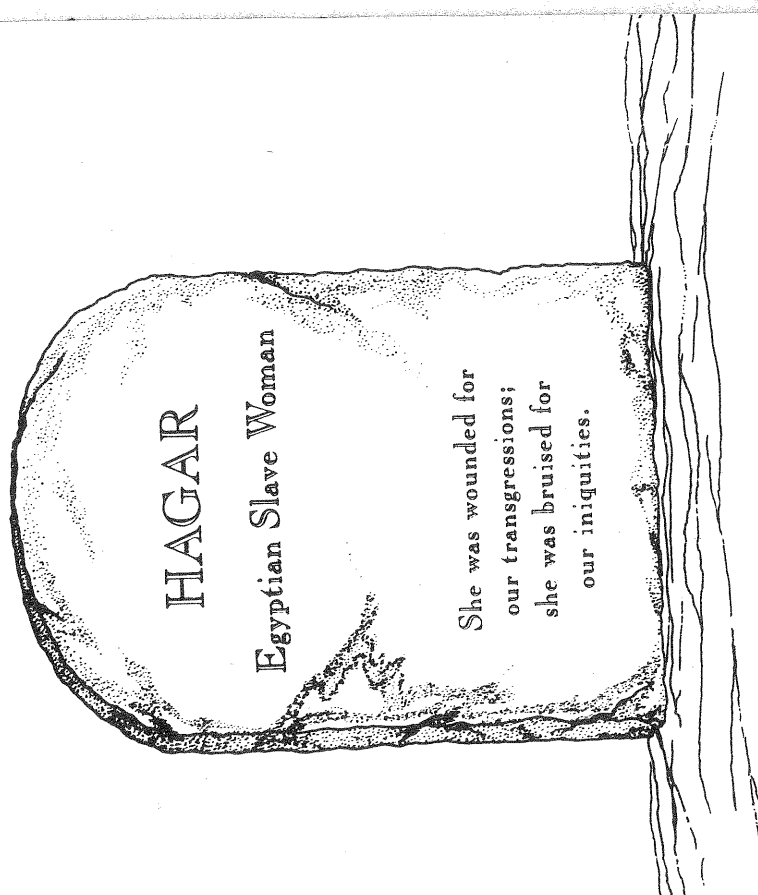


Genesis 16:1–16; 21: 9–21

Though Abraham prevails in scripture as the symbol of faith, his story pivots on two women, Sarah and Hagar, who shape and challenge faith. Their own stories diverge to give Sarah the better portion. Wife of a wealthy herdsman (Gen. 13:2), she holds privilege and power within the confines of patriarchal structures.¹ To be sure, on two occasions Abraham betrays her, passing her off as his sister to protect himself (12:10–20; 20:1–19),² but each time God comes to her rescue. Without effort, this woman along with her husband enjoys divine favor. Yet her exaltation poses major tension in Abram's story because "Sarai is barren; she has no child" (11:30, RSV*).³ Moreover, "it has ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (18:11, RSV*; cf. 17:17). Her situation would seem to thwart the divine promise of an heir for Abram.⁴ Hence, Sarai plans to secure a child through her maid Hagar, who becomes the other woman in Abram's life.

As one of the first females in scripture to experience use, abuse, and rejection, Hagar the Egyptian slave claims our attention. Knowledge of her has survived in bits and pieces only, from the oppressor's perspective at that, and so our task is precarious: to tell Hagar's story from the fragments that remain.

These fragments come from separate scenes in the Abrahamic saga.⁵ The first (16:1–16) precedes by several chapters and the second (21:9–21) just follows the birth of the child God eventually gives to Sarah herself.⁶ Similar structures and subjects order the scenes. In both, narrative introductions and conclusions surround two episodes. The opening episodes, located in Canaan, highlight Sarah as



she deals with Hagar and Abraham; the closing ones, located in the wilderness, feature Hagar encountering the deity. Besides providing continuity, these structural and content parallels between the scenes highlight their differences. For Hagar, the plot of the first story is circular, moving from bondage to flight to bondage, while the action of the second is linear, proceeding from bondage to expulsion to homelessness.⁷

A CIRCLE OF BONDAGE

Scene One: Genesis 16:1-16

A. *Introduction, 16:1.* The opening sentence of scene one emphasizes Sarai. Reversing the usual Hebrew word order, it places before the verb her name as subject. "Now Sarai, wife of Abram, did not bear a child to him" (16:1). The statement of the problem leads in the second half of the sentence to an answer. "But to her [was] an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar."⁸ Beginning with Sarai and ending with Hagar, the narrated introduction opposes two women around the man Abram. Sarai the Hebrew is married, rich, and free; she is also old and barren. Hagar the Egyptian is single, poor, and bonded;⁹ she is also young and fertile. Power belongs to Sarai, the subject of action; powerlessness marks Hagar, the object.

B. *Episode One, 16:2-6.* From the introduction the story moves to its first episode. At the beginning, Sarai speaks in the imperative mood.¹⁰ Dialogic order and verb construction match content to present this woman as the commanding figure. While confirming the problem and solution that the storyteller has reported, she makes subtle changes:

And Sarai said to Abram,
 "Because Yahweh has prevented me
 from bearing children,
 go to my maid.
 Perhaps I shall be built up from her."
 (16:2a)

Unlike the narrator, Sarai speaks of building up herself through Hagar rather than of bearing a child to Abram (cf. 16:1, 15). In a

man's world, the woman's voice sounds a different emphasis.¹¹ Further, unlike the narrator, she attributes her barren plight to Yahweh and thus seeks to counter divine action with human initiative. What the deity has prevented, Sarai can accomplish through the maid whose name she never utters and to whom she never speaks.¹² For Sarai, Hagar is an instrument, not a person. The maid enhances the mistress.

Sarai's words effect obedience. Abram makes no attempt to halt the plan; instead, he yields so passively that the storyteller must answer for him. "And Abram heard [obeyed] the voice of Sarai" (16:2b). Continuing to underline *his* acquiescence, the narrated discourse reports *her* action:*

Sarai, wife of Abram, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid,
 after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan,
 and gave her to Abram her husband, to him for a wife.
 (16:3)

Again in the structure of a sentence, two females encircle Abram (cf. 16:1). And they are unequally matched. As subject of the verb: *take* and *give*, Sarai exercises power over Hagar, the object. Though her actions relate the two women, the absence of dialogue maintains distance between them. Repeated use of the relational language wife/maid, husband, and wife accents the growing opposition. In making Hagar Abram's wife, not his concubine,¹³ Sarai has diminished her own status in relationship to this servant. But she still retains full control over Abram. As he first obeyed her voice in a narrated sentence of few words, so now he fulfills her command, "Go (*bō*) then, into (*el*) my maid" (16:2). "And he went (*bō*) into (*el*) Hagar" (16:4a, RSV).¹⁴ No mighty patriarch is Abram, but rather the silent, acquiescent, and minor figure in a drama between two women.

Sarai has spoken; Abram has agreed. Sarai has acted; Abram has obeyed. Next the plot shifts to Hagar, the one through whom Sarai wishes to be built up. Making the maid subject, not object, the narrator reports, "She conceived" (16:4b). Although this result is what Sarai wants, it prompts an insight on Hagar's part that her mistress:

* For an explanation of the underlinings in this and subsequent units, see the Preface p. xiv.

has not anticipated. "When she [Hagar] saw that she had conceived, her mistress was slight in her eyes" (16:4c). Hagar is other than a tool; for that difference Sarai has failed to allow.

The Hebrew expression "her mistress was slight (or trifling) in her eyes" inspires various interpretations. Many translators alter the syntax to make Hagar the subject of the verb. They also attribute to the verb (*qll*) the legitimate, though not necessary, meaning of contempt or disdain. Accordingly, one reads, "When she knew she was with child, she despised her mistress" (NEB); or "when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress" (RSV).¹⁵ Yet the verb with its correct subject also offers the less harsh reading that is present in the translation, "Her mistress was lowered in her esteem" (NJV).

Although strife between barren and fertile wives is a typical motif in scripture,¹⁶ in this study the typical yields to the particular. Seeing, that is, perceiving her conception of a child, Hagar acquires a new vision of Sarai. Hierarchical blinders disappear. The exalted mistress decreases while the lowly maid increases. Not hatred but a reordering of the relationship is the point. Unwittingly, Sarai has contributed to Hagar's insight. By giving Hagar to Abram for a wife, Sarai hoped to be built up. In fact, however, she has enhanced the status of the servant to become herself correspondingly lowered in the eyes of Hagar.

This unexpected twist provides an occasion for mutuality and equality between two females, but it is not to be. If Hagar has experienced new vision, Sarai remains within the old structures.¹⁷ Still in charge, she speaks to Abram, faulting him for the outcome of her plan and appealing to Yahweh for judgment. While she uses the same vocabulary as the narrator to describe Hagar's response, the words on her lips have a pejorative meaning:¹⁸

And Sarai said to Abram.

"May the wrong done to me be upon you!

I ('*ānōkî*) gave my maid to your embrace
but when she saw that she had conceived,
then I was slight in her eyes.

May Yahweh judge between you and me!"
(16:5, RSV*)

The mistress wants returned the superior status that she unintentionally relinquished in using Hagar. Further, she demands that her husband rectify the wrong because he holds authority over Hagar too. But Abram, speaking for the first time in this scene, chooses not to exercise power and thus remains passive.¹⁹

But Abram said to Sarai,

"Since your maid is in your hand,
do to her the good in your eyes."

(16:6a)

The idiom, "the good in your eyes," plays upon the reference to Hagar's eyes: "Her mistress was slight in her eyes." The vision of the mistress opposes the insight of the maid. What is good for the one is suffering for the other.

If Sarai's opening speech to Abram ordered the use of Hagar (16:2), her words to him now, with his reply, lead to the abuse of the maid. Succinctly, the narrator declares, "And Sarai afflicted her" (16:6b). Once again the two women meet unequally as subject and object, vanquisher and victim, and this time Hagar has lost her name (cf. 16:3). Moreover, the absence of dialogue continues to separate the females. Inequality, opposition, and distance breed violence. "Sarai afflicted her." The verb *afflict* (*nh*) is a strong one, connoting harsh treatment. It characterizes, for example, the sufferings of the entire Hebrew population in Egypt, the land of their bondage.²⁰ Ironically, here it depicts the torture of a lone Egyptian woman in Canaan, the land of her bondage to the Hebrews. Sarai afflicted Hagar.

In conceiving a child for her mistress, Hagar has seen a new reality that challenges the power structure. Her vision leads not to a softening but to an intensification of the system. In the hand of Sarai, with the consent of Abram, Hagar becomes the suffering servant, the precursor of Israel's plight under Pharaoh. Yet no deity comes to deliver her from bondage and oppression; nor does she beseech one. Instead, this tortured female claims her own exodus. "Sarai afflicted her, and so she fled (*brh*) from her"—even as Israel will later flee (*brh*) from Pharaoh (Exod. 14:5a). Thus, episode one closes with Hagar taking command of her own life under the threat of Sarai.

C. *Episode Two, 16:7-14*. The opening of episode two plays upon this ending:

And Sarai afflicted her.

So she fled from her.

But the messenger of the Lord found her.

(16:6b-7a)

In the first and third sentences, Hagar is the direct object of verbs with different subjects. While the afflicting of her by Sarai is hostile treatment, the finding of her by the deity holds uncertain meaning. The divine action may either counter or confirm Sarai's action. If the finding counters the afflicting, then the flight of Hagar in the middle of the sequence signals a new direction that the deity enhances, encourages, and, in fact, empowers. But if the finding confirms the afflicting, then the flight of Hagar is a futile activity that the deity circumscribes, controls, and, in fact, cancels. The juxtaposition of the three sentences poses ambiguity in the development of the narrative. Resolution awaits further action by the messenger of the Lord.

Before continuing with the divine action, the storyteller provides a brief note about Hagar's location. Like Israel in years to come, this runaway pregnant maid has fled from the house of bondage to the wilderness. For her it is a hospitable place, symbolized by a spring on the way to Shur, a region at the Egyptian border.²¹ There, with water to nourish life, Hagar is almost home. How different are her circumstances from Israel's exodus! When "Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur, they went three days in the wilderness and found no water" (Exod. 15:22, RSV). Indeed, Moses had to ask the Lord for water. But Hagar does not cry out to any god, most especially not to Yahweh whose action in closing Sarai's womb has brought affliction to the maidservant. Nevertheless, like Moses, Hagar encounters deity after she has fled from her oppressor (cf. Exod. 2:15b-16; 3:1-2).²² The messenger of Yahweh finds her by the spring of water in the wilderness. This Egyptian maid is the first person in scripture whom such a messenger visits.²³

Speech alone reveals the divine presence. "Hagar, maid of Sarai,

from where have you come and where are you going?" (16:8a, RSV). For the first time a character speaks to Hagar and uses her name. The deity acknowledges what Sarai and Abram have not: the personhood of this woman. Yet the appositive, "maid of Sarai," tempers the recognition, for Hagar remains a servant in the vocabulary of the divine. Rather than freeing her from a human bond of servitude, "the messenger of the Lord" (16:7) addresses "the maid of Sarai" (16:8). These relational identifications pose a striking contrast even as they harbor a parallel meaning. To be "of Sarai" is to be "of the Lord."

"From where have you come and where are you going?" The questions embody origin and destiny. In answering, Hagar speaks for the first time. Exodus from oppression liberates her voice, though full personhood continues to elude her. Subtly, the narrator suggests this limitation by omitting her name throughout the entire episode, most particularly in the introductions to her speeches.²⁴ Only feminine verb forms or pronouns identify Hagar. She herself acknowledges this incompleteness of personhood in replying to the divine question, "From where have you come?" While she answers in the same syntactical order that the question was posed, she transforms the content of both the prepositional phrase and the verb. "And she said, 'From the face of Sarai, my mistress, I ('*ânôkî*) am fleeing'" (16:8b). "From where have you come?" From a place she has not come; rather, from a person she is fleeing. Matching the messenger's designation, "maid of Sarai," the phrase, "Sarai my mistress," indicates the continuing power of the social structure. Exodus from oppression has not secured freedom for Hagar. She continues, however, to resist. "I ('*ânôkî*)," she says emphatically, "am fleeing." This *I* stands over against the *I* ('*ânôkî*) of Sarai (16:5). Powerlessness defies power.

"Where are you going?" is the second question. Hagar seems not to answer. Or is departure her destiny? After all, the wilderness signifies escape from oppression, nourishment of life, and revelation of the divine. But if for her departure is destiny, for the messenger of the Lord a different answer prevails. The appositives, "maid of Sarai," and "Sarai my mistress," indicate that the past invades the present to shape the future. Hence, wilderness is not destination but

point of return. "The messenger of the Lord" has found "the maid of Sarai" in order to tell her where she is going. And the divine command merges origin and destiny: "Return to your mistress, and suffer affliction under her hand" (16:9). Truly, to be "of Sarai" is to be "of the Lord."

Double imperatives underscore the severity. By itself the order "Return to your mistress" might mean reversion to the beginning when servitude existed apart from harsh treatment. But the second command negates such an interpretation: "Suffer affliction under her hand." The verb (*ʾnh*) is the same word used for Sarai's earlier abuse of Hagar (16:6b). Further, the phrase, *under her hand*, echoes Abram's reply to Sarai, "Look, your maid is in *your hand*; do to her the good in your eyes" (16:6a).

Without doubt, these two imperatives, return and submit to suffering, bring a divine word of terror to an abused, yet courageous, woman. They also strike at the heart of Exodus faith. Inexplicably, the God who later, seeing (*r'h*) the suffering (*ʾoni*) of a slave people, comes down to deliver them *out of the hand* of the Egyptians (Exod. 3:7-8) here identifies with the oppressor and orders a servant to return not only to bondage but also to affliction.²⁵ Thus, the ambiguity present at the beginning of this episode finds its resolution in the approval of affliction. "Sarai afflicted her" (16:6b) and "the messenger of the Lord found her" (16:7a) are parallel in form and meaning. Surrounded by these sentences, Hagar's flight is futile.

To be sure, two promises attend the divine command to return and suffer affliction, but each is fraught with ambivalence.²⁶ The first assures Hagar of innumerable descendants. "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (16:10, RSV). While all the patriarchs of Israel hear such words,²⁷ Hagar is the only woman ever to receive them. And yet this promise to her lacks the covenant context that is so crucial to the founding fathers.

From this assurance of innumerable descendants the focus narrows, in the second promise, to the birth announcement of a child.²⁸ Although Hagar knows that she is pregnant, the divine messenger sanctions what has come through human machinations. The annunciation has three basic elements: the prediction of the birth of a male child, the naming of the child, and the future life of the child.²⁹

Truly you are pregnant
and will bear a son.

You will call his name Ishmael,
for Yahweh has paid heed to your affliction.

He will be a wild ass of a man,
his hand against everyone and everyone's
hand against him.

And against the face of all his brothers
he will dwell.

(16:11-12, RSV*)

As the first to receive an annunciation, Hagar the Egyptian is the prototype of special mothers in Israel.³⁰ For her the unborn child signifies not just comfort but also suffering. The name Ishmael ("God hears") affirms the two meanings.³¹ While Hagar has never cried out to God, the deity pays heed to her past affliction (*ʾnh*; 16:6) by assuring her a future through the son.³² The promise would seem to negate Sarai's plan to be built up through Hagar.³³ Thus hope prevails. On the other hand, the deity has already paid heed to Hagar's affliction by ordering her to submit further (*ʾnh*; 16:9) to Sarai in the present. Suffering undercuts hope. A sword pierces Hagar's own soul. The divine promise of Ishmael means life at the boundary of consolation and desolation.

The ending of this birth announcement turns from mother to son. Concern for the male deflects interest from the female. Ishmael is to be a wanderer and loner, in strife even with his own people. Two words in the description, however, reflect Hagar's story: *hand* and *face*. "His *hand* [will be] against everyone and everyone's *hand* against him" (16:12b). Such language recalls Abram's words to Sarai, "Look now, your maid is in your *hand*" (16:6), as well as Yahweh's orders to Hagar, "Return to your mistress and suffer affliction under her *hand*" (16:9). If Hagar lives under the hand of Sarai, the hand of Ishmael will engage in ceaseless strife against such power. Indeed, "against the *face* of all his brothers he will dwell" (16:12c). The word *face* builds upon his mother's action when she said, "From the *face* of Sarai my mistress I am fleeing" (16:8). In Ishmael, Hagar's story continues.

Responding to these ambivalent promises from the heavenly messenger, Hagar "calls the name of Yahweh who has spoken to her"

(16:13a). The expression is striking because it connotes naming rather than invocation. In other words, Hagar does not call *upon* the name of the deity (*qr' bšm yhw'h*; cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:4). Instead, she calls the name (*qr' šm-yhw'h*), a power attributed to no one else in all the Bible. "She calls the name of Yahweh who has spoken to her, 'You are a God of seeing'" (16:13b).³⁴ The maid who, after seeing (*r'h*) her conception of a child, had a new vision of her mistress Sarai (16:4), now, after receiving a divine announcement of the forthcoming birth, sees (*r'h*) God with new vision.³⁵ Hagar is a theologian. Her naming unites the divine and human encounter: the God who sees and the God who is seen.³⁶

To this name she attaches an explanation. It yields confusion because the Hebrew is obscure. "For she said, 'Have I even here seen (*r'h*) after the one who sees (*r'h*) me?'" (16:13c).³⁷ Perhaps Hagar is questioning her own understanding of the revelation she has just received. The God who sees her remains unclear to her. Following this elusive comment, the narrator adds an aetiological note identifying her location as "the well of the living one who sees (*r'h*) me" (16:14a). But the connection between her words and her locale is also nebulous.³⁸ In the end, then, the meaning of Hagar's question remains uncertain. We know only that the maid who names the deity "God of seeing" must return to the suffering that Yahweh imposes upon her, specifically to the mistress who is slight in her eyes. A circle of bondage encloses Hagar.

D. *Conclusion, 16:15-16.* Of her return and affliction under Sarai the storyteller says nothing. Instead, scene one concludes with a formulaic report of the birth of Ishmael that exalts Abram:³⁹

And Hagar bore to Abram a son,
and Abram called the name of his son,
whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.
Now Abram was eighty-six years old
when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

(16:15-16, RSV*)

The very first word of the story was Sarai (16:1); the last is Abram. The introduction sounded the negative note, "did not bear a child to him." The conclusion responds with the positive word, "bore

Ishmael to Abram." Moving the story from a sad beginning to a happy ending is Hagar. Yet throughout, her own story runs counter to this movement.

Not surprisingly, the narrated ending continues to undermine Hagar. First, though it restores her name, it silences her voice. Second, it stresses not her motherhood but the fatherhood of Abram, whom the messenger of Yahweh never mentioned. Third, in reporting that Abram named the son Ishmael, it strips Hagar of the power that God gave her. Moreover, the ending undercuts Sarai. The one who spoke of building up herself, not Abram, through Hagar's child receives no mention at all. Neither Hagar nor Sarai but Abram has a son whom he names Ishmael. Patriarchy is well in control. This conclusion to a scene otherwise focused on women resumes Abram's story.

THE WAY OF TRANSITION

Genesis 17:1-21:8. The resumption of Abram's story brings changes to all the characters. No longer Abram and Sarai, the patriarch and his wife become Abraham and Sarah (17:5, 15). Hagar disappears, but her story remains. Ishmael becomes the object of divine rejection precisely because Hagar, not Sarah, is his mother (17:15-21). Thus Abraham's story continues to pivot on these two women, and again Sarah receives the better portion: the divine promise of her very own son (18:1-15).⁴¹ Yet the patriarch laughs to herself about the possibility of bearing a child in her old age (18:12). Unlike Hagar, Sarah is never the recipient of a birth announcement. In fact, Yahweh speaks to her just once, and then with a curt reprimand for disbelieving laughter (18:15).

Promise and delay, doubt and deception move to the advent of Isaac whom Sarah bears to Abraham through the grace of God (21:1-8).⁴² Her response to this miraculous birth suggests that she is built up, not in herself, however, but in giving Abraham a son:

Who would have said to Abraham,
"Children Sarah will nurse"?
Yet (*kt*) I have borne him a son
in his old age.⁴³
(21:7, RSV*)

What the culture expects of Sarah, what she has tried to accomplish

through her maid, God has at last given her. Yet, rather than alleviating her trouble with Hagar, the presence of Isaac intensifies it. Hence, additional fragments of Hagar's story emerge in a second scene.

A LINE TO EXILE

Scene Two: *Genesis 21:9-21*

Though similar in design to scene one, scene two has a more complicated plot. Ishmael and Isaac enlarge the cast of characters to bring other changes. In contrast to its parallel (16:2-6), the first episode (21:9-14abc) portrays Sarah speaking less while accomplishing more, Abraham not speaking but resisting, God intervening directly, and Hagar suffering increasingly.

A. *Introduction and Episode One, 21:9-14abc.* The narrator introduces the story by hinting at further tension between the two women. Sarah provokes it.

Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian,
whom she had borne to Abraham, playing.⁴⁴
(21:9, RSV*)

The description "the son of Hagar the Egyptian" highlights mother, not child. The phrase "whom she had borne to Abraham" recalls Sarai's role in making Hagar Abram's wife. And the verb *see* (*r'h*), which describes Sarah's activity, earlier reported Hagar's response to pregnancy: "When she saw (*r'h*) that she had conceived, her mistress was slight in her eyes" (16:4c). Now Sarah sees the fruit of this conception. Thus, enmity persists between the Hebrew mistress and her Egyptian maid.

What the narrator suggests, Sarah's words confirm, indeed exacerbate. Constructing opposition on inequality, she commands Abraham:

Cast out (*grš*) this slave woman and her son,
for the son of this slave woman will not inherit
with my son, with Isaac.
(21:10, RSV*)

The presence of Ishmael in Canaan plagues the future of Isaac,

whose inheritance is threatened.⁴⁵ In her move to eliminate the danger, Sarah debases Hagar and Ishmael while exalting herself and Isaac. The phrase "her son," without the name Ishmael,⁴⁶ counters "my son . . . Isaac." The description "this slave woman," rather than "my maid" (cf. 16:2), increases distance between Hagar and Sarah.⁴⁷ Not only is the possessive adjective *my* missing, but also a change in nouns connotes a change in status. From being a maid (*šiphā*) to Sarai in scene one, Hagar has become a slave (*'āmā*), serving the master of the house as his second wife.⁴⁸ By contrast, Sarah, the first wife, enjoys power greater than ever because she has born a son. As the life of the mistress has prospered, the lot of the servant woman has worsened.⁴⁹

With a disturbing twist, the words of Sarah anticipate vocabulary and themes from the Exodus narrative. When plagues threatened the life of his firstborn son, Pharaoh cast out (*grš*) the Hebrew slaves.⁵⁰ Like that monarch, Sarah the matriarch wants to protect the life of her own son by casting out (*grš*) Hagar the slave. Having once fled from affliction (16:6b), Hagar continues to prefigure Israel's story even as Sarah foreshadows Egypt's role. Irony abounds.

According to the storyteller, Abraham disapproves of Sarah's order and so departs from his usual acquiescent role. His vision, however, encompasses only his son Ishmael. Hagar his wife he neglects altogether.

The matter was very distressing (*r'c*)
in the eyes of Abraham
on account of ('*al* 'ōdōt) his son.
(21:11)

Yet his resistance simply strengthens Sarah's power, for God sides with her. Consequently, the deity alters Abraham's vision.⁵¹

Do not be distressed (*r'c*) in your eyes
on account of ('*al*) the lad
and on account of ('*al*) your slave woman.
(21:12a)

Although most of this command repeats the narrated language, the changes merit attention. To minimize Abraham's relationship to Ishmael, God calls him "the lad" rather than "your son." Moreover, the deity describes Hagar not as "your wife" but as "your slave

woman," a description that tellingly emulates the vocabulary of Sarah (21:10). If Abraham neglected Hagar, God belittles her.

In a second imperative, the deity explicitly confirms Sarah's order: "Everything that Sarah says to you, heed her voice" (21:12b; cf. 16:2).⁵² A reason follows: "For in Isaac will be named to you descendants" (21:12c). In the midst of Sarah's triumph, the word *descendants* (*zr'*) recalls Hagar's story. Long ago in the wilderness, the messenger of Yahweh said to her, "I will greatly multiply your descendants" (*zr'*). That promise was made to Hagar alone, without reference to the father of her child (16:10). Juxtaposed, these two promises of progeny, first to Hagar through Ishmael and now to Abraham through Isaac, seem to allow Hagar the singular honor of being the female ancestor of a nation.⁵³ This interpretation falters, however, in light of God's closing words to Abraham:

Also (*gam*) the son of the slave woman
a nation I will make,
for your descendant (*zr'*) he is. (21:13)

The syntax of the sentence places object before verb, thereby highlighting the child of the slave woman. For Hagar, the apparent afterthought is devastating because it shifts descendants from her to Abraham. In various ways, then, Sarah, Abraham, God, and even Ishmael all diminish Hagar.

To protect the life of her own child, Sarah commands Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman and her son . . ." (21:10a). Supporting Sarah, God orders Abraham to obey. Though these instructions fore-shadow themes and vocabulary of the Exodus story, the difference is again terrifying. When Pharaoh cast out (*grš*) the Hebrew slaves to save the life of his firstborn,⁵⁴ God was on their side to bring salvation from expulsion. By contrast, the deity identifies here not with the suffering slave but with her oppressors. Hagar knows banishment rather than liberation.

Abraham obeys Sarah and God to become the active agent in the suffering of Hagar (cf. 16:3, 6). The husband expells his slave wife and the father his son, although, in reporting these events, the narrator omits the relational ties. Abraham himself does not speak, but he does give bread and water to the outcasts. Such provisions suggest a precarious future for mother and child.

So Abraham rose early in the morning,⁵⁵
and took bread and a skin of water
and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her
shoulder, along with the child.⁵⁶
(21:14abc, RSV)

By using the name Hagar at the end of this episode, the storyteller matches the emphasis of the beginning (21:9). Abraham's last deed maintains this focus: "He sent her [not them] away" (21:14d, RSV). Like the verb *cast out*, this one (*send*) also anticipates vocabulary from the Exodus story, with a disturbing twist. As the act of Pharaoh, the verb *send away* (*šlh*) connotes freedom for the Hebrew slaves; as the act of Abraham, it means banishment for an Egyptian slave.⁵⁷ All the talk about Hagar has resulted in action against her. On this negative note, episode one concludes.

B. *Episode Two, 21:14e–19*. Though in scene one Hagar fled from Sarai, this time she has no escape. She must do what Sarah, God, and Abraham impose upon her. Their command determines her exit. "She departed" (21:14e) responds to the statement, "he sent her away" (21:14d).⁵⁸ Whereas in the Exodus traditions the verb *depart* (*hlk*), as the response to *send away* (*šlh*), describes what the Hebrews want to do,⁵⁹ in Hagar's story this corresponding action is what the slave woman must do. Identical words and similar themes tell opposing stories. Departing her land of bondage, Hagar knows not exodus but exile.

A second verb gives her destination: "She wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba" (21:14f, RSV*). In reference to physical movement, the verb *wander* (*šh*) connotes uncertainty, lack or loss of direction, and even destitution.⁶⁰ Since this word never describes the action of the Hebrews after the departure from Egypt, its use for Hagar indicates a wilderness experience different from theirs. Sent away from the land of bondage, "she departed and wandered in the wilderness. . . ." Through the pronoun *she*, Hagar becomes the subject of active verbs for the first time in this scene. If banishment is not liberation, nevertheless, it moves her toward personhood. The movement begins episode two.

In contrast to its parallel in scene one, this wilderness episode comprises two sections. The first (21:14e–16) depicts Hagar alone with her child; no divine messenger finds her by a spring of water.

In fact, unlike the region of Shur, the territory of Beersheba provides no water at all.⁶¹ Furthermore, it does not border Egypt. Receiving Hagar in forced exile rather than voluntary flight, this wilderness is an arid and alien place. It offers a deathbed for the child.

When the water in the skin was gone,
she left⁶² the child under one of the bushes.
(21:15, RSV*)

Using "the child" (*yld*) rather than "her child" or "her son," the storyteller suggests emotional distance that becomes physical distance.

Then she went and sat down over against him
a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot.⁶³
(21:16a, RSV)

Unlike the bush (*sēneh*) in the wilderness of Horeb (Exod. 3:2), the shrub (*śtāh*) under which the boy lies reveals no messenger of the Lord in a flame of fire.⁶⁴ In despair, Hagar contemplates the imminent death of the child. It is more than she can manage. For the only time in this entire scene, she speaks,⁶⁵ though her utterance is perhaps interior thought.⁶⁶ Deepening the portrait of this woman, the words suggest suffering and isolation in the wilderness of exile. "For she said, 'Let me not see (*r'h*) the death of the child'" (21:16b, RSV*). Having once seen (*r'h*) her conception of the child and also having seen (*r'h*) the God who sanctioned that new life (16:4, 13), the mother now seeks to block her vision of its demise. Like the narrator (21:15), she uses a vocabulary of distance. She speaks of "the child" rather than of "my child" or "my son." Directed to no one, these last words of Hagar surrender to death.

Hagar wept. Pointedly, the Hebrew text says, "She lifted up her voice and she wept" (21:16c). From ancient times, however, translators have robbed this woman of her grief by changing the unambiguous feminine verb forms to masculine constructions.⁶⁷ Such alterations make the child lift up his voice and weep. But masculine emendations cannot silence Hagar. A host of feminine verb forms throughout this section witness unmistakably to her tears: she departed and she wandered in the wilderness; she found a place for the child to die; she kept a vigil; and she uttered the dread phrase, "the death of the child." Now, as she sits at a

distance from death, *she* lifts up her voice and *she* weeps. Her grief, like her speech, is sufficient unto itself. She does not cry out to another; she does not beseech God. A madonna alone with her dying child, Hagar weeps.

Of the few fragments that disclose Hagar's story, this section alone (21:14e-16) depicts her apart from all other major characters. Though the child is dying, the narrated focus remains steadily upon the mother: her actions, her thoughts, her words, her emotions. With one minor exception (21:15a), she is the subject of every verb. But her powerlessness is present in the absence of her name. Moreover, as subject she is also object, having been cast out into the wilderness. While the wilderness she chose in scene one was hospitable, yet fleeting, the wilderness imposed upon her in scene two is hostile, yet enduring. Thus this one symbol embodies for Hagar the polarities of life and death.

In time to come Israel will experience these polarities as its triumphal flight to freedom becomes forty years of life in the wilderness. Unlike Hagar, Israel will complain; it will murmur and rebel; it will demand food and water.⁶⁸ Yet throughout, God will be on Israel's side. With Hagar, the reverse happens. God supports, even orders, her departure to the wilderness, not to free her from bondage but to protect the inheritance of her oppressors.

If in the first section of this episode (21:14e-16) Hagar receives major attention, in the second (21:17-19) she begins to recede as the child comes to the forefront. God makes the difference. Narrated phrases at the ending and the beginning of the two sections signal the change. Hagar "lifted up her voice and wept" (21:16c) yields to "God heard the voice of the lad" (21:17a). A change in vocabulary from "the child" (*yld*) to "the lad" (*n'r*) also indicates this transition.

Although the mother's weeping elicits divine silence, the lad's voice evokes divine speech. But instead of finding Hagar in the wilderness (16:7), the messenger of God calls to her remotely "from heaven." As on the first occasion, the deity asks a question, addressing her by name: "What troubles you, Hagar?" (21:17c, RSV). Unlike the parallel occurrence (16:8), Hagar, the outcast rather than the fugitive, has no opportunity to reply. God continues to speak. Whereas in her exodus she answered the Lord, in her exile she

listens to a deity who is concerned primarily with her son: "Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is" (21:17d, RSV).⁶⁹ When speaking to Hagar about her child, God never uses the noun *son* or the adjective *your*. The deity follows the lead of the narrator by referring to Ishmael as "the lad." Subtly, the motherhood of Hagar is undercut.

"Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is." This divine word of assurance confirms the shift from madonna to child that the storyteller has introduced. In continuing, God exalts "the lad" while making Hagar his support:

Arise, lift up the lad
and hold him by your hand,
for I shall make him a great nation.
(21:18, RSV*)

Unlike the revelation in scene one, the utterance contains no promises to Hagar (cf. 16:10). After all, the promise that *her* descendants would be innumerable has already passed to Abraham (21:12-13), and through him it comes to rest on the son. Hagar decreases as Ishmael increases. Having lived under the hand of her mistress Sarai (16:6, 9), this woman must now lift up the hand of "the lad."

Theophanic speech resolves the plight of the outcasts. In reporting the aftermath, the narrator depicts the woman serving the child, as God has decreed.

Then God opened her eyes,
and she saw a well of water;
and she went and filled the skin with water,
and she gave the lad a drink.
(21:19, RSV)

Once more visual language attends Hagar. At the beginning of this episode, when the water in the skin was gone, she said, "Let me not see (*r'h*) the death of the child" (21:16b, RSV*). Now, as God opens her eyes, she sees (*r'h*) a well of water,⁷⁰ fills the skin, and gives the lad a drink. Life overcomes death. Yet this language of sight contrasts with the conclusion of Hagar's earlier sojourn in the wilderness. On that occasion she was the theologian who named Yahweh God of seeing (16:13). This time her voice ceases and her vision changes. She sees not God but material resources to nourish

her child in the wilderness of exile.⁷¹ From bondage to expulsion to homelessness, scene two brings Hagar's story to its close.

C. *Conclusion, 21:20-21.* Years pass with Hagar serving Ishmael. At first, the narrator credits only the deity.

And God was with the lad;
and he grew up and lived in the wilderness,
and he became an expert with the bow.
(21:20, RSV*)

Ishmael prospers. For him the wilderness becomes home and provides work. To complete the picture, the storyteller turns from the providence of God to the activity of Hagar. For the last time she appears as a character in the Hebrew Bible,⁷² and for the first time she is called mother. Yet Ishmael is still "the lad," not her son. Continuing to serve, the mother finds him a wife.

He lived in the wilderness of Paran;⁷³
and his mother took for him a wife
from the land of Egypt.
(21:21, RSV*)

The choice of a wife for Ishmael highlights tension in Hagar's story. Having at first promised her innumerable descendants (16:10), God later transferred that promise to Abraham (21:13). In her last act, Hagar guarantees that these descendants will be Egyptians.⁷⁴ Thus the mother suggests for herself a future that God has diminished. On this poignant note Hagar's story ends, but the reader's response does not.

REFLECTIONS ON HAGAR'S STORY

Belonging to a narrative that rejects her, Hagar is a fleeting yet haunting figure in scripture. To recover her story from the fragments that remain is a precarious task; nevertheless, it yields an abundance of hermeneutical reflections. In many and varied ways, Hagar shapes and challenges faith.

Read in light of contemporary issues and images, her story depicts oppression in three familiar forms: nationality, class, and sex.⁷⁵ Hagar the Egyptian is a maid; Sarah the Hebrew is her mistress. Conflicts between these two women revolve around three males. At

the center is Abraham, their common husband. To him belong Ishmael, child of Hagar, and Isaac, child of Sarah. Through their husband and his two sons these females clash. From the beginning, however, Hagar is powerless because God supports Sarah. Kept in her place, the slave woman is the innocent victim of use, abuse, and rejection.⁷⁶

As a symbol of the oppressed, Hagar becomes many things to many people. Most especially, all sorts of rejected women find their stories in her.⁷⁷ She is the faithful maid exploited, the black woman used by the male and abused by the female of the ruling class,⁷⁸ the surrogate mother, the resident alien without legal recourse, the other woman, the runaway youth, the religious fleeing from affliction, the pregnant young woman alone, the expelled wife, the divorced mother with child, the shopping bag lady carrying bread and water, the homeless woman, the indigent relying upon handouts from the power structures, the welfare mother, and the self-effacing female whose own identity shrinks in service to others.

Besides symbolizing various kinds and conditions of people in contemporary society, Hagar is a pivotal figure in biblical theology. She is the first person in scripture whom a divine messenger visits and the only person who dares to name the deity. Within the historical memories of Israel,⁷⁹ she is the first woman to bear a child. This conception and birth make her an extraordinary figure in the story of faith: the first woman to hear an annunciation, the only one to receive a divine promise of descendants, and the first to weep for her dying child. Truly, Hagar the Egyptian is the prototype of not only special but all mothers in Israel.⁸⁰

Beyond these many distinctions, Hagar foreshadows Israel's pilgrimage of faith through contrast. As a maid in bondage, she flees from suffering. Yet she experiences exodus without liberation, revelation without salvation, wilderness without covenant, wanderings without land, promise without fulfillment, and unmerited exile without return.⁸¹ This Egyptian slave woman is stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted for the transgressions of Israel. She is bruised for the iniquities of Sarah and Abraham; upon her is the chastisement that makes them whole.

Hagar is Israel, from exodus to exile, yet with differences. And these differences yield terror. All we who are heirs of Sarah and

Abraham, by flesh and spirit, must answer for the terror in Hagar's story. To neglect the theological challenge she presents is to fail faith.⁸²

NOTES

1. A correct understanding of this sentence depends upon its context. The phrase "within the confines of patriarchal structures" sharply curbs the privilege and power of Sarah. Further, such a description is contingent upon the contrast with Hagar and tempered by the fact of Sarah's barrenness. See note 17 below.
2. Wherever they are not identified in this essay, chapter and verse citations come from the book of Genesis.
3. I follow the biblical text in using two spellings for the names Sarah; Abram and Abraham. On these variants, see the commentaries: Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1977), pp. 220, 223; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 127; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis OTL* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 199-200, 202. On the stigma of barrenness, see Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974), pp. 62-63.
4. See Gen. 13:16; 15:4, 5.
5. Throughout this chapter the word *saga* means story.
6. Scholarly disciplines offer different readings of these stories. (a) Historical criticism attends to source analysis. Genesis 16:1-16 is J, with exception of a few verses from P (16:1, 3, 15, 16), while Gen. 21:9-2 E. See, e.g., S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (New York: Edwin S. Cram, 1904), pp. 180-84, 209-13; Sean E. McEvenue, "A Comparative Narrative Styles in the Hagar Stories," *Semeia* 3 (Missoula, Mont.: SCLARS Press, 1975), pp. 64-80. For a revision of such analyses, see John Setters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 192-202; cf. also Alan W. Jenks, *The Elohist in North Israelite Traditions*, SBL Monograph Series 22 (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 22, 67. (b) Form criticism attends to genre, traditions, settings in life, and literary parallels. See, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *The Legends of Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), *passim*; idem, *Genesis*, Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964 reprint), pp. 184-93, 226-33; Robert C. Culley, *Studies in the Structure of Hebrew Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), pp. 43-46; Hugh C. White, "The Initiation Legend of Ishmael," *ZAW* (1975): 267-305. White also comments on the tradition history of the passage. Cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, 2 Teilband, Biblischer Kommentar (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981), pp. 281-82, 412-14. As a development of form criticism, motif criticism attends to the identification and classification of plot-motifs and traditional episodes within messenger stories. See Dorothy Irvin, *Mytharion* (Kevelaer: Butzon u

Bercker; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), pp. 1-17, 24-26. (d) Literary criticism attends to the type-scene as it moves between fixed conventions and flexible appropriations. See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), pp. 47-62. Literary criticism also attends to close readings focused on the particularities of the text in its final form; cf. Zvi Adar, *The Biblical Narrative* (Jerusalem: Department of Education and Culture of the World Zionist Organisation, 1959), pp. 119-25. More than any other, this last approach shapes the present essay.

7. For a substantial bibliography, see the M.A. thesis of Bernadette F. Revicky, "'Hagar, Maidservant of Sarai, From What Place Have You Come and Where Shall You Go?': A Rhetorical Critical Study of Genesis 16 and Genesis 21:8-21," (M.A. thesis, Andover Newton Theological School, 1980), pp. 93-100.

8. Prepositional phrases side by side offer contrast and resolution. Although Sarai did not bear a child to him (*lô*), to her (*lah*) was an Egyptian maid. The Egyptian identity of Hagar recalls the earlier sojourn of Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Gen. 12:10-20).

9. In Genesis 16, Hagar is identified as *sîphâ*, a virgin, dependent maid who serves the mistress of the house, whereas in Genesis 21 she is called *'âmâ*, a slave woman who serves the master as a second wife. The latter term is the more oppressive. See A. Jepsen, "'Ama" und Schiphcha," VT 8 (1958): 293-97. To convey the distinction, I render *sîphâ* as maid, servant, or bondswoman and *'âmâ* as slave. See Hans Walter Wolff, "Masters and Slaves," *Int* 27 (1973): 266-68; Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 283.

10. These are the first words of Sarai in the entire Abraham saga. On the importance of such speech, see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 63-87. For the translation of *hinnêh-nâ* as *because with the imperative* (16:2a below), see Thomas O. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 170-71.

11. Cf. Gen. 30:1-13.

12. On the legalities of this arrangement, see, e.g., von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 191-92; Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 119-21; Vawter, *On Genesis*, pp. 214-15; Mattiahu Tsevat, "Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," *The Meaning of the Book of Job and Other Biblical Studies* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1980), pp. 53-76. But also cf. John Van Seters, "The Problem of Childlessness in Near Eastern Law and the Patriarchs of Israel," *JBL* 87 (1968): 401-8; Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), pp. 252-69. On this issue in the context of current research on the patriarchal narratives, see William G. Denver [sic] and W. Malcolm Clark, "The Patriarchal Traditions," *Israelite and Judean History*, ed. John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), pp. 70-148; M. J. Seaman, "Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age," *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), pp. 91-139.

13. Drawing upon cognate languages and legal background, some scholars do render *'isâ* here as concubine rather than wife (e.g., Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 116-17; Vawter, *Genesis*, pp. 213-14). But cf. RSV and Westermann,

Genesis, p. 277. The specific Hebrew word for concubine (*pilegēs*) does not appear in Hagar's story; cf. Judg. 19:1.

14. Like Sarai, Abram never uses the name Hagar nor does he speak to her; only narration reports the direct contact between them (16:4; 21:14). Westermann, *Genesis*, pp. 190-91; Vawter, *On Genesis*, pp. 214-15; 16. Cf. Rachel and Leah (Gen. 30:1); Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam. 1:4-6).

6. Of special interest also is the rivalry between Hebrew and Egyptian women during the Exodus period (Exod. 1:19). In our story, the contrast between bonded and free, foreign and native women reverses to oppose the fertile Egyptian maid to the barren Hebrew mistress. On such rivalry as a plot-motif, see Irvin, *Mytharion*, pp. 15, 17.

17. Cf. Prov. 30:21-23. Recall that Sarai, as well as Hagar, is a victim of patriarchy (see note 1). On infighting among oppressed groups, see Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1983), p. 48. Cf. Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), pp. 165-83.

18. Tsevat understands Sarai's words to constitute a legal form ("Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," p. 55); cf. Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 287.

19. Cf. Vawter's gentle treatment of Abram over against his harsh judgment of Sarai (*On Genesis*, p. 215).

20. E.g., Exod. 1:11, 12; Deut. 26:6; cf. Gen. 15:13. See David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 26-27.

21. On Shur, see Denis Baly and A. D. Tushingham, *Atlas of the Biblical World* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1971), p. 104, and J. Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), p. 217. Cf. Gen. 20:1; 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7; 27:8.

22. Moses' flight from Pharaoh (Exod. 2:15b) and Hagar's flight from Sarai employ the same verb (*brh*). After fleeing, Moses "sat down by a well" (Exod. 2:15c); Hagar was "by a spring of water in the wilderness" (Gen. 16:7).

23. See Martin Buber, *On the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 39. On the messenger of God, see Westermann, *Genesis*, pp. 289-91.

24. Note that the direct speeches of all the other characters are repeatedly introduced by their proper names even when such identifications are unnecessary (16:2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11). For other instances of the correlation between the presence of name and speech and the phenomenon of personhood, see the comments on Tamar in chapter 2; see also, on the book of Ruth, Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 166-70, 190.

25. Tsevat also notes affinities between this story and the Exodus tradition, but with a different interpretation ("Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," p. 69).

26. Historical, form, and redaction critics tend to separate these promises by appeals to earlier forms of the text. Their conclusions are often contradictory. See, e.g., Vawter, *On Genesis*, p. 217; Van Seters, *Abraham in*

History and Tradition, pp. 194–95; Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 12–13; idem, *Genesis*, pp. 292–95; Robert Wilbur Neff, "The Announcement in Old Testament Birth Stories" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1969), pp. 97–102; Tsevat, "Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," pp. 57–60. My concern is the coherence of the final form of the text.

27. E.g., Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 28:3. Note that the term "your descendants" (*zr'*) refers not to the seed of Abram, even though he is the biological father, but rather to the offspring of Hagar; cf. Gen. 3:15 where *zr'* again specifies the "seed" of the woman rather than of the man.

28. Contra Van Seters who finds 16:10 incompatible with 16:11 (*Abraham in History and Tradition*, p. 194).

29. For a form-critical analysis, see Neff, "The Announcement in Old Testament Birth Stories," pp. 55–69, 104–8; also Robert Wilbur Neff, "The Announcement in the Birth Narrative of Ishmael," *BR* 17 (1972): 51–60.

30. Of the six birth announcements studied by Neff (Gen. 16:11–12; Gen. 17:19; Judg. 13:5, 7; 2 Kings 13:2; 2 Chron. 22:9–10; Isa. 7:14–17), only two (Gen. 16:11–12 and Judg. 13:5, 7) are spoken directly to women (Hagar and Ms. Manoah). Cf. also the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 4:16; note that the prophet Elisha, not a divine figure, speaks to her. In the New Testament a birth announcement is spoken directly to Mary (Luke 1:26–38); cf. the announcement to Zechariah about Elizabeth (Luke 1:13–20).

31. For discussions of the name Ishmael, see Mitchell Dahood, "The Name *yishma'el* in Genesis 16, 11," *Biblica* 49 (1968): 87–88; idem, "Nomen Omen in Genesis 16, 11," *Biblica* 61 (1980): 89. Cf. Irvin, *Mytharion*, p. 15.

32. The theme of deliverance from the afflictions in Egypt echoes in the line, "Yahweh has paid heed (*šm'*) to your affliction (*šn'*)," cf. Deut. 26:7. On this and other wordplays in the story, see Martin Buber, *Darko shel miqra* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1964), pp. 295–97.

33. See Tsevat, "Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," p. 67.

34. The pointing of the Hebrew text allows two meanings for this declaration: the God who may be seen and the God who sees (me). Though the Greek Bible and the Vulgate choose the second, the ambiguity of the MT is perhaps desirable to retain. See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), p. 288; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 118.

35. Note that her declaration of divine seeing, with its positive emphasis, occurs after the birth announcement, not after the divine command to submit to affliction. Cf. Hagar's plight with that of the Hebrew slaves who were delivered from their affliction because God saw (*r'h*) it (Exod. 3:7).

36. On auditory versus visual speech in Old Testament theophanies, see Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 37.

37. Cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 117–19.

38. Attempting to connect Hagar's words with the aetiological note that follows them, Julius Wellhausen emended the text in several ways to have Hagar ask, "Havq I really seen God and yet remained alive?" (*Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* [New York: Meridian Library, 1958], p.

326). Cf. Skinner, *Genesis*, pp. 288–89; Tsevat, "Hagar and the Birth of Ishmael," pp. 63, 66; Westermann, *Genesis*, pp. 296–97. Though such a question has a theological base in the assertion that no person may see the deity and live (cf. Exod. 33:20; Judg. 6:23; 13:20–23) and also offers another foreshadowing of an Exodus motif in Hagar's story, nevertheless, the reading remains an emendation. Cf. H. Seebass, "Zum Text Von Gen. XVI 13B," *VT* (1971): 254–56; Irvin, *Mytharion*, p. 16 and the references cited there; Neff, "The Announcement in Old Testament Birth Stories," pp. 93–94; Th. Booij, "Hagar's Words in Genesis XVI 13B," *VT* 30 (1980): 1–7; A. Schoors, "A *Tiqun Sopherim* in Genesis XVI 13B?" *VT* 32 (1982): 494–95.

39. Note the use of repetitions with variations. They enclose the unit as well as mark emphases within it.

40. Note the possessive "his son" as well as the repeated assertion that the child was born to Abram; cf. Gen. 25:9, 12.

41. Cf. Robert Alter, "How Convention Helps Us Read: The Case of the Bible's Annunciation Type-Scene," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983): 115–30, especially 120–21. In light of his proposed schema for the annunciation type-scene, Alter is unable to take account of the birth announcement to Hagar.

42. See Robert Wilbur Neff, "The Birth and Election of Isaac in the Priestly Tradition," *BR* 15 (1970): 5–18.

43. Cf. Isaac Rabinowitz, "Sarah's Wish (Gen. XXI 6–7)," *VT* 29 (1979): 362–63.

44. The Greek Bible says that he was "playing with Isaac." This reading has prompted different interpretations: e.g., that Ishmael was physically abusing Isaac; that the social equality implied between the two children was unacceptable to Sarah. When the phrase "with Isaac" is omitted, other interpretations follow: e.g., that Ishmael was masturbating; that his joyous demeanor aroused Sarah's maternal jealousy (Jubilees 17:4). See the commentaries, e.g., Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, p. 155; Vawter, *On Genesis*, pp. 248–49; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 232; Westermann, *Genesis*, pp. 414–15. Note that the verb *play* (*shq*) suggests a pun on the name Isaac (*yishaq*). 45. On the legalities involved, see Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 155–57; Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, pp. 257–58.

46. The name Ishmael never occurs in scene two.

47. Another sign of the increased distance between Sarah and Hagar, in contrast to episode one of scene one (16:3), is the absence of any direct contact between them.

48. See note 9 above; also Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 415.

49. Cf. the comments above on 16:4.

50. Exod. 12:39; cf. 6:1; 10:11; 11:1. See Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, pp. 30–34.

51. Note the repeated use of the idiom "in . . . eyes" by the narrator, Sarai, Abram, and the deity (16:4, 5, 6; 21:11).

52. Note that in 21:12–13 God also "heeds the voice" of Sarah by emulating her vocabulary of 21:10: the use of the name *Isaac* (v. 12) and not the names *Hagar* and *Ishmael*; the use of *slave woman* (vv. 12, 13) and of *son* (v. 13). Von Rad calls vv. 12–13 the "'tense moment' in the structure

of the narrative" because the reader expects God to be on the side of Abraham, not of Sarah (*Genesis*, p. 233).

53. Note the similarities in form and content, as well as the divergencies in meaning, between the opening sections of this episode (21:9–12) and the corresponding material in 16:1–2: (a) Narrated introductions set up tension between the two women (16:1; 21:9). (b) With direct discourse, Sarai (Sarah) commands Abram (Abraham) to act upon Hagar. In the first imperative (16:2a), Sarai wants to obtain a son through Hagar; in the second (21:10), she wants that son, along with Hagar, sent away from her. (c) Different narrated responses by Abram yield different results. The first time he obeys Sarai (16:2b), and the episode continues without intervention by the deity. The second time (21:11) Abraham balks, and so God enters to assure that Sarah's will be done (21:12).

54. See Exod. 6:1; 10:11; 12:39 for uses of the verb *cast out* (*grš*).

55. For the phrase "rose early in the morning" as a formula to introduce a unit of action, see Irvin, *Mytharion*, p. 25.

56. On the syntactical problems of the Hebrew text, see Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 155; Vawter, *On Genesis*, p. 249.

57. On uses of *šlh* in the Exodus story, see Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, p. 29. He suggests that the banishment of Hagar by Abraham constitutes a divorce.

58. These geographical and pronominal changes indicate that a new section of the story begins with 21:14b, *contra* many translations (e.g., RSV, NEB, NAB, and NJV).

59. On the pairing of *send away* (*šlh*) and *depart* (*hlk*), see Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible*, p. 34; cf. pp. 58–59.

60. See, e.g., Gen. 37:15; Ps. 107:4; 119:176; Isa. 53:6; Job 38:41.

61. On the "wilderness of Beersheba," see the entry "Desert" in Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*, pp. 21–23.

62. With the NJV, I translate the verb *šlk* as *left* to distinguish it from the verb *grš* (*cast*) in 21:10; *contra* RSV.

63. The reference to "bowshot" foreshadows the description of Ishmael as an "expert with the bow" (21:20).

64. *Contra* Gunkel, the shrub is not a holy place (*Genesis*, pp. 230–31). The deity speaks to Hagar explicitly "from heaven" (21:17).

65. In both scenes Hagar speaks in the wilderness and not in the house of Abraham and Sarah.

66. On interior thought, see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 69–70.

67. This change appears first in the Greek Bible; cf. RSV, NAB. For attempts to justify the change, see, e.g., Skinner, *Genesis*, pp. 248–49. But cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 155–56.

68. See George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968).

69. Cf. the play on the name Ishmael. For a form-critical study of this divine speech, see Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 419.

70. See Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 420.

71. Certain themes and vocabulary suggest associations between this text

and Gen. 22:1–19. In both stories two sons of Abraham are under threat of death; at the crucial moment the deity intervenes to spare the children. God opens the eyes of Hagar; she sees (*r'h*) a well of water and gives the lad a drink (21:19). Abraham lifts up his eyes, sees (*r'h*) a ram that the Lord has provided (*r'h*), and sacrifices it instead of his son (22:13–14). Note also the repeated use of phrases and words, such as "Abraham rose early in the morning" (21:14; 22:3); "angel of God (Lord) called to . . . from heaven" (21:17; 22:11); "fear" (*yf*) (21:17; 22:12); "the lad" (21:17, 18, 20; 22:5, 12); "hand" (21:18; 22:10, 12). Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 181–82. Similar geographical settings may also relate these stories; see Baly and Tushingham, *Atlas of the Biblical World*, p. 104. For a meditation, see Arthur I. Waskow, "The Cloudy Mirror: Ishmael and Isaac," *Godwrestling* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), pp. 23–33.

72. Though reference is made to Hagar in the genealogical list of Gen. 25:12, she herself does not appear as a character.

73. On Paran, see Baly and Tushingham, *Atlas of the Biblical World*, pp. 93, 104; Simons, *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*, p. 22.

74. Cf. the ancient Near Eastern custom of the father securing a wife for his son (Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 156). Note the continuing emphasis on the Egyptian theme in the genealogical introduction of Gen. 25:12 as well as in the geographical reference to Shur opposite Egypt (25:18; cf. 16:7).

75. I use the word *sex* to designate people, female and male. The word *gender* I reserve for grammar. See William Safire, "On Language: Vox of Pop Sixpack," *The New York Times Magazine*, 19 December 1982, pp. 18–19.

76. Recent studies on the interrelationships of racism, classism, and sexism are pertinent here; cf. e.g., Rosemary Radford Ruether, *New Woman! New Earth* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 115–33; Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–1978* (New York: W. Norton & Co., 1979), pp. 275–310.

77. The list that follows reflects stories of contemporary women who identify with Hagar. Cf. Margaret Laurence, *The Stone Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968).

78. While racial ties between the ancient Egyptians and black people are problematic, cultural affinities are certain. Hagar was an African woman. On this issue in general, see Robert A. Bennett, Jr., "Africa and the Biblical Period," *HTR* 64 (1971): 483–500.

79. By historical memories, I mean to exclude *Genesis* 1–11.

80. See Zvi Adar, *The Biblical Narrative*, p. 124.

81. In light of these contrasts, note the irony of Paul's equating Hagar with the Sinai covenant (Gal. 4:21–31). Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 184.

82. The place of Hagar in Islam also deserves mention. She does not appear in the Qur'an but in the *Hadiths*; see Arendt Jan Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), p. 90.