at the character of Rachel and her relationship with Jacob.

It is not surprising that this narrative based on opposition and conflict abounds in binary relationships. In such relationships, the choices and motives of the Subject are shaped by the presence of the Other and through the interaction with the Other. When one considers the patterns of relationships between paired or contrasted characters in the Jacob cycle, it is possible to distinguish among them two different forms of binarity.

The Subject vis-à-vis the Twin: Antagonistic Relationship

In this relationship the initial equality is stressed, exemplified in the pair of the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau. The Hebrew term *'ah*, 'brother', communicates the idea of sameness and affinity as well as difference. A brother is someone like me, but not myself. The equality of coming from the same womb, or even more, of sharing the same womb in the case of twins, purports their essential parity. This parity makes the opposition between them even more striking. Starting with their struggle in the mother's womb in the opening scene of 25:22, Jacob and Esau undergo a gradual process of differentiation, which leads them through the experiences of deception, theft, anger, fear, exile, to reconciliation and the final establishment of boundaries. Constituting the main story line of the Jacob cycle, this process gives the narrative its structure and thrust.

The other pair of characters that exhibits the structural characteristics of the *Subject-Twin* type of relationship is Rachel and Leah, the two sisters who become Jacob's co-wives. Being daughters of the same father and wives of the same husband, they are nevertheless made unequal by the social structures (elder/younger daughter), characterisation (fertility/sterility) and attitudes of other characters (love/hate of Jacob). As in the case of the twin-brothers, Rachel and Leah's equality on one level (siblings,

co-wives) reinforces the opposition on another,³⁶⁵ to the extent that their dispute achieves, at least in the eyes of Rachel, the scale and intensity of the 'twists of God'.

The Subject in his/her relationship to the Twin typically lays claim to the Other's identity. The Subject (Jacob, Rachel) cannot accept the dichotomy of being with the Other, which involves seeing the Other as a subject possessing the equivalent existential freedom. Instead, both Jacob and Rachel attempt to assume the identity of their opponents and to take up all the existential space in the story. This relational model is typified in the Hebrew Bible by Cain's attitude towards Abel (Gn 4:1-16), the attitude that leads the eldest brother to the total elimination of his Twin.

The Subject craves everything that belongs to the Twin: Jacob strives for the status and the blessing of the first-born, and Rachel yearns for her sister's fertility. It is a peculiarity of the Jacob story that the character of the Twin is endowed with a superior institutional standing (*b^ekor, b^ekirah*), whereas the narrative favours the Subject whose status is inferior and whose importance derives from his/her individual quest.

Despite the strong structural parallels between the two antagonistic pairs, the conflict in each case ends in a different way. The opposition between Jacob and Esau is resolved, and the two brothers achieve reconciliation in Genesis 33, where Jacob's lengthy preparations to meet his brother and his ritual-like welcome lead to the symbolic return of the stolen blessing in 33:11. In this way, the main storyline is rounded off, with no less narrative space given to the account of the brothers' reconciliation than was allotted to the story of their conflict.

Nothing like this is found in the case of female Subject/Twin opposition. Lapsley observes that in the patriarchal narratives as well as generally in ancient Israelite culture 'women do not participate in the form of negotiation that brings about reconciliation'.³⁶⁶ For the women involved, there are no boundaries established, no apologies issued, no relationship formed beyond that of rivalry. The story of the sisters' 'twists of God' has no resolution. As characters, both of them disappear from the stage without comment: first, Leah, when she quietly merges with her role of mother, having failed to attract her husband; next, Rachel, when she dies prematurely, despite her final

³⁶⁵ Fuchs makes a similar observation. Comparing the confrontation between the two sisters to that between Sarah and Hagar, she finds that 'the power relations between Rachel and Leah are more balanced, which exacerbates the rivalry between them. ...What Leah wins through reproductive performance, Rachel nearly outweighs through sexual appeal' (Fuchs, *Sexual Politics*, p. 162).

³⁶⁶ Lapsley, 'The Voice of Rachel', p. 236.

success in becoming a mother. The binary opposition between female characters is not developed fully because it is subordinate to the androcentric plot.

The Subject vis-à-vis the Double: Parallel Relationship

The character of Rachel, among all the protagonists of the Jacob story, is structurally unique. Her narrative identity unfolds on two distinct planes, both of which present different degrees of opposition between the characters. The first opposition develops along the lines of Subject *versus* the Twin; the second, Subject *versus* the Double. In the first form of binary relationship Rachel is the Subject who defines herself through the conflict with the Twin, her sister Leah. In the second form of opposition Rachel is the Double, in other words the character who shadows the main Subject, her husband Jacob.

The many similarities between Jacob and his favourite wife have been acknowledged in the scholarly literature. Fokkelman calls Rachel a 'true Jacoba, related by nature to Jacob'.³⁶⁷ Pardes describes Rachel's narrative programme as a counterplot that 'mirrors' the primary plot of Jacob.³⁶⁸ Like Jacob, Rachel is the younger sibling, deprived of status, and, like him, she strives to acquire it. Both of them are resourceful and determined, both are engaged in a confrontation with their rival (Twin). Both of them, as Fishbane observes, 'deceive their fathers and flee from home', having appropriated the patriarchal blessing and inheritance.³⁶⁹ At the end of their stay in Haran, they are put alongside each other, committing parallel thefts (Gn 31:19-20).

In the episode with the *ʿrāpīm* in 31:33-35, Rachel's behaviour imitates that of her husband. Rachel steals and hides her father's idols (31:33-35), matching Jacob's stealing of his father's blessing in Genesis 27.³⁷⁰ On the lexical level, Fishbane observes the use of the verb *māšaš*, 'to feel', in both episodes: Laban 'feels' for the idols in Rachel's tent (Gn 31:34, 37), similar to Isaac feeling Jacob's hands in 27:22. In both cases, the action characterises the father as a man who cannot see clearly. The lack of sight and perception undermines the authority of the father and allows his son/daughter to remove the symbols of patriarchal succession. By stealing the idols, Rachel claims

³⁶⁷ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, p. 163; see also Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 56.

³⁶⁸ Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 73-75.

³⁶⁹ Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 56.

³⁷⁰ Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, p. 56; see also Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, p. 268.

something of the same nature as the blessing of Isaac. Only, in her case, the bid for status is more daring than that of Jacob, for she has been doubly deprived of it, first, as the younger daughter, and second, as a woman. The misappropriation of status holds in itself the danger of death, and both successful deceivers have to experience this threat. Thus, Jacob, despite his new position of power, has to flee from his brother who seeks to kill him, and Rachel's death will come as a delayed outcome of her theft.

What is the function of this marked parallelism? Indeed, what is the narrator's purpose in introducing another Subject, subordinate to the first and bearing such a close resemblance to it? In this story the Subject's journey, like a play of mirrors, seems to generate multiple reflections revealing different aspects of narrative identity. Zakovitch calls this type of narrative a 'reflection story'. In such a story, the narrator shapes a 'character, or his or her actions, as the antithesis of a character in another narrative and that character's actions'.³⁷¹ According to Zakovitch, this technique is used to guide the reader in evaluating characters. However, it appears to me that narrative parallelism functions at a deeper level than that of ethical evaluation. Rather, reflection stories seem to redress the structural balance in the story; they manifest its inner thematic connections and causal links, and, on the whole, together with other forms of intertextuality, reveal a narrative world where everything is a sign of everything else.

While the Subject and his Double display many parallel features, they still stand in opposition to each other. Their binarity is based on the same complementary opposition between Male and Female that governs the metaphors of father's and mother's land. Rachel continues the *mother's* strand in the story, epitomizing all the features of the feminine known to the biblical narrator: her meeting with Jacob at the well, her beauty, the love of her husband for her, her initial sterility, and her shrewdness, all these features associate her with Jacob's mother Rebekah and single her out as the one who continues the matriarchal succession. Like Rebekah who once took the place of Isaac's mother in Sarah's tent (24:67), Rachel takes the place of Jacob's mother in his mother's land.

It seems significant that Rachel's role as a character is restricted to the area outside the promised land (she dies almost as soon as the family has reached Canaan in Genesis 35). She is Jacob's Shadow, confined to Haran, the realm of the mother, the shadow-land of the story. Her function in the story is determined by her belonging to what is for Jacob the other side of the looking glass, and is to reflect and invert the

³⁷¹ Zakovitch, 'Through the Looking Glass', p. 139.

narrative identity of the Subject. This is seen clearly in 29:22-26, where Rachel, the younger daughter, symbolically representing Jacob, is passed over in favour of the elder daughter, Leah, who represents Esau.

Rachel's personal tragedy seems to be a direct reversal of Jacob's success. While Jacob is the chosen heir to the promise, blessed and prosperous, his beloved wife stays unblessed (sterile) for a long time, and when she finally gives birth to sons, the very childbirth she has longed for brings her death (Gn 35:16-20). For Pardes, Rachel's narrative programme has to fail because, as a subordinate female counterplot, its function is to serve the primary plot centred on the male subject. As a female character, Rachel serves Jacob's symbolic transformation and therefore cannot shape her own programme, fulfil her own ambitions.³⁷² On the occasions when she 'goes too far in striving to become a subject, like her counterpart, ... her voice must be repressed'.³⁷³

This ambiguous role of Rachel determines the pattern of her relationship with Jacob. Whereas Jacob's changing attitude to Esau brings him to see God in the face of his brother (33:10), Rachel's face for Jacob remains a reflection of his own. Therefore, if the Subject-Twin relationship moves from *confrontation* towards *association*, the relationship Subject-Double follows the opposite pattern, changing from *unity* to *dissociation*. At the beginning the narrator stresses Jacob's love for Rachel, using the word '*ahab*' three times in the space of twelve verses (29:18, 20, 30). And yet, this love is allocated a specific, limited place, that is, the sphere of affection is restricted by the primary institutional values of status and fertility. The association between the Subject and his Double soon begins to crumble, as Jacob's love turns into anger after Rachel's desperate demand for children ('and Jacob's anger flamed at Rachel' 30:2). Later, having left Haran, Jacob unwittingly but effectively sentences her to death, saying to Laban, 'whoever you find your gods with shall not live' (31:32). The beloved wife of Jacob is not allowed to be brought to the land 'where Abraham and Isaac dwelt' (35:27): she dies in childbirth and the pillar that Jacob erects over her tomb conveys the final character of his dissociation from his Double.³⁷⁴ But this dissociation also signals the end of Jacob's story. With the feminine presence in the myth gone, the Subject's

³⁷² Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 75-77.

³⁷³ Pardes, *Countertraditions in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 74.

³⁷⁴ In a recent article, Benjamin D. Cox and Susan Ackerman examine the reasons why Rachel is buried in a road-side grave and not in the ancestral tomb at Machpehah like all the other matriarchs. They conclude, on the basis of anthropological evidence from other cultures, that the reason for it lies in the particular manner of her death – in childbirth – which is deemed polluting ('Rachel's Tomb', *JBL* 128 (2009), pp. 135-148).

journey is over. The story of Jacob and Rachel demonstrates the general pattern of dissociation that characterizes the Male-Female opposition in the Hebrew narrative, where love stories do not have happy endings.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Rachel's symbolic role is to represent a repressed part of the Subject associated with his misdeeds. In this light, Jacob's gradual dissociation from his Double could be seen as a process of semiotic 'cure' that the patriarchal psyche undergoes in the mother's land. By burying his Double, the patriarch symbolically buries the part of his identity that is problematic to the narrative consciousness (his character as thief and deceiver) and thus 'clears' himself of all charges. Rachel's death is a necessary part in the process whereby the Subject casts off his identity of *ya^aqōb* and becomes Israel. In this new capacity, he becomes capable of returning to the land of his fathers, where the narrative resumes its institutional framework. Yet the seed of the narrative resistance to the institution that was associated with Rachel will be distinguishable in the patriarch's subversive preference for his younger sons Joseph and Benjamin, both sons of Rachel (37:3; 42:4). The individual strand in the narrative will persist, and Jacob's love for Joseph will trigger the conflict in the next generation of the patriarchs, which will lead to the family's move to Egypt and the setting of stage for the exodus and the birth of Israel as a nation.

It could be said by way of conclusion that the Jacob narrative validates the feminine as the area of Otherness at the level of a general metaphor as well as that of a specific character. The story owes its depth and complexity to the structural tension between the crucial role of the feminine as a fundamental constituent of identity and its narrative representation as a subordinate reality that never quite rises to the status of the Subject. In his study of Genesis 2-3 Jobling observed that structural methods of exegesis have a potential, almost fully unexploited, for furthering the programme of feminist biblical exegesis.³⁷⁵ The analysis of binary structures in the narrative of Gn 25:19-37:1 shows just how rich that potential can be.

³⁷⁵ Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, p. 19.

Conclusion

The present study concurs with recent biblical scholarship in recognising the fundamental tension between the dominant patriarchal discourse and the subversive voices underlying biblical narrative. In this, my enquiry shares ground with feminist criticism, which steps outside the dominant ideology of the text, bringing its suppressed elements to the surface.³⁷⁶ The perspective of this study is, however, slightly different, inasmuch as it explores the ambiguities created by the andro- and ethnocentric argument from the vantage point *inside* the narrative. To clarify my view, I would refer to Jobling's suggestion to 'accept the Bible as everywhere patriarchal, but as everywhere expressive, for that very reason, of the bad conscience that goes along with trying to make sense of patriarchalism'.³⁷⁷ I would add that this bad conscience comes, for the most part, with some degree of resistance and an attempt at compensation that the narrative makes in response to the created imbalance. At a deeper level, this tension could be examined in terms of the opposition between the Subject and the Other.

In Julia Kristeva's theory of subjectivity, the subject is viewed as a dynamic signifying process, an unstable identity that is 'constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled'.³⁷⁸ The ever-changing boundaries of this identity are shaped by the subject's continuous abjection of what is different and threatening to the existing order.³⁷⁹ Applying Kristeva's model of the 'subject in process' to the narratives of Genesis,³⁸⁰ one distinguishes here two processes of signification that run alongside each other, namely, the construction of the androcentric Subject that starts in the garden narrative, and the formation, in the stories of the patriarchs, of the ethnocentric Subject of Israel. In both cases, unified subjectivity is perceived in relation to an over against the Other, represented respectively as female and foreign identity.

³⁷⁶ Exum describes her approach as a feminist reader as 'stepping outside the ideology of the text and reading against the grain' (*Plotted, Shot, and Painted*, p. 89; see also *Fragmented Women*, p. 9).

³⁷⁷ Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative II*, p. 43. Jobling's view reflects a widespread position of feminist critics.

³⁷⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'A Question of Subjectivity: Interview with S. Sellers', in *Women's Review* 12 (1986), p. 19.

³⁷⁹ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (trans. L.S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

³⁸⁰ As it was mentioned above, Exum has used the concept of abjection to illuminate the formation of the subject in the story of Hagar (see 'Hagar *en procès*', pp. 1-16).

In Genesis 2-3 the unified discourse is epitomised by the central character of *hā'ādām*, who simultaneously occupies two structural planes: one, as a general representation of humankind, and the other, gendered as male. In the double logic of the plot, *hā'ādām* can only emerge as a complex Subject in possession of knowledge and in a relationship with the earth with the help of woman, the transforming and therefore - threatening Other to whom the narrator attributes both the agency and the blame.

In Genesis 12-36 the unified identity inherent in *hā'ādām* is represented in a sequence of patrilineal genealogies that convey the idea of totality and continuity of the male Subject. Narrative identity, however, cannot be built through genealogical accounts. To become a Subject, Israel needs a story, an instance of symbolic communication, through which it can draw its significance in relation to the world. At the level of female subjectivity, this story starts with the image of the sterile mother (Sarah), which interrupts genealogical continuity and demonstrates the need of the gendered Other. At the level of national representation, the narrative Self of Israel begins by establishing itself over against the other nations, which it has to 'abject' in order to become a separate, or holy, that is, 'set apart' people (Ex 19:6). To become a chosen nation, Israel needs the Other, the non-chosen.

The Other, therefore, has to be born, and, because the Subject is total, it can be born only out of the Subject. In the garden narrative, the Other is taken out of the Subject's body, separated from it, and at once becomes subordinated to its needs (woman as 'helper'). In a similar way, the narrative of the ethnogenesis of Israel time after time derives foreign identity from the members of the patriarch's family.³⁸¹ To be able to define itself over against the Other, the Subject first needs to construct the Other as a split-off, separated part of the Self, as 'flesh of its flesh', and only then move on to its exclusion. Accordingly, Lot is paralleled to Abraham as a brother and 'double', and the patriarch shows particular attachment to his nephew (Genesis 14) before the definitive separation is effected. Ishmael has to be named and circumcised by Abraham, carrying the patriarch's mark on his flesh and identity, to foreground the significance of his expulsion (16:15; 17:23-26). In the Jacob narrative, out of the patriarch's two

³⁸¹ The eponymous ancestors of the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Ishmaelites, and the Midianites are all close relatives of Abraham, Edom is associated with Jacob's brother Esau, and Aram is a descendant of Abraham's brother Nahor. Although Egypt, Canaan and the Philistines are not immediately related to Abraham's parentage, their lineage is traced, incorporated into the account of Israel as a Hamite branch of Noah's posterity and is, therefore, not entirely unconnected (10:6, 13-14).

opponents, from whom he will be formally separated, Esau is his twin-brother, and Lot is his uncle, who also calls Jacob his brother and his own flesh (29:14-15).

While the dominant patriarchal discourse aims at the construction of the unified Subject – *hā'ādām* in Genesis 2-3 and Israel in Genesis 12-37 – the Other in all its guises is also constructed, serving the Subject's need of self-definition and yet always threatening, by the very fact of its existence, to slip across the boundaries of identity and subvert them. The subversive discourse arises from the structural impossibility to construct identity without difference. The Other epitomises difference and subversion, has it as its *raison d'être*. Without it, the story would revert to genealogy.

Incorporated into the overall patriarchal and ethnocentric discourse of Genesis, the voices of subversion and difference serve a function within the project of unified identity, are subordinated to it. In Genesis 2-3 woman, the gendered Other, communicates the knowledge of distinctions to *hā'ādām*, destabilising his totality-based identity. The effects of her agency are incorporated into the Subject's new identity. She is, however, subsumed by the Subject once she has served her task, and her place is taken over by the earth, *hā'dāmāh*, the metaphorical counterpart of *hā'ādām*.

The Abraham cycle introduces new, national parameters to the Subject. Here, the patriarch's emergent identity as personification of Israel is constructed over against Egypt, the powerful Other that cannot be subsumed and therefore has to be rejected. Lipton's idea that the book of Exodus is guided by Israel's resistance to assimilation could be successfully applied to Genesis 12-24.³⁸² As a 'people who came out of Egypt' (Num 22:5, 11), Israel has to relinquish its memory of the land and the desire to 'turn back' to it on the one hand, and to deal with the threat of assimilation through intermarriages with the Egyptians on the other. The narratives of Lot and Hagar provide a semiotic solution to these problems. In these texts, it has been argued above, the identity of Egypt is purged from Israel's self-image through the mechanism of projection. The patriarchal Subject symbolically disposes of the desire for the lush and fertile land of Egypt by attributing this desire to the character Lot. Since, in the collective consciousness of Israel, longing for Egypt is seen as a threat to identity, the Subject's projection leads to the 'abjection' of Lot and the obliteration of the land of Sodom as the other land and an image of Egypt. At a different level, the threat to the patriarch's descent posed by Egypt is removed through the expulsion of the other mother, Hagar the Egyptian, and of the other heir, her son Ishmael. Sarah here occupies

³⁸² Lipton, *Longing for Egypt*, pp. 13-49.

a central role as a mediator of dominance, through whom the primacy of Israel is asserted.

By projecting its desire and its dominance onto Lot and Sarah, the patriarchal consciousness achieves the desired effect (destruction of the other land, expulsion of the rival heir) without assuming responsibility for it. However, the very need to project reveals the uneasiness that marks the unifying discourse, shown also in Abraham's apparent displeasure about the destruction of Sodom and the expulsion of Ishmael (18:23-32; 21:11). Moreover, the validity of exclusion is thrown into question when the Subject, having 'removed' the Other, is forced symbolically to expel, eliminate the 'only son', the symbol of the unified Self. The final trial of the Subject in 22:1-19 makes Abraham re-enact in relation to himself what he has done to the others, and thus subverts the idea of identity based on dominance and exclusion. Although, in the end, the Self is restored, the trauma of the 'binding of Isaac' remains imbedded in the narrative consciousness as a price Israel has to pay for its being 'set apart'.

The Jacob narrative presents a different stage in the construction of the Subject that culminates in the patriarch acquiring the name and identity of Israel. Here concerns over assimilation are translated into the focus on endogamy, and the Subject establishes himself not with respect to other nations, but within the extended patriarchal family. In the analysis of the Jacob cycle, I used Lévy-Strauss's structural approach to demonstrate how the initial contradiction between Father and Mother unfolds through a series of oppositions into a general conflict between the institutional and the individual structural perspectives. The difference between the two perspectives does not run along the gender divide, as Leah comes to represent institutional values, while Jacob, the future patriarch, first appears as a deceiver who destabilises the institution. In his individual quest, Jacob is associated with the mother and with the mother's land, the transformative space where he becomes Israel; it is, however, also a place of bondage and exile. In this space, Jacob is paralleled to Rachel, upon whom his subversive qualities are projected and through whom he is punished for his misdeeds. Through Rachel, the narrative disposes of Jacob the deceiver, and then invests him with the new, heroic identity of Israel, the one who 'strived with God and with men and prevailed'. The name, however, comes with a wound (32:25, 31), and though the unified, institutional Subject is re-established, his new identity as Israel is marked by conflict and alterity.

In the dynamic opposition between the Subject and the Other, the dominant programme is subverted every time the Other emancipates to subjectivity. Woman in

Genesis 3:6 becomes the garden narrative's only independent subject who seeks experience and understanding. Hagar becomes self-aware and rejects the oppressive structures, running away to the desert. Lot's wife, in the minimal narrative space she has, subverts Yahweh's judgment of Sodom simply by 'looking back'. Rebekah searches for the meaning of her painful pregnancy and uses her knowledge to reverse the patriarchal status quo. More than others, Rachel is subversive in both what she says and what she conceals. Her reticence in the mandrake episode allows for the possibility that she uses Reuben as a surrogate father (30:14-16). In the episode with the stolen idols, she communicates her point of view as 'the way of women', thus indicating her power to confront patriarchy on her own terms. In this she manages, if only briefly, to turn the tables, and treats patriarchy as her Other. It is noteworthy that Hagar, Rebekah, and Rachel all use emphatically the personal pronoun 'ānōkī, 'I', in their speeches, drawing attention to their subjectivity (16:8; 25:22; 30:1, 3). Typically, their resistance to the patriarchal structures stems from uniquely female conditions. Hagar's conception triggers her flight from her mistress; Rebekah's pregnancy, interpreted in Yahweh's oracle, leads to her deception of Isaac; and Rachel's alleged menstruation allows her to subvert the authority of her father. The female Other finds her strength in that which cannot be taken away from her and which patriarchy both needs and fears, her alterity.

The present study has highlighted the essential similarity between the narrative structures mapping out the construction of the Subject in Genesis 2-3 and in Genesis 12-36. On the one hand, the basic opposition between the Subject and the Other that underlies the narrative imposes a hierarchy of value and significance, where the transformation is teleologically subordinated to the patriarchal ethnocentric discourse. In the end, the apparent concern guiding the overall composition is that each narrative cycle establishes a male genealogical entry in the *tōlēdōt* of Israel. Yet, on the other hand, the Subject in these narratives is both challenged and changed by what the hierarchies cannot contain – the transforming power, the symbolic fecundity of the Other. This posits a different kind of teleology that is never explicit, yet, like Yahweh's shadow agenda in Genesis 2-3, is what pushes the narrative forward. For both *hā'ādām* and the patriarchs become who they are through their ambiguous relationship with the gendered and political representations of the Other. Whether it is woman as the mother of all living, or the fruitful paradise of Egypt, the Other, being repressed, expelled, destroyed or punished, remains foundational to Israel's consciousness.

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