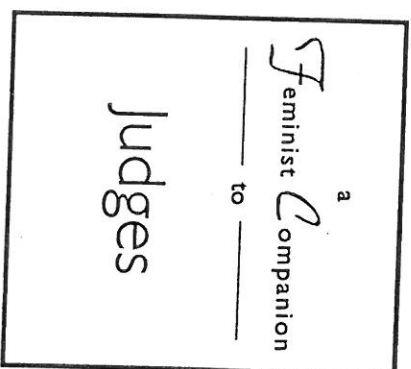




edited by Athalya Brenner

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AAR
BDB

American Academy of Religion
F. Brown, S.R. Driver and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and*

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CBQ
CIQ
Exptim
HUCA
ICC
Int
JAAR
JBL
JSOTSup

Classical Biblical Quarterly
Expository Times
Hebrew Union College Annual
International Critical Commentary
Interpretation
Journal of the American Academy of Religion
Journal of Biblical Literature
Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
Supplement Series

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JTS
LCL
NIV
OTL
Sem
TDOT
UT
VT
ZAW

Journal of Theological Studies
Loeb Classical Library
New Jewish Version
Old Testament Library
Semiotica
G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological*
Dictionary of the Old Testament
C.H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*
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The much-debated question of whether or not Jephthah's daughter was indeed sacrificed is part of a general strategy to defend the father at the daughter's expense.

Though Phyllis Trible is right in wrestling Jephthah's daughter from the marginal role assigned to her by traditional Bible exegeses and scholars, it is worthwhile to examine the original text for the ways in which it focuses attention on the father. We have seen that the narrative follows Jephthah's point of view, both perceptually and emotionally. By using ambiguity at key points, the text furthermore leaves to conjecture actions whose detailed description might have condemned the father. By dramatizing Jephthah's anguish and by describing to us his readiness to respond positively to his daughter's request, and by using ambiguity and oblique references to the actual sacrifice, the narrator interprets the events he is reporting as the father's tragedy. By tagging on a postscript about the annual mourning of Jephthah's daughter, the narrator would counterbalance the daughter's horrid end. Literary strategies work here in the interests of patriarchal ideology, the ideology of male supremacy. This understanding calls for a resistant reading of the biblical text, a reading attuned to the political implications of omissions, elisions and ambiguity. A reader, above all, that resists the tendency in biblical narrative to focus on the father at the daughter's expense.

ON JUDGES 11

J. Cheryl Exum

1. *The Awful and Sustaining Power of Words*

A particular power resides in words of blessing and curse, oaths and vows.¹ 'I have blessed him—yes, and he shall be blessed' (Gen. 27.33). Isaac cannot alter his blessing of Jacob, even though he has been tricked into giving it. 'I have opened my mouth to YHWH, and I cannot take it back' (Judg. 11.35). The vow is irrevocable, irreversible and unalterable.² Thus Jephthah, who has elsewhere shown a propensity for negotiation, though not with particularly impressive results, does not make any attempt to modify its terms, by which he is bound to sacrifice to God his only child. Nor does his daughter challenge the inviolability of the vow, but asks only for a two months' reprieve, after which the vow is carried out. The word kills.

A father's sacrifice of his only child in fulfillment of an

1. As A.C. Thiselton ('The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings', *JTS* 25 [1974], pp. 293-96) shows, the power of such utterances is not magical but rather lies in their nature as what J.L. Austin called performative utterances. The blessing, for example, has power in so far as it constitutes the *act* of blessing. Such utterances also have power in that they usually invoke the deity. My approach to words here is inspired by G. Hartman's chapter 'Words and Wounds' in *Saving the Text: Literature/Derrida/Philosophy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

2. The present story clearly assumes this, whereas Lev. 27.1-8 stipulates monetary payment by which a person vowed to God could be released. In the midrashic literature, one finds various attempts to explain Jephthah's ignorance of the law; see D. Marcus, *Jephthah and his Vow* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech Press, 1986).

unfortunate vow bears witness to the pernicious power of words. But if words can kill, they can also heal. The corrosive power of language, its destructive aspect, is counterbalanced in this tale by its antipodal movement, the healing and sustaining capacity of words. Jephthah's daughter asks that one thing, *hadā bār hazzē*, 'this word', be done for her, that she be given a period of two months during which to grieve with her companions. After her death, the women of Israel commemorate Jephthah's daughter in a yearly ritual. Whether we translate *l'annôt* as 'lament' or 'mourn', with the Septuagint and Vulgate or, more likely, 'recount' (as in its only other occurrence, Judg. 5.11), we are speaking of a memorial event that is in some sense a linguistic act, not a silent vigil. To recount the story of Jephthah's daughter is to make her live again through words. This communal commemoration by women is an act of identification and integration, mitigating the wrong done by the word of the father. It cannot undo that word, just as Isaac could not undo his blessing given to the wrong son and give it to the rightful heir, but it prevents that word from extinguishing memory along with life. More than this, both the women's response and the father's unholy deed belong to a larger world of words. Because it contains within its formal and linguistic boundaries both the tragedy and the human courage to face and rise above it, the story itself provides a palliative for the wound this terrible deed inflicts on our sensibilities. Jephthah's daughter finds life through communal recollection, though different, of course, from the life she might have had through family and children, the life her father took away. The recounting of the daughter's courage and the women's refusal to forget is not just a balance to, but a transcendence of the tragedy of the daughter's death. The word heals.

A concern with words, their power and their importance, forms an important theme in the story of Jephthah. Speech exiles him, 'You shall not inherit in the house of our father' (11.2). But speech, in the form of some rather contrived negotiations, also brings him back. What is interesting about these negotiations are the subtle changes in the way things are formulated. As we have seen, at first the leaders of Gilead offer to make Jephthah their leader and then they mention fighting the

Ammonites; when they reiterate their offer in response to Jephthah's sarcastic retort, they speak first of fighting and then offer Jephthah the position of chief. Jephthah, who has just been offered the position of leadership, now places a condition on it where none has appeared before, 'if YHWH gives them to me, I will be your chief'. Now the elders do a significant thing: they bind themselves to Jephthah's words by an oath to YHWH, 'YHWH is hearing between us, if we do not do according to your word'. These negotiations between Jephthah and the elders afford our first sample of the nature of Jephthah's words, words that appear to complicate matters.

Jephthah returns (11.11) to become both chief and leader and we find the interesting statement that 'Jephthah spoke all his words before YHWH at Mizpah'. Perhaps this refers to a ratification of his agreement with the elders, but it also points to a fatal association of Jephthah's words with Mizpah. Mizpah, where, according to 11.34, Jephthah makes his home, is a marginal place, at the boundary between Israel and Ammon, just as Jephthah is a marginal figure, an outcast from the familial hearth who goes raiding with worthless fellows.¹ It is apparently from Mizpah that Jephthah carries out negotiations with the Ammonites; passing over Mizpah, he offers his vow, and there he fulfills it. (Note the play on *mispā* and *pāšit* [I have opened]). All his words are thus through extension associated with Mizpah, and they are useless and destructive words—useless in that they fail to achieve peace, destructive in that they cost him his only child.

Jephthah's negotiations with the Ammonites represent what David Jobling has aptly described as 'verbal combat preliminary to the military combat'.² Verbal violence temporarily displaces physical violence which, however, soon erupts. To the Ammonite king, Jephthah sends messengers who speak in his name ('thus says Jephthah', v. 15). His long speech presents a circuitous

1. See F. Landy, 'Gilead and the Fatal Word', in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), pp. 39-44; D. Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible*, II (SOTSUP, 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), pp. 124-32.

2. Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, p. 128.

argument that fails to persuade. Certain curious elements of the speech lead Jobling to conclude that 'Jephthah is dissatisfied with his case, and that he is disingenuously avoiding reference to the real basis of Ammon's claim'.¹ For example, Jephthah neglects to mention that Israel avoided Ammonite territory when it took possession of the promised land (cf. Deut. 2; Num. 21). His point about divine disposition (11.24) works both ways: perhaps Ammon has been given the disputed territory by its god. Finally, his argument that, having laid no claim to the land during the three hundred years of Israelite occupation, the Ammonites have no right to dispute it now, suggests that Ammon has a legitimate claim. Even the precedent Jephthah cites—the speech within the speech, where Jephthah recounts Israel's earlier attempts to negotiate entry into the promised land—is not successful in averting conflict (vv. 17-20). Like the kings before him, 'the king of the Ammonites did not heed the words of Jephthah which he sent to him' (v. 28). Battle is imminent, when Jephthah opens his mouth and out comes the vow. Even as the words are spoken, they arouse anxiety. Just who or what might come out from Jephthah's house to meet him? Whereas verbal combat was unsuccessful, the military combat is a success because words have been taken further. Jephthah has promised the ultimate in return for victory.

Now words are out of Jephthah's control. The vow cannot be retracted and both Jephthah and his daughter are caught up in its immutable course toward fulfillment. Granting her request for a two-month reprieve, he sends her away with one word, 'go', the last recorded word he speaks to her (11.38). Between his first words to her, denoting their intimate relationship, 'ah, my daughter' or 'alas, my daughter', and his last, 'go', without any accompanying mollifying particle (such as the customary particle of politeness, *nā'*, usually translated 'please' or 'I pray you'), a distancing occurs a separation now complete, a severing of

1. Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 128-31; the citation is from p. 129. B.G. Webb (*The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* [JSOTSup, 46; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], p. 55) similarly observes, 'these are not the words of a man who is desperate for peace'. Webb also (pp. 54-60) draws attention to the ambivalent and uneasy nature of Jephthah's suit.

familial integrity, which spells the extinction of Jephthah's family. Similarly, the young woman's speech to her father echoes this crucial metamorphosis.

She said to him,

My father, you have opened your mouth to YHWH; do to me according to what has gone forth from your mouth, now that YHWH has vindicated you against your enemies, the Ammonites.

And she said to her father,

Let this thing be done for me,
let me alone two months
that I may go and wander upon the hills
and lament my nubility,¹
I and my companions.

Judg. 11.36-37

Only at the conclusion of her speech does the young woman reveal that, unlike her father, she has companions with whom to share her grief. Her last spoken word in the narrative is *ʔē ʔitay*, 'my companions'; *ʔitay*, 'my father' was her first. Symbolically, through speech, she journeys from the domain of the father who will quench her life to that of the female companions who will preserve her memory.

The vow is carried out in the absence of dialogue, a pain too deep for words. There is a sinister play of words and silence in the text. Most disquieting, there is no word from the deity; no 'Do not put forth your hand against the child or do anything to her' (cf. Gen. 22.10).

The text is silent about God's and Jephthah's reactions to the deed. It proceeds to narrate a final incident that illustrates vividly the power of words and the danger of speaking the wrong words. The Gileadites capture the fords of the Jordan and slaughter any Ephraimite who attempts to cross. 'And the men of Gilead said to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" And he said, "No". And they said to him, "Say shibboleth". And he said, "Sibboleth", for he could not pronounce it' (*ʔābbāṭr*, to speak it, to word it). The correct word preserves life; the wrong word

1. On this translation, see Bal, *Death*, p. 49, and the discussion in 2 below.

(the incorrect pronunciation) brings death. The power of language to destroy and redeem, so eloquently at work in the story of Jephthah and his daughter is here reduced to its barest form: one word—one letter of one word—holds the power over life and death. Verbal violence is now at one with physical violence, and we recognize that their identity has hitherto been only thinly disguised. This is violence entirely out of control. For a second time Jephthah fails to prevent the outbreak of hostilities, but this time he seems less inclined to rely on words to help him. We saw above how his heated exchange with the Ephraimites (12.1-3) contrasts starkly with his laborious reasoning with the Ammonite king. Words fail Jephthah repeatedly. He, like his daughter, is the victim of words—his own words. In this final incident, there is no healing or mitigating word. Thus we might say that the daughter's tragedy is redeemed but the father's is not. Her memory is kept alive by the community of women, but ultimately, of course, through the story, since otherwise the women's ritual is unattested. And her story keeps Jephthah's memory alive, with the remarkable irony that perhaps the most memorable thing about him is not the kind of thing one wants to be remembered for. Jephthah is remembered and later hailed as a deliverer (1 Sam. 12.11), but human sacrifice and needless shedding of blood within Israel mark his record as a judge—a judge caught up in the escalating cycle of violence to which the book of Judges bears witness.

Geoffrey Hartman, in an essay on 'Words and Wounds', suggests that we can associate the healing influence of words with a sense of closure. It seems to me that the story of Jephthah's daughter, with its resolution in the women's ritual of remembrance, indeed illustrates 'closure [as] a sealing with healing effect'.¹ On the other hand, no healing takes place in the Ephraim incident, where closure is, at best, awkward and abrupt. The aftermath of the battle between the tribes of Gilead and Ephraim is not recounted; Jephthah judges for six years and dies. The absence of healing/closure here prefigures the absence of closure to the book of Judges as a whole and is paradigmatic of the chaos and dissolution with which the book of Judges ends.

1. Hartman, *Saving the Text*, p. 150.

2. *Jephthah and his Daughter: A Feminist Reading*

Having recognized the connection between verbal violence and physical violence, let us consider how that violence is directed against women. The story of Jephthah's daughter presents us with a literary murder, and literary murder is different from the real thing, which may explain why the perpetrators have gotten away with it for so long.¹ The ritual act of sacrifice transforms murder in this story into a socially acceptable act of execution.² As we have seen, words make potent murder weapons in this narrative. Not only are the words spoken by the male protagonist deadly instruments of power over a woman, but the storyteller also uses the young woman's own words against her. How does Jephthah's daughter speak against herself? By neither questioning the man who consigned her to death nor holding him accountable.

She said to him, 'My father, you have opened your mouth to YHWH; do to me according to what has done forth from your mouth now that YHWH has granted you vindication against your enemies, the Ammonites.'

Judg. 11.36

The daughter submits to the authority of the father. His word is not to be countermanded but simply postponed: she asks only for a two-month respite before the vow is carried out. In encouraging her father to fulfill his vow, she subordinates her life to the communal good. The seriousness of the vow is upheld, the need for sacrifice is satisfied,³ and paternal authority goes unchallenged.

1. For fuller discussion, see J.C. Exum, 'Murder they Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative', *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 43 (1989), pp. 19-39. E. Fuchs (see above) also discusses how the narrative subordinates the daughter in its androcentric interests, specifically in order to make Jephthah a more sympathetic character.

2. This is not to say that we are to condone Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, but only that human sacrifice was practiced. As we have seen, no outright condemnation of Jephthah's sacrifice appears in the text.

3. See R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. P. Gregory; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

After reporting the daughter's sacrifice, the text adds, 'She had not known a man' (11.39). Particularly striking about this statement are the facts that it appears at the end of the story as a kind of closure sealing the woman's fate; it is stated categorically, as if it were an entirely neutral observation; and it is necessary. As sacrificial victim, Jephthah's daughter must be a virgin for reasons of sacrificial purity.¹ Since one lived on through one's progeny, having offspring—many offspring, especially sons—was important both to men and to women (witness, for example, Abraham's concern over his childlessness). Understandably it mattered significantly to women, since women did not have other opportunities, open to men, to leave their mark on the world.² Without children, the woman is somehow incomplete; she has not fulfilled her role as woman. If to have no children means to die unfulfilled, it also means that the young woman has no one to stand up for her, no *gô'el* to plead her case. She can be eliminated without fear of reprisal.³

The young woman inhabits a narrative world that, like her father, seeks to subordinate, and finally control, her. She accepts her fate with alarming composure. The vow is carried out, but the unnamed young woman who leaves behind no children as a legacy is not forgotten. Her memory is kept alive by the ritual remembrance of women. Because she does not protest her fate, she offers no threat to patriarchal authority.⁴ And because she

1. The situation of the sacrificial victim is more complex than can be considered here. Married women are not good candidates for sacrifice because a married woman has ties both to her parents' and her husband's families, either of which might consider her sacrifice an act of murder and thus take vengeance; see Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, pp. 12-13. On the opposition between sacrificial purity and the pollution of childbirth, see N. Jay, 'Sacrifice as Remedy for Having Been Born of Woman', in C.W. Atkinson, C.H. Buchanan and U.R. Miles (eds.), *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), pp. 283-309. Girard argues that anyone who does not have a champion makes an appropriate sacrifice.
2. Deborah is an important exception who proves the rule.
3. This is crucial according to Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 13 *et passim*.
4. Pace C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 24-26. I am

voluntarily performs a daughter's duty, her memory may be preserved.

It became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to commemorate Jephthah the Gileadite's daughter, four days each year.

Judg. 11.39-40

Patriarchal ideology here coopts a women's ceremony in order to glorify the victim. The androcentric message of the story of Jephthah's daughter is, I suggest, submit to paternal authority. You may have to sacrifice your autonomy; you may lose your life, and even your name, but your sacrifice will be remembered, indeed celebrated, for generations to come. Herein lies, I believe, the reason Jephthah's daughter's name is not preserved: because she is commemorated not for herself but as a daughter. If we translate the difficult *wait'hî hōq b'yisrā'el* at the end of v. 39 as 'she became an example in Israel' rather than 'it became a custom in Israel', her value to the patriarchal system as a model is underscored.

The women of Israel commemorate Jephthah's daughter for four days each year. Exactly what their ritual involves is not clear, but, as I have indicated, the verb *l'aniôt* suggests that the women recount Jephthah's daughter's story. These women, however, do not actually speak in the narrative. They remember, and their yearly ceremony is used by the narrator to keep alive the memory of the victim. Jephthah and the women of Israel represent two poles: he blames his daughter, 11.35; they praise her through memorializing her. Praising the victim can,

unwilling to forego the use of the term 'patriarchal' to describe the male gender bias of narrative, a usage widespread in feminist literature. Meyers holds that this usage reflects a misunderstanding of patriarchy as a social system. I understand patriarchy not just as a social system, but as an ideology behind it. To the extent that texts produced by patriarchal culture are androcentric, they may also be termed patriarchal. Meyers is correct that I apply contemporary feminist standards to feminist readings of the text; such an approach is necessary if the study of women in ancient literature is to become anything other than the study of men's views of women.

1. Marcus, *Jephthah and his Vow*, p. 34; see also Tribble, *Texts of Terror*, p. 106.

however, be as dangerous as blaming the victim. The problem lies in the victim-victimizer dichotomy, a way of structuring experience that ignores the complicity of the victim in the crime.¹ If we make Jephthah the callous victimizer and his daughter the innocent victim, we fall into a patriarchal pattern of thinking. If we allow the women's ceremonial remembrance to encourage glorification of the victim, we perpetuate the crime.² How do we reject the concept of honoring the victim without also sacrificing the woman? We must recognize that guilt and innocence are not clearly distinguishable. As I indicated above, Jephthah, like his daughter, is a victim of forces beyond his control; he utters his vow in a critical situation and is not responsible for the fact that his daughter appears rather than another. Nor is the daughter innocent; she did not resist. She speaks on behalf of the sacrificial system and patriarchal authority, absolving it of responsibility. And the women of Israel cooperate in this elevation of the willing victim to honored status.

It has been frequently suggested that the story of Jephthah's daughter is etiological, aimed at explaining a women's annual observance.³ There is, however, no evidence of such a ritual in ancient Israel apart from this story. Recently both Mieke Bal and Peggy Day have argued that the ritual involved is a rite of passage that signifies a young woman's physical maturity, her

1. Cf. G. Lerner's remarks on the complicity of women in patriarchy, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 5-6, 233-35.

2. Thus a reading such as Tribble's (*Texts of Terror*, pp. 93-109) that makes Jephthah all-but, irredeemably guilty, and wholly responsible for the crime of murder, and his daughter helpless and totally innocent, simply reinforces the victim-victimizer dichotomy. Bal (*Death*) in contrast, completely reinterprets the daughter's death and the meaning of the women's remembrance; see pp. 45-68, 96-113, 119-22, 161-68 *et passim*.

3. J.A. Soggin, *Judges* (trans. J.S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 217; J. Gray, *Josiah, Judges, Ruth* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 319; P.L. Day, 'From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter' in P.L. Day (ed.), *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), pp. 58-74. See also the older commentaries of C.F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (New York: Knave, 1970 [1903]), pp. 332-34; G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985 [1895]), pp. 304-305.

preparation for marriage.¹ Indeed, it is likely that the word *bēṭūlah* in the phrase usually translated, 'to bewail my virginity', does not mean 'virginity' but rather refers to a stage in the female life-cycle.² *Bēṭūlah* is a liminal stage, marked by insecurity and danger, a point of transition symbolizing the death of one phase in a young woman's life and the preparation for a new one.³ Jephthah's daughter does not go to the mountains for two months to lament her childlessness, her lack of fulfillment, but rather to engage in a rite of passage with her friends. Bal thus reads the young woman's request for a two-month delay as 'the accompanying ritual speech-act of the vow which gave her away'.⁴ But whereas for the daughter virginity is not the issue, for the androcentric narrative it is: 'she had not known a man'.⁵

1. Bal, *Death*, pp. 46-68; Day, 'From the Child is Born the Woman', pp. 58-74. Day sees the story as etiological and is concerned with identifying the ritual rather than with its meaning for Jephthah's daughter as a character in the story. Bal uses narrative theory to offer a sustained analysis of the meaning of the daughter's sacrifice and the women's ritual.

2. M. Tsevat, 'bethulah: bethulim' TDOT, I, pp. 340-43; G.J. Wenham, 'Bethulah, "A Girl of Marriageable Age"', UT 22 (1972), pp. 326-48; K.H. Keekens, 'Richter, 11,37f.: Rite de passage und Übersetzungsprobleme', *Biblische Notizen* 19 (1982), pp. 41-42; Bal, *Death*, pp. 46-48; Day, 'From the Child', p. 59. The frequent references to Anat as *btlt* 'it in the Ugaritic texts indicate that the word refers to a woman who has not borne children, not to a woman who has not had sexual intercourse.

3. Bal, *Death*, pp. 48-49; Day, 'From the Child', p. 60.

4. Bal, *Death*, p. 49. Bal's emphasis on speech-act complements nicely my comments above on the power of words. Bal deconstructs the male concept of virginity via a detour into Freudian theory. Her resultant (re)reading of the story, a counter-reading, challenges the more traditional interpretations found within biblical scholarship and illustrates one way to reinscribe a female perspective.

5. Bal (*Death*, p. 51) takes this phrase as related to the *value* of the girl as a possible wife, not, as I want to read it here, a reference to her unfulfilled life. In either case, the emphasis is androcentric. In the present text, the *women's* ritual commemorates the *death of a virgin*, whereas one might imagine that a *women's* ritual would celebrate fertility. Is this an androcentric inversion of female expression? Such androcentric appropriation of female experience can be seen, for example, in Genesis 2-3. In this classic illustration of womb envy, the creative power of women is assumed by the prototypical Man, who like Zeus birthing

Another possibility of reading a different meaning into the phrase, 'to bewail *b'etlay*', presents itself if we suppose the young woman's familiarity with the sacrificial system; that is, her better knowledge than ours about human sacrifice in the ancient Near East. She laments the brutal fact of imminent death, recognizing that if she were not a virgin daughter, her father could not sacrifice her.¹ Such an argument, informed by anthropology and Girardian theory, involves the same kind of retrospective reasoning as the rabbinic objection—what if the 'one coming forth' had been a camel, a donkey, or a dog (*Gen. R.* 60.3; *Num. R.* 37.4)—based on purity laws. I suggested above that narrative necessity determines the outcome. The daughter's tragedy is that she, not another, is the one to come forth to meet Jephthah, and that she is an (I would even say, the) acceptable sacrificial victim. This takes us back to my earlier remarks about the coincidence between the terms of the vow and the daughter's appearance, a conjunction of events beyond human control.

The androcentric bias of the narrative is clear in the way it presents the tragedy both from Jephthah's perspective (his family line comes to an end: 'apart from her he had no son or daughter') and from his daughter's (the patriarchal concern with her virginity and the denial to her of motherhood). The narrative does not acknowledge female sexual pleasure. Indeed, patriarchal literature, and thus the Bible in general, reflects the underlying attitude that woman's sexuality is to be feared and thus carefully regulated.² Patriarchy severs the relationship between eroticism and procreation. As Julia Kristeva observes,

Athena from his head, symbolically gives birth to woman with the help of the creator god (no creator goddess is involved).

1. I thank my colleague Ellen M. Ross for suggesting this idea. As my discussion above indicates, if Jephthah's daughter were married, her husband, not her father, would have power over her. If she had borne children, she would not be sacrificially pure.

2. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, traces male control of female sexuality from its locus within the patriarchal family to regulation by the state. On woman's sexuality 'not so much as part of her feminine being but, rather, as an exclusive form of male experience', see N. Aschkenasy, *Eve's Journey: Feminine Images in Hebrew Literary Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 123-24. Within the Bible, the Song of Songs is the great exception.

it affirms motherhood but denies the mother's *jouissance*.¹ Jephthah's daughter is denied not just motherhood, the patriarchal mark of female fulfillment, but also the pleasure of sex, the right of passage into autonomous adulthood that opens the eyes with knowledge (cf. Genesis 2-3).

The father's name is remembered but the daughter's is not. Ultimately the text withholds autonomy from Jephthah's daughter. It confines her voice within patriarchal limits, using it to affirm patriarchal authority, but it does not succeed in fully suppressing it. The two parts of her speech pull in different directions. In the first part (v. 36), she surrenders volition. In the second (v. 37), within the boundaries set by her father's vow, boundaries she accepts, she attempts to define herself, to lay some claim to her own voice: she asks for a period of two months in which to grieve, accompanied by her female companions. As we have seen, her speech that begins 'my father' and ends 'my companions' transports her to a point of solidarity with her female friends and with other daughters, the 'daughters of Israel', who refuse to forget. The resultant image cannot be fully controlled by androcentric interests. The (androcentric) text segregates women: the daughter spends two months with female companions, away from her father and the company of men; the ritual of remembrance is conducted by women alone.² But, as Gerda Lerner points out, when women are segregated ('which always has subordination as its purpose'), they transform such patriarchal restraint into complementarity and redefine it.³ One way to read this story differently is by exposing its valorization of submission and glorification of the victim as serving phallogocentric interests, and by redefining its images of female solidarity in an act of feminist symbol-making. If we approach the story as resistant readers, mistrustful of the dominant (male) voice, or phallogocentric ideology in the

1. J. Kristeva, *About Chinese Women* (trans. A. Barrows, New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 26; on patriarchy's division of eroticism and procreancy, see Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, esp. pp. 141-60.

2. The Israelite women engage in ritual whereas the men are busy fighting, in the war with Ammon (10.17-11.33) and among themselves (12.1-6).

3. Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, p. 242.

narrative, we can give the victim a voice that protests her marginalization and victimization—one that claims for her a measure of that autonomy denied her by the narrative that sacrificed her to the father's word.

Part IV

ON RELATIONAL WOMEN: A MOTHER AND WIFE