JUDGING MORIAH: GENDERED NARRATIVES OF SACRIFICE
IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

A Thesis by
Vicki K. Jensen
Bachelor of Arts, University of Kansas, 1970

Submitted to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
and the faculty of the Graduate School of
Wichita State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

May 2006
JUDGING MORIAH: GENDERED NARRATIVES OF SACRIFICE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

I have examined the final copy of the Thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.

Stuart Lasine, Committee Chair

We have read this Thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Ramona Liera-Schwichtenberg, Committee Member

Jeanine Hathaway, Committee Member
DEDICATION

To the memory of family
And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among the father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them (Num. 27.6-7).

Then Moses commanded the Israelites according to the word of the Lord, saying, "The descendants of the tribe of Joseph are right in what they are saying. This is what the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, 'Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married, so that no inheritance of the Israelites shall be transferred from one tribe to another; for all Israelites shall retain the inheritance of their ancestral tribes'" (Num. 36.5-7).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank mentors Carol Konek and Marilyn Klaus for their generous sharing of wisdom and for giving me the confidence to pursue a graduate education.

Thank you also to the members of my committee, Stuart Lasine, Ramona Liera-Schwichtenberg, and Jeanine Hathaway. I also want to thank Joan Beren for the generous award of the fellowship which bears her name and the Department of English, which provided not only financial support but also a community of fellow students with whom to share the graduate school experience. To each I extend my heartfelt gratitude.
ABSTRACT

This study examines the function of a patriarchal ideology in the episodes of human sacrifice narrated in Genesis 22 and Judges 11 and 19. The Akedah, or "the binding of Isaac" story, is discussed in terms of the midrashic literature it has historically generated, and a feminist, poststructural approach is used in the analysis of the Jephthah's daughter and Levite's concubine narratives. While traditional theology locates the significance of Genesis 22 in Abraham's faithful obedience and the cessation of human sacrifice, midrash documents the extent to which readers both ancient and modern have found not only God's command but also Abraham's silence in and Sarah's absence from the narrative problematic. On the other hand, scholars have previously interpreted the violence of Judges 11 and 19 in terms of their textual setting "when there was no king in Israel" and the Israelites' corresponding apostasy or in terms of the tension experienced during times of social/cultural transition. However, underlying both the Genesis and Judges episodes are the tensions created by God's unrealized promises of descendants, land, and nationhood to his chosen people and by the patriarchal hierarchy the biblical text at once asserts and undermines. Exploring these gendered narratives both contextually and intertextually affords the reader another way of understanding these troubling texts, reframing them from stories of ritualized human sacrifice to narratives of deferred promise and sacrificed inheritance.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. SARAH ON MORIAH</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. DONNER LE CHANGE: ISRAEL AND OTHER IN JUDGES 1, 11, AND 19-21</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

If narratives of the Hebrew Bible are "fraught with background" and the marriage of feminism and Marxism has been an "unhappy" one as Erich Auerbach and Heidi I. Hartmann respectively suggest, perhaps inevitably the intersection of feminism, religion, and biblical studies has historically fulfilled all the promises of a contentious relationship (Auerbach 12; Hartmann 411). In her article "American Women and the Bible: The Nature of Woman as a Hermeneutical Issue," Carolyn De Swarte Gifford considers the vast influence biblical narratives have exerted in shaping American women's lives and points out that whenever a social movement questions traditional gender ideology those threatened by such actions invoke biblically-based arguments in opposition. Gifford dates the American clergy's use of scripture against feminism from Judith Sargent Murray's 1790 essay "On the Equality of the Sexes." Arguing for more educational opportunities for women, a colleague responded to her appeal by citing Genesis 3.16 as scripture's proof text for man's divinely ordained privilege. When Murray answered his argument with her own interpretation of the Garden of Eden narrative, Gifford notes that Murray confronted in private correspondence the same questions that will come to dominate public and scholarly debate surrounding the issues of feminism, religion, and the field of biblical studies (11-13). Do biblical narratives admit to more than one interpretation? What authority determines the criteria by which to accept or reject any reading of a text, and who decides if the offered interpretation satisfies such criteria?

The following nineteenth-century wave of reform activity highlighted the discord between woman's designated cultural role as moral guardian and the domestic sphere to
which she was assigned. When sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimke spoke out against slavery and advocated women's equality at the Northeastern Abolitionist Society-sponsored meetings, the General Association of Massachusetts responded with their Pastoral Letter of 1837 (Gifford 14; Clark and Richardson 238). Directed to their churches, the letter criticizes the activities of the Grimke sisters based on the clergy's interpretation of New Testament teachings regarding woman's proper sphere and duties. The Pastoral Letter argues that "the power of woman is her dependence, flowing from the consciousness of that weakness which God has given her for her protection"; it further charges that the Grimkes' activities represented "dangers" to the "female character with wide-spread and permanent injury" (qtd. in Grimke 241, 243). In response, Sarah Grimke locates the danger in those of the General Association and other members of the church hierarchy who had historically "held the reins of usurped authority" and defined "what is virtue in man, is vice in woman" (241, 245). Ten years later Grimke's words echo in the resolutions passed at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, America's early feminist movement conference, which included on its agenda "the religious condition and rights of woman" and identified the "perverted application of the Scriptures" to which women had been subjected (Clark and Richardson 237-38; qtd. in Gifford 21).

Nineteenth-century feminist reform movements, however, evidenced not only dissension between the institutions of religion and feminists but also between women holding positions of feminist leadership. Frances Willard, president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, acknowledged scripture's authority in shaping moral and ethical principles and the construction of gender roles in Western culture. Recognizing the clergy's interested application of biblical knowledge as a source of oppression,
Willard encouraged young women to study theology and thereby contribute to the rights movement by offering a counterbalancing "stereoscopic view of truth" that would "make a correction for" the male clergy's biased perspective regarding the scriptural teaching on women (qtd. in Gifford 25). Alternatively, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, editor and contributor to *The Woman's Bible* and a leader in the suffragist movement, concluded that Christian theology rested on women's secondary status and that the Bible provided no basis for faith apart from patriarchy (Gifford 27-29; Clark and Richardson 246).

Stanton's strategy in *The Woman's Bible* included feminist interpretations and imaginative rewritings of biblical narratives and a denouncement of the Bible's patriarchal bias. Regarding Genesis 1.26-28, Stanton argues that "the masculine and feminine elements were equally represented" in the creator God and that "equal dominion is given to woman over every living thing" (14-15). In her commentary on Judges 11:30-37, Stanton criticizes both Abraham and Jephthah for their willingness to sacrifice their children; rejecting the unequal legal force of women's vows, Stanton envisions Jephthah's daughter pledging personal accountability for her life and refusing to be the object of her father's vow: "You may sacrifice your own life as you please, but you have no right over mine. [...] Not with my consent can you fulfill yours" (24-26).

Although Grimke's expressed request that "our brethren take their feet from off our necks" again surfaced in second wave feminism and both Grimke's and Stanton's feminist exegesis find their counterpart in modern biblical studies, each encountered contemporary opposition to their approach even by those who supported their respective causes. Grimke agreed to separate her abolitionist interests from her feminist ones by segregating the latter into her *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, lest the abolitionist
movement suffer, as one male supporter wrote, due to "some paltry grievance of our own" (qtd. in Clark and Richardson 239). Stanton alienated her fellow suffragists with her identification of the Bible as an important contributor to an oppressive patriarchal worldview that many women had internalized. Stanton's initial attempts to solicit contributors to The Woman's Bible failed, and after publication of its first volume in 1895, the National American Woman Suffrage Association formally disassociated their organization from it (Clark and Richardson 247-49). Clark and Richardson suggest that this action of the part of the N.A.W.S.A. reflected the extent to which feminism had become "socially respectable" and dominated by those with "more conventional values than Stanton" (248).

Stanton lacked not only the support of other nineteenth-century feminists in writing The Woman's Bible; women biblical scholars whom she invited to contribute to the volumes also declined to collaborate in her effort, even though the German-developed historical-critical interpretation of the Bible was then being adopted throughout the West. Dorothy C. Bass observes that while the American embrace of higher criticism in biblical studies temporally coincided with its first wave feminist movement, the two did not form the alliance their shared features invited. Both higher criticism and feminist exegesis drew from the notion that the Bible was a historical text rather than authoritative divine revelations of "infallibility" and "monoliths" of "truths," each group sought to analyze the Bible through the lens of Enlightenment values, and opponents leveled charges of heresy against advocates of both endeavors (6). However, as Bass points out, the Society of Biblical Literature did not admit its first female member until 1894, some fourteen years after its founding. The SBL published no articles by women until the second decade of
the twentieth century, and even the works of these scholars exhibited no interest in feminist exegesis (7-10). Stanton understood women biblical scholars' reluctance to join her project in political terms: such women voiced fear "that their high reputation and scholarly attainments might be compromised" by contributing to such a controversial work (qtd. in Bass 11).

With the advantage of hindsight, modern feminist biblical critics suggest other reasons nineteenth-century women biblical scholars may have declined alliance with The Woman's Bible. Adela Yarbro Collins notes that while Stanton reexamined biblical narratives in the service of advocacy for women's rights, historical-critical analysis valued objectivity. Separating itself from the study of theology, historical criticism sought to identify the "original context," the "objective meaning of a text," and the "author's intentions" in their analyses—concepts believed unproblematic in the nineteenth century (3). Katheryn Pfisterer Darr identifies yet another feature of historical-critical analysis inimical to Stanton's feminist exegesis in noting that in all subcategories of such analysis—source-critical, form, redaction, tradition-history, and social scientific—"their principal focus [..] is not the [biblical] text itself, but rather the reality lying behind it" (22). Such analyses view the Bible as "a means to an end," and that end rests in discovering the evolving history of the text and the ancient Israel that produced, collected, edited, and preserved it (24). In observing that literary criticism focuses on biblical texts as "ends in themselves" and "intrinsically valuable" (24), Darr hints at a third salient difference between historical-critical and feminist exegesis: both Stanton and her second wave counterparts' concerns included not only the Bible in its received form
but also the influential role these ancient texts and their culturally authorized interpreters play in controlling the lives of contemporary women.

Although the consideration of biblical narratives as "ends in themselves" and "intrinsically valuable" may seem a likely tack in the study of sacred stories, literary criticism ranks as a relative latecomer in the history of American biblical studies. In the introduction to their 1987 Literary Guide to the Bible, editors Robert Alter and Frank Kermode trace the literary challenge to the monopoly of the historical-critical approach in biblical scholarship to the 1946/1953 publication/English translation of Auerbach's Mimesis. In his literary comparison of the Genesis 22 story of the binding of Isaac with the Homeric epic The Odyssey, Auerbach provided by example a way to reunite "the secular with the religious critical tradition" that had been divided into separate disciplines by the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and objectivity as determiners of truth (4). While respecting the contributions of historical-critical analysis, Alter and Kermode argue for the primacy of a literary approach to scripture on the very basis of reason that objective scholarship prizes: the Bible "achieves its effects by means no different from those generally employed by written language," and "unless we have a sound understanding of what the text is doing and saying, it will not be of much value in other respects" (2). A.K.M. Adam makes much the same point when he notes that "the formal character of narrative provides no way to distinguish a narrative that describes events that actually happened from one that reports fictional events" (63). Peter Rabinowitz, in his examination of "Truth in Fiction," suggests that the narrator in fiction becomes "an imitation of an author" and assumes the role of "an historian," as fictive writing "is generally an imitation of some nonfictional form," such as "history, [...] biography and
autobiography" (127). Hayden White asserts that "historical narratives [...] are verbal fictions"; the historian becomes a fictive author/narrator who "emplots" the "facts contained in the [historical] chronicle," motivated by the same desire as the novelist or poet—to make sense of "the real world" (1713-14, 1728).

Alter and Kermode's dating of the emergence of modern literary criticism in biblical studies over the twenty years preceding their 1987 volume coincides with the "linguistic turn" in scholarship introduced in the United States largely through the conference hosted by Johns Hopkins University in 1966. In addressing the conference topic, "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man," speakers such as Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan influenced American scholarship across disciplinary lines (Leitch 1816). In 1974 the SBL introduced its journal *Semeia*, providing a forum for such scholarship in biblical studies by soliciting "studies employing the methods, models, and findings of linguistics, folklore studies, contemporary literary criticism, structuralism, [and] social anthropology" (*Semeia*). Yet *Semeia*’s self-description as "an experimental journal for biblical criticism" reveals the extent to which such approaches departed from the dominant historical-critical method of study. In the forward to *Semeia*’s first volume on literary critical biblical studies, published in 1977, editor Robert W. Funk finds it necessary to distinguish the literary critical approaches used in the volume—those "employed by literary critics of the non-biblical sort [...] who occasionally wander into our precincts"—from the source criticism "traditional sort" of literary critical biblical study (vii).

Adam succinctly identifies the problems poststructuralism and deconstruction caused for such traditional notions as the "original" biblical text, context, and audience,
the "author's intentions," the recoverability of the "history" of ancient Israel, and the "objective" nature of any knowledge—the model on which historical-critical analysis based its claims to authority. He questions the concept of "the original" of any text or context by pointing out that the original of anything is "constituted by unoriginal ingredients" and by showing how the original such an interpreter finds "differs from the 'originals' other interpreters manufacture for the same referent" (35). The concept of the "original" leaves the critic to wonder where in the chain of infinite regression does she begin her search for it and "which representation of the nonexistent original ought an interpreter [to] rely on" (35). No reader has special privilege to "the 'author's intentions'" but only to the received text that she studies; in considering such analyses of others, the reader has access "always only to the interpreter's notion of what the author intended" (20). The historical record carries the same constraints of the interpreter, as well as the impossibility of knowing "the whole truth about even a single [historical] event" (21, 31). Assuming *arguendo* that such a complete history was possible, Adam asserts that "it would be like a map with a scale of 1 inch : 1 inch—perfectly accurate, and perfectly useless" (31). Finally, no "intellectual discourse is disinterested or pure" but open to "subjective' biases in countless ways" (15). Craig and Krisjansson take Adam's observation one step further: "The content of the 'objective' reading [...] points toward the subjective interests of the scholars who support it" (122).

While causing practitioners of a historical-critical approach to reconsider their relationship to their work in biblical studies, structural and poststructural critical theory also helped legitimate feminist exegesis as no longer did the admittedly interested interpretation of scripture carried out by feminists appear so foreign to the practices of
guild-sanctioned methodologies. The second wave of American feminism coincided with the 1960s linguistic turn, reflecting what Jane Flax convincingly argues is feminism's affinity with postmodern philosophy when it questions reason and science as the foundational models for pure knowledge and language as a transparent conveyor of their discovered truth claims (466). Begun in the 1970s, reader response criticism offered a poststructural complication of rhetorical criticism, and retrospectively one might characterize the disagreements among first wave feminists as a nineteenth-century rehearsal of the twentieth-century Wolfgang Iser, E.D. Hirsch, Stanley Fish, and Roland Barthes debate over the role of the author, text, and reader in the textual meaning-making process. And if Murray, Grimke, Willard, and Stanton are American feminism's early daughters of Zelophehad in claiming the biblical text as their own, their descendants multiply greatly among second wave feminists who assert their own textual inheritance rights. Nevertheless, while Alter and Kermode identify the purpose of their edited volume as introducing the reader to the work of those who "make possible fuller readings of the [biblical] text" and emphasize the "skeptical attitude to the referential qualities of texts" their included critics share, they intentionally exclude the work of feminist critics due to "their inapplicability to our project" (5-6). Collins points out that the first SBL Annual Meeting to include a program unit specifically addressing women did not occur until 1980 (1); the first Semeia volume devoted exclusively to feminist hermeneutics carries the publication date of 1983.

Yet framing the historical record only in terms of women's late admission into the SBL, the paucity of their early SBL publications, Alter and Kermode's exclusion of feminist writing, and Semeia's delayed focus on a feminist hermeneutics risks
misrepresenting the history of feminist exegesis itself. Stanton’s location of an uncontested patriarchal worldview “in” the biblical text and Willard’s appeal for a feminist “correction” to a male-biased interpretation are, after all, decidedly non-poststructural in approach. In some ways, early feminist endeavors in the realm of biblical studies repeat liberal feminism’s concentration on leveling the playing field based solely on gender and mirror the same claims to disinterested scholarship they challenge in others. When Collins briefly reviews the various approaches of nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist biblical critics in her introduction to the 1985 volume Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship, the later scholarship appears more as a continuation of its predecessor rather than one informed by new theoretical interests. The techniques of “proof-texting,” focusing on strong female biblical characters as “role models,” and identifying the Bible’s patriarchal bias evidenced in first wave criticism find their second-wave parallels in the rejection of the Bible’s “sexist characteristics” as “unauthoritative,” attention to “ways in which the Bible has empowered women,” and consideration of the extent to which “[biblical] women are enmeshed in patriarchy” (4-5). Ilana Pardes perhaps best summarizes the “two tendencies” of first and second wave feminist biblicists: those who “efface its patriarchal stamp” in their desire to “turn the remote past into the fulfillment of current dreams” and those who reduce the plurality of voices in the biblical text and “focus solely” on its “patriarchal presuppositions” (2-3).

In the 1990s, however, one can discern a decidedly poststructural turn in feminist exegesis. In Craig and Kristjansson’s 1990 “Women Reading as Men/Women Reading as Women,” the authors acknowledge that it is not only biblical women who are enmeshed in patriarchy but also those who write feminist criticism today. To avoid the earlier
tendencies of feminist criticism identified by Pardes, they suggest a hermeneutic of suspicion in analyzing "pro-woman" biblical narratives, a focus on the vast number of narratives that either portray women negatively or ignore them completely, a resistance to women's acquired inclination to read as men, and a structural approach which avoids staying "only with the surface level of the text" (119-20, 133). Deconstructing the binary oppositions of any text opens it to "a plurality of legitimate meanings" and thus argues against any one authoritative objective interpretation (121). Similarly, in her 1995 article "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?" Cheryl Exum includes "counterreadings" as a feminist approach, a literary analysis which follows "the clues most authors provide (even if unconsciously) to alternative ways of reading" biblical narratives (68). Exum's term "counterreadings" echoes the very title of Pardes' 1992 Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach, who attributes the "clues most authors provide" to the heteroglot nature of their texts and doubts that writers "can be fully aware of, or have full control over, the implications of the dialogues he or she creates" (145). Through identification of "repressed" narrative elements and Bakhtin's notion of textual heterogeneity, Pardes seeks to expose the "antipatriarchal perspectives" which survive within the Bible (2, 4). Alicia Suskin Ostriker's 1993 writing concurs with Pardes' assessment of the Bible as a heteroglot text in characterizing language as "inexhaustibly multiple," open to "contradiction rather than [. . .] monolithic" (102); in her 1994 offering, Lore Segal affirms Pardes' notion of the psychologically repressed within a text when she writes, "story has a mind of its own and tells things sometimes it might have preferred us not to know. Stories operate like dreams; both veil what is to be uncovered; neither is capable of the cover-up" (324).
And as dreams sometimes join a displaced past and future into a present awareness, contemporary feminist biblical criticism benefits from the same conflation of time through the practice of reading narratives intertextually. In their introduction to the 1995 Semeia volume *Intertextuality and the Bible*, editors George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips distinguish the concept as developed by Julia Kristeva from the traditional understanding of intertextuality as "a matter of allusion or source tracking" or of "linear development, authorial design, and textual influence" (8, 11). Informed by the work of both Barthes and Derrida, Kristeva's intertextuality draws from their descriptions of text as a "tissue or weaving," a "network of significations" and "a web that envelops a web" (Aichele and Phillips 8; from Of Grammatology and Dissemination in Leitch 1827, 1830). In Kristeva's reconception of the term, texts "are rewoven or rewritten out of the threads of innumerable other texts" by the "individual reader," who is also "constantly made and remade in and through the intertextual process" (8, 10). Intertextuality plays a transformative role, not only in the remaking of texts and readers, but in transgressing all boundaries between text, reader, and world: "intertextuality is not some neutral literary mechanism" but "a means [... ] of social transformation" (9).

As Auerbach's *Mimesis* offered a reunion between the secular and religious study of scriptural narratives, one might detect in Kristeva's formulation of intertextuality a poststructural reconciliation of literary and historical approaches to biblical studies. Exum argues similarly for the interdependence of literary and social scientific methodologies in observing that "texts construct social reality even as they are shaped by it" (69). And if the recognition of a plurality of legitimate meanings, an attention to the repressed within a narrative, a disinclination to remain only with the surface level of the
text, a disregard for a linear timeline, and a concern with contemporary application characterize some of the more recent endeavors in biblical criticism, they find their correlatives in the most ancient study of the Torah. Darr dates the "traditional Jewish interpretation of scripture" from "two and a half millennia" ago and remarks that such study certainly did not draw from a historical-critical approach but from a close textual scrutiny of their sacred literature (26). The ancient rabbis recognized as authoritative divine instruction not only the Written Torah of the Pentateuch but also the Oral Torah revealed at Sinai and passed down throughout the generations. Eventually the Oral Torah was collected and reduced to writing, first in the Mishnah of approximately 200 C.E. and then interpreted further in the Gemara; the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds combine the two earlier collections of oral teaching and date from around 370 and 500 C.E. (26-28). The Halakhah and the Aggadah of the Oral Torah examine the legal and nonlegal biblical texts in terms of contemporary application and concerns, allowing the Torah a "flexibility" in addressing "the ever changing circumstances and new questions of subsequent generations" (28-29). In their teachings, the rabbis did not reject contradictory interpretations but allowed them to exist side by side; midrashic teachings "ignored biblical chronology" and chose to see all scripture as a "seamless web," all with the aim of revealing "some deeper meaning of the text" and bringing scripture "into contact with everyday life" (29-33).

Yet in his article "Writing the Wrongs of the World," David Jobling comments that feminist critics "have so far paid little attention to deconstruction" and its potential for generating social and political reform (81); much the same could be said regarding the writing of contemporary feminist midrash, although those who do so provide powerful
evidence for the rich possibilities it offers. In concurrence with Jobling, Craig and Kristjansson assert that deconstructive criticism is "tailor-made" for feminist analyses in "discerning and challenging the oppressive structures of our world" (120). While Adam describes the Bible as a site of "internal contestation" (18), David Porush contends that since the Hebrew alphabet lacks vowels, "the written text takes on a life and freedom of its own" and, liberated from an imposing "will of the author," retains an "inherent ambiguity." Regina M. Schwartz also argues strongly for the applicability of a poststructural criticism based on the nature of the text: if one overcomes the tendency to categorize literature along a linear timeline, the Bible itself can be seen as "postmodern," as any one story it tells "surfaces only to be stubbornly subverted by conflicting stories" ("Adultery" 36). Yvonne Sherwood, Alastair Hunter, and Philip Davies have great good fun with this conflicting nature of biblical narratives in an invented missive from the editors of their imagined original Bible, identifying specific problems with "consistency" in the submitted "drafts" of their "contributors":

Does God change his mind or not?

Is kingship a good or a bad thing?

Was Canaan taken wholesale or by gradual incursion?

Are the sins of the fathers visited on the children?

Does God really like sacrifices or not? (156-57)

And it is this possibility of stories that attracts Norma Rosen to the genre of midrash. Comparing midrash to "alternative drafts of a Bible story," Rosen's contemporary feminist version "insist[s] on its right to imagine what might have been" (18-19); she "give[s] a voice to women" whom biblical narratives frequently represent as
marginalized, silenced, and forgotten figures (6). In the imaginative rewriting of sacred stories, midrashists "supply [...] what the text omits" (18). Rosen's aim to "supply what the text omits" echoes the medieval Midrash Tanhuma, Genesis 1: "The Torah is written 'black fire on white fire.'" Here, the "black fire" signifies the actual written letters and words of Torah; the "white fire" represents "the white spaces between them" ("The Torah"). Eighteenth-century Rabbi Levi Yitzhak writes, "not only the black letters [of Torah] but the white gaps in between, are symbols of the teaching" (qtd. in Buber 232).

As deconstructive criticism and midrash expose a text's potential for telling other stories, both offer ideal means for exploring biblical narratives which more frequently than not raise more questions than they answer. As the opening Auerbach quote asserts, biblical narratives are "fraught with background," and their spare prose encourages if not requires the reader to supply what the text omits and actively co-create meaning from it. While for Auerbach such a biblical writing style accentuates the moral teachings of its narratives, Derrida emphasizes the ethical responsibility of the reader: to demonstrate "a respectful, responsible affirmation of the other" and "to make space to let the other be" (Caputo 44). Feminist midrashists such as Rosen explore the lives of marginalized and forgotten figures and give them a voice; Derrida looks "for the bits and pieces that tend to drop from sight in the prevailing view of things, listening with cocked ear for the still small voices" (Caputo 52). Both midrash and Derridean criticism remain open to "the 'other' or even the 'wholly other' (tout autre)" of the narrative (Caputo 52), and I will use both approaches in this study.

In this necessarily limited look at how gender functions in the Hebrew Bible, I have chosen to focus on the sacrifice narratives of Genesis 22 and Judges 11. In response
to the Lord's command, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son in the Genesis Akedah or "binding of Isaac" story; in fulfillment of his vow to the Lord, Jephthah sacrifices his daughter. While in the chapters leading up to Genesis 22 Sarah plays an integral role in fulfilling the promises of the Lord—as much the chosen matriarch as is Abraham the chosen patriarch—she is narratively absent thereafter except for the mention of her death in the beginning verses of Genesis 23. The Genesis 22 story therefore invites the reader "to supply what the text omits," providing a voice the narrator denies to Sarah in the Moriah narrative. I follow Craig and Kristjansson in exploring the potential of deconstructive criticism to expose the oppressive structures at work in the book of Judges and focus on narratives that represent women in complex ways. Depending on the critic, Jephthah's daughter can be seen as a role model for all women in her submission, as a participant who accepts responsibility for her plight, or as one who willfully comes forth in judgment of her father.¹ I give equal attention to the stories of Achsah and the Levite's concubine which frame the book of Judges in order to explore both its underlying textual logic and the extent to which the narrator progressively represents the Lord as an absent and forgotten figure and, like Sarah in Genesis 22, silent in the Judges 11 and 19 narratives. My examination of these stories shares the belief implicit in all feminist exegesis: how these biblical narratives are interpreted makes a difference, as scripture comes into contact with the everyday lives of women yet today. During the writing of this study, the composition of the U.S. Supreme Court—and thus the reproductive rights

¹Nineteenth-century interpreter Alexander Whyte describes the daughter's sacrifice as an inspirational model for women to be "better daughters [. . .] softened, and purified, and sobered at heart [. . .] ready to die for their fathers, and for their brothers, and for their husbands, and for their God" (qtd. in Gender, Power, and Promise 128). Exum moves from evaluating the daughter negatively in failing to "resist" her sacrifice to criticizing the narrator that requires the daughter to "speak against her own interests" (Fragmented Women 36; "Feminist Criticism" 76-77); Fewell and Gunn question whether the daughter knowingly becomes the object of sacrifice and through "her voluntary action passes judgment" on her father (GPP 127).
of all U.S. women—hangs in the balance; The Onion comments on the continuing erosion of civil rights for all marginalized citizens in a parodic Bushian eulogy to Rosa Parks; the chilling Mukhtar Mai story erases on an international level any delusion that the Judges 19 experience of gang rape survives only in the pages of ancient literature.2

For the methodology of deconstructive criticism, I rely on Barbara Johnson's article "Teaching Deconstructively." Johnson defines deconstruction as "a reading strategy that carefully follows both the meanings and the suspensions and displacements of meaning in a text" and identifies seven "signifying conflicts" on which such a reading strategy might focus: ambiguity in diction and syntax; textual "incompatibilities" between "what a text says" and what it professes to do, its "literal and figurative language," and its explicit "assertions and illustrative examples"; ways in which the writing "foregrounds" its own "textuality," either through textual "obscurity" or "excessive clarity" in autoanalysis (140-45). In her discussion of obscure expression, Johnson encourages her reader to question both what the language of a text "is saying" and what the "language is doing" (144); the extended narrative of Jephthah provides strong incentive for exploring this aspect of the text when the lives of 42,000 Ephraimites depend solely on their pronunciation of the word Shibboleth. The always already problematic literal/figurative use of the word prostitute in the book of Judges finally collapses in Judges 19, and, in the end, introduction of the book’s multiple problems of textual ambiguity and obscurity can be traced back to its beginning, in the chapter one story of Achsah. While David M.

2 The death of Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O’Connor have allowed George W. Bush to nominate two candidates for the Supreme Court. The Onion’s 2 Nov. 2005 article "Now We Can Finally Put Civil Rights Behind Us" relates, "During today's service, America not only bade farewell to a seamstress from Alabama, President Bush said at a special GOP fundraiser Monday evening, 'America buried the idea of civil rights itself.'" The BRC News World Edition 27 June 2005 article "Pakistan Hears Rape Case Appeal" reports the story of Pakistani woman Mukhtar Mai, who was ordered gang raped by a tribal justice council as punishment for an offense allegedly committed by her younger brother.
Gunn writes that Judges 1.11-15 "demands of its reader mental leaps" and that "difficulties in the Hebrew text have also occasioned head-scratching" (23), I rely on Johnson in pursuing the idea that the language of the Achsah narrative is doing something in alerting the reader to the book's inherent and salient textual instabilities.

I also draw from Jonathan Culler's observation that deconstructive criticism explores how a text "undermines the philosophy it asserts" and his specific discussion of the practice of an "a posteriori" assignment of causality whereby "we invert the chronology of cause and effect" (On Deconstruction 86). In the book of Judges, the reader encounters an uncharacteristically intrusive narrator who, within the two opening and chronologically confusing chapters, heavy-handedly provides explicit directions for how the book is to be interpreted in terms of causality. However, the stories of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine undermine this "excessive clarity" of self-interpretation, a thematic element again subtly introduced in the context of the Achsah narrative. The consideration of Achsah as a paradigmatic character and her narrative as a mirror text that counters the autoanalysis provided by the intrusive narrator facilitates the move from the level of character to that of narrative in terms of mental association. In "Joseph's Bones," Schwartz identifies the "dialectic of forgetting and remembering, loss and recovery [. . .] frequently depicted in the text and enacted by the text" of the Hebrew Bible (46). The recovery of the Torah—its remembrance and rereading—cause the text to be "rewritten" as well, so "all we have from the beginning is a copy, one that proliferates further copies" (46).³ The intrusive narrator of Judges 2 reports that the

³ In support of her observation, Schwartz cites the retelling of the exodus story in Deuteronomy, Moses' admonishment to remember the story, the Israelites' forgetting of the Deuteronomic injunctions, the finding of the lost book of Deuteronomy in II Kings, the scroll of Jeremiah which is destroyed by fire page by page
Israelites "abandoned" the Lord "who had brought them out of Egypt," but the Jephthah narrative highlights the book's problems with chronology, causality, and memory: oppressed by the Ammonites and the Philistines, the Israelites seek but are refused divine intervention by the God who reminds them that he "delivered you from the Ammonites and from the Philistines." Similarly, the condemning angel of Judges 2 recalls the Lord's promise to "never break my covenant with you" but then announces the Lord's intention to break his covenant. The evocations by the intrusive narrator and the angel of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt function not unlike a Memento or Final Cut exercise in "rememorying," as its mention simultaneously unveils for rumination events the story might have preferred its audience not to remember and increasingly brings into question the chronology and cause/effect relationship at work in the book of Judges.

In a study that examines the ambiguity of language, perhaps a definition of terms is in order. Leviticus 6 and 7 describe the types of sacrifices prescribed by Mosaic law and provide instructions for how to perform them, in line with what the dictionary defines as "an offering, as of a life or object, to a deity" ("Sacrifice," def. 1). However, while in the Genesis 22 narrative Abraham builds the altar, binds his son, and takes the knife in hand, Isaac does not become a burnt offering. Neither Judges 11 nor 19 conforms to the types of sacrifices described in Leviticus; both Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine are "sacrificed" in the sense of "to give up one thing for the sake of another" ("Sacrifice," def. 2). Eventually my analysis will explore the extent to which the "sacrifices" in Judges fulfill its third dictionary definition: "to sell" or surrender "at less than the supposed value" ("Sacrifice," def. 3). While acknowledging a patriarchal bias in
valuing men over women in the Hebrew Bible, I maintain that this view does not go uncontested and choose to consider the examined texts in light of the term "hegemonic masculinity," defined by Karin Wahl-Jorgensen as "a process subordinating both women and other men, as well as a process in which both men and women participate" (73). My analysis of the Judges narratives centers on the French idiomatic expression "donner le change," translated as "to mislead, deceive, or betray someone (à quelqu'un); in venery, the ruse of a pursued animal in detouring the dogs to another quarry." In terms of value, the noun change refers to "the exchange of one currency for another" ("Change"); the verb changer means "to replace one person or thing with another" ("Changer").

Finally, a few words regarding what I am not doing in this study. I do not address the historical question of whether human sacrifice was practiced in ancient Israelite culture but limit my discussion to the narrative world of the examined texts, nor do I suggest that such a narrow study can be generalized even on a narrative level to other stories of human sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. Additionally, I write as only one situated reader of a received text in translation and do not explore how an ancient audience may have interpreted the narratives I examine. Contra Craig and Kristjansson, I do not attempt a gender-specific reading of the texts, finding such an approach both impossible and unnecessary. Resisting an acquired inclination to "read as a man" suggests at once an underlying essentialism and an ability to stand outside one's self, and in its asserted hierarchy of God/man/woman, the Hebrew Bible relegates Israel to the role much secular literature reserves for women. Returning to the questions of interpretive criteria with which this introduction began, absent claims to truth or historical accuracy such readings can only be judged on the extent to which they are "well executed," "convincing,"

---

4 I rely on the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.
"satisfying, or instructive" (Adam 64). Lastly, deconstructive criticism requires humility and an appreciation of the ironic on the part of its practitioner. Adam writes that such interpretations are not authoritative sentences that close the book on interpretive questions but are ventures in persuasion" and reminds such a critic that "deconstructive arguments are not exempt from the deconstructive critique they level at others" (30, 73). If that were not enough, in her discussion of deconstruction Danna Nolan Fewell warns that "method plus text always equals a surplus of text" ("Deconstructive Criticism" 141). Therefore, as this study begins by "rubbing two texts together" in an attempt to generate "heat and light" (Culler, Pursuit 118), I find myself reenacting the roles of those in the studied narratives: I realize the vulnerability to deconstruction of my creation by unwittingly sacrificing constituent parts of the very text on which I otherwise rely and in so doing gain insight into the paradox of surrendering one's inheritance in order to insure it that I recover from the Genesis 22 and Judges sacrifice narratives.
CHAPTER II

SARAH ON MORIAH

A reader may protest that Erich Auerbach overstates his case in contrasting the Homeric style of *The Odyssey* with that of biblical narrative artists, but no one argues against his choice of the *Akedah* to support the contention that "silence," "obscurity," and "unrelieved tension" characterize narratives of the Hebrew Bible (11-12). For Auerbach, the heroes of Homeric epics "wake every morning as if it were the first day of their lives" (12). In contrast, biblical characters such as Abraham always carry with them a "multilayered" history of relationships, memory, and psychological complexity although this "background quality" remains "unexpressed" (11-12). As Phyllis Trible points out, the three-word introductory phrase "after these events" of Genesis 22 "collects a tortuous saga of multiple dimensions" ("Genesis 22" 271), yet the thoughts, emotions, and motivations of the *Akedah* characters remain obscure while Sarah is absented from the narrative altogether. The deficiency in concrete details of time and place, the paucity of dialogue, and Abraham's vision of "the place far away" contribute to the story's dreamlike quality, and the reader might recall Thomas Mann's description of the jealous, brooding, and exhausted brothers' view of the approaching Joseph before their "sacrifice" of him as a mirage, "a flash of silver, which disappeared and came again, [...] a shimmering figure" (372). The Genesis 22 divine command to sacrifice Isaac may jar the reader, but the biblical narrator limits Abraham's response to the actions necessary to fulfill it—he arises early, saddles the donkey, cuts wood, and takes Isaac and two of his young men with him. Such a narrative style suggests that biblical writers share more with both Homer and modernists such as Kafka than Auerbach allows: when the Lord issues a
command, Abraham wakes, not unlike Gregor Samsa and Odysseus, as if it were the first
day of his life to an unforeseen condition, and the reader is left to explore all the
possibilities such a text suggests but fails to elucidate.⁵

Biblical scholars from ancient through contemporary times have explored such
possibilities of biblical narratives by means of what Norma Rosen in Biblical Women
Unbound: Counter Tales characterizes as the necessary invention of midrash (10). The
word midrash derives from the root verb darash, which means "to study," "to search," "to
investigate," "to inquire," or "to go in pursuit of" (Bruns 628). In Reimagining the Bible:
The Storytelling of the Rabbis, Howard Schwartz attributes the need to record the
aggadic tradition of Oral Torah to the destruction of the Second Temple and the closing
of the Hebrew biblical canon. A closed canon necessitated the assertion that within it
were answers to questions of all subsequent generations; additional aggadot and
midrashim were therefore created in response to the different questions for which
scriptural answers were sought after the closing of the Talmuds and continuing until the
twelfth or thirteenth century (3-8). As the questions asked of Torah changed, the aggadic
tradition evolved as well, from writings "terse and judicial in style and content" similar to
the Halakhah to midrash which resembled the "narrative expansiveness of the Bible,"
incorporating "imagination" and "an increasingly conscious attitude toward the use of
literary devices, styles, and techniques" (9-10).

Rosen focuses on the devices, styles, and techniques of biblical narrative artists
and suggests that the very "fraught with background" quality of biblical narratives
Auerbach identifies contributed to the generation of midrash (BWU 5). Although

⁵ Howard Schwartz discusses the midrashic influence evidenced in Kafka's writings, including "An
Imperial Message" and "Before the Law," and Kafka's own rewriting of the Akedah in "Abraham" (170,
199, and 201).
presumably written as texts of moral instruction, biblical narratives carry within them subtexts that *command* their own narrative resolution (*BWU* 16), and Rosen rejoices in the freedom to explore the motivation of characters in the "midrashic magic realism of time conflation" allowed in the thought world of Judaism (*BWU* 12). Through studying classical rabbinical midrash and writing her own, Rosen learns that what readers see in biblical narratives and what questions they ask of it depend both on their historical location and, more specifically, on "who does the seeing" ("Rebekah and Isaac" 23). In addition to the obvious benefit of revisioning sacred stories from the perspective of non-dominant characters, midrash offers feminist biblicalists association with a longstanding and highly valued tradition. Rabbinical scholars viewed revelation as "ongoing," including their own interpretations of, reflections on, and additions to the biblical text (*BWU* 19). The power of *narrative* itself provides an additional advantage to the biblicalist over that of traditional commentary or interpretation, as midrashic inventions tend to attach to the biblical narrative in the reader's memory: having read a particular midrash, one "can never unknow it. It is burned into the story as simultaneous alternative reading" (*BWU* 14-15). In creating their own midrash, modern writers sometimes draw not only from the scriptural story but also from their predecessors' contributions attached to it and *attribute* a knowledge of both to the characters on whom they focus.

Although a valuable tool for imaginatively exploring the gaps, inconsistencies, and silences of biblical narratives, such license does not come without restrictions to its use. In filling textual silences, the writer is constrained by what the biblical storyteller has chosen to reveal; midrashic inventions come "not by riding roughshod over" the biblical text but through an "intense experiencing of" and "wrestling with" it (*BWU* 15).
Rosen refuses to reduce her efforts to a "feminist reparational" project but seeks to recover "what might have been heard" had biblical women been given a voice in their own textual lives (BWU 9). Schwartz emphasizes the highly textual character of midrash in writing that the "rabbis searched in the details" of the text and contributed significance to "even the slightest variation in biblical phrasing" in their attempts to resolve "incomplete narratives" and determine "the meaning of obscure passages" (4-5).

Invented additions and embellishments to the canonical text allowed unparalleled freedom but required adherence to strict rules: a firm anchor in "proof-texts," a loyalty to the "reverent spirit" of the narrative, and a consistency with the tone and style of the primary source (Schwartz 9). In the invitation to contributors of Yours Faithfully: Virtual Letters from the Bible, editor Philip R. Davies offers both a concise description of contemporary midrash and identifies its goal. Encouraging the contributors to "be as imaginative as you wish," he adds that "contents [. . .] should not contradict (and ideally should 'throw light' on) events and persons" of biblical narratives. In political terms, giving voice to the silence of a narrative can initiate a compelling cultural critique: by means of narrative the writer subtly exposes the ideological biases underlying the biblical account and demonstrates how this thought world manifests in material terms through faithful adherence to the written text. A close reading of midrash, however, can expose the "unexpressed" ideological biases and theological agendas of the midrashists, whose offered resolutions to incomplete narratives and obscure passages reflect their own worldview as much as that of the biblical storyteller.

The volume of midrashim generated by the Genesis 22 narrative documents the power of what Yvonne Sherwood describes as "the most wordless of texts" to disturb
those who read it (7), an uneasiness which results from both what the text reveals and what it conceals. The reader learns that God intends to "test" Abraham but remains ignorant regarding the motivation behind such a trial and what it is designed to assess, and although the command to murder his son may strike the reader as outrage, Abraham responds to it with methodical execution. The two unnamed young men whom Abraham takes on the journey to Moriah seemingly know less than the reader, and Abraham's order that they remain behind on the third day while he and Isaac "go over there" to "worship" eliminates from the narrative all but one questioning voice. Isaac's direct query regarding the absence of a sacrificial lamb receives the most ambiguous of answers from Abraham: as Trible notes, the "my son" in 22.8 can be read as either a direct address to Isaac or an appositive of "the lamb for the burnt offering" ("Genesis 22" 276). The intervention by the angel in 22.11 suspends the tension between Abraham's statement to his young men in 22.5 that "we"—both he and Isaac—will come back from the mountain and his actions reported in 22.9-10, which argue his willingness to comply with the divine command to sacrifice Isaac. However, the Lord's blessing of Abraham because "you have done this and have not withheld your son" and Abraham's return to his young men without Isaac reinstate this tension (22.15-18; 22.19), and his burnt offering of the ram caught in a thicket in place of Isaac in 22.13—traditionally understood as part of the two divine interventions which enclose it—appears on closer examination to read only as Abraham's sacrificial invention.

The multilayered history of relationships, memory, and psychological complexity recorded in the preceding chapters do little to prepare us for the events of Genesis 22, but to these narratives the reader returns both to appreciate the Akedah's "loud silence[s]" and
to fill them (Ostriker, Feminist Revision 41). The Lord's call of Abraham follows the
death of his father, Terah, who had taken Abraham, Abraham's wife Sarah, and their
nephew Lot with him from their home in Ur to journey into the land of Canaan. Terah
dies when they settle in Haran, and the Lord now commands Abraham to travel to "the
land that I will show you" with the promise that he will make of Abraham "a great
nation" (12.1-2). Although Sarah is sixty-five years old and barren, Abraham is seventy-
five, and the land already inhabited, the Lord vows to give Canaan to Abraham's
offspring (12.4-7), a promise frequently reiterated albeit in slightly altered form in later
chapters (Gen. 13.15, 15.18, 17.8, 26.3, 28.13, and 35.12). Lest the reader believe that
the fortunes of Abraham, Sarah, and Lot have reversed from lack to prosperity with such
a divine promise, we learn that the three travel to Canaan with "all the possessions they
had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran" (12.4-5), and the
promised land of Canaan reveals itself to be one so ravished by famine it cannot support
the flocks and herds they have acquired (13.2-7). The solution to separate results in the
capture of Lot, who has settled in Sodom. Abraham gathers "his trained men, born in his
house, three hundred eighteen of them" and with "his servants" recovers "Lot with his
goods, and the women and the people" of Sodom and Gomorrah (14.13-16).

Having once saved both the women and people of these cities, Abraham attempts
to do so again when they become the target not of human pillage but divine destruction.
The text has previously revealed glimpses of an Abraham willing to question the
promises of the Lord with a reminder of his childlessness, the request for a sign to seal
the promise of land for his descendants, and—after twenty-five years—his falling on the
ground and laughing at the Lord's pronouncement that it is through ninety-year-old Sarah
that the son of promise will be born (15.2-16; 17.15-17). In the second Sodom and Gomorrah episode, the reader encounters an extended exchange with the Lord wherein Abraham questions the justice of a god who would "sweep away the righteous with the wicked" (18.23). Here, Abraham unassumingly but persistently and progressively bargains with God to spare the cities should fifty, forty-five, forty, thirty, twenty, even ten righteous inhabitants be found there, and the Lord agrees to Abraham's pleadings (18.22-33). However, although two angels remove Lot and his family from Sodom before its destruction, relative to Abraham the text reports only that he "went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord." Gazing toward the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham sees "the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace" (19.27-38), and Lot is disappeared from the narrated life of Abraham thereafter.

But if Abraham exhibits an admirable courage in confronting the divine on behalf of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, he demonstrates a selfish willingness to forswear Sarah in the interests of his own well-being. Chapters 12 and 20 recount the journeys of Abraham and Sarah to Egypt and to Gerar; in both stories, Abraham represents Sarah as his sister when he fears that others' desire for her will cause them to kill him. The Gerar episode is particularly problematic since it follows the divine announcement that Sarah will conceive and bear a son and precedes the birth of Isaac. Cheryl Exum observes that in passing Sarah off as his sister, Abraham "guarantees that his wife will be taken" (Fragmented Women 156). Pharaoh and King Abimelech each "take" Sarah, but the Lord intervenes by affliction, "Pharaoh and his house with great plagues" and by appearing to Abimelech in a dream, threatening him with death if he does not return "Abraham's wife" (12.17; 20.3-7). Although Pharaoh "dealt well with
Abraham" when Sarah is "taken into Pharaoh's house," both the narrator and the Lord confirm that Abimelech "had not approached" or "touch[ed]" Sarah (20.4-6). This salient difference between the two narratives, presumably meant to resolve one important textual problem, ironically raises two: the paternity of Isaac and all that inheres within the phrase "taken into Pharaoh's house." Sarah is silenced in both narratives, and although the Lord afflicts Pharaoh "because of Sarah" and threatens Abimelech, he does not rebuke Abraham (12.17). Admonishment of Abraham comes only through the actions and speech of Pharaoh and Abimelech, who both demonstrate a higher regard for the marriage relationship of Abraham and Sarah than does Abraham. Additionally, Pharaoh recognizes the plagues as divine punishment for his taking of Sarah, and Abimelech entreats the Lord to not "destroy an innocent people," echoing Abraham's earlier plea for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (20.4). Pharaoh and Abimelech both reprove Abraham for his deceit, but in the end it "goes well" for Abraham in Egypt and Gerar. Though ordered to leave Egypt, Abraham does so with all that Pharaoh had given him in exchange for his "sister," and Abimelech rewards Abraham similarly with the additional boons of "a thousand pieces of silver" and the choice of land on which to settle.

And as Abraham surrenders Sarah and exposes her to sexual violation at the hands of others to protect and promote his own interests, Sarah shows an equal readiness to exercise a similar control over those whom she has authority. After living in Canaan ten years and with the promise of descendants to Abraham still unfulfilled, Sarah "gives" her Egyptian slave, Hagar, to Abraham "as a wife" in order to "obtain children by her" (16.1-3). Through these brief verses, the narrator introduces elements of the gender ideology informing the stories of each of the patriarchs. Here, the reader finds Sarah's
first expression of what may be construed as a desire for a child, and the meaning of the word *barren* changes from the earlier "she had no child" of Genesis 11.30 to the wife's inability to reproduce. The narrative attributes Sarah's barrenness to "the Lord," who has "prevented" Sarah from childbearing and introduces the social custom of gaining offspring through the surrogacy of a household slave. This theme of barren matriarchs appears again in the stories of Rebekah and Rachel, with the same causal attribution; Leah's fertility threatens Rachel's favored wife status, and both give their maidservants to Jacob in order to acquire sons (Gen. 15.20-26 and 29.31-22).

Such narratives assert that the value of women rests in their ability to produce male descendants and introduce an oppositional element into women's relationship with other women. When Sarah's Egyptian slave-turned-second-wife conceives Ishmael, she now regards Sarah with contempt. Abraham refuses to intervene in the dispute, and Hagar flees from the abuse of Sarah. An angel of the Lord responds to the runaway Hagar with both a command and a blessing/curse: Hagar must "return and submit" to Sarah, her offspring will "greatly multiply," and her son will survive although "he shall live at odds with all his kin" (16.4-12). After the birth of Isaac, however, Sarah demands that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out, so that Ishmael "shall not inherit along with my son Isaac" (21.8). The "my son" of Sarah's speech to Abraham highlights Isaac's unique relationship to Sarah, and Abraham is "distressed" by Sarah's petition "on account of his son" Ishmael (21.11-12). The previous disharmony between Sarah and Hagar regarding Ishmael now shifts to one between Sarah and Abraham, and, as in the Hagar episode, the Lord sides with Sarah and consoles Abraham with the promise to "make a nation of him [Ishmael] also" (21.13).
Louis Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews* reveals the disparate ways scholars have historically responded to such biblical narratives. This 1909 seven volume publication includes midrashim from sources ancient through medieval, pseudepigraphic writings, and kabalistic and Hasidic legends from the thirteenth through nineteenth centuries. Ginzberg's collection is therefore remarkable both for its historical breadth and its successful interweaving of multiple and diverse source materials into one continuous narrative. Such a bricolage approach produces a biblical metacommentary which ranges from apologist to critical intertextual commentary. *The Legends*, not unlike the Bible on which it reflects, is at once timeless and time bound; it both supports Rosen's assertion that what one sees in a biblical narrative depends on "who does the seeing" and can surprise its modern reader by exploring the very questions that remain problematic to a twenty-first century audience.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the midrashim of *The Legends* sometimes affirm the patriarchal assumptions of the biblical narratives and seek to quiet the nagging ethical questions they raise through embellishment or revision. Sarah prays for a child (238), and when the Lord gives Abimelech's wife a child, angels cry out in Sarah's behalf, arguing that "it is just and fair" that she also be remembered; when Isaac is born, "the whole world rejoiced" because "all barren women" gave birth at the same time as Sarah (261). Sarah's harsh treatment of Hagar finds justification in the observation that "she was Sarah's property," whom Sarah frees and decides—"without a trace of jealousy"—that she will give to Abraham as a wife. Having been "taught and bred by Sarah," Hagar now makes a "suitable companion for Abraham" (237). Other embellishments expand on Hagar's "contempt" and frame Sarah's treatment of Hagar in terms of a patriarchal justice.
Although Sarah is "particularly tender toward her," Hagar questions Sarah's righteousness and piety "when noble matrons came to see Sarah," citing her barrenness after so many years of marriage to Abraham as proof since Hagar "became pregnant at once" with him (238). Abraham, "ready to do justice to Sarah," accords full power to her over Hagar (239). The midrashic imagination revisions the Genesis 12 story and rehabilitates Abraham by attributing the trip not only to the famine in Canaan but also to Abraham's desire "to become acquainted there with the wisdom of the priests and, if necessary, give them instruction in the truth" (221). The "chaste" Abraham observes Sarah's beauty for the first time on their journey to Egypt and elects not to pass her off as his sister but to hide her in a casket; when the "tax collectors" become "suspicious" and the king's men take Sarah to Pharaoh, both Sarah and Abraham pray for her safety (223-24). God answers their prayers and both sends an angel to protect Sarah and afflicts Pharaoh and his household with leprosy, so Pharaoh "could not indulge his carnal desires" (223-24). Concerning the trip to Gerar, midrash responds to Abraham's willingness to surrender Sarah to Abimelech—at least from Abraham's point of view—on the basis of his prophetic powers, which allowed him to know not only "the danger to himself" but also that Abimelech "didst not touch his wife" (259).

At other times midrash opens the door to textual problems and alternative readings of the biblical narratives only to close it. Before their sojourn to "the Holy Land," Abraham and Sarah understand their childlessness as "punishment for not abiding within it," but after ten years in Canaan, Sarah knows "that the fault lay with her" (237). Another account voices the question of Isaac's paternity but "silence[s] those who asked" with the invention that the Lord commands an angel to fashion Isaac's embryo "precisely
according to the model of Abraham" (262). God prophesies to King Og of Bashan—a
guest at Abraham's celebration of the birth of Isaac—that he will fall at the hands of
Abraham's descendants for having called him "a sterile mule" (263). The servants of
Pharaoh who first observe Sarah's beauty believe that she "ought not to remain the
property of a private individual," but the reader appreciates the emphasis on "private"
when Sarah is taken by "a powerful armed force" to the palace of Pharaoh (222).

Perhaps less predictably, other midrashim of The Legends do not hesitate to
elevate Sarah and criticize Abraham. The three men/angels who visit at Mamre and
announce that Sarah will bear a son do so as a "communication which was intended for
Sarah and not for Abraham, to whom the promise had been revealed long before" (244).
Sarah's laugh provokes a divine response, but "the reproach made by God was directed
against Abraham as well" since "he, too, had showed himself of little faith" (244). God
does not report Sarah's words that accompany her laugh—"yet is not my lord Abraham
old?"—but repeats to Abraham, "Am I too old to do wonders?" and here the writer
questions through Sarah the ability of ninety-nine-year-old Abraham to pleasure her and
father Isaac (244). King Abimelech rewards Abraham "in accordance with the just
claims of a brother of the queen" (258), and when he discovers that Sarah is Abraham's
wife, he gives Sarah "a costly robe" to shield her from the gaze of others—a gift
understood as "a reproach to Abraham, that he had not fitted Sarah out with the splendor
due to his wife" (260). A revision of the Genesis 12 story relates that Pharaoh deeds over
to Sarah his gold, silver, slaves, the land of Goshen, and "his own daughter Hagar as
slave" in his "marriage contract" with her; additionally, the angel whom the Lord sends to
protect Sarah asks "at each blow" to Pharaoh if she chooses that he deliver or withhold it
(223-24), and here the absence of Sarah's quoted speech raises as many interesting
questions as the text it embellishes. Surprising to the modern reader—and perhaps
unintended by its author—midrash offers a proto-feminist appraisal of a patriarchal
marriage relationship and a matrilineal argument of descent in one stroke: due to the
plagues visited upon Pharaoh and his house, Sarah's time with him finds its parallel in the
Hebrews' four hundred year servitude under Pharaoh, when "God visited the Egyptians
[...] in order to redeem Israel, the descendants of Sarah" (224). One account argues both
matrilineal descent and rights of inheritance and reinforces the link between Sarah, the
land, and the future Israel in holding that the land of Goshen was inhabited at the time of
Joseph "by the descendants of Sarah, because it was their property" (223).

When it comes to the Genesis 22 narrative, the midrashim of The Legends find
Sarah's absence from it and the relative silences of Abraham and Isaac within it as
troublesome as does the modern reader. In one account, Abraham considers the problem
posed by the Lord's command to sacrifice Isaac to be one of separating "my son Isaac
from Sarah his mother" and offers Sarah an explanation for the journey as ambiguous as
the response he will later offer Isaac concerning the absence of a sacrificial lamb: the
now grown Isaac "has not yet studied the service of God" and he "will learn the ways of
the Lord" in the land of Moriah (275). When Sarah prepares Isaac for departure by
dressing him in "a very fine and beautiful garment from those that Abimelech had given
to her" (275), the rabbinical writer both links his midrash with that of the brothers'
betrayal of Joseph and collapses the chapter 12 and 20 narratives. Several versions stress
that Isaac is Sarah's only child and envision her response to knowledge of the Akedah.
Sarah comes to believe Satan's report of Isaac's sacrifice when she observes Abraham
returning from the land of Moriah alone and dies from grief (286); she dies from joy when Satan revisits her, confesses his lie, and assures her that Abraham "did not kill his son" (287). One account describes a Sarah who responds to Satan's report of Isaac's sacrifice with the cry, "that I had this day died instead of thee!" but reconciles the loss on the basis that it was "the word of God" (286), while another chooses a both/and approach: when Satan tells Sarah that Abraham intends to sacrifice Isaac, she is "no more of this world" but then revives and affirms, "All that God hath told Abraham, may he do it unto life and unto peace" (278). Midrashists imagine the effects of Sarah's death in ways ranging from the prospering of Abraham by God and the birth of his daughter by Hagar to an Abraham who "did not recover" (291-92). Abraham "felt himself young and vigorous" during Sarah's life, but "old age suddenly overtook him" when she dies (291). Not only Abraham but the "whole country" suffers, and the land where before "all went well" now turns into a "confused" state (287). One writer again associates Sarah, Isaac, and the journey to Gerar in reporting that Abimelech attends Sarah's burial and joins in "the seven days' mourning" of her death (290).

The unquestioning Abraham of the Akedah transforms through midrashic embellishment into one who insists on his right to speak and engages God in prolonged dialogue, consistent with his portrayal in earlier narratives. In response to the Lord's command of Genesis 22.2, Abraham answers that he has two sons, that he loves them both, that "the one is the only son of his mother, and the other is the only son of his mother," and questions whether he is "fit to perform the sacrifice" since he is not a priest (274). Abraham responds to the angel who commands him to "not lay your hand on the boy" by exposing the contradictory nature of the two divine commands and questioning
which voice he should obey (282). One midrashic addition to the biblical text resolves
the textual issue concerning the substitute sacrifice of the ram through Abraham's asking
if he should leave the mountain without making an offering; in response, God directs
Abraham's gaze to the ram in the thicket (282). Another account chooses not to resolve
the underlying ethical question posed by the Akedah but to reinscribe it with a divine
sleight of hand: when Abraham demands to know why God required such a test, the Lord
justifies his command on the grounds that Abraham's response to it justifies his chosen
status, since now the world knows that Abraham "fearest God" (284).

But justification of Abraham can quickly transform into a questioning of God's
justice in midrashic writing. Oblique commentary comes in the form of praise for
Abraham, who did not "reproach" God for the contradiction between his promise of
"yesterday" to give Abraham descendants through Isaac and his command of today to
sacrifice him, nor did he "cast aspersions upon the ways of God" for having to buy the
burial site for Sarah even though "God had promised him the whole land" (284, 288).
However, a terrorized-to-death Sarah requires the narrative legerdemain of an Akedah-
willing, untraumatized Isaac, and so the midrashist imagines a son who is both "joyful
and cheerful" when his father tells Isaac that he will be the Moriah burnt offering (279).
Concerned only that he might "tremble at the sight" of the slaughtering knife and become
an unfit sacrifice for God, Isaac asks only that Abraham "make haste" to "bind my hands
and feet securely" and "burn me unto fine ashes" to give to Sarah (280). Against this
portrayal of Isaac, the writer juxtaposes a "high and exalted" God who looks down upon
the scene and speaks proudly of his creation to the angels, only to be reminded by them
that he is breaking his covenant with Abraham with such a command (281). And such
commentary on the *Akedah*, perhaps drawing from Abraham's questioning of God's justice in the Sodom and Gomorrah episode, develops into a Job-like theodicy at the hand of one midrashist who envisions the Lord boasting of "the perfect and upright" Abraham before the sons of God. When Satan reminds the Lord that Abraham has "built no altar before Thee" for the thirty-seven years "from the time of his son's birth till now" and calls God on his declaration that Abraham "would not withhold" Isaac from him as a burnt offering (272-73), Isaac becomes subject to the same collateral damage as Job's children.

Contemporary midrashim explore both Isaac's innocence and the collateral damage he suffers as a result of the *Akedah* by recounting events either through the eyes of another or those distanced from it by time. Ostricker's Isaac, nine years old at the time of the *Akedah*, feels nothing but "awe" toward his father, can hardly contain his excitement for the opportunity "to meet my father's God," and attributes the silence of Abraham and his servants to their desire to "surprise" him (*Nakedness* 85-86). But "surprise" turns to "disbelief" on the mountain: Isaac's "stomach drops" and "every muscle contracts" when Abraham ties Isaac to the altar, and Isaac the storyteller now understands the *Akedah* as a joke on "the old man," the "schlemiel" who trusted too much in a god who disappeared into the "thin air" of the Moriah mountains (87-88). The hostility that bristles beneath the humor of Ostricker's midrash surfaces in Sherwood's imagined missive "Isaac to Abraham." Sherwood's postmodern Isaac spends the post-*Akedah* millennia researching the literature of his textual life and struggles to carve out its unique significance, disappeared as he is from the narratives he haunts—his "I turned on its side" and reduced to "a mere hyphen" that connects Abraham and Jacob (7). Isaac decries Franz's "filial whines" in Kafka's "leeching off" of Isaac's own story, detects in
Freud's Oedipus complex a "slip" that ignores the "Laius- or the Abraham-complex," laments to Abraham that he lacks "yours and God's clarity of vision" in choosing between sons, and identifies himself to Abraham as "the name of the background with which your text is fraught" (8, 11, 13). In her midrash "Rebekah and Isaac," Rosen considers the more immediate effects of the Akedah on Isaac's relationship to Rebekah and the childlessness of their first twenty years of marriage. Rebekah's maids tell her of the Akedah to explain why Isaac is "so nervous" and that his fear of death causes him to "finish things as quick as he can" ("Rebekah and Isaac" 16); Isaac confesses to Rebekah the fear that he, like his father, will receive "the call to Mount Moriah" and interprets their childlessness as "God's mercy" (18). In an imaginative reversal of the Abraham and Hagar story, Rosen's determined and resourceful Rebekah proposes to Hagar that Ishmael father sons for her and Isaac, arguing that "since men have spouses and concubines [...] then why can't women have both?" (19-20).

Attempts to see the Akedah from Abraham's point of view are notably absent from contemporary midrash although writers frequently provide commentary on Abraham through the voice of other characters. Their inventions, however, demonstrate the difficulty in separating Abraham from the negative contagion of the Akedah itself. Both Fewell and Gunn and Trible question whether God's commands represent any real test of Abraham since much of his past behavior demonstrates a lack of attachment (GPP 39-55; "Genesis 22" 284-85); Exum and Ostriker interpret the Akedah in terms of the erasure of women in biblical narratives and the transfer of their reproductive power to a male deity (Fragmented Women 119-29; Feminist Revision 31-40). Ostriker's midrashic Sarah therefore sees Abraham as a "holy man with a holy theory" who "betrays" her by
submitting Isaac to the ordeal of Moriah and who bargains with the Hittites to bury Sarah "out of my sight" when she dies (Nakedness 67-68; Feminist Revision 42). Ostriker links Sarah's death both to the Genesis 12 and 20 narratives and to older midrash on them in writing, "he shut me in a box" and reiterated to the Hittites the same "I am but a stranger and sojourner / Among you" line he used in Egypt and Gerar (Nakedness 69). David Holgate likewise associates the three narratives with a Sarah who feels betrayed by Abraham, both by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and to surrender her in exchange for his benefit. For Sarah, "something died" in Egypt when Abraham showed himself "more interested in profiting than prophesying" (1-2).

Contemporary writers tend to identify more with Sarah than Abraham and fill in her narrative absence and silences more kindly than those of Abraham. Drawing from the biblical portrayal of her agency within the household, her ability to laugh in the presence of the divine, and her unique relationship to Isaac, Holgate imagines a Sarah who chooses to separate from Abraham and live in Hebron after the Akedah but who questions whether her own actions with Hagar contributed to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac. In the end, Sarah's intrigue with the ways of the Lord and her desire to fill the gaps of Abraham's written account of their lives together lead Sarah to reunite with him (1-3). Ostriker creates for her reader a Sarah who defiantly rejects the midrashic explanations of her death and dies "of age" (Nakedness 69), while the Sarah created by Rosen follows Abraham to Moriah with a male sheep in tow to substitute for the sacrifice of Isaac; the Lord with whom she converses en route reminds Sarah of her "cruelty" to Hagar and Ishmael but also concedes that she is his creation and "made in my image" (BWU 55). Sarah claims the same prophetic powers in the casting out of Hagar
that rabbinical midrash extends to the Abraham of Gerar and gently mocks the God who forever reminds Israel of their deliverance by his hand from Egypt: Sarah "knew" that God would rescue "the slave-girl's child," and by giving her "a push through the door" Sarah rescues Hagar from a slave mentality so she can "enter her real destiny" (BWU 55).

The following midrash, written in the form of a letter from Sarah to Rebekah, shares more with Holgate's and Rosen's revisions than that of Ostriker—a Sarah who recalls both feelings of guilt and times of joyful laughter, one who grieves the absence of both Isaac and Yahweh in the quiet company of Abraham. Having learned from her experience with Hagar, Sarah no longer defensively views other women as a threat and extends to Rebekah the right of informed consent both she and Hagar lacked in their relationships. And whatever fear Sarah may have initially felt in Egypt and Gerar—and anger at Abraham for his giving her such a "push through the door"—has been replaced over the years by memories of a time when both the Lord and his angels and earthly kings and all in their court attended to her. The passage of time has also allowed Sarah to understand Abraham's silent obedience to a god who demands the surrender of a son. If the relationship between Sarah and the Lord changed in Egypt and Gerar, perhaps "something died" in Abraham, not only then, but also the morning he went to the place where he had stood before the Lord and saw the smoke going up from Sodom and Gomorrah and then, too, the morning he gave the bread and water to Hagar and sent her away with Ishmael on her shoulder. The letter imagines a relationship between Sarah and Abraham disrupted by the changed desires that God's promises initiate and centers on the metaphorical relationship which links Sarah, the land, and Yahweh. Sarah's barrenness finds its parallel in the dry, infertile land, whose harsh nature is sometimes mirrored in
both Sarah and the Lord. The three also share a metonymic relationship of contiguity: in response to Exum and Ostriker, an equally strong argument can be made that in biblical narrative God replaces not the power of women in procreation but the potency of men. Sarah bears Isaac when "the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised" (Gen. 21.1), and she acts as the transfer agent through which both Abraham and her descendants gain possession of land on which to live. Consistent with the text from which it draws, the letter leaves open to the reader's imagination whether Rebekah chooses to enter into a relationship with Isaac and "his god" or if her privilege of choice extends only to the appointment of Jacob/Israel for God's blessing.6

6 This letter is an only slightly revised version of the one which first appeared in Yours Faithfully: Virtual Letters from the Bible published by Equinox Publishing Ltd. and is reprinted here with their permission.
Rebekah—

I have thought of you as my daughter for some twenty years now, ever since I heard the report of your birth. How I rejoiced at that report and felt, even then, that you would be the woman chosen by Yahweh to carry the seed of promise. When this letter reaches you, know that the time is at hand when Abraham will send his servant to your land in search of a wife for Isaac. The Lord has spoken to me and I, in turn, have encouraged Abraham to secure the woman for our son from among his kindred. I know Abraham will do as I ask, and soon, as you will understand when you read this letter.

I do not understand the ways of Yahweh nor can I offer adequate explanation of this god to you. Abraham thinks of the Lord as his God, but I assure you that he is accessible to women and responds to even our unspoken thoughts. Abraham believes that Yahweh wants only obedience from us and that we will be blessed as promised. Sometimes I think Yahweh wants—or demands—more than obedience. Abraham and I followed his command to go from our country and kindred and come to the land of Canaan, but if this is the land of promise, it is the land of promises deferred. We build altars under every spreading tree to him on our journeys, and yet there are still times of drought and famine.

I know Abraham wonders about the justice of this god as much as I do. When told of the pending destruction of Sodom, he once questioned Yahweh about those who were righteous. As Abraham recounted this exchange to me, I began to imagine the scene as if it had occurred before my very eyes: I had never heard Abraham grovel so—his speech so hesitant!—even though he was fighting for the life of his own family. I felt both shamed for Abraham and angered with him, and angry at Yahweh as well that such a plea was even necessary. And yet while I lament that the Lord forgets those he has chosen, I know also that he remembers. Although I have looked back to you, Rebekah, and to the place we knew as home every day since we left, still I remain here today, writing to you.
You should know, however, that this land is not kind to women. While Yahweh promised Abraham descendants as innumerable as the stars of heaven, I myself felt as dry and barren as the ground under my feet, and it was this mirror image I began to see reflected in Abraham’s eyes when he looked into mine. Before, Abraham and I had grown old together and he still thought of me as beautiful. Throughout all those years, we had always found pleasure with each other; neither Abraham nor I ever considered his taking a concubine to give us a child. Now, with Yahweh’s promise of fertility in this infertile land, things were different. Pleasure became duty, and every month failure bled us to despair. And so it was that Hagar was offered by me and taken by Abraham. And it was not until I saw Hagar with Ishmael that the hunger for a child grew within me. Abraham loved Ishmael, but I could not; I eventually cast Hagar and Ishmael out, willing to sacrifice them both for the sake of Isaac.

If seeing Hagar with Ishmael changed my desires, the time I spent in Pharaoh’s harem changed Abraham’s. We had traveled to Egypt for relief from the severe famine suffered in Canaan. Abraham desired to pass me off as his sister, fearing that he would be killed if the Egyptians saw me as beautiful and wished to take me. When Abraham tells this story, he always says he did this so it would go well for him. I assure you, Rebekah, it would go well for me also. Can you imagine what it was like for me in Pharaoh’s harem? After all those years of wandering through Canaan, living in tents, not even a rooftop on which to bathe, having nearly forgotten the notion of pleasure? Until then, I had not laughed since the first time we camped at Mamre and I heard from the Lord his promise for me! Twelve months I spent in the harem under the regulations for the women, a time of cosmetic treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics. I was admired by all who saw me, and I became Pharaoh’s favorite over all the others. Pharaoh wished to set the royal crown on my head, make me queen, and give me even to the half of his kingdom, but I asked only for sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, camels, land, and a thousand pieces of silver for Abraham. It was only after this that Abraham began to look at me anew, and I grew full with Isaac. I
tell you my story so you will know that Canaan can be a harsh land. Know that if Isaac ever suggests a sister ruse during such a time, you may be well advised to go along with it and see if Isaac cannot restrain expression of his affection for you once again.

Isaac! Merely the thought of what I need to tell you now makes my chest tighten again in pain. It happened one day when I arose and noticed a man by the oak. I was reminded of the three men who had visited Abraham and me so long ago at Mamre, and I wondered why Abraham had not awakened me to prepare food for our guest. Eliezer told me that Abraham had risen early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and taken two of his young men with him, and our son Isaac; that Abraham had cut wood as if for a burnt offering and then had set out for the land of Moriah. It was then that I was overcome with fear. What was it that the Lord demanded of us now? The one by the oak only confirmed what I could barely imagine—that Yahweh, in order to test Abraham, had asked him to take our only son, Isaac, and sacrifice him on one of the mountains.

I wondered if Abraham and Isaac, only an hour or two away, heard my scream. For the next two days, all I heard was the echo of my cry resounding off the mountains of Moriah. Had the man of God not assured me that Isaac would not be sacrificed, I vow that even he could not have restrained me in my effort to overtake Abraham and Isaac. As it was, I was struck by the sound of my own resonating wail and the realization that I was to witness the anguish of Abraham as he raised the knife over Isaac’s bound body and record forever in my mind the fear in Isaac’s eyes as he came to his own realization of death. And why? Because I had laughed at God’s promise of pleasure? That I thought such a thing was too great even for the Lord? But Abraham had laughed as well, hadn’t he? Because I denied I had laughed? Because I had cast Hagar and Ishmael out? But had not Yahweh supported me in this regard to Abraham? Was I not but acting to protect the very son that the Lord had promised to us? Let the curse be on me then if I am so accused! But my words seemingly fell on deaf ears, and on the third day my ears grew deaf as well. All was silent and all passed before my eyes as if time itself had slowed. On the
mountaintop, I remember only seeing the glint of Abraham's knife raised overhead and feeling Isaac's scream now resounding off me before my body grew as heavy and numb as the mountain itself. I shared, for a time out of mind, the fate of Lot's wife and became but part of a sacrificial landscape.

I have not been well since that day, nor has Abraham. Neither of us can meet the other's eyes, nor have we seen Isaac. I trust the boy is out in the fields, searching for comfort. I don't know if I will ever see him again. It appears that the God who put us together is now intent on separating us forever. Yahweh has been from the beginning a god of separation. On this point and two others Abraham and I agree: We suspect we will hear no further from the Lord, and that it is now time to secure a wife for Isaac. And here my letter to you comes full circle. Abraham will soon send his servant to your land in search of a wife for Isaac. The Lord once revealed to me the sign which will tell our servant that he has found the one appointed for Isaac: She will be near a spring of water and will offer to the servant a drink of water from her jar and then draw water for his camels to drink. The word appointed now seemingly carries the threat of curse as well as the promise of blessing, and you may soon be the first to know if the one so chosen retains any privilege of choice in the appointment.

~Sarah
CHAPTER III

DONNER LE CHANGE:7 ISRAEL AND OTHER IN JUDGES 1, 11, and 19-21

By the end of Genesis, part of the Lord's promise to the patriarchs has been realized: the number and power of their descendants have increased greatly. The Israelites now reside in Egypt, however, and what the reader may interpret as a realized promise appears as a threat to the Egyptian king (Exod. 1.8-11). The king therefore subjects the Israelites to slavery. Yahweh eventually "remembers" his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and intervenes to end the oppression of his people (Exod. 2.24). After a four hundred thirty year stay in Egypt, Israel embarks on what Lore Segal calls the "forty-year death march" toward Canaan under the leadership of Moses, narrated in Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (323). This last book ends with the death of Moses and with Israel poised to enter the promised land under the leadership of Joshua. Israel enters Canaan but succeeds only partially in possessing the land. The book of Joshua concludes with his death, making Caleb the lone adult survivor of the original exodus generation whose story continues in the book of Judges.

The intervening books also develop the notion of a provisionary relationship between Yahweh and Israel. The unqualified promises of land and descendants so frequently reiterated to the patriarchs in Genesis now become conditional upon Israel's faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant. Of particular concern in Judges, the covenant commands the Israelites to drive out the inhabitants of the promised land and prohibits

---

7 An idiomatic French expression meaning to mislead, deceive, or betray someone (à quelqu'un); in venery, the ruse of a pursued animal in detouring the dogs to another quarry. In terms of value, the noun change refers to the exchange of one currency for another; the verb changer means to replace one person or thing with another (Nouveau Petit Larousse). Peggy Kamuf, in her article "Author of a Crime," discusses the element of substitution implicit in the expression and notes that the Levite of Judges 19 donne le change when he offers his concubine in response to the mob's demand for him (190, 200). Kamuf's observation led me to consider the extent to which each of the characters in the Judges narratives examined donne le change and to explore how such a dynamic contributes to the book's violence.
them from making a covenant or intermarrying with those they will dispossess (Exod.
23.31-3 and 34. 12, 15-16; Deut. 7.2-4, 12.31; Josh. 23.12-16). Several Judges narratives
involve the implications of spoken language, and those of Judges 11 and 19-21
specifically draw from the Numbers 30.1-2 law regarding the inviolable nature of a man's
vow or oath. Most importantly, after Genesis the reader is introduced to a jealous god, a
Yahweh who prohibits the Israelites from serving any other gods and commands them to
tear down all the altars of foreign gods in the promised land (Deut. 5.6-10, 6.13-15, 7.5).
As Segal observes, by the self-descriptor "jealous," Yahweh "means what you and I
mean: Love me and me alone" (318). Yet the Lord means something quite different from
what you and I mean when he repeatedly promises the Genesis patriarchs that he will
"give" the land of Canaan to their descendants (Gen. 12.7, 13.15, 15.18, 17.8, 26.3,
28.13, and 35.12). Now Israel faces the challenge of conquering the already inhabited
land of Canaan in battles wherein they must annihilate "anything that breathes" in the
towns of their inheritance (Deut. 7.2, 20.16-17).

Such a command leads Mieke Bal to begin her book Death and Dissymmetry: The
Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges with the words "The Book of Judges is about
death" (1). If women in Genesis compete with each other in producing life, the book of
Judges shows them as victims of violent deaths. In striking contrast to the prominent role
of mothers in Genesis, maternal figures are largely absent from Judges. Women in
Judges are the daughters of fathers, women who are sacrificed before any birth narratives
can be written. In place of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, Judges 11 gives us
Jephthah's daughter, a virgin sacrificed by her father. In place of Hagar, Zilpah, and
Bilhah, we read of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19, sacrificed by the Levite, with no mention of children born to their union.

The sacrifices of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine in Judges point to several reversals from Genesis. The *Akedah* involves the offering of a *son*; the Judges sacrifice narratives reverse the gender of the victims, offering not sons but daughters. Abraham offers Isaac in response to Yahweh's order to do so, but Judges lacks any such divine command. Jephthah sacrifices his daughter in response to his own ambiguously expressed vow, and the Levite surrenders his concubine in response to an angry mob's demand for him. Finally, an angel of the Lord ultimately intervenes in the story of the *Akedah*, ordering Abraham not to harm Isaac and providing a substitute offering. For Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine, there is neither divine intervention nor ram in the thicket.

Certainly not all women in Judges are represented as victims, nor are all the thematic elements of Genesis reversed. The stories of Manoah's wife and Achsah both echo elements of Genesis' promise of descendants although these materials are reshaped in Judges. In the sole birth narrative in Judges, the angel of the Lord appears to Manoah's wife announcing to her that she will conceive a son. Like Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, Manoah's wife is barren, and the son she will bear will be one chosen from birth by Yahweh. In Genesis, however, Yahweh speaks directly only to Abraham of Isaac's promised birth while the divine messenger in Judges speaks directly to Manoah's wife. Both Abraham and Sarah initially laugh in response to the announcement; Manoah's wife accepts the message without questioning that the promise is from Yahweh, and it is Manoah who expresses doubt as to the messenger's identity and his message. Isaac holds
the promise of descendants for Abraham, but the messenger offers no such assurance regarding Samson. The son Manoah's wife will bear "shall begin to deliver Israel" from the hand of its enemy (Judg. 13.5). Although Achsah's story, discussed in detail below, reintroduces the association of women with the land, fertility, and Yahweh's promises from Genesis, we read of no children born to either Samson or Achsah.

Similarly, not all the victims of violence in Judges are women; men slay other men—sometimes by the thousands in battle—and women sometimes victimize men or lead them into battle, reversing gender role expectations. To claim that violence in Judges is gender-bound would suppress the focus of many of its narratives and would delimit the roles women play in the book, something Judges refuses to do. During a time of military incursion and political upheaval, Judges portrays women in roles that sound eerily modern. As noted above, Manoah's wife conceives and bears a son, consecrated to the Lord for the purpose of leading the Israelites into battle against their Philistine oppressor. Barak, the commander of Israel's troops, demands the presence of Deborah, judge and prophet of Yahweh, in entering into battle with the army of Sisera in accordance with a battle plan of Deborah's design. Judges locates its maternal images in the characters of Deborah, "a mother in Israel" who marches her children into battle, and Jael, who offers Sisera succor to the point of death (Judg. 4.18-21, 5.7). In the Song of Deborah celebrating the Israelites' victory over Sisera's army, the writer envisions Sisera's mother, anxiously awaiting her son's return from battle and comforting herself with the thought that Sisera and his men are dividing the spoils of war—"a womb or two for every man" (Judg. 5.29-30). Sisera's demise comes not at the hand of Barak, but that of Jael.
Judges also portrays women in the more traditional roles of daughter or wife, their fate in life during this period of military conquest determined by men. While Barak demands the presence of Deborah to insure victory in battle, Acsah's father promises her as a present in marriage to "whoever attacks Kiriah-sepher and takes it" (Judg. 1.12), and the Philistines target Samson's Timnite wife for violent aggression because of her relationship with Samson. Jephthah sacrifices his daughter when she unwittingly becomes the object of his vow, uttered to guarantee his success in battle against the Ammonites. The Levite surrenders his concubine in his place when the men of Gibeah threaten him with personal aggression; the Levite then uses her dismembered body as motivation for Israel to enter into an intertribal war. Eventually, the command to annihilate "anything that breathes" in the towns of their inheritance becomes so skewed in Judges that the Israelites turn the order against their own family members and begin to self-destruct.

The challenge for commentators and critics of Judges therefore lies in analyzing the coherence of a book that seemingly resists that very quality. Biblicists employing a literary approach in their analysis of Judges observe that it is both a complete literary unit in itself and one situated within other books of the Hebrew Bible, a work that incorporates and reworks thematic and ideological material from the books described above while anticipating that which follows.\(^8\) Judges begins by selectively repeating narrative elements with which Joshua concludes, continues with the stories of Israel's

---

\(^8\) Boling sees Judges in its final form as a "post-587 edition" whereby Judges 1 and 19-21 provide a "tragicomic framework," offering comedic "escape [...] from despair" of exile (37-38). Webb describes chapters 17-21 as a "coda" that both "resonates[s] with themes" and reworks narrative elements from the book's introduction, creating a "rounded literary unit" (208). Fewell and Gunn identify images from chapter one which are repeated, although "skewed," in the book's closing chapters: Judah initiating the attack against the Canaanites/Benjaminites (1.1-2/20.18); the dismemberment of Adonizek/Levite's concubine (1.5-7/19.29); Acsah's/Levite's concubine on a donkey (1.14/19.28) (GPP 135).
efforts to conquer Canaan, and looks forward to the ensuing monarchical period. After reiterating Israel's failure to occupy all of Canaan, repeating the story of Israel's victory against Kiriath-sepher, and reporting once again the death of Joshua, the text offers a structural outline of the book of Judges in verses 2.11-23. By means of narratorial exposition, the reader learns that the Israelites will repeatedly turn to worshiping foreign gods, Yahweh will give them over to their enemies and then, in response to their cries of oppression, will raise up a judge to deliver them. Israel turns again to foreign gods, and the cycle Cheryl Exum identifies as "apostasy/punishment/cry for help/deliverance" repeats ("The Centre" 412). This structure breaks down progressively in Judges, reflecting the disintegration of social cohesion among and within the various tribes of Israel and their increasingly estranged relationship with Yahweh throughout the book.

Although concurring on the basic structure of Judges, the literature examined offers various answers to the questions of major issues and themes the book addresses. Barry Webb concludes that Yahweh "oscillate[s] between punishment and mercy" in his relationship to the book's other leading character, Israel (209). He identifies the "non-fulfilment [sic] of Yahweh's oath" to give Israel the land of Canaan as the "fundamental issue which the book as a whole addresses" and adds that the book explores the "knowable aspects" and "unknowability" of Yahweh not unlike the book of Job (208-09). For Webb, the major theme of the book involves Israel's continued apostasy and Yahweh's progressive refusal to deliver an Israel that repeatedly turns to other gods and his punishment of Israel for so doing (208). Robert Polzin observes that the books of Joshua and Judges center on the tension between the Lord's promise of giving all the land of Canaan to the Israelites and their loyalty to the covenant on which the promise is
conditioned; he also notes the similar questions of ideology raised in the books of Judges and Job (152-56; 159-60). For Polzin, the book of Joshua serves as a "meditation" and reflection on the Israelites' attempt to occupy both the land and the law on which the gift is conditioned during the time of transition from dispossessed outsiders to possessors of the land while Judges ultimately explores the extent to which covenant loyalty determines Israel's fate (148-56). In his Judges commentary, Robert Boling identifies the "tragicomic framework" of the book (37). According to Boling, the opening chapter represents Israel as "scattered and ineffective" while chapter twenty-one ends in an "ideal" and "reunited" Israel (37-38). Overall, Boling asserts that the book's stories "describe an ancient international community in miniature struggling to realize a way of life that affords an equal range of opportunities for all its citizens" (3).

Considering the acts of violence committed against women in Judges, Boling's reference to equality for "all its citizens" recalls Moses' amplification of Yahweh's directive to prepare "all the people" for the theophany of Mount Sinai (Exod. 19.11). In consecrating "the people," Moses admonishes them to "not go near a woman" (Exod. 19.15).\(^9\) In response, feminist literary criticism offers a counterbalance to the androcentric judge/hero analysis by centering their analyses on the roles female characters play in the book. Adrien Janis Bledstein reveals her provocative feminist approach in her article title "Is Judges a Woman's Satire of Men Who Play God?"

Accordingly, Bledstein posits an ironic storyteller in Judges, perhaps a woman, who employs satire and parody in condemnation of men who, in their exaggerated notions of

---

\(^9\) Drorah O'Donnell Setel cites this verse in addition to the commandments in Exod. 20.1-17 as indication of "the secondary status of women and their exclusion from the central institutions of Israelite society" (33). Fewell also discusses women's general exclusion and cites additional passages in Joshua, e.g., 5.5 and 5.8, where the words "all the people" and "all the nation" clearly refer only to Israelite males ("Joshua" 64-66). Note also the slippage of "all Israelites" in the epigraphic daughters of Zelophehad inheritance laws.
self-importance, "have a tendency [...] to behave as if they were gods" (52). Bledstein identifies two themes developed in Judges: the use of women by men to insure success in their conflicts with other men and the parallel deteriorating relationships between men and women and between men and Yahweh (37-38).

In directing her focus on the violent acts committed against women in Judges, Mieke Bal argues that the transition from patrilocal to virilocal marriage patterns underlies such narratives (Death 6). In a patrilocal marriage, the daughter/wife remains in her father's house, and the children born to her belong to her father; in a virilocal marriage, the daughter/wife becomes part of her husband's household, and the children born to the union constitute the lineage of the husband (Death 5-6). For Bal, the narratives of Judges "reflect" and "respond" to this "social revolution" in marriage patterns, a revolution she suggests may be the underlying source of the book's violence to a greater degree than the ostensible primary concern with the political struggle involved in the conquest of the land (Death 5-6). The word house in Judges extends beyond the designation of private space into the public/political realm of lineage and becomes the site of contention and social disruption during this time of transition in marriage patterns; Bal points out that the killing of men by women and the women victims of murder in Judges are all associated with the space of the house (Death 172). By foregrounding the stories of women, Bal also discovers that Judges not only concerns battles and the men who fight them but also the issues of "lineage, fatherhood, and the lives of young girls"; "virginity, mothers, and violence"; "sex, obedience, and death"; "power and its dissymmetrical distribution, the conflicts and competition it generates, its consequences for those who have it and for those who lack it" (Death 16-17).
In her discussion of Judges in "The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges," Exum examines the roles men, women, and Yahweh play in the text. She concludes that the Judges storyteller presents Deborah as "the only unsoiled hero of the book" and notes that after the chapter five celebration of Deborah and Jael in song women characters will not again be so praised (415-16). According to Exum, both Yahweh's role and that of the other judges can be characterized as morally problematic (412). Exum writes that after Gideon the formulaic language changes from "Yhwh raised up a deliverer" to a deliverer "arose" and the phrase "the land had rest" after defeat of the enemy drops from expression (421). After the lone Judges mention of Israel's repentance, the Lord in 10.13 "refuses to intervene" on their behalf against the Philistines and the Ammonites (421); in contrast, the Israelites in the Samson narrative do not cry out to the Lord, but here God appoints the deliverer before his conception (423).

Particularly troublesome for Exum are the questions of how the spirit of Yahweh influences the behavior of the judges and the inconsistent presence/absence of Yahweh in the subsequent narratives (417-26).

While separating feminist from nonfeminist approaches to the book of Judges illustrates well the divergent foci of their respective analyses, ultimately such an opposition works no better in secondary sources than claiming gender-bound violence in the primary source. In her article "Dealing/With/Women: Daughters in the Book of Judges," Bal assesses the value of any theoretical approach to a text in terms of its "capacity to raise problems rather than solve them" (317). According to Bal, the theory's value is maximized to the extent that it can "be brought into dialogue with texts" (317). Even the most cursory of literature reviews offers the same dialogic potential. Bal's
reminder that women play both the role of perpetrator and victim of violence places
Boling's "equal opportunity" language in new light and discourages any simple
opposition of male/female. This leads to Exum's claim that the actions of both human
and divine characters remain morally ambiguous in Judges, which joins in conversation
with Bledstein's contention that men sometimes behave like gods and Bal's assertion that
the opposition of public/private dissolves in Judges. If women are the source of both life
and death in Judges, Bal then enters into dialogue with Webb and Polzin, whose focus on
the question of Israel's covenant loyalty recalls the Deuteronomist's framing of obedience
to the commandments in terms of life and blessings versus the death and curses that greet
those who turn away (Deut. 30.15-20). Polzin's emphasis on the reinterpretation and
application of covenant provisions during the Joshua/Judges time of transition and
dispossession joins with Boling's discussion of the Deuteronomistic composition of
Judges during a time when Israel is similarly dispossessed of the land. A dispossessed
Israel recalls the time of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, another time of transition both
explicitly and implicitly echoed in Judges in the forms of direct speech and the
doors/threshold imagery associated with the sacrifice narratives (Judg. 2.1, 12; 6.8, 13;

Such discussion of times involving transition invites the voice of Claudia V.
Camp to the roundtable. In the introduction to her book Wise, Strange and Holy: The
Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible, Camp examines the "intense preoccupation
with identity boundaries" within Second Temple Judah, those generally recognized as
originators of the canon (13). According to Camp, "postexilic Judah [...] was a time of
struggle over Jewish identity formation, including the use of a powerful rhetoric of
Othering in the interest of defining and controlling "Us" (15). Additionally, Camp explores the complexity of the concept of "strangeness," variously including in its definition "nationality/ethnicity, idolatry, sexual behavior and cultic proximity" and the question of whether marriage to another Israelite is a defining factor (21).

Many of Camp's insights appear equally applicable to the "mixed crowd" exiled from Egypt in Exodus who struggle to distinguish themselves from the inhabitants of Canaan they are to disposess (Exod. 12.38). The tendency to separate women from Israel has been noted above in their implicit exclusion from the community addressed in the covenant of Exodus 19 and 20. Camp points out that Proverbs undermines the attempt to gender the concept of Otherness by embodying wisdom as well as strangeness in female figures. Citing Proverbs 8.15-16, 8.22-30, 8.18, and 8.35-36, Camp notes that female Wisdom creates order and justice in society, that she was the Lord's first creation and remains at his side during formation of the earth and heavens, and that she "walk[s] in the way of righteousness and justice" while bestowing "wealth" on those who "love" her (78). While Wisdom offers life, Proverbs associates the Strange Woman with deceptive speech, social upheaval, prohibited sexual and cultic behavior, intermarriage with foreign women, and death, which Proverbs 2.22 correlates metaphorically with "being cut off from the land" (17, 75, 78-79). Camp complicates what may appear at first blush as "classic patriarchal virgin-whore stereotyping" and demonstrates in her analysis of Proverbs that "the dichotomy of wise and strange tends to break down in the ambiguity of telling one woman from another" (17-18). The metaphorical marriage relationship between Yahweh and a faithful Israel further complicates the notion of gendering Otherness. Extending the figurative language, Israel "plays the harlot" when it turns to
idolatry in the Hebrew Bible (25). Yet Camp observes that such double figurative representation leads to collapse of the metaphor in two ways: the relationship between Yahweh and Israel becomes a homosexual one, and/or Israel is "necessarily transformed into a woman and, one might note, seldom a good one" (25). In the realm of figurative language associating "right sexual practice" with "right religion," Camp finds Israel "struggling to stay upright before its now gender-bent altar" (25).

With such an emphasis on Israel and Other, unsurprisingly many critics have found a structuralist approach valuable in their analyses of the Hebrew Bible in general and the book of Judges in particular. David Jobling, in his article "Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning," traces the development of structuralist criticism from Ferdinand de Saussure's identification of language as a system of relationships based on difference through Vladimir Propp's analysis of plot structure in the Russian Fairy Tale, Claude Lévi-Strauss's identification of binary oppositions at work within a text, and A. J. Greimas's contributions in structural narratology (92-105). In Course of General Linguistics, Saussure defines language as a "social institution" and a "system of signs that express ideas" (15-16). Signs give form to the "shapeless and indistinct mass" of human thought; for Saussure, "there are no pre-existing ideas" prior to language (111-12). A sign is "the combination of a concept and a sound-image," which Saussure calls respectively the signified and the signifier (67). Both "the bond between the signifier and the signified" and signs are arbitrary and conventional (67); additionally, the signifier and the signified are differential: "their most precise characteristic is in being what the others

\[\text{Editors note that Course in General Linguistics was not "authored" by Saussure during his lifetime but through his colleagues’ efforts to document his ideas from students’ notes of his lectures after his death (xii-xiv).}\]
are not" (117-18). Most importantly, in language "there are only differences [...] without positive terms" (120). Regarding signs, Saussure abandons the idea of difference and concludes that "between them [two signs] there is only opposition" (121). Words acquire value from the way they relate to other signs within the system; within language, words are relational on both a horizontal and vertical level, which Saussure calls syntagmatic and associative (paradigmatic) relations (123). An associative relation "unites terms in absentia," and "a word can always evoke everything that can be associated with it in one way or another" (123, 126).

Here Saussure comes within one sentence of the structuralist observation that paradigmatic relations pertain "to the relation of a sign present within the sign system to its implied absent counterpart" (van Zoonen 75) and to Derrida's extension of Saussure's structural approach into a poststructural one with terms such as "différence," "supplement," and "deconstruction." In his book Of Grammatology, Derrida notes that since "the signified always already functions as a signifier," the distinction between the two terms becomes arbitrary as well, thereby eliminating the possibility that any signified "escapes [...] the play of signifying references that constitute language" (7). Derrida thus concludes that all elements of a language system are arbitrary, differential, and conventional without positive terms, and Saussure's "difference" becomes Derrida's "différence," a neologism which combines the two meanings of the verb différer—to "detour" or "delay"—a temporal deferment—and "to be not identical, to be other" ("Différence" 8). In his analysis of Rousseau's Confessions, Derrida focuses on the former's use of the word "supplément," which denotes both "substitute" and "addition"; he notes that the supplement acts as an "intermediary" and "occupies the middle point
between total absence and total presence" and, as a substitute, "fills and marks a
determined lack" (OG 157). Derrida adds that the expression *donner le change*
describes the recourse to the supplement admirably" (OG 154). Finally, deconstructive
criticism "show[s] how texts come to embarrass their own ruling systems of logic; [...]where texts get into trouble, come unstuck, offer to contradict themselves" (Eagleton
116). Binary oppositions "represent a way of seeing typical of ideologies," states
Eagleton, and deconstructing them becomes possible when we "demonstrate how one
term of an antithesis secretly inheres within the other" (115). In the form of a question
that could have been written with the book of Judges in mind, Stephen Moore
paraphrases Derrida's deconstruction of the speech/writing opposition: "What if the
illegal alien, the parasite, were already within?" (31).

Roland Barthes employs a structuralist approach in his 1988 analysis of Jacob's
Genesis 32 wrestling with the angel, as does Edmund Leach in his discussion of Judges
19-21 (Jobling 100-02). Exum relies on the Derridean insight into the operation of binary
opposition, noting that it is "a way of structuring reality, differentiating it into a hierarchy
of opposition, in which one side of the opposition is always privileged" and identifies
many such binary oppositions at work in the Samson narrative (Fragmented Women 72-
77). Camp describes her ideological criticism as "the attempt to trace a perceived logic
of ideas lying under the surface of the texts, somewhere between the surface structure of
New Criticism and the deep structure of structuralism, though including a bit of both" (8).
Jobling offers his own structuralist reading of the three "Fords of the Jordan" episodes in
Judges (110-15). Likewise, Bal employs Greimas's semiotic square in her analysis of the
patrilocal and virilocal father-house and the interrelationship of gender and violence in
the book of Judges (Death 174).

Jobling asserts, however, that the structured patterning one reader finds in any text
is a product of the "individual mind" and "will not be identical" to that any other reader
might find, thereby opening the door to alternate explanations of the very questions Bal
examines (91). Bal supports her thesis through an interdisciplinary approach, employing
not only structuralist, narratological, and feminist theories but also those of psychology,
anthropology, history, and philology in her analysis. Drawing from much of Bal’s work
but staying within a feminist/poststructural/literary critical approach, an alternate
explanation of the interrelationship of gender and violence in Judges suggests itself.

Bal’s observation that the house in Judges signifies both the private space of family and
the public/political sphere of lineage arguably finds its roots in Yahweh’s promises to the
Genesis patriarchs. In Genesis 12.2, the promise of descendants to Abraham and a land
for those descendants extends to the notion of nationhood, dissolving any opposition
between private and public spheres. In Joshua and Judges, we witness the initial attempts
of the familial tribes of Israelites, descendants of the “mixed crowd” from Exodus, to
realize this promise of nationhood as a united Israel.

As noted above, however, the Genesis promise to give the land to the patriarchs’
descendants now becomes conditional upon the Israelites’ adherence to the Mosaic
covention, and here Camp's discussion of the process of Oothering aligns well with the
requirement of covenant loyalty. In Leviticus, Yahweh stresses observation of the
statutes and ordinances to Moses on the basis that “[Yahweh] have separated you
[Israel] from the peoples” (20.22-24). Moses reiterates this very point to the people when
they renew the covenant at Moab: The Lord "has chosen you out of all the peoples on
earth to be his people" (Deut. 7.6). Deuteronomy 29.12-13 specifically identifies the
reason for the covenant between the people and Yahweh with the language "in order that
he [Yahweh] may establish you today as his people." In contradistinction, Moses
declares that the realization of Yahweh's promises to the patriarchs depends neither on
any past demonstration of righteousness on the part of the Israelites nor on the power in
their numbers (Deut. 7.7; 9.5). Both Moses at Moab and Joshua at Shechem warn the
people that the distinction between them and the inhabitants of Canaan will become so
jeopardized they will fare no better in the land than those whom the Lord despises and
will dispossess before them absent adherence to the Lord's statutes and ordinances (Deut.
7.9-11; 8.18-20; 11.26-29; 28.15-68; Josh. 24.20).

The covenant thereby functions to create the distinctions between the current
inhabitants of Canaan and the Israelite tribes and to establish the identity of Israel based
on difference between Self and Other. Conditioned specifically upon obedience to the
commands to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan and to destroy the altars of their foreign
gods, the tribes of Israel will realize the Genesis promises of innumerable descendants,
land, nationhood, and Yahweh's blessing and protection. The covenant thus sets forth the
binary oppositions of Self and Other at work in the book of Judges: Israelites/Canaanites,
Yahweh/foreign gods, land of promise/Canaan, and descendants/annihilation. Yet as
early as the twenty-fourth verse of chapter one in Judges, the reader may question the
stability of the Israelite/Canaanite opposition when an inhabitant of the land befriends
Israelite spies and, in return, is allowed to build the city of Luz in the land of the Hittites
(Judg. 1.22-26).
The following eight verses comprise a litany of other Israelite failures to "drive out" the inhabitants of the land, resulting in the angel of the Lord's announcement that Yahweh will no longer "drive out" the inhabitants of the land but leave them and their gods as "adversaries" and "a snare" to the Israelites (2.1-3). Perhaps in no other text can Umberto Eco's semiotic dictum "a sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else" find better application than the book of Judges (A Theory of Semiotics 7). The obviously artificial opposition of land of promise/Canaan—the land of promise is Canaan—serves to draw attention to the problematic character of the other oppositions and recalls Jobling's observation that "the introduction into the language of some new word [...] may signal less a new reality than a reorganization of the words used for existing things" (93-94). Throughout the book of Judges, each of the asserted oppositions on which Israel's identity relies will likewise donne le change à quelqu'un. The Lord alternately raises up judges to deliver the Israelites and raises up an adversary to oppress them. The Israelites alternately cry out to Yahweh for deliverance and turn to building altars to Canaanite gods. The Israelites fail to drive out the inhabitants of the land and begin annihilating fellow Israelites.

The issue of gender further destabilizes the binary oppositions of Self and Other. Are women Israel or Other? The language of Exodus 19-20 implies the exclusion of women from the addressed community; when the people renew the Mosaic covenant at Moab, women are specifically included in the covenant community (Deut. 29.10-13). Two other issues complicate the position of women in the oppositions set forth above, those of Israel's repeated apostasy and women's continuing association with the land, descendants, and Yahweh. As noted in the above discussion of Camp, the figurative
language of a marriage relationship between Yahweh and a faithful Israel and the extended metaphor of Israel's "playing the harlot" when it turns to foreign gods transform Israel into a woman. Similarly, the metaphorical language of "playing the harlot" associates women with foreign gods. While the storyteller in the book of Judges portrays women in divergent roles, all the women discussed herein perform some function relating to the Israelites' efforts to realize God's promises to the patriarchs. Explicitly extending the notion of mother from a private to public role in Judges, the Judges text maintains the metonymic relationship between Yahweh, women, land, and descendants from Genesis. Accordingly, when Yahweh leaves adversaries and their gods within the land to act as a snare to Israel or raises up the Other against the Israelites, he _donne le change_ from the point of view of the Israelites, carrying with him in the shift to Other the sign "woman" as well. Women, therefore, occupy a vulnerable position in the unstable sign system used to establish the self-identity of Israel and are caught in the middle of a deteriorating relationship between the Lord and Israel. The interrelationship of gender and violence in the book of Judges arguably results from women's unstable position in the sign system, sliding between Self and Other in the asserted binary oppositions on which Israel's identity rests.

The short pericope of Achsah, in the condensed narrative form typical of the Hebrew Bible, subtly introduces these issues of Israelite identity and the inheritance of land at stake in the book of Judges. The Achsah narrative appears in both Joshua 15.13-19 and Judges 1.11-15, drawing attention to the story's importance as transitional material between the preceding books and Judges and signaling its importance as a key to interpreting the latter. While Joshua 11.23 states that Joshua "took the whole land" of
Canaan as promised by the Lord, Polzin notes that the book of Joshua concludes with the description of an "ideal" covenantal Israel, one whose realization of Yahweh's promises to the Israelites is written as a *fait accompli*, and with the very real reminder that foreign nations remain in the promised land (141). The book of Judges will counter with narratives not of total possession of the land, but in increasing degree, with those of defeat, oppression, and disintegration of the Israelite tribes. The story of Achsah assumes a similar shape, associating Achsah with Caleb, the remaining hero of the Israelites' initial spy mission into Canaan narrated in Numbers 13; with Israel's first hero/judge, Othniel; and with the successful conquest of Kiriath-sepher, part of the promised land. Additionally, the Judges narrator situates Achsah's story within the context of Judah's successful efforts to possess its allotment of land in Canaan (Judg. 1.1-18).

Directly following these reports, however, the reader learns of Judah's *failures*: even though "the Lord was with Judah," complete success eludes the tribe. We learn that Judah "could not drive out the inhabitants of the plain, because they had chariots of iron" (Judg. 1.19). What is the reader—or Judah—to conclude regarding this mixture of success and failure and Yahweh's involvement in them? As David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell write in *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, the narrator prefaces Judah's efforts in Judges 1.2 with the Lord's declaration to "hereby give the land into his [Judah's] hand," and Joshua promises military success over the Canaanites "though they have chariots of iron" in Joshua 17.18 (159). Gunn and Fewell suggest that a "failure of vision" on the

---

11 Regarding the "ideal" Israel, Polzin cites Josh. 23.9 and 23.14: "For the Lord has driven out before you great and strong nations; and as for you, no one has been able to withstand you to this day," and "you know in your hearts and souls, all of you, that not one thing has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you; all have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed" (141). In the direct discourse of Joshua 13.2-6, the Lord itemizes the parts of Canaan still unconquered that Joshua refers to as "these nations left here among you" in his speech to the Israelites in Josh. 23.7. The Lord assures Joshua that "I will myself drive them [the remaining nations] out from before the Israelites" (Josh. 13.6).
part of Judah accounts for their limited victories (159). The same verses, however, can suggest failure on the part of Yahweh. The reported experiences of Judah draw into question the Lord's promises of land and nationhood to Israel and highlight the ambiguity of the acting subject in the promise/command to "drive out" the enemy. Bal notes that Achsah, the first named woman in the book of Judges, "holds, in condensed form, all features of the other daughter-stories" (Death 148). A close examination of the Achsah narrative reveals how the story of this first named woman additionally undermines Yahweh's promises and the binary oppositions of the covenant and implicates the language by which they gain expression as a source of the instability.

The story of Achsah initially reinscribes the association of women with the Genesis promises of land and descendants made by Yahweh to the patriarchs. Caleb gives his daughter Achsah to Othniel when the latter successfully captures the city of Kiriath-sepher. From Joshua 15.18-19 and Judges 1.14-15, the reader can infer that the gift of land by Caleb might have reasonably accompanied Achsah's marriage to Othniel, much as a faithful Judah, having recently renewed their covenantal relationship with Yahweh, might have reasonably expected full realization of their promised inheritance despite the chariots of iron. The reader learns, however, that Caleb initially withholds the gift of land and then gives his daughter and Othniel only dry land in which to reside. Caleb, however, responds unquestioningly to the additional request for basins of water by giving Achsah "Upper Gulloth and Lower Gulloth," thereby making the land arable (Judg. 1.15).

In her article "Achsah: What Price this Prize?" Lillian R. Klein remarks that this narrative element shifts the textual focus of the first chapter of Judges "from war and
death to land and water and generation" and, by extension, to the possibilities of "blessings of life, of birth" to Achsah as well as fertility to the land (22, 26). Other associative shifts also occur in the story. Earlier narratives attribute the blessings of land and fertility to Yahweh. In the Achsah narrative, Othniel receives land only through his relationship with Achsah, thereby associating her and, ultimately, Caleb with such an inheritance. Similarly, Caleb's award of springs in response to his daughter's request serves to transfer the blessing of fertility from God to the father.\textsuperscript{12} This promise of fertility, however, is no more realized in the Achsah narrative than is Yahweh's promise of Canaan to the patriarchs' descendants in the book of Judges.

Here the reader sees how Achsah's story functions as a bridge between earlier biblical narratives and those of Judges. Much of the narrative echoes elements of Yahweh's initial Genesis promises of land, descendants, and nationhood to the patriarchs. Joshua allots the city of Hebron, the city of Sarah's death, to Caleb (Gen. 23.2, Judg. 1.20). Caleb's delay in bestowing land of the Negeb to Othniel condenses the four hundred year deferral between the Lord's promise of land to Abraham and the exodus from Egypt and foreshadows Yahweh's four hundred year ambivalence in giving the land of Canaan to Israel as promised in the book of Judges. The "gifts" of land in each instance involve the capture of cities through battle. The intermediate conditions of dry land in which Othniel and Achsah reside recall the time of drought and famine Abraham and Sarah endure in Canaan, and the association of women, water, and fertility resonates in the Achsah story as well as those of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. Additionally, the triangulation of women, men, and the receipt of land in which to reside occurs equally in

\textsuperscript{12} See Klein's slightly different approach on this issue in \textit{From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible} 21-23 and discussed below.
the Achsah and Sarah narratives. Abraham grants King Abimelech sexual access to his "sister" as Caleb gives his daughter to Othniel. Through Sarah and Abimelech, Abraham receives land in the region of the Negeb, where he lives as a resident alien (Gen. 21.34); through Achsah and Caleb, Othniel also acquires land of the Negeb. Abraham confronts King Abimelech regarding his right to a well for the land and barters for ownership rights to it (Gen. 21.25); Achsah approaches Caleb on the same issue. Finally, the life-threatening danger to which Abraham and Caleb expose Sarah and Achsah for personal/material gain lurks in the "white space" of their respective stories, a violence explicitly described in the narratives of Judges 11 and 19 and discussed below.

Such echoing of the Sarah narrative invites examination of the extent to which the narrator presents Achsah as both an active and passive character. The Judges story associates Achsah with the acquisition of land in two ways: as "the object traded for a city" in the capture of Kiriath-sepher and as the agent instrumental in obtaining land in the Negeb through marriage (Gunn and Fewell, Narrative 161). Sarah encapsulates both means of acquiring wealth for Abraham in two separately reported events, but since Abraham presents her as his sister and Pharaoh and King Abimelech "take" Sarah, many critics reduce her to the "object" traded for material gain (Gen. 12.13-15 and 20.2). In the wife/sister episodes of Abraham and Sarah, however, the reader has no access to Sarah's actions, thoughts, or speech while a part of Pharaoh's or King Abimelech's harem and cannot know if she assumes any responsibility for brokering Abraham's enrichment. Reading intertextually offers this interesting possibility, but the argument from such narratorial silence in Genesis 12 and 20 translates into Sarah's silence in criticism, and any such filling of the textual gap remains to the midrashic imagination.
Given one verse of agency containing three ambiguous verbs in relation to Achsah, however, and the reader finds that the gap between translation, criticism, and midrash diminishes, as critics generate multiple translations and textual offspring for her. Judges 1.14 relates Achsah's actions in obtaining land in the Negeb and her approach to her father in requesting water for the land: "When she came to him, she urged him to ask her father for a field. As she dismounted from her donkey, Caleb said to her, "What do you wish?" In her book From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible, Klein argues that the "when she came" of verse 1.14 indicates Achsah's agency in controlling the narrative in two ways. Achsah both instigates the bestowal of land immediately when she comes to Othniel, and she calculatingly poses the request to Othniel only after "she came" in consummating the marriage, a time when Klein envisions Othniel "pleasantly weak with sexual satisfaction" (19-20). From verse 1.14, Klein concludes that Judges "extols women who take initiative within the constraints of patriarchal mores" (20). The claim of whether the text or individual readers find Achsah's actions laudable remains open to question. The text, however, clearly reverses the terms of exchange from Judges 1.12-13 to those of 1.14-15: initially publicly given by her father in marriage to the victor possessing Kiriath-sepher, through her marriage Achsah privately gains from her father possession of arable land in the Negeb.

Whether or not Achsah takes the initiative within the constraints of patriarchal tradition in securing the gift of arable land remains arguable, however, and here criticism focuses on the Hebrew verbs of verse 1.14 rendered in the NRSV as "urged" and "dismounted." Fewell writes in "Deconstructive Criticism: Achsah and the (E)razed City of Writing" that critics and commentators have variously translated the first verb as
"decided," "prompted," "moved," "persuaded," "nagged," "induced," and "urged," and she points out, along with Klein and Bal, the gender assumptions involved in each of the translations (135-36; Klein, *From Deborah* 20; Bai, *Death* 152 and 275 n. 26-29). Fewell asserts that translation of the verb depends largely on whom the critic/translator sees as the acting subject of it (135). Bal points out that in his 1981 Judges commentary Alberto Soggin’s choice of Othniel as the subject causes him to amend his translation of the verb (Death 152). Soggin finds the verb, "normally" rendered as "seduce" or "tempt," problematic if Othniel is the acting subject and therefore opts for a translation of the verb in line with his assumptions and interests: "When he came to her, he prompted her to ask her father for a field" (18, 22).

Although asserting that the Masoretic text identifies Achsah as the subject of 1.14, Klein’s *From Deborah* assessment of Achsah as "an ideal woman in the patriarchal system" guides her translation of the verse as well (23). Achsah "incites" Othniel to request the gift of land according to Klein, who fully acknowledges and finds unproblematic the sexual connotations of the translation (20). Klein additionally interprets Achsah’s alighting from the donkey as "dropping down" and "prostrating herself" before her father (21). In this reading, Achsah gives "obeisance to her father" (22). Klein further remarks that Achsah places her father in an equally "Godlike position" in requesting from him the land and fertility that "only God can give," and notes that even in relationship to her father the contribution on his part of springs to facilitate generation enhances the sexual undertone of the narrative (22). For Klein, all such actions on the part of Achsah are "befitting a woman" and demonstrate the power women can exercise to satisfy their wants within the constraints of a patriarchal culture (22).
At stake in such translations/interpretations of Judges 1.14 is maintenance of Othniel's image as the conquering hero/judge and Achsah's representation as the patriarchal ideal trophy daughter/wife from verses 1.12-13. Other critics suggest translations of the third ambiguous verb that allow a more transgressive representation of Achsah in verses 14-15. According to Bal, the subject of the verb "nagged" is textually "beyond decision," but after detailed discussion of the possible translations of "she alighted [from her donkey]" and "she clapped [her hands]," Bal recommends the latter (Death 153-55). She bases her recommendation at least in part on the fact that this same verb in the Judges 4.21 story of Jael describes "the tent-pin going through Sisera's temple" (149). Bal concludes that "force" inheres in the obscure verb, which allows her to interpret Achsah's "body language" in conjunction with her subsequent speech as stating a "claim" more than a "request," one that "sets the limit to the father's absolute power" (150, 154, 156).

Although finding Bal's analysis problematic, in "Deconstructive Criticism" Fewell joins Bal in acknowledging the assertiveness of Achsah's actions as a possible interpretation. For Fewell, readers may choose to interpret Achsah's dismounting as an "emphatic gesture" of "self-determined mobility" rather than evidence of subordination (137). Fewell supports her view by reading intertextually as well, comparing Achsah's autonomy with that of Rebekah in Genesis 24 and contrasting it with that of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19.28 (137). Fewell additionally offers a translation of 1.14 suggested by Paul G. Mosca: "When she arrived, she beguiled him, asking from her father arable land" (qtd. in Fewell 136). 13 In this translation of 1.14, notes Fewell, the object of Achsah's beguilement is her father, erasing Othniel from all involvement in

13 Fewell quotes from Mosca 21.
procuring the arable land (136). Finally, although relying on the NRSV translations of 
"she urged [Othniel]" and "she dismounted," Richard G. Bowman makes a similar case 
for Achsah's control of events in 1.14-15. Bowman writes that when Othniel "fails to 
achieve all she desires," Achsah "acts in his place [. . .], demanding arable land under the 
rubric of the paternal blessing" (24).

At stake in the instant discussion of the active/passive character of Achsah is 
whether or not this paradigmatic character overcomes her gender-vulnerable designation 
of Other to become solidly identified as Israel, and here Bowman's mention of the "rubric 
of the paternal blessing" gains salience. Previous discussion links Achsah with Israelite 
matriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. Bal's argument on translation and Bowman's 
observation of Achsah's acting in Othniel's place when he fails to achieve the desired end 
connect Achsah with Jael, and her exercise of power over Caleb and Othniel in the 
private realm mirrors that of Deborah, judge and prophet of Israel, over Barak and his 
warriors in the political arena. While critics offer disparate translations and 
interpretations of the ambiguous verbs of verse 1.14, Gunn and Fewell, Klein, and 
Bowman agree that Achsah requests a blessing from her father in verse 1.15.14 Bowman 
and Klein both note that according to Israelite tradition fathers bless sons rather than 
daughters, with Klein offering the examples of the blessing of Isaac in Genesis 25.11, of 
Jacob in Genesis 27.27-29, and of Jacob's sons in Genesis 48 and 49 (Bowman 24; Klein, 
"Achsah" 25). In Narrative, Gunn and Fewell compare Achsah's request for water to that 
of the Israelites' plea in the wilderness (161). In Gender, Power, and Promise, they 
associate Achsah's actions to Tamar's Genesis 38 seduction of Judah, Rebekah's Genesis

14 Soggin translates Achsah's quoted speech of 1.15 as "Do me a favour" [sic] although he acknowledges 
that the literal translation is "a blessing" in his notes (18, 22).
27 manipulation of Isaac's blessing of Jacob, and Jacob's Genesis 32 face to face
encounter with another at Peniel (122). Jacob here prevails over "a man" from whom he
demands a blessing and receives from his divine opponent the new name "Israel" (Gen.
32.22-30). Linking Achsah to Jacob in this way, she evokes not only the matriarchs,
Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel; the mother in Israel, Deborah; or the one who defeats
Israel's enemy, Jael; here, Achsah becomes clearly identified with Israel itself.

Or does she? The narrator situates Achsah's story in Judges within the context of
Judah's efforts to possess its allotment of land in Canaan, and Numbers 13.6 identifies
Caleb as the man sent from the tribe of Judah to spy out the land by Moses. Additionally,
Numbers 34.16-19 names Caleb as a leader of Judah assigned by Yahweh to apportion
the land of Canaan to that tribe for inheritance. However, Joshua 15.13 reports that
Joshua gave Caleb "a portion [of land] among the people of Judah," and Numbers 32.12
and Joshua 14.6 and 14 identify Caleb as "son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite." Joshua 15.17
and Judges 1.13 inform the reader that Othniel is Caleb's nephew, the son of Kenaz,
Caleb's younger brother, thereby making Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah—either by birth or
marriage—non-Israelites, descendants of those who inhabit the land when Yahweh
promises it to Abraham (Gen. 15.18-21). That Caleb was part of the "mixed crowd" of
the exodus generation and only exceptionally receives an allotment of the promised land
due to his demonstration of "complete fidelity to the Lord" at Kadesh-barnea adds
support to the argument that Achsah may well have expected an inheritance of land upon
marriage to Othniel (Num. 14.24, 38 and 26.65; Deut. 1.35-36; Josh. 14.6-14). Any
claim to land by Achsah—or arguably by Othniel—depends not on their kindred
relationship to Israelites but on their status as descendants of Caleb.
The non-Israelite identity of Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah does not escape the
attention of Klein, Gunn and Fewell, and Polzin although each offers unique discussion
of the implications of the Other in Israel's midst. Klein points out that Achsah and Rahab
are the only two named women in the book of Joshua and compares Achsah to Rahab in
their shared non-Israelite status, recognition of Yahweh, and involvement in the Israelites'
occupation of the land, and contrasts the ideal daughter/wife role of Achsah to Rahab's
profession of "innkeeper-prostitute" ("Achsah" 18-19). In line with her conclusion that
the Judges narrative focuses on Achsah "as a paradigm for Israelite womanhood" and on
Caleb as Israel's successful military leader, Klein asserts, "the text suggests that converts
to Israelite beliefs and practices may be more sincere and devoted" than those "who are
merely born into the faith" ("Achsah" 21). Fewell also reads Othniel as "a model of
courage to the (other) tribes of Israel" and "a great warrior" but notes that his association
with both Judah and the Kenizzites "undermines the us-them ideology" of Judges
("Deconstructive Criticism" 139-40).

As Klein presents two interpretations of Achsah, Fewell and Gunn consider two
possible readings of Rahab. In considering that Rahab's confession of faith to the
Israelite spies may indeed be genuine, Fewell and Gunn contrast her expressed Canaanite
trust in Yahweh of Joshua 2.8-11 with the Israelite spies' apparent lack of faith,
rhetorically asking what are the implications of a story wherein "foreigners can quote
Deuteronomy with more facility than Israelites can?" (GPP 120). Ironically, this
identified contrast between Israel and Other results in an Achsah who slides more to the
Israelite side of the binary opposition than that of Other. Klein asserts in her comparison

\[15\] Klein identifies Achsah as a non-Israelite albeit a daughter of the Kenites, a descendant of Jethro, Moses'
father-in-law ("Achsah" 18-19). Genesis 15.18-21 identifies both the Kenites and Kenizzites as inhabitants
of Canaan during the time of Abraham.
of Achsah and Rahab that "both women [. . .] recognize YHWH as the supreme deity," but the Judges 1.11-15 text remains silent on this issue, and Fewell and Gunn's subsequent consideration of a self-serving Rahab who speaks disingenuously to the Israelite spies links Rahab more strongly to the manipulative Achsah Klein envisions in From Deborah ("Achsah" 19). Fewell and Gunn observe that Rahab only "tells the spies what they want to hear" in affirming that Yahweh has indeed given the land into the Israelites' hands and discloses nothing regarding "the strength of the military forces and the city's fortifications" (GPP 119-21). They point out that Rahab has nothing to lose in her negotiations with the Israelite spies and everything to gain should the Israelites successfully take the city and maintain their promise to her. Regardless of the military outcome between the men of Jericho and Israel, Rahab creates for herself a secure future. In this scenario, Fewell and Gunn see Rahab as one who "knows more than a little about sheer survival" and retains her right to live in the land because of her shrewd bargaining with the two men (GPP119-20).

If the story of bargaining with two men for a promised right to land in which to live with one's family evokes the nothing to lose circumstance of Achsah, the elements of a developed instinct for self-survival and the offering of a safe haven to men on the run call to mind the situation of Jael in Judges 4.17-22. In chapter four, the reader learns that the Israelites have again turned away from Yahweh, who "sold them into the hand of King Jabin of Canaan" (4.1-2). Deborah summons Barak to rally the Israelites against Sisera, commander of King Jabin's troops, advising Barak "the Lord has given Sisera into your hand" (4.4-14). Sisera flees on foot from the losing battle to the tent of "Jael wife of Heber the Kenite," believing he will find sanctuary there due to the peace that existed
between King Jabin and the clan of Heber the Kenite (4.15-17). Reversing narrative elements, the Jael scenario presents a counterbalance to the Achsah story: Achsah comes to the victor/hero of the Israelites' capture of Kiriath-sepher, Othniel; Sisera, the defeated general of King Jabin's troops and Israel's enemy, comes to Jael. The Deborah/Jael story recalls that of Rahab in other ways: Deborah's certain statement that Yahweh has delivered the enemy into the hands of the Israelites echoes that of Rahab at Jericho, and Jael extends the offer of hospitality to Sisera as Rahab does to the Israelite spies. All three women share, in varying degrees, non-Israelite status, and Jael, like Achsah and Rahab, "does what she has to do" to survive in the land and murders Sisera in his sleep (Fewell and Gunn, GPP 124). The sexual undertones critics find in the narratives of Achsah, Rahab, and Jael further unite the three women within the category of Other. 16

In Narrative, Gunn and Fewell offer another discussion of the non-Israelite Rahab, but here they compare her relationship to Yahweh and the Israelite spies with that of the man of Bethel in Judges 1.22-26. In both episodes, the spies allow an inhabitant to remain in the land in exchange for their aid in overtaking the respective cities. Gunn and Fewell recognize numerous differences in the two episodes; most important to the instant discussion is Rahab's "profession of Yahweh's invincible presence among the Israelites" rather than the "simple trade" involved in the man of Bethel episode (160). A close reading of the two stories reveals other differences: Rahab acts on behalf of the Israelites before reaching any agreement with them, and the Jericho spies only explicitly threaten her own safety should she breach the agreement they make with her. The agreement with

16 See Mosca, "Who Seduced Whom?" and Klein, From Deborah 19-23 and above discussion on Achsah; Fewell and Gunn, GPP 117-20 on Rahab; Fewell and Gunn, GPP 124-25 and Bal, Death 214-17 on Jael; Exum, "Feminist Criticism" 73-75 on Jael and Deborah.
the Israelites, in fact, derives not from the spies but from Rahab herself, who requests in return for her kindness to the spies that they deal kindly with her family (Josh. 2.12).

Polzin discusses the outsider status of Caleb, Othniel, and Achsah and additionally draws both Rahab and the man of Bethel into his analysis but takes these elements in a different direction than either Klein or Fewell and Gunn. In his discussion of Joshua, Polzin examines the Deuteronomy 20.15-18 law of warfare that requires the annihilation of all that breathes in the towns of inheritance, the Deuteronomy 4.2 and 13.1 law that commands nothing shall be added or taken away from the Mosaic law, and the existence of outsiders in the midst of Israel. He identifies in these two passages the "voice of an authoritarian dogmatism" in opposition to "a voice of critical traditionalism" in Deuteronomy and Joshua that "recognized the constant need for revision and varying interpretations of the traditions" (84). For Polzin, these revisions and varying interpretations/applications of the law explain not only the presence of Rahab and the man of Bethel in the land but that of other non-Israelites as well. Rahab, the Gibeonites, the daughters of Zelophehad, the Kenizzites Caleb, Achsah, and Othniel, and the man of Bethel all function as "reminders" to Israel that it also is "an alien of the land" (152). Relying on Deuteronomy 9.5 and the Israelites' idolatry at Sinai, Polzin asserts that neither the Israelites nor the non-Israelites among them "deserve" the land and concludes that the outsiders in Israel's midst "enjoy a functional equivalency with reference to Israel's relationship to the Lord" (88, 90, 114, 126). The non-Israelites within the land demonstrate Yahweh's "mercy" in that they "escaped God's justice as had Israel" at Sinai; the Gibeonites and Rahab survive because of the promises made to them by the Israelites,
just as Yahweh did not destroy the Israelites due to his promises to the patriarchs (89, 120, 133).

Polzin’s discussion of Rahab warrants a closer analysis since in her we see "the typological representation" of the nations that remain in the land after Joshua (88). According to Polzin, Rahab and her descendants remain "not because of Rahab’s merit [...] but because of the wickedness and lack of faith of Israel" (88, 90). He supports this charge in two ways: Joshua evidences the same "timidity" at Jericho in first sending out spies that "previously helped to condemn a whole generation of Israelites" at Kadesh-barnea, and the willingness of the spies "to be pressured into taking an oath" with Rahab "reveal[s] that they do not deserve the land" (86-89). Rahab’s "oath of salvation" relationship with the Israelite spies is the same as that of Israel with God in that it "is binding only so long as she follows their instructions" (89). Here the reader notes that Polzin argues for the same slippage of signifiers evidenced in the Achiṣah narrative with her efforts to obtain water for the land from her father: Rahab "stands [...] in the place of Israel" and "the two Israelite spies stand in the place of God" (89).

Perhaps troubling to the reader of Polzin in this discussion, however, is the extent to which his identified voice of critical traditionalism begins to sound much like the voice of authoritarian dogmatism. Neither the Israelites nor the non-Israelites "deserve" to live in the land, all the non-Israelites within Israel’s midst become indistinguishable from each other, and their narrative raison d’être is reduced to "elements" that function as "a constant internal reminder of Israel’s own deficiencies, just as the powerful Jebusites and Canaanites were a constant external reminder of them" (134). How different is this voice from the one of Judges 2.11-13 that accuses this generation of Israelites of heretofore-
unreported apostasy? From that of Deuteronomy 7.22 which cautions that Yahweh will only drive out the inhabitants piecemeal so "the wild animals" will not become "too numerous" for the Israelites? Or from that of Judges 3.1 and 3.4 which explains the continued existence of the Other within the land as practice military targets or as tests of Israel's faithfulness to the covenant? The reader notices the total absence of wild animal stories in the books of Joshua and Judges and doubts, based on previous narratives, that the Israelites require training in putting men, women, and children to the sword as long as Yahweh or his spirit accompanies them.17 And why test the Israelites further if the intention remains to fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs? Nonetheless, each of these voices identifies some lack or failure on the part of the Israelites as the reason for the less than complete possession of Canaan.

The reader might also question the criticism of Joshua's "timidity" in first sending spies into Jericho; this decision merely echoes Yahweh's command in Numbers 13.1-2.18 God condemns the wilderness generation at Kadesh-barnea because of their rebellion against him in response to the spies' report. Any criticism regarding Joshua's sending of the spies to Jericho finds no correlation in either the Israelites' or God's response to this decision. In the Jericho episode, the spies bring back the same positive report that earned Caleb Yahweh's exceptional blessing, the people respond admirably, and divine presence brings down the walls of the city. Caleb surely deserves exemption from the other non-Israelites who function solely to remind Israel of their deficiencies as do the

17 One might argue that in Judges the Israelites require training in proper identification of the enemy, but the question arises whether the existence of Others within the land clarifies or confuses this issue.
18 Polzin bases his claim of "timidity, faithlessness, and apparent wickedness" on the part of Joshua and the spies in the parallel language of Deut. 1.21 and Josh. 1.2, 9. Although he notes the spies bring back a positive report in Josh 2.24, Polzin concludes that "this new generation of Israelites [...] is no more confident of God's promise to give them the land than their predecessors were" (86, 89). I suggest that what begins as a parallel to the Deuteronomy version of the Kadesh-barnea episode ends as its reversal, as evidenced in the response of both the people and God and the devastation of Jericho.
Canaanites and Jebusites; Yahweh specifically grandfathers Caleb into the Israelite generation that will inherit the land of Canaan (Num. 14.22-24). Although interesting in the context of the present questioning of women's inclusion/exclusion from Israel, categorizing the daughters of Zelophehad as outsiders contradicts their status as descendants of Manasseh (Num. 26.34).

Regarding Rahab, the observation that the Israelite spies stand in the place of God and that Rahab stands in the place of Israel in the covenant of Joshua 2 could easily be reversed based on the language of the text. In her conversation with the Israelite spies, Rahab echoes the speech of Yahweh and Moses reported in Deuteronomy 2.25, 4.39, and 11.25, and when she confirms, "the Lord has given you the land" to the Israelite spies in Joshua 2.9, Rahab reiterates the words of the Lord to Joshua in 1.3. Polzin notes that Rahab "has complete power over the lives of the timid Israelites" (87). She shows mercy to the Israelites before introducing the issue of justice, the spies must follow her commands of Joshua 2.16 in order to be saved from annihilation, and when she states in Joshua 2.21, "According to your words, so be it," Rahab merely agrees to what she herself has requested from the spies. Moreover, if Rahab stands in the place of God and the spies stand in the place of Israel in Joshua 2, how just and wise of them to insist that she keep her part of the covenant with them lest they be released from it as well. Here, the words of the spies recall those of Jacob/Israel at Bethel: Yahweh promises Jacob to give the land of Canaan to his descendants; Jacob responds with the conditional vow, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, [...] then the Lord shall be my God" (Gen. 28.13-21). How differently would the book of Judges read had the Israelites of Joshua 24 echoed the Israel of Genesis 28?
Perhaps no differently at all. Perhaps the Israelites’ subsequent actions speak as loudly as the words of the spies at Jericho and of Jacob at Bethel. Precisely at stake in the book of Judges is what the Israelites know of the promises of Yahweh, their covenant with him, and their relationship to non-Israelites. Even Caleb seems to find it necessary to remind Joshua of the Lord’s promise made to him some forty-five years earlier at Kadesh-barnea (Josh. 14.5–9). The reader of Joshua may want to distinguish Rahab from the Gibeonites and the man of Bethel due to her profession of Yahweh’s sovereignty and her self-endangering actions on behalf of the Israelite spies, but such a response only demonstrates the power of what Polzin identifies as the voice of authoritarian dogmatism. Although one’s understanding of Rahab’s exemption from annihilation may be influenced by "witnessing" the dramatized scene of Rahab and the spies in Joshua 2, the narrator informs the reader in Joshua 6.25 only that Rahab was spared because "she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho." The Israelites know nothing of the interaction of Rahab with the spies and are told only that her hiding of the spies exempts her from destruction (Josh. 6.17).

From the Israelites’ standpoint, Rahab, the Gibeonites, the Kenizzites, the man of Bethel, and Jael all share a willingness to donner le change. At some point in time, each of them betrays the people with whom they are associated—those whom the Lord and Moses in Deuteronomy repeatedly associate with iniquity and foreign gods—and comes to the side of the Israelites. Likewise, Joshua exhorts all the tribes of Israel gathered at Shechem to forsake the gods of their ancestors and to recognize only the god who has driven out the inhabitants and given them the land of promise (Josh. 24.1–14). In contrast, Numbers 36.6–8 prohibits the daughters of Zelophehad and other daughters who
possess an inheritance of land from betraying even their ancestral tribe, and after Rahab deceives the king of Jericho in hiding the Israelite spies and sends their pursuers down a false trail, the Israelite spies require her to swear that she will subsequently not betray them. From the standpoint of the Israelites, Rahab, the Gibeonites, the Kenizzites, the man of Bethel, and Jael all choose life, which Deuteronomy 30.15-20 links figuratively with adherence to the covenant. In this sense, the Israelites respect the language of the covenant and honor the polarities it asserts as thoroughly as any voice of authoritarian dogmatism.

Therefore, when the angel of the Lord condemns the Israelites for entering into covenants with inhabitants of the land in Judges 2.1-3, it may sound to them less like the nuanced voice of critical traditionalism and more like the voice of one who changes the rules of the proverbial game once they finally learn how to play it. From the perspective of the Israelites, they may well wonder what in the world of God's justice happened to the notion of stare decisis.\textsuperscript{19} Ambiguously included in the messenger's apparently explanatory language of his open-ended accusation "see what you have done!" in Judges 2.2 is the mention of the command to "tear down their [the inhabitants'] altars," leaving the reader to wonder if the Israelites' knowledge now exceeds their own or if the allegation sounds as new to the Israelites as it does to the reader. The narrator follows the messenger's speech with the unambiguous affirmation that "the people worshiped the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua" (Judg. 2.7); combined with the angel's statement that the gods of the Canaanites will be left by

\textsuperscript{19} While the Deut. 20.15-18 statutory law leaves little room for ambiguity, uncertainty arises when particular cases become immune from its application, with either implicit or explicit divine approval of the exemption. In addition to the exclusion of Rahab and her descendants noted above, Polzin discusses the inconsistent application of the law of heqem in the stories of Achan at Jericho, the Israelites at Ai, the inhabitants of Gibeon (Josh. 7, 8, 9), and the man of Bethel from Judges 1 (113-14, 117-22, 154).
Yahweh as a snare to the Israelites, the two statements raise doubt regarding both agency and causation in the messenger's mention of altars in his accusation.

The condemning angel in Judges also reminds the people of their divine deliverance from Egypt, but memory of the exodus recalls along with it their centuries of oppression and the Lord's forbearance toward the Canaanites during the same time period, and remembrance of Pharaoh's order of death for the Israelite newborn males evokes the Lord's striking down of all Egyptian firstborn (Judg. 2.1; Gen. 15.13-16; Exod. 1.22, 12.29). Accordingly, when the angel announces that the Lord will leave the remaining inhabitants of the land and their gods as "adversaries" and "a snare" to the Israelites, they may imagine an opposition of Yahweh competing with foreign gods, as in the Face/Off of Pharaoh and Yahweh in Exodus. On the other hand, the Israelites may envision a god who announces his willingness to donner le change, one who becomes a foreign god, alternately competing on opposing sides of the Israelite/Canaanite struggle for possession of land in which to live. Recalling their time in Egypt, the Israelites may foresee a god who will sell them into the hands of the oppressor absent any attempt of justification by iniquity on their part and wonder if they must again endure a four hundred year struggle for continued existence, abandoned by Yahweh to find their own means of survival. The descendants of those who perished in the forty-year death march may perceive that the "terror and dread" earlier celebrated as falling upon the inhabitants of Canaan now befalls them (Exod. 15.14-16). The midnight darkness that envelops Egypt during the tenth plague recalls the "deep and terrifying darkness" that descends on Abram when the Lord foretells the Israelites' servitude in Egypt, his judgment on the oppressing nation, and the subsequent exodus of Abram's descendants, and formalizes in
covenantal language his expressed vow to give those descendants the land of Canaan (Gen. 15.12-21). In Judges 2.1-3, the Lord's Genesis 15.18 vow to give the land to the Israelites is undermined and his Joshua 13.6 promise to drive out the remaining nations is revoked by his own messenger's words. The Lord reverses his promise of Genesis 12.2 to curse those who curse Israel and will now leave the remaining foreign nations as a curse to Israel, the Israelites' loss of Yahweh's promised protection translates as the Canaanites' gain in the either/or oppositional terms of the covenant and the us-versus-them ideology of Judges, and the darkness the people experience is figurative: the destroyer who brought "a loud cry throughout the whole land of Egypt" now threatens those gathered at Bochim, so that "all the Israelites [...] lifted up their voices and wept" (Exod. 11.6; Judg. 2.4).

Polzin identifies in the book of Joshua the semantic counterpart of the donner le change phenomenon the Israelites experience when he notes that at Mount Ebal the categories of alien and native reverse: the "invaded" Canaanite inhabitants, such as Rahab and her family, become the "alien" in the land, and the dispossessing Israelites become the "natives" when the Israelites cross the Jordan (117, 133). Yet when Yahweh donne le change and alienates himself from those gathered at Bochim, he subverts the language of his promises to the Israelites and that of his covenant with them. The language of Judges 2.3 not only makes explicit the ambiguity of the acting subject but also calls into question the object of the promise/command to "drive out" the inhabitants of the land and places the Israelites in an untenable position in their relationship to the Lord. Deuteronomy 6.14-15 commands the Israelites to serve only the god "who is present with you" and, at the same time, prohibits them from serving "any of the gods of the peoples who are all
around you," thereby introducing a classic example of the double bind into the Judges text from the standpoint of the Israelites. 20 In this light, the reader confronted with the later Judges refrain of “in those days, when there was no king in Israel” may begin to question whether the responsibility for this crisis rests entirely on the shoulders of the Israelites (Judg. 17.6, 18.1, 19.1, 21.25). Such observations lead directly back to the story of Achsah, where Fewell identifies the corresponding semantic exchange in Judges: Othniel leads the Israelite attack and takes Canaanite Kiriath-sepher; Judges 1.11 informs the reader that Kiriath-sepher subsequently becomes known as Debir (“Deconstructive Criticism” 131). Fewell’s observation and Achsah’s narrative thereby return us to the first polar opposition identified as problematic in the Judges story of conquest, that of land of promise/Canaan.

In Achsah, the Judges storyteller creates a paradigmatic character that personifies the very notion of reversal and exchange. The Achsah narrative undermines the promises of Yahweh to the Israelites, subverts the binary oppositions of his covenant with them, and implicates the language through which both find expression as a source of the instability. Achsah’s story evokes those of patriarchs Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel, both reinscribing Yahweh’s Genesis promises to the patriarchs of land and descendants and undermining them. The promise of fertility for Achsah remains unrealized, and Caleb initially withholds inheritance of land from her. In her association with the land, Achsah reverses the terms of exchange from that of object given away by her father to secure

20 Umberto Eco examines a parallel case of God’s Genesis 1.29-31 pronouncement that he has given every plant yielding seed to his human creations for food, his observation that everything he has made was “very good,” and his later prohibition voiced to Adam against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil lest they die (Gen. 2.16-17). Eco considers whether God mistakenly or intentionally introduces this “ambiguously phrased prohibition” and logical contradiction into the language system of the Edenic text, Adam and Eve “invent” the prohibition/contradiction, or “the prohibition myth was invented” by the biblical writers in recognition that “the language system incorporated this contradiction from its very beginnings” (“On the Possibility of Generating Aesthetic Messages in an Edenic Language” 91).
Kiriath-sepher to the receiving agent of arable land in which to live. How the reader interprets Achsah’s actions in obtaining the arable land shapes their understanding of her as the seductive woman/Other, the submissive daughter bowing down before the father, or the embodiment of Israel demanding receipt of a promised blessing. Through her kinship with Caleb and her association with Deborah, Rahab, and Jael through shared narrative elements, the Judges text links Achsah both with those who enjoy exceptional status with Yahweh and Israel and with the inhabitants of the land Yahweh despises and promises to dispossess.

In their discussion of the Israelite/Canaanite opposition, Fewell and Polzin expose in contrasting ways the extent to which the distinction between the Israelite and Canaanite blurs. Fewell reads Kenizzite Caleb as a courageous model to the Israelites; Polzin envisions the Kenizzites and all Others who remain in the land as exemplars of the undeserved mercy Yahweh extends to the Israelites. Polzin argues that the outsiders in Israel’s midst function as “types of the Israel depicted in the Deuteronomic History,” noting their relationship to the Israelites is the same as that of the Israelites to God (133). Conversely, further analysis of the Rahab narrative reveals the way in which the non-Israelite/Other/prostitute can stand in the place of God relative to Israel. In addition to the voices of authoritarian dogmatism and critical traditionalism Polzin identifies in the books of Joshua and Judges, the text reveals a more transgressive narrative voice that invites the reader to assume the epistemological standpoint of the Israelites and to consider how they understand the promises of Yahweh, the covenant that binds them to him, and their relationship to non-Israelites. In a book that undermines the Lord’s promises and the binary oppositions on which Israel’s identity rests in the story of the first
named woman in chapter one and presents a Yahweh who *donne le change* by chapter two, the suggested Israelite understanding of such a turn of events does not bode well for women.

Looking back at the discussion of Achsah offers a key to understanding the subsequent narratives of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine. Regarding the various translations/interpretations of the ambiguous verbs in Judges 1.14, it was noted that Soggin and Klein both argue for maintenance of Othniel's image as the conquering hero/judge and Achsah's representation as the patriarchal ideal trophy daughter/wife from verses 1.12-13. In their analyses both Soggin and Klein bump up against Camp's identification of the gendered dilemma that inheres in the figurative language of Yahweh's marriage to a faithful Israel and the extended metaphor of Israel "prostituting" itself to foreign gods (Exod. 34.15-16; Lev. 20.5-6; Deut. 31.16; Judg. 2.17, 8.27, 8.33). In order to avoid the suggestion that Othniel "seduced" Achsah for material gain, Soggin changes his normal translation of the verb in question to "prompted," thereby mitigating the potential negative attribution to Othniel. Klein finds the sexual connotations of the verb unproblematic with Aachsah as the acting subject and notes that within a patriarchal system women are "expected to make requests" of the man whom they have sexually satisfied (From Deborah 20). Here Klein comes very close to the radical feminist observation that monogamous heterosexual marriage in a patriarchal culture necessarily amounts to a form of prostitution, albeit one that restricts the woman to only one patron. Klein goes on to observe that Achsah's obeisance to her father inscribes "the hierarchy of God-man-woman" and yet adds that in this action "Achsah represents all Israel as a bride to God" (20).
Couched within this last observation of Klein lies the second double bind at work in the book of Judges. The first double bind forces the Israelites to choose between obeying the command to serve the now alien but still jealous Yahweh and observing the prohibition against prostituting themselves to such a god. If the Israelites choose to bow down to the Lord, they serve a god who sells them into the hand of the Other, making them, *ipso facto*, prostitutes; choosing not to serve him results in the situation "when there was no king in Israel." The remedy to this crisis offered by the voice of authoritarian dogmatism—to annihilate, destroy, and set aside all associated with other gods—creates the second double bind, one even more ominous in its implications than the first. Who are the Israelites to annihilate, destroy, and set aside in a book where they prostitute themselves to foreign gods and the Lord has become a foreign god to them? Setting aside Yahweh amounts to no more than a reverse abandonment, and the crisis described in the refrain "when there was no king in Israel" finds no resolution. Yet if the Israelites must destroy all associated with foreign gods as a final "test" of their loyalty in order to hear once again divine affirmation that they will "possess the gate of their enemies," then they are commanded to place themselves on the sacrificial altar, as the Lord commands Abraham to do with Isaac (Gen. 22.17). In both cases, strict obedience to the command would nullify the promises of Yahweh to the patriarchs.

This double bind in the book of Judges, as evidenced in chapters 11 and 19, threatens to become the Genesis 22 binding of Isaac writ large, and how faithful to the promises of Yahweh, the binarities of the covenant, the Moriah sacrifice story, and a patriarchal system are the Israelites when they listen for a voice of divine intervention, look for a substitute offering? However, no divine pronouncement in the book of Judges
offers a Genesis 22.12 reprieve from the willingness of one person to sacrifice another, and no ram comes forth to stand in the place of the human victim. In Genesis, Abraham sacrifices Sarah sexually to those he fears will murder him and raises the knife over the son he has bound; in Judges, Jephthah sacrifices his daughter in fulfillment of a vow offered to guarantee his survival, and the Levite surrenders his concubine to the rapist mob who demands his body and butchers her with the knife. In Genesis 22, the "sacrifice" of Isaac remains rhetorical; in Judges 11 and 19, no adequate language exists to describe the moment of death for its textual victims. In the slippery semantic world of Judges where house denotes both a private space and lineage, Jephthah's only child becomes the one and only sacrifice that will satisfy his vow to offer unto God "who/whatever comes out of the doors" of Jephthah's "house" (Judg. 11.30-31).

Judges reverses the Akedah in yet another way: Isaac must be saved in order to fulfill Yahweh's promise to Abraham of descendants as innumerable as the stars of heaven; in a book where Yahweh promises no descendants, a sacrifice must now be made in order to preserve the descendants of those whose numbers and power once threatened Pharaoh. The divine messenger in Judges 2.1-4 explicitly speaks of the exodus, evoking memories of sacrifice from one's own household and of the liminal space of the doorway/threshold separating inside from outside, life from death at the hand of the divine destroyer. In Exodus, Yahweh leads the people out when all danger has passed; in Judges 11 and 19, Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine cross the threshold into the face of danger and into the hands of their human destroyers in absentia of any divine protection. In Judges 11 and 19, Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine stand in the place of divine protection for Jephthah and the Levite.
Identification of the second double bind at work in Judges offers some understanding of the vulnerable position women occupy and of the otherwise incomprehensible violence directed against them in the narratives of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine. The textual problems with translation, literal and figurative language, intertextual contradiction/reversal, and the double bind reappear in these later episodes and offer the reader another way of understanding the Judges 1, 11, and 19-21 narratives. Polzin argues for a translation of Judges 10.16 that reflects not a compassionate God but an "annoyed" or "impatient" one, consistent with the Yahweh of 10.13-14 who declares "I will deliver you no more" (177). However, if Yahweh refuses to accept the Israelites' acts of contrition, he violates his own covenantal hold harmless clause to be faithful to them and to remember his Genesis vow to the patriarchs should they repent (Lev. 26.40-42; Deut. 30.1-10). If the Lord violates his vow because he anticipates that the Israelites will again be unfaithful, he repeats the response of the Israelites to the angel of 2.1-3 in their unfaithfulness of 2.11, reintroducing the fundamental questions that underlie the books of Joshua and Judges: in the judgment of the text, who or what comes forth as responsible for Israel's success/failure in gaining possession of the land? Who or what must be sacrificed so the Israelites can live free from oppression in the promised land of Canaan?

21 Regarding intertextuality, Hugh S. Pyper reasons that a later narrative "can have a retroactive effect" (268); Camp argues that "unidirectional intertextuality" is reductionist with "no clear rationale" to justify the practice when reading the canon synchronically (17).

22 Polzin translates Judg. 10.16 as "he [the Lord] grew annoyed (or impatient) with the troubled efforts of Israel" (177). Although disagreeing with Polzin's translation of the noun/object and offering the alternate translation of "Yahweh could no longer tolerate their misery," Webb notes that in Num. 21.4-5, Job 21.4-5, Zech. 11.8-9, and Judg. 16.16 the verb in question "normally expresses frustration, impatience, exasperation, anger." Webb concludes that God's subsequent response to his exasperation—to relent to Israel's cries or reject them—remains indeterminate in 10.16 (46-48). Dennis T. Olson agrees with Webb regarding the "ambiguous and indeterminate" nature of the 10.16 response and notes that "the reader is left to wonder how God is involved" in the Jephthah judgeship (45-46).
While the voice of authoritarian dogmatism in the book of Judges attributes the misfortunes of the Israelites to their prostituting themselves to foreign gods, the text associates both Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine with prostitution. Jephthah is the son of a prostitute, and the Levite's concubine "prostituted herself against" the Levite (Judg. 11.1, 19.2). Comparing the status of Jephthah's daughter to that of African American women marginalized by both race and gender, Valerie C. Cooper adopts a womanist approach to the Judges 11 narrative: when his brothers deny Jephthah a share of the land because he was born to a prostitute, he becomes a "disinherited" man, and his daughter becomes "doubly marginalized" by her father's lack of status and her gender (186). Of particular interest in the present discussion, the elders of Gilead seek Jephthah's leadership in fighting against their Ammonite oppressor only after the Lord vehemently denies their appeal to him for deliverance; Fewell suggests that the Gilead elders turn to Jephthah because he is "expendable to the community should he fall in battle" ("Judges" 70). That Jephthah has been disowned and displaced from the community of such an ambiguously situated transjordanian tribe allows the observations that Jephthah and his daughter are respectively three and four times removed from inclusion in the Lord's promises and that the daughter of one twice sacrificed by Gilead now inherits the role of victim.  

Critics frequently note that Jephthah's imprecisely expressed vow to sacrifice who/whatever comes forth from his house is prefigured in Caleb's promise to give Achsah to "whenever attacks Kiriath-sepher and takes it" (Bledstein 37; Bal, Death 62 and "Dealing/With/Women" 320; Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism" 133; Webb 87).

---

23 Both Polzin and Jobling discuss the ambiguous "inside"/"outside" status of the transjordanian tribes (134-41; "Structuralist Criticism" 113-15).
Jephthah's unwitting use of his daughter as an incentive payment for victory in battle reframes Caleb's intentional offering of Achsa as a sign-on bonus to the successful warrior. Coupled with the Levite's outrageously ruthless treatment of his concubine, the danger to which Caleb exposes Achsa by his vow becomes clear. Although the Judges 1.11-15 narrative relates no tragic ending for Achsa, Fewell remarks that as readers "we assume" that Othniel is "not an Attila or [...] an unnamed Levite from the hill country of Ephraim" (133, emphasis added). We also assume Achsa becomes Othniel's primary or favored, if not only, wife. However, alternative translations of Caleb's 1.14 greeting to Achsa suggest that even he may be aware of the danger lurking below the surface of the narrative: the benign NRSV "What do you wish?" can also translate as "What ails you?" or "What's the matter?" (Bledstein 37; Fewell, "Deconstructive Criticism" 137). Then again, the reader might see Caleb's vow as a potentially ironic fulfillment of Deborah's Song, with the victor—*whoever* that might be—laying claim to "a womb or two" from the spoils of a battle Caleb initiates. In the textual world of Judges where everything is reversible except a man's vow and Mosaic law determines inheritance, should "whoever" share ancestors with the outsider-turned-inheritor Caleb, he stands to gain not only descendants but land in claiming Achsa.

In Judges 11, the latent danger of a father's ambiguous speech realizes its potential. Because of his ill-spoken vow, Jephthah faces the double bind of fulfilling it in observance of Numbers 30.1-2 or observing the prohibition against sacrificing a child to a god as do the Canaanites (Deut. 12.31, 18.9-10). 24 Ironically, Jephthah further aligns

---

24 Critics have questioned the "irrevocable and unalterable" nature of Jephthah's vow, citing both Lev. 27.1-8 and Saul's similar oath in 1 Sam. 14 (Exum, "Feminist Criticism" 76; Fewell and Gunn, GPP 128). The Leviticus option to redeem a vow involving a person further highlights the question of the Israelites' knowledge of the law code, its potential for contradiction, and its inconsistent application noted in the
himself with the outsider/Other by remaining faithful to the statutory law of the covenant regarding a vow. Jephthah's daughter lacks even the choice between contradictory laws; as Cooper observes, the absence of "social and economic options" rules out even the alternative to flee for her (187). The narrative elements of Yahweh's rejection of Israel's appeal in 10.13-14, the narrator's ambiguous report in 10.16, the intervening repentance of the Israelites, the presence of the Lord's spirit in Jephthah, and Jephthah's subsequent vow resist the establishment of a determinate causal chain, leaving the reader to wonder if the Lord gives the Ammonites into Israel's hand because of his own vow to remember the patriarchs, Jephthah's vow to sacrifice from his household, or if the two vows mutually contribute to the victory. If either of the latter, Jephthah's virgin daughter stands in the place of all the Israelites who have prostituted themselves to other gods in presenting herself for sacrifice, with the same consequences the Israelites seek to avoid: in strict fulfillment of his vow, Jephthah and his daughter both die without descendants, and any hard-won inheritance of land by Jephthah reverts six years later to the brothers who previously divested him. Desperate to be included in the Lord's promises and the community of Israel, Jephthah excludes himself and his daughter from such participation by observing the letter of the Numbers 30.1-2 law and succeeds only in serving the oppressive forces that relegated him to the position of disinherited Other in the first place.

books of Joshua and Judges. Similarly, the contradiction between the laws of Num. 30.1-2 and Deut. 12.31 Jephthah seemingly faces may exist only for the reader of the text; Jephthah may again be demonstrating incomplete knowledge of Mosaic law. Cooper's observation regarding Jephthah's marginal status responds well to the 1 Sam. 14 episode: Jephthah is not the king, and his desire is to negotiate his way into the promises of the covenant and the community of Israel, as did Caleb and Othniel, rather than opt out of its obligations.

25 Philip R. Davies offers a precise commentary on the paucity of options available to Jephthah's daughter, her willing compliance/complicity in the tragedy criticized by some biblicists, and the circular nature of the narrative: he imagines a daughter who does not return but follows in her grandmother's trade of prostitution (43).
The lack of social status and power of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11 is matched by that of the Levite's concubine in chapter 19. The word pilegesh, used to identify the woman in 19.1 and translated as "concubine" in the NRSV, describes "a wife of secondary rank," one who "endures double subordination" to her husband and to the primary wife (Yee 161). As in their analyses of the Achaiah narrative, critics vary in relying on translations of the Septuagint (as does the NRSV, she "became angry with" the Levite) or the Masoretic text (she "prostituted herself against" her husband) in discussing verse 19.2, and they arrive at disparate interpretations of the concubine's reported actions even when using the same source. Also noted in the discussion of Achaiah above and by Bal regarding 19.2, the difference in translations affects how the reader interprets the woman's subjectivity in their respective narratives; in verse 19.2, the reader can judge the concubine as "either [the] culprit or [the] offended party" of the narrative ("Dealing/With/Women" 325).

While Kamuf relies on the translation from the Greek, other critics explore the implications of translation from the Hebrew. Koala Jones-Warsaw considers the Masoretic language in the more literal sense of sexual exclusivity, offering for consideration the possibility that the concubine leaves her husband "in anger or fear for her life" when "after consummation of the marriage [he] accuses her of not being a virgin" (174). In so arguing, Jones-Warsaw points out the covenantal importance of the wife's sexual status for the Levite in citing Leviticus 21.1-15. Bal's analysis of the concubine's actions includes discussion of the metaphoric language of Israel's "going astray" in unfaithfulness to the Lord (Death 87-88); coupled with Jones-Warsaw's observations on the prescribed sexual purity for the Levite, the text contains in the single
verse of 19.2 the circular pattern of causality that haunts the book of Judges: the Levite and the concubine's conflated—and perhaps only suspected or anticipated—violation of the Mosaic law leads to the accusation of unfaithfulness on the part of the concubine by the Levite and/or the Judges storyteller. Other critics offer a figurative interpretation of *zanah*, asserting that the act of leaving her husband and returning to her father could in itself earn the concubine the epithet of "whore," with Fewell and Gunn envisioning the Levite's actions in 19.25-29 as part of an abusive pattern that manifests prior to 19.2 as her reason for leaving him (Yee 162; GPP 133). Considering the landless status of both Othniel and the Levite and the sexual undertones of their Judges 1 and 19 narratives highlights elements of their similitude: Achsah and the concubine both travel from the father to the husband and then return from the father to the husband when Othniel, Achsah, the Levite, and/or his concubine find the marital package lacking.

The indeterminacy of the causal chain leading to the concubine's sacrifice introduced in 19.2 multiplies in subsequent verses. Perhaps in an effort to reestablish an amicable relationship, protect his daughter, and insure her safety, the concubine's father prolongs the stay of the Levite when he comes to the father's house to reclaim her. However, the temporal deferment serves only to endanger the concubine by necessitating the overnight stay of the Levite and his concubine at Gibeah. When the men of Gibeah demand to know the Levite, the old man host first tenders his daughter and the Levite's concubine as substitute offerings; whether the old man host or the Levite "seized his concubine and put her out" remains unclear although who benefited from the exchange of victims is not (Judg. 19.23-25). Accused of having prostituted herself against the husband, the concubine becomes the object of sexual defilement in place of the Levite,
and whether the concubine endures or her Camp-identified metaphoric signification escapes the onslaught of the Judges 19 narrative remains for the reader to decide.

The textual silence of the concubine, the Levite, and Yahweh in verses 19.22-26 allows the more transgressive narrative voice of Judges to cry out for all Israel a covenantal relationship gone perversely awry, but distortion and displacement abound in its transmission and reception. While Jones-Warsaw points out the Levite’s omission of all events leading up to the concubine’s rape in his recounting of events (178) and Polzin notes the ambiguity of the "such a thing as this" language of 19.30 (201), other critics turn their attention to the cryptic message that the concubine’s dismembered body sends throughout Israel. Fewell and Gunn suggest two possible translations available to the reader: that the concubine "has been abandoned and betrayed by all the men with whom she has come in contact" and that the Levite’s "honor has been insulted, his life threatened, and his property damaged" (GPP 135). Kamuf reads the "Levite's publication" as a repetition of his Gibeah "crime of representation": using the concubine's body again as "a delegate [...] in his stead," the Levite "sends a self-accusatory message" (201). For Bal, "the agents of the woman's death are as unclear as is its moment," as responsibility for her death "keeps being displaced from one man to the next" ("A Body of Writing" 223). The observations of these critics hold in condensed form the very donner le change phenomenon the text executes upon the reader who pursues a determinate answer to the book’s fundamental question of responsibility. The "such a thing [as this]" language of 19.30—attributed to either the sender or receiver of the message, depending on translation and the interests of the translator—recalls the "see what you have done!" of Judges 2.2 in ambiguity; both the Lord and the Levite omit
crucial details yet include self-accusatory traces in their delegate's messages, and their imprecise language functions to divert attention from one party to another, leading only to further acts of betrayal, violence, displacement, and substitution.

The Israelite tribes in Judges 20 "put the whole city [of Gibeah] to the sword" in response to the Levite's story of his concubine's rape and swear to deny marriage of their daughters to Benjaminites (Judg. 20.37; 21.1). Sacrificing his daughter annuls any promise of lineage for Jephthah; by withholding their daughters from the surviving Benjaminites in line with their vow, the avenging Israelite tribes threaten to eliminate an entire tribe of Israel. To prevent such a wrong, the Israelites sanction the seizure of the virgins of Jabesh-gilead and the young women of Shiloh for sexual service to the six hundred remaining Benjaminites, reenacting the crime of the men of Gibeah for which they originally sought vengeance (Judg. 20.37; 21.1-23). More precisely, the tribes of Israel and the Benjaminites repeat the Judges 19 acts of the old man host and the men of Gibeah in offering/taking women who belong to others, and the women of Shiloh reenact the part of Jephthah's daughter in "coming out to dance" (cf. Kamuf 193-94; Bal, Death 62). In response to the crime of Gibeah, the Israelites thereby victimize the innocent and mirror the acts of the original criminals in their execution of justice. The Israelites order the other inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead, involved neither in the original crime nor its repetition, put to the sword because of their failure to participate, while the Lord before whom the Israelites sit and to whom they offer sacrifices on the Bethel altar remains silent (Judg. 21.8-10). The Israelite massacre of the inhabitants of Gibeah returns us to the ambiguously expressed command of the covenant to annihilate "all that breathes" in the towns of their inheritance, which again draws into question whether the responsibility
for such an action rests entirely on the shoulders of the Israelites. Jephthah makes his vow only after "the spirit of the Lord came upon" him (Judg. 11.29-31); the Israelite tribes inquire of the Lord regarding their plan of attack against the Benjaminites before engaging in battle (Judg. 20.18, 23, 27).

The narratives of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine thereby expand upon the very issues raised by the pericope of Achsah. The brief narrative of Judges 1.11-15 introduces in condensed form the issues of Israelite identity, divine fidelity, exposure to violence, and deferred fulfillment of promised inheritance and Yahweh's protection developed throughout the book. The covenant that seeks to create the distinctions between the current inhabitants of Canaan and the Israelite tribes eventually proves unequal to the task. The uncertainty of Achsah's identity as Israel or Other finds later expression in the inability of Jephthah and the Israelites of Judges 19-21 to distinguish between their kindred and their enemy. The unrealized promises of land and descendants read merely as temporally deferred in the Achsah narrative resound in the childless, motherless, and landless stories of Jephthah's virgin daughter and the Levite's concubine. The Lord's promise to protect the Israelites from those antagonistic to them, only partially fulfilled in the recitation of Judah's military efforts where the Judges storyteller embeds Achsah's narrative, fails completely for Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine; their stories but realize the potential danger to which Caleb exposes Achsah by his vow. The sacrifice of women in the book of Judges results not only from the ambiguous speech of their fathers but also from the language of the covenant and the gendered dilemma that inheres in the figurative language of Yahweh's marriage to a faithful Israel and the extended metaphor of Israel's "prostituting itself to foreign gods."
Women function instrumentally in the Israelites' efforts to realize Yahweh's promises of descendants, land, and nationhood in a book where Yahweh promises no lineage, frustrates the hopes and efforts of the Israelites in possessing the land, and sells them into the hands of the oppressor nations and foreign gods he leaves to serve as adversaries and a snare. When the voice of authoritarian dogmatism attributes the Israelites' failures to their prostituting themselves to foreign gods, those whose ambiguous identity associates them differentially with both Israel and Other inherit all the threatening implications of the command to destroy all things foreign within its midst. In this sense, women function as a Derridean supplement, a Jephthah-expendable addition excluded from Yahweh's promises and his covenant with Israel, ideal sacrificial victims.

Yet as the pattern of deferment in Yahweh's promises of land, descendants, and nationhood for the Israelites continues, even the avenging Israelites of chapter twenty-one acknowledge that women are not supplemental but essential to their realization, and the dogmatic voice that assigns sole responsibility for Israel's failures to their unfaithfulness to Yahweh and the Mosaic covenant competes with a more transgressive narrative voice that invites the reader to understand the text from the perspective of the Israelites. First detected in Judah's failure to drive out the inhabitants of the plain despite the Lord's declaration to give the land into Judah's hand and his presence with them in battle, this voice gains volume in the narratives of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine. Challenging the dogmatic explanation of divine retributive justice for Israel's transgressions and complicating the causal chain of events that results in self-destruction, these narratives offer the reader another Judges rationale for the choice of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine as sacrificial victims. Women throughout the book
are associated with Yahweh in his thwarted promises of land, descendants, and
countryhood, and can stand in the place of God relative to Israel as noted in the narratives
of Achsah and Rahab. Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's concubine function as
substitutes for divine protection for Jephthah and the Levite, Derridean supplements that
fill and mark a determined lack of the promised protection of Yahweh. This absence
provides an alternative answer to the fundamental questions that underlie the book of
Judges: in the judgment of the text, who or what comes forth as responsible for Israel's
success/failure in gaining possession of the land? Who or what must be sacrificed so the
Israelites can live free from oppression in the promised land of Canaan? Fewell
concludes her analysis of Judges 1.11-15 by asking if Achsah is "Israel's own self-
perception" and poses for the reader a provocative rhetorical question: "Wasn't she
promised milk and honey? And yet now she finds herself in a vastly overrated land
having to insist on being blessed with the very basic necessity of life, water"
("Deconstructive Criticism" 140). The stories of Jephthah's daughter and the Levite's
concubine offer a provocative rhetorical response to Fewell's questions: if Israel finds the
land and promises of Yahweh overrated in Judges, women are correspondingly devalued,
objectified, silenced, and sacrificed in desperation and revenge.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Bowman, Richard G. "Narrative Criticism: Human Purpose in Conflict with Divine Presence." *Yee* 17-44.


---. "Jephthah's Daughter to Her Father." Davies 41-43.


---. *From Dissemination.* Leitch 1830-76.


---. "Feminist Criticism: Whose Interests Are Being Served?" Yee 65-90.


Yee, Gale A. "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body." *Yee* 146-70.
