

Fragmented Women
Feminist (Sub)versions of
Biblical Narratives

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For Detlev Grohn and Francis Landy

*Chapter 4, which grew out of an essay I was unable to complete
for inclusion in his Festschrift, is dedicated to Norman Gottwald*

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trayed in texts where they are the object of sexual aggression and to inquire how women's bodies are focalized in these texts; that is, to investigate women as the object of male gaze.

The narrated rape is perhaps the most gruesome and violent tale in the Bible, the gang rape of the unnamed wife of an unnamed Levite by unnamed members of a mob of ruffians recounted in chapter 19 of the book of Judges. Against that horrible story, which some people are shocked to discover is in the Bible, I propose to juxtapose a well-known story of named rather than anonymous characters: the story of David and Bathsheba, which has long held a place in popular imagination both as a tale of unbridled lust and also, curiously, as a famous 'love story'. Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, is 'sent for' by King David, who has sex with her in a moment of passion that unleashes a chain of disaster upon his house. It is not my intention to make David's exploitation of Bathsheba into a rape, though I will explore its potential for such an interpretation below. The rape of Bathsheba is something that takes place not so much in the story as by means of the story. When I refer to the 'rape of Bathsheba' in what follows, I use it as a metaphor to describe Bathsheba's treatment at the hands of the androcentric biblical narrator, whose violation of her character consists both in depriving her of voice and in portraying her in an ambiguous light that leaves her vulnerable, not simply to assault by characters in the story but also by later commentators on the story.

Throughout this study, I have taken the position that women in the biblical narrative are male constructs. I do not assume, therefore, that these stories report actual events. If there was a historical Bathsheba, I do not believe incidents from her life can be reconstructed from the story we have about her. And, because the violence against the woman in Judges 19 is so brutally excessive and offensive, I prefer to think that she is a literary creation. I do, however, take these stories to be realistic: they represent a society and its values. They show us a society's norms, and they show us how that society responds to the violation of those norms. Moreover, by presenting models of acceptable and unacceptable behavior

Chapter 6

RAPED BY THE PEN

In the last war we lost a lover.

A.B. Yehoshua, *The Lover*

Male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of women's lives; and all struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's own body, especially control over physical access to one's own body.

Andrea Dworkin

Raped by the pen is not the same as raped by the penis. There is no sense in which the damage that can be done by a literary text is comparable to actual violence as experienced by women in the real world, to the trauma and pain inflicted on the body through an act of sexual aggression and hatred. This is obvious, but it needs to be stated, since in speaking of rape by the pen I am applying the language of bodily experience to literary representation.¹ In this chapter, I am not dealing with real violence against women, but rather with violence against women as it takes place in biblical narrative. I take this violence seriously, though I do not take it literally, for like pornography—though not so blatantly—these literary rapes perpetuate ways of looking at women that encourage objectification and violence. I want to consider certain features common to two very different kinds of textual rape: rape that is recounted in a narrative, and rape that takes place by means of a narrative (obviously, I am using the word 'rape' metaphorically in this instance). My primary interest in the comparison is to see how women are por-

1. On the complex relationship of embodiment and voice, pain and acts of imagining and creative work, see Scarry (1985).

ior for men and women—by encoding messages to men and women about sexual transgressions and sexual limits—they shape and perpetuate gender roles and expectations. For this reason, a feminist response to them is needed, particularly in view of the enduring cultural influence they have exerted because of their presence in the Bible. Let us consider, then, ways in which these stories reflect androcentric ideas about women and promote androcentric interests.

The 'Rape' of Bathsheba

In what sense is Bathsheba raped? The account is remarkably brief:

David sent messengers and took her. She came to him and he lay with her, while she was purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house (2 Sam. 11.4).

The encounter takes place in a context of aggression and violence—war with Ammon during which David stays at home. Given the long-standing and integral association of war with rape—to which the other text under discussion here, Judges 21, bears witness—is the embeddedness of this account in that of the Ammonite war a hint that force is used here? The text seems ambivalent on the matter. 'Sent' and 'took' indicate aggression on David's part; on the other hand, the two verbs of which Bathsheba is the subject, 'came' and 'returned', are not what one would expect if resistance were involved. The king sends for a subject and she obeys. His position of power gives him an advantage: he

2. The association of war and rape is well documented; see, e.g., Brownmiller (1975: 31-113). To be sure, in 2 Sam. 11, David is not a soldier on the battlefield and Bathsheba is not among the 'spoils of war'. I am speaking here only of the fact that war and rape are connected in fact and as literary tropes; cf., e.g., the representation of war and rape in Kleist's *The Marquise of O* discussed by Winnett (1991); see also Fokkelman (1981: 41-70), and Bal (1987: 10-36), who discuss the significance of the combination of war, sexuality, and violence in 2 Sam. 11. In Judg. 21, the rape precedes, and in fact is presented as resulting in, the war. Cf. Num. 31.6-18; Deut. 21.10-14; Amos 7.17; Hos. 2.9-13 [Heb. 11-15]; Isa. 3.16-4.4; Jer. 38.22-23.

'takes'. Does she know for what purpose she is summoned? Sexual extortion can take many forms, and coercion can be exerted subtly, making women feel they must agree to sex. Is it, then, against her will that David has sex with Bathsheba? Whereas some commentators recognize Bathsheba's status as passive object,³ rare is the commentator who would go so far as to describe this encounter as rape.⁴ Can it be because most commentators are men, and men are uneasy accusing other men of rape, even in an ancient text?⁵

In what sense is Bathsheba raped? The question is not whether or not she could have resisted. We cannot subject a literary creation to cross-examination. The point is not what Bathsheba might have done or felt; the point is we are not allowed access to her point of view. There is no attempted seduction recounted, which would give the woman a role, even if one in which she is manipulated.⁶ The denial of subjectivity is an important factor in rape, where the victim is objectified and, indeed, the aim is to destroy her subjectivity. The issue of force versus consent is crucial for constructing the woman's point of view, and it is never raised. By denying her subjectivity, the narrator symbolically rapes

3. E.g. Fokkelman (1981: 53). The withholding of information about Bathsheba in 2 Sam. 11 leads Berlin (1983: 27) to conclude that she is 'not even a minor character, but simply part of the plot'.

4. Bal (1987: 11) and Yee (1988: 243) raise the question of rape.

5. On this point and the tendency among classical scholars to downplay, and even to romanticize, rape, see Curran (1984). I witnessed a similar reaction on the part of biblical scholars at the 1991 Society of Biblical Literature International Meeting in Rome, when Azila Reisenberger, of the University of Cape Town, read a paper on rape cases in the Bible (she dealt with legal texts and four narrative examples: Dinah, Tamar, Lot's daughters in Gen. 19, and the women in Judg. 19). Men in the audience were quick to challenge Reisenberger's use of the word 'rape' on the grounds that what we today consider rape may not have been considered rape in ancient times. What struck me about their response was not the content or even the cogency of their arguments, but the intensity of emotion and vehemence of their objections. What in this situation evoked such an angry protest? The fact that a woman called a rape a rape?

6. On the difficulty with the rape/seduction opposition, see Rooney (1991: 92-99). She notes: 'A feminine subject who can act only to consent or refuse to consent is in fact denied subjectivity' (p. 92).

Bathsheba, and by withholding her point of view, he presents an ambiguous portrayal that leaves her vulnerable to the charge of seduction. 'We must, however', says H.W. Hertzberg, 'ask whether Bathsheba did not count on this possibility [being seen bathing]'.⁷ Why must we? In the story, David, not Bathsheba, is the offender (we shall investigate below the exact nature of his guilt). Should we blame Bathsheba for appearing on the scene naked, when it is the narrator who has chosen to portray her this way? The narrator who disrobes Bathsheba and depicts her as the object of David's lust is the real perpetrator of the crime against Bathsheba, and commentators like Hertzberg, who imply Bathsheba may have desired the king's attentions, perpetuate the crime.

We also are forced to participate. By introducing Bathsheba to us through David's eyes, the narrator puts us in the position of voyeurs:

... he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful (v. 2).

The narrator controls our gaze; we cannot look away from the bathing woman but must consider her appearance: 'very beautiful'. And we presume she is naked, or nearly so; at any rate, we are forced to think about it, to disrobe or partially robe her mentally. Is not this gaze a violation, an invasion of her person as well as her privacy? Nakedness makes her more vulnerable, and being observed in such a private, intimate activity as bathing, attending to the body, accentuates the body's vulnerability to David's and our shared gaze. A woman is touching herself and a man is watching. The viewing is one-sided, giving him the advantage and the position of power: he sees her but she does not see him.

7. Hertzberg (1964: 309). Hertzberg also speaks of 'the honour of having attracted the king' (p. 310). Cf. Nicol (1988: 360): 'It cannot be doubted that Bathsheba's action in bathing so close to the king's residence was provocative, nor can the possibility that the provocation was deliberate be discounted. Even if it was not deliberate, Bathsheba's bathing in a place so clearly open to the king's palace can hardly indicate less than a contributory negligence on her part.'

Looking at the female body is both a cultural preoccupation and an accepted expression of male sexuality. Art, film, and pornography provide constant reminders that men are aroused by watching a woman touch herself. And if Bathsheba is purifying herself after her menstrual period, we can guess where she is touching. Readers of this text are watching a man watching a woman touch herself, and I suspect male and female readers react differently to the scene. For my part, I am uncomfortable being put in the position of voyeur, watching a naked woman being watched.

Nor are we and David the only voyeurs: 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' (v. 3). It is not clear who says these words, whether David⁸ or an attendant,⁹ but, in any event, 'Is this not Bathsheba?' suggests that someone else is looking too.

I said that the encounter is brief. This is no love story. David and Bathsheba do not have sex again until after she has become his wife. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that David wanted Bathsheba for himself. On the contrary, the text makes clear that he would prefer to have Uriah assume paternity of the child. David has Uriah killed and then marries Bathsheba only because his ploy to get Uriah to 'go down to his house'—that is, to have sex with his wife (11.11)—fails. Indeed, the narrative necessity to establish paternity accounts for the one circumstantial clause in the controlled description of the encounter between David and Bathsheba: 'while she was purifying herself from her uncleanness' makes it clear that, when Bathsheba becomes pregnant, it is with David's child. Otherwise the scene is the biblical equivalent of 'wham bam, thank you, ma'am': he sent, he took, she came, he lay, she returned.

If force is played down in 2 Sam. 11.4, it is not entirely edited out: 'he took her', the text says. Not only the larger context—the position of the story in the middle of the account of the Ammonite war—but also the aftermath of the encounter suggests force. When David's children reenact his

8. So, convincingly, Bailey (1990: 85).

9. So most commentators and most translations.

crimes as part of his punishment, David's adultery with Bathsheba is replayed as rape, not once but twice. Following closely upon this scene, Amnon rapes his sister Tamar (2 Sam. 13), who, like Bathsheba, is beautiful (13.1) and, like Bathsheba, is objectified (13.17).¹⁰ And when Absalom does in the sight of the sun and all Israel what David had done in secret, he openly rapes ten of David's wives in a tent pitched for him on the roof—the roof, of course, serving as a reminder that this is where David's crime began (2 Sam. 12.11-12; 16.21-22).

The Levite's Wife of Secondary Rank

The anonymity of the woman who is gang-raped in Judges 19 encourages readers not to view her as a person in her own right. We can counteract this textual strategy for distancing the reader from the character by giving the woman a name. Mieke Bal, whose work on this story has convinced me of the importance of naming the woman,¹¹ calls her 'Beth', a name that fits the context of Bal's analysis of the story, where the house (*beth*) plays a central role. But because 'Beth' strikes my ear as odd and somehow modern, I give her a different name, even though I recognize that if every interpreter chooses a name that is right in her own ears, discussion of the story could become complicated. On the analogy of Bath-sheba (daughter of an oath, or daughter of seven), I call her Bath-sheber (daughter of breaking). The Hebrew verb *shabar* means 'to break' or 'to break in pieces'; the noun *sheber* can mean 'breaking', as in the breaking of pottery into pieces (Isa. 30.14), or 'fracture', as in the fracture of a limb (Lev. 21.19; Lev. 24.20); it can also refer to anguish or brokenness of spirit (Isa. 65.14). I choose Bath-sheber as a name for this woman because it can serve to remind us both of what happens to her at the hands of the men of Gibeah and also of her subsequent dismemberment by her husband. I do not want Bath-sheber's name to stand for only the

10. Unlike Bathsheba, Tamar speaks and we see something of her point of view. In particular, she resists.

11. Bal (1988a, 1988c).

horrible things that happen to her. The word *sheber* can refer to interpretation, as in the phrase, 'breaking of a dream' (Judg. 7.15). Like dreams, according to Freud, texts require over-interpretation.¹² Since I propose to over-interpret this text, I intend Bath-sheber's name to signify the role feminist criticism plays in breaking open the text's phallogocentric ideology and exposing the buried and encoded messages it gives to women—messages upon which it relies to control women and keep them in their place. Both naming the woman and making her the focus of our inquiry are interpretive moves that restore her to the subject position the androcentric narrative destroys.

Like Bathsheba, Bath-sheber is a married woman; she is a *pilegesh*, a legal wife of secondary rank.¹³ The English translation, 'concubine', gives the impression that she is less valued, and probably more expendable than a legitimate wife. Indeed, an odd feature of this story is the absence of a primary wife. According to the Hebrew text, this Levite's wife 'played the harlot against him' (the verb is *zanah*), a reading most English translations acknowledge in a textual note. The translation of *pilegesh* as 'concubine', together with the note about *zanah*, encourages the popular identification of concubine and prostitute, which Bal rightly criticizes. It also, I believe, predisposes readers to view the rape of this nameless 'Levite's concubine' less sympathetically than they might view the rape of a lawful wife, for, as Andrea Dworkin observes, 'a whore cannot be raped, only used'.¹⁴

12. See the discussion in Chapter 5 above.

13. Zakovitch (1981: 38) points out that her relation to the Levite is described in terms of marriage: the technical use of 'to take' (v. 1); the description of the woman's father as the Levite's father-in-law (*hoten*, v. 4); and the fact that the term *pilegesh* is interchangeable with *shiphah* and *istishah* in the case of Bilhah (Gen. 35.22; 32.22 [Heb. 23]; 30.4; 37.2). Bal (1988a: 83-86) argues that *pilegesh* designates a wife who remains in her father's house after her marriage (so-called *berna* marriage or *tsadiah* marriage), but such a meaning does not fit most biblical occurrences. It may well be, as Bal suggests, that the meaning of the word changed over time; clearly further study of the social position of the *pilegesh* is called for.

14. Dworkin (1981: 204).

An understanding of the woman as sexually promiscuous is not promoted by the story, however, which describes not the woman's involvement with other men but only her act of leaving her husband: 'she went away from him to her father's house' (v. 2).¹⁵ As Robert Boling observes, 'It is strange that the woman would become a prostitute and then run home'.¹⁶ Moreover, if she were promiscuous, why would her husband go to such lengths to get her back? In view of such incongruity, it is not surprising that many translations follow the versions in reading that she 'became angry with him'.¹⁷ But what are we to make of the Hebrew text, which clearly has the woman 'zanahing', to coin a word? As Bal points out, the translation of the unique combination, *zanah* + 'al, as 'play the harlot against' implies an ideology according to which women's bodies are the property of men.¹⁸ Bal proposes that originally the verb referred to an act related to a particular type of marriage, specifically to the woman's breach of patrilocal marriage to live with her husband: 'The unfaithfulness—to the father, to the old institution—for the sake of marriage, hence for sex, becomes [through linguistic development] sexual unfaithfulness'.¹⁹ Yair Zakovitch argues that *zanah* refers to what amounts to divorce on the woman's part: 'The verb simply means that she dared to leave her husband, a phenomenon which was frequently connected with immoral behaviour'.²⁰ Indeed, Zakovitch's argument that Bath-sheber essentially divorced

15. If marital infidelity were meant, one might expect the verb *na'ap*, 'to commit adultery'; on *zanah* and *na'ap*, see Bird (1989: 77).

16. Boling (1975: 273).

17. Cf. LXXA, OL.

18. Bal (1988a: 86). The very concept of 'harlot' or 'whore' has meaning only within the ideology of male sexual domination; see Dworkin (1981: 203-209). Only women are harlots or whores; if the terms are applied to males it is only in an extended or figurative sense. This is true in Hebrew as well; see Bird (1989).

19. Bal (1988a: 88).

20. Zakovitch (1981: 39). Zakovitch suggests that perhaps the term *zanah* was applied to women who left their husbands without the possibility of returning to their father's house, and thus had to become prostitutes to support themselves.

her husband and that she had the right to decide whether or not to take him back is supported by the *Ketib* of v. 3, according to which the Levite went after her 'to let him return to her' (most translations follow the *Qere*, 'to bring her back').²¹

Rather than argue for a specific meaning of *zanah*, I propose to consider how its use promotes the text's androcentric agenda. That the word *zanah*, which commonly refers to sexual relations outside of marriage,²² appears here is, in my opinion, no coincidence. By juxtaposing these two acts—*zanahing* and leaving her husband—the text establishes a connection between them that is critical for what happens later. Whether the woman acts contrary to patrilocal or virilocal marriage customs (in the first case, by living with her husband; in the second, by returning to her father), or whether she divorces her husband, her behavior is a gesture of sexual autonomy. The issue, as Bal and Zakovitch are aware, is male ownership of women's bodies, control over women's sexuality. A woman who asserts her sexual autonomy by leaving her husband—and whether or not she remains with him is a sexual issue—is guilty of sexual misconduct.²³ This ideology informs the way gender relations are understood and evaluated in this story. Women give up autonomy in return for protection by their men from other men. By daring to act autonomously in the first place, Bath-sheber puts herself beyond male protection, and for this she must be punished. The men who ordinarily would be expected to protect her—her husband and their host—participate in her punishment because her act is an offense against the social order; that is, against the patriarchal system itself. In the end, the woman is raped by a mob and

21. Zakovitch (1981: 39).

22. See Bird (1989: 76-79), who notes that the primary usage of the verb is limited to female subjects, 'since it is only for women that marriage is the primary determinant of legal status and obligation' (p. 77). *zanah* can refer to premarital sex by a daughter, sex by a levirate-obligated widow, or the activity of a professional prostitute (p. 77).

23. Boling (1975: 274) draws a similar conclusion: 'As Israelite law did not allow for divorce by the wife, she became an adulteress by walking out on him'.

dismembered by her own husband. As narrative punishment for her sexual 'misconduct', her sexual 'freedom', she is sexually abused, after which her sexuality is symbolically mutilated.

The woman is raped and tortured all night and released only at daybreak (19.25). Her husband (the text has '*adoneha*, 'her lord') finds her at the doorstep in the morning. He speaks to her but receives no answer. He puts her on his donkey and takes her home, where he divides her body into twelve parts which he sends 'throughout all the territory of Israel' (v. 29). It is not entirely clear at what point the woman died or even that she is dead when he dismembers her, a detail the LXX and Vulgate translators apparently felt the need to clarify by adding 'and she was dead' after 'there was no answer' (v. 28).

Why is this additional act of violence necessary? I am prepared to grant that the dismemberment is a morbid parody of Saul's cutting into pieces a yoke of oxen and sending the parts throughout Israel to muster the people to battle (1 Sam. 11.5-7).²⁴ There, however, it constituted a threat: 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!' Here, commentators are at a loss to explain its symbolic value.²⁵ This is because they have looked elsewhere than the gender code for its meaning. If we seek the meaning of the act in the gender code, we discover that an implicit message about sexual behavior is

24. Most commentators note the parallel; on the relationship between these two accounts, see Lasine (1984).

25. Niditch (1982: 371) sees the dissected body as a symbol of Israel's 'body politics', its divisions; Lasine (1984) takes it as a sign of perversity in a topsy-turvy world. He comments (p. 42), 'The "message" sent by the Levite by means of the severed body is made more bizarre because he is not quoted as declaring the exact significance of the message, unlike Saul, who makes it clear that the dismembered oxen represent what will happen to the oxen of those who do not rally to his call'. Soggin (1981: 282) offers a typical response: 'However, in this instance the symbolism seems to be missing: the quartered limbs of the concubine are not a summons to arms, nor do they threaten the reluctant; they simply arouse horror. Such a macabre gesture is not only unnecessary for summoning the assembly; it does not even seem to serve a useful purpose.'

being given to women. By leaving her husband the woman makes a gesture of sexual autonomy so threatening to patriarchal ideology that it requires her to be punished sexually in the most extreme form. The symbolic significance of dismembering the woman's body lies in its intent to de-sexualize her. Otherwise the act remains insufficiently motivated. It is not enough that the woman who has offended sexually, by acting as if she and not the man owned her body, is abused sexually, by having her body possessed by many men. An even more radical punishment is called for. Because it has offended, the woman's sexuality must be destroyed and its threat diffused by scattering. 'If the female body offends you, cut it up' might be the motto. Cutting up the woman can be viewed on a psychological level both as an expression of male fear of women's sexuality, which must therefore be destroyed, and as an attempt to discover the secret of woman's sexuality. Because woman is the seductive and dangerous other, her mystery must be opened up by force.²⁶

If one man, her husband, cannot possess her, then many men will. But in the end, no one can possess her. What is the husband to do with his damaged goods? He destroys the evidence of the rape in a way that symbolically repeats it, by sharing the woman's body among men, but that at the same time de-sexualizes the female body, by cutting it up and scattering the parts. And we shall see below how he also destroys the evidence of the crime against the woman by giving a different account of what happened when he offers his testimony to the Israelite assembly.

What I am describing here is a gender-motivated subtext, not a conscious misogynistic design on the part of the narrator. It is a subtext motivated by male fear of female sexuality and by the resultant need of patriarchy to control women. In order to illustrate the social and moral disintegration of Israel before the monarchy, the narrator of Judges 19-21 tells

26. I borrow the notion of forcibly opening the woman to reveal her mystery from Showalter (1990), whose discussion has influenced my thinking on this issue; see especially pp. 105-43.

a story in which the threatened abuse of the Levite and the actual treatment of his wife lead to internecine warfare, the near-extinction of an Israelite tribe, and mass rape and murder. All of these events come under narrative censure, with violence against women treated merely as part of a larger social and moral problem—that is, as if the gender of the victims of violence were irrelevant.²⁷ Yet the fact that the central act in the illustration is the rape and dismemberment of a woman foregrounds the important role gender plays, on a deeper level, in the presentation. Moreover, in the aftermath, women are again the objects of male violence.

Something else could have been chosen to illustrate the depravity of the times. In fact, the narrator offers another possible scenario: the rape of the Levite himself. This is what the men of Gibeah are portrayed as having in mind: 'Bring out the man who came into your house that we may know him' (19.22). Does this mean that all these men of Gibeah are homosexuals? Hardly.²⁸ Rape is a crime of violence not of passion; homosexual rape forces the male victim into a passive role, into the woman's position. The men of Gibeah want to humiliate the Levite in the most degrading way. But this is, as we know, not what happens. And since it does not happen, it obviously—in terms of narrative poetics, in terms of the story the narrator chose to tell—was not meant to happen. Certainly the threat to rape the man, in violation of ordinary mores and the laws of hospitality, illustrates the baseness of the men of Gibeah, and thus the lawlessness of the times. In terms of the gender politics of the narrative, however, it has the effect of deflecting attention from the woman as the object of a different moral lesson, a warning to women about the consequences of sexual independence, so that the gender issue becomes submerged in issues of concern to men: hospitality and codes of behavior. The success of this narrative ploy in promoting the androcentric agenda is witnessed by the amount of attention commenta-

tors devote to the issue of hospitality—a host's obligation to his guests in the ancient world—as compared with the treatment of the woman. The de-gendering of male sexual violence that results when the story is interpreted in terms of violation of the rules of hospitality is a displacement. Our unwillingness to look at what is most disturbing about this story prevents us from seeing its buried and coded message to women.²⁹

The men want the man; they get a woman. They are offered two women; they get one. Why, since they could obviously overpower the host and his guests, do they settle for only Bath-sheber? I suggest that two impulses are at work here: homosexual rape is too threatening to narrate, and, in terms of the subtext, it would leave the woman unpunished. The narrative possibility of the Levite's rape by the mob is therefore abandoned. 'Do it to women but not to the man' is the androcentric ideology, for which the host is the spokesperson. He offers his virgin daughter to the crowd along with his guest's wife: 'Rape them and do to them whatever you like, but to this man do not do so foul a thing' (19.24). Commentators are often perplexed that although both women are offered, only Bath-sheber is thrown out. It seems, in fact, that her husband, and not the host, is the one who throws her to the licentious mob, though 'the man' who casts her out is not specifically identified—an ambiguity that shields the true culprit and paradoxically exposes the guilt of both men. If we understand Bath-sheber's abuse as her narrative punishment, then the sparing of the virgin

27. This is still a problem with violence against women, like race and ethnicity, the role of gender in violence should not be ignored.

28. See the discussion in Bal (1988c: 20-21).

29. I owe both these ways to looking at reactions to the textual violence to Showalter (1990: 152, 142). The coded message to women is also overlooked by readings that see the violence against the woman as the prelude to the 'real problem' of social and moral anarchy in Israel. For example, Fokkelman (1992: 43) reads with the text's ideology when he says, 'After all, and without any underestimation of the woman's experience, the crime of chap. 19 is merely an incident'. Similarly, Niditch (1982: 371): 'The man's insensitivity towards his concubine, his non-communication with her, his selfishness are, in fact, a microcosm of larger community-relationships in Israel'. My reading is very much at odds with that of Penchansky (1992: 83-86), whose speculations about a feminist critique of this story are self-defeating.

daughter makes sense: she is not mistreated because, unlike Bath-sheber, she has not committed a sexual offense against male authority. Decoded, the message the story of Bath-sheber gives to women is that the consequences of sexual autonomy (presented as unfaithfulness or misconduct) are terrible and deadly. Male violence is something every woman fears. The best defense is, stay out of the way; maybe you won't be noticed. The host's daughter illustrates that sometimes this stratagem works.

Narrative Judgment

I have been speaking about rape—rape in a narrative and by means of a narrative—and about crimes. But what, exactly, are the crimes that are condemned in these stories? The fact that, in both our examples, judgment occurs *within the story itself* enables us to probe more deeply into the workings of biblical sexual politics. In 2 Samuel 12, God sends the prophet Nathan to condemn David:

Why have you despised the word of Yhwh to do what is evil in his eyes? Uriah the Hittite you have slain with the sword, and his wife you have taken to be your wife, and him you have killed with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house.

Because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife—thus says Yhwh—I am raising up evil against you out of your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the eyes of this sun. For you did it in secret, but I shall do this thing before all Israel and before the sun (2 Sam. 12.9-12).³⁰

David's crime is twofold: he had Uriah killed and he took Uriah's wife—both are crimes against Uriah and against God (as the protector of the patriarchal social order). But they are not treated as crimes against Bathsheba, who is defined solely in terms of her relation to Uriah. Having sex-

30. Dividing v. 10 with Fokkelman (1981: 83-86), who makes a convincing case against the Masoretic division.

ual intercourse with Bathsheba is a crime because it violates another man's marital rights. Adultery is always a matter of the woman's status: a married woman who has sex with a man other than her husband commits adultery; a married man who has sex with a woman other than his wife commits adultery only if that woman is another man's wife.³¹ Indeed, David's punishment—that what he did to another man will be done to him, only more so—shows how irrelevant the woman's perspective is. *David's* punishment for adultery is that *his wives* will be raped. No thought is given to their experience of being publicly raped or to their treatment after the rape. In effect, they are punished for having been raped:

And David came to his house at Jerusalem, and the king took the ten wives whom he had left to care for the house and put them in a house under guard, and provided for them, but did not go in to them. So they were shut up until the day of their death, living as if in widowhood (2 Sam. 20.3).

In Judges 19-21, the narrator presents a graphic picture of moral depravity in Gibeah of Benjamin. A strange feature of these chapters is the disparity between the information given to us about events at Gibeah and the information given to the assembly of Israelite tribes, on the basis of which they go to war against the Benjaminites, who refuse to hand over the evil men for punishment. This is the account the tribes hear from the Levite:

To Gibeah that belongs to Benjamin I came, I and my wife, to spend the night. The men of Gibeah rose against me and surrounded the house against me by night. Me they meant to kill and my wife they raped, and she died. I took my wife and cut her in pieces and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel, for they have committed abomination and wantonness in Israel (Judg. 20.4-6).

31. On adultery in ancient Near Eastern law, see Westbrook (1990), and the references cited there. There are obvious similarities between the David-Bathsheba-Uriah triangle and the patriarch-matriarch-foreign ruler triangle discussed above in Chapter 5; for a comparison of the stories, see Miscal (1979: 1983: 27-40). In Chapter 5, I spoke of the Genesis stories in terms of Girard's theory of triangular desire; for a Girardian reading of 2 Sam. 11-12, see Jensen (1992: 44-54).

The Levite stresses the threat to himself: the men 'rose against me'; they 'surrounded the house against me'; 'me [in first place for emphasis] they meant to kill'. In his version of the events, his life is at stake, and he does not mention the humiliating threat of homosexual rape. Indeed, it sounds as if the mob set out to kill him and only incidentally did it come about that they raped his wife. He neglects to mention that he and his host remained in the safety of the house while the woman was thrown out to the crowd to be raped all night. His statement, 'and she died' (*wattamot*), implies that her death resulted from the mob's abuse, whereas in the earlier version whether she died from the rape or later was left somewhat ambiguous. His act of dismembering a human being, his own wife, he describes matter-of-factly, while accusing the men of Gibeah of committing lewdness.

By placing in the Levite's mouth an account so self-serving and so unlike the events described to us in ch. 19, the narrator reveals the Levite's baseness. Indeed, the narrator's sympathy does not lie with the Levite. He represents him as too irresolute to leave on his journey home at a reasonable hour and then too stubborn to remain another night at his father-in-law's house (19.5-10). Had he left early in the morning with his wife and servant as intended, they would not have needed to stop in Gibeah and the outrage might have been avoided. Moreover, it is surely a callous man who, upon finding his raped and battered wife lying at the door, can say, 'Get up; let's go' (v. 28).³² But even though the Levite is a disreputable character, it is nonetheless the Levite's version of events to which the tribes respond. They go to war with Benjamin to avenge the threatened crime against the Levite and the actual abuse of his wife. As in David's case, where the crimes of adultery and murder are crimes against the husband and not the wife, here also the threat of murder and the rape are crimes against the husband.³³ Is it, then, the case that Bath-sheber's mistreatment

32. On the negative narrative evaluation of the Levite, see Trible (1984); Lásine (1984); Exum (1990).

33. It is not clear to me what Fokkelman (1992: 43) means when he asserts: 'What the Levite is concerned with is the sexual crime, not a

by the mob is as irrelevant for the narrative judgement as Bathsheba's exploitation by David?

There seems, indeed, to be some lingering guilt on the narrator's part about the treatment of the woman. After the Levite dismembers Bath-sheber and sends the parts of her body throughout Israelite territory, we read:

All who saw it said, 'Such a thing has never happened or been seen from the day that the people of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt until this day; consider it, take counsel, and speak' (Judg. 19.30).

What is this thing (*kazot*) that has never happened or been seen before? Unless we assume that some explanation accompanied the body parts, in its context 'such a thing' can only refer to the dismemberment and parceling out of the woman's body, since only later do the tribes learn from the Levite what happened at Gibeah.³⁴ When they assemble at Mizpah, they ask the Levite: 'Tell us, how did this evil come to pass?' (20.4). Here, too, the only obvious referent for 'this evil' is the dismemberment.

We have, then, in Judges 19-21 a situation in which the narrator tells us that the tribes go to war to avenge what are certainly crimes against a man and his property. But he shows us horrible crimes against the woman, both the gang rape and the dismemberment. When, in the story, judgement is executed upon the guilty, the Benjaminites are punished for their role; that is, for siding with the rapists and would-be murderers (though later the tribes will have 'compassion

case of mere loss of property'. This seems to me a false dichotomy, since both sex and property are involved: the wife is a special kind of property who, if used by another for sex, cannot be returned in the same state as she was taken. If, for example, she had been kidnapped but not sexually abused, it seems to me she could have been restored to him; cf. 1 Sam. 30, where David's wives and the other women taken as spoil by the Amalekites are recaptured. As I suggest here, the mistreatment of Bath-sheber is problematic; similarly, Bal (1987: 20-36) exposes the problem the narrator of 2 Sam. 11 has with the treatment of Bathsheba.

34. The differences in LXX do not resolve the problems posed by v. 30.

for Benjamin, their brother'; 21.6; cf. also v. 15). The mutilation of the woman's body by the Levite, in contrast, is neither redressed nor explicitly censured. This does not mean that the mutilation is unproblematic, however. The narrative disjunction that allows the Israelites' strongly negative reaction to 'such a thing' and 'this evil' to be read as a response to the dismemberment may be regarded as a symptom of the narrator's discomfort and guilt about the crime against Bath-sheber.

She Asked for It

It is well known that in cases of rape the issue of the woman's responsibility is often raised. Why was she dressed like that? What was she doing alone at night in that neighborhood? Consider simply how the 'stories' of these women begin: Bathsheba is bathing; Bath-sheber is '*zannah*'. Gender is an important factor here; a man bathing or behaving in a sexually autonomous way would not raise the same questions about provocativeness because what is being provoked is *male* desire. Bathing or *zannah* is sexually suggestive in our respective stories because a woman is doing it and because a man is affected. On a different occasion, David exposes himself, at least partially, when he dances before the ark of Yhwh (2 Sam. 6). The sight arouses a woman's anger, not her desire. But unlike Bathsheba, who is the passive object of the voyeuristic gaze, David displays himself publicly, and when Michal criticizes him for his exhibitionism ('How the king of Israel has honored himself today, exposing himself today in the eyes of his subjects' women servants!'), he revels in the attention focused on him ('among the women servants of whom you have spoken, among them I shall be held in honor'). Freud saw voyeurism as the passive counterpart to exhibitionism.³⁵ It doesn't take David long to make the transition from exhibitionist, with wife Michal watching from the window as the subject, to voyeur, with wife-to-be Bathsheba as the object whom he

watches from his subject position on the roof.³⁶

Biblical style typically suggests a causal connection by means of simple juxtaposition:³⁷ because Bathsheba was seen bathing, she was sent for. It is thus the woman's fault that the man's desire is aroused. To be desirable means being desirable in someone's eyes, which introduces the voyeur or rapist perspective. Bathsheba is guilty of being desired, but the text hints that she asked for it: she *allows* herself to be seen. Bath-sheber asks for it too, the text implies. Had she stayed in her place, under her husband's authority where she belonged, she would not have ended up at the wrong place—Gibeah of Benjamin—at the wrong time. By insinuating that women, either by the way they let themselves be seen by men or by the way they behave, are responsible for male sexual behavior, our two texts rely on a fundamental patriarchal strategy for exercising social control over women. Using women's fear of male violence as a means of regulating female behavior is one of patriarchy's most powerful weapons. And it remains effective. As Peggy Sanday observes:³⁸

By blaming the victim for provoking their own sexual aggression, men control and define acceptable and unacceptable female sexual behavior through the agency of fear. A woman who does not guard her behavior becomes the target of male sexual aggression.

36. Male display of sexuality is active (David is dancing) and public (he is in control); he lets himself be seen by many women, as well as men) and (as the dispute between David and Michal shows) nothing to be ashamed of. Female 'display' of sexuality is passive and private (Bathsheba is bathing and observed). In both accounts, fertility is a related issue: Michal sees and objects to David's nakedness and she has no children; Bathsheba is seen naked and it leads to her pregnancy (I thank Martha Morrison for drawing my attention to the fertility aspect). For detailed comparison of the two scenes, see Bach (forthcoming). For a compelling analysis of the male as glorified nude and the female as shamefully naked in the art of the Christian West, see Miles (1989).

37. As, for example, the verse about Michal's childlessness (2 Sam. 6.23), discussed in Chapter 1 above.

38. Sanday (1990: 13). On gang rape as a means of social control, see also Brownmiller (1975: 284-89, 397-400).

35. Freud (1962: 33); I owe this reference to Bal (1993: 4-6).