

rep. Boston, 1989). Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law* (New York, 1984) is an excellent introduction to the position of women in rabbinic legislation and social policy. Among bibliographies that deal with women in Judaism are Aviva Cantor, *The Jewish Woman: 1900-1981. Bibliography* (Fresh Meadow, NY, 1981); Ora Haimendorf and Sandra Adelsberg, *Jewish Women and Jewish Law: Bibliography* (Fresh Meadows, NY, 1980); and Inger Marie Ruud, *Women and Judaism: A Select Annotated Bibliography* (New York, 1988). The notes to the essays in the present volume are an excellent source of bibliographical references, as is Sue Levi Elwell, *The Jewish Women's Studies Guide* (Lanham, MD, 1987), which compiles detailed reading lists from eighteen university courses dealing, in whole or part, with Jewish women.

11. A pioneering effort for the general reader is Sandra Henry and Emily Taitz, *Written Out of History: Our Jewish Foremothers* (Fresh Meadows, NY, 1983), which discusses extraordinary Jewish women in a number of different eras; the volume includes a good bibliography.

12. On alternative life-styles for Jewish women in the modern era, see Evelyn Torton Beck, ed., *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology* (Boston, 1989); Christie Balka and Andy Rose, eds., *Twice Blessed: On Being Lesbian, Gay, and Jewish* (Boston, 1989); Carol Diamant, *Jewish Marital Status: A Hadassah Study* (Northvale, NJ, 1989); and excerpts in Kaye/Kantrowitz and Klepfisz, *Tribe of Dina*.

13. For an analysis of the subordinate roles women have held in most human societies, see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York, 1975), 157-210.

14. See, in particular, Wegner's discussion in chapter 3 of whether or not women are allowed to study Torah according to rabbinic Judaism.

15. On these topics see notes to chapters 7-8 and 10 and my *Selected Bibliography*.

16. See my *Selected Bibliography* for suggested readings on these topics.

CHAPTER 1 SUSAN NIDITCH

Portrayals of Women in the Hebrew Bible

To study women and the Hebrew Bible is to delve into a variety of fields including not only Bible scholarship but also women's studies, Judaica, literary criticism, anthropology, and sociology. Primary material in the Hebrew Scriptures is rich and varied, the relevant bibliography extensive, and the methodologies employed by students of women and the Bible interdisciplinary, daring, and often at the very crest of scholarship. This essay explores portrayals of women in the Hebrew Bible, discusses the challenges and problems such a study poses, and provides a guide to major trends in recent scholarship.

METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Challenges in the study of women and the Hebrew Bible are in many ways parallel to challenges faced in Scripture study as a whole. The ways in which biblical authors portray families or women or kings do not necessarily correspond to how families and women actually

sources, periods, and cultural threads lie behind the work we call the Hebrew Bible. Revisions and elaborations were essential to the biblical process, while the notion of "original" or "first" version may be completely out of place in dealing with traditional literature, which until its codification or canonization always exists in multiplicity and which is always undergoing change even while belonging to a continuum with the past.

Given that the Hebrew Bible is the product of a complex process of growth, what can we hope to learn about women in the Hebrew Scriptures? Can we place individual portraits on a historical time line or are all the portrayals archetypal and timeless? Is it possible to speak of individual authors and their life settings, or should we treat the tradition as a whole?

First, we need not forego all notions of history or sociological setting. Acknowledging that all pieces of Scripture were given final form by someone allows us to speak of composers or authors who belong to particular periods and settings. Certain values and attitudes—often contrasting ones—emerge in how women are presented; in these are found a history of worldviews and ethos, if not simple reliable fact.² We do not know if a character named Rahab once saved Israelite spies (Joshua 2), but we know that an author employs the traditional and cross-cultural motif of the helpful harlot at the crossroads in a way that comments on the appeal of Yahwism to non-Israelites and on the marginality of Israelites at a certain point in their history. This author implicitly comments on the potential power for directed action and on the cleverness of a woman, in particular, one who is outside the social order and who in a sense symbolizes the situation of Israel as narrated. Yahweh is with her and she with him. We might then go on to discuss at which periods in real history such a portrait with its implicit messages might be of particular interest to Israelite authors and audiences.

→ We must also keep in mind that the Hebrew Scriptures, even in its final composed form, is no monolith. It reflects various periods of time, as well as differences among Israelites, even of one period. As Morton Smith has shown, every attitude in favor of a particular position hints at the existence of counterattitudes.³ "Yahweh-alone-ers" no doubt coexisted in Israel with those who worshipped Yahweh along with other personal gods, some of these perhaps female divine figures.

lived or kings governed in specific, historically datable and definable social realities. In the Bible's own scheme, Israelite history divides into three major periods: (1) the time before the monarchy (before c. 1000 B.C.E.), (2) the period of monarchy (c. 1000–586 B.C.E.), and (3) the post-monarchic period (586 B.C.E. on). Within the Bible's narrative framework the first era includes the patriarchs and matriarchs, the exodus from Egypt, and Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, the conquest and settlement, Joshua and Rahab, and all the judges including Deborah, Samson, and the prophet-judge Samuel. The second era includes the first king, Saul, and his successor, David; David's wives, Michal, Abigail, and Bathsheba; certain "wise women"; the other Northern and Southern kings; and the rise of prophecy. A major theme of this period is the building and maintenance of the Temple and the Holy City, Jerusalem; the epoch ends with the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the exile of the elite of Jerusalem. The third era includes the prophets Zechariah and Haggai and the leaders Ezra and Nehemiah and is the so-called Second Temple period following the Babylonian exile. During this time the Temple is rebuilt and a new theological grounding for Yahwism is established; Israelite religion begins to be Judaism.

All this being said, however, how do we date the literature of the Hebrew Bible? No modern scholars would accept, for example, that all the material pertaining to the lives of the patriarchs or the exodus was written in, or even originated in, a premonarchic period. A few texts such as Exodus 15 and Judges 5 may predate the monarchy as revealed by their language and orthography, but these are the exceptions. Two well-known scholars recently refused to include a so-called "patriarchal" period in their major history of Israel, beginning instead at "the eve of the establishment of the monarchy" (c. 1200 B.C.E.).¹ What, then, do we do with figures such as Sarah or Rachel?

Since the early twentieth century most scholars have accepted the so-called documentary hypothesis, which suggests that one can date certain layers of the Hebrew Scriptures through the names by which God is called. Thus, one chapter of Genesis will be attributed to the Yahwist and another to the Elohist (depending on whether the deity is referred to as Yahweh or Elohim). This hypothesis, too, has come under attack, and I am among those who do not accept many of the old attributions. Nevertheless, scholars do agree that many authors,

LAW AND SOCIAL SETTING

The spiritual basis of Israel's history and law is the covenantal relationship enjoined on all believers in Yahweh, who are bound to each other through him in a vow of love and obedience. While such an exalted vision of human equality in the presence of their Creator might seem to be a positive and liberating force in Israelite religion, the statutes preserved in Scripture present the image of a strongly patrilineal culture in which women are in some instances highly marginalized and fenced out and in others neatly fenced in, enclosed, and safely bound.⁸ Again, we must always remember that biblical law is material edited, preserved, codified and presented in literature and not necessarily a reflection of actual lives. In discussing this literature, the image of woman as vessel or a house is appropriate. She is to be filled with her husband's seed which (it is hoped) will develop into children, especially male children. As she contains and shelters the future child, so her realm is the home, the private realm of children and procreation. Women are legally governed by their fathers before marriage and by their husbands after marriage. In the former condition they are virgins; those discovered to be sexually active are to be stoned by their fathers' houses (Deuteronomy 22:21). As wives, they are to be faithful, child-producing spouses, a position they may share with other wives in polygynous marriage. Those who cannot bear successfully or who displease their husbands may be divorced (Deuteronomy 24:1-4, but see the protections offered in Deuteronomy 22:13-19); those who commit adultery are to suffer the same fate as nonvirgins (Deuteronomy 22:22; Leviticus 20:10), though we have no way of knowing whether these laws were consistently carried out. Those accused by their husbands of adultery, in the absence of certain proof, undergo a trial ritual rich in the symbolism of "purity and danger" (Numbers 5:11-31). Adultery involves relations with a married woman. A married man's relations with an unmarried woman are not adulterous, for intimate aspects of women's lives really have to do with relations between men. Thus, a man is executed for lying with another's wife because he has committed a crime of theft against a man. If a man seduces or rapes a virgin, he must pay bride-price to the father and marry her (Deuteronomy 22:28). Rules of incest—information about

Hints of the attitudes of these Israelites remain in the Hebrew Scriptures in polemics against worshippers of the ancient Near Eastern goddess, Asherah, for example. So, too, while the Hebrew Bible in general is male-centered, interesting nuances and threads emerge when one goes beyond that generalization.⁴ Equally misleading can be claims, difficult to substantiate, suggesting women may be responsible for one of the sources believed to underlie the Pentateuch just because many of the stories are about women, children, and the home and that 2 Isaiah may be a woman because some of the Isaianic prophecies employ female imagery to describe God (e.g., Isaiah 42:14, 49:15; and later material in 66:9 and 13).⁵

The situation becomes even more complicated when one thinks of the various life settings and orientations from which authors may have come, and the various options in life-style possible for real Israelite women, especially during the period of the monarchy and beyond. I have found, for example, at least three definable styles and worldviews in Genesis, one more baroque and courtly, one more popular, and one more homiletical and self-consciously theological.⁶ Might not authors with such differing orientations present women differently? If one looks behind the literature to real lives, it becomes clear that the eighth-century B.C.E. woman surrounded by the "ivory couches" and other luxuries of the Northern Israelite aristocracy condemned by Amos (6:4-7), would have led a life quite different from the wife of a small landowner or a poor destitute widow. Issues of class within one period are as important as issues of date across several periods. Here, archaeological information becomes critically important even though major archaeological digs have often involved the sites of cities and temples rather than ordinary villages where people ate, and cooked, and worked.⁷

Finally, one must acknowledge that the canon of the Hebrew Bible, like the implicit canon of English literature or Renaissance music, is an explicitly edited work from which many women's roles and important aspects of women's lives have been excluded. As we turn to portrayals of women in the Hebrew Scriptures and explore attitudes toward women implied in its narratives and legal corpora and especially as we speculate on the lives of real Israelite women and on the historical settings of biblical composers, we must always think about what may have been excluded.

clear exactly how rules such as these affected ordinary women's daily lives or their participation in community life. Are these purity laws premonarchic and pre-Temple in date or later? One can conclude that for at least one important group in Israelite culture, all discharges were regarded as rendering unclean. The ordinary woman of child-bearing age has regular discharges and is therefore regularly subject to uncleanness, an uncleanness associated with the psychologically and physically powerful rhythms of fertility, pregnancy, and childbirth. As such, woman becomes a monthly source of danger and power, containing an uncleanness that can spill over and contaminate, making successful mediation between God and humans in ritual impossible. Thus, in the priestly worldview, the woman is bound out of most aspects of cultic life. Do such laws reflect male priests' desires to hold power? Were there other competing options in religious expression open to women, threads not preserved in our sources?¹¹ There are, after all, cultures in which women's procreative powers render them influential in the realm of the religious.

A few more features of legal material should be mentioned. Men are obligated to perform conjugal duties for their wives in Exodus 21:10, pointing to a power of the woman in the private realm, emphasized in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis discussed below.

While prostitution is outlawed, as in the book law of many cultures, some of the narrative material assumes the existence of independent, working prostitutes, women who are crossroads people, beyond ordinary cultural norms assumed for women and not under the thumb of husband or father. These marginal women are of interest to biblical writers, as shown by the stories of Rahab (Joshua 2) and the disguised Tamar (Genesis 38).

Within the Bible, legal material does not always tally with narrative. Jacob marries two sisters although this is forbidden in Leviticus 18:18; the law of the levirate is contrary to Leviticus 18:16. These differences may reflect different periods and changes in the law or indicate that the priestly laws of Leviticus 18 were not "law" to all.

As we move on to portrayals of women in narrative and other genres, certain sometimes overlapping typologies emerge. Biblical women include matriarchs and tricksters, wise women and warriors, and finally a group whom Phyllis Trible calls the victims.¹²

who is or who is not an appropriate marriage partner—are likewise addressed in the masculine singular to men. Leviticus 18 is a fascinating passage revealing priestly views concerning what constitutes too close a marriage tie, as this thread of Israelite culture steers a course between incest and exogamy.

Women normally do not inherit property, although exceptions are made in families without sons (see Numbers 27:1–11), and the author of the Book of Ruth assumes a wife could inherit her husband's property.⁹ All of this paints a portrait of women with very little de jure political or economic autonomy. The married woman who does not bear children is in an especially marginalized position, for she is no longer a virgin in her father's home yet does not fully function in her husband's. It is the children who form her bond with her husband's clan. No specific law applies to her; but the barren wife is a favorite biblical motif, marking the birth of heroes, as in many cultures. The condition of infertility is presented as a special cultural worry for the woman, and the young childless widow is a particular problem case, for she is caught between two stages in her life. This problem is addressed in Deuteronomy 25:5 by a law requiring the dead man's brother to take her as his wife to raise up children in the name of the deceased, thereby regularizing the woman's position in the patriarchal clan.¹⁰

Perhaps the most noticeable laws of fencing off and boundary making vis-à-vis women are laws pertaining to purity. The menstruating woman is forbidden to her husband sexually for seven days. Her uncleanness (an invisible but real *substance*) contaminates what she sits upon, and a man can contract uncleanness by touching her or a seat or bed where she has been (Leviticus 15:21). This uncleanness from touching lasts until the transitional evening time returns the man's state to cleanness (15:19). The man who has intercourse with her is rendered unclean for seven days (15:24). So, too, the postpartum woman is unclean for seven days after the birth of a son, then must remain an additional thirty-three days in the blood of her purification. She may touch nothing "holy nor enter the sanctuary" in this period. Twice these lengths of time—fourteen and sixty-six days—are prescribed for the birth of daughters, in a sort of anticipation of the female babies' future dangerous states (Leviticus 12). This material is found in a portion of Scripture preserved by priests; it is not entirely

So the blind Isaac is deceived by his wife and son in his old age, so Abraham must acquiesce to Sarah's wishes *vis-à-vis* Ishmael, so Ma-
noah sees but does not comprehend. A relevant scene is the "selling"
of Jacob's marital duties. Rachel, desperate for children, buys fertility-
producing mandrake plants from her sister Leah in exchange for Ja-
cob's conjugal services. When he returns from the field Leah gives him
his orders. He will sleep with her that night; meekly, without ques-
tion, he goes and performs his duty (Genesis 30:14-18), yielding
Leah an unexpected son. These stories fit traditional narrative pat-
terns: youngest sons always inherit and heroes are born under special
circumstances. Nevertheless, the fact that the biblical writers create
special roles for the women in the working out of these patterns, that
they draw the mothers and wives a certain way, does say something
important about their perceptions of the feminine, an important per-
ception apparently shared by the participants in the literary tradition.
The portraits of women holding power in the private realm, a power
associated with fertility and children, tallies with the portrait emerg-
ing in the legal material and is not unique to Israelite culture.¹⁷

In addition to the portrayals of "mothers," the matriarchs, we find
equally penetrating portraits of women warriors and wise women, both
of whom share traits with the tricky mothers discussed above and in-
deed with most of the successful men of the Hebrew Scriptures, who
succeed by means of savvy and concealment, wit and deception.

The warriors, Deborah and Jael, make their appearances in the
Book of Judges in the context of Israel's battles with Canaanite ene-
mies. While Deborah is a judge, a general, and a tactician who clearly
dominates and outshines Barak, her man-at-arms (Judges 4:8-9),
Jael is a guerrilla assassin who welcomes the fleeing Canaanite general
Sisera into her tent with promises of safety and succor and then runs
him through the head with a tent peg (Judges 4-5). In language and
imagery richly dripping in eroticism and death, Jael partakes of a wider
Ancient Near Eastern and more universal archetype of the seductress-
exterminator. Jael is an unlikely heroine, a self-appointed female sol-
dier, who reverses the normal fate of a woman in battle (cf. Judges
5:30). She is not seduced, taken, or despoiled but herself seduces,
marginalizes, and despoils a man. An Israelite author and Israelite
audiences of various periods clearly identify with her when confront-
ing enemies better armed and more powerful than themselves (so, too,
the Maccabean-period Judith, based on Judges 4-5). As JoAnn Hack-

WOMEN IN NARRATIVE

Biblical authors portray Rebecca, wife of Isaac, and the sisters Rachel
and Leah, wives of Jacob, as young women in their fathers' homes who
marry their paternal cousins, that is, who participate in the time-
honored custom of cross-cousin marriage¹³ (see Genesis 24 and Gene-
sis 28-30).

Except for the unloved Leah, all the wives of the patriarchs—
Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel—are able to bear children only with dif-
ficulty; they are archetypal barren women, as are Hannah, the mother
of Samuel, and Samson's unnamed mother.¹⁴ Paradoxically, however,
they have power in the private realm over matters of sex and children;
in this connection they often play the role of tricksters, of those who
use irregular, deceiving means to gain an end.¹⁵ Those who are mar-
ginal in their family and culture use wit to derive some benefit from,
or power over, those in control. It is in child-related areas, in particu-
lar, that the women display their strength and a certain closeness to
the divine. Communications about children to be born are some of
the few instances in which God is seen to speak to women. The an-
nunciation to Samson's mother in Judges 13 is of special relevance,
for the divine emissary makes it quite clear that he wishes to speak to
the woman—not with her husband, who is, in fact, portrayed as a
doubtful, fearful dolt in contrast to his more sensible, down-to-earth
wife.¹⁶ Sarah has the nerve to laugh when she hears a child is to be
born (Genesis 18:12). Hannah herself prays for a child at the sanc-
tuary and interacts with the priest Eli (1 Samuel 1:9-18). Sarah
and Rebecca, moreover, further with God's blessing the careers of
their favorite sons, the younger offspring, Sarah in having Hagar and
Ishmael expelled and Rebecca in tricking Isaac into giving Jacob his
blessing (see also Bathsheba's role in 1 Kings 1:15-21, 28-31). The
women, like Manoah's wife, are perceived in these cases as having the
inside track to God's will. Similarly, Rachel successfully steals her
father's household gods and hides them under her, chasing her father
away with the warning that she is in a menstrual state (Genesis
31:34-35). This scene, with its implicit emphasis on the woman's
power grounded in her fertility places the power of the hearth over
the power of the public realm. Laban, like the patriarchs, is reduced
to impotency.

ett has shown, the larger, more active, public, and aggressive roles given Deborah and Jael may well indicate works composed during periods of "social dysfunction" and decentralization, when women emerge from the shadows as more directed, overtly aggressive or powerful figures.¹⁸ Certainly, such characterizations of women are found in the literature about such periods.

Jael, like Judith, seduces and kills via deception, and thus shares in the category of biblical men and women who use their wit to achieve their goals, escape danger, or improve their status. Among such figures are Abigail, Esther, Ruth, and Naomi. Abigail's beautiful appearance, clever rhetoric, and demeanor of self-effacement save her household from the future king David who appears on her husband's estate very much like a bandit or pirate as he flees from Saul (1 Samuel 25). Esther, also assuming the pose of the humble, vulnerable, and beautiful supplicant, saves herself and her people from her foolish but powerful husband, Ahasuerus, the Persian monarch who has fallen under the influence of the evil Haman. Ruth, with Naomi's help, wins a husband to efface her widow status. All of these women share two traits: their husbands are foolish or absent (in the cases of Abigail and Esther, the women clearly outstrip their husbands in intelligence); and they present an appearance of subservient "female behavior," dressing for success, dealing obsequiously with spouses or future spouses, flattering, and using language well and convincingly. The wisdom tradition in Proverbs suggests a similar combination of savvy and subservience as the means of obtaining political success in dealing with the powerful, for spheres of politics and gender are often mirror images. Proverbs 31:10-31 presents a slightly different portrait, that of the respected, capable wife, the jewel in her husband's crown, having various economic as well as familial responsibilities.

Quite different are the so-called "wise women" who appear in two fascinating passages in 2 Samuel. Does the term *wise woman* simply refer to a woman who is wise, or were there professional wise women in ancient Israel? If so, what were their roles? In 2 Samuel 14 a wise woman from Tekoa is summoned to become a living *mashal*, or parable. Joab, general to King David, instructs her as a director would direct an actress to portray the role of bereaved mother and spin a tale to David that will convince him to allow his son Absalom to return to court. She plays the part beautifully, convincing the king. She is, in short, a professional mediator, an improvisationist skilled in the

dramatic weaving and enactment of mediating parables.¹⁹ In a similar role, the wise woman of 2 Samuel 20:16 intervenes between her town and the general Joab, who has come on a search-and-destroy mission to capture the rebel Shimei ben Bichri. She uses appropriate proverbs, rhetoric, and skills of mediation to convince her townsmen to give up the offender to the agent of the king and in this way prevents great destruction. These wise women are not unlike Abigail and Esther in their mediating roles but appear also to be titled professionals. Their activities, moreover, have much in common with those of prophets like Nathan, who weaves a parable to mediate between God and David, indirectly accusing the king of murder. Numerous other prophets, named and unnamed, become living dramatizations or symbols of God's message (see 1 Kings 11:29-40, 20:35-43; Jeremiah 13:1-11). These women and men employ a creative, artistic, and formalized technique to accuse an offender of wrongdoing or to reveal a true situation in order to resolve tensions, ease conflict, and render justice, sometimes shaming a person or persons into acting justly.²⁰

One might wonder if women also played the prophetic mediating role or any prophetic role, for prophecy is a form of wisdom. In other Near Eastern cultures women were prophets, dream interpreters, diviners, and singers (and perhaps ecstatic composers) of sacred texts.²¹ The Hebrew Bible does include some portrayals of such female figures involved in leadership roles in the publically religious sphere (see Isaiah 8:3; 2 Kings 22:14-20; and Nehemiah 6:14).²² Hulda, the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14-20), provides the seventh-century B.C.E. King Josiah with a divine warning of doom unless he becomes a pro-Yahwist reformer, casting out idols. Her oracle is framed in rubrics typical of biblical prophecy, although all other examples are delivered by male prophets. The accusations, suggestions for reform, and acceptance of the king's confession and repentance are presented in language completely at home in the canon of prophetic speech. Her prophetic gift is not treated as unusual for a woman. Petition to her is made in the most matter-of-fact way, leading one to wonder whether she was one of a score of female prophets not included in the Hebrew Scriptures or at least a characterization based on such real-life figures. Miriam, sister of Moses, is called "the prophetess" in Exodus 15:20. Passages such as Numbers 12 reveal another thread in the tradition. In its criticism of Moses' sister, the tale of Miriam's "gossiping" about Moses' wife is an attempt to squelch Miriam's pretensions—or more

precisely the claims of priestly groups and leaders, perhaps female leaders, claiming Miriam as ancestress heroine.²³ One also thinks of the female spirit medium who raises the ghost of the prophet Samuel for Saul in an eerie and powerful adumbration of the latter's final deed (1 Samuel 28:7). In an apparent trance state she brings forth the feat (1 Samuel 28:7). In an apparent trance state she emerges from her state crusty old man to predict Saul's death and then emerges from her state and professional role to offer the depressed king food. Much like Achilles to Priam after the death of Hector in Homer's *Iliad*, she attempts to bring Saul and his thoughts out of the realm of death to the realm of the mundane and ordinary, the realm of eating. Thus the spirit medium is also the nurturer, Woman.

In discussing women able to cross the boundary from earthly to divine, this-worldly to otherworldly, we raise several important issues touched upon above: (1) the question of ordinary women's cultic and religious activities: How did women reach God? (2) special cultic roles for women in various forms of Yahwism; (3) the question of women goddesses in the Ancient Near East and in some forms of Yahwism; (4) images of Yahweh as female.

We do not have the space to discuss each of these matters in detail but direct the reader to fine secondary readings. Phyllis Bird's essay and a forthcoming book discuss the first two of these issues, including biblical and extra-biblical evidence for forms of Israelite popular religion not sanctioned by the framers of the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁴ For an overview of ancient Near Eastern goddesses, places to start are E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess*, an older but still useful work;²⁵ articles by Judith Ockshorn and C. J. Bleeker in C. Olson's edited *Book of the Goddess Past and Present*;²⁶ and Carole Fontaine's study of goddess tricksters.²⁷

In one spot in the Hebrew Scriptures a goddess-like figure meets Yahwism in the female personification of Wisdom, whose alter ego, or Jungian negative counterpart, is the "strange" woman personifying Antiwisdom. The biblical figure of Wisdom of Proverbs 8 has a certain grand stature, accompanying God at the Creation and exhorting men to follow her ways. Claudia Camp has explored the female Wisdom figure in detail.²⁸ Another important area involves the place of the Near Eastern goddess Asherah in the religious life of some Israelites who worshipped her, much to the horror of, and in spite of the condemnation of purist Yahwists (see 1 Kings 15:13, 18:19; 2 Kings 21:7, 23:4, 7). As noted by P. D. Miller, inscriptions from Kuntillet

Ajrud described by William Dever as "a 9th–8th century B.C.E. Israelite-Judaean caravanserai and attached shrine" refer more than once to "Yahweh of Samaria and his 'asherah.'" Scholars debate about 'asherah's status, though many believe her to have been regarded as a consort of Yahweh.²⁹ Also relevant are the prophet Jeremiah's condemnations of worship practices involving "the Queen of Heaven" (see Jeremiah 7:17–18, 44:15–25). The possibility that in some forms of Israelite religion women played greater roles in cult or that some Israelites may have worshipped female deities, of course, does not necessarily imply that the workaday lives of women in these traditions differed markedly from the lives of women whose Yahwism is sanctioned by the biblical framers nor that the former enjoyed better or fuller lives, socioeconomically or politically. As for images of Yahweh as mother or nurturer, as a starting point, I recommend Phyllis Trible's *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.³⁰

Having raised questions concerning the connections between the patterns of literature and the patterns of real lives, we turn to a group of women whom, after Phyllis Trible, we call the victims. Phyllis Trible explores a number of these characters with her usual great literary sensitivity and thoughtfulness in the book *Texts of Terror*.³¹ By victims we refer to women who suffer physical and/or mental abuse at the hands of some of the male characters of Scripture. Most troubling is the narrators' neutrality and seeming lack of sympathy for the victims. As Eve Sedgwick has shown for a different corpus of literature, the stories featuring women are not necessarily about women but about relations between men.³² Thus, the rape of David's daughter Tamar, about which David does nothing, becomes the cause of the blood feud between Absalom, Tamar's brother, and Amnon, the half brother, who has his way with her (2 Samuel 13–18). The rape of Jacob's daughter Dinah similarly becomes the cause for Jacob's sons' vengeance against the men of Shechem (Genesis 34). The nameless concubine in Judges 19 is another rape victim thrown to her fate by her husband to save his own skin from rapists, "evil fellows" among the Benjaminites. The evil deed spills over into a full-scale civil war. Michal, David's first wife, daughter of Saul, is caught between her father and husband, given to David, taken away, retaken by David, and then cast off by him.³³ Jephthah promises as a sacrifice to God the first thing he sees upon return from battle if God helps him to succeed. He succeeds, but the first thing he sees is his daughter. She meekly

agrees to become a sacrifice and goes off to the hills to mourn her virginity with friends her age (Judges 11:29-40). Hagar, Abraham's concubine, is sent away with her son, alone and deserted (Genesis 21:8-21). She is caught in the Ishmael-Isaac contest for succession, though they are both children at the time. The complex texts that present these women are open to interpretation. Do the authors of these tales mean us to sympathize with the women? A modern reader of this material cannot but do so, but is the sympathy reader-generated or author-generated? The men of the narratives are variants of the folk or author-generated, stupid father-husband mentioned above. Like Beauty's foolish father, or the father of the "Girl without Hands" (Grimms' *Fairy Tales*, nos. 88 and 31, respectively), Jephthah thoughtlessly and with concern only for his own success makes a vow dooming his daughter. So the Levite in a more visceral way sacrifices his concubine to a barbaric mob. When Jacob hears of the rape of his daughter, he is more concerned to make peace with the rapist's father than to defend his child. Abraham—and indeed his advisor, God—cast off the mother Hagar. David and Amnon use young women and then discard them, later suffering—or in the case of Amnon, dying—because of the family strife they create. Even the pro-Davidic writer of David's court narratives portrays David as a weak and impotent father and husband, a man whose personal life never reaches the successes of his public achievements. It is as if the artistic demands on this creative and traditional-style author outweigh his pro-Davidic propagandistic motivations. Even the men who defend women, Dinah's brothers and Absalom, might be accused of being self-serving—with honor in the case of Jacob's sons, concerned with ridding himself of a senior prince in the case of Absalom (though this is not certain). These narratives may reflect an interesting anthropological, psychological, and mythological pattern whereby the brother-sister relationship is the love relationship rather than the relationship between father and child (e.g., the birth narratives of Cronos and Zeus and his siblings in *Theogony* 145-210, 453-506, and the folktale "Hansel and Gretel," *Grimms' Fairy Tales* no. 15).

The women submit silently (Dinah, concubine, Hagar) or verbally (Jephthah's daughter) or protest in vain (Tamar). Are the authors of these narratives providing models of how women should be or how they must be? Are the characterizations typological reflections of a cultural reality? How does each author judge this reality if it exists?

Do the authors sympathize with the women, or are the narrative voices too silent, too neutral, to read? Jephthah's daughter displays a certain nobility and is described as the founder of a ritual for young women; Tamar and Hagar certainly evoke pathos. These women are surely presented as the heroines of their stories; the men around them are bumbling, cruel, foolish, or all three.

CONCLUSION

To study women in the Hebrew Bible is to reexamine and reassess a lengthy history of biblical hermeneutics; it is to pose new questions about legal and nonlegal texts and to make what will strike some readers as radical suggestions concerning the religion and culture of Israel. I have explored the characterizations of women, and the tone, texture, and point of view of the compositions in which they appear as a student of literature, asking what sorts of authors and audiences would have found these portrayals meaningful and why. As a student of history, I have faced the challenge that even the so-called historical books of the Bible and the legal texts are not simple reflections of historical fact or verifiable data. Most important, I have tried to convey a sense of the varieties of Israelite religion and culture both in any one period of time and over time as relevant to a study of women. An examination of the provenance and biases of particular authors is critical, as is the realization that information about women's modes of religious expression, about alternate forms of Yahwism, and about particular women leaders and positions of leadership held by women, may have been excluded from the canon. We have explored some of the hints left behind in the edited texts. Perhaps most interesting in our study is the realization that the laws of the Hebrew Bible come from various periods and groups responding to, and reflecting, various perceptions of Israelite mores and worldviews.³⁴ The priestly view of women, emerging in laws of purity, for example, may not have been the most characteristic view of women in all periods or segments of Israelite culture. Just as Jacob Neusner and other feminist scholars have suggested that early rabbinic law originally may have reflected the cosmology of the rabbis and not Jews in general,³⁵ so, too, priestly law may reveal the worldview of a small group of Israelites and not the worldview of all or even most participants in Israelite culture.

NOTES

1. J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia, 1986), 79.
2. For a judicious as well as creative approach to the reconstruction of Israelite women's history see JoAnn Hackett, "In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women in Ancient Israel," in *Inmaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston, 1985), 15-38.
3. Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and Politics That Shaped the Old Testament* (New York, 1971).
4. A less-than-adequately complex approach to patriarchy is Esther Fuchs, "The Literary Characterization of Mothers and Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible," and "Who Is Hiding the Truth? Deceptive Women and Biblical Androcentrism," both in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico, CA, 1985).
5. For conclusions too quickly drawn, see Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco, 1987), 86. A more interesting and careful—if controversial—analysis of the issue of female authorship and the female composer's voice is found in Mieke Bal, *Murder and Difference: Gender, Genre, and Scholarship on Sistra's Death* (Bloomington, 1988).
6. See my *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco, 1987), 22-69.
7. For application of anthropological, sociological, and archaeological perspectives to some questions about the lives of "ordinary people" in Israelite culture, see Carol Meyers, "Procreation, Production, and Protection: Male-female Balance in Early Israel," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51 (1983): 569-94; idem, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York, 1988), 16-20. See also her earlier article "The Roots of Restriction: Women in Early Israel," *Biblical Archaeologist* 41 (1978): 91-103. This paper interestingly contrasts with suggestions offered in Hackett, "In the Days of Jael." For additional material on the lives of women in the Ancient Near East, see Sue Rollin, "Women and Witchcraft in Ancient Assyria," Jackie Pringle, "Hitrite Birth Rituals," and Katarzyna Grosz, "Bride-wealth and Dowry in Nuzi," all in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (Detroit, 1983). The reader might also consult resources in *La femme dans le Proche Orient antique*, ed. J. M. Durand (Paris, 1987).
8. For a thorough but concise examination of Israelite law and women, see Phyllis Bird, "Images of Women in the Old Testament," in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York, 1974), 48-57.
9. See Bird, "Images," 53.
10. See my "Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38," *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979): 143-49.
11. On this matter see Phyllis Bird, "The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride (Philadelphia, 1987), 408-9.
12. See Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, 1984), 102, 104-6, and 114 n. 43.
13. On cross-cousin marriage and the patriarchal narratives see Robert Oden, *The Bible without Theology* (San Francisco, 1987), 106-30.

14. For a fine study of the patriarchal narratives see J. Cheryl Exum, "Mother in Israel: A Familiar Figure Reconsidered," in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia, 1985), 73-85; for a different but equally interesting perspective see Fuchs, "Literary Characterization of Mothers."
15. See my *Underdogs and Tricksters*, and the various articles in J. Cheryl Exum and Johanna W. H. Bos, eds., *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power*, *Semeia* 42 (1988).
16. On Manoa's wife see J. Cheryl Exum, "Promise and Fulfillment: Narrative Art in Judges 13," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 43-59.
17. The classic discussion of issues of public and private in gender roles is Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview," in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, 1974), 17-42.
18. Hackett, "In the Days of Jael," 24-26.
19. See Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43 (1981): 14-29, esp. 24, 26.
20. See Camp, "Wise Women."
21. For a review of comparative Ancient Near Eastern sources see Judith Ochshorn, "Ishtar and Her Cult," in *The Book of the Goddess Past and Present*, ed. Carl Olson (New York, 1983), 16-28; Gay Robins, "The God's Wife of Anun in the 18th Dynasty in Egypt," and Ulla Jeyes, "The Nadiu Women of Sippar," both in *Images of Women*, ed. Cameron and Kuhrt.
22. See also the fuller discussion in Bird, "Images of Women," 67-69.
23. See Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (Atlanta, 1987).
24. Bird, "Place of Women," 404-5.
25. E. O. James, *The Cult of the Mother Goddess* (London, 1959), 47-90.
26. Ochshorn, "Ishtar and Her Cult," and C. J. Bleeker, "Isis and Hathor: Two Ancient Egyptian Goddesses," in *Book of the Goddess*, ed. Olson.
27. Carole Fontaine, "The Deceptive Goddess in Ancient Near Eastern Myth: Inanna and Inanas," *Semeia* 42 (1988): 84-102. Also see material listed in n. 7.
28. See Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, *Bible and Literature Series* no. 11 (Sheffield, UK, 1985); and "Woman Wisdom as Root Metaphor: A Theological Consideration," in *The Listening Heart: Essays on Wisdom and the Psalms*, ed. K. Hogland et al. (Sheffield, UK, 1987), 45-76.
29. See P. D. Miller, "The Absence of the Goddess in Israelite Religion," *Hebrew Annual Review* 10 (1986): 239-48, esp. 246 and nn. On the topic of goddesses among ancient Israelites, see also Peter R. Ackroyd, "Goddesses, Women, and Jezebel," in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. Cameron and Kuhrt.
30. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia, 1978), 31-72. See also Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God As Female* (Philadelphia, 1983).
31. For readings of the tales of Jephthah's daughter, the unnamed woman in Judges 19, Tamar, and Hagar see Trible, *Texts of Terror*.
32. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York, 1985). See also Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna P. Reiter (New York, 1975), 157-210.
33. For an insightful study of the role of David's wives in the characterization of

the king himself, see Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982): 69–85.

34. R. R. Wilson points to some of the ways in which the varying legal traditions of the Hebrew Bible reflect variations in world-view and culture in "Ethics in Conflict. Sociological Aspects of Ancient Israel," in *Text and Tradition: The Hebrew Bible and Folklore*, ed. Susan Niditch (Atlanta, 1990).

35. See Jacob Neusner's excellent articles, "Anthropology and the Study of Talmudic Literature" and "Thematic or Systemic Description: The Case of the Mishnah's Division of Women," in *Method and Meaning in Judaism* (Missoula, MT, 1979), esp. 95–96; and chapters 2–3 below.

CHAPTER 2 ROSS S. KRAEMER

Jewish Women in the Diaspora World of Late Antiquity

In the second century C.E., in the city of Smyrna on the western coast of Asia Minor, a Jewish woman named Rufina commissioned the following Greek inscription on a marble slab: "Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her household. No one else has the right to bury anyone [here]. Anyone who dares to do [so] will pay 1500 denaria to the sacred treasury and 1000 denaria to the Jewish people. A copy of this inscription has been placed in the [public] archives."¹

Rufina's inscription seems surprising for many reasons: Rufina, who has a Latin name, commissions an inscription in Greek, calls herself "head" or "president" of the synagogue, acts both autonomously and publicly without any reference to a father, husband, son, or male guardian; oversees her own household of slaves and former slaves; and lives in sufficient social proximity to the non-Jewish community to prescribe a double penalty for anyone audacious enough to violate the tomb. By considering each of these aspects of Rufina's inscription in