

THE
ISRAELITE
WOMAN

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SOCIAL ROLE AND LITERARY TYPE IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

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Despite these differences, and the difference in scope, for the story of Ruth is so much longer, the two tales share one overall pattern of structure. A relatively young woman becomes, through no fault of her own apart from, perhaps, a touch of temporary barrenness, a childless widow. After she despairs of any other means of salvation she decides to take the initiative herself, and to resolve the situation which is intolerable from her point of view. In other words, she sets out to fill the lack she suffers from. The plot deals with the movement of her venture towards its satisfactory conclusion.² The woman's weapon is her sexuality. She chooses her victim with an eye to his social standing, and exploits his male vanity as well as his weakness for drinking. She compromises the male to such an extent that he must either admit the justice of her claim (Judah) or marry her (Boaz), or both. The woman's sense of time and place, together with her sexual charms, determines the inevitability of the outcome. In short, despite the differences (which ensure that the stories will be accepted as two separate literary pieces, each unique in its own right) the figures of both Tamar and Ruth undoubtedly conform to one basic stereotype, the temptress who beguiles prominent but glibly

On the face of it, we might have expected the biblical storytellers to condemn women like Tamara and Ruth or, at least, to record a certain degree of dissatisfaction with their conduct. Regarding sexual mores, abusing male trusts, stepping outside one's social boundaries—these are a few of the hypothetical accusations that the authors could have levelled, implicitly or explicitly, against them. However, this does not happen in either story. Judah's admission that Tamara behaved more righteously than he did (Genesis 38.26) apparently expresses the author's opinion. Nevertheless, the positive judgment passed on Tamara's character and behaviour is not unequalled. Judah does not marry her, as if to say that the manner she chose for changing her circumstances tainted her somewhat. Ruth's figure is presented in an even better light than Tamara's. Throughout the book she is depicted as a paragon of virtue: even the temptation scene

Chapter 10

a. The 'positive' Temptress: Tamar and Ruth

Many links connect Tamar's story (Genesis 38) to that of Ruth. Both women belong to the female side of King David's lineage (cf. Chapter 5, section 2 above). The basic circumstances in which both heroines find themselves are similar—the loss of the husband is followed by an attempt to produce a male heir who will continue the dead husband's name and, incidentally, supply his mother with the security only a male child can bring. Both are young and helpless widows, presumably attractive. Both are foreigners, even in Ruth's case, the foreigner origin is of secondarily importance only. Both fulfil the lack of a husband/son by resorting to charade and seduction. Their sense of timing is excellent: they exploit a joyful occasion (harvest, shearing) in which the chosen male victim, the necessary agent for realizing the woman's ambition, is replete with food and wine, thus more susceptible to sexual blackmail. Both are successful in their venture. In both stories there are males who at first seem to act as the destructive woman's saviour, but then turn out to be false saviours—the brothers of Tamar's husband, who do not give her children, have the same structural function as Ruth's 'redeemer' (Ruth 4). Finally, both Tamar and Ruth are involved with a father figure, be he a patriarch or a head of clan.

The many similar features should not obscure the fact that the two stories differ from each other in several details. Boaz marries Ruth, while Judah never comes near Tamar after she cheats him into giving her what she is after. As if to compensate for this factor, Ruth—who begins a husband—has one child only (or, at least, only one 'important' child), while Tamar—who remains husbandless—produces twin boys. Naomi functions as Ruth's senior shadow figure, to the point that there is some confusion in regard to her status vis-à-vis Ruth and the infant towards the end of the book, where she is treated as the

(ch. 3) develops from her obedience to Naomi and does not seem out of her own initiative. In short, the reader gets the impression that deeds attributed to these mothers of great men are recounted with relish rather than with an intention to moralize. They celebrate the matriarch's achievement to such an extent that the dubious means she employs are considered tokens of her resourcefulness and determination. The question is: What are the features in each story that enable the authors to rise above conventional morality and record the exploits of the Temptress without censure?

The answer pertains more to the motivation ascribed to the female protagonists than to the character traits, action or conduct attributed to them. Tamar and Ruth (and Naomi, who at various times fulfils various functions—she is Ruth's dependent as well as prime-mover and supergo; in addition, she is chief beneficiary of the younger woman's actions) are motivated neither by pleasure-seeking nor by financial or social ambitions. On the contrary: the chief motive attributed to them is the desire to produce a male heir for their deceased husbands. This is regarded as a worthy, even admirable, motive. While it is recognized that personal salvation for a destitute woman can be achieved through widowhood and motherhood only, the women are presented as if this consideration were of secondary significance and not the chief reason for their actions. Furthermore, in substituting themselves (an element which is more pronounced in Tamar's story), the women run an enormous risk. They know that if their plan fails society may reject, and even persecute, them for their attempt to ensure an orderly functioning of that same society through the production of suitable heirs. This kind of motivation and the extreme actions it requires is approved of, even admired. Women who risk whatever little social status they have, and possibly their lives, in order to perpetuate the continuity of Judahite leader stock display a rare kind of courage. Therefore, and despite the fact that they are foreigners, the authors who record their tales are on their side.

Lot's daughters conform to two types: that of the paired-off matriarchs (Sarah and Hagar, Leah and Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah, Hannah and Peninah, Ruth and Naomi); and that of the Temptress. The use of these two models, which are complementary but also contradictory, within the same story creates a structural tension. This duality and

b. Lot's daughters (Genesis 19.31-36)

The tension it generates were caused by the transmission process this particular legend has undergone. As we shall see, certain views were inserted into its present place within the biblical text.

The two daughters, who remain nameless, function as a cooperative team, much in the way Ruth and Naomi do. One is older, thus socially superior and, appropriately, the initiator of the action; the other is younger and obeys her sister, as befits her inferior status. They commit incest in order to produce a male heir, for they believe that they and their father are the only human survivors of the Sodom and Gomorrah catastrophe. If judged by the yardstick used for the evaluation of Tamar's and Ruth's deeds, Lot's daughters behave in an exemplary fashion, according to their assessment of the situation that the future of all humankind is at stake. If the transgressions of Tamar and Ruth are justified, those of Lot's daughters should be justified as well. Perhaps even more so, because the situation, as they see it, is urgent. They are, of course, wrong in the assumption that the fate of the world now hangs upon their initiative; however, they act in good faith. Indeed, like Tamar and Ruth, they achieve success. They become the mothers of heroes: their sons (like those of Sarah, Hagar, and other matriarchs) found nations which are Israel's neighbours and are politically significant, one way or the other, throughout the First Temple era.

So far we have dealt with the 'matriarchal' elements in the story of Lot's daughters. Let us now examine the elements introduced from the 'Temptress' paradigm. The male victim is a biological father, which goes beyond the mere father figure (father-in-law or an older, influential relative) encountered in the stories of Tamar and Ruth. Tamar and Ruth exploit the fact that their male target has drunk, and therefore may be more manageable; Lot's daughters go one step further by actually making their father drunk so as to ensure his befuddled cooperation. As we have seen, cheating the male whose awareness has been weakened by drink is an important ingredient of the Temptress paradigm. Once the male is weakened, Lot's daughters use their sexuality and seduce their father. As is dictated by their motivation, the daughters are not promiscuous; their interest in incestuous relations is limited to the preservation of mankind. Once they think that they have done their duty, they stop. One feels like asking: are they very different from Tamar and Ruth? They are certainly guided by the exact same motive! Why, then, is their story

social order. Her action reinitiates a dead man's claim to his rightful place within clan and community and may even, as in Ruth's case, save his property from passing outside the immediate family. On the other hand, the so called 'negative' Temptress, as exemplified by the figure of Potiphar's wife, is characterized by a total disregard for the social order, a disregard which, if not checked, can ultimately endanger the very fabric of this order. A man's wife should know her place: if she is disloyal, she should be exposed and punished. Sexual politics is indeed used by both types of Temptress, but it is done in different ways and, most important, for different ends. The main issue is whether the Temptress's action benefits society, for within the society we are dealing with the individual must protect the social framework without which he/she is defenceless. Hence, self-fulfilment must be subordinated to the higher value of social order.

The Foreign Woman (Proverbs 1-9; cf. Chapter 3, section g above) is yet another example of a 'negative' Temptress. She shares quite a few traits with Potiphar's wife, and some additional features complete her portrait. Like all the other temptresses mentioned, 'positive' and 'negative' alike, she is a foreigner. She is a married woman who takes advantage of her husband's periodical absences, and indulges in adulterous activities. Her two chief weapons are her sexual charms and rhetorical skills. She states her business clearly and forcefully. Her motivation, though, is dissimilar to that of the other temptresses: it seems from passion (like Potiphar's wife), as well as the practice of fertility rites. This last feature is unique to her. Succumbing to her charms endangers the fabric of society, as well as the life and well-being of the individual. Therefore, she should be identified and avoided. In short, both Potiphar's wife and the Foreign Woman belong to the 'negative' Temptress type. The differences (or additions, in the case of the Foreign Woman) define each of them as belonging to a sub-type of their kind.

d. Samson's women (Judges 14-16)

Samson gets married twice, and both wives bring him bad luck. The anonymous first wife (chs. 14-15), who may exemplify a special kind of marriage, whereby the bride remains at her father's house, as well as Delilah (ch. 16) are both foreign—they are Philistines. They utilize sexual persuasion and verbal skills for the purpose of extracting from Samson either the meaning of his riddles (the first wife), or the source of his unique strength (Delilah). In so doing they cause grave

damage to Samson, who in spite of his strength, intellect, and divine inspiration is like putty in their hands. Ultimately they bring destruction not only upon Samson's head but also upon their own and their countrymen's, for Samson's revenge in both cases is terribly effective. In other words, these women endanger the society in which they live to the point of physical destruction.

The features listed so far are those common to the 'negative' Temptresses described in the previous section and to Samson's wives. Some differences, though, are very much in evidence. Samson's wives are no adulteresses—even the first one, who at some point is accused of wilful adultery.³ Furthermore, the motives for their behaviour are not hedonistic ones. On the contrary: they act out of loyalty to their native community—their family and Philistine society. It so happens that there is a conflict of interests between their native community and their husband's. According to the author, however, a wife should adopt her husband's interests. In this case, then, each Philistine woman should have suppressed her native patriotism (there is a hint that financial gain and personal safety play their part in the choice the wives made) by subjecting it to the husband's. A wife's loyalty, on the political as well as the domestic level, is a basic requirement for an orderly family life. Samson's wives, once married, should have transferred their loyalty to him, but failed to do so. Their failure endangers the social order. This, in the last analysis, is their worst crime, inasmuch as it is the weightiest argument against any 'negative' Temptress. Lack of marital devotion might lead to anarchy and the demolition of the communal framework of which the family is the basic unit, and without whose protection individual members of the community cannot survive. This is borne out by the final outcome of the stories. The Philistine community suffers a great loss and Samson, who should have chosen more wisely, pays for his fatal and repeated mistake with his life.

e. Summary

Characteristic features of the 'positive' Temptress type are: She is a husbandless foreigner, motivated by the desire to produce male offspring, a seductress who uses sexually for achieving her aims; and a successful manipulator of her chosen male victim. The 'negative' Temptress is a foreigner too. She is married and an adulteress; is motivated by lust and/or foreign fertility cult practices; has consider-

able rhetorical powers, as well as sexual charms; and is not always successful in her attempts to manipulate men. The similarities point to the fact that the two kinds of 'Empress' possibly belong to one basic prototype which for literary and ideological reasons was divided into 'positive' and 'negative' halves. Structurally, the two sub-types perhaps relate to one basic model.

Ruth, Tamar, and possibly Jael (who will be discussed in the next chapter) belong to the 'positive' paradigm. Potiphar's wife and the Foreign Woman to the 'negative' one. Lot's daughters have more in common with the former than the latter. Samson's wives present a variation on the 'negative' type. They are not adulteresses, but allow former loyalties to override the loyalty they owe to their husband. Loyalty to the male spouse is placed by the author/editor of the Samson cycle above other loyalties. We are told that when two values are in conflict, the right one should be chosen and adhered to, with no regard to any other values; and that Samson's wives failed to make the right choice.

a. *Old Testament attitudes towards foreign women and mixed marriages*

Chapter 11

FOREIGN WOMEN

From the very beginning of Israelite history patriarchs, leaders, and simple folk took foreign (non-Hebrew) women for wives, concubines, and mistresses. Hagar was an Egyptian slave (Genesis 16.21 and 25.12). Apart from her Abraham had another foreign wife, Keturah (Genesis 25.1, 4; 1 Chronicles 1.32-33) whom he took after Sarah's death. Judith and Basemath, Esau's wives, were Hittite (Genesis 26.34). Bathshua, Judah's wife, was a Canaanite (Genesis 38.2, 12; 1 Chronicles 2.3). Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law and the mother of his twin children Perez and Zerah, was probably a Canaanite as well (Genesis 38). Joseph married Asenath, an Egyptian woman and the daughter of an Egyptian high priest (Genesis 41.45, 50; 46.20). Moses' wife Zipporah was a Midianite (Exodus 2.21; 4.25; 18.2), and his second wife was a Cushite (Numbers 12.1). Genealogical lists in Chronicles record foreign wives and concubines within the accepted structure of Israelite tribal society. These women were Egyptian (1 Chronicles 4.8), Aramean (7.14), and of other ethnic origins. Jael was a Kenite (Judges 4-5). Samson's two wives were Philistine (Judges 14-16). Ruth, King David's ancestress, was a Moabite. Bathsheba, David's wife and Solomon's mother, was perhaps a foreigner; at any rate, her first husband Uriah was a Hittite. Absalom's mother was from Geshur (2 Samuel 3.3 and elsewhere). King Solomon used foreign marriages as a diplomatic tool to an even larger extent than his father had done—he married many foreign women of noble descent, the most notable of whom was Pharaoh's daughter (1 Kings 3.1; 7.8; 9.24; 11.1 onwards). His heir Rehoboam was the son of an Ammonite woman (1 Kings 14.21), although we might have expected the Egyptian lady to be the mother of the heir to the throne. Asa's mother Maacah was probably an Aramean (1 Kings 15.9); Jezebel (1 Kings 16.13 and elsewhere) and Athaliah (2 Kings 8.26; 11; and elsewhere), of Phoenician origins. Mixed marriages, especially with

women of neighbouring nations, were so prevalent during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah that both leaders felt duty bound to fight this practice (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13.23ff.).

In short, according to the biblical records, many foreign women—many more than foreign men—intermarried into ancient Israel. Many of them turned out to be mothers of great men. King David's personal ancestry and history, for instance, are spiked with foreign females—Lot's daughters, Tamar, Ruth, and his wives Bathsheba (?) and Maacah. How did Old Testament writers, in various times and places, regard this phenomenon of ethnic impurity? As we shall see, mixed marriages were either overlooked or objected to. The reasons for upholding either of the two diametrically opposed views were dictated by changes in the political circumstances of the community. The patriarchal stories in Genesis stress, time and time again, that a foreign wife is inferior to and less desirable than a woman of the man's clan or ethnic-national group. Abraham (Genesis 24.3-8, 37-41) and Rebecca (27.46) insist on endogamy at least for the favourite son, the carrier of the divine promise. Ishmael is inferior because he was born to a woman of foreign descent and lowly status, and married outside the family. Esau's Hittite wives annoy Rebecca, and serve as an excuse for sending Jacob to her family so that he finds a wife for himself. The migrant family of Abraham refuses to inter-mingle with the Canaanite nations of their new country. Inter-marriages did occur, but were frowned upon or—in extreme cases—prevented by force. Thus Jacob and his sons refuse the importantly political liaison with Shechem when they reject Hamor's proposal to marry Dinah (Genesis 34). It is true that, in this instance, another wealthy principle is at stake—Hamor of Shechem had raped Dinah before he asked for her hand, and her honour must be avenged. The girl herself is not consulted and the Shechemites' readiness to make amends by joining the Israelite community is exploited but not taken seriously. It seems, therefore, that the pretext of a sister's honour—although it is one of the reasons for attacking the city—is less significant than the reluctance to lose the clan's unique identity through intermarriage.

Once the self-confidence of the migrants grows, they begin to explore the benefits of intermarriage as a device for their cultural and political acceptance into their new environment. Prominent families set the trend, for they are more susceptible to fresh cultural influence and ethnic assimilation than other families. From the beginning of the monarchy the number of intermarriages increases, and exogamy

is socially tolerated to the point where it inspires indifference rather than anxiety. This attitude prevails until well into the First Temple era. It is usually assumed that a foreign wife will join her husband's family and adapt to its cultural and religious customs. From the time of Hosea, however (second half of the eighth century BC), the tide turns once more. Some classical prophets—Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah—compare the nation of Israel to a foreign born and inferior slut (Ezekiel 16.45, for instance). Narrative sources from this period onwards contain strong indictments against intermarriages; and Wisdom literature (Proverbs 1-9) presents the danger of associating with foreign women of a certain type in vivid, perhaps too attractive, terms. A curious picture emerges: the main stream of Old Testament ideology views foreign women negatively. At the same time, royal persons as well as lesser dignitaries and ordinary people continue to intermarry. The wrath expressed by the prophets and the anger of the other literary sources could not change this until, during the Second Temple era, the situation became so bad that the cultural and religious identity of the community was threatened. Then, by the mid-fifth century BC, Ezra and Nehemiah struck an official blow against the practice and excommunicated families who refused to send their foreign members away (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13).

Intermarriage is perfectly natural and politically expedient. Why, then, did it provoke persistent opposition—which, for hundreds of years, did not succeed in suppressing the phenomenon?

The Deuteronomistic view of 1 Kings 11 argues that King Solomon's chief shortcoming was not his unwise treatment of the Northern Israelite tribes, but his inclination (in his later years) to indulge and even to participate in the foreign cults practised by his wives. Women are very often typecast as inherently religious; and when such a woman marries into an Israelite family—especially when she is of noble birth and good education—she tends to stick to her original religion. Instead of embracing Israelite religion, as they should, such foreign wives cause their menfolk to deviate from the right path and follow their pagan ways. King Solomon's wives, Asa's mother, Jezebel, and Athaliah—to mention but a few illustrious foreign ladies—all behaved in the same manner; and Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite chief, nearly managed to convert an Israelite (Numbers 25.15-18). Women are viewed as chief practitioners of fertility cults by Hosea (mainly in chs. 2-3). Ezekiel (ch. 8 and elsewhere), Jeremiah (9.19), and other prophets. Israelite women are accused of practising these rites too, but foreign women are regarded as the most

fanatic adherents of the rites. This foreign religious influence must have been so great—probably because the beliefs and the practices it entailed seemed attractive, or culturally and diplomatically beneficial, to the Israelites and Judahites who adopted them—that they had to be continuously fought against.

Because foreign women were generally associated with fertility cults, they became associated with seduction, prostitution, and sexual disloyalty also. Even the best of them, those who were assimilated to the point that they became matriarchs and local or national heroines (and see section b below), are described as operating within the framework of sexual seduction. The associative chain which links foreign women with fertility cults, sexual promiscuity, and unscrupulous disloyalty is used many times by various prophets, from Hosea onwards, as a model for describing Israel's attitude towards God in terms of a relationship between a loving husband and his faithless, often foreign immoral wife.

Some prominent foreign women have already been discussed above, under headings pertaining to their sphere of influence (Part I—Jezebel, Asa's mother, Athaliah), or the literary model which informs their description (Part II—Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and others). In order to avoid redundancy, the following remarks are confined to one particular aspect: What defines a given foreign woman as a positive or a negative character? Jael's case, which has hardly been touched upon so far, will be dealt with in greater detail than the other stories.

b. *The positive side:
Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and Jael*

There are a few features which are shared by all four women, or by most of them. All of them are seductresses, amateur or professional: Tamar seduces Judah; Ruth does the same thing to Boaz; Rahab is a prostitute; and Jael, who puts Sisera in her own bed and his him so that he 'fell between her legs' (Judges 5.27, according to the Hebrew text), probably used her charms as part of her apparent hospitality—sexual connotations are part and parcel of the story. Tamar and Ruth feature in the genealogy of King David and, according to a New Testament source (Matthew 1.5, where Ruth and Tamar are mentioned as well), so does Rahab. All three marry into the tribe of Judah and produce male children who turn out to be leaders. At first glance Jael seems to differ from her three colleagues for, as far as we

know, she is childless. In addition, she is not a single woman who marries into the tribe of Judah. Jael is a married woman, the wife of Heber the Kenite. However, the Bible describes how the Kenites, originally a non-Israelite clan or tribe, were slowly assimilated into Judah. This process of assimilation was first geographical, then ethnic (Judges 1.16; 4.11, 17; 1 Samuel 15.6; 1 Chronicles 2.55). Indeed the foreign origin of the Kenites is noted, but no importance is attached to it because they cooperated with the tribe of Judah and were later incorporated into it.

Tamar and Ruth place the welfare of the family they have joined above their personal interests; Rahab and Jael prefer to serve the cause of the adopted community. By so doing, all four reap a personal reward as well. Their foreignness enhances the impact of their deeds, and their acceptance within their chosen community is assured. By choosing this particular path, all four women incur grave risks to their person, and face these risks courageously. Tamar risks being burnt as an adulteress. Ruth leaves family, home, religion, and cultural milieu. Rahab is in danger of being exposed as a traitor to her home town. Jael might have easily been overpowered by Sisera, a seasoned warrior who, even when exhausted, still possessed a presumably strong instinct for survival. All of them succeeded because of their faith, and because they serve the right cause. It is no wonder, therefore, that their characters are judged to be extraordinarily righteous, and their contribution is acknowledged without any reserve. In short, when a foreign woman chooses to adopt Israelite (Judahite) society and religion, and her behaviour indicates that she is seriously committed to her new community, then her acceptance is guaranteed.

Tamar, Ruth, and Rahab have been discussed previously, and therefore no more will be said about them now; however, a few additional words about Jael seem to be in order. Unlike her three colleagues, Jael is a married woman. It even seems that she actually commits adultery with Sisera. The text (Judges 4-5) does not say so explicitly; nevertheless, various euphemisms and references to legs, beds, and so on impart broad sexual connotations. Because of her marital status, Jael's deeds could have been condemned by the biblical writers. However, she is not classified as a 'negative' foreign woman. In her case—as in that of Rahab's—political and military considerations which involve the community as a whole are placed above considerations of conventional morality. The narrator's view-

later in date and more refined in tone—is Judith, who kills Holofernes by using deceit and seduction (Judith 8–13).

c. *The negative side:*

Porphyah's wife, Samson's women, and the Foreign Woman of Proverbs

Porphyah's wife and Samson's women are temptresses of a dangerous kind: their behaviour has fatal consequences for their male victims and, sometimes, for their own selves (cf. Chapter 10, sections c and d above). They share quite a few formal traits. They are foreign and married. They are faithless—be it for reasons of sexual desire (Porphyah's wife), cult (the Foreign Woman), or loyalty to a previous community (Samson's Philistine wives). This is their biggest fault. When a woman marries, she should join in her husband's community. Like Ruth, she should forsake all other loyalties in favour of her newly-found one. Otherwise, law and order within the community will be supplanted by anarchy. Instead, these foreign women remain loyal either to their own personal interests or to those of the paternal household. Therefore, the results of consorting with them and their like are unacceptable. The results of consorting with them and other women of the same type will invariably turn out to be calamitous. Thus Joseph goes to jail—an event which, ironically, serves to elevate him to a position much higher than the one he occupied in his master's household. Samson loses his strength and is blinded; when he regains his unique power he commits suicide, destroying many Philistines together with his own person. And the Foreign Woman of Proverbs, that clever female of loose morals, devours charms and deviant religious convictions, is fatal for her followers.

d. *Summary*

Foreign women were accepted into the Judeahite/Israeli community if and when they were prepared to forsake their previous ethnic, cultural, and religious ties and to adopt the systems of values and beliefs prevalent in their new environment. When this basic condition was met, exogamic marriage was either permitted or else overlooked. When a woman continued to practise foreign ways even after her marriage, she and her children were disapproved of. The examples of Tamara, Ruth and Rahab show that whenever a foreign woman demonstrated that she valued the welfare of her chosen community

point is encountered again and again: whenever two social principles come into conflict (in this case, sexual standards of an individual *versus* survival of the community), the Bible teaches that survival comes first. Similarly, during the Maccabean period, self-defence in times of emergency was defined as more important than the observing of the Sabbath. When everything else fails, then, even adulterous seduction is a legitimate means of eliminating an elusive enemy. In this instance Deborah's—and Barak's—considerable talents prove to be inadequate: the outcome of the battle is not decided until Sisera is killed, and this they do not manage to do. It is perhaps symbolical that Deborah and Jael have to combine their resources in order to defeat Sisera. At this point Barak disappears from the scene, and does not participate in the conclusion of the battle.

A sizable part of the poem (Judges 5) deals with the two heroines—Deborah and Jael—and with their victim Sisera. The juxtaposition of the two heroines is interesting. Deborah is a female community leader—prophetess, military strategist, poetess, and judge. However, her figure lacks sexuality and domesticity: the attribute *'šer lappidot*, which is applied to her name, can be understood either as 'wife of Lappidoth' (an individual about whom nothing else is known), or simply as 'a spiced woman'. The Hebrew term *'šer* lends itself to both renderings. The Jewish Sages, who speculated about Lappidoth, identified him with Barak, thus supplying Deborah with 'wifely' integrity and womanhood. This interpretation, as we have seen, is linguistically uncertain. It is informed by the extralinguistic opinion that a woman, even when she is active in the public sphere, should retain her distinctive duties and sexuality. Otherwise, she cannot hope to be either happy or completely successful. Deborah, despite the efforts of the commentators, is sadly lacking in these 'feminine' qualities. Therefore, a complementary figure is required, Jael, who is represented as Deborah's complement, spends her whole life inside the domestic framework. She uses hospitality—a traditional virtue—and sexuality as devices for winning the battle. Whatever she does could have been done by any ordinary woman, for she uses no weapon but her own self. Is there a note of censure in the way events are told, an implied criticism levelled at Deborah for her deficiency as a woman? Jael herself, at any rate, is typocast as a representative of a well-established intercultural tradition—that of a brave married or widowed woman who sacrifices, or seems to sacrifice, her virtue in order to save her people. Another (post-biblical) instance of the same type—

above her own she was accepted without further reference to her origins.

Most of the stories about women of foreign descent focus on these women's sexuality, or powers of seduction. This places the description of most of them within literary paradigms which have been discussed earlier. Thus Tamar and Ruth are temptresses; Rahab a prostitute; the Foreign Woman of Proverbs a prostitute, sacred prostitute or simply an adulterous woman; and so forth. Therefore, it is impossible to delineate a stereotype which would efficiently define all or most members of this group. In most cases, the foreign origin of these women was judged to be secondary to the more important features which make up each character, or which determine what literary type it belongs to.

THE ANCESTRRESS—AN EXTENDED FEMALE METAPHOR

Chapter 12

(Genesis 2.4b-3.24)

a. *The story of the First Man*

I find the story of the Garden an extremely difficult and frightening topic to discuss. It is one of the best known and most written about passages of the Old Testament. Most readers either view it as a cliché of male chauvinistic attitude, or as a justification for these same attitudes. It is well-nigh impossible to contemplate such an important literary opus objectively. One tends to read into it ideological conceptions and biased opinions. So much has been written about it, in ancient as well as in modern times, that an attempt to approach it afresh is doomed to failure almost from the outset. With these reservations in mind, I would like to advance a few tentative remarks concerning the contents and meaning of the passage.

Many people interpret the Garden story as a tale of human disgrace, of the fall of mankind from divine grace through the initiative taken by the first woman. If this is really the main theme or *leitmotif* of the story, it should contain a strong, one-dimensional, single-minded condemnation of the female species. As we shall presently see, this is not exactly the case. Although the first woman, spiritual mother of her sex and prototype of her daughters and sisters in successive generations, is roundly blamed for the expulsion from the Garden, she is not simply typecast as a foolish and villainous person, but characterized as a complex figure. The expulsion itself, although it entails a loss of comfort and deprivation of contact with the divine cosmic principle, is inevitable in terms of other details in the narrative, which are not directly linked to the woman's conduct. These details are built into the narrative from its very beginning, so that the woman's action—although it is of crucial importance for the outcome—does not generate this outcome exclusively. Furthermore, the rift between Creator and created is not only unavoidable, but also beneficial for mankind. The concept that man is a combination of earthly and divine elements is extremely important. Hence, the critic