

One concern of literary theorists is the question of boundaries in filling gaps. I have adopted for this study Bal's method in which historical and literary texts can be made to read and rework each other. Fortunately for such an intertextual method, the writings of the Second Temple period and subsequently rabbinic midrashic literature provide a rich taproot for this endeavor. Using the postbiblical and rabbinic midrashic versions to fill the gaps of the biblical story assures that the reading remains within the boundary of the tradition. However, the reading also steps outside the tradition. By using the post-biblical texts to fill some of the gaps of the biblical story, one is able to produce a new text, a new story, one that breaks through the biblical frame-up. In a circular version, reading backward and comparing the gap-filled story with its hole-y version allows one to comment on biblical narrative design, to examine the narrator's agenda.

A second layer of reading is necessary in order to free the reader from the patriarchal codes that have controlled traditional readings. The feminist perspective both invites a reader to give voice to the female figure in the text and seeks to escape being seduced by the narrator into accepting his view. Of course my reading is also partial, not prescriptive, and as such may stand as a reminder that there is no impartial reading.

Narrative re-collects, re-members, repeats, in order for there to be an escape from repetition, in order for there to be change or progress. As Peter Brooks has observed, narrative, like psychotherapy, aspires to 'a narrative redescription of reality', to a 'new story' (1984: 235, 285).¹ The literary text is the place where writer and reader, narrator and narratee engage in the dialogue that produces the new literary work. Comparing the story in Genesis 39 of Joseph and the Egyptian woman I call Mut-em-enet with its re-collected, re-membered version in the *Testament of Joseph*, a section of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, provides an opportunity to examine the literary effect of this new story created from the skeleton of the old.

Most interpreters read only the first narrative level of a story,

1. See also Schafer 1981: 25-49 for a discussion of 'narrative redescription'.

BREAKING FREE OF THE BIBLICAL FRAME-UP: UNCOVERING THE WOMAN IN GENESIS 39

Alice Bach

The angel of the Lord told me and instructed me that women are more easily overcome by the spirit of promiscuity than are men. They contrive in their hearts against men, then by decking themselves out they lead men's minds astray. (T. Reub. 5.3)

One can find everything in a text, provided one is disrespectful toward it (Umberto Eco).

Getting at her Story

Getting at the suppressed story of the female in male-authored literature requires both filling the gaps in the narrative and reading the text for the patriarchal agenda that has shaped the telling of the story. Some time ago Harold Bloom, in a moment of anxiety, envisaged that

the first true break with literary continuity will be brought about in generations to come, if the burgeoning religion of Liberated Woman spreads from its clusters of enthusiasts to dominate the West. Homer will cease to be the inevitable precursor, and the rhetoric and forms of our literature may then break at last from tradition (1975: 33).

Bloom's confrontational description maintains polar tensions of gender, and would exchange one hierarchy for another. The kind of feminist reading that I offer here does not lay any claim to dominate the West, not even a desire to dominate the reading of biblical texts. Rather, getting at her story changes the rules of the politics of gender, by emphasizing the partial nature of each critic's reading.

the one focalized through the narratorial voice. For those concerned with gender readings, however, the reading strategy of embedding allows the female literary figure at least to whisper underneath the narrator's full voice. My reading of the texts in this study follows in part Mieke Bal's model of the woman's story text that permits the fictive reconstruction of the woman's story within a man's story (Bal 1977; 1981: 41-59). In Genesis 39 one moment of focalization through the female literary figure occurs: in v. 13, when Mut-em-enet sees (realizes) that Joseph has left his tunic in her hands. For a moment we see what Mut-em-enet saw: we can follow her train of thought. The warm tunic in her hand is the evidence that drives her subsequent dialogue. However, this moment of focalization reveals only a fragment of an embedded story.

Because the narrator has succeeded in effectively silencing Mut-em-enet with the powerful frame of his story—he has already told us in v. 10 that 'as often as she tried to coerce Joseph day after day, he did not yield to her desire to lie beside her, to be with her'—no other moments of feminine focalization allow us to get at the suppressed story of the woman. Thus, in Genesis 39 the search for the woman embedded does not produce a very full picture of the woman's story in Genesis; narrator's victory in suppressing the woman's story in Genesis 39, I suggest that there is a way to recreate Mut-em-enet's story, her version of what happened in bed with Joseph. The literary strategy that allows the reader to imagine her story is one that links the biblical text with the embedded texts found in the versions of subsequent narrators.

An integral part of this reading strategy, then, is to read beyond the ending of the biblical story, beyond the *telos* of crime and punishment and its regimen of righteous resolutions.¹ Another strategy developed by Bal, connected to the first, is to wrest interpretations from traditional commentators who have filled the textual gaps with discourse born of their own agenda. Women's alienation from the literary canon has partially been due to the fact that the literary works of men reflect chiefly a

1. See DuPlessis 1985, who analyzes women's fiction of the twentieth century in this manner.

male view of life which is not necessarily women's experience. Thus, the text I am producing gives speech to the silenced suppressed female figure, and tries to understand how social restrictions have shaped women's lives. As such, my text becomes a political document, as well as one of literary criticism. Since the biblical expansions and commentators have concentrated on Joseph's story, we readers have been taught to experience the woman as strange and alien. Reading as a woman then, requires reversal of the self and other. To achieve transformation one must refuse to be flooded by the otherness the author's thoughts. Reading as a woman means not being carried away by the magic of his story.

To reconstruct her story, I shall look primarily at the narrative of the *Testament of Joseph* and later midrashim, later remembrances of his story. Parenthetically it should be noted that the theological code in the *Testaments* has been used to justify an implicit moral code, the one that extols the pious Jewish hero fleeing away from the sexual advances of the woman, while the same time the woman's sexual desire is universally condemned. The technique becomes a restrictive code by devaluing it other, or as Hayden White identifies it, 'ostensive self-definition by negation' (White 1972: 5). The interpreters, both ancient and modern, have been led by the gender code to enhance, not to eliminate the differences between the two versions, his story and her story. The gender code accomplishes this 'by structuring those differences according to the division between men and women on which the thematic network is based' (Bal 1988b: 111).

The same interpreters, in my view, have closed off the opportunity to multiple readings by genre stereotyping. By prefacing and suffusing their interpretations of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* with the description of a testament as a combination of parennetic and apocalyptic genres, scholars and critics have guaranteed the meaning of the literary work. Such prescription insures a one-note reading for texts based on shared similarities of form and language. Reading a work within the confining category of genre conveys the values of the social system which it reflects, supports and encompasses. There is also an element of elitism in genre stereotyping, in which the

theorist preserves authority over the text and over its less expert readers.

Joseph's Version: Embedding the Woman

In literature, as Genette has emphasized, the idea of what makes a particular personality probable or realistic differs for every society and for every era of Western society. A literary personage is always a construction in language of a network of relations and associations. It is an element in a text or, in semiotic terms, a signifier analogous functionally to other signifying elements in the text.¹ In Genette's terms the behavior of both Joseph and Mut-em-enet seen through the lens of the ancient world is 'realistically' portrayed. He embraces all the characteristics of the hero: loyal and pious, strong enough to resist the temptations of the female. She is the out-of-control female, slave to her passions. Read through the conventions of the moral code, his story is one of honor, hers one of shame. On the other hand, as I shall argue in the final section of this essay,

1. The question of 'focalization', a term of Genette's, has been itself the focus of literary debate. See Genette 1972: 49-70; also Genette 1988 for text subsequently critiqued by Rimmon and Bal. For a collection of essays which contain both the method and application of Genette's narratological method to works of Stendahl, Flaubert and Proust, see Genette 1982. Genette's most recent reconsideration of point of view, voice, and focalization and his response to his critics on these subjects can be found in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988).

Shlomith Rimmon (1976:33-62) alters Genette's concept of focalization by arguing that 'focalization depends on the narrator and on the amount of information imparted to the reader by the narrator' (p. 59). The difficulty with this observation is that the reader will always be controlled by the narrator's version of the story. Bal (1985a: 111) has offered another way of understanding the difference between the focalizer and the narrator by her observation that one needs to distinguish between 'the vision through which the elements are presented and on the other hand, the identity of the voice that is verbalizing the vision'. Bal's method of distinguishing between the dominant narratorial voice and the suppressed voice of the other is invaluable to those who wish to offer readings that give voice to the story of the silenced characters in a literary text.

a literary character is more than an abstract literary function. Inevitably, as readers we endow characters with three-dimensional lives of thoughts and feelings similar to our own. When one reads like a woman, therefore, one needs to resist the conventions of *vraisemblance* that assure the reader, 'this is the only way the story could have happened'. Thus, one goal of my reading is 'to destroy the myth inside and outside ourselves' (Wittig 1981: 50-51).

In analyzing the narratological aspects of the *Testament of Joseph*, the effect of voice becomes primary. The device of first-person narration permits the character of Joseph to filter the events of the story through his own point of view. Presented with apparent objectivity, the story bristles with slanted conclusions. Viewed from a structuralist approach, one can see the male story as the opposite of the embedded female story. Since the *Testament of Joseph* account presents Joseph as the subject, and Mut-em-enet the object, the intention of the story as told by Joseph is to resist the object. For if the righteous man is continuously able to reject the wicked woman, the center will hold. Paternal authority will continue to triumph over unrepressed female sexuality.

If the story's subject and object were reversed, Mut-em-enet might have got her man. The story, admittedly a different one, would allow the subject and object to fall in love, the obstacles to that love to be removed, and a happy-ever-after ending. That is the structure of the biblical story of Abigail and David told in 1 Samuel 25, where the husband conveniently dies, leaving Abigail a widow.¹ It is the romance of *Joseph and Aseneth*, where the improper love object becomes Jewish paragon.²

1. David is a biblical hero much attracted to women, unlike Joseph. The only woman who does not excite David is Michal, the one given by her father in the traditional manner. Unlike Joseph, David prefers women who belong to other men. Indeed the future king is anxious to be linked with his paramours. Thus, the husband of Bath-sheba is also dispatched so that the subject can have a clear field to pursue his love object. One wonders how David's story would sound in the mouth of *ho sophron*.

2. For a comparison of Mut-em-enet with these two heroines of Jewish tradition, see below.

The character of Joseph held particular appeal for a Hellenistic audience since he is the Jewish hero struggling for power and position in the foreign/Gentile court. This model was one with which Flavius Josephus, a Jewish official on the fringes of the Roman court, connected himself. Philo, an Alexandrian, could make use of the popularity of Joseph as a biblical figure living and succeeding at the Egyptian court.

A second aspect of Joseph's character that became important during the postbiblical period, a time when erotic themes were being played out dramatically in the works of New Comedy authors and in Greek romantic novels, was his God-assisted ability to hold the line against sexual temptation. In each retelling of Joseph's encounter with a woman (except for the romance *Joseph and Aseneth*) the key issue is adultery, the moral struggle between the good (male) and the wicked (female), between the self (Jewish hero) and the other (foreign/Gentile woman). *Joseph and Aseneth* also has the dichotomy of chastity/pleasure as the primary focus: it is a version of self and other, as in our adultery texts, but in this novel the resolution is marriage, since the foreign/wicked woman converts/is transformed into the self, thus absorbing or eradicating evil. In the adultery texts the good hero triumphs over the wicked, but the dichotomy of good/evil remains—defeated temporarily. As Kugel notes, in postbiblical associations with the biblical Joseph, Joseph's piety was connected specifically with his refusal to succumb to the sexual overtures of the Egyptian woman. 'There can be little doubt that this name [*Yôšep̄ haššadîq̄*] was based on this incident with Potiphar's wife' (Kugel 1990: 25).

In the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* Joseph is the 'ethical model par excellence' (Hollander 1981: 16). In his own story, the *Testament of Joseph*, the hero refers to himself at the beginning as the beloved Israel (1.2), an ambiguous appellation that refers both to his father and to his nation. Young Joseph, as we will learn in the *Testament of Joseph* 3–9, is beloved of a woman, one who is obsessed with him and approaches him time after time for seven years (3.4). Because she is married, and dalliance with a married woman is a capital crime, Joseph sees her love as a threat, raw sexual desire as an overture to death. 'Beloved of Israel' allies Joseph with his father rather than his

mother, with whom the biblical text connects him. The father-son alliance signals the reader that this is a story about an all-powerful father who is able to rescue the hero from brother who want what he has¹ and a woman who wants him. In his recounting of the ten temptations that prove Joseph to be validated by the symbolic Father ('in ten temptations he showed that I was approved, and in all of them I endured; for endurance is a mighty remedy, and patience gives many good things' [2.7]) Joseph describes the tangle with the woman at great length before he describes in an incidental way the perfidy of his brothers that made him a martyr slave.² Thus, the danger from the Egyptian woman is so threatening that Joseph steps outside the chronology of his story in order to emphasize the primary danger of female sexual desire. In fact, in the second sequence of the *Testament of Joseph* narrative, the narrator hero returns again to his purchase by Pentephres, which was engineered by the Egyptian woman.

About that time the Memphian woman passed by in a chariot the wife of Pentephres, with great pomp and she cast her eyes upon me;

for the eunuchs had told her concerning me.

Now therefore, try him and set the youth free to be your steward,

and the God of the Hebrews will bless you, for grace from heaven is upon you (T. Jos. 12.1, 3).

Thus, in Joseph's version, in spite of the moral code which refers the interpretation to the ultimate victory of society's demands:

1. The fact that Joseph was beloved of his father clearly disturbs the brothers. Joseph's special status is mentioned in T. Sim. 2.6; T. Dan. 1.5 T. Gad 1.5, and T. Jos. 10.5, where Joseph reminds us again that 'my brothers know how my father loved me, and yet I did not exalt myself in my heart'. One advantage of monologue is, of course, the lack of response to self-aggrandizing statements. The reader, knowing the biblical Joseph's arrogant nature may smile at his unwitting reminder that old age has not shriveled his ego.

2. Kugel argues (1990: 23) rightly that in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 'the incident with Potiphar's wife is the main—virtually the only—item on the agenda: Joseph narrates it in some detail, then returns to it again afterwards with more particulars'.

over individual erotic desire, the woman is his rescuer. The wife of Pentephres is the one who saves him from the Ishmaelite merchant who has enslaved him, a detail that does not appear in the biblical version, Josephus, Philo or *Jubilees*. However, Joseph is so threatened by her pursuit of him, and so involved in defending his boundaries from her invasion, he never experiences her act as one of rescue.

Much like the martyrs of Maccabean literature, Joseph feels threatened with death from several sides, although the most severe threat comes from the woman who would take his honor as well as his life.¹ The brothers set out to kill him but, as Joseph reminds us,

they let me down into a pit, and the Most High brought me up again. I was sold as a slave and the Lord made me free; I was taken into captivity and His strong hand protected me; I was beset with hunger and the Lord himself nourished me. (*T. Jos.* 1.4-5).²

Having referred to the brothers' dastardly deed, although in no detail, Joseph focuses his extensive narrative upon the greater trouble with the Egyptian woman. Returning to the testamentary frame of the narrative, it becomes apparent that, all these years later, what Joseph the patriarch wants his sons to remember as the focus of his life story is his successful struggle against sexual desire. The central figure of the *Testament of Joseph*, then, is the primary adversary who threatened the hero with death, 'the shameless woman (*hē pornē*) urging me to

1. The motif of transgression, a challenge to commit *paramomia* is also frequent in martyr traditions. See 4 *Macc.* 5.13, 17, 20, 27; 8.14; 9.3ff.; also Philo, *Somn.* 2.124. Hollander and de Jonge, note that in the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* 'both aspects seem to be combined; like the tyrant, the woman wants to bring the pious man to transgress the law' (Hollander and de Jonge 1985: 370).

2. It is interesting to note a similarity between the testimony Joseph gives of God's rescuing him from captivity, hunger, loneliness, sickness and prison with the works of mercy as described in Isa. 58.7 and Jesus' statement to the disciples in Mt. 25.35-36, which recounts the same combination of trials as Trito-Isaiah and the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*. Hollander notes the influence of Psalms of individual thanksgiving in both style and terminology (1981: 19-20).

transgress with her; but the God of Israel my father guarded me from the burning flame' (*T. Jos.* 2.2). Thus God, the symbolic father, rescues Joseph from the predatory woman, much as Israel the father has rescued the child Joseph from his jealous siblings.

The language of the psalm of thanksgiving,¹ in which Joseph frames his story, sets the conditions for reading the story. Joseph is the hero; his adversaries are the evil characters against whom God protects him. Thus the psalm found at the opening of the work, acts to suppress the story of the woman by structuring the story as the rescue of the hero by the deity. God is on the side of Joseph. The traditional reader joins this elite 'we' against the adversarial female 'they'.

A glance at a few of Joseph's statements in the *Testament of Joseph* will illustrate how they prejudice the reader:

1. 'She pretended to regard me as a son' (3.7);
2. 'she drew me into impurity' (3.8);
3. 'she came to me under the pretense of instruction' (4.4);
4. 'she sent me food mingled with witchcraft' (6.1);²
5. 'her officiousness was to lead astray the soul' (6.2);
6. 'in her madness she was holding fast to my clothes' (8.3).

When each of her actions is focalized through Joseph's fear, it becomes an action cloaked in menace. Joseph says, 'she came to me *under the pretense of instruction*', but what evidence is there to support such a charge? When Aseneth, another Egyptian woman in a similar situation, decides to convert in order to be a

1. See Hollander and de Jonge 1985: 367-68 for structure and analysis of the *T. Jos.* 1.4-2.6 as psalm of individual thanksgiving. Their argument is that the psalm in *Testament of Joseph* indicates a later development of the type of psalm found in Dan. 2.20-23; Sir. 51.1-12; *Pss. Sol.* 2, 13, 15.

2. The idea of love-philtres and other dangerous magic through which women try to seduce helpless men reflects male fear of female feeding turned into death-dealing. The parade example of this proof of female treachery in the Bible is Jael's offering of milk to Sisera before nailing him. For a description of the thematic elements that structure this scene, see Bal 1988b: 62-64. For an analysis of *pharmakon* within the discourse of love magic in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, see Goff 1990: 48-54.

suitable wife for Joseph, no hint of duplicity accompanies the lengthy and laudatory description of her prayer, fasting and conversion. In my view Aseneth's conversion is valid and Mut-em-enet's a ruse because Aseneth is a suitable desexualized bride and Mut-em-enet is an improper woman, ignoring societal strictures, reaching for erotic freedom.

There are twelve brief episodes in Joseph's testamentary account that play 'time after time' on the motif of Joseph as the victim of passion:¹

1. She punishes and threatens Joseph many times (3.1-6).
2. She pretends to regard Joseph as a son (3.7).
3. She draws him 'openly into impurity' (3.8).
4. She flatters Joseph (4.1-3).
5. She pretends to want to convert to his religion (4.4-5).
6. She offers to kill her husband to marry Joseph (5.1-4).
7. She sends Joseph magical food (6.1).
8. She falls ill and threatens suicide (7.1-5).
9. She tries to force Joseph into a sexual act (8.2-5).
10. She accuses him and he is sent to prison.
11. She offers to get him released if he will satisfy her (9.1-4).
12. She falls ill but continues to visit Joseph in prison.

Each episode begins with an action of the woman followed by a reaction from Joseph. Clearly she is the initiator each time. The final two verses of the story (9.4-5) remind the reader of Joseph's remarkable achievement, resisting a woman who has tried every conceivable avenue of seduction.

How often, though she was ill,
did she come down to me by midnight
and listened to my voice as I prayed.
And understanding her groanings² I held my peace.

1. I follow, with a few minor changes, the structure suggested by Hollander and de Jonge. It is interesting to note that the structure as given by these interpreters emphasizes a reading from Joseph's point of view. They divide the story into ten episodes, whereas my structure has twelve episodes.
2. 'Groanings' or 'sighings' is used three times in Joseph's story: T. Jos. 7.2; 8.5; 9.4. The Greek word *stenagmos* does not necessarily imply

For when I was in her house,
she used to bare her arms and breasts and legs,
that I would meet her;
for she was very beautiful
splendidly adorned in order to beguile me.
And the Lord guarded me from her attempts.

The portrait of the woman is consistent. The 'time after time' motif of her villainy continues and parallels the 'time after time' of his righteousness. Ill and out of control with her obsessive love, Mut-em-enet continues to visit Joseph in his prison. In my reading the *stenagmoi*, 'groanings', reflect the depth of her pain, sounds that might emanate from a woman lamenting the impossibility of her desire. The narrator hears a malevolent sound, urgent, sexual, which he connects with her nakedness.

Even though Joseph has previously described the *stenagmoi* as sounds of lost purity, threatening to pollute him, he surrenders for an instant to sexual fantasy. Finally, late into the story, there is confirmation of the woman's beauty. The beauty of the hero has been mentioned at the outset. It is of course his beauty that has first aroused Mut-em-enet. Nowhere in the biblical account or in the expanded accounts is the reader provided with a physical description of the woman. For just a flicker of an instant in Joseph's narration, the curtain of purity is parted and the focalization shifts. The reader sees what Joseph saw: *bare arms and breasts and legs, very beautiful, splendidly adorned* (9.4). Immediately after presenting this erotic picture, Joseph interprets the woman's body as alien: 'splendidly adorned, in order to beguile me'. Joseph returns to his 'understanding' her groanings as sexual, and therefore of evil design. Finally, he cools his heated sensual description of her with a pious reference to God, who 'guarded me from her attempts'.

In a twist of ironic sexual politics, her sexual/spiritual malaise is bared to an indifferent Joseph. When Mut-em-enet saw Joseph naked and powerless, being beaten by a eunuch of the

pain is indicated: *apo stenagmou tēs kardias mou*, 'the sighing of my heart'. While the context of T. Jos. 7.2, 8.5, 9.4 would indicate sexual groanings, since emotions connected to sexuality are the only ones attributed to the Egyptian woman, the term could indicate a woman profoundly sick at heart.

court, instead of turning away from him, she tried to rescue him from his pursuers.

And he [the eunuch] commanded me to be beaten naked.
But the Memphian woman was looking through the window while I was being beaten,
and she sent to her husband, saying
Your judgment is unjust, for you punish a free man
who has been stolen as if he were a transgressor (T. Jos. 14.1).

The sympathy she offered the naked man is withheld from her. He undermines the power of her text by not taking it seriously, by displaying indifference to her declaration of love. Our story exhibits a motif similar to that of 1 Samuel 25, where the woman rescues the outlawed young man beloved of the God of Israel. Each woman attempts to place herself into the public confrontation between the powerful husband and the desperate young hero. Yet the narratorial voice renders opposite judgments on the two women: Abigail is the good wife from Proverbs and the wife of Potiphar is the strange woman. The plot reflects this judgment in the behavior of the two female figures after their confrontation with the hero: Abigail returns home and waits for David to act (proper behavior); Mut-enet pursues the hero with clear sexual intention (improper behavior). After the iconoclastic moment in the biblical story, sexual hierarchy has been reinstated; in the *Testament of Joseph* the female figure perseveres in her attempt to challenge that hierarchy.

A pattern emerges through *Testament of Joseph* 3–9, in which each mention of the woman's disruptive sexual action is balanced and defused by an admirable reaction from Joseph, *ho sôphron*. The talisman quality of *sôphrosunê* that cools the passion of the Egyptian woman is mentioned in 6.7 and 9.2. The reader is not permitted to lose sight of the parenetic/salvific frame: 'The wickedness of the ungodly has no power over those who worship God in righteousness (*sôphrosunê*)' (6.7). The character of Joseph projects the attitude of a man in distress who prays, fasts and weeps in his extensive request to God for deliverance. Thus, the framed prayer of thanksgiving in *Testament of Joseph* 1 prefigures Joseph's 'time after time' prayers throughout his story.

His most frequent action is to pray for deliverance:

1. 'Going into my room, I prayed to the Lord' (3.3).
2. 'I lay upon the ground in sackcloth and prayed and begged God that the Lord would deliver me from the Egyptian woman' (4.3).
3. 'I gave myself more to fasting and prayer, that God might deliver me from her' (4.8).
4. 'I prayed to the Lord' (7.4).
5. 'I knelt before the Lord all day together with all the night; and about dawn I rose up, weeping the while and prayed for a release from the Egyptian woman' (8.1).
6. '[She listened to] my voice as I prayed' (9.4).

Joseph also tells us three times that he fasted, 'for God loves him who fasts with chastity (*sôphrosunê*) in a den of darkness more than him who lives luxuriously in licentiousness (*akolasias*) in chambers of a palace'.

1. 'And I fasted (*enesteion*) in those seven years' (3.4).
2. 'I drank no wine, nor for three days did I take my food' (3.5).
3. 'And I gave myself even more to fasting (*nestein*)' (4.8).

He tells us four times that he wept:

1. 'I wept (*eklaion*) for the Egyptian woman of Memphis' (3.6).
2. 'I sorrowed (*elupethen*) unto death... and I lamented (*epenthēsa*) for her' (3.9).
3. 'When he had gone out, I wept (*eklaion*)' (6.3).
4. 'About dawn, I got up, weeping (*dakruon*) all the time' (8.1).

The biblical Joseph, who bragged of his superiority in Genesis 37, has undergone no change in personality. In this Second Temple version, speaking as an old man, the character is still bragging, this time of his spiritual superiority. The parenthesis is clear: every heated female evil intention is met with cool male virtue.

In my view, the structure which appears to support the story of Joseph's beleaguered years in the house of Potiphar also

presents a portrait of a woman in love. It is the narratorial frame that polarizes the action, setting up an evil/good dichotomy and prescribing the reader's conclusions of the dangers of uncontrolled female sexuality. This frame functions, similarly to the frame in Genesis 39, to guide the reading of the text.

Within the fabula itself, there is also an intention to direct the reading. Joseph, the primary actor in the text, aspires to power. In order to achieve his aim, he must exonerate himself of the accusations leveled by the wife of his master. Her aim, to take him as a lover, is clearly at cross purposes with his aim, to accrue power and position in the society in which he finds himself. Since the fabula recounts his story, her program fails.

But Joseph does not achieve his aim without help. There are other male figures in the Genesis text: Potiphar, a representative of the social order, who causes the rise and then the fall of Joseph and Potiphar's male servants, who have no functional role in the structure of the fabula because they do not cause functional events. This is not to say, however, that they are not important as figures who represent social stratification.

It is interesting that the unnamed male servants who hear the story from Mut-em-enet (Gen. 39.14-15) have not fired the reader's imagination. They are servants like Joseph; they are Egyptian unlike Joseph. Much has been made of Mut-em-enet's clever way of manipulating them, by fanning the flames of ethnic competition, referring to Joseph as 'g'ibri, 'the Hebrew'. But nothing has been made of the effect of their silence and inaction in the light of their mistress's accusation of rape.

The biblical text does not provide even a glimmer of their response to the woman. She has screamed out *b'qol gadol*, 'in a loud voice', and they have responded with silence. However, their stolid presence serves a narrative function. Since the reader is given no response from these background figures, one is left a gap commodious enough to accommodate many possibilities. (1) The servants had been similarly propositioned by their mistress and were relieved to see another man caught in her vise. (2) The servants were embarrassed at her prevarication, having glimpsed the frightened fleeing Joseph. (3) The servants were delighted to see the much privileged Hebrew servant in trouble. The one suggestion that seems unlikely, at least to this

trouble. The one suggestion that seems unlikely, at least to this reader, is that the servants' silence implies sympathy with the woman who is claiming rape.

The total lack of reaction of the male servants to the woman's startling accusation keeps them from any interaction with her. One can imagine that her frustration over Joseph's rejection was enlarged by the silence of the servants. In the biblical version, then, the woman presents her case to these servants, who exhibit no reaction. Her frustration must be multiplied when she presents a second, slightly altered, version of the story to her husband. Her story does elicit action this time, although not a direct verbal response. The narrator informs the reader that 'his anger was ignited' (v. 19). But Potiphar does not articulate his anger, he does not match Mut-em-enet's direct speech with an outraged one of his own. Rather he shows his loyalty to his wife through his action, putting the offensive Joseph in jail. Every reader knows the proper punishment for rape is death.

For a second time Mut-em-enet's voluble accusation has been met by male impassivity. The combination of the servants' lack of response with Potiphar's tepid one suggests a tightly structured society with strong male bonding, in which the female character is unsupported against a range of men. This male solidarity asserts the powerful social order arrayed against the female dissimulator: the shame of Joseph in being imprisoned on the word of a woman is eradicated by the honor of his loyalty to his God and to his master. By not speaking against him, the servants have increased the display of honor among men. Their silence is similar to the explanation Joseph presents of his own silence in prison, 'I wanted to weep, but I restrained myself that I should not put my brothers to shame' (T. Jos. 15.3).

In the *Testament of Joseph* as well as the versions found in Josephus, Philo and *Jubilees*, there are no male servants. In the *Testament of Joseph*, the most expansive of the Second Temple recollections of the story, the narrator Joseph fashions a tale for his sons in which there are two poles of activity: himself and the erotic evil woman. In order to emphasize the tug of power between them, there are no extraneous characters to distract the reader's attention from the male-female struggle. In

Specialized terms: the absence of the names of actors within a
 fabula indicates the degree to which the fabula is subjective (Bal 1977: 32). The aim of this fabula appears to be different from that in Genesis. In the *Testament of Joseph* power and position is not the goal so much as moral purity. Other men would clutter the stage in this fabula: for Joseph wants to impress upon his sons that his *sôphrosunê*, a gift from God, has allowed him to resist sexual temptation. Thus, the fabula will not deflect any of the male power from the figure of Joseph.

Mut-em-enet's Version

Those interested in a feminist reading need not despair. Joseph's version may have stood unchallenged by interpreters for centuries, but his story has been remembered. Attending to the midrashic gap-filling of the biblical story allows a reader to uncover Mut-em-enet's story. The distance between the respective psychological landscapes of the chaste male and the lusty female is reflected in the structure of the *Testament of Joseph*. The fear of the male, threatened by the manipulative female, drives his story. In spite of the strategy of first-person narration in which the character Joseph prescribes the reading of his story, searching for the embedded story allows glimmers of the woman's story to come through the fabula. The male-female dichotomy and its resultant tensions structure the work. Joseph's fear and shame stand as the obstacle between her desire and satisfaction.

There are strong moments of female focalization in the *Testament of Joseph* through which her story asserts itself. Remember that remarkably focalized scene in which Mut-em-enet sees the naked Joseph being beaten? It is Mut-em-enet who rescues Joseph from the Ishmaelite merchant:

But the Memphian woman was looking through the window
 while I was being beaten,
 and she sent to her husband, saying
 Your judgment is unjust, for you punish a free man
 who has been stolen as if he were a transgressor (T. Jos. 14.1).

Even in Joseph's account, she is his protector. While Joseph reports her initial kindness to him to contrast it with her eventual perfidy, we can extract pieces of her story even from

tual perfidy, we can extract pieces of her story even from Joseph's biased account. As Joseph recalls the events from the time of his arrival in Egypt as a slave to his entrance into Pentephres' house, the reader is told of Mut-em-enet's gradual invasion of Joseph's world: first the male enclave of the marketplace, then the intimate world of his body.

Her persistence structures the second half of the *Testament of Joseph*, much as it did the first. Her attraction to Joseph is no momentary whim. Mut-em-enet's sexual desire is the engine that turns the action. She urges her husband to buy the slave and free him. All the while the merchant is being tried by Pentephres for stealing the slave, and Joseph is being beaten, the woman continues to press for Joseph's release. After the trial, she continues to try to possess Joseph. When she is told by a double-dealing eunuch that the merchants are demanding too large a price for the boy (16.3), she sends a second eunuch to bargain for the young man:

Even if they demand two minae¹ of gold
 take care not to spare gold,
 only buy the boy and bring him (T. Jos. 16.4).

The pattern has been set: the woman's tenacity is emphasized even before she has spoken a word to Joseph. According to the *Testament of Joseph*, her obsession began when she saw him in the market and intensified when she saw him naked. The biblical text reports only that the woman saw Joseph (39.7), but does not provide such rich detail. Neither the narrator Joseph nor subsequent exegetes comment on the woman's having seen Joseph naked.² There are rabbinic and modern speculations about

1. A monetary unit, equivalent to 100 drachmas, from the Hebrew *māneh*.

2. Rabbinic tradition is filled with speculation about whether Joseph participated in sexual activity with his master's wife. The speculation comes from the expression *la'šôt m'la'ktô* (Gen. 39.11), which the rabbis interpret 'to satisfy sexual desire'. Gen. R. 87.6 insists that Joseph declined her invitation, since he knew that to lie with the woman in this world would assure him of lying next to her in the Gehenna of the world to come. R. Samuel b. Nahman argued that Joseph intended to 'do his work', have sex with the woman, but became impotent. Rabbi Isaac pushed the image of Joseph 'doing his work' even further, claiming that

Joseph having fled naked from the bedchamber of the wife of Potiphar in the biblical account since the woman is left holding his garment (Gen. 39.12). Kugel rightly observes that narrative depiction of Joseph as wavering at sexual temptation presents 'a Joseph of flesh and blood with whom others can identify and whose example of sudden repentance others might seek to emulate' (Kugel 1990: 98). No commentator, including Kugel, suggests that the sexual attraction may be mutual, and indeed the woman may have been given to believe that her feelings for the Hebrew servant were returned. The assurance in the *Testament of Joseph* that 'not even in my mind did I yield to her' (T. Jos. 9.2), may have been added by an author anxious to avoid his own fantasies about what happened between Joseph and Mut-em-enet.

In the order of the text, the woman's attention had been drawn to Joseph when she saw him in the marketplace, and her passion was intensified when she saw him naked. The sexual connection had been made before the mistress-servant connection. Not only had she heard about the young man from the eunuchs (12.1), but she has defended him to her husband, identifying the Hebrew as one who possesses grace from heaven (12.3). Whether the eunuchs have told her that he is a blessed Hebrew or whether she simply intuitively has a special relation to the deity must be determined by the reader. But this familiar literary motif of the woman seeing a young man and recognizing him as special to the deity is found in *Joseph and Aseneth* and 1 Samuel 25.¹

Upon first seeing Joseph from her window, Aseneth realizes that he is the sun from heaven:

his seed was gathered and spilled out onto the ground through his fingernails' (87.7). This onanistic metaphor is an interesting echo of the sexual difficulties of Tamar, another foreign woman who seduces one of Jacob's sons. In both instances spilling the seed is the man's reaction to undesirable sexual intercourse initiated by the woman. B. Sol. 36b argues both sides: (1) Joseph was blameless; (2) the two of them (Joseph and Mut-em-enet) had planned to sin together.

1. The motif of the unexpected confrontation between the lover (female) and the beloved (male) is frequently found in ancient romances, e.g., Apuleius 5.22–6.5, Chariton 4.1.9. For other examples see Burchard, 1985: 208, n. 6c.

BACH Breaking Free of the Biblical Frame-Up

Aseneth saw Joseph on his chariot and was strongly cut [to the heart] and her soul was crushed and her knees were paralyzed, and her entire body trembled, and it was if she has been been struck with lightning. She feared a great fear. She sighed and said in her heart:

What shall I now do, wretched that I am

Did I not speak saying that Joseph is coming,

the shepherd's son from the land of Canaan?

And now behold the sun from Heaven has come to us on his chariot and entered our house today and shines in it like a light upon the earth (Jos. Asen. 6.1–2).

As with Mut-em-enet seeing Joseph, the sight of the beloved produces a powerful reaction in Aseneth. Of course, being marriageable virgin, Aseneth can say, 'Let my father give me Joseph for a maidservant and slave and I will serve him ever' (6.8). Mut-em-enet can cajole her husband into purchasing Joseph, but she cannot overcome the obstacle of her husband Abigail, upon first meeting the young outlaw David on mountain pass, recognizes that he is 'fighting the battles of Lord' (1 Sam. 25.28):

When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey, and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, 'Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; pray let your handmaid speak in your ears and hear the words of your handmaid' (1 Sam. 25.23–24).

Abigail shares with Mut-em-enet the impediment of a husband blocking the fulfillment of her desire for the beloved.¹ After meeting with David, she leaves him with a poignant request: 'Remember me!' But unlike Mut-em-enet, Abigail is lucky. Her husband dies almost immediately after she has seen her beloved Abigail gets her man.

A common narrative strategy used to suppress a woman's story is to isolate her within the text. In the biblical version of the Second Temple expansions of the story of Mut-em-enet, there are no other women to reflect or respond to her experience. There is no confidant or 'helper' figure, similar to the stories of other women.

1. My literary analysis of the story of Abigail appears in *The Pleasures of her Text* (1990: 25–44).

character of the nurse found in the Greek version of the tale, Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Beginning with *Midrash Tanhuma*, a mediaeval midrashic collection, a new tradition is added to the narrative spun from Genesis 39. In this tradition, the revisioned story changes as it encompasses new characters: the women of the court. At first these Egyptian women are scandalized by the besotted wife of Potiphar. But during a party she arranges to show off her Hebrew servant:

She took citrons and gave them to each of the women and gave each a knife and then called to Joseph and stood him before them. When they beheld how handsome Joseph was, they cut their hands. She said to them: 'If you do this after one moment, I who see him at every moment, am I not all the more so [justified] in being smitten?' (*Midrash Tanhuma* Gen. 39.7).¹

The tradition continues in *Midrash ha-Gadol* and in *Surah XII* of the Qu'ran. The same basic theme, that other women have the same reaction as the wife of Potiphar to the beauty of Joseph, is found in the work of later Muslim poets and exegetes as well as the mediaeval Jewish collections of midrash, *Chronicles of Yerahme'el*, assembled in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and *Sefer ha-Yasār*, an Italian work no earlier than the thirteenth century.² When the narrative is focalized through the collective view of the women, a new dimension is added to the story:

When they saw him, they praised him, and they cut their hands. They said, 'God protect us. This is no mortal, this is none other than a noble angel.' (*Surah XII.31*).

The blame that had been heaped upon the wife of Potiphar for her foolish behavior is forgotten and the women's emotions become a mirror of Mut-em-enet's reactions. The Egyptian women of the court are captivated by Joseph's beauty as was Mut-em-enet. She is no longer isolated, the woman who

1. As translated in Kugel 1990: 29. I was unable to find this episode in the Buber recension of *Midrash Tanhuma*.

2. For an extensive, detailed discussion of the mediaeval development of the theme he refers to as 'The Assembly of Ladies', see Kugel 1990: ch. 2.

behaves improperly. The astonishment of the other women the sight of Joseph assures the reader that Mut-em-enet behaved just like a woman.

The episode in these later versions remains under narrator control, and thus imparts the traditional view that all women are equally treacherous when led by their passions. But the isolation surrounding the female figure in the earlier version the isolation that makes her response to Joseph appear unique and her love obsessive and strange, is altered by the scene which other women confirm her response as universal. Comparing this *mise en abyme* text¹ embedded within the large narrative with the biblical version, in which there are no women to reflect Mut-em-enet's action and feelings, will allow us to find some of the silence surrounding the solitary female figure in the biblical version.

The prefiguring effect of the *mise en abyme* text is maintained in *Midrash Tanhuma* because the reader is already familiar with the primary conflict between the lovestruck Mut-em-enet and the beautiful young Joseph. The reaction of the women, who inflict pain upon themselves with the blades of their fruit knives after beholding Joseph, foreshadows the bloody outcome Mut-em-enet's having first seen Joseph. In narratological terms the subtext, or embedded fabula, found in the *Tanhuma* is a sign of the primary fabula, our root story of Mut-em-enet and Joseph.² When the character of Mut-em-enet says in the *Tanhuma* to her friends, 'If you do this after one moment, I will see him at every moment, am I not all the more so [justified] being smitten?', she is attempting to align herself with her friends, to normalize her obsession. Bal has observed about this incident as it appears in Mann's novel, *Joseph in Egypt*, 'st

1. A *mise en abyme* text is an embedded text that presents a story which resembles the primary fabula and may be taken to be a sign of the primary fabula. For a description of this mirror-text and the ways which it may be related to the primary fabula, see Bal 1985a: 144-50.

2. Bal has analyzed Mann's use of this tradition in 'Myth à la lettre (see this volume)', in which she observes, 'Mut-em-enet planned the event with the explicit purpose of making herself understood. She wants her friends to *understand* her love at the very same moment she *know* it; the difference is identification' (below, p. 358).

[Mut-em-enet] planned this event with the explicit purpose of making herself understood'.¹ I would add to that observation that Mut-em-enet hoped through the power of a community of women to deflect disapproval and judgment from herself.

Another aspect of the woman's story that is suppressed in the biblical version is what happened to her after Joseph is sent to prison. The reader is told nothing of the wife of Potiphar after the episode in which her husband, responding to her accusation, puts Joseph into prison. Eliminating an account of her reaction indicates that the woman's emotions are not central to the story. The narrative in the *Testament of Joseph*, then, is important to the task of recovering the woman's story as it indicates Mut-em-enet's love was not extinguished by the satisfaction of revenge. Indeed, her desire to free Joseph from prison is so intense, one might conclude that some other person had been responsible for his incarceration.

This gap of information, this lack of what happened after the momentous scene of accusation, must have confounded early readers. For the *what happened* is remembered in the *Testament of Joseph*. Instead of leaving the story with Joseph in prison, with the character of the woman erased from the subsequent narrative, the story has been extended in time. Indeed the 'time after time' motif of the woman's sexual obsession with the young hero follows him into the recesses of the prison. In the versions of Josephus and Philo, the *sōphrosunē* of the character of Joseph was based upon his ability to deflect the sexual advances of the Egyptian woman. That he is locked inside the prison is the external factor blocking her satisfaction. But the permanent block to her satisfaction is his loyalty to the deity and the social order. It is a version of 'Freud's Masterplot', to use Peter Brooks's term (1984a: 280-300), an urgent sexual desire faces the factors that block satisfaction until finally love and death join together in the climactic thrust of a symbolic *Liebestod*. The death in our story is the literary death of the female figure, whose story is suppressed.

By filling the gaps of Genesis 39 with the Second Temple period version of the story found in the *Testament of Joseph*,

1. Bal, 'Myth à la lettre', p. 358.

one can piece together an imagined story for the woman embedded in the biblical version—embedded so deeply that it is not possible to tell her story without the help of subsequent texts.

Speaking for the Women

The feminist reader, refusing to align herself with the narratorial 'we', joins the ranks of the disloyal and the unfaithful. Such a betrayal of authorial trust implies the denial of patriarchal rule and rejection of the shadow cast by the giant phallic 'I' over everything men write.¹

One way to ignore that commanding shadow is for the reader to move outside the boundaries of individual texts. To escape the confines of patriarchal readings, I suggest that we break through the isolation of character portraits of individual female characters. Part of the ideological effect of the text is to splinter the power of women, and the most efficient way of accomplishing this effect literarily is to isolate women from each other within textual units and commentaries. Hence, by comparing the portrait of a biblical character with the expansions of her role in postbiblical literature and other uses of the figurative motif in a variety of contemporaneous literatures, I think we can extend our vision of the woman in the text. More vivid portraits can be created when the reader can rely upon more than one view of a character.

The story of Mut-em-enet reflects the uncertainty of her position through the tepid response of her husband to her accusations, the silence of the servants, and Joseph's rejection of her immodest proposals. In my view both the universal story and its expansions reflect a desire to enclose women's uncertainty in an image of woman as only the specular reflection of man, thus serving to perpetuate the system in which all that is visible is masculine.² My intention in trying to give voice to the suppressed story of the woman, silenced in both the biblical and

1. For the analysis of the way literary texts reveal a distinctively male narcissism, see Gardiner 1985: 129.

2. Irigaray 1977: 203-17.

postbiblical stories, is then to prevent the seduction of the reader into the writer's world, where women are defined in relation to men, that is, by their sexual identity. To search for whispers of the embedded woman, one must resist the writer's view that Mut-em-enet behaves 'just like a woman'.

MYTH À LA LETTRE:
FREUD, MANN, GENESIS AND REMBRANDT, AND THE STORY
OF THE SON*

Mieke Bal

The universal story of the Chaste Youth and the Lustful Stepmother is best known to Western readers in the biblical account of Joseph's temptation by the wife of Potiphar and in the Greek myth (later embodied in drama) about Hippolytus and Phaedra'; thus begins an article by John Yohannan on Thomas Mann's version of this 'universal story' (Yohannan 1982). Although Yohannan is well aware of the difference between the innumerable 'versions' and traditions, as his earlier book shows (1968), there is no sign of awareness of the scholar's own projections in the very enterprise of his paper. Indeed, the terms in which *myth* in literature has been discussed are terms denoting *eternity* and *truth, similarity* and *imitation*, and the term that summarizes these features, 'universal', does appear in Yohannan's first sentence.

Taking the universality of the story for granted, the author detaches Mann's text from its discursive contingency.

* Reprinted from S. Rimmon-Kenan (ed.), *Discourse in Psychoanalysis and Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987): 57-89.

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