

The Gendering Garden: Narrative Creations of Adam and Eve as Cisgender Prefiguration in Biblical, Rabbinic, and Contemporary Young Adult Literature

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Creation's Binary Surface Structure

Within the contextual frame of Jewish tradition, the origin of humankind, including its sex, appears to be well-documented in the first three chapters of Genesis, the first book of the Torah. Nevertheless, the biblical depiction of the creation of earth and life by God serves as a starting point for a continuous tradition-historical reception of humankind's sex and gender identities and their social relations. Contemporary studies in the Hebrew Bible and its reception cannot only reconstruct branches of these traditions in terms of a chronology but can also reflect their transmission-dynamics and deconstruct cultural processes of the establishment of gender roles and identities within traditional narratives.

My paper undertakes this same hermeneutical adventure, deconstructing the narrative creation of humankind's sexes and genders in biblical, rabbinic, and young adult literature by reference to Genesis 1–3, the Palestinian midrash *Genesis Rabbah* (fifth century CE) and Deborah Bodin Cohen's volume of teenage tales, *Lilith's Ark* (2006). Since the scope of this study is restricted to these few selected source texts, I do not aim for a complete history of ideas. Rather, I target an insight into the literary relatedness and cultural dynamics of the reception and construction of sex/gender roles and identities within the Jewish tradition from antiquity until today. In addition, I aim to demonstrate to what extent the contemporary study of the Bible and its reception can enter into dialogue with poststructuralist theories and fruitfully contribute to highly topical gender-discourses.¹ In my approach, I understand deconstruction as a hermeneutical concept that aims to expose the constructiveness of social roles and identities that are literarily imparted as natural, or at least traditional. The

1 The potential of ancient religious texts' contribution to current challenges of gender studies is also reflected by U. Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion and Gender: Biopolitics – Performativity – Agency* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 68.

tools of this revealing concept emerge from a combination of close-reading biblical exegesis, socio-philosophical theories, and historical-critical literary reception studies.²

A general structure of the biblical creation story is apparent from Gen 1:1 until the first verses of Genesis 2. The repeated contrapositions of heaven and earth (Gen 1:1, 15, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30; 2:1, 4), light and darkness (1:4–5, 15–16), day and night (1:5, 14, 16, 18), morning and evening (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), sea and land (1:10, 20, 22, 26, 28), earth and earthling (2:5, 7), and not least man and woman (1:27), imply that the whole world is structured by opposing or complementary pairs.³ This pattern is framed by further iterations and compositional parallelisms in the verses' structure, especially in Genesis 2. At least the text's surface structure, the sing-song of its reading, bets on the harmony of binarity. And as the world is here initially created as a paragon of perfection, without wasting any words on destruction or death, it appears to be intended for the balanced equilibrium of one thing and the other. According to the surface structure and rhythm of Genesis 1, the world's logic seems to operate in binary patterns of thought. This impression is intensified by the continual repetition of the stated conceptual pairs.

What disappears from view thereby, is a third component that is in fact continuously involved as well as being related to all these pairs: the creator, God. As the center of the system of creation, God escapes the structurality of this system, being perceptively located outside of it, so that "the center is not the center,"⁴ as the deconstructivist philosopher Jacques Derrida characterizes such phenomena. Beyond that, the creative deity in Genesis is not merely creating pairs, but rather bringing them into being by separating elements or entities into others. Taking a closer look at Gen 1:7–10 for example, we find God separating the water into one water above and one water below, then identifying the water above as heaven, while the water below is again separated from the newly appearing dry land. Indeed, we find here a distinction of dry land, sea and heaven (which then continues in Gen 1:20, 26, 28), and therefore a picture of a world that is more complex than the pair of above and below. Equally, it is continuously said that it became evening and it became morning (Gen 1:5,

2 The development of biblical exegesis into reception studies, including discourse analysis and intertextuality, is expounded in the methodological chapter of my dissertation: D. Vorpahl, *Aus dem Leben des Buches Jona: Rezeptionswissenschaftliche Methodik und innerjüdischer Rezeptionsdiskurs* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 19–35.

3 See also R. Brubaker, "Social Theory as Habitus," in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, ed. C. Calhoun et al. (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1993), 221.

4 J. Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (London: Routledge, 1990), 279.

8, 13, 19, 23, 31), thus we have an awareness that the becoming itself is each time an entity of endless shades of dusk and dawn, framing a day with several further spaces of time.

A close reading of the biblical creation story thereby reveals that dualisms do not at all correspond with the complexity of life. The evening is not explained to its full extent by differentiating it from the morning, as it is also the end of a day, or the beginning of a night. Structuralism, beginning with the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, argues that “no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present.”⁵ But, as Jacques Derrida added, this “interplay of signification has [actually] no limit,”⁶ but the “presence of an element is always a signifying and substitute reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain.”⁷

Nevertheless, the binary surface structure of the biblical creation story persists and has its tradition-formative impact. Within the Hebrew Bible alone, the reception of God as the creator of heaven and earth,⁸ the contraposition of morning and evening,⁹ or the perception of women and men as a correlated contrastive pair¹⁰ are generally acknowledged among a whole “series of mythico-ritual oppositions.”¹¹ In places where the philosopher Pierre Bourdieu in principle locates the embedding of the “opposition of the sexes,”¹² I recognize a structure of thinking that spawns the heteronormative binarity of the human sexes and legitimizes its social gender expressions.

Binary Patterns of Thought in the Garden of Eden

My argument is that the creation story's binary surface structure also shapes the creation of humankind, in Gen 1:26–28 as in Gen 2:7–25, and subsequently dictates the rhythm of construction of a binary cis-gender culture and the

5 J. Derrida, “Semiology and Grammatology. Interview with Julia Kristeva,” in *Positions*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 26.

6 Derrida, “Structure,” 281.

7 Ibid., 292.

8 See, e.g., Gen 14:19, 27:28, Exod 31:17, Deut 4:39, 1 Chr 29:11, Ezra 5:11, Ps 115:15, Isa 37:16, and Jer 32:17.

9 See, e.g., Deut 28:67, 1 Sam 17:16, 1 Kgs 17:6, 1 Chr 16:40, and Ps 30:6.

10 See, e.g., Gen 5:2, 24:16, 26:11, Lev 20:11, and Deut 22:5.

11 P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 18.

12 Ibid.

establishment of heteronormativity within the Hebrew Bible and its subsequent traditions.¹³

This assumption rests on two premises. The first is that the biblical creation narrative is a sequence of divine speech acts according to the perceptual convention of the world in which the ancient Near Eastern recipients lived. God utters and designates what immediately comes into being, from heaven, over the line of the horizon, through the sea, until the shoreline and solid ground (Gen 1:3–10, 14–25). The performative utterances of God become manifestations of the transcendent word in the immanent world. The biblical creation story is hence an epitome of speech act theory according to J. L. Austin.¹⁴ And in Genesis 1–2, performative utterances are established as an effective tool to create a *fait accompli*.

Austin's discovery of "the performative use of language,"¹⁵ its ability to execute action instead of being only descriptive, provides the basis for the understanding of performativity as the core feature of gender, developed by Judith Butler.¹⁶ Butler's theory that "the gendered body is performative" and "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality"¹⁷ marks the second premise of my argument. In this analysis, performativity refers not to a singular 'act of performance,' but to "a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms"¹⁸ that "produces the effects that it names."¹⁹ The biblical creation story makes a major contribution to the normativization of such effects that were culturally internalized as expressions of gender.

In Gen 1:26–28, the binary pattern of thinking that I expounded at the outset of this article is apparent: God creates the earthling (אָדָם/*ha'adam*) likewise male (זָכָר/*zakhar*) and female (נִקְבָּה/*neqevah*, Gen 1:27). The following verse's commandment of multiplication (Gen 1:28) implies that these two variants of the human being are intended for sexual reproduction and could therefore consider themselves to be correlated biological sexes. Similar to the

13 See also C. L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 60.

14 See J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 5–6.

15 J. H. Gill, *Words, Deeds, Bodies: L. Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, M. Merleau-Ponty, and M. Polanyi* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 24.

16 See J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 178–9.

17 *Ibid.*, 173.

18 J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On The Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 12.

19 *Ibid.*, 2.

separation of water into heaven, sea and finally land (Gen 1:7–10), one entity (water/human) is split into two forms (heaven and sea/male and female), with the final outcome of a new third entity (land/offspring), which corresponds to the more complex reality of life underneath the binary surface structure of creation as described above. But this complexity is camouflaged by the ascription of heteronormativity, as it is no longer God but humankind itself that becomes responsible for re-creation. The earthling's binarity is no longer a condition in a series of events of the creation, but becomes a performative identity, in particular if זָכָר (*zakhar*) and נְקֵבָה (*neqevah*) are translated, interpreted, or actually embodied as man and woman.

Although Gen 5:2 explicates that אָדָם (*adam*) is the generic term for both sex variants already in Gen 1:27,²⁰ for a number of verses the text speaks only about the primordial human *ha'adam* and *his* woman (*ishah*, Gen 2:25; 3:8, 17, 20; 4:1). This exemplifies that even the claim for “equality as woman in contrast to *the* man” must bow to the idea of a natural sex/gender binarity in a competitive and likewise “heteronormative fashion.”²¹ Moreover, the consequential rabbinic interpretation that the first human being was androgynous (GenR 8:1)²² offers no way out of this binary pattern of thinking, as the term אַנְדְּרוֹגִינוֹס (*androgynos*) is nevertheless a binary composition, namely of the ancient Greek *andros* (man) and *gyne* (woman).

The second story of the earthling's creation in Gen 2:7–25 is no less binary. However, it is often emphasized that Genesis 2 focuses on the social coexistence of the human being instead on its reproduction.²³ In Gen 2:18, God declares that it is not good for the earthling to be on their own. But the inferred identification of the human as a social being disregards that God is not looking for companion for the earthling, but for exactly one equivalent counterpart (Gen 2:20). The creation story's binary pattern of thinking is also influential in this socially oriented creation of humankind, although in the everyday reality of ancient Israel the individual human being lived not as part of a couple but in close companionship with social circles of immediate family and extended kin, which merged together in nomadic tribal groups.²⁴ Indeed, even marriage

20 See also Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 71.

21 Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion*, 59 (accentuations in the original).

22 See also Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 73.

23 See R. A. Simkins, “Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth,” in *Genesis: A Feminist Companion to the Bible*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 1998), 44–5.

24 See N. P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israel* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 26–7 and 98–102.

existed in numerous forms, including polygamy.²⁵ No less out of touch with this ancient ethnic group's reality is the statement that the man will leave his parents to cling to his wife (Gen 2:24), as the ancient Israel was a patrilocal culture.²⁶

To acknowledge the mechanism of action evident in these binary thought patterns is mandatory to understand the societal model of a heteronormative cis-gender relation which gets its final shape in the further garden narrative. Each and any construction of dualisms generates a lack of differentiation and fuels simplification, which subsequently promotes the exercise of power, as one can solely act from just one of two opposing sides. To phrase it from a Bourdieuc angle: binary oppositions symbolize "hierarchical relations of difference,"²⁷ which correspond to a concept of power. And this is what we find in the garden narrative, at the latest in Genesis 3, but clearly already prepared in the chapter before.

After the manufacturing of the earthling (הָאָדָם/*ha'adam*) out of the earth (הָאֲדָמָה/*ha'adamah*) in Gen 2:7, a woman (אִשָּׁה/*ishah*) is made out of the human being (הָאָדָם/*ha'adam*) and brought to it (Gen 2:22). Only now the species of the human being is differentiated into two sex/gender identities: woman (אִשָּׁה/*ishah*) and man (אִישׁ/*ish*), whereby the former is derived from the latter, who is and remains identical with the primordial earthling (Gen 2:23). Both man's and woman's coming-into-being is dependent on the other's, as they only come into existence by being distinguishable from each other.²⁸ But unlike Derrida's deconstructivist approach,²⁹ the differentiating reference of *ish* and *ishah* is presented as binary and not unlimited, despite the fact that according to Gen 2:19–20, 23 they are likewise different from all other animals. The normativization of this binary gender model is then clearly recognizable when, in the rabbinic tradition, other sex/gender identities, such as *ailonit* or *saris*, are solely defined by their difference with respect to the female and male sex/gender identity (m. Nid. 5:9).

Distinguishing both creation narratives of humankind as the origin of a reproductive sex (Gen 1:27–28) and a social gender (Gen 2:7–25) cannot hide

25 See K. Southwood, "The Social and Cultural History of Ancient Israel," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*, ed. J. Barton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 68–9.

26 See A. Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play in the Hebrew Bible: The Ways the Bible Challenges Its Gender Norms* (London/New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 36.

27 L. McCall, "Does Gender Fit? Bourdieu, Feminism, and Concepts of Social Order," *Theory and Society* 21, no. 6 (1992), 838.

28 See also Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 35.

29 See Derrida, "Structure," 292.

the fact that both are developed within binary patterns of thought, which gives rise to a “gender-role plan”³⁰ beginning with Genesis 2:22–24. Considering at least rudiments of binary gender equality within the garden narrative, it is often emphasized that in Gen 2:18, 20 the term עֶזֶר (*ezer*) “connotes a mentor-superior in the Bible rather than an assistant and is used frequently for the relation of God to Israel (and not for the relation of Israel to God).”³¹ Linguistically, the fitting helper that God aims to provide for the earthling is indeed not intended to be a general servant but rather an equal partner in everyday life. But according to Amy Kalmanofsky, woman and man appear in Gen 2:24 to be even “more than complementary figures; they are [an] interchangeable ... undifferentiated unit ... not defined by hierarchy, but by symmetry.”³² Analogously, Ronald Simkins sees the gender-roles in Genesis 2 as not yet developed and differentiated, but being pronounced within a matrimonial structure.³³ And so does Kalmanofsky’s image of the earthling and *his* woman as husband and wife incidentally confirm the impact of heteronormative binarity. But even with the best will, I cannot confirm her reading of a harmoniously social equality of man and woman in the manner initially purported by the term עֶזֶר (*ezer*).

Indeed, Gen 2:22–24 formulates no parallelisms at all: The earthling notes that the woman is taken from his flesh and bone. That is, it is not the other way around, nor is it recognized that both are made of the same flesh and bone. He receives the woman from God instead of being mutually introduced, and he recognizes and designates her as woman in deduced differentiation from himself. Also, it is stated that he will cling to her, while her will is not even articulated, until they finally unify symbolically into one flesh. This narration of the origin of binary genders and their relation is one-dimensional, “presented entirely from the masculine point of view; it is the man who decides that Eve is his soulmate and it is the male who searches for a partner, with no indication that the love he bears her is reciprocated,”³⁴ as Lisa Maurice puts it forthrightly. The relation of the first two humans, as described in Genesis 2, may indeed be neither explicitly hierarchical nor equal, but at the most complementary, in a

30 Simkins, “Gender Construction,” 38.

31 T. Frymer-Kensky, “The Bible and Women’s Study,” in *Studies in Bible and Feminist Criticism* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006), 168.

32 Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 36.

33 See Simkins, “Gender Construction,” 45.

34 L. Maurice, “Tempting Treasures and Seductive Snakes: Presenting Eve and Pandora for the Youngest Readers,” in *Gender, Creation Myths and Their Reception in Western Civilization: Prometheus, Pandora, Adam and Eve*, ed. L. Maurice and T. Bibring (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 76.

distinct one-dimensional way.³⁵ Subsequently, a rabbinic tradition even tells that the earthling requested the woman from God as his partner (GenR 17:4). So far, we can say that Gen 2:22–24 is not only binary and heteronormative but also androcentric, wherein, in my assessment, it becomes apparent how the creation story's binary patterns of thought fundamentally structure "the embodied gendered dialectic."³⁶

To maintain the social-relation-perspective within Genesis 2, it has to be observed that the human beings are not taken as a starting point to search for the configuration of social roles, but that the set-up of their social relation seems to be rather predefined by the principles of reproduction and androcentric satisfaction of needs. In fact, since the very beginning, the gender roles of the then-still-unnamed Eve and Adam have to fit in with a binary, limited, heteronormative relational model. As I will expand in the following section, this is an example of *epistemic violence* in the way that Ulrike Auga explains and uses the term.³⁷ Thereby, it is decisive that the compulsory provision of the knowledge of categorical role ascriptions for man and woman in Genesis 2–3 likewise hides and enhances the binarity of gender.

The Naturalization of Adam and Eve

The initial creational pattern of reproduction (Gen 1:27–28) and the circular reasoning that *ish* (man) and *isha* (woman) in Gen 2:23 are embodiments of *zakhar* (male) and *neqevah* (female) lead to the establishment of heterosexuality as the normative mode of life. From there the process of normativization continues through the assignment of gender roles to the first two human beings, namely as mother, wife, patriarch and breadwinner (Gen 3:16–20). These ascribed roles hide the binary scaffold that lies underneath and generates the basic rhythm for the composition of the whole song of gender binarity, whose melody has become established as our cultural soundtrack. A huge stake in this sociocultural process has the naturalization of heteronormative sex/gender binarity. It is majorly based on the fact that these role ascriptions

35 A cynical interpretation of the gender-inequality as prospects in regard to the imperfect worldly living conditions, contrary to the paradisiac circumstances in Gan Eden, is offered by Tikva Frymer-Kensky, saying the garden narrative simply announces "that gender inequality is the norm of the imperfect universe." Frymer-Kensky, "The Bible and Women's Study," 167.

36 B. Skeggs, "Context and Background: Pierre Bourdieu's Analysis of Class, Gender and Sexuality," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004), 22.

37 See Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion*, 53.

are an immediate part of the creation of woman and man as social variants of the earthling, fitting seamlessly with the two biological sexes who received the commandment of sexual reproduction. The historical context of this process is “a society that places a premium on procreation [and therefore] has to justify and naturalize the sexual act required to procreate and thereby naturalize heterosexuality.”³⁸ When Genesis 2–3 ascribes the essence of two gender-identities (*ish* and *isha*) to the binary sex-entities (*zakhar* and *neqevah*) a socio-cultural process of naturalization is taking place, as explained by Pierre Bourdieu:

Because the social principle of vision constructs the anatomical difference and because this socially constructed difference becomes the basis and apparently natural justification of the social vision which founds it.³⁹

By the time that Eve (Gen 3:20) and Adam (Gen 4:25) are individually named, they already embody immovable gender roles. When Eve is named by the earthling as the “mother of all living” (Gen 3:20), it is a matter of *vaticinium ex eventu*, a literarily created destiny, as the woman was initially made to fulfill sexual reproduction with *ha’adam* (Gen 2:24), who will finally keep this term as his name (Gen 4:25).⁴⁰ The construction of the woman’s body follows the target of reproduction, first formulated in Gen 1:27–28, and so does her punishment at the end of the garden narrative (Gen 3:16). The derivation of Eve’s name finalizes this heteronormative naturalization of her gender identity, which is then body-visually reflected in the rabbinic literature by describing the woman as a constructed vessel for the storage of fetuses (GenR 18:3).⁴¹ The woman’s social role is thus completely deduced from the functional aim of her body’s initial creation, which is not the case for the man’s social role. Although he was initially made to cultivate the land (Gen 2:5, 15), which surely corresponds with Gen 3:17–19, the male earthling (*ha’adam*) was also charged to procreate (Gen 1:28). Vice versa both, female and male earthling, were initially made to rule the world, to dominate over the animals (Gen 1:28), and to generate food from the vegetation (Gen 1:29). But the binary gender distinction that

38 D. Guest, *Beyond Feminist Biblical Studies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 106.

39 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 11.

40 See Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 72, and J. Gellman, “Gender and Sexuality in the Garden of Eden,” *Theology & Sexuality* 12, no. 3 (2006), 323.

41 See also D. Vorpahl, “The Body as a Wonderland: Rabbinic Talk of the Human Body as a Sex/Gender Construction,” in *Constructions of Gender in Religious Traditions of Late Antiquity*, ed. S. Sheinfeld and K. Ehrensperger (Lanham, MD: Academic Fortress, 2024), 257–280.

“constructs the body as a sexually defined reality”⁴² founds a social order of masculine domination, which Pierre Bourdieu sees expressed in the gendered structures of labor division, space, and time.⁴³ These social structures are vindicated by circumstances that they actually create, namely by means of binary patterned identities of gender, which “is one of the most silent and invisible epistemological fundamentals of knowledge.”⁴⁴ That the described binary patterns of thought became a dominant form of thinking within the production of knowledge must be identified as an example of epistemic violence, according to Ulrike Auga.⁴⁵

By negating the similarities and abilities that man and woman should share, and avoiding differences among men and among women,⁴⁶ but overemphasizing a sexual difference, while at the same time Adam is presented as the normative human being (*ha'adam*),⁴⁷ difference becomes the essence of female gender identity, as Simone de Beauvoir expressed in the title of her book *The Second Sex* (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949). A rabbinic tradition then uses the woman's origin from the (male) earthling's body to argue that, contrary to the man, she shall need perfume, have a loud voice, and be stubborn (GenR 17:8). Beyond the biblical depiction, the rabbis not only describe the woman as essentially different, but further use this constructed difference to depict her as deficient, which in turn strengthens the normativity of the man. The one discrepancy between the prototypically imagined female and male body, namely the ability to ovulate, conceive and give birth, and breastfeed, is turned into Eve's prior role, at the latest by the end of Genesis 3. Although Carol Meyers reads the first part of Gen 3:16 not as a threat of “pangs in childbearing” but as an announcement for the woman's duty of work and pregnancy,⁴⁸ this means a double burden at best, in respect of the ancient Israelite's daily life reality, as explained in the following subchapter.

On the other hand, Adam is finally established as a cultural human being, responsible for breadwinning by agriculture. In contrast to the woman's duty,

42 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 11.

43 See *ibid.*, 9–11.

44 Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion*, 53.

45 See *ibid.*

46 See McCall, “Does Gender Fit?” 849.

47 The normativization of maleness as the original form of the human being is then further established within the rabbinic tradition when male fetuses are declared to be fully developed after forty-one days, and female fetuses only after eighty-one days (m. Nid. 3:7), which continues in the higher social estimation of boys towards girls (b. Ber. 60a). See also Vorpahl, “The Body as a Wonderland,” 260.

48 See Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 89–91.

the man's is not bodily induced, as "the masculine order"⁴⁹ has no need for legitimation at all. The physical aspect of his duty's profile can be likewise fulfilled by the woman, as one needs no penis to cultivate land.⁵⁰ De facto the punishments of Gen 3:16–19 manifest gender prototypes of the ancient Israelite society: "the first man's role as a farmer and the first woman's role as a mother symbolize the appropriate behavior for all Israelite men and women."⁵¹ Such prototypical gender-role-ascriptions must be clearly differentiated from the idea of so called "archetypes," which shall manifest "qualities and behaviors common to all men and women,"⁵² as Amy Kalmanofsky explains in accordance with Carol Meyers. Because "gender has a cultural meaning which is ascribed to the human body, but not an inherent attribute of personhood or subjectivity,"⁵³ as Auga states according to Butler and Austin. There are no such things as natural gender identities but the social construct of a patriarchal, androcentric society in which the owning of land was normally not conceded to women, trapping them in economic dependence on men.⁵⁴ This is an example of power relations that are based on epistemic sovereignty, finding expression in a structural domination that Bourdieu would label as symbolic violence.⁵⁵

Reproduction as Symbolic Capital

At least within the rabbinic tradition, agriculture is also regarded as a metaphor for procreation,⁵⁶ which comes as no surprise. Metaphors play a big part in processes of naturalization, as our "ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical."⁵⁷ Metaphors are a linguistic tool for describing what we see or what we perceive without seeing, or sometimes of what we just assume by interpretation. When one comes

49 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 9.

50 For a list of text-related essentials for highland agriculture see Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 81–2.

51 Simkins, "Gender Construction," 48.

52 Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 42.

53 Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion*, 61.

54 See Frymer-Kensky, "The Bible and Women's Study," 160. The single case of the daughters of Zelophehad in Num 27:1–8, who aim for a distributive share of their father's land and receive it because he had no sons, simply demonstrates the rarity of such exceptions.

55 See Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 34–5.

56 See Simkins, "Gender Construction," 39, and Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 13.

57 G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

to think of it, the earth (*ha'adamah*) gives birth to the earthling (*ha'adam*) by the impact of God (GenR 14:7–8; 17:8).⁵⁸ Then *ha'adam's* body gives birth to the woman (*ish*), again by the impact of God (GenR 17:8; 18:2). This essentially means that when the woman becomes Eve (“the mother of all living,” Gen 3:20) and is afflicted with the maternal role, she actually receives this ‘natural’ destiny as a sort of male, but also divine, heritage.

Within the Bible, a picture language is kept alive, which sees the male semen as the source of life (Gen 3:15; Num 5:28; Pss 89:30, 37; 105:6), similar to a fruit’s seed, while the woman’s body is seen to function as soil or incubator,⁵⁹ as Ronald Simkins explains:

The woman’s role in procreation is metaphorically compared to the arable land’s. Like the soil, a woman nurtures to full development the seed that is planted within her.⁶⁰ [But the] arable land is dependent upon the man to bring forth vegetation. It will remain a barren desert without the man to till it and sow seed in it. Similarly, the woman’s ability to bear children is dependent upon her husband, who must first impregnate her.⁶¹

The garden narrative in particular spawned a number of such metaphors, whose symbolic meanings also transport cultural gender norms: the fruit (within European art history, often depicted as an apple), the serpent, or man and woman beneath a tree.⁶²

Proceeding from Simkins’ interpretation of a metaphorical parallelism between the man’s sowing of seeds into the soil to produce vegetation and the similar act done to the woman’s body to give birth to a child,⁶³ we may likewise adapt Pierre Bourdieu’s use of the term capital to the concept of reproduction within the context of Ancient Near Eastern society.⁶⁴ This allows us to realize that reproduction work for a woman does not have the same value as for a man, as she “cannot escape the consequences of such capital when compared to other types of cultural capital.”⁶⁵ According to his selective use of different

58 “[T]he creation of humans from dirt or clay is a common ANE metaphor. [...] In the Mesopotamian creation myths the fashioning of clay served as a metaphor for gestation during pregnancy.” Simkins, “Gender Construction,” 41.

59 See *ibid.*, 46.

60 *Ibid.*, 51.

61 *Ibid.*, 49.

62 See *ibid.*, 38 and Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 63.

63 See Simkins, “Gender Construction,” 51.

64 See McCall, “Does Gender Fit?,” 841.

65 *Ibid.*, 845.

forms of capital,⁶⁶ it seems misleading to identify reproduction as a *cultural* capital in the Bourdieuc sense, especially in light of the distinction between ancient societies and the modern ones that Bourdieu took into account. In the patriarchal ancient Israelite society, reproduction is not even just a physical capital, but also an economic one. Both values are in general ascribed to men, being successfully transformed into a symbolic capital, which Bourdieu uses to describe the social appreciation of an achievement or competence that cannot be proven.⁶⁷ Within the historical context of ancient Israelite society, biological fatherhood could not be proven, but abundance of especially male children had a positive influence on the social status of a man (Gen 15:1–6, 22:15–18) and the maintenance of his legacy.⁶⁸ Women on the other hand were expected to fulfil the social role of a mother in the face of an infant mortality rate of about fifty percent, which meant a continuous load of pregnancy, birth pang, feeding and childcare in view of enormous health hazards,⁶⁹ plus a continuous exclusion from socio-cultic activities (Lev 12:1–8). Carol Meyers qualifies this perspective by emphasizing that “women exercised managerial power”⁷⁰ in the household, and further argues that “both genders would find unending days of toil unwelcome. But women generally have positive feelings about producing offspring.”⁷¹ Two pages later Meyers contradicts this gender-binary stereotype, probably unwittingly, by contextualizing that “[t]he more pregnancies a woman had, the greater her own risk of dying.”⁷²

Given this social perspective of reproductive work, it must indeed be questioned, “whether gendered forms of capital, possessed by women, can in fact unequivocally function as profitable capital.”⁷³ I would argue that within the patriarchal ancient Israelite society, reproduction became a symbolic capital for men, but not for women. This is due to its close connectedness to gender, which is itself an asymmetric form of symbolic capital hidden by naturalization.⁷⁴ With this in mind, Gen 3:16, 20 appears as a cultural inscription of social

66 See P. Bourdieu. “The Forms of Capital.” In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. J. Richardson (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241–58.

67 See *ibid.*, 245.

68 See Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 97–8.

69 See *ibid.*, 100.

70 *Ibid.*, 97.

71 *Ibid.*

72 *Ibid.*, 99.

73 McCall, “Does Gender Fit?,” 846.

74 See Skeggs, “Context and Background,” 23.

power relations within the female body.⁷⁵ Its reading as a natural essence of womanhood leads then to the ascription of women's social status in labor division, space, and time,⁷⁶ as Bourdieu states clearly:

Far from the necessities of biological reproduction determining the symbolic organization of the sexual division of labour and, ultimately, of the whole natural and social order, it is an arbitrary construction of the male and female body, of its uses and functions, especially in biological reproduction, which gives an apparently natural foundation to the androcentric view of the division of sexual labour and the sexual division of labour.⁷⁷

The Rabbis' Binding of Eve

The first act of sexual reproduction within the Torah takes place in Gen 4:1 and is expressed with the term יָדָע (*yada*), to be literally translated as 'to know', which is a term used only infrequently in the Bible to refer to sexual intercourse. Wherever it is used in this sense within the Torah, it almost exclusively describes the male perspective of a heteronormative penetration of a woman (Gen 4:1, 17, 25; 19:5; 24:16). In the rest of the Bible, this usage is even less common, although occasionally adapted to a female perspective (Num 31:17; Judg 11:39). But the conventional use of the term יָדָע (*yada*) expresses perception and knowledge, which puts another complexion on its meaning in Gen 4:1, appearing to be an intellectualization of heteronormatively male penetration, if not even a parallelization of phallus and logos. This is all the more astonishing as the term יָדָע (*yada*) is seldomly used this way, while it appears as knowledge (*yada*) in the immediately preceding chapter, where it was the woman's intention to receive the knowledge of good and bad by eating from the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:5–6).

The conversation of woman and serpent that leads to the emancipatory act of picking and eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and bad (Gen 3:6) reveals that the woman has already developed intellectual skills (Gen 3:1–5).⁷⁸ However, it is only the male earthling who names the animals (Gen 2:20), distinguishes the human being into man and woman by a performative utterance (Gen 2:23), and finally names Eve in Gen 3:20, which is an

⁷⁵ Carol Meyers states that Gen 3:16 is "giving the man and henceforth all men mastery in marital sex – but not dominance in all aspects of life." Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 96.

⁷⁶ See Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 9–11.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁸ See also Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 80.

expression of cultural domination.⁷⁹ According to a rabbinic tradition passed down in the aggadic midrash *Genesis Rabbah* (fifth century CE), Adam was even the name giver of himself and God (GenR 17:4). But in the Torah's garden narrative the woman is not just his silent sidekick, but actually "the more active character."⁸⁰ In Gen 3:1–6 the woman's "high level of linguistic ability"⁸¹ appears as a counterpart to the serpent's well-developed communication skills.⁸² As the literary scholar Nehama Aschkenasy explains, the woman's reception of the tree as "desirable" (Gen 3:6) goes beyond simple observation, but shows that "her language is conceptual,"⁸³ analogously to her report that the serpent "beguiled" her (Gen 3:13): She "first creates the concept of seduction before she reports on the physical act of eating," while the man in Gen 3:12 "describes an automatic act of putting in his mouth something that was given to him."⁸⁴ Gerald Blidstein attributes this automatism as "typical husbandly fashion,"⁸⁵ setting a further example of stereotypical gender role ascription within the academic reception of the garden narrative.

Unlike her man, the woman acts independently and reflectively.⁸⁶ Her reflectivity strengthens the reading of the garden narrative as a story of emancipation and autonomous action, while in the rabbinic tradition the woman's punishment is even extended (GenR 17:8). Otherwise, GenR 17:2 compiles quotations of several rabbis, explaining that each man needs a wife for the sake of the good in his life, and to complete the heteronormative pair that the earthling initially is in the image of God according to Gen 5:1–2. But the rabbis have their own approach to the initial suitability of the woman as helper (עֵזֶר/*ezer*) of the earthling by focusing on the subsequent preposition כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*kenegdo*, "correlating to him") in Gen 2:18, interpreting this preposition as confrontational rather than analogical: "if one merits, she is a helper [*ezer*], but if not, she is against him [*kenegdo*]" (GenR 17:3). Instead of inevitably becoming a correlated counterpart, the woman appears here to be also a potential antagonist of

79 See Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 40.

80 Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve*, 59.

81 N. Aschkenasy, *Woman at The Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 126.

82 See D. Vorpahl, "A Donkey That Speaks Is a Donkey No Less: Talking Animals in the Hebrew Bible and Its Early Jewish Reception." In *Speaking Animals in Ancient Literature*, ed. H. Schmalzgruber (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020), 513–5.

83 Aschkenasy, *Woman at The Window*, 126.

84 Ibid., 127.

85 G. J. Blidstein, *In the Rabbis' Garden: Adam and Eve in the Midrash* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1997), 44.

86 See Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 39.

the (male) earthling. But likewise, it expresses that the obligation is upon the man to merit how his woman deals with him. The converse argument then says that the woman's acting is a permanent re-acting to the man, which means a notable restriction of her autonomy of action.

This boundedness of woman and man is based on the hidden legitimacy of a binary pattern of thinking, whose androcentric direction leads to a general challenging of the woman's independence of mind and action. Therefore, rabbinic traditions deal with the question of what the man might be doing during the woman's conversation with the serpent (GenR 19:3). Instead of reflecting upon the serpent's general intention to talk to the earthling,⁸⁷ most scholars delve further into the question of the man's whereabouts, assuming that it is more expected of the serpent to talk to the man.⁸⁸ It is not that the whereabouts of the man in Gen 3:1–6 are not a matter of exegetical interest, but rather a reflection of greater amazement that the serpent addresses the woman instead of the man. Thus, this analysis speaks for the establishment of androcentric binary patterns of thought. This becomes even more obvious when the question is turned around, asking why God obviously addresses only the male earthling in Gen 3:9–12.

In consequence, the rabbis quoted in *Genesis Rabbah* explain the woman's autonomous acting in Gen 3:1–5 by the temporary absence of the male earthling, leaving the following statement that her man was “with her” (עמה/*imah*, Gen 3:6) when she shared the fruit astonishingly unrecognized.⁸⁹ The rabbis' assumptions are that the man either had fallen asleep after having sexual intercourse with his woman, or that meanwhile God gave him a tour of the entire world (GenR 19:3).

This reading is also influenced by a preceded discrediting of the female creature in general. According to GenR 18:2 God had initial doubts about which body part should become the source for the female earthling. A subsequent commented series of items explains that the woman was not made from the head, so that she may not pridefully raise it, not from the eye, so that she may not look around coquettishly, not from the ear, so that she may not eavesdrop, not from the hand, so that she may not touch and steal, and not from the foot, so that she may not prowl (GenR 18:2). Following this, a number of biblical

87 See Vorpahl, “A Donkey That Speaks,” 515–6.

88 See Kalmanofsky, *Gender-Play*, 36–7, and Blidstein, *In the Rabbis' Garden*, 21–2.

89 See also Blidstein, *In the Rabbis' Garden*, 21–2. Restrictively I have to emphasize that I do not share Blidstein's presupposition of a “bourgeoise” atmosphere in which “the serpent would never have dared approach her” if Adam would have been around to protect her, depicting Eve as the serpent's vulnerable prey (*ibid.*, 22–3).

quotations are used to verify that these and other putative defects of character are nevertheless essential characteristics of women (GenR 18:2).

This method of elimination rather secondarily explains the creation of the woman from a human rib, while it primarily lists a number of stereotypical gender-role-ascriptions in association with a biological human body. By ascribing the danger of these embodied attributes to a primordial womanhood, these stereotypes are naturalized even beyond divine purpose. Beyond that, the female earthling's character traits are here tied to the male earthling's source material, which confirms that in the rabbinic episteme the woman's creation out of *ha'adam's* flesh and bone (Gen 2:23) is not an accomplishment of equality but an embodiment of the hierarchical relation of a compulsory binary pair. Against the woman's autonomy of action in Gen 3:1–6, the rabbinic traditions in *Genesis Rabbah* carry out a binding of the primordial woman on male power.

Releasing Eve to a Cisgender Prefiguration

Rabbi Deborah Bodin Cohen understands her anthology *Lilith's Ark* (2006) explicitly as a continuation of the narrative tradition established within the classical rabbinic literature, addressing it to a Jewish teenage readership.⁹⁰ Bodin Cohen's self-sufficient genre association is based on the book's formation process: merging a sensitive Bible reading with traditional commentaries and historical details, recognizing gaps and tensions, filling them sensitively with her own and others' experiences and imagination.⁹¹ By locating her book forthright standing in the tradition of midrash the author not only expresses her awareness of those ways of reading and the necessity to react to them. She also legitimizes her own literary innovation by reference to the continuity of this tradition, for herself and for her readership.⁹² Likewise, she creates for them a literary area of freedom that is exempted from other authorities and offers space for subjectivization along one's own belief and power of imagination.

In the anthology's first story, *Eve: The Seeds of an Apple*, the author depicts the female earthling (consistently called Eve) in the Garden of Eden as a

90 See D. Bodin Cohen, *Lilith's Ark: Teenage Tales of Biblical Women* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006), ix–x.

91 Compare Bodin Cohen, *Lilith's Ark*, ix–x, and Y. Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1996), 17.

92 See D. Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 142.

markedly active and fearless character whose male counterpart (consistently called Adam) emerges as remarkably patronizing and protective towards her. Primarily, these characterizations find expression in additional elaborations of the garden narrative. So does Adam constantly giving Eve unsolicited advice and instructions about living in the garden, based on his emphasized experiences as the first human being, which conflicts with Eve's self-confidence and curiosity. Instead, she begins to explore the garden on her own, to which Adam responds with disapproval, protest, and concern. But as he also refuses to join her scouting expeditions, it happens that the serpent meets Eve alone, several times in fact, before they talk about the tree of the knowledge of good and bad.⁹³

Bodin Cohen thereby answers, with a narratively plausible clarification, the rabbis' prior question of how it came about that the serpent talks only to the woman. But, likewise, she presents indications in characters of the male and female earthlings that make it plausible that Adam would have been too prudent to speak to the serpent and that Eve dares to raise questions that Adam never would have asked. When she hears him talking to God and demands the same for herself, Adam insists upon speaking for both of them.⁹⁴ At this moment, Eve feels anger for the first time and follows the serpent's path once more, where she reaches the tree of knowledge and articulates her desire for wisdom.⁹⁵ Again, Eve's aim for knowledge is made narratively plausible.

In her version of the garden narrative, Bodin Cohen fleshes out Eve's relation with both the serpent and Adam into a processual web of relationships and thereby portrays the female earthling as a confident and self-reliant young person instead of a seducible and guilty primordial woman. Eve prowls around in the garden with her head held high, looking around, and eavesdrops upon Adam talking to God, which leads her to demand equal rights. Furthermore, she desires wisdom, which is why she touches and steals from the tree of knowledge. In fact, Bodin Cohen designs Eve's character and behavior in accordance with all the defective attributes that are ascribed to women in GenR 18:2. Yet she does so without condemnation.

Under the terms of the midrash, Adam must be accountable for Eve counteracting him, as he neither heard her out, nor gave serious consideration to her opinion and needs, as it says in GenR 17:3: "if one merits, she is a helper, but if not, she is against him." Bodin Cohen confronts this rabbinic tradition with Eve's autonomy of action. Pursuant to the contemporary genre of young

93 See Bodin Cohen, *Lilith's Ark*, 6–9.

94 See *ibid.*, 9.

95 See *ibid.*, 9–10.

adult literature, the Eve of *Lilith's Ark* is presented as a strong, emancipated female character facing a mansplaining counterpart within an androcentric environment. Thus, the author acknowledges the woman's autonomy of action in Gen 3:1–6, narratively strengthening Eve's subject formation and achievement of agency.⁹⁶

When Eve finally takes a bite out of the fruit, Bodin Cohen describes its sweetness as an intense taste adventure, followed by the bodily reaction of Eve's puberty: "I felt my body grow and change. I developed curves, a thinner waist, and round breasts. I lifted my hands to my face. High cheekbones of womanhood had replaced the full face of a child."⁹⁷ Once young Eve has transformed into a woman, her aim shifts in a different direction than before: "Then I felt desire. I wanted a companion, a man, with whom I could explore the world."⁹⁸ Suddenly, heteronormative binarity appears in Bodin Cohen's story like a natural force that is essential to womanhood. Now Eve's "thoughts and perceptions are structured in accordance with the very structures of the relation of domination that is imposed on" her, and her "acts of cognition are, inevitably, acts of recognition, submission,"⁹⁹ according to Pierre Bourdieu.

With a second piece of the fruit, Eve returns to Adam, whose "jaw dropped"¹⁰⁰ at her sight, and she convinces him to eat from it as well by saying: "I am now a woman [...]. And you are just a boy. Eat the fruit, and we will become equals."¹⁰¹ That Eve is now presenting Adam the prospect of equality, exegetically closes a blank space in the text of Gen 3:6, while it creates the impression of feminist agency within Bodin Cohen's narrative. But what kind of equality is held out in prospect here? It is an equality of bodily growth to an extent of sexual maturity with an aspiration for heteronormative coupling, as Bodin Cohen describes Adam eating the fruit and "[h]is chest grew wide and hairy, his arms thick and strong, and his face angular and handsome. I felt my body drawn to him,"¹⁰² says Eve.

Bodin Cohen's description of physical transformation reproduces stereotypical body images in terms of a heteronormative differential feminism. Releasing Eve from an androcentric oppression, she turns her into a strong, confidently sexy cisgender prefiguration, with Adam as her masculine counterpart. And signifying Eve as cisgender at this point of Bodin Cohen's story gives credit to

96 See Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion*, 74.

97 Bodin Cohen, *Lilith's Ark*, 10.

98 Ibid.

99 Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 13.

100 Bodin Cohen, *Lilith's Ark*, 10.

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid., 10.

the circumstance that after the consumption of the fruit she is not any kind of woman but precisely this heteronormative prefiguration. Bodin Cohen's version of the garden narrative is unmistakably framed by a heteronormative episteme of binary patterns of thought. Identifying the moment of knowledge with the bodily process of puberty is indeed an innovative interpretation, but, as a result, all previous autonomy and emancipation gets a veneer of childish revolt.

Looking at *Lilith's Ark* as young adult literature for a Jewish teenage readership, Bodin Cohen successfully turns the biblical tradition of the eating of the fruit into a mobilizing story about the individualization of adolescents.¹⁰³ She emancipates Eve from the rabbinic tradition, whose aggadic elaborations in return close the content gap in Gen 3:6 by telling that Eve either forced Adam with verbal aggression to eat from the fruit, or tricked him into its consumption by giving it to him as a juice or holding out the prospect of loneliness to him (GenR 19:5). The former explanation is based on the reading of Gen 3:17, where it is written that *ha'adam* was listening to the voice (קול/*kol*) of his woman and not to her words. This is pointed out by Gerald Blidstein, who adds to the rabbis' interpretation that the woman's "best weapons are tears and cries. [... So] Adam may simply have been overpowered by his wife's outburst, [... as] women neither reason nor cite Scripture – they weep and cry to gain their ends. And men succumb."¹⁰⁴

What Blidstein frequently identifies as a "bourgeois" atmosphere with "fully defined and functioning"¹⁰⁵ roles already in the biblical text, does indeed repeatedly document Blidstein's own exemplariness for a modern, mansplaining expression of a heteronormative and androcentric, if not even misogynist episteme, based on profoundly internalized binary patterns of thought.

To overcome such ways of academic thinking, its essentialized categories of sex/gender have to be denaturalized.¹⁰⁶ But even then, their norms have to be unlearned, ascriptions of sex/gender identity have to be transformed into an open and dynamic understanding of subject formation and agency, as Auga outlines it.¹⁰⁷ To overcome the binary patterns of thought that structure the meaning which needs to be deconstructed, is a challenging but necessary step

103 See also Hervieu-Lèger, *Religion*, 159.

104 Blidstein, *In the Rabbis' Garden*, 50–51.

105 *Ibid.*, 22.

106 See Auga, *An Epistemology of Religion*, 53.

107 See *ibid.*, 72–74, and P. Bourdieu and L. J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 122.

in the pursue of this approach.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, binarity hast to be unmasked as a conceptual scaffold of thinking behind preconcepts of sex, gender roles, or heteronormative norms, but also religious or ethical beliefs in the dualities of good and bad, or right and wrong, which are all taken for granted. Binary patterns of thought do not correspond with the complexity of our world, especially not with all the tasks that we have to solve in the nearest future.

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108 See J. Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory*, ed. S. Seidman (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 282–98.

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