BREAKING THE SILENCE:
WOMEN POETS REWRITE THE BIBLE

A Thesis

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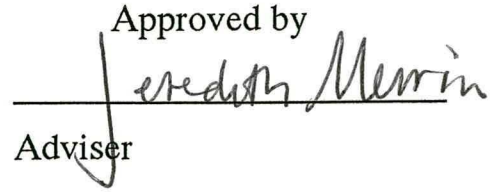

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to my parents

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Chapter I

Introduction

Recasting biblical narrative is a common practice of both male and female Jewish poets. In the Bible, the main characters in the story of Jacob and Esau are the men, and the foci are patriarchal birthright and blessing. Male poets tend to concentrate on such tales, exploring themes of heritage through masculine metaphors. Amir Gilboa, for one, uses male-centered narratives to understand his own Jewish experience and employs biblical motifs from Isaac to Moses, often working through those stories to express his personal and communal grief for the losses of the Holocaust. Gilboa chooses specifically male characters to give voice to his narratives; in his poem "Isaac" he compares the meaningless "sacrifice" of the Jewish people in the European genocide to the *akeda* , the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22). Sarah, Isaac's mother, is not included in the Bible's rendition in which Abraham brings her only son to be sacrificed to God. However, today's female Jewish poets use the *akeda* as a vehicle to explore Sarah's feelings of maternal loss and helplessness. Despite the habit of omission of women's voices in the Bible, women poets today explore biblical myth by speaking through and for biblical women.

Women's revision of the Bible is empowering. But this is not without its cost—for women, such power brings with it particular responsibilities and pain. In Shirley Kaufman's poem "Rebecca," for example, Rebecca is shown as the architect of Jacob's usurpation of the birthright from Esau.

Acting on behalf of her favorite child, Kaufman's Rebecca experiences a mother's grief and regret over betraying her husband, portraying herself as a witch-like woman, "any / clever woman at her stew" (19-20). Kaufman's narrator is conflicted because she accedes to the male construct of woman as conniver, as ungodly. A similar conflict is found in other poems as well, such as "Sarah: Cheshbon Hanefesh" by Mindy Rinkewich, in which Sarah expresses her bitterness at her own impotence in the face of God and Abraham, at the same time lamenting that she doesn't "look too good" (1). Even though Sarah is upsetting one conventional view of women, she is reluctant to leave behind another.

Do women poets understand biblical myth differently from male poets? The women poets I will discuss, Shirley Kaufman, Zelda, Helen Papell, Lillian Elkin and others, give a voice to those women in the Bible whose silences in that text are conspicuous. I will argue that the women poets who write about the Bible revise it in uniquely female ways—ways epitomized in the Hebrew poet Zelda's poem, "The Moon is Teaching Bible."

> The moon is teaching Bible.
> Cyclamen, poppy, and mountain
> listen with joy.
> Only the girl cries.
> The poppy can't hear her crying—
> the poppy is blazing in Torah,
> burning like the verse.
> The cyclamen doesn't listen
> to the crying—

the cyclamen swoons
from the sweet secrets.
The mountain won't hear her crying—
the mountain is sunk in thought. (1-13)

In "The Moon is Teaching Bible," a young female student learns from the moon and weeps over the sadness of the stories, while the natural images, which I see as unconventionally linked to typically male responses here—cyclamen, poppy, and mountain—are caught up in the glory and excitement of the experience. The burning poppy, swooning cyclamen, and thinking mountain evoke traditional biblical exegesis, which celebrates the text as a record and source of power. The girl in Zelda's poem, listening to the teachings of the moon, responds instead to the depth of human emotion involved in the tales.

Zelda's allusion to the moon calls attention to the feminine nature of its teachings in the poem. Like the other poets I will discuss in this paper, Zelda operates both by participating in and changing the system of metaphors familiar to the Western reader. The moon is universally a feminine symbol, connected to women through its cyclical nature: a woman's menstrual cycle is approximately the same length as the orbit of the moon, twenty-eight days. Canaanite civilizations existing before and at the same time as early Judaism worshipped the moon as a goddess, representing "hidden goddesses in the Old Testament" described in Anne Baring and Jules Cashford's The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image as: "the mother goddess Ashera. . . [and her] daughter Anath-Ashtoreth" (454). Even now, as in the Bible, Western culture views the moon with suspicion, attributing strange behavior to the full moon and using it as a symbol for

pagan festivals like Halloween. The acts of the poppy, cyclamen, and mountain that block out the moon's teaching and listen only to themselves—"The poppy can't hear her crying—" (5) reflect our culture's distrust of the moon and its related distrust of and revulsion for the functions of the female body. These natural entities ignore the reaction of the girl in favor of a more traditional approach.

Despite its negative charge, the inconstant, unattainable, feminine moon has of course remained an important image for Western culture. The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, with the first of every month being the day of the new moon. This day is celebrated by religious Jews with a special blessing of thanksgiving at the moon's reappearance: the *Birkat ha-Levanah* ("the blessing of the moon") or *Kiddush Levanah* ("sanctification of the moon"). (Encyclopaedia Judaica 291). Even most Gregorian or solar calendars generally depict the moon and its phases. And today, as always, farmers depend on the moon to determine harvest times. The poet Zelda both adopts and adapts these natural associations with the moon in her poem, using the moon's positive connotations that have survived biblical negativity. Her poem begins, "The moon is teaching Bible" (1): that is, the moon has something to teach, has something to offer us. And the moon's teaching has a profound effect on women: "the girl cries" (4).

The Bible shows both the sun and the moon as subordinate to God, but equally obvious is that the moon, in its association with women is represented as feminine and subordinate. On the fourth day of creation, God creates the sun and moon; significantly, he creates the sun first: "So it was; God made the two great lights, the greater to govern the day and the lesser to

govern the night" (Gen. 1:15-16). Louis Ginsberg, in his Legends of the Jews, recounts the way in which the Rabbis interpreted this passage:

> The moon: "O Lord, Thou didst create two worlds, a greater and a lesser world; Thou didst create the heaven and the earth, the heaven exceeding the earth; Thou didst create fire and water, the water stronger than the fire, because it can quench the fire; and now Thou hast created the sun and the moon, and it is becoming that one of them should be greater than the other." Then spake God to the moon: "I know well, thou wouldst have me make Thee greater than the sun. As a punishment I decree that thou mayest keep but one-sixtieth of thy light." The moon made supplication: "Shall I be punished so severely for having spoken a single word?" God relented: "In the future world I will restore thy light, so that thy light may again be as the light of the sun." The moon was not yet satisfied. "O Lord," she said, "and the light of the sun, how great will it be in that day?" Then the wrath of God was once more enkindled: "What, thou still plottest against the sun? As thou livest, in the world to come his light shall be sevenfold the light he now sheds." (23-24)

The reader can see that not only is the moon referred to as "she" and the sun as "he," but that God places the moon in a lesser position as a punishment for speaking. This seems to be consistent with the Bible's continuous silence of female voices, as they might have learned from this episode that speaking up is a punishable offense.

The biblical examples to follow show how the moon's positioning in the stories link the moon explicitly with femininity. In Genesis, the moon appears in a dream to Joseph: ". . . the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me" (Gen. 37:9). In this passage, Joseph's father explicates the dream. Joseph's father (the sun), his mother (the moon), and eleven brothers (the stars) are all Joseph's subjects. Here is the first use of the word "moon," or "*yareach* " in Hebrew, and in its first use we see its specific relationship to womanhood through Joseph's mother. The moon is conceived as a symbol of womanhood and motherhood, as well as being relegated to subordinate status. In a further embodiment, the reference to the moon in the Book of Joel is fraught with feminine sexuality: "Before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes, / I will set portents in the sky and on earth: / Blood and fire and pillars of smoke; / The sun shall turn into darkness / And the moon into blood" (Joel 3:3-4). This transformation of the moon on Judgment Day has telling resonance for women. First of all, the moon turns to blood, calling to mind the moon's association with the menstrual cycle and with women. Also, the moon is a "portent," a sign of the Lord's wrath that is to come. It acts as a warning to all people, that they should invoke the name of the Lord so they will be saved. Further, the moon is transformed by God, so it is certainly subject to God's power. And finally, the moon is again linked to a day of judgment, a day in which the moon (and sun) will be darkened, yielding to god's power. [see also Eccl. 12:2]. All of these biblical references to the moon share the pattern of subordination, the position in which the Bible consistently places women.

Biblical narrative continues to construct both the moon and the sun as symbols of submission, particularly submission to the wrath of God:

"Before them (the vanguard of the Lord on the day of reckoning) the earth trembles, / Heaven shakes, / Sun and moon are darkened, / And stars withdraw their brightness"(Joel 2:10). Even when the moon is a symbol of power, such as in Psalm 121 ("The Lord is your guardian, / the Lord is your protection / at your right hand. / By day the sun will not strike you, / nor the moon by night. (Ps.121:5-6)), it remains something over which God has power and something that trembles before Him. The female moon succumbs to the wrath of God as well as the sun, associated in modern times more with Christianity than with Judaism. Although the sun is equally subjected here to the wrath of God, Jewish poets choose the moon in particular to symbolize a Jewish woman's subjection to patriarchal structures and strictures. Often, this power play is depicted in the Bible on a day of judgment, where the sins of being female are punished. The forced obedience of the moon reflects the Judeo-Christian cultural fear of female sexuality and female perceptions. In Psalm 136, the moon and stars "dominate the night" (Ps. 136:9), but God has power over all. In all these quoted passages, the moon is powerful only in a secondary way to the Jewish male God and is sometimes established as a power that is usurped by God once people have come to know Him.

The moon is also a false or dangerous deity in the Bible: "If ever I saw the light shining, / The moon on its course in full glory, / And I secretly succumbed, / And my hand touched my mouth in a kiss, / That, too, would have been a criminal offense" (Job 31:26-27). "And when you look up to the sky and behold the sun and moon and the stars, the whole heavenly host, you must not be lured into bowing down to them or serving them" (Deuteronomy 4:19). In Isaiah, the moon is even more explicitly construed

as a false light, a substitute for the one true God: "No longer shall you need the sun / For light by day, / Nor the shining of the moon / For radiance [by night]; / For the Lord shall be your light everlasting, Your God shall be your glory" (Isaiah 60:19). The punishment ordained for worshipping the moon is stoning to death:

> [T]urning to the worship of other gods and bowing down to them, to the sun or moon or any of the heavenly host, [is] something I (God) have never commanded—and you have been informed or have learned of it, then you shall make a thorough inquiry. If it is true, the fact is established, that abhorrent thing was perpetrated in Israel, you shall take the man or the woman who did that wicked thing out to the public place, and you shall stone them, man or woman, to death. (Deut. 17:3-5)

We can see how worshipping the moon, and with it, female sexuality, was fashioned by the Hebrew Scriptures as evil, a severely punishable crime. Forbidding the worship of the moon was just one way of setting the Jewish people apart from its Semitic neighbors, such as the Mesopotamian worshippers of Anat and Ishtar; in the process it stigmatized the worship of female gods and femaleness.

If the biblical stories were told from a woman's point of view, they would be different. Today's Jewish women poets do just that . In Zelda's "The Moon is Teaching Bible," we learn how the entire Bible might be re-seen by women. The moon / female figure perceives the sadness in the Bible, while other natural phenomena depicted, subject as well to God's will, are unaware of the anguish of the stories. Women, like this moon, both re-cover and dis-cover the true meaning in the Bible. That is, women both

rewrite biblical myth to include women's voices and reinterpret what is already there in a new way. In Jewish tradition, it is the men who study the Bible and biblical writings—the composers of Jewish interpretive texts such as the Talmud and Midrash have traditionally been men. In this poem, these men are "blazing in Torah, / burning like the verse. . . swoon[ing] / from the sweet secrets" (6-11). However, in their sequestered studies, men have lost something. They feel joy in mouthing the words of the sacred texts but are oblivious and hardened to the emotional truths of the stories. By reciting the passages over and over, men lose the human impact of the words. The words become simply sounds, like the babbling sounds a toddler makes when repeating a new word again and again. Women, who are not privy to these "secrets," who stay home and keep a Jewish household, perhaps more vividly and truly live Judaism and embrace it in their everyday lives.

The cyclamen, poppy, and mountain, foils to the moon, are all natural images associated with the land of Israel. In Israel one thinks of cyclamen and poppies in vast fields— beautiful, but not individual. The mountain, another natural image, is immobile, unmoved by the girl's crying. It is the wind, in the second stanza, that lends hope to the poem:

> But here comes the wind,
> soft and fragrant,
> to honor hope
> and sing—
> each heart
> is a flying horseman,
> an ardent hunter
> swept to the ends of the sea. (14-21)

Wind brings in a new way of thinking, something soft and fragrant, which we might associate with an emotional way of responding to the Bible. And the heart is lifted by the wind, which like the horseman, is a biblical symbol of prophecy and war. Linked as they are to the day of judgment, the moon and the horseman suggest that women, through their unique understanding of the Bible, lend hope and strength. By using the image of horseman, Zelda chooses a male image to empower female study. It might appear to undermine her feminist revision to use such a masculine trope; but Zelda, by choosing the word "horseman," "*parash* " in Hebrew, enriches the line. First of all, readers might be tempted to make the horseman, *parash* , female, by adding the feminine ending to get *parashah* . And *parashah* , which shares the same root as *parash* , is the Hebrew word for paragraph, or the weekly Scripture lesson. Zelda implies that feminist study of the Bible is a messenger of not only a new midrash, or biblical commentary, but of a new scripture, one (re)written by women.

Zelda uses a biblical motif to offer an explanation for how women respond to the Bible in general; the poets I will now turn to in the body of this essay offer various responses to specific female characters in the Bible. These women poets create their own midrashim. Shirley Kaufman offers some particularly insightful renditions of biblical tales. She chooses the tales of biblical women involved in human dilemmas—Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel and Michal, David's wife—women whose stories are traditionally told and interpreted from a masculine point of view. In place of this traditional stance, Kaufman incorporates many different feminist approaches into her poetry, from exploring the historical significance of these women to portraying them in a human, sometimes humorous light.

The sum of Kaufman's work in this area reveals a dedication to feminist principles as well as an affection for these biblical matriarchs who have shaped the lives of so many Jewish women.

Because of Sarah's possible association with the moon as a priestess or goddess incarnate, the idea of the moon in Kaufman's poetry and in others' , while not always explicit, is central to their female interpretation of the Bible. Additional evidence comes from Sabina J. Teubal in her book Sarah the Priestess, who argues that Sarah and the women who come after her—Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, and others—may have been followers of a goddess culture in which the moon was a central figure. Like Zelda, the other poets I will discuss often play upon the woman's association with the moon, exploring a feminist spirituality associated with acceptance of the woman's body and affirmation of a female perspective. Poems about Sarah, in particular, function as a paradigm for discussing the other poetry in this essay because of Sarah's role of matriarch of the Jewish faith. Sarah thus serves as an everywoman figure, and the poems about Sarah exemplify different approaches toward feminist interpretations of the Bible. The poems about the other female biblical figures , the daughters of Sarah, then correspond with these several approaches or interpretive stances.

Chapter II

Sarah

Sarah is mentioned neither in the Bible's Genesis 22 (the binding of Isaac), nor in the interpretation of Genesis 22 in Genesis Rabbah, the major Midrashic document probably compiled in 400 C.E. But Mindy Rinkewich, Lillian Elkin, Annette Bialik Harchik, and Helen Papell give a voice to Sarah, and before them the Rabbis of the Middle Ages offered their own ideas about what Sarah might have said and thought. The midrashim of these Rabbis explain her death as resulting either from grief at Isaac's supposed sacrifice or from shock at hearing he is still alive (Ginzberg 287). Louis Ginzberg, in his Legends of the Jews, recounts what the ancient Rabbis said in other sources about Sarah's reaction to God's request of Abraham. Drawing upon the Talmud, Ginzberg writes that Abraham lies to Sarah—he tells her that he is taking Isaac to study the service of God, when Abraham is really planning on sacrificing Isaac. Sarah responds by asking God to care for Isaac in his absence from her (275). After Abraham and Isaac have left, Satan appears to Sarah and informs her of Abraham's intent. Ginzberg suggests that Sarah responded with great inner emotional turmoil: "In this hour Sarah's loins trembled, and all her limbs shook. She was no more of this world. Nevertheless she aroused herself and said, 'All that God hath told Abraham, may he do it unto life and unto peace'" (278). In the Talmud, the Rabbis invent a response in which Sarah ignores her initial motherly instinct ("her loins

trembled") and acts instead in a way appropriate for a Biblical female role model, in the eyes of the male composers and interpreters. Sarah swallows her grief and shows faith in God in the face of distress. Later, as Abraham and Isaac are on Mount Moriah, Satan again appears to Sarah and tells her that her son is dead. Sarah faints but recovers. Satan then returns to her and tells her that Isaac is alive; it is at this point that Sarah is overcome by emotion and dies. In these stories from the Talmud, in which the Rabbis speculate on what Sarah might have gone through during the binding of Isaac, Sarah behaves in a way appropriate to a male-constructed world. Although in her heart she disapproves of what Abraham is doing, she gives her blessing to Abraham's actions. It is apparent from the latter part of this story that the Rabbis attribute great emotion to Sarah. What they value in her is her ability to suppress her maternal instinct in deference to God and Abraham.

Poems by modern women tend to approach Sarah's response much differently: rather than silencing Sarah or suppressing her feelings, these poets allow Sarah to speak through them. "Sarah: Cheshbon Hanefesh," by Mindy Rinkewich, for example, carries with it Sarah's ambiguity about her own agency during her life. The title of the poem in English, "Sarah: An Accounting of the Soul," puts Sarah in the situation of looking back on her life and evaluating what she sees, accounting for her actions by blaming God or Abraham for her misfortune. This is not an empowering interpretation of the Sarah story, even though it is a version we receive from her lips, a voice given to her by the poet. Although told in the first person, Sarah's story is here recounted in terms of God's or Abraham's actions upon her. The first person narrative may suggest that Sarah does

control her fate to some extent, and later, that she sees herself as stronger than Abraham or any other man—"What man has the guts it took / For me to bring Hagar to Abraham?" (9-10)—but Rinkewich's poem concludes with an image of despair. The idea of Sarah's impotence is brought home at the end of the poem by her observation that "Had I done this, that or the other / The tunnel was sealed at both ends from the start" (27). This final image brings to mind Sarah's sealed womb, her barrenness until God decides it is time for her to bear a child. This conclusion to Rinkewich's poem abandons Sarah to God and Abraham; she is powerless to change the path of her life.

As Sarah evaluates her life, she sees that she was without choice. Her despair is the result of knowing that in her life she was a mere actress, manipulated by forces beyond her control; Sarah mourns "the strength *he* never gave me" (7). Sarah's "he," whether it be God or Abraham, demonstrates her oppression at the hands of a patriarchal culture. She feels wronged that God made her barren, only to make her pregnant after she was forced to give Abraham a concubine. Sarah perseveres in the face of this unending adversity, saying of her oppressor: "He puts me through tests beyond my endurance" (3). But Sarah's own story belies her words: she has endured: "He puts up walls many times my height for me to scale / He strikes a high, fast note / And orders me to dance to a tune only an acrobat could follow" (4-6).

Rinkewich's portrayal of the oppressive male figure—whether God or Abraham—reveals her opinion of how women are treated by biblical authors. The only words spoken by Abraham in this poem are "—You bitches be quiet, I tell you! / —Can't a man have a moment of peace?" (24-

5) Sarah (as the speaking poet) envisions the women's state as hopeless, doomed always to be seen by men as "bitches." Women are defined by the way Abraham speaks to them. He asks them to "be quiet": that is, women's voices are not to be heard in this Bible, nor, perhaps in this world. Abraham says let there be quiet and he expects quiet. Abraham's use of the words "I tell you" in the poem show his likeness in his mind to his God, who created or acted by speaking: "God said 'Let there be light' and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). As Susan Stanford Friedman, in "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor" observes, "The power of the Word became the paradigm of male creativity, indeed the foundation of Western patriarchal ideology" (374). And in asking, "Can't a man have a moment of peace?" (25), Abraham likens himself to all men. The poet is showing us that all men see themselves akin to God and as having the power to act by speaking. Yet, ironically, Abraham is given a voice by the female author of the poem as well as by Sarah herself. Sarah imagines Abraham saying these words and remembers him as having said them before.

Sarah lists issues that she and Hagar have struggled with (perhaps not overtly):

> We still would have had that big fight
> If not over a child
> It would have been over my authority
> or her privileges
> or my jealousy
> or hers (17-22)

This litany reveals the hopelessness that Sarah feels about her relationship with Hagar and the mutual responsibility for their problems. Sarah desires

Hagar as an ally but realizes this is impossible in the man's world she inhabits. She realizes that it is inevitable that she and Hagar are in conflict with each other. Elie Weisel interprets this story to show that the conflict between Sarah and Hagar is the origin of strife between Arabs and Jews (237). Rinkewich seems to agree with Weisel, saying that Jews and Arabs must always be in conflict: if there hadn't been the strife between Hagar and Sarah over the birthrights of their sons, it would have been something else that Arabs and Jews would have fought about. "Sarah: Cheshbon HaNefesh" does not limit itself to male / female conflict or female / female conflict; like all strong poems, it also explores, more broadly, human relationships.

Rinkewich's reading of the Bible story does, however, focus on Sarah as an oppressed woman. Rinkewich's poem does not acknowledge research by scholars such as Savina Teubal, who give historical explanations for Sarah's bringing Hagar into her family and subsequent expulsion of Hagar. Rather, Rinkewich sees the Sarah story as a fable exploring the human condition. In biblical times, as now, many women did not have the power to prevent their husbands from loving another, or to protect their children from their husbands. Even if Sarah had the strength, her accomplishments would not be her own because the very power she possesses has been bestowed on her by a male entity. According to this feminist interpretation, women characters in the Hebrew Bible were given roles to play by the male writers of the text and given life by the male deity those writers glorify. Sarah and her daughters in the Bible are unable to behave in any way that is outside the imagination of the male writers. Only in arguments like Teubal's do we see that powerful women might have

existed and that they may not be portrayed adequately in the Bible that we read today. It is unfortunate that Sarah and Hagar's roles in Genesis are limited to negative sexual stereotypes. The Sarah of Rinkewich's poem does the best that she can with what she is given, but in the end realizes that she has not been in control of her own destiny.

Like Rinkewich, Lillian Elkin's "Sarah Talks to God" exploits the universality of the biblical tale, in this case, of a mother's love for her child. And like Rinkewich's poem, Elkin's poem possesses a tone of resignation. To Elkin, Sarah is a woman who has left her people and given up her religion for that of Abraham; she has taken Abraham's word as God's word. In "Sarah Talks to God," Sarah resists God's request of her son Isaac as a sacrifice. Sarah is a frightened mother, wondering why God asks this of her when she has been a good woman all her life.

The poem follows the form of an implied prayer: Sarah acknowledges God's greatness, reminds God of what she has done for him, and then makes a request of her own: that he spare her son. Sarah sees God as great and fearsome: "in the shadows of your timeless sandals / the small gods were weeds." He is the eternal god, and compared to him, the gods of pantheistic religion are so insignificant as to be crushed by his power. Sarah's God is anthropomorphic, a King wearing sandals. One can see the parallel she draws between this god and her husband Abraham. In fact, it is not until line 18 of the poem that it is clear she is talking to God, rather than Abraham (notwithstanding the title). This ambiguity is something this poem has in common with "Sarah: Cheshbon Hanefesh." Both Elkin and Rinkewich conflate the male figures of Abraham and God as withholders and bestowers of power, then contrast these masculine

figures with the comaparatively powerless Sarah. Sarah reviews what she has done in her life for God. She has raised a good Jewish son, who makes sacrifices of wheat, fruits, and flowers to God. She has left her own people and religion to follow her husband's. She has welcomed guests into her home. All of these are mitzvot (good deeds) later described in Leviticus. Even before these were written down Sarah was living them. How can God ask for her son on top of all these other sacrifices Sarah has made? Sarah's request in this poem is implicit: do not take my son as a sacrifice.

And Sarah's plea is convincing. When she begs for Isaac's "small fingers / and the fright of little hands" (5-6), we cannot help but be affected by the image she creates. The thought of the blood of little Isaac, a child whose purity touches the reader, spilling in fulfillment of a commandment of God, is abhorrent. Depicting the boy who innocently "gathered fruits and wild flowers," this poem exhibits a tenderness of parent to child and horror at sacrifice similar to Amir Gilboa's "Isaac."

Elkin focuses on the role of mother, but in no way does this make the poem antifeminist. In its focus, Elkin's poem is indirectly related to the interpretation of the Sarah story that posits that Sarah was a priestess of the moon cult, clearly criticism that emphasizes Sarah's life in connection with the woman's body. Savina J. Teubal, in her book Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis, postulates that we can read between the lines of the male narration of Genesis that the matriarch Sarah was a priestess of a non-patriarchal tradition in her time. Her life represents a struggle between her non-patriarchal culture and the budding patriarchal culture of Abraham. Incidents in Sarah's life, as well as in those of the other

matriarchs, are used to illustrate Teubal's assertion that these women are from a goddess-culture, slowly being replaced by the patriarchy.

Teubal empowers Sarah in a different way—she changes the standards by which we judge the story and Sarah's behavior. Sarah, the speaker, narrates in Elkin's poem, "I have left the home of familiar herds and shepherds / and my mother's loom is silent" (15-16). A reader aware of Teubal's scholarship might connect this pronouncement not only with Sarah's leaving her home to go with Abraham, as we are told in the Bible, but also with Sarah's abandonment of her native culture.

The issue of Sarah's death by grief from Isaac's death is raised in Annette Bialik Harchik's "Confession to Mother Sarah," which, as the title reveals, concentrates on Sarah's importance as a mother. The speaker in the poem, confessing to Sarah, grieves at her own childlessness:

> You were luckier than I
> albeit in your old age
> you were granted a son,
> though he too was
> targeted for loss. (1-5)

The words "albeit" and "though," words of contrast, reverse the direction of the speaker's thoughts twice. This mirrors the way in which Sarah, in her life, was pulled one way and then the other by God, first accepting her barrenness by finding a concubine for Abraham and then finding out that she herself is pregnant at a very old age. These reversals also underscore the irony of what the poet is saying: on the one hand, she envies Sarah's motherhood—at least Sarah has had a child. On the other hand, how can

she envy a mother who is bereaved? For at the moment of her death, in this poem, Sarah was bereaved: she believed her child to be dead.

Perhaps the reversals in "Confession to Mother Sarah" reflect the emotions of motherhood, the painful ties to one's child. But the speaker of this poem does not have a child who would be sacrificed; instead, it is her own self who is given up to God's wrath on Mount Moriah. The poem's narrator is at once Isaac and Sarah, the innocent child about to be sacrificed, and the mother dying of grief. She is the one about to be sacrificed, the daughter of Sarah. This poem takes issue with the idea of luck, exploring the connotations both of good luck and of fate. There is no such thing as luck when someone you love dies. Sarah herself, according to Midrashic sources, died of grief in thinking that her child was dead.

Helen Papell, in "Sarah and Isaac, Her Son: A Midrash," also explores the possible reactions of Sarah when Abraham takes Isaac to be sacrificed at God's request. Like Rinkewich, Elkin, and Harchik, Papell gives a voice to Sarah in her poem. Instead of simply "Sarah and Isaac," Papell adds the words "Her Son." The most important relationship in Sarah's life is that with her son. We don't get this emphasis so much from the Bible as from this poem and others. In biblical interpretation of Genesis 22, scholars have noted that the word *b'ni* , or "my son" (Abraham's son) is used over and over. Although we know that Isaac is Abraham's son, *b'ni* is used repeatedly to emphasize the father-son relationship. The reader is made to see the significance of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to God's command. Abraham's faith is truly profound if he will kill his child, his only child, in obeyance of his God. Of course, most interpreters of the Bible see Abraham's faith as good, but

Papell has a different interpretation. Her counter-assertion is that Isaac is *Sarah's* son. In Papell's poem, Sarah says "*My* son," "*my* son," "*my* child." And she also says "*my* husband" twice, indicating possession, but perhaps, a slightly less obsessive love than her love for her son. Sarah expresses her personal responsibility for Abraham and for Isaac. Sarah's use of the possessive demonstrates that she feels guilty that she has not prevented *her* husband from taking Isaac away.

Abraham's faith, to her, is blind: "Abraham's eyes blaze the command to bathe his son / in fire." Papell stresses the paternal relationship by ending the first line of her poem with "son." But Papell's Abraham does not seem to see the importance. He is deaf to Sarah's pleas for her son's life. Sarah points out the barbaric nature of what Abraham is about to do: "'I didn't promise my son's breath to the fiery throat / of the bull-god Moloch in the pagan ravine.'" She tries to make Abraham see that his act is like those of other cultures of the time, "pagan." The god to whom she compares Abraham's god is Moloch, a masculine Near Eastern deity. Although female goddesses also were thought to require sacrifices, both Moloch and the god of the Hebrew Bible are male. This male god requests not only that a child be killed, but that his own father do the killing. Furthering the pagan idea, Sarah wonders aloud,

> "If my child's sweet sorrowing bones shall crumble
> in the wind,
> Would the grass of the desert grow greener?
> Would the spring flow sweeter?" (7-10)

She construes Isaac's death as a sacrifice to nature, rather than as a test of faith.

In keeping with Teubal's explanation of Sarah in Sarah the Priestess, Sarah's knowledge of folkways or pagan ritual in this poem is evident. She prays to gods other than Abraham's one god who demands exclusive rights to the worship of his people. Sarah's acts of supplication contrast with what Abraham is about to do, the poem questioning the ways of this new religion of Abraham's. In contrast to Abraham's, Sarah's acts are peaceful and beautiful: "Sarah carries a jug to sands awaiting rain" (11). She creates rather than destroys: "Sarah pulls a noose of leaves that had choked / a spring's throat as dry as Hagar / banished long ago / to the desert by Sarah, mother, wife" (17-20). This second act is a little less clear-cut. Although Sarah is clearing away life-preventing debris, her action is compared to the clearing away of Hagar from her own life. Are we to understand that Hagar was stifling or suffocating to Sarah? This is reasonable in light of the interpretation that she was a competitor with Sarah for Abraham. Yet these lines still create a problem. Sarah's banishment of Hagar is unkind, even inhumane, according to some critics, since Hagar is likely to starve alone in the desert. Some critics believe that Abraham insisted on seeing her off alone so that he would be able to give her provisions to survive (Weisel 237). So a feminist interpretation cannot posit Abraham and Hagar as enemies and Sarah as the victim or vice versa. At the end of the poem Sarah herself is not at peace with her behavior toward Hagar: the poet leaves Sarah "[w]eeping for Hagar's forgiveness as though it were a trail / she might follow." She desires Hagar's forgiveness as Abraham might desire hers. Perhaps the poem ends with Sarah learning a woman's responsibility for another woman.

Shirley Kaufman's poetic rendition of Sarah and Hagar's story, "Déjà Vu," further develops the idea of responsibility or shared experience. Kaufman explores the relationship between Hagar and Sarah through her portrayals of two women living in modern Israel. Although they come from different cultures, Sarah and Hagar in this poem want the same things for their sons. They encounter each other at the Temple Mount, neutral yet conflicted ground for these two women, because although a Muslim temple there stands at the site, it is still a holy place for both Arabs and Jews. The Temple Mount, thought by some to be Mount Moriah, where Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed, is thought by Muslims to be the place where Mohammed flew up to God.

Kaufman begins "Déjà Vu" with humor, a typical device of feminist interpretation of the Bible that may be seen as participating in a deconstruction of patriarchal interpretation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her book, But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation, argues that

> feminist biblical studies . . . must deconstruct the dominant paradigms of biblical interpretation and reconstruct them in terms of a critical rhetoric that understands biblical texts and traditions as a living and changing heritage, one which does not legitimate patriarchal oppression but can foster emancipatory practices of faith-communities. (5)

And Kaufman's use of humor, as well as that of other poets discussed here, certainly challenges the lofty interpretations that have come before. Kaufman, together with other women poets, reminds us that the characters in the Bible are people, just like us. What woman does not want, as do

Sarah and Hagar in "Déjà Vu," that her sons "should be / good to their mothers" (3-4)? Comic elements also come later in the poem when Kaufman depicts Sarah preparing dinner as her husband reads the newspaper. "Guess who I met she says talking / across the desert" (44-45). The distance between the husband and wife is bitterly funny; the mundanity of Sarah and Abraham's present existence contrasts in the extreme with the dramatic events of their time with Hagar. Meanwhile, as Sarah and Abraham blandly go about their evening routine, Hagar inspects fruit at the open-air market in the same way that she must have sized up Abraham as potential father of her child: "I got what I wanted / from the old man" (52-53).

Kaufman employs images familiar to Western religions to emphasize the shared aspirations of women with different beliefs. Like the Rock which has significance to the faiths of both Jews and Muslims, love of their sons is common to both Sarah and Hagar. These women interest themselves, albeit subtly, in the lives of each other's children: "Sarah wants to find out what happened / to Ishmael but is afraid to ask" (17-18). Furthering the link between the two is the way in which Kaufman uses the pronoun "they" repeatedly throughout the first half of the poem to refer to Sarah and Hagar: "they meet at the rock" (5), "They bump into each other at the door" (14), "They know the world is flat" (21). Their actions closely parallel each other in the first half; then later in the poem the women's paths diverge, yet remain parallel: "Jet planes fly over their heads / as they walk out of each other's lives" (26-27). The flight patterns of the jets mirror the corresponding paths of Sarah and Hagar.

"Déjà Vu" is certainly an appropriate title for Kaufman's poem about the parallel lives of Sarah and Hagar. Each woman's life reminds us of the other, and each is sadly familiar—familiar to readers acquainted with the biblical story of Hagar and Sarah and familiar to Jews and Arabs unhappy with the conflict between them. Shirley Kaufman, in her account of Sarah and Hagar, reminds us that the Bible is a human story, one that we can understand both in ancient and modern terms.

All of these contemporary woman poets give Sarah a human voice, depicting her as a woman with responses true to her feminine predicament. What the midrash leaves out of the Sarah story is Sarah's deep love for her husband and child and her frustration at the conflict between herself and Hagar. The poems cited explore the nature of Sarah's power and powerlessness in her life and offer explanations of her behavior which conform to a contemporary feminist viewpoint, that is, rendering Sarah in a sympathetic light, attempting to come up with understandable reasons for her actions, and criticizing the patriarchal culture which shapes Sarah's life. Sarah, and all women, are like God in their creative power, and this also is exemplified in the writing of the poetry presented here. As Eve is constructed by many feminist biblical scholars (Pardes 54), Sarah is similarly shown as a collaborator with God and Abraham in perpetuating the Jewish people.

Chapter III

Rebecca

Rebecca, like Sarah, both quarrels and collaborates with God and man to assure the survival of her line. Louis Ginzberg, in his Legends of the Jews cites Jewish sources giving Rebecca's piety and difference in her beliefs from her own family as the very reason for her marriage to Isaac (312). Yet Savina J. Teubal portrays Rebecca as a woman determined to preserve her own pagan traditions, offering as evidence Rebecca's stealing of her father's household gods. According to Teubal, in her aforementioned Sarah the Priestess, Rebecca's behavior exemplifies that of an early Near Eastern priestess. By choosing the second child, Jacob, over the first child, Esau, Rebecca follows a Mideastern tribal tradition of ultimogeniture, probably the custom of Rebecca's homeland. Teubal explains Rebecca's participation in Jacob's usurpation of Esau's inheritance as complying with her people's tradition of ultimogeniture, rather than patriarchal primogeniture which is often, according to some feminist critics, inaccurately overlaid upon events of the Bible. That is, Rebecca insists that the second son be given the inheritance because this is the tradition of her ancestors. Teubal explains the controversy about the inheritances of Esau and Jacob as a struggle between cultures:

> We see then, that the birthright and the blessing, two different endowments, could be bestowed on either son—which implies that Rebekah's family at that time was not bound to one

> standard set of rules. This seems indicative of a period of transition, of a change in the social order involving this particular family. (45)

Offered by Teubal as further evidence of Rebecca's role as a priestess is her insistence that Jacob return to her homeland to find a wife. Teubal explains that Rebecca desires to preserve the customs of her people by having Isaac marry within her kinship group, thus preserving her matrifocal custom (42).

Shirley Kaufman draws upon such scholarship in her retelling of Rebecca's story. Rebecca's internal conflict over betraying her husband is evidenced by her expressions of inner turmoil: "I am disgusted with my life," and "What good will my life be to me?" (Gen. 27:46 qtd. in Teubal 46). Kaufman shifts the emphasis from the Bible's patriarchal thrust to a woman-centered narrative. Jacob is barely mentioned in Kaufman's "Rebecca," and Isaac is named only once. Esau, only "his brother," is not even given a name. The focus of "Rebecca" is Rebecca; the important aspect of the narrative is her deceiving Isaac. Jacob is a passive character; he lets his mother dress him like a small child. As Rebecca "wound the pelts around / his wrists, his smooth girl's neck, / and dressed him in his brother's clothes" (13-15), the meter becomes iambic, imitating the winding motion of the mother methodically dressing her son. Rebecca even says that "Jacob was slow to move" (8) although she herself was "quick about it" (7). With his "smooth girl's neck, "Jacob's only action is to skin the goats; he is a vulnerable boy who prefers staying at home with his mother to hunting with Esau. It sounds as if Jacob were reluctant to steal the blessing of his father, even though Esau had already traded it to him for a bowl of lentil soup. By

relegating Isaac, Jacob, and Esau to the background of her tale, Kaufman once again stresses the importance of women's roles in the Bible, in agreement with Teubal's assertion that "it becomes clear that the matriarch's story, the story of the women in Genesis, is not being told; it has been completely disregarded in favor of the story of the patriarchs" (46). In "Rebecca," Kaufman seeks to right this wrong by allowing Rebecca to tell her own story.

"Rebecca" is narrated in the first person, as opposed to the third person narration of the Bible. Her version of the story, differing from the original significantly, illustrates in just what ways women are to understand the Bible. The poetic voice in "Rebecca" is that of a woman sharing with a friend what she has done to "trick" (2) her husband. Rebecca's tone is matter-of-fact, portraying herself as a witch-like woman, "any / clever woman at her stew" (19-20), as if she were relating the story to a neighbor over tea. But Rebecca's final, ironic words belie her tone, and her acceptance of the male construct of woman as conniver, as ungodly, illustrates her inner conflict over deceiving Isaac.

Details are added to the original, like the hungry anticipation of Isaac as he hears the meat cooking: "Rocking, he hugged / his knees and heard the meat already / ticking in its grease" (3-5). The onomatopoeia in this line, missing in the Hebrew Bible, makes the story vivid and domestic in a way that the Bible does not. Rebecca notes the blood running from the pelts that she uses to describe Jacob, another added image that foreshadows Rebecca's deep regret for her deceit. As Jacob "stripped the goats" of their skins, so does he strip the birthright from Esau.

Rebecca invites the reader's participation as she shares, as if with a friend, her recipe for Isaac's favorite stew: "A pot / of deer, salt, and fresh herbs" (20-21) , and we wait with Rebecca, suspenseful, to see if the plan works. An onomatopoetic half-rhyme intensifies our experience: "It wasn't easy pacing inside my *flesh* / while Isaac ate, sucking my *breath* / between the cracks of my small *teeth* " (22-24, italics mine). "Flesh," "breath," and "teeth" imitate the noise Rebecca makes as she waits impatiently. As Rebecca waits, she is "pacing inside [her] flesh," recalling the way in which her two sons fought while still in her womb. Even though Jacob and Esau are no longer part of her body, their struggle is still within her. Kaufman breathes life into the story, drawing us in and making us feel that this is not a fable, but a real story that happened to a real woman, made all the more believable by the exacting detail .

Rebecca's responsibility for the deception is even more apparent in her feelings of remorse. Although she has been told by God that Isaac will inherit the birthright, she suffers for her cooperation in fulfilling the prophecy. In the Biblical version of the story, the episode is cast in vastly different terms; there is no hint of Rebecca's regret. When Rebecca becomes pregnant with the twins Esau and Jacob, she asks God why they are struggling in her womb and he replies:

> Two nations are in your womb,
> Two separate peoples shall issue from your body;
> One people shall be mightier than the other,
> And the older shall serve the younger. (Gen. 25: 23)

According to the Bible, Jacob's domination over Esau is predestined. That Rebecca favored Jacob may result from God's pronouncement that he, the

younger son, will rule over Esau. God's word is fulfilled in this same book when Esau sells his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew. So Rebecca is only a part of a sequence of events predicted (and, ostensibly, orchestrated by God) that awards the birthright to Jacob. Rebecca does not regret her actions because she is not responsible; she only fulfills the will of God. Kaufman, by attributing remorse to Rebecca, ascribes responsibility to her for what happens and challenges the predestination so tacitly accepted in the Bible.

Rebecca's bitterness is evident in the last lines of "Rebecca" when she paraphrases Isaac's blessing of Jacob. The blessing, which appears in the Bible as:

> May God give you
> Of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth,
> Abundance of new grain and wine.
> Let peoples serve you,
> And nations bow to you;
> Be master over your brothers,
> And let your mother's sons bow to you.
> Cursed be they who curse you,
> Blessed they who bless you. (Gen. 27:28-29)

is adopted to Kaufman's poem as follows:

> *Let people serve and nations bow*
> *to thee.*
>
> And all the rest. It stays
> in my ear like cramps. Blessed, Blessed. (34-37)

Kaufman changes the line breaks from the Biblical structure,[a] a breaking the line at "bow," emphasizing the subjection of one brother to the other. By engineering this subjection, Rebecca in a sense takes the active role and empowers herself, in a small way exchanging the usual patriarchal order in the Bible for a matriarchal one.

Rebecca also asks here for the reader's complicity, assuming by "And all the rest" that the reader knows the story and Biblical passage cited, but now is invited to share her version of it. And this same phrase is loaded with irony, bringing the sanctity of a father's blessing crashing down to earth. Now the reader disputes, with Kaufman, the importance of the blessing of God as well as fathers. These are just words. Rebecca changes the course of history through her actions, and Isaac's blessing is merely a reaction to her machinations. Kaufman devalues the father's blessing and the ability of the words of a man to change history, because in this poem, it is really Rebecca who decides what will happen. This is similar to the way Mindy Rinkewich, in "Sarah: Cheshbon haNefesh" scorns Abraham's demand for quiet, touching upon the feminist affirmation of a woman's creative power.

Isaac becomes the instrument of Rebecca's will. His feebleness is evident from Kaufman's description, adding emphasis to Rebecca's power over him:

Clumsy at noontime in his night,

---

[a] No matter which version of the Bible Kaufman was using, it is certain that the line breaks would be the same as in the version I am using. Parallelism is an accepted convention of Biblical verse; as a matter of fact, when translating the Bible it is one way of knowing you have found a poem. So in the lines, "Let peoples serve you / And nations bow to you," whatever variations might be in the translation of individual words, the lineation would follow the parallel syntax.

he wiped his mouth and shook the light
outside him, touching the wrong one.
His fingers, delicate as leaves,
dropped in the false skin. (29-33)

Isaac is old, "in his night," as he touches the "false skin" (or as we might hear it, false kin) with his trembling fingers, "delicate as leaves, "in his blessing. The "false skin" here can also represent the parchment used for holy documents, such as the Torah. This reference lends doubt to the validity of these documents, their laws, and their blessing by linking them to an image of a feeble old man blindly giving his blessing to his second son. More powerful is Rebecca, the matriarch, who deliberately accomplishes her goal: the assurance of the birthright for her son Jacob.

In this case, woman rules over man and then mourns the consequences of her actions. Kaufman marks this in the last lines of the poem, when Rebecca imagines that the unending repetition of Isaac's blessing "stays / in my ear like cramps" (36-37), calling to mind the curse laid on Eve much earlier in Genesis (3:16). The emotional price of effecting change is, like the curse of menstruation laid on Eve by a male God, a curse on women.

Like Sarah, Rebecca is shown by Kaufman to demonstrate a kind of power, yet her power has a price. Kaufman portrays Rebecca in a human light, just as the poets I have discussed portray Biblical matriarchs, giving her power but understanding the good and bad that come with it. In addition, rather than forcing her interpretation to conform in terms of a male constructed patriarchy, Kaufman's poem adds depth to scholarly research that seeks to prove that the historical matriarchs were strong women who behaved as they did for their own, woman-centered reasons.

Finally, worth mention for its humorous and down-to-earth feminist approach to Rebecca is an untitled poem by Barbara D. Holender, found, appropriately, in a feminist midrashic document, Taking the Fruit: Modern Women's Tales of the Bible. Holender's narrator, Rebecca, speaks from the point of view of a modern "Jewish mother," a stereotype not always seen as flattering or accepted by Jewish women. Holender tells us to lighten up, to enjoy the humor in the "Jewish mother" folklore, and not to worry so much about its political implications. She portrays Jacob as a "mama's boy" whom Rebecca trusts to "[take] care of his mama" (10) in her old age. Esau is her equally loved "bear of a boy" who is more interested in hunting and girls. Through her light tone and informal word choices, Holender good-naturedly reminds us of the long-lasting implications of a woman's actions, in her own way empowering the mother's role.

Poems about Rebecca, like traditional Midrash, confront the problematic issue of her deception of Isaac. Kaufman offers that Rebecca herself feels conflicted about tricking Isaac, and never comes to terms with her action. Holender, instead, playfully announces that Rebecca not only didn't have any regrets about duping Isaac, but also flippantly disregarded the effect of her guile on future generations. Rebecca, like her biblical sisters, is a controversial character. Her behavior is neither absolutely good nor absolutely bad. Women poets add deeper dimension to biblical interpretation of these women, not merely judging them harshly for their misdeeds or glorifying their more admirable accomplishments, but examining them in a new light which enables the modern reader and student to see and to celebrate their humanity.

Chapter IV

Leah and Rachel

If Shirley Kaufman empowers Rebecca by making her feel responsible for her actions, she empowers Leah in another way by attributing an awareness of her situation to her. Somehow, when one knows she is at a disadvantage, it makes it less of a disadvantage. Told in the first person, Kaufman's poem "Leah" once more embodies Kaufman's desire to allow the women in the Bible to speak for themselves. "Leah" retells the story of a rivalry between sisters in Genesis, in which Jacob (Rebecca's son) has contracted with Laban, the father of Leah and Rachel, to work for seven years in order to win Rachel's hand. When on his wedding night Jacob discovers that his veiled bride is actually Rachel's older sister Leah, he works for another seven years in order to marry Rachel. The poem's epigraph comes from Genesis 29:17: ". . . but Rachel was beautiful." The whole biblical verse reads, "Leah was dull-eyed, but Rachel was graceful and beautiful." Kaufman replaces with an ellipsis the Bible's description of Leah, that she was "dull-eyed" (Oxford) or as having "had weak eyes" (JPS). This epigraph may lead the reader to believe that the poem is about the contrast between Rachel's beauty and Leah's plainness. Yet what Kaufman has left out, that Leah had weak eyes, was interpreted by the Rabbis as a result of Leah's crying over the fact that since she was the oldest, she was destined to marry Esau, not Jacob: "So she wept, saying, 'May it be God's will that I not fall into the domain of the wicked Esau," said Rabbi

Yohanan. Added Rabbi Huna, "Great is prayer, for it nullified the decree, and not only that, but she came before her sister." (Neusner GR v.III 39-40). The Rabbis assume that Leah weeps because of men, that she is thinking about marriage: to them her weeping can only be on account of a man. While this may be so, other, less male-centered interpretations are possible but are not offered by the Rabbis.

Kaufman omits Leah's "weak eyes" from the epigraph for the very reason that she wants to focus on Leah's sense of sight, or insight. "Leah" is Kaufman's own midrash on what the writers of the Bible meant when they described Leah as "dull-eyed." Throughout the poem, she repeats the idea of light versus darkness: I watch you / every day," "I'm . . . the one pushed into your bed / at night," "Why can't you look at me / in daylight." Kaufman emphasizes the fact that the only time Jacob comes to Leah is at night, when he cannot see her. Conversely, Leah watches Jacob in the "daylight," as she wishes he would watch her. Looking at her in the light would mean acceptance to her, but Jacob's touch during the night means nothing.

Leah had no choice in marrying Jacob; her father determined that she should marry first because she was the elder of Laban's two daughters. This is evident in Kaufman's "I do what I have to do," a play on today's nuptial vow, "I do." Leah does not crave Jacob's touch, she says, yet she also says, "I watch you every day as you watch her." We question the reliability of Leah's narration. And later in the poem, Leah admits that she wants Jacob to desire her:

> Why can't you look at me
> in daylight, or take
> my hand and press it

against your mouth? (15-18)

Leah admits that she does have feelings; she is not empty inside as is Rachel.

Leah speaks of her own fertility, as contrasted with Rachel's barrenness. It is ironic to her that Rachel, the one who really is "a shell" is the one so desired by Jacob. The last lines of the poem, "Your sons have sucked me / empty and full" (24-25), accentuate this irony. Although Jacob has made Leah "full" in the creation of his children, the act of nourishing them has made her "empty." Here, Jacob's sons are not only the four, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, but their progeny as well. After Leah has given birth to four sons, she "for a while bore no children" (Genesis 29:35). So she is made empty by the birth of these four sons. The Rabbis in Genesis Rabbah explain this:

> . . . since the matriarchs had the expectation that this one would produce three sons and that one would produce three and the other would produce three and the fourth would produce three, once she had given birth to a fourth son, she said, "*This* time [in particular] I will praise the Lord" [since it is more than I had coming to me]. (GR v. III, p. 47)

That is, having given birth to more than her share of sons, the Rabbis said, Leah was prevented from having more children. Although Leah had more children by Jacob through her maid Zilpah, it was not until she purchased a night with her husband that she again became pregnant. It is said by Rabbi Abbahu in Genesis Rabbah, that

> The Holy One, blessed be he, discerned that her intent was only that it be on the condition of producing more tribes. Therefore

> it was necessary for Scripture to use the language [under other circumstances deemed coarse], "You must come in to me." (GR v. III, p. 58)

According to the Rabbis, Leah was made "full" again because her intention was a male-centered one. She wanted to increase the number of male children, that is, "producing more tribes." Only after Rachel's praying for a son was Leah's seventh child changed from a male embryo to a female. Because Jacob was destined to have twelve sons, this child had to be a daughter so that Rachel could bear a son. (GR. v. III, p. 60). In yet another sense, Leah is made "empty," but this time by Rachel. Only in this instance, Leah is empty only in the eyes of those who view female children as less valuable. So Leah is made empty in the sense that in the eyes of men focused on patrimony she is empty, or without a son, but Kaufman asserts that this is a male-constructed emptiness.

Barbara D. Holender's "Leah," like Kaufman's poem, explores Leah's bitterness over the love between Rachel and Jacob. Holender, too, plays upon the implied weakness in the Bible's description of Leah' s eyes. Although Leah may have "weak eyes," says Holender, here she possesses a sight that her sister and husband may not realize: "If I squint I can see him in the field, that Jacob / the shape that isn't a tree or a sheep" (1-2). Although Leah must squint, she has learned how to see in a way others cannot. Leah's ironic tone shows the reader that she is all too aware of her situation, even though she herself says, "They could do anything to me, those two, / and I wouldn't see it until it was too late" (5-6). Again, Leah calls attention to her eyes, and we know that she sees exactly what is going on between Rachel and Jacob. Although Leah has one sort of "power"—" here I sit in my tent /

exercising power" (11-12), she says—Rachel has Jacob's love. Leah sits in her "tent" (we can assume, also, in her maternity dress), watching Rachel and Jacob make love out in the field: "I watch till two shapes melt and sink" (4). Jacob and Rachel are coupling, an act mirrored in the structure of the poem . On the page, the title "Leah" sits alone, while the words of the poem are in couplets, illustrating Leah's exclusion from the loving pair.

Leah's resentment of her situation is given a full voice; she is allowed to talk back to those Biblical writers and commentators who constructed her the way she is. To some extent, however, Leah's ironic conclusion—"and here I sit in my tent / exercising power"—reveals her acceptance of male constructs. Leah, on one level, feels she really is strong because she is carrying Jacob's child. Yet she also feels helpless because she knows that her husband is with Rachel, rather than with her. Leah's conflicting feelings reveal the omnipotence she attributes to men, in that Jacob's company and the birth of his sons are validations of her own worth. Holender addresses in "Leah" an issue central to feminist Biblical poetry, to much feminist criticism of the Bible, and to other literature: power.

As with Sarah, a tradition of exploring Leah's physical appearance seems to evolve as one studies the poems about her. Lynn Saul offers two versions of Leah's story: the first is a modern parable of love, a sonnet in which the two sisters, Rachel and Leah, represent two sides of the same woman. In this poem, Saul combines the problems of the relationship between and Leah and Jacob and between Leah and Rachel. In "A Midrash on Leah," Rachel, beautiful and thin, is the woman the husband agreed to marry, and Leah, with her "awkward body" is the woman the husband sees "when the novelty wears off / (stanza break) or passion goes the way of

dirty dishes" (9-10). While Leah, the dutiful wife, is engaging in a nurturing task, or worse, involved in her own intellectual pursuits, her husband turns to her "slender sister Rachel." The final couplet reveals the end of the story: "he'll go back to your slender sister Rachel / Even today, he'll have her too." Saul explores the notion of sisterhood in "A Midrash on Leah." Sisters, to her, can be two sides of the same woman, or they can be two women competing for the same man, or both of these at once. Rachel, to this Leah, is both her younger, prettier self and her husband's young lover.

Lynn Saul's second Leah poem, "Leah Tells Rachel She Wants to Learn Not to Let Jacob Matter . . . ," moves toward a cooperation between the two sisters, ending with "a clean blanket / that might have room for us both." This poem, like "A Midrash on Leah," closely examines the relationship between herself and her sister. But implied is the impossibility of the "clean blanket," which carries an implication of the premarital chastity of an unused bed, which at this point in the story, is no longer unused. Both the sisters have been to bed with Jacob. Does this mean that there is no way to cooperate with another woman when there is a man involved?

In her poem "Rachel's Hunger," Helen Papell's narrator uses a matter-of-fact tone to explore the relationship between Rachel and her sister Leah. Leah narrates the tale of Rachel's desperation to give birth, which in the Bible leads Rachel to give Jacob one of her handmaids in order to have a child of her own. Ironically, Rachel's frustration with her barrenness is described as "I've seen Rachel tear at the strings / that sew her womb closed." Usually, sewing is seen as a woman's act of creation, so its use as a metaphor for childlessness is ironic.

Leah recounts her efforts to help Rachel almost coldly, echoed in her choice of metaphor for her own fertility: Leah's babies "drop like snowflakes," as a natural phenomenon, but not as a result of an act of love between her and Jacob. Leah doesn't describe her childbirth with motherly warmth. Her cool tone seems appropriate since there is no evidence of a loving relationship between herself and Jacob. While Rachel's "hungry eyes licked at the skin / of every passing child" (8-9), one can imagine Leah's hunger for Jacob. But Jacob wants only Rachel.

Like the Sarah of Mindy Rinkewich's "Sarah: Cheshbon haNefesh," Leah in Papell's version is aware of her appearance and realizes that it might be the reason for Jacob's distaste for her. Papell's Leah offers her own interpretation of Genesis 29:17. She attributes her unglamorous appearance to the fact that she "was a born root-healer. Why else / are my legs short and my eyes twisted?" (10-11) Leah's abilities as a healer are seen by her as a disadvantage because they make her unattractive to men. In this poem, as in the Bible, male standards are imposed upon women. Papell plays upon the literature saying that the matriarchs were part of a goddess culture, explaining Leah's "weak eyes" in a more positive way. Yet when Leah tells her sister in the poem "Jacob loved her" (6) she means that Jacob loves Rachel, and not Leah.

Leah used "powder of snake / killed on the entrance floor [of the caves they crawl in]" (14-15), an image mirroring the act of conception, as a cure for Rachel's infertility, but this was unsuccessful: "[Rachel] fell into a sleep / waking only to sing lullabies to a doll" (19-20). And the "mandrake tea" (18) that Leah gives Rachel in this poem as an infertility remedy (a known folk cure using mandrake, or mayapple) re-interprets the Bible's Genesis

30:14-16 where Leah buys the right to sleep with Jacob by giving Rachel mandrakes.[a] In a patriarchal setting, women are placed in opposition, just as Sarah and Hagar are opposed by the writers of Genesis and of Genesis Rabbah.

The poem comes full circle with its closing image of "the cave of crystals / that tie roof to floor with frozen strings" (21-23). These strings mimic the strings "that sew [Rachel's] womb closed" (2). It is unclear whether at the end Leah has been able to help Rachel have a child of her own. When Papell writes, "[Rachel] crawled to it on her belly / and suckled / until the shadow of a child's hand / touched her face" (24-27), Papell suggests that Rachel never does have her own child, just as it is written in the Bible. Rachel eventually had a child by sending one of her servants to Jacob, legally making the child Rachel's. But the child is not Rachel's biological child, and like the "cave of crystals" (21), Rachel's womb is permanently closed in Papell's "Rachel's Hunger."

The poem plays upon the conflict between the two women. In line three, when Leah says, "She's my sister, I don't know why / my babies drop like snowflakes" (3-4) there is an ambiguity. Line three alone sounds like "I don't know why she's my sister," but taken with the next line, the words mean "I don't know why Rachel is barren when I am so fertile." Leah, in Papell's poem, never reveals a warm sisterly concern for Rachel. She coolly

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[a] Genesis 30:14-16 reads as follows: "Once, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben cames upon some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." But she said to her, "Was it not enough for you to take away my husband, that you would also take my son's mandrakes?" Rachel replied, "I promise, he shall lie with you tonight, in return for your son's mandrakes." (JPS)

relays the facts of how she tried to help Rachel have a child. But by leading her to a cave that is closed just like Rachel's womb, her actions are suspect. It seems unlikely, at least on a metaphoric level, that a blocked cave would help a barren woman. Helen Papell's midrash on the story of Rachel and Leah does not change the adversarial relationship between the two women, but it does highlight the futility of their situation.

Although most of the poems discussed here portray Leah as the victim of the conflict between the two sisters, Dalia Ravikovitch's "Like Rachel" offers a different perspective. In keeping with some feminist interpretation of the story of Leah and Rachel, Ravikovitch's view is sympathetic to Rachel. "Like Rachel" explores the death of Rachel, which, like the deaths of other matriarchs of the Bible, is an event of import. Rachel's tomb, purported by scholars to be near Beth-Lechem, is visited on the new moon, or Rosh Chodesh, again linking feminine power to the moon, and is invested with the power of healing the sick (Encyclopaedia Judaica, "Rachel," 1490). Rachel died giving birth to her son Ben-Oni, renamed Benjamin by Rachel's husband Jacob. Ravikovich acknowledges Rachel's eventual motherhood, but also acknowledges that the Bible tempers any joy in it by having her die as a result. Ravikovitch's interpretation of Rachel's death is a celebration of Rachel's last moments: "To die like Rachel / That is what I want." Her husband and son, Jacob and Joseph, "spoke of her with awe" as she gave birth, yet when they buried her, "They laid her down among the mountain stones / And spoke no eulogy." Although Rachel does not speak in this poem, Rachel, in her final act of creation, has the last word.

Chapter V

Michal and Abishag

Like Rachel and other matriarchs these poets rewrite, Michal is barren. Her husband, David, produces sons through Bathsheba, whom he marries after he engineers the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah. Unlike Sarah and Rachel, who give birth late in life, Michal never has a child. The Bible construes this as a result of her disdain for David's joy in bringing the holy ark home to Jerusalem. Shirley Kaufman's version of Michal's story, "Michal," engages with the complexity of the relationship between David, Michal, and the poet. David has long been invoked by poets, male and female, as a sort of muse. His psalms and musical talent serve as inspiration for more recent poets. Kaufman, through a sometimes ironic speaker, struggles with her empathy with David as an artist while she acknowledges Michal's contempt for him.

The first stanza of "Michal" addresses the issue of female silence in the Bible, explicitly Michal's silence:

> That wife unsettles me. Michal
> at her window exhales propriety,
> worries about appearances
> while David jumps in the street.
> Her David tearing off his clothes,
> lifting his arms, their own
> wild plumage, dancing for God? (1-7)

These lines retell 2 Samuel 6:16: "As the Ark of the Lord entered the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord, and she despised him for it." She feels distaste and contempt for David's joyful demonstration, yet Michal stifles her own voice, and does not say anything to David. In these first lines of her poem, Kaufman condemns Michal both for her concern for "appearances" and for her silence. Some scholars have attributed Michal's anger at David to the fact that she sees his bringing the ark to Jerusalem as a political act of legitimating his kingship and his city by linking himself to Israel's past through the ark. Michal is upset by this because she thinks the kingship should remain in her father's family, not David's. An alternate interpretation is that Michal was upset by what Jo Ann Hackett calls her husband's unfaithfulness or his "abundant sexuality" when it came to women other than his wife. In any case, critics agree that Michal's punishment for her ill will is childlessness, resulting either from God's will or David's refusal to sleep with her. Hackett observes that "the punishment resembles the outburst in that it is for Michal both a sexual tragedy and a family tragedy, since it means that no children will be born to one of the few surviving offspring of Saul's house (Hackett, "1 and 2 Samuel" 91).

It seems as though the speaker of the poem berates Michal for looking down on David. The speaker seems to be a married woman, referring to Michal as "that wife" (as opposed to the speaker, who is also a wife). Michal "unsettles" the speaker, because of her concern with "appearances." This poem judges Michal for judging David. At the same time, the ending of the poem reveals sympathy for Michal:

Her handmaids dance him to their beds.
Their hands are cool. He stays
with them.
Michal? He never
sleeps with her again. (22-25)

There is a sense of loss in the rhythm of these lines--the question mark after Michal's name causes an interruption of Kaufman's dance-like rhythm of David going to his handmaids. Michal is left alone, questioning and childless. At the end of the poem, the way in which David celebrates his victory conflicts with the feminist view usually expressed by Kaufman. It has to be ironic when she implies that Michal deserves David's infidelity to her. David's faith in God contrasts with his lack of faith to his wife. The poet says that it is much more important to demonstrate faith in private observance, such as dedication to one's family. David's public display of sensuality does nothing to uplift him in the eyes of the poet.

Rather than be the leader of the Hebrews, David would prefer to "run with the sheep" (20). David here wishes to be a follower, a sheep instead of the shepherd. Although he was a shepherd as a boy, nothing here seems to say that David would like that societal role. Instead, he wants to be one of the sheep, following his sexual desires thoughtlessly, dancing naked in public and sleeping with Michal's handmaids. "Gardens / explode" (14-15) representing David's sinful behavior, echoing the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. Because of David's sin, his effort "To bring God home!" is hypocritical: rather than going home to Michal and fulfilling the mitzvot of marriage with her, David instead enters the beds of Michal's handmaids. Although Kaufman seems

ambivalent towards Michal at the beginning of the poem, by the end we know that she is sympathetic. Because of David's creative power, it is difficult for a poet to turn her back on him. It only serves to emphasize the magnitude of his wrongdoing that Kaufman ultimately judges him to be unrighteous.

And Kaufman's speaker does sympathize on some level with David's joyous demonstration of his spirituality. In order to nurture his faith, David must dance: "he has to / catch them on his skin, to leap / with each new pulse of fire" (10-12). Even nature feels a kinship with David: "The hills move back. The whole sky / stretches to make room. Gardens / explode. To bring God home!" (13-15) These three lines, enclosed in one stanza, embody David's exhilaration in bringing the holy ark to the holy city of Jerusalem, the city of David. David thinks that all of nature celebrates his victory with him.

In her poem "Michal, "Rachel Blaustein further investigates the internal strife of the poet's attitude toward David and of Michal's feelings for him. Blaustein's modern speaker acknowledges a kinship between herself and Michal: "Though years divide, we're sisters yet" (1). Like Michal, this woman feels a sense of loss as she watches her husband find pleasure elsewhere. Blaustein employs the images of a "red silk garment" still as bright as it was in Michal's time, and the tinkling of Michal's anklet and amulet calling to her over time. The speaker is linked to Michal through both sight and sound. Symbols of sensuality and mysticism, the anklet and amulet sound today as reminders of a woman's ties to her husband, like the wedding ring that encircles a finger, just as Michal's anklet circled her leg. Blaustein, like Kaufman, explores the struggle

between husband and wife, yet ends on a more uncertain note: "My sister, I can understand— / Who also love whom I despise" (7-8).

"Princess Michal's Song" by Rosalind Darrow, like Kaufman's "Michal," addresses the issue of David's unfaithfulness to his wife. Like David the poet, Michal in this poem writes a song, but it is not in praise of God. Rather, it is a lament for Michal's loneliness that is to come. The love songs that David sings to Michal are "not true." The "garland / of cob-webs and dew" that David and Michal weave is made of beautiful yet insubstantial, impermanent things, evaporating in the light of day and dissolving with a touch. Although David's words to Michal are "sweet," they are not to be trusted. Yet, even though David is unfaithful, Michal still loves him. This inner struggle of the problems of loving a man seems to be a central conflict in the poems written about Michal and other biblical figures by today's Jewish women. He "presses his lips / Upon each of her eyes," in a way, asking for her complicity in his infidelity to her. And Michal allows it, remaining in the garden alone after David goes "Away to the hills."

At the end of Darrow's poem, the garland image recurs, giving a circular structure to the poem: "And I shall weave / Garlands alone in the night" (23-24). "Garlands" also recalls the word "garden" of the first line of the poem, lending a somewhat conflicted connotation to the word "garland." The garden in Western thinking has long been linked to both innocence and sin, and Darrow plays upon both these meanings here. The garland, or fiction, that David and Michal weave together of their love, encompasses both the purity of Michal's love for David and her cynicism at knowing he will leave her. Like the garden of Eden, this paradise is only

temporary, soon to be corrupted by David's sin. Michal remains in the garden "alone," yet no longer innocent since she has knowledge of David's infidelity.

Poems about Abishag similarly explore the loss of innocence of a woman connected with David. Abishag was the young girl brought to David's bed to keep him warm in his old age:

> King David was now a very old man and, though they wrapped clothes round him, he could not keep warm. So his household said to him, "Let us find a young virgin for your majesty, to attend you and take care of you; and let her lie in your bosom, sir, and make you warm." So they searched all over Israel for a beautiful maiden and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. She was a very beautiful girl, and she took care of the king and waited on him, but he had no intercourse with her. (1 Kings 1:1-4)

Abishag develops into a political pawn after David dies, becoming a bargaining chip in negotiation between Adonijah (Solomon's rival for David's throne) and Bathsheba (Solomon's mother). Claudia V. Camp, in The Women's Bible Commentary, proposes that Adonijah tries to use Abishag as a "channel to power" by asking for her as his wife because she had belonged to David (100). As would be expected because of her passive role, Abishag is mentioned only a few times in the Bible and speaks not at all. The reader's only information about her is filtered through the third person narrative.

Louise Glück's two-part poem, "Abishag," written in the first person, provides a vessel through which Abishag speaks for herself. We

learn in the first part of this poem that Abishag goes reluctantly to serve David, and that, although the Bible says she remains a virgin, Abishag knows that "No one will touch [her] now" (29). After having shared David's bed, Abishag no longer views herself as pure. Abishag's duty towards David is yet another obligation she must fulfill for her father, who behaves as if he as asked nothing of her before:

> . . . my father turned to me saying
> *How much have I ever asked of you*
> to which I answered
> *Nothing*
> as I remembered. (8-11)

Abishag remembers how she is supposed to behave, and how she has conformed in the past. She remembers all that she has been asked to do by her father as she tells him what he wants to hear: that he has asked nothing from her. And she sees is unable to see her own face as she looks into a gourd, a dipper for a well (incidentally, in the Bible, wells symbolize woman's service to man and gourds often symbolize the womb):

> . . . the face
> was featureless
> of which they did not say
> *She has the look of one who seeks*
> *some greater and destroying passion* . (21-25)

As she examines her reflection in the water-filled gourd, Abishag envisions in a way her own rebirth, as her image emerges from the womb-like gourd. She sees nothing, as she has been taught to believe that she is nothing by her father, and she loses hope for ever being accepted for

herself rather than for her body. Abishag's service to her father is not even worth his remembering it. To others, as well as to herself, Abishag's inability to see her own reflection signifies ther passionate desire for self-destruction. She has been taught that her life is insignificant and that her body holds no other value than its use as a heater for King David.

The second part of Glück's "Abishag" reflects on what Abishag's life might have been like after King David no longer needed her; he was dead. The fact that Abishag remains a virgin seems not to matter to her—to Abishag and to her suitors, she is no longer untouched. She imagines being addressed by men as "my love," rather than by her name Abishag, perhaps an attempt to bury her past and create a new identity for herself. But Abishag knows this cannot happen; her despair causes her to desire death more than any suitor—to her, death is the only option she has. In her own eyes, her body might as well be dead, since to the men who shape her world, she is nothing more than a thing.

Shirley Kaufman's "Abishag," too, laments Abishag's being used as a prop or an object. She had as well been a water bottle, for all her value to the house of David:

> That's what they ordered
> for the old man
> to dangle around his neck,
> send currents of fever through his phlegmatic
> nerves, something
> like a rabbit fur, silky,
> or maybe a goat-hair blanket to tickle his
> chin.

Abishag sees herself as an amulet, an object used merely for her body heat. Like Glück, Kaufman explores the way in which Abishag is used for her body. Kaufman's contrast between the "phlegmatic" old man and the beautiful young girl, "silky," heightens the contrast between the two people, emphasizing the inappropriateness of Abishag's assignment. It seems perverted that a young girl is forced to lie next to a naked old man. Kaufman attributes the fact that David never "knew" Abishag to his impotence in his old age: "He can do nothing else / but wear her, pluck at her body / like a lost bird / pecking in winter" (9-12). There is nothing sensual about what goes on between David and Abishag. Kaufman portrays David as a carrion-eater, a metaphor which, if taken further, implies that Abishag herself is nothing more than a piece of rotting meat. Yet she is not dead: "She suffers the jerk / of his feeble legs. Take it easy, / she tells him, cruelly" (22-24). Abishag's resistance to David reveals her desire to be loved gently, though she must endure David's overtures.

Abishag and Michal emerge in modern poetry as representative of the poet's conflict. These women are obligated to David by the social rules of their time, yet their relationships with David are inequitable and unjust. Women poets have a similar relationship with David, king and poet, with whom many poets feel a strong kinship. David was a great poet and leader, but his treatment of the people in his life leaves much to be desired. A striking example is David's conspiracy to have Uriah killed in battle so he could marry Uriah's wife Bathsheba. Like Bathsheba, Michal, and Abishag, the Jewish women poets considered in this paper are constrained by an unfair society and confined within mysogynistic metaphorical

conventions. Here, they struggle to escape an oppressive patriarchal tradition.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The women poets I have discussed work toward changing the woman's status which resembles the moon's positioning as "lesser light" in the Bible. Like Zelda, who plays upon and reworks the image of the moon in her poem, "The Moon is Teaching Bible," these women draw upon familiar metaphors in order to reshape them in a modern feminist framework. They bring together ancient and modern biblical scholarship, educating their readers to both traditional and innovative interpretations of biblical narrative. Important in their poetry are the poets' acts of creating voices for female biblical characters. What is missing in the Bible, the matriarchs' earthy feminine responses to their lives' problems, can be found in modern Jewish women's poetry.

Although imposing one's own voice upon characters silenced in the Bible might be seen as yet another way of oppressing them, these poets, in contrast to the male compilers of the Bible, speak through and for biblical women from an empathic standpoint. Several approaches to revising the Bible have emerged from this study. Mindy Rinkewich and Lillian Elkin, for example, reject the silence imposed upon biblical women and imagine what they might say if they were allowed to speak. In Rinkewich's "Sarah: Cheshbon HaNefesh," Rinkewich imagines Sarah's assessment of her life, and in Elkin's "Sarah Talks to God," Sarah is given an opportunity to express her grievances to God about the unfairness of his demand. All this is

missing from the Bible's portrayal of silent and obedient wives. Annette Bialik Harchik, along with Lynn Saul, reaches toward bonding between women, and an understanding of the ways in which men sabatoge the relationships between women. Their poems about Sarah, and about Leah and Rachel, offer an alternative to the antagonistic relationships sometimes exacerbated by the love of the same man. Some poets incorporate interpretationsof the Bible that examine goddess-culture or earthy characteristics of the matriarchs. Louise Glück, finally, exploits the story of Abishag for her own agenda, overlaying her obsession with the separation of body and mind while at the same time, offering her own explanation of what this character might have felt.

Shirley Kaufman, having written so eloquently about all five Biblical women discussed here, serves in my view as a model for Jewish women's revisionist poetry. Shirley Kaufman's approach, for example, is to adopt the persona of a biblical woman in a sympathetic reading of her plight. Kaufman examines these women from a contemporary perspective, often narrating her poems through modern counterparts to the Biblical characters, or through a narrator who perceives her characters' thoughts.

These women poets exhibit different types of feminism, but their interpretations, closely connected with Jewish myth and ritual, agree that women deserve equal time in the Bible. Early biblical scholars may have made some effort toward understanding the motives of biblical women, but these modern women poets go even further, breaking the biblical silence to create their feminist revisions of the Bible. Perhaps these poets' respective relationships with David are the most fitting example of the woman poet's conflict. David, himself a poet, writes of the moon and of women as inferior

to male entities in the Psalms traditionally ascribed to him. As the embodiment of the psalmist, David represents the oppressive creative impulse of the male, like the Creator Himself who created the woman second, and made the moon subordinate to the sun. As it is written in Psalm 148:

> O praise the Lord.
> Praise the Lord out of heaven;
> praise him in the heights.
> Praise him, all his angels;
> praise him, all his host.
> Praise him, sun and moon;
> praise him, all you shining stars;
> praise him, heaven of heavens,
> and you waters above the heavens.
> Let them all praise the name of the Lord,
> for he spoke the word and they were created;
> he established them for ever and ever
> by an ordinance which shall never pass away. (Ps. 148:1-6)

—yet God's ordinance, his establishment of a patriarchal chain of being, does pass away—or at least undergoes a radical revision—in the poems discussed here.

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