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Woman Has Two Faces: Re-Examining Eve and Lilith in Jewish Feminist Thought

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WOMAN HAS TWO FACES: RE-EXAMINING EVE AND LILITH IN JEWISH

FEMINIST THOUGHT

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by

Diana Carvalho

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the religious history of American feminism, Jewish feminist biblical interpretation shifted attention away from Eve as a viable example of women's identities. Instead, Lilith, the independent, "demon" and "first wife" of Adam is praised as a symbol of female sexuality for "Transformationist" Jewish feminists. Re-claiming Lilith as the "first Eve," "Transformationist" Jewish feminists turn scripture on its head. Eve's creation and her actions in Genesis are interpreted as a product of patriarchy and male dominance, while Lilith in the midrashic narrative, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, is used by Jewish feminists to reclaim their identities on religious and spiritual levels.

This thesis explores the history of "Transformationist" Jewish feminism to understand the methods by which scripture is interpreted, and ultimately arrive at new working interpretations of Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. This thesis' significance lies in an exploration of Jewish feminism's ability to cross religious and gender boundaries.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been completed without the support of various individuals. I would particularly like to thank my advisors and thesis chair, Professor Gregory Robbins, Professor Alison Schofield, and Professor Sarah Pessin for going above and beyond their necessary duties to offer support and guidance throughout the development of this thesis. Lastly, I wish to thank my family and my loving partner without whom none of this would be possible.

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Introduction

My interest in how modern American feminism appropriates strong feminine religious imagery from non-American or non-"Western" cultures and religions prompted the search for feminist expressions within Judaism. As a Christian feminist scholar studying the account of creation in Genesis 1-3, the desire to find out how modern Jewish feminists self-identified with female biblical figures led me to investigate various methods of Jewish feminist interpretation. Because modern Jewish feminism is such a vast topic, the decision to narrow my investigation to "Transformationist" Jewish feminist identities (as defined by Lynn Resnick Dufour in chapter one) allowed me to focus on one particular strain of feminism and Jewish feminist interpretation, as well as highlight the biblical figures that many Transformationist Jewish feminists identify/struggle with: Lilith and Eve.

To begin my investigation into Transformationist Jewish identities, and feminist biblical interpretation, I chronicle the history of American Jewish feminism, taking into account the influences that the First and Second Waves of Feminism in America had on the Jewish feminist mindset. The First Wave of American Feminism occurred during the early 19th century was when the Woman's Suffrage Movement developed. [1]The Women's Suffrage Movement was concerned with women's rights to vote and women's marriage rights. Individuals such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, both

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[1] Rampton, Martha, "The Three Waves of Feminism," http://www.pacifica.edu (accessed April 29 2009).

Christian conservative women, questioned the status of women's rights in relationship to their faiths. In her work, *The Woman's Bible*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton reveals the impact the Bible had on the development of the Woman's Suffrage Movement and the advancement of women in American society during the early 19th century:

> From the inauguration of the movement for woman's emancipation the Bible has been used to hold her in the "divinely ordained sphere," prescribed in the Old and New Testaments. The canon and civil law; church and state; priests and legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, of man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man.[2]

Thus the connection between women's status in the Bible and women's status in society was established very early on in American Feminism. The concerns that the Women's Suffrage Movement had with Christianity in particular was expressed by Stanton in her analysis of the Genesis creation account. Stanton was one of the first among many American feminists whose concerns with Genesis' portrayal of women shaped the movement's relationship with both Jewish and Christian traditions. The common portrayal of women across both secular and religious spheres has fueled the fire within American Feminism down to this day.

The First Wave of American Feminism "ended" in 1920 with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.[3] The Second Wave of American Feminism began in the 1960s and lasted until about the 1980s.[4] In an attempt to differentiate from the previous Woman's Suffrage Movement, the terms "Second" and

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[2] Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, "The Woman's Bible," The Internet Sacred Text Archive, http://www.sacred-texts.com (accessed January 5 2009).

[3] Rampton, Martha, "The Three Waves of Feminism."

[4] Rampton, Martha, "The Three Waves of Feminism."

"First Wave Feminism" were used during the 1960s-80s by prominent feminists. Like the First Wave of American Feminism, the Second Wave, also termed "the Woman's Liberation Movement," remained concerned with the equality of women in the workplace and women's suffrage, but primarily focused on women's roles in the family, women's sexual expression, and reproductive rights.[5] During the Second Wave of Feminism, religion took on a new aspect. Women Christian and Jewish adherents looked for ways to gain authority within their respective faiths. Unable to achieve priestly ordination or the right to recite Torah in the synagogue, some Christian and Jewish feminists turned to a different way of gaining authoritative power in their religions – self-identifying with "goddess" figures hidden within their sacred texts.[6] Particularly for Judaism, these "goddess" figures were found in the Bible and the Kabbalah, and included Asherah, Shekinah, Hochmah, Lilith and Matronit.[7] Interestingly enough, Transformationist Jewish feminists "replace the God with Goddess" in their appropriation of Lilith and in their self-identification with her.[8] Likewise, the notion of whether to call God "male" or "female" is difficult for Transformationist Jewish feminists, and feminists in general. Judaism's contribution to the Second Wave of American Feminism was to dissect the patriarchal attitudes evident within Genesis (much like Elizabeth Cady Stanton did).

The Third and Fourth Waves of Feminism in America are currently coming into play with regards to Jewish feminism in particular. Third Wave American Feminism (ca.

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[5] "Topics in Feminism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-topics/ (accessed April 29 2009).

[6] Raphael, Melissa, "Goddess Religion, Postmodern Jewish Feminism, and the Complexity of Alternative Religious Identities," *Nova Religio* 1 (1998): 199, 202.

[7] Raphael, 202.

[8] Raphael 201.

1980s/90s-today) reevaluates the goals and actions of the previous Second Wave, with particular emphasis on redefining gender roles and engaging in cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue especially with Third World/post-colonialist feminists.[9] The Fourth Wave of Feminism is currently emerging within American society as a continuation of the Third Wave's cross-cultural/global communication. However, the Fourth Wave is, according to author Carol Lee Flinders, a "feminine spirituality" that occurs "when you get Jewish, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi women all practicing their faith in the same room."[10] This convening of faiths is a direct result of Jewish and Christian feminist efforts to engage in religious dialogue from the previous Waves. Likewise, specifically for this thesis, continued efforts of both Third and Fourth Wave Jewish and Christian feminists reveal that their biblical interpretations are in communication with one another and cannot be easily separated.

Transcribing the history of American feminism reveals the necessity within Transformationist Jewish feminism to find and develop communities aside/within from their traditional religious communities. Judith Plaskow reveals this tendency and its importance to the construction of a collective "raising of consciousness" within the feminist movement as a whole, stating that "becoming involved in the women's movement means moving from isolation as a woman to community."[11] This sense of community within Jewish feminism, and specifically within Transformationist Jewish

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[9] "Topics in Feminism."

[10] Peay, Pythia, "Feminism's Fourth Wave," *Utne Reader*, http://www.utne.com/2005-03-01/feminisms-fourth-wave.aspx. (accessed April 29 2009).

[11] Plaskow, Judith, "The Coming of Lilith: Toward a Feminist Theology," in *WomanSpirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, ed. Carol P. Christ and Judith Plaskow (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 199.

feminism is crucial, since the main concern for many Transformationist Jewish feminists is to reconstruct the patriarchal institutions of Judaism and create within them a place where women are valued as authoritative individuals/scholars/exegetes alongside the male rabbis of their religious tradition.

What emerges from this need for a female-centered community and a self-identification with biblical and midrashic figures such as Eve and Lilith, is a distinct method of biblical interpretation, that brings women's experiences as they are "imagined" in the Bible to the context of modern Jewish feminism. Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki mentions the importance of bringing women's experiences to the forefront in connection to feminist conceptions of deity, which play an important role in determining the methods by which Transformationist Jewish feminists interpret scripture:

> Thus the concept of God as male serves to define men and male roles, and to reinforce the inferior definition and roles of women. How, then, is it a concept of *God* rather than androcentrism in faint disguise? Responses to this question by feminist philosophers of religion include (1) rejection of the transcendence of God in favor of a totally immanent God, (2) replacement of God with Goddess, (3) reconsideration of the linguistic structure by which we name a reality beyond ourselves as God at all, and (4) reconceptualization of the presuppositions concerning the nature of reality as a whole, whether God or the world.[12]

I attempt to utilize the second and third methods above described by Suchocki to examine and understand the power of "male-centered God-language" within the two textual accounts I will analyze in this thesis: the Genesis 1-3 account and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. I use these two texts because they inform each other with regards to the account of man and woman's creation as described in the Bible. Lilith is mentioned in detail in

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[12] Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy," *Hypatia,* 9, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 60-61.

the *Alphabet of Ben Sira,* an anonymous work from the 7th to the 11th century C.E. This text is attributed to a fictional figure of the same name and is a midrash of the Genesis creation account, which describes Adam's first wife, Lilith, their equal creation, and her demonization. It is thought by David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky to have been composed in the style of a haggadic midrash in a non-Christian country around the 8th century.[13] I use an English translation by David Stern and Mark J. Mirsky that strives to stay as close to the original Hebrew as possible. Likewise, in keeping with my investigation of a Transformationist Jewish identity and method of interpretation, David Stern suggests that this particular translation of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* "demonstrates how imaginative narrative can document and preserve aspects of classical Jewish experience that otherwise would be entirely lost to us."[14] Because of its popularity and the completeness with which this midrash retells Lilith's story, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is an important text that Jewish feminists use as a starting point of identification with Lilith.

For my English translation of Genesis 1-3, I use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (abbreviated throughout this thesis as NRSV). My reasons for choosing NRSV is that it attempts to render as close a translation of the original Hebrew as possible, and is used by many of the Transformationist Jewish feminists I cite in this thesis. Any transliterated Hebrew words in this thesis are cited according to the encyclopedic source used.

By accepting Lilith as a symbolic figure to be emulated and admired, modern Jewish feminists have dismissed Eve and the biblical tradition from which both figures

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[13] Stern, David, Mark J. Mirsky, *Rabbinic Fantasies: Imaginative Narratives from Classical Hebrew Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 167.

[14] Stern, David, Mark J. Mirsky, 22.

originated. I proffer a new interpretation of both Eve and Lilith achieved by analyzing the language, characteristics, and sexual symbolism used to describe both figures in the context of Genesis 1-3, and in the midrashic text, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. This new interpretation will reveal that both figures, in their attributed roles as submissive wife and independent seductress, contribute to a unified perception of "woman" which speaks to both a Jewish and feminist identity.

The History of Jewish Feminism

In order to present a feminist view of biblical scholarship, in particular the scholarship of Jewish feminists, it is necessary to chronicle briefly the history of biblical interpretation within Jewish American feminism. Jewish American feminism, especially during Second and Third Wave Feminism (1960s-1980s, and 1990s-present) contributed much in the way of biblical scholarship and religious feminist identity. Contentions with rabbinical ordination of women, women's rights to recite the Torah, and the portrayal of women in biblical texts resulted in the rise of various scriptural interpretive methods to address these issues. Concerns with women's portrayal in the Bible, and Genesis in particular, did not arise with American Jewish feminism alone, but were apparent within the American Feminist Movement. Individuals like Elizabeth Cady Stanton who wrote the *Woman's Bible* in 1898, wanted to address similar issues of social, economic, and religious equality within the Judeo-Christian tradition. What follows is an exploration of the progression of American Jewish feminism, and the various feminist identities that arise out of a desire to self-identify with female biblical figures.

American Feminism has at its core a very strong response to both secular and religious patriarchal ideals. The majority of biblical scholarship by American Feminists addresses issues of patriarchy within the traditions of Christianity and Judaism. In her preface to *On Being a Jewish Feminist*, Susannah Heschel pinpoints one of the most debated issues in Judaism during the Second Wave of American Jewish feminism– the

denial of Jewish women to recite the Torah in the synagogue.[15] The infamous Second Wave of Feminism in the United States focused on an equality of the sexes on social, political, and economic spheres. For Jewish feminists of this time period, Feminism's Second Wave focused on an equality of the sexes within the context of religious ritual and was signaled by feminist readings/interpretations of the Torah in the synagogue.[16] American Jewish feminists raised questions concerning women's identities within certain religious texts, particularly the multitude of Halakhic texts and Talmudic writings, which contain regulations for, and reasons why, Jewish women were excluded from participating in certain religious activities.

A specific issue that made its way into American Jewish feminism during the Second Wave is what both Susannah Heschel and Judith Plaskow call "gender-specific God-language."[17] Because the majority of biblical language refers to the divine as male, Heschel insists that "changes in women's roles would be insufficient without comparable changes in theological discourse."[18] What emerged within American Jewish feminism during the 1960s and 1970s was a tendency to grapple with problematic biblical language, especially within the Genesis creation account and its medieval Talmudic counterparts, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.* Both texts portray the creation account in Genesis 1-3 with particular attention to female figures such as Eve and Lilith, and how these

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[15] Heschel, Susannah, *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader* (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1995), xi. Also see Baskin, Judith. *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 2002), 79-83.

[16] Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader,* xi-xii.

[17] Heschel, Susannah, *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, xxi-xxiii. Also see Plaskow, Judith, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003* (Boston: Beacon Press Books, 2005), 44-48.

[18] Heschel, *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader,* xxi.

figures play vital roles in determining the status of Jewish women in the synagogue, at the temple, and in ritual participation. The aforementioned statuses of women reflected in the biblical figures of Eve and Lilith are juxtaposed with the presence of biblical language that refers to God as the "Shekinah," a concept which many American Jewish feminists take notice of.[19] However, the need to come to grips with language and the notion of gender equality within Genesis 1-3, did not arise in the Second Wave of feminism in America, but rather with Feminism's First Wave (ca. 1848-1920).

Historically, biblical scholarship has been attributed to male scholars, posing a problem for feminists concerning the social justifications for a primarily male interpretation of creation. However, during the American Feminist movement in the early 19th century, feminists contributed considerably to biblical scholarship by offering an interpretation of Genesis that paved the way for modern feminist thinking about patriarchal religions and women's roles within them. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a Christian feminist and one of the leading figures in the Women's Suffrage Movement of the early 19th century, offers an interpretation of Genesis in the *Woman's Bible* that not only reveals her agenda for system of gender equality in political and social matters, but also divulges her desire to reconcile a theological equality with an equality of the sexes, something which is mirrored in the Second and Third Wave of American Jewish feminism. Christian feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton adopted a unique American Feminist viewpoint about sacred texts and women's roles within religion. Stanton

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[19] Patai, Raphael, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 96-97. Patai refers to the "Shekinah" as "the visible and audible manifestation of God's presence on earth" representing an "independent, feminine, divine entity prompted by her compassionate nature to argue with God in defense of man." This capacity for independent and yet assertive, argumentative nature reveals modern Jewish feminism's attraction to the "Shekinah."

particularly focused on the conflict between traditional Christian exegesis and feminist exegesis with regards to Genesis' account of woman's creation. Both Elizabeth Cady Stanton and modern American Jewish feminists struggle to find meaning and a method to self-identify with the Genesis text. Stanton's analysis of the Genesis 1-3 text plays a pivotal role in shaping feminist identity throughout ideologically and historically distinct time periods, particularly the time periods of the First and Second Waves of American Feminism. Whether one is a Christian or Jewish feminist, Genesis 1-3 is a watershed in feminist theological discussion.

The *Woman's Bible* resulted from the perceived need to prove that women were created equal in the eyes of God, and should therefore be considered equal citizens in the eyes of the United States. Stanton's explanation of woman's creation and its importance to gender equality follows:

> God created man in his "*own image, male and female*." Thus Scripture, as well as science and philosophy, declares the eternity and equality of sex- the philosophical fact, without which there could have been no perpetuation of creation, no growth or development in the animal, vegetable, or mineral kingdoms, no awakening nor progressing in the world of thought. The masculine and feminine elements, exactly equal and balancing each other, are as essential to the maintenance of the equilibrium of the universe as positive and negative electricity, the centripetal and centrifugal forces, the laws of attraction which bind together all we know of this planet whereon we dwell and of the system in which we revolve.[20]

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's treatment of the creation account in Genesis is not just concerned with theology; it is concerned with the ways theological language is used to support the arguments of the Woman's Suffrage Movement. Stanton draws upon the Woman's Suffrage Movement's focus on the advancement of women in scientific,

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[20] Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, "The Woman's Bible," The Internet Sacred Text Archive, http://www.sacred-texts.com (accessed January 5 2009).

political, social, and economic sphere, and applies it with a critical eye to the ways Genesis portrays women. Stanton's concern with the advancement of women influences the modern feminist movement on a religious level. By focusing on gendered language in the *Woman's Bible*, Stanton re-examines "two" stories of creation in Genesis 1-3, thereby comparing the unfavorable social circumstances for women in Genesis with the progressive feminist lifestyle of her day. Stanton focuses on the language used to describe women in the creation account. Jewish feminist interpreters later apply similar findings to their own religion as they attempt to grasp and re-appropriate/re-identify with the Genesis text. Stanton challenges the male dominated hierarchies present within Christianity, something that is mirrored in later Jewish feminist concerns with the hierarchical character of Judaism and the ways in which feminist exegetical practice creates changes within that hierarchy.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's interest in Genesis and Eve indirectly influences modern feminist biblical interpretation. The *Woman's Bible* went out of print shortly after it was introduced in 1898 due to conflicts between the collaborators and members of the Woman's Suffrage Movement. However, the *Woman's Bible* came to the surface again during the aforementioned Second Wave of Feminism in the 1960s and 1980s, when the movement was at its strongest. During this time period many American Jewish feminists, dissatisfied with their roles in the synagogue, read and analyzed scripture to reclaim a sense of identity that was both wholly Jewish and wholly feminist. This particular facet of American feminism pertains to the interpretation of the creation account in Genesis and the ways modern American Jewish feminists struggle with the text on theological and social levels. The common concerns of Christian feminists like Stanton and American

Jewish feminists with the social statuses of women in their particular religions, determines the ways their interpretations transform the Bible into a text that constitutes an important part of feminist identities.

During the Second Wave of Feminism, various methods of biblical interpretation were developed. Christian Theologian and scholar, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, explores ten different methods of feminist biblical interpretations which arose during the Second Wave and are used by Jewish feminist exegetes. Although feminist biblical exegesis is not limited to these methods or to Christianity itself, Schüssler Fiorenza's insight into the developments of these approaches is paramount. In fact, throughout the Second Wave of Feminism in the United States, Christian and Jewish interpretive methods and exegeses become increasingly difficult to separate because Christian and Jewish feminists are in constant communication with each other. Schüssler Fiorenza's methods are as follows: revisionist interpretation, text and translation, imaginative identification, women as authors and biblical interpreters, historical interpretation, sociocultural reconstruction, ideological interpretation, women as subjects of interpretation, sociopolitical location in the context of biblical texts, and a critical feminist interpretation.[21] When used by Transformationist Jewish feminists, Schüssler Fiorenza's methods of biblical interpretation reveal these feminists' desire for a self-identification with figures like Eve and Lilith. Transformationist Jewish feminists' desire to self-identify with these figures underlies their tendency to achieve ritual reformation and inclusionism within Judaism's patriarchal structure.

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[21] Schüssler Fiorenza, Elisabeth, *But She Said,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 21-44.

Schüssler Fiorenza's imaginative identification method is "interested in personal

identification and biblical imagination."[22] This approach results in a creative

interpretation of biblical literature by means of storytelling. This storytelling reveals the

existence of women who are "silenced" or "not present at all" in biblical texts.[23]

Furthermore, this storytelling breaks down the androcentric barriers that years of

patriarchal male interpretation and exegesis have imposed upon texts like Genesis 1-3

and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.*[24] Lastly, the "imaginative identification" method of reading

and interpreting scripture allows Transformationist Jewish feminists to reclaim female

biblical figures from androcentric biblical texts, allowing for a positive self-identification

with figures such as Lilith or Eve who are conceived by some male scholars, and biblical

authors as "negative."[25]

The Transformationist Jewish feminist identity arose out of the aforementioned

dissatisfaction with the male-dominated leadership within the structure of the Jewish

faith, also known as "patriarchal plausibility."[26] As a result, Transformationist Jewish

feminists (often found, as noted by Lynn Resnick Dufour, within the Reform and

Orthodox Jewish traditions) seek to create a "feminist plausibility not necessarily by

changing the patriarchal practices of the religion, but by creating separate avenues for

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[22] Schüssler Fiorenza, 26.

[23] Schüssler Fiorenza, 26.

[24] Schüssler Fiorenza, 27. Schüssler Fiorenza goes on to comment that the development of feminist storytelling is common to both Jewish and Catholic women.

[25] Schüssler Fiorenza, 27-28.

[26] Dufour, Lynn Resnick, "Sifting Through Tradition: The Creation of Jewish Feminist Identities," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 1 (March 2000): 100.

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worship."[27] The conflict between "patriarchal plausibility" and "feminist plausibility" is both historical and literary, and arises out of the desire to move from a strictly patriarchal approach to theological discussions of the bible, to a feminist approach which is equally authoritative.

Transformationist Jewish feminists create their own ritual practices that separate them from the patriarchal institutions of Judaism. Although this separation challenges patriarchal ideals and sexual norms, Transformationist Jewish feminists self-identify with the biblical figures they have been exposed to since early childhood.[28] The religious practices of Transformationist Jewish feminists take the face of all-women spirituality groups in which female biblical and midrashic figures found within the Jewish literary tradition are reclaimed as part of a very Jewish and very feminist identity. These figures include Eve, Lilith, the Shekinah, and Asherah, among others.[29] Furthermore, by constructing a particularly Transformationist feminist identity, specific Jewish feminist scriptural interpretations that incorporate Schüssler Fiorenza's "imaginative identification" method, are developed. This method, primarily interested in "personal identification and biblical imagination" as opposed to "biblical language and translation," is used by Transformationist Jewish feminists to transcend the patriarchal and "androcentric tendencies" of both Jewish rabbinical midrashic texts and the Genesis text.[30] For Transformationist Jewish feminists, then, the "imaginative identification"

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[27] Dufour,100.

[28] Dufour,101.

[29] Patai, Raphael, *The Hebrew Goddess,*12-18

[30] Schüssler Fiorenza, 26.

method reaches into biblical texts to reveal what is not be explicitly said about women's participation in ritual, the extent of their importance in relationship to the authoritative men in their lives, and their relationships to God.

Lynn Resnick Dufour explains that various practices undertaken by Transformationist Jewish feminists cause them to "sift into their identities a variety of practices and attitudes such as the creation of feminist midrashim (stories), liturgy, and rituals."[31] This creation of rituals, midrashim and liturgies allows for a distinctly progressive method of looking at the traditions of Judaism in a feminist context. As one Jewish feminist Transformationist puts it, "We're trying to transform our traditional stuff. Keep it, keep the essence of it and keep the traditions but also transform them."[32] It becomes clear then that the goal of Transformationist Jewish feminists to interpret biblical texts is not to do away with the traditions of Judaism, but to "transform" these traditions into a language that modern Jewish feminists use to advance the religious authority of women amidst a traditional exclusively of male rabbis and scriptural exegetes.

Judith Plaskow, a prominent Jewish feminist and professor at Manhattan College, insists that the Feminist Movement is a "religious experience." The various stages of what Plaskow calls, "consciousness raising" in the process of developing feminist exegeses is "analogous to the stages in a religious journey, culminating in the experience

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[31] Dufour, 101.

[32] Dufour, 101. This quote is taken from a woman named Dena whom Dufour interviewed for her article on Jewish feminist identities, and who identifies as a Transformationist Jewish feminist.

of full, related sisterhood."[33] This sense of sisterhood speaks to the characteristics of a

Transformationist Jewish identity, and is concerned with how theological language and

feminism coincide. The theological concerns that are at the basis of what many scholars

call the Fourth Wave of Feminism, which focuses on positive changes that result when

spirituality and activism combine, are touched upon by Transformationist Jewish

feminists like Plaskow, whose concern is to regain a sense of community within a Jewish

feminist framework. This sense of community revolves around reclaiming women's

identities in the Bible that are constructed and re-constructed by male scholars.

Plaskow, like many Transformationist Jewish feminists, struggles with what it

means to have a "woman's experience" versus a "man's experience" as it pertains to

gender in biblical literature. Plaskow's concern is the tendency of male scholars to

address male sexuality and "male experience" as the normative against which to base all

other experiences. In contrast to "male religious experience" then, women's religious

experience is devalued by notable individuals such as de Beauvoir, Thomas Aquinas, and

Sigmund Freud, because it lacks the necessary component of a whole human being.[34]

Thus, in Judaism and Christianity, women are considered "other" in their relationships to

men and most importantly for this discussion, in their relationships to God. An apparently

"male" God, the Creator in Genesis has always posed a problem for Transformationist

Jewish feminists, and indeed feminists in general, with regards to the nature of the

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[33] Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*, 27.

[34] Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-*2003, 41. Plaskow quotes all three figures separately; Simone de Beauvoir calls the "absolute human type, the masculine," Thomas Aquinas's definition of women were as "misbegotten males," and Freud's description of female sexuality was summed up in two words, "penis envy." The notion that all three of these individuals' conceptions of woman as an incomplete human being derive from my own interpretation of the way Plaskow introduced these concepts.

divine's relationship to women. For the Jewish Transformationist feminist, the use of

male-centered "God-language" (as used by Plaskow), is vital in maintaining the

patriarchal ideals felt by feminists as stifling their progression on a religiously

authoritative level. Plaskow states the following regarding one of Transformationist

Jewish feminism's most contended topics: (viz) allowing women to take on religiously

authoritative roles:

> The problems with male God-language are manifold. First of all, like
> specific negative statements about women, male images can be used
> directly to authorize the subordination of women. God was originally
> imaged (primarily) as male in Biblical culture because human models of
> power, authority, and majesty were primarily male. But thinking of God as
> male reinforces the notion that authority *should* be male.[35]

Clearly, like feminists of the First and Second Waves, Plaskow is concerned with

gendered biblical language and the implications it carries for a self-identification with

God and female biblical figures. Gendered language in particular influences Jewish

Transformationist feminists' view of the various female figures with whom they identify.

On the other hand, the Genesis text portrays Eve as a problematic figure, with whom

Jewish feminists struggle to identify. However, Lilith, who is found primarily in

midrashic texts, is quickly claimed by Jewish feminists as a positive, powerful,

authoritative, and independent role model whose sexuality and assertiveness fly in the

face of male-centered, patriarchal authority. The tendency to identify with Lilith as

opposed to Eve is important for revealing the ways Transformationist Jewish feminists

interpret scripture, and how their interpretations reconstruct Eve's identity on a larger

scale within the greater Jewish feminist movement. A historical exploration into the

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[35] Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003*, 46-47. For further insight into Plaskow's explanation of God-language in relation to feminism, see Plaskow, Judith, *Standing Again at Sinai* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1990), 134-143.

figures of Eve and Lilith within their respective texts reveals hundreds of years' worth of interpretation that influences the modern Jewish mindset. Medieval rabbinical writings and early Christian exegesis continues to influence the Jewish feminist mindset with regards to the biblical and midrashic figures of Eve and Lilith.

Introducing Eve and Lilith

No two figures in the history of biblical scholarship and exegesis have enticed the

minds of Jewish and non-Jewish writers, adherents, and feminists as Eve and Lilith have.

Eve and Lilith emerge from the pages of Genesis and Rabbinical midrash as two

opposing forces that, paradoxically, are considered by many feminists to comprise the

true nature of woman. By focusing on the history of both Eve and Lilith with an emphasis

on biblical and midrashic tradition, and the ways biblical Hebrew is used to describe both

figures, one can reconcile archaeological findings with cultural and social circumstances,

in order to gain an understanding of Transformationist Jewish feminists'

identification/problems with these biblical/midrashic figures. An overview of Eve and

Lilith's archaeological history, and the ways both figures developed from their initial

inception within the Israelite, pre-Israelite, and Jewish mindset, reveals the influences

which both figures have over Jewish feminist mindsets of the Second and Third Waves of

Feminism.

Lilith

In modern feminist circles, the name Lilith evokes a radical and self-empowering

sense of belonging and being wholly woman, a woman who is not afraid to be

courageous in her defiance of Divine Law, or in some cases, man-made law. However,

how did this perception of Lilith come about? Who was she before feminism claimed her

as their Queen? Lilith was a deity of Babylonian, Assyrian, and Sumerian descent, who

was well known to Semitic and non-Semitic populations.[36] Etymologically, the earliest

known evidence of Lilith's existence is found in a Sumerian list from 2400 B.C.E. that

describes the father of the hero Gilgamesh's as one of the "Lillu-demons." These "Lillu-

demons" were comprised of four creatures of the night (three of which were female) who

would visit sleeping men in order to seduce them and thereby produce grotesque

children.[37] According to Siegmund Hurwitz, Lilith is associated with the "Lillu-demons"

through her connection with two other storm and nocturnal Babylonian and Akkadian

deities: Ishtar and Lamastu. Indeed, Lilith's very name derives from the proto-Semitic

layil ("night"), but is also connected to the word for "storm" which is found in numerous

cuneiform tablets.[38] Due to Lilith's association with Ishtar and Lamastu, Hurwitz views

her with two different "aspects": a "Lamastu Aspect" (responsible for torturing pregnant

women and kidnapping newborns), and an "Ishtar Aspect" (that of a seductress whose

purpose is to entice men).

One achieves a clearer sense of Lilith's identity within the context of Israelite and

Pre-Israelite religious practice and through her identification with Lamastu. Lamastu's

representation in the Shiptu texts (Babylonian incantation texts) describes her as a

ferocious, frightful goddess with the face of a lion and the feet of the bird.[39] Clearly,

Lamastu's association with lions and birds connects her and Lilith on the basis of

appearance, which is reflected on the Burney relief (dated to ca. 1800 B.C. by the British

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[36] Hurwitz, Siegmund, *Lilith, the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects, of the Dark Feminine* (Zurich: Daimon Verlag, 1992), 32.
[37] Patai, 221-222.

[38] JewishEncyclopedia.com, "Lilith.," Jewishencyclopedia.com, http://www.JewishEncyclopedia.com (accessed January 10, 2009).

[39] Hurwitz, 43.

Museum) (Fig. 1). There is much contention concerning whether or not the figure

depicted on the Burney relief is Lilith, Ishtar, or Inanna, but the figure itself is intriguing.

The Burney relief, of Sumerian origin, shows a naked, winged, wild-haired, eagle-footed

goddess with her arms pointed upwards holding two objects which Siegmund Hurwitz

and Henri Frankfurt interpret as a "ring and staff."[40] Around her head is a tall hat, which

Hurwitz suspects is a "coiled turban," and which Jo Milgrom insists is a headdress

symbolic of divine authority.[41] Four animals are in her presence; she stands on two lion-

like figures and is flanked on either side by two owls, a description reminiscent of the

Lady of the Beasts found in ancient Greece. This opens Lilith up for interpretation,

especially within the context of textual references to her; the New Revised Standard

Version and New International Version of the Bible's Isaiah 34:14-15 attribute the

Hebrew word *qippoz* to "great owl" or even "snake" respectively. Interestingly enough,

the more conservative New International Version's definition for *qippoz* associates Lilith

with medieval Christian interpretation, thereby associating her with the serpent that

tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. This popular motif places Lilith back in the context

of Genesis, from which Jewish midrashic texts insist she originated, as Adam's

disobedient first wife.

Lamastu's "sliding in and out" of the home connects her to the infamous "Lilith

bowls" of the 6th century C.E. Archaeological evidence shows that protective amulets

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[40] Hurwitz,79.

[41] Milgrom, Jo, "Some Second Thoughts About Adam's First Wife," in *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden*, ed. Gregory A. Robbins (Lewiston: The Edwin Millen Press, 1998), 227. Jo Milgrom compares the coiled headdress to a stele which shows Hammurabi receiving divine authority from the sun god. The sun god wears the headdress and ironically, the same "ring and staff" as the figure on the Burney relief. Milgrom insists that this "ring and staff" are "tools for measuring and limiting the span of man's life, or judging him at death," an interesting observation in light of the meaning of Lilith's name vs. the meaning of Eve's name, "Mother of All Living."

bearing the names of both Lilith and Lamastu were in existence between 900-1800 C.E.

What Raphael Patai calls the "Lilith of the Bowls" were found in Babylonia and later

spread into Persia, which places the demon goddess into a timeframe and society that did

not limit Lilith's existence to Talmudic writings, but rather reflect she represented for the

daily lives of rural individuals.[42] Incantations on the Lilith bowls dealt with everything

from keeping the goddess-turned-demon outside and away from the home, to appeasing

her, and ironically enough, to "divorcing" her from any human males she seduced. These

bowls were usually placed at liminal places within the home; at thresholds, doorways,

and other arches, faced down in corners.[43] Many of these bowls carried the image of

Lilith herself, at times along with the names of other demons. According to Hurwitz,

there were various instances in which the bowls were buried, and it is speculated that they

may have contained some sort of liquid to be consumed by members of the household or,

in the case of certain divorce-related incantations like the one below, by a specific

individual who was enchanted by the demon.[44] An excerpt from one such bowl, written in

Aramaic from the 6th century C.E. incorporates an image of Lilith, along with an

inscription of a *get* (divorce notice):

> In the name of the Lord of salvations. Designated is this bowl for the
> sealing of the house of this Geyonai bar Mamai, that there flee from him
> the evil Lilith, in the name of "Yahweh El has scattered"; the Lilith, the
> male Lilin and the female Liliths, the Hag [ghost?] and the Snatcher, the
> three of you, the four of you, and the five of you. Naked are you sent forth,
> nor are you clad, with your hair disheveled and let fly behind your
> backs...[45]

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[42] Patai, 225.

[43] Patai, 225.

[44] Hurwitz, 92-93.

[45] Patai, 225-227.

The remainder of the above incantation also contains various names of God, El-Shaddai and Yahweh being the most prominent, as well as mention of angels protecting the family and driving out the various Lilim. It is interesting to note that the incantation addresses multiple "Liliths," and yet the bowl itself displays a single figure in its center, surrounded by the Aramaic incantation. The number of Lilim can be attributed to "Lillu-demons" in the 2400 C.E. Sumerian list, or to a tradition which, present within Isaiah 34: 14-15 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira,* presents Lilith as a single demon who settled herself in the desert after she fled Eden and asexually produced thousands of baby demons. Interestingly enough, the aforementioned incantation bowl does not depict the Lilim as winged demons, but rather as naked women with unkempt hair. The picture in the center of the bowl is described by Patai as "naked, with long loose hair, pointed breasts, no wings, strongly marked genitals, and chained ankles."[46](Fig. 2). Clearly, this depiction of Lilith is a response to her association with the household and especially with young women. She is the opposite of what young Israelite women should be, especially since she is regarded as a danger to women during their times of womanhood; menstruation, pregnancy, and the loss of virginity.[47] Likewise, the names associated with Lilith in the above *get* are epithets of Lamastu, who is also known as the "Snatcher" and the "ghost-Hag," which places Lilith within the context of later midrashic tales concerning her child-snatching nature.

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[46] Patai, 225.

[47] Patai, 225.

The latter aspect of Lilith, known as the "Ishtar aspect" is of a demon that does not need or desire a mate to produce children but is responsible for controlling a man's reproductive functions while he is under her spell.[48] These seemingly oppositional characteristics stem from her association with the two goddesses Ishtar and Lamastu, and also the demons associated with her in Jewish legend. One such demon is the asexual Alu/Ailo, to whom female attributes are later given. Alu/Ailo was one of Lilith's secret names, or at times associated with a licentious daughter of Lilith herself, which connected the goddess with nightly sexual visitations to unsuspecting men in order to produce demon children.[49] This association with sexual demons, along with the fact that Babylonian texts dealing with Ishtar call Lilitu a "temple prostitute of the goddess" may have contributed to her "Ishtar aspect," which is purely sexual and not connected to any of her previous associations with Lamastu. [50]

The account with which this thesis is concerned details Lilith's creation and hearkens back to the advent of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-3. The *Alphabet of Ben Sira* reveals a possible reasoning behind the two "different" accounts of creation in Genesis; one account (Genesis 1:26-28) details God's simultaneous creation of man and woman, while a later account (Genesis 2: 18-24) tells of Eve's creation from Adam's rib or side. The earlier account causes much contention in midrashic writings; who was this creature created equally with Adam? Who was Adam's first wife? Ben Sira answers these questions with the following tale. While visiting King Nebuchadnezzar's ill son, Ben Sira

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[48] Hurwitz, 34-62.

[49] Hurwitz, 39.

[50] Hurwitz, 60-61.

was asked to heal him or face death. In an attempt to avoid death with his unwavering

wisdom, the scholar tells the tale of the angels of medicine, Snvi, Snsvi, and Smnglof and

their connection to Lilith. After God created Adam and Lilith, fighting ensued between

the couple because she would not "lie below" Adam during intercourse. Lilith questioned

the very nature of this quarrel since both her and Adam were created equally from the

same substance, the earth. After Adam denounced Lilith's equality with him, she uttered

God's "Ineffable Name" and flew out of Eden. The tale culminates with the discovery of

Lilith hovering over the sea, and an agreement between the woman-turned-demon and the

aforementioned angels:

> 'Leave me!' she said. 'I was created only to cause sickness to infants…'
> But she swore to them (the angels) by the name of the living and eternal
> God: 'Whenever I see you or your names or your forms in an amulet, I
> will have no power over that infant.' She also agreed to have one hundred
> of her children die every day. Accordingly, every day one hundred
> demons perish, and for the same reason we write the angels' names on the
> amulets of young children. When Lilith sees their names, she remembers
> her oath, and the child recovers.[51]

Clearly, the above Lilith is reflective of the cultural and social memory of the

Israelites and their observance of ancient Babylonian practices such as protecting their

children from demons using amulets and magical inscriptions. As was previously

mentioned, Lilith's connection to owls and serpents is given credibility both in the above

story and its continuation in Isaiah 34:14-15:

> Wildcats shall meet with hyenas,
>   goat-demons shall call to each other;
> there too Lilith shall repose,
>   and find a place to rest.
> There shall the owl nest
>   and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow;

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[51] Stern, David, Mark J. Mirsky, 184.

there too the buzzards shall gather,
 each one with its mate.[52]

The language used to describe Lilith as both owl and serpent not only reconciles the archaeological findings of protective amulets, incantation bowls, and the Burney relief, but also validates the cultural and social circumstances experienced by the Israelites as they came into contact with pre-Israelite ideas and notions of the divine, of demons, and of death. The imagery used to describe Lilith in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira,* along with all of these archaeological and literary findings, also contrasts Lilith with Adam's second wife, Eve, a contrast which will find itself traced down into history and developed into two preconceived notions of what woman is and should be: either a demure housewife, or an independent wild-woman.

<div align="center">Eve</div>

Eve's history within Pre-Israelite and Israelite culture is as complex and rich as Lilith's. We first find Eve in Genesis 2: 21-24:

> The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,
> 'This at last is bone of my bones
> and flesh of my flesh;
> this one shall be called Woman,
> for out of Man this one was taken.'
> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. [53]

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[52] Isa. 34:14-15 NRSV

[53] Gen. 2:21-24 NRSV

Eve's creation in Genesis not only reveals her relationship with Adam, but also her status as a woman. Unlike Lilith, Eve is not formed from the same material as Adam. Her creation from Adam's side or rib suggests that she is inferior to her mate, an argument that is found in many midrashic and early Christian writings to justify the inferior status of women. However, it is interesting to note that Adam calls Eve, "woman." The Hebrew term is *ishah* literally means "woman" but also denotes the rules and regulations of marriage as mentioned in Genesis 2:24. The term *ishah* is placed in direct opposition to the other Hebrew word we attribute to the "first" woman, *Havvah*. It is only after Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit of the tree of wisdom in the Garden of Eden, that *ishshah* becomes *Havvah*: "Adam named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all who live."[54] The term *Havvah* is connected to the Hebrew word, *hay*, which is the noun for "life."[55] *Havvah* is also an allusion to the Aramaic/Phoenician/Arabic word for "serpent," which connects Eve in the later Christian mindset to the snake that beguiled her, and to Lilith herself who is often depicted alongside Eve in art as a half-woman half-serpent.[56] According to John A. Phillips, the term *Havvah* or "Eve" is an allusion to the Near Eastern Mother Goddess, who often carried the title of "Mother of All the Living." This goddess was overcome and her power usurped by the Yahwist God in the second account of creation. [57] Phillips' analysis of Eve and her connections to a Near Eastern Mother Goddess accounts for the supposed

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[54] Gen. 3:20 NRSV

[55] *Encyclopedia of Religion,* 2nd ed., s.v. "Eve."

[56] *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender,* s.v. "Adam and Eve."

[57] Phillips, John A, *Eve: The History of an Idea,* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1984), 3.

"gaps" present within the "two" stories of creation and divulges the socio-religious circumstances that may have been in the mind of the author of Genesis at the time the text was written down. This tendency to portray Eve not only as the submissive wife of Adam, but also a Near Eastern Mother Goddess who was not strong enough to survive in the face of the masculine Yahwist God carries certain implications for how Eve is perceived by modern Jewish feminists, and indeed, by medieval Jewish and Christian scholars.

The account of Eve's digression from God and disobedience of His law connects her to another figure in antiquity: the Greek Pandora. Pandora, given to the Greek god Epimetheus by Zeus as a punishment for giving fire to humankind, is seen as the harbinger of evil through her carelessness and disobedience. Pandora's name is said to mean "all gifts" or "all abundance," due to the way she was fashioned by the gods. She is brought down to earth and presented to Epimetheus as his bride, with a very interesting dowry gift, a box which she is instructed never to open, lest she unleash what is inside. Of course, Pandora does not heed this warning and, while her husband is away, she opens the box. The box unleashes a myriad of "evils:" illness, disease, war, death, and, according to Phillips, "sin" upon the world, making Pandora a "beautiful evil" (*kalon kakon)*.[58] Both the Pandora myth and the account of creation describe what John A. Phillips calls "the change from a paradise into a problematic place" within which death and a constant chaotic state is experienced, as opposed to the tranquil, orderly existence of the Garden of Eden.[59]

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[58] Phillips, 17.

[59] Phillips, 19.

Eve's presence in art, in sharp contrast to Lilith's, embodies a view of the feminine that instills a unique sense of fear and guilt attributed to the circumstances surrounding her actions in Genesis. One of the most famous depictions of Eve is by Michelangelo located in various places on the Sistine Chapel (Fig. 3). This example is important because of the way Eve is portrayed; she receives the fruit of the forbidden tree of wisdom from a serpent that is half-woman. This half-woman, half-snake figure is interpreted by many scholars and art historians to be Lilith. John A. Phillips makes it a point to say that Michelangelo's reason for portraying Eve the way he did was to emphasize that her presence in the Garden of Eden, and not necessarily her disobedience to God, heralded the Fall for the rest of humanity.[60] This is an important observation in relation to the text of Ben Sira; Eve was the only woman in Eden, just as Lilith was once the only woman. It is their presence as women, and their "transgression" that constitutes the change from a peaceful existence to exile from Paradise.

Eve's presence within the *Genesis Rabbah*, a midrash of Genesis composed during Judaism's classical period (2nd-7th centuries C.E.) as well as references to her in 1 Timothy 2:12-15 and Tertullian's "On the Apparel of Women," demonstrate the ways she has been interpreted in early Christian exegesis and Jewish midrash/interpretation. A comparison of these texts illustrates the ways Eve has been transformed from our initial meeting with her in Genesis 2, to the later medieval Christian conception of her as the harbinger of sin (a concept that is not accepted in Jewish theology) and the tempting

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[60] Phillips, 25. It is important to note that the expression "the Fall" is a later Christian invention used as an explanation for the supposed "punishments" bestowed upon Adam and Eve after they consumed the forbidden fruit. "The Fall" is also used to herald the beginning of the Christian notion of "original sin," which is attributed to Eve's transgression.

seductress, which continues in modern society's conception of her. According to the *Genesis Rabbah,* Lilith is not present within the story of creation. However, Adam is said to have been "created with two bodies, one of which was cut away from him and formed as Eve."[61] This creation culminates in a marriage ceremony between the "first" couple, attended by the angels Michael and Gabriel, thereby sealing the union under divine law. It is interesting to note, however, that this rabbinic source regards Eve as inferior to Adam from the time of her creation, although it was previously stated that they were created simultaneously:

> The builder mixes a thick sand with a thinner one in the mortar, by which contrivance the latter becomes very strong and the building more substantial. In creating the first pair, something of this method was adopted. Adam was the strong, and Eve the weaker. This mixture of the weak with the strong is beneficial to the human race.[62]

The above statement presents Eve as the weaker party, but also validates the necessity for marriage between a man who is morally, and physically strong and a woman who is submissive and bends with her husband's will. This view of Eve, the first woman, reflects classical Jewish society's (2nd-7th century C.E.) treatment and view of all women and their relationships with their husbands and their creator. Therefore, there is no mistake or threat that Eve will ever become like Adam's first wife, Lilith, whom many Jewish feminists consider to be stronger and more independent than her husband because of her ability to utter the ineffable name of God and escape Paradise. These ideas present themselves in early Christian writing as well, which lends itself to later perceptions of the nature of woman in both Jewish and Christian interpretive circles. Once again, Jewish

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[61] Hare, John Bruno, "Genesis Rabbah," Internet Sacred Text Archive, http://www.sacred-texts.com (accessed January 10, 2009).

[62] Hare, John Bruno, "Genesis Rabbah."

and Christian interpretations are blurred. For example, in 1 Timothy 2: 12-15, women

are, inasmuch as they are always descendants of/daughters of Eve, called inferior when it

comes to worship:

> I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep
> silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived,
> but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be
> saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and
> holiness, with modesty.[63]

Clearly, the allusion to child-bearing as a means by which women achieve

salvation is a direct reference to Eve's "punishment" after her transgression in Genesis 3:

16-17, in which she is told that God will greatly increase her birthing pains and cause her

to submit to her husband. The above passage indicates a common theme in Christian

writings: Eve becomes the harbinger of sin. Therefore polluted, sinful women are

prohibited from obtaining priestly positions either in the church or synagogue, something

that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was of concern to American Jewish feminists

during the Second Wave of Feminism in the 1960s-1980s. This "sinfulness" is most

clearly expressed in Tertullian's "On the Apparel of Women," which states that a woman

must emulate Eve in her repentant state after her expulsion from Eden, lest original sin

pollute her or the human race any further. Perhaps the phrase in Tertullian that seals his

argument is a phrase that forever influences the image of Eve and of woman in the early

Christian (and ironically enough, Jewish feminist) mindset,

> You are the devil's gateway: *you* are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree:
> *you* are the first deserter of the divine law: *you* are she who
> persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You*
> destroyed so easily God's image, man. [64]

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[63] 1 Tim 2:12-15 NRSV

[64] Tertullian, "On the Apparel of Women," The Internet Sacred Archive, http://www.sacred-texts.com

Tertullian views all women as "Eves" in their own way, since their birthright is traced back to the original "sinner." Eve is blamed for the destruction of Adam, although he willingly ate the fruit of the forbidden tree as it was given to him in Genesis 3: 6-7. Through Eve, all women become a pathway or gateway for the devil to pass through and influence their daily lives, whether it be through lust, vanity, or jealousy. The only way for a woman to relieve herself of association with this "sin" and become "proper" is through perpetual repentance and submission to God and those responsible for spreading God's message – men. This view influences the modern American feminist movement as well as the Jewish Feminist movement to a great degree, resulting in a change of hierarchical structures within religious practices in synagogues as well and the development of a feminist exegesis of the Bible, particularly an exegesis of Genesis. Although the Jewish concept of sin does not carry the same implication as the Christian notion of sin, it is largely due to popular historical exegeses that have made their way into the American religious society and mindset that a perpetuation of the sinfulness of woman from her creation in Genesis is maintained. It is important to remember that the patriarchs whom Jewish feminists may be listening to are not only Jewish, but Christian as well. The presence of both Christian and Jewish writings concerning Genesis dominates the discourse of what it means to be a woman/daughter of Eve, and the consequences of disobedient behavior.

(accessed January 10, 2009).

Submission vs. Power: Two Jewish Feminist Readings of Genesis 1-3

and the Alphabet of Ben Sira

Two of the most well-known texts that conflict with the current Jewish feminist mindset concerning the roles of women are Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.* Both texts engage a view of creation in which woman is a central, yet flawed, figure. In the Genesis account of creation, expulsion from Eden is initiated by Eve's disobedience of God's will, whereas the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* depicts Lilith as the first transgressor because she refuses to obey Adam. Lilith's transgression in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is a pathway to Eve's creation, which reveals rabbinical attitudes about women, their societal roles, and their access to God. Transformationist Jewish feminists, such as Aviva Cantor and Judith Plaskow, utilize Schüssler Fiorenza's method of "imaginative interpretation" to reconcile their identities as Jewish women with the women of the Genesis account of creation and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.*

Interpreting the Language of Genesis

A main argument made by many Jewish feminists is that the patriarchal Yahwist writer (often referred to as J) of the much disputed Genesis 2 creation account weaves a tale of submission in which Eve is perceived as inferior to Adam, both in her creation, and in the "punishments" which God bestows upon her at the time of expulsion from Eden. It is speculated by scholars that Genesis' construction consists of two literary traditions, which seemingly jumble together to form contradictory creation accounts. The

first creation account is called the "E Text" or "Elohist Text" because of its reference to one of the names of God, *Elohim*. The "J Text" or "Yahwist Text" refers to the second literary tradition that uses the Tetragrammaton (also known as *Yahweh* or *Yahweh Elohim*) as one of God's names as opposed to *Elohim* on its own.[65] The Yahwist text is credited with the "second" longer account of creation found in Genesis that introduces Adam and Eve with the narrative of the Fall.[66] The answer to Jewish Feminism's contention with this second "version" of creation is found through the appropriation of Lilith, whose identity is most firmly established in detail within the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. However, both Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* are problematic not only within the scope of Jewish feminist writings and exegesis, but also in regards to how these texts were interpreted by early Christian and Jewish scholars. According to Helen Schungel-Straumann, the ways scripture is analyzed today is credited to centuries of biblical exegesis by early Christian and Jewish scholars/priests. For example, the preservation of Genesis 2 and 3 in Greek carries consequences for the texts' meaning. Since Greek and Hebrew do not coincide linguistically or grammatically there are instances in which the entire meaning of a word or words changes as it passes from one language into the other.[67] Schungel-Straumann argues that this is the basis for misinterpretation of gender-related language in the Bible. Schungel-Straumann

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[65] Wheeler, L. Kip. "What are the J, E, and P Texts of Genesis?" http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/Genesis_texts.html (accessed March 20, 2009).

[66] Wheeler, L. Kip. Judith Antonelli cites the "E Text" and the "J Text" as the "egalitarian text" and the "sexist text," respectively. See Antonelli, Judith, *In the Image of God: A Feminist Commentary on the Torah* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995), 4-5.

[67] Schungel-Straumann, Helen, "The First Woman and Man as a Gender Issue," in *Biblical Studies Alternatively: An Introductory Reader,* ed. Susanne Scholz (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 81-82.

specifically cites the following example of the incorrect interpretation of *adam* to mean

anthropos:

> In Genesis 1 there is only one passage which involves a woman, that is, the statement on the creation of man and woman in the image of God (1.27). Nevertheless, in the Hellenistic traditions we are not only confronted with the text itself, but also with a whole host of developments and interpretations. The first important obstacle to a proper understanding of this passage is the fact that the term *adam* was used by P in the collective sense of 'man' or 'humankind.' In the Hebrew text P never refers to *adam* as an individual: this is not questioned by the exegetes. Still, early Jewish interpretation read *adam* in Genesis 1 as a proper name, due to a misinterpretation of the J texts in Genesis 2 and the following chapters.[68]

Schungel-Straumann's identification of the errors within exegetical writings and multi-lingual interpretations explains why Jewish feminism carries strong issue with the language used to described Adam and Eve. Clearly, Schungel-Straumann's investigation into the language of Genesis not only reveals the mindset of early exegetes, but also the mindset of some Jewish feminists who re-appropriate images of Lilith in favor of Eve. Whom are they truly appropriating? How does their interpretation change the face of early Jewish midrashim and ideas about the status of women? How does the language of the early Greek version of the Hebrew Bible affect the ways women are viewed in light of English translations? The ways text and textual meaning affect interpretation must not be overlooked, despite the fact that many current interpretations depend upon English translations of the original texts. The juxtaposition of Jewish feminist readings of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the Genesis 2 account, reveals the effects that feminism has on biblical interpretation (and vice versa) and the contribution Jewish feminism has made to

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[68] Schungel-Straumann, 84.

the de-construction and re-construction of scripture in bringing Midrash about Lilith to the forefront.

Two Transformationist Jewish Feminist Interpretations: Aviva Cantor and Judith Plaskow

By appropriating Lilith, Jewish feminists identify with her on a powerful and authoritative level. They interpret the Lilith myth as a means of self-identification and of reclaiming personal, spiritual power. What emerges is something akin to what Mary Daly calls the "principle of immanence in feminist theology."[69] This principle states that the divine is and can be found within the human and specifically, female, psyche where there is no real difference between what is ultimate (in divine terms) and what is intimate (in personal terms).[70] This is why there is such a tendency in modern Jewish feminist groups to personally identify with female biblical figures and incorporate them into ritual observances. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza recognizes this phenomenon and calls it the "imaginative identification approach to feminist biblical interpretation," a method that emphasizes personal identification with a biblical figure as opposed to textual translations. This personal identification is transformed into a working interpretation of a text in which women's voices are lurking in the background or not apparently present at all.[71] Although this may suggest that feminist exegetes are grasping at thin air when it comes to initiating this method of interpretation, "imaginative interpretation" is a strong attempt to reconcile a seemingly "lost" history of women with history as the author(s) of

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[69] Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt, "The Idea of God in Feminist Philosophy," *Hypatia,* 9, no. 4 (Autumn 1994): 60-61.

[70] Suchocki, 61.

[71] Schüssler Fiorenza, 26-27.

Genesis perceived and experienced it. Bringing this kind of exegesis into modern biblical

scholarship is an important process of uncovering a particularly Jewish history which

necessarily incorporates a view of women and gender that is hidden between the lines of

the text.

In Jewish Feminist biblical interpretations, the ways religious practice mirror a

biblical text (as is the case with midrashic writings), reveal changes in interpretation that

cause developments in religious practice. Mary Daly's principle (along with Schüssler

Fiorenza's "imaginative identification" approach) coincidentally parallels

Transformationist Jewish Feminism, where practice and theology are intertwined as a

result of feminist biblical interpretation. For Transformationist Jewish Feminists, an

interpretation of Genesis 1-3 involves a return to the midrashic text of Ben Sira in order

to reconcile the creation accounts of Lilith and Eve. More specifically, the examination of

these texts involves the creation of a *new* Jewish feminist midrashic commentary on the

Alphabet of Ben Sira, one which Judith Plaskow indirectly employs in her story "The

Coming of Lilith":

> In the last decade or so, Jewish feminists have begun to use midrash as an
> important way of both reconnecting with and transforming tradition. Just
> as rabbinic midrash often begins from some gap or silence in the biblical
> text, Jewish feminists are using midrash to explore and fill in the great
> silence that surrounds women's history and experience. I did not intend to
> write an interpretation of the traditional midrash but to capture the
> experience of consciousness-raising within a religious framework.[72]

Plaskow's creation of a midrash and her ability to produce "an experience of

consciousness raising" brings feminism, and Jewish feminism in particular, in connection

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[72] Plaskow, Judith, "Lilith Revisited," in *Biblical Studies Alternatively: An Introductory Reader,* ed.
Susanne Scholz (Upper Saddle River : Pearson Education, Inc., 2003), 111.

with the larger concerns of American feminism. American feminism's larger concerns are identified by Plaskow as a need to obtain a sense of empowerment from a community experience. Plaskow's decision to create a modern Genesis "midrash" reflects this community experience.[73] Plaskow's goal in creating this midrash, which also contributes greatly to her use of Schüssler Fiorenza's method of "imaginative interpretation," is to achieve the Jewish "transformation" and repair of the world, better known as *tikkun olam*, from the social disarray that is felt on a distinctly feminist level.[74] Plaskow's creation of a midrash *is* the use of an "imaginative identification" method because it reveals Jewish feminist concerns with portraying women in a negative light and perpetuating "patriarchal" and androcentric ideas that are buried beneath the lines of the text of Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.*

Plaskow's re-creation of the Genesis account incorporates material that is relevant to modern Jewish feminists and falls into the criteria for a Transformationist and "imaginative identification" interpretation. Much of the relationship between Adam and Eve, and indeed between Eve and Lilith is later admitted by Plaskow as evidence of the influences in her own life at the time it was written, and also of her involvement with feminist activism and the development of feminist biblical interpretations. The inherent sexuality between Adam and Lilith in the midrashic text of Ben Sira is transferred in Plaskow's rendering to the *implied* relationship between Eve and Lilith. The omission of Lilith's sexual nature (as is evident in the translation of *The Alphabet of Ben Sira* by David Stark and Mark Mirsky) and its subsequent replacement with her portrayal as

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[73] Plaskow, "Lilith Revisited," 110.

[74] Plaskow, "Lilith Revisited," 109-110.

Adam's servant and slave removes her sexuality from constituting the problem in their relationship. Lilith is no longer a demon whose sexual voracity is the means by which she survives and destroys human children, but a woman who, having stood up for herself, is demonized by the very individual whose clutches she escaped.

Adam, as a symbol of male patriarchy, is responsible for constructing the demonic identity of Lilith in order to maintain Eve's subservience. Adam fears that Eve will abandon him and the garden forever. Plaskow's description of Eve hearkens back to Lilith's description in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.* In Plaskow's midrash, Lilith is the one who "threatens women in childbirth and steals children from their cradles in the middle of the night."[75]Although Eve is not mentioned specifically in this particular passage of the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Plaskow infers from the midrash and Genesis that Eve contains previous knowledge of Lilith's existence. By including Lilith in her rendition of Genesis, Plaskow's portrayal of the woman-turned-demon serves not only as a reminder to Eve that she must not transgress her husband's authority, but also reveals the androcentric nature of the literature Plaskow used to construct her vision of the creation account. Plaskow's rendition of Genesis 2 supports the view of the Yahwist writer in that it utilizes the text of Genesis itself, a sexist and patriarchal source that immediately places women in the role of mothers and home-makers, whose concern is for the welfare of their children their own pregnancies. The element of fear evident within this warning, that childbirth and offspring will be threatened, hearkens to Aviva Cantor's analysis of Genesis in reference to the Exile, a concept that will be explored in detail later in this chapter.

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[75] Plaskow, "Lilith Revisited," 107.

Interestingly, Plaskow portrays Eve as a subservient housewife until she one day catches a peek of Lilith from beyond the walls of Eden. Eve is not at all frightened by the woman, who is just that – a woman. Plaskow does not portray Lilith as a demonic individual either in form or in personality. Rather, Plaskow's wishes to portray Lilith as an "everywoman" type of character; someone to whom feminists of all types can relate. It is precisely this relation that Plaskow wants to achieve. According to Plaskow, upon meeting Lilith, Eve accomplishes what every potential feminist should accomplish – leaving behind one life for another and finding a kind of "sisterhood" within the company of other women.[76] For Plaskow, this is truly what being a Transformationist Jewish feminist is about.

Furthermore, Plaskow's description of the walls surrounding Eden, and Lilith's efforts to climb over them indicates a deeper meaning for feminist exegetes struggling to comprehend the patriarchal barriers of the original Genesis text. In order to supersede the negative portrayal of women in both midrash and patriarchal interpretations of the Genesis text, feminist interpretation (specifically, feminist Transformationist and imaginative interpretation) is instilled. Therefore, the changing development of the structure of Eden heralds a progressive way of living and a change in the patriarchal traditions of Judaism (with regards to ritual and textual practices). By climbing over Eden's walls and confronting Adam, Lilith attempts to upset the social and religious order which her former companion has constructed at her expense; Lilith *is* a Transformationist Jewish feminist in Plaskow's account.

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[76] Plaskow, 108. Plaskow places considerable importance on the creation of a community of feminists. However, as I will discuss in my conclusion, this is a limiting view of feminism, and does not represent the vision and goals of all Jewish feminists or feminists in general.

Transformationist Jewish feminism strives to achieve a change from patriarchy to a more progressive biblical interpretation via the implementation of ritual reformations, the organization of all-women prayer groups, and the advocacy for women rabbis. In the original accounts of creation, neither Eve nor Lilith ever meets one another. By placing the two women into contact with each other, Plaskow juxtaposes the "old" view of women as subservient creatures with the "new" view of women as powerful, capable, and independent individuals whose lives exist apart from the lives of men. Plaskow herself admits to drawing upon her personal life when she wrote this account and insists that her participation in the 1972 Women Exploring Theology conference prompted the creation of this midrash of a midrash as decidedly imaginative and Transformationist feminist interpretation of Genesis 1-3.[77] Furthermore, Plaskow collaborated with three Christian women in composing "The Coming of Lilith," a collaboration that was ultimately successful because of the communal experiences of all four feminist women, despite the differences in religion.[78] What Plaskow's interpretative method demonstrates is how modern Jewish feminist biblical interpretation deconstructs and reconstructs the identities of women in scripture, thereby transforming them and bringing them into a current frame of interpretation. Likewise, Plaskow's interpretation is the product of a multi-religious identity, an identity that is feminist and yet encompasses and does justice to both a Christian and Jewish identity. The Bible is no longer purely patriarchal when something like this is achieved, but rather progressive, or at least the very means by which scripture is put into practice by modern feminists is progressive. Certainly, Plaskow's re-

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[77] Plaskow, "Lilith Revisited," 108.

[78] Plaskow, "Lilith Revisited," 83.

appropriation of the Genesis creation account and the midrash of Lilith combines the two stories into a single representation of the conflicts that Jewish feminists encounter when dealing with patriarchal images of women in Jewish texts.

Another Transformationist Jewish feminist whose interpretation of Lilith within the context of Genesis and rabbinical midrash is influential is Aviva Cantor. As one of the founding members of the *Lilith* magazine, a Jewish feminist publication started in the 1970s, Cantor's contribution to feminist biblical interpretation is most notably found in her essay "The Lilith Question." Cantor's essay addresses the importance of self-identification with Lilith by attempting to re-interpret and re-appropriate her as she is described in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.* Aviva Cantor describes Ben Sira's Lilith in opposition to patriarchal ideals and as a reflection of a dying and lost matriarchal society. Most importantly, Cantor describes Lilith in terms of her significance in Jewish history, specifically the history of Jewish women during the Babylonian Exile in 586 B.C.E.[79] Because Lilith's significance is linked with the Exile in Cantor's mind, she defines women who lived during Exile as "enablers" in a society where midrash and *halakhah* became more and more prevalent:

> In the Exile, it became even more important that Jewish women continue to function as enablers because of the threat to Jewish survival. It is especially significant that Lilith, the only important negative female role model invented by Jews, was primarily an Exile invention. Lilith is a negative, shadow role, the flip side of Eve. Eve is the enabler ("helpmeet"), Lilith the disabler; Eve, the "mother of all life," Lilith, a destroyer of life. In creating the Lilith shadow role, men are telling a woman that if she is independent, assertive, free, as Lilith was, she'll end up a frigid nymphomaniac childless witch.[80]

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[79] Cantor, Aviva, "The Lilith Question," in *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*, ed. Susanna Heschel (New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1995), 44.

[80] Cantor, 45.

Clearly, Cantor's method of interpretation incorporates a historical analysis with Schussler Fiorenza's "imaginative identification" method. This combination creates a new context within which to place Eve and Lilith. Cantor's strategy is to search for feminist identification with Lilith by examining the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and how this literature determines the two trajectories of Lilith that are identified with by modern Jewish feminists: "the rebel against tyranny or the wild-haired vengeful witch."[81] Cantor blends a historical interpretation of the midrashic account of Lilith and a Transformationist Jewish feminist's interpretation of history as presented in the Bible. For example, Cantor's discussion of Lilith as the "shadow role of Eve" and how she represents women's assertive nature during the Exile indicates that she reads between the lines in order to grasp and use Schussler Fiorenza's method of "imaginative identification." It is interesting how Aviva Cantor describes Lilith's portrayal in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.* Cantor juxtaposes Lilith and Eve in decidedly modern terms, judging Lilith's "creators" as masochistic and fearful of their own survival without a complacent companion to help them along the way. It is also interesting that Lilith (as a projection of men's fears for survival during the Exile) becomes a role model for modern Jewish feminists. Cantor connects this interpretation with the Exile, a clear indication that she continues to struggle with the post-exilic Yahwist text.

Cantor uses the method of "imaginative interpretation" in her discussion concerning Lilith. Her reasoning and the method by which she illuminates the history of women during the Babylonian Exile through the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, embodies a feminist reading that employs what Schüssler Fiorenza calls "a reinterpretation of biblical

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[81] Cantor, 41.

texts that sometimes argues openly for gender-specific biblical hermeneutics in terms of

Jungian archetypal psychology and cultural glorification of femininity, motherhood, and

true womanhood."[82] Although it seems that Cantor downplays the roles of women during

the Exile, she in fact honors their multi-faceted nature and their sexuality by

acknowledging that women hold a position of prominence within their society, a position

that elicits fear if it is abused or elevated to the level of male authority. This fear of

women usurping male authority is implied in the midrashic tale of Lilith, and in many

ways, with Eve's attributed "coerciveness" in Genesis 2-3 leading up to the infamous

"Fall." Cantor rightfully acknowledges a patriarchal hierarchy underlying the *Alphabet of*

Ben Sira, but seeks to turn that patriarchy on its head by reclaiming Lilith as a role model

for women, and insists that Lilith represents the true natures of women in Exile.

However, Cantor corrects history's view of Jewish women and accomplishes it in a way

that not only neglects some modern Jewish feminist identities, but also various female

figures in scripture who may not exhibit Lilith's characteristics. The reference here is of

course to Eve.

 Although many Jewish feminists look to the past to self-identify with the women

of the Bible, biblical women may have felt uplifted as mothers and wives. This possibility

must not be voided from any type of feminist scriptural interpretation, including

"Transformationist/imaginative identification." Many Jewish feminists such as Nancy

Fuchs-Kreimer believe this to be true and eloquently states,

> The Bible is built on its own symbolic world, models of and for a society
> different from our own. When we begin to recreate Judaism, do we do so
> *de novo*? If the Bible is so tragically flawed in its symbols, laws, and
> images, can it still be an authoritative witness on some matters? What does

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[82] Schüssler Fiorenza, 27.

one do with an ancient text if one is determined to root out a corrupt symbol system at its very core?[83]

Many Jewish Transformationist feminists would answer "yes" to Fuchs-Kreimer's question of whether or not the Bible can remain an authoritative witness. Attempting to wrestle with the symbols, laws, and images of the Bible that conflict with feminist exegeses develops a critical eye for one's own interpretations. The question of what should be done with Lilith now that Eve is in the picture is also counterbalanced by the concern of leaving Eve to the wayside. If Lilith is at the forefront of a particularly Transformationist Jewish feminist identity, where and when does Eve enter the scene?

Re-creating Judaism from scratch, as is Fuchs-Kreimer's concern, does not necessarily solve the problem of the presence of patriarchal attitudes within in a text. "Rooting out the corrupt symbol system" of a text cannot erase hundreds of years worth of interpretation that carry the same amount of so-called "corruption" even down to religious practice. However, addressing the need to wrestle with problematic figures and symbols in biblical language and exegesis is an effective method of interpretation, and believe it or not, of self-identification. One such Jewish feminist who addresses problematic biblical figures is award-winning poet Yiskah Rosenfeld. Rosenfeld reclaims Eve from Judaism's patriarchal tradition while offering an interesting view of Lilith. For Rosenfeld, Lilith is a problematic answer for feminists because she is often singled out as the only answer to the issue of patriarchy/androcentrism. Rosenfeld wonders where Eve, Adam's second wife, has been left. In contrast to Aviva Cantor, Rosenfeld asks the ever important "Eve Question":

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[83] Fuchs-Kreimer, Nancy, "Feminism and Scriptural Interpretation: A Contemporary Jewish Critique," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20, no. 4 (Fall 1983): 539.

Could it be that in the excitement and, let's be honest, relief, of discovering an uncompromising feminist role model in the Jewish tradition – someone who is defiant, outspoken, fearless, and free – we have forgotten about Eve? If anything you would expect feminists to reclaim her as well[84]

Although Rosenfeld does not blatantly identify as a Transformationist Jewish feminist, she self-identifies with both figures as two components of complete womanhood, and reveals an "imaginative identification" streak in her analysis of the Genesis text. Rosenfeld's desire to reclaim Eve speaks to a "lack" that is, according to her, experienced across the board by Jewish feminists. Being unable to reclaim a female figure that is not rebellious enough and still a vital part of Judaism's patriarchy was difficult in the early days of Jewish feminist exegesis and self-identification.[85]

Rosenfeld expects Jewish feminists to reclaim Eve. This expectation speaks to a new generation of Jewish feminists who desire to remain active in the Jewish community without compromising their contributions to Jewish textual and theological debates; i.e. without being lost in their own rebellion like Lilith.[86] In reclaiming Eve, Rosenfeld brings her to the forefront as an important component of Judaism and Jewish feminist identity. Eve's identity is not simply comprised of rabbinical interpretations, but also of her presence within Genesis. Rosenfeld considers both of these textual instances valid and makes this clear in how she presents Eve in an analysis of *Genesis Rabbah* and the Genesis text. Just as Jewish feminists of Rosenfeld's generation are understood within the

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[84] Rosenfeld, Yiskah, "You Take Lilith, I'll Take Eve: A Closer Look at the World's Second Feminist," in *Yentl's Revenge: The Next Wave of Jewish Feminism,* ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: Seal Press, 2001), 132.

[85] Rosenfeld, 134.

[86] Rosenfeld, 149.

context of Jewish feminists of the Second Wave, so too can "Eve be understood within the context of Lilith, by drawing Lilith back into the text of Genesis as the first woman."[87] According to Rosenfeld, Eve's creation from Adam's "rib" or "side" constitutes the contention that modern Jewish feminists have when attempting to identify with Eve. Genesis 2:22 "is the text that sends many contemporary women straight into the arms of Lilith."[88] Likewise, Rosenfeld's mention of the following *Genesis Rabbah* associates Eve with "sin:"

> "And why was the precept of *niddah* [separation during menstruation] given to her?" "Because she shed the blood of Adam." "And why was the precept of challah [removing a piece of the challah] given to her?" "Because she corrupted Adam, who was the challah of the world." "And why was the precept of lighting the Sabbath candles given to her?" "Because she extinguished the soul of Adam."[89]

The implied subordination of Eve within Genesis 2:22 and in the above excerpt from *Genesis Rabbah* 17:8, separates Eve and Lilith. Lilith becomes favorable in the feminist mindset, a figure that wholly represents the feminist movement in general and the Jewish feminist movement in particular. In the above quote, Eve's "sin" is transcribed onto the ritual actions undertaken by Jewish women. This connection between Eve, her supposed act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden, and the implications it carries for Jewish women's participation in ritual observances leads many Jewish feminists to give up on Eve in favor of Lilith. Eve is left to the wayside as an unfavorable role model, the antithesis of Lilith. However, this does not need to be the case. Rosenfeld does an excellent job of juxtaposing Eve and Lilith, but also allows both figures to exist

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[87] Rosenfeld, 135.

[88] Rosenfeld, 139.

[89] Rosenfeld, 133. Notes in brackets are Rosenfeld's.

simultaneously, in a similar fashion to Plaskow's midrash on Genesis. Rosenfeld sifts

through the midrashic rabbis' dialogue in her exploration of Eve and Lilith, speculating

that the serpent in the Garden of Eden is Lilith in disguise, there to give Eve what she

lacks: dialogue. Because Eve lacks constant contact with God (here again, is the problem

of a primarily male-centered "God-language"), her dependence on the serpent leads her

to "disobedience." As Rosenfeld puts its, the Lilith-snake is there to "teach Eve about

power and freedom."[90]

Although a Transformationist Jewish identity comprises the majority of Jewish

feminism's views on Lilith and Eve, historical and textual interpretations serve as the

counter-argument for "imaginative identification," thereby addressing the problematic

strains evident in the Genesis text. In order to obtain a comprehensive view of Jewish

feminist readings and the influences that Hebrew literature and history have on feminist

exegesis, it is necessary to investigate Hebrew scholar Phyllis Trible's biblical

interpretations. As a Hebrew scholar, Trible addresses the problematic language of

Genesis 2-3 in her book, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality,* with particular emphasis on

gendered-language, and the ways problematic language is addressed by modern Jewish

feminists. Her chapter entitled, "A Love Story Gone Awry," focuses on the relationship

between Adam and Eve, and the consequences that certain interpretations of their

relationship have for modern scholars and feminists. Although Trible does not focus on

an "imaginative interpretation," her analysis of biblical language and the role that gender

plays in constructing Eve's identity greatly contributes to Jewish feminist interpretations

of all types.

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[90] Rosenfeld, 141-143.

In contrast to Fuchs-Kreimer's method of interpretation, to Schüssler Fiorenza's method of imaginative interpretation, and indeed to Transformationist Jewish identity, Trible insists that searching the text for patriarchal motifs or language does injustice to the text itself and the traditional intended meaning. However, Trible insists on interpreting Genesis as a "fresh work of art" as opposed to allowing patriarchal interpretations to shadow her understanding of it. For example, Trible reads the motif of Life and Death into Genesis, followed by the introduction of Eros whereby the entire story takes a turn and results in what is termed as "The Fall." Trible focuses on Eve, her connection to the advent of sexuality within the Genesis text, and a delineation of "gender" after Adam's (the earth creature's) creation. Trible also insists that the creation of Eve was absolutely necessary to fulfill Adam's need for a companion. Subsequently, Trible challenges the view that Eve is subservient to Adam, with the following exegesis:

> ..after God formed the animals of the earth he brought them to *ha-adam* "to see what it would call each one and whatever it called each one, that was the name." In other words, the earth creature was specifically given dominion over the animals through naming. By contrast, in episode four no purpose at all is stated in Yahweh's bringing of the woman to the earth creature, whose very body has now been changed because of her. Specifically, God does not give *ha-adam* power over the woman. She does not fit the pattern of dominion that the preceding episodes have established.[91]

Trible's interpretation is a mixture between Schüssler Fiorenza's "textual interpretation" method, and "woman as subject of interpretation." Trible delves into the text to extract the most accurate and proper understanding of woman's creation. Trible's exegetical method has as its means to an end, an exploration of how Eve is viewed in light of her relationship to Adam and in her relationship to God as creator. Therefore,

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[91] Trible, Phyllis, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 97.

Trible's interpretation differs from the interpretation of Transformationist Jewish feminists Judith Plaskow and Yiskah Rosenfeld in that it is not concerned with reading between the lines of the Genesis text and creating or developing a subsequent story. Rather, Trible wrestles with the text itself to develop a reason why Eve is viewed as a submissive wife.

There is however, a transformation of the original Genesis text to Trible's new interpretation that signals an important turn within Jewish feminism. Trible's interpretation is inclusive of sexuality since she recognizes that a differentiation between the sexes is evident in Genesis. For example, once Eve is extracted from Adam's "rib" or "side" as opposed to the initial creation of *ha-adam* as a double-sexed earth creature,[92] she becomes a woman whose existence is troubled by the fact that there is no one else like her. Likewise, Trible offers an interesting view on the equality between Adam and Eve once the "earth creature" is separated:

> As we have seen, the rib is raw material, comparable to dust from the earth. It requires processing before the woman is created. Clearly, in the prose account, then, it is the raw material, not the woman herself, that is taken from the earth creature; furthermore, the earth creature is not the man. Paradoxically, to be taken from man is to be differentiated from him while being bone of bone and flesh of flesh. Differentiation, then, implies neither derivation nor subordination.[93]

Adam and Eve's equality is based on their separation from each other; Trible reveals that Eve is in fact created from the same substance as Adam. To say that the earth creature was not Adam alone, suggests that the only equal union was between Adam and Eve, not Adam and Lilith. Lilith was in constant conflict with Adam because she was not

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[92] For more information on the androgynous nature of Adam and Eve, see Baskin, 60-64 and Antonelli's comments on the "Double-Faced Hermaphrodite," 4.

[93] Trible, Phyllis, 101.

of him. In contrast to previous interpretations, Eve is given a place of prominence in

Trible's reading of Genesis. After hundreds of years of interpretation, Eve is recognized

as equally a powerful role model for modern Jewish feminists as Lilith. Trible's

implication that Eve is not simply created from Adam demonstrates Eve's equality to

him, as opposed to her previously attributed "inferiority," and also her equality to Lilith.

According to Trible, maintaining Eve's inferiority within the Jewish feminist mindset is

the result of allowing patriarchal interpretations, as opposed to feminist interpretations, to

remain authoritative. In this way, one can never achieve a feminist interpretation which

embraces sexuality and gender-inclusive language.

A New Interpretation

This chapter is a new interpretation of the significance of both Eve and Lilith as biblical and midrashic figures. A new interpretive method for reading Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* is realized by exploring the theme of sexual identity and empowerment concerning Lilith and Eve, and by using the language of semiotics and symbolism to explore the self-identification with Lilith favored by so many Jewish feminists. This identification is primarily of a sexual nature, and deals as much with gender identity as it does with power relations between the sexes. This is exemplified by feminist readings of the Yahwist Genesis text. I propose another reading of Genesis 1-3, which focuses on and uses the text itself as justification for Eve's authority in Eden, her equal status with Adam as a "companion," and her ability to serve as a role model for female biblical scholars.

The issue of gendered language and sexuality is a theme in the discourse of Jewish feminism with regards to self-identification with Eve and Lilith. I will demonstrate an exegetical method which utilizes a historical/textual interpretation of the Genesis 1-3 text and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira,* combined with an "imaginative interpretation." This combined method concentrates on the sexual nature of the language describing Lilith and Eve. This exegetical method, a combination of historical and imaginative scriptural interpretations, allows for both a Transformationist view and a historical view of Genesis 1-3 to exist simultaneously while bringing a "theology of

sexuality" to the forefront. To accomplish this, my interpretation takes seriously Aviva Cantor's concern with the historical context in which the Bible was written. For example, this interpretation will serve as a viable means to understand Eve and Lilith's roles in the context of the biblical texts written during the Exilic period as mentioned by Cantor. Likewise, for this particular chapter, I will use Carol Meyers' exploration of Eve and the status of ancient Israelite women to supplement my discussion about sexuality and gender-identity in Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. By examining the language with which these "patriarchal" texts describe both Lilith and Eve, I offer an interpretation that accounts for a feminist interpretation of both Eve and Lilith.

The account of creation in Genesis 1-3 explains the nature of woman and her participation in what is later known in Christianity as "the Fall" of humankind. Likewise, the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* defines Lilith as a demon simply due to her marital "disobedience," and her refusal to return to the Garden of Eden. By investigating Jewish feminist writings and exegetical methods, it becomes clear that there is an issue with gendered language inherent within the Genesis 1-3 text and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira.* A primary concern, especially for Transformationist Jewish feminists (and the reason why so many favor Lilith), is the problematic role which gender plays in the Genesis account with regards to Eve. For example, in later midrashic texts, Eve is considered a Pandora-like figure who is responsible for disrupting and transcending God's law. Her status as a woman becomes connected to her "transgression" of God's law. Likewise, Eve' identity as a submissive wife, an attribute that arises out of Christian exegesis, causes problems when Transformationist Jewish feminists attempt to self-identify with her and reclaim her as a symbol of their struggle for equality within the "patriarchal" institutions of Judaism.

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Eve is an inadequate role model for Transformationist Jewish feminists, and instead

Lilith is upheld as the ultimate role model and the "goddess-figure" of modern Jewish

feminism.

In her explanation of Postmodern Jewish feminists who "celebrate the Goddess

within the alternative Jewish community," Melissa Raphael reveals that sexuality, in a

politically and socially activist way, is at the core of a desire to re-identify with strong

feminine Judaic figures by re-appropriating them:

> Jewish feminists may turn to the Goddess as a straightforward sexual-
> political protest against the social inequalities produced by the worship of
> an exclusively male God and the legal formation and transmission of
> Torah by men.[94]

For Raphael, Postmodern Jewish feminists' desire to self-identify with the

Goddess (in Raphael's context, this refers to various female figures within Judaism,

particularly Lilith[95]), is a result of the sexual-political struggle for power and authority

within traditional Jewish practices. This sexual-political struggle necessitates that Eve

and Lilith become symbols not only of personal feminist religious identity, but of

authoritative roles for women within the synagogues. Furthermore, the importance of

sexual identity and language for Postmodern Jewish feminists takes into account the void

that is created by the inability to relate to male specific God-language within Genesis 1-3.

Lilith is one main figure who fills this void. Upon reading Raphael's statement, it is clear

that the postmodern Jewish feminists to whom she refers also encompass a

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[94] Raphael, Melissa, 199.

[95] Raphael, Melissa, 202, 208. Raphael mentions the various biblical figures which Jewish feminists identify with. Included in these are: Asherah, the Shekinah, Hochmah, Matronit, and Lilith. One should take notice that all these figures are connected in some way to pre-Israelite and Israelite female deities. It is also important to notice that she does not mention Eve alongside these other figures.

Transformationist Jewish identity that allows a re-creation of and restructuring of the sexual language used to self-identify with Lilith and used to tear down the patriarchal structures of Judaism that prevent participation from women. Postmodern Jewish feminists also reconstruct Lilith by re-appropriating the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and turning the rabbinical author's view of Lilith on its head. By blending their traditional Jewish practices with the "sexual-political" aspects of "feminist spirituality," Raphael's Postmodern Jewish feminists reach into the texts of Genesis and rabbinical midrash to find a system of self-identification which is gender-specific. This system of self-identification reveals authoritative models for the creation of newer Jewish feminist practices, while speaking to the various forms of sexuality/sexual-identity that is common to the Third Wave of Feminism. Judaism, accused of not approving of sexuality, becomes a religious tradition that embraces sexual identity because it is already present in the tradition's texts. What follows is an exploration of the sexual symbolism already inherent within the texts of Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* that proves to be a means of self-identification for Jewish feminists.

Examining Judith Plaskow's "theology of sexuality" is necessary in order to approach the appearance of sexual symbolism in Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*. Plaskow's views on sexuality and spirituality reveal a growing concern about female "God-language" as opposed to male "God-language" within the Jewish feminists' mindset. This concern is transformed into a method of self-identification that allows for a personal sexuality to enter the equation:

> A number of feminists concerned with the connections between sexuality
> and spirit have suggested a new model of sexuality that sees it as part of a
> continuum of embodied self-expression. From this perspective, our

passions, including but not limited to our sexual passions; our self-identity as female or male, including but not limited to our capacity for sexual expression; and our capability of feeling generally, are all rooted in our being in the world as embodied persons.[96]

Plaskow's "theology of sexuality" is inclusive of any and all expressions of sexuality inasmuch as human beings respond to the world and to expressions of divinity via their physical feelings, their gender expressions, and their relationships to one another. From the moment Eve was "extracted" from Adam, her identity became, as was mentioned in the previous chapter, separate from the identity of her husband. Eve develops a sexual identity that causes problems for how she sees herself in relation to everyone and everything else in the Garden, whether they are human, animal, or divine. The importance of identity for Eve is explicitly a gender issue since the Genesis 1-3 text does not necessarily identify the genders of the animals in the Garden, and the instances where gender is mentioned identifies God and Adam in contrast to Eve herself. In the Genesis 3 text at the very moment of Eve's "extraction" from Adam's "rib" or "side," her sexual identity as a woman identifies the ways she relates to God, to Adam, and to the serpent in the Garden:

> Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit

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[96] Plaskow, Judith *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism From a Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1990), 195.

and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.[97]

In a way, Eve's sexuality presents a problem when she attempts to situate herself in relationship to Adam and God. In the previous chapter of Genesis, God specifically forbids Adam from consuming the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, *before* Eve is created. Therefore Eve, by trusting the serpent, develops a relationship to someone/something other than God. The relationship between Eve and the serpent is developed because of a "sexual lack." That is to say, Eve does not necessarily desire a sexual relationship with the serpent, but her desire for "dialogue" (as Yiskah Rosenfeld points out[98]) persuades her to listen to the snake, which is not identified as either male or female. Why does Eve engage in dialogue with the snake as opposed to God or Adam, and how does this signify a sexual "lack"? The status of Eve's "sexuality," i.e., her gender and identity as a "female," does not allow her to experience God fully in the way Adam does; she is easily persuaded by the serpent because she cannot understand or live up to "male centered God-language." To reference Cathy Schwichtenberg, Eve is "expectantly waiting for a gratification of her desire."[99] Because Adam is now male as opposed to a dual-gendered earth creature, his relationship to God, who is also described in male/masculine terms, is a strong one. Eve on the other hand, verbally communicates very little with God until He specifically asks the couple why they had transgressed His law. In agreement with Yiskah Rosenfeld, Eve's "desire" is the desire for dialogue with a

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[97] Gen. 3: 1-6 NRSV

[98] Rosenfeld, Yiskah, 143.

[99] Schwichtenberg, Cathy, "Erotica: The Semey Side of Semiotics," *SubStance* 10, no. 3 (1981), 27.

male God with whom she cannot identify. To quote Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki's analysis

of Mary Daly's concept of God in Jewish feminism, "the concept of God as male serves

to define men and male roles, and to reinforce the inferior definition and roles of

women."[100] In this attempt at a relationship with God, Eve grasps at the very object

which she cannot have in order to substitute the missing communication. When Eve

reiterates God's command to the serpent about staying away from the forbidden fruit, it is

also implied (in Genesis 2) that she simply repeats God's command as given to her

husband. This symbolic indication of men as the only viable intermediaries between

humans and God, and women and God, contributes to gender and self-identification

issues that Eve, and Israelite women (and which modern Jewish feminists) have to deal

with.

The consumption of the forbidden fruit by Eve signifies a "lack," something that

Cathy Schwichtenberg calls a "desire based on a mediation which is a substitution that

distances us from the thing itself."[101] The forbidden fruit is a mediator, a substitute, of

Eve's desire for communication with God. However, it is precisely the consumption of

this fruit that distances both Adam and Eve from God. Dialogue and speech, in the

Genesis 1-3 text occurs with the naming of animals and plants by Adam, and by God's

constant communication with Adam before Eve appears. Eve's consumption of the

forbidden fruit is physically and spiritually satisfying; it replaces the verbal

communication she does not have with God. Transformationist Jewish feminists believe

Eve's action to be a sign of weakness when compared to Lilith's bold action of loudly

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[100] Suchocki, 58.

[101] Schwichtenberg, 28.

pronouncing the ineffable name of God and flying away from Eden. However, Eve's action speaks louder than her words, and in many ways, louder than Lilith's words.

To say that Eve was a virginal, submissive wife is inaccurate. Eve's attainment of the knowledge of Good and Evil through her consumption of the forbidden fruit is as powerful an act as Lilith's decision flee the Garden of Eden forever. For Lilith, a proper expression of her freedom was to be attached to no "man," including God and Adam. For example, in the *Alphabet of Ben Sira,* Lilith "pronounces the Ineffable Name and flies away into the air" when she is dissatisfied with the inequality in her "marriage" to Adam.[102] Hearkening back to Aviva Cantor's analysis, Lilith's refusal to be Adam's sexual "enabler" threatens his very existence, and is the reason why Lilith is "punished" once she leaves Eden. Because of Lilith's "transgression," 100 of her children die each day, children who are born to her, without a "helpmeet."[103] In contrast, many Jewish feminists would argue that Eve's "punishments" for her "transgression" are more severe and sexist than Lilith's "punishment." Eve's "punishment" is described as follows:

> The woman said 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' The LORD God said
> to the serpent,
> 'Because you have done this,
>   cursed are you among all animals
>   and among all wild creatures;
> upon your belly you shall go,
>   and dust you shall eat
>   all the days of your life.
> I will put enmity between you and the woman,
>   and between your offspring and hers;
> he will strike your head,
>   and you will strike his heel.'
> To the woman he said,

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[102] Mirsky, Mark J. , David Stern, 184-185.

[103] Mirsky, Mark J. David Stern, 184.

> 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
>   in pain you shall bring forth children,
> yet your desire shall be for your husband,
>   and he shall rule over you.'[104]

Keeping Aviva Cantor's interpretation of Genesis in connection with the Exile,

Eve's "punishment" is not necessarily a punishment for refusing to be an "enabler" or a

"helpmeet" to Adam. Rather, Eve's "punishment" is to continue bearing children with her

husband, yet to do so in pain. Although Adam and Eve's ability to have children before

their "transgression" is implied, it may have been a less painful experience for Eve since

God says that He will augment her childbearing pains. Likewise, there is a connection

between the onset of suffering and the acquiring of "wisdom" via the consumption of

forbidden fruit. This "wisdom" is connected to Aviva Cantor's analysis of suffering

during Exile; the acknowledgement of the reality of suffering and the temporary safety,

nourishment, and bounty of the Garden of Eden is something that was experienced during

the Exile. This temporary safety net was not fully experienced by Lilith when she chose

to leave Eden. Likewise, her punishments are incomparable to Eve's; she bears demon-

children of her own accord and must allow 100 of them to perish everyday.[105] Lilith

therefore, remains isolated in the desert, doing as she chooses and living as she wishes,

while Eve, although beset by suffering and hardship, remains an active and crucial

member of society. Adam even gives his wife the name "Eve," because "she was mother

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[104] Gen 3: 12-16 NRSV

[105] Mirsky, Mark J., David Stern, 184.

of all who live,"[106] a sign that Eve's contributions to society in Exile was necessary for the survival of all.

Eve's expression of freedom, and her desire for dialogue through the transgression of God's law, did not indicate that freedom meant leaving the Garden. Unlike Lilith, Eve's freedom comes from her desire for knowledge and wisdom, which is possessed by God alone. Only Eve was present when the serpent "tempted" her with the fruit of the forbidden tree. Adam appears in the scene only after the serpent reveals the truth behind God's prohibition. Therefore, Eve is the initiator and provider of wisdom to her husband via the forbidden fruit. The consumption of the forbidden fruit is followed by an acknowledgement of "nakedness" by both Adam and Eve, and God's subsequent acknowledgement that something has gone awry:

> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.
> They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' [107]

Adam and Eve's "transgression" of God's law is accompanied by an acknowledgement of "nakedness" which is also an acknowledgment of sexual differentiation. Eve's understanding of the sexual difference between herself and Adam,

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[106] Gen 3: 17 NRSV

[107] Gen 3: 6-11 NRSV

and even God, is apparent in her communication with the serpent and her agreement to eat the forbidden fruit. However, the sense of shame which comes with a personal sexual identity and the acknowledgment of hierarchy that comes with it; both Adam and Eve cannot meet God face to face because they are ashamed of being "naked," not because they are ashamed to have disobeyed His law. Furthermore, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil imparts wisdom to Adam and Eve which is equal to God's wisdom. As the serpent stated in Genesis 3:4-5, "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."[108] This knowledge of good and evil is directly linked to sexuality in the use of fig leaves as clothing. Shamefulness (and not sinfulness) is attributed to this new perceived sexuality; Genesis 2: 25 specifically states that both Adam and Eve were naked and felt no shame before they disobeyed God's command.[109] The only thing that has changed in Adam and Eve's existence is their perceptions of themselves as God sees them.

Historically, Eve's supposedly "submissive" and "obedient" character simply does not mirror the lives of all Pre-Israelite and Israelite women. If one takes the Genesis text, and particularly Genesis 3, as evidence for ancient Israelite women's struggle for authority, it becomes increasingly clear that not every woman was a "submissive" housewife. Judith Plaskow's method for "reading arguments for female subordination backwards" is especially helpful when tackling the Genesis 1-3 text.[110] Taking Genesis 1-

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[108] Gen 3: 4-5 NRSV

[109] Gen 2: 25 NRSV

[110] Plaskow, *The Coming of Lilith: Essays on Feminism, Judaism, and Sexual Ethics, 1972-2003,* 47.

3 into account, especially Eve's consumption of the forbidden fruit, it is said that her

"transgression" of God's law and her dependence on Adam as the intermediary between

God and humankind signifies/mirrors an actual historical struggle between women in

ancient Israelite society and religious male authority figures. As a result, the concerns of

Transformationist Jewish feminists with religious authority during the Second Wave are

grounded in Genesis. In her book, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*,

Carol Meyers explores the ancient culture of Israelite women in relationship to how they

were viewed in society versus the way they actually lived. Written from an

archaeological and historiographical point of view, Meyers' book indirectly brings a great

amount of insight into the Genesis 1-3 text. For example, Meyers sums up the following

points concerning the status of women in Israelite culture and how Eve is a reflection of

that status:

> Not only does Eve represent Israelite women, she is also a product of the
> way of life of women in that world. Similarly, the depiction of Eve must
> be treated as a reflection of and sanction for the lot of the Israelite woman.
> To become aware of women's way of life during the time the Hebrew
> Bible was written is to come to grips with the reality that determined Eve.
> In this sense, "Eve" is Everywoman – every woman who lived in ancient
> Israel.[111]

There are various ways Meyers' historical view of Israelite women can contribute

to a reading of Genesis 1-3 that encompasses both an imaginative

identification/Transformationist reading and a historical reading. By reading a historical

background into the Genesis text, the perceptions of women that the text may underline

become clearer and applicable to the context of the society and times during which these

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[111] Meyers, Carol, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context,* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4.

texts were constructed by post-exilic editors. Meyers drives home the point that most

biblical interpreters (Christian and Jewish feminist biblical scholars included) derive their

understandings of the interpretations of Genesis 1-3 from early, post-biblical Christian

and Jewish scholars/exegetes, and are therefore "not aware that [they] often look at

Israelite texts with post-Israelite eyes."[112] In this sense, a "truer" view of the roles of

women within Israelite culture lurks behind the interpretations that medieval and modern

scholars attempt to place upon the texts. Meyers' view insists that by getting rid of the

"psychological barriers created by the later Judeo-Christian tradition," an accurate and

"original force of the texts can speak in a voice uncomplicated by later voices."[113] This is

not to say that the traditional Judeo-Christian interpretations are unnecessary or invalid

contributions to interpreting Genesis today, but only that this Judeo-Christian scholarship

constructs Eve's role within scripture according to the social circumstances of the Exile,

and not according to our current social circumstances.

Meyers' explanation of the effects of Judeo-Christian scholarship on modern

feminist biblical interpretations reveals that "sin" is imposed upon Eve as if she were the

only one to disobey God's law.[114] However, Meyers does not believe either Adam or Eve

to have "transgressed" or "sinned" at all. According to Meyers, "None of the words that

are part of the Hebrew vocabulary for sin and transgression are present in the story" and

one should read the tale of Cain and Abel for an explanation of human "sinfulness."[115] In

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[112] Meyers, 72-73.

[113] Meyers, 74.

[114] See Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 75-76 for further information on the Judeo-Christian texts Meyers uses to back up her claim.

[115] Meyers, 87.

fact, Meyers reads the Genesis narrative and Eve's placement in it in the context of

Israelite culture and the "struggles" for survival present therein:

> Original human consciousness, as set forth in the Eden story, thus consists
> of two vital aspects: the human's ability to hear and comprehend God's
> instructions and the human's need to know about the source of sustenance.
> It is the woman, and not the man, who perceives the desirability of
> procuring wisdom. The woman, again not the man, is the articulate
> member of the first pair who engages in dialogue even before the benefits
> of the wisdom tree have been procured…it is important to note that the
> Eden tale sets forth a primal relationship between woman and the
> acquisition of whatever it is that the tree of knowledge provides.[116]

The "sustenance" explained by Meyers is found in the consumption of Eden's

forbidden fruit. However, it is interesting that Meyers mentions Eve's role in obtaining

wisdom and distributing it to Adam or mankind. Meyers' deduction is that wisdom, in the

verbal and literal sense, was a necessary symbol of "sustenance" that the Israelites used

in order to survive their trials and tribulations during the Exile period. The ability to

procure wisdom is directly linked to seeing the world the way God sees it, which

simultaneously brings suffering with regards to tilling the soil, pain in childbirth, disease,

murder, death and the like. Essentially, according to Meyers, the Genesis text reflects the

importance of women in the acquisition of wisdom through language and

communication, but also underlies the struggles that both sexes endure when attempting

to wrestle with wisdom in a time where suffering is paramount.

One final note on Meyers' explanation of Eve as "Everywoman" and her

relationship to the Genesis text is the importance such a figure carries for women in

ancient Israel. Eve is the household woman in Israel; she reflects the female gender as a

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[116] Meyers, 90-91.

whole for Meyers and represents only part of women in Israelite society.[117] Eve's

presence in the Garden of Eden is sustained by her ability to obtain wisdom, to use this

wisdom as a woman, and apply it to her life outside of Eden. A reflection of Israelite

women, Eve is the harbinger of wisdom and a strong role model for Jewish feminists, as

opposed to Lilith, whose chance to obtain wisdom in the Garden of Eden was trumped by

her refusal to return to Paradise.

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[117] Meyers, 131.

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis of Genesis 1-3 and the *Alphabet of Ben Sira*, Eve and

Lilith were juxtaposed by Transformationist Jewish feminists who wish to self-identify

with them. I chose to contrast Eve and Lilith in this final chapter in order to reclaim her

importance for Jewish feminism and for the history of biblical interpretation. Although

Eve returns to the forefront in my analysis, it is crucial to bring her back into

communication with Lilith to demonstrate how both figures encompass all the faces of

First, Second, Third and Fourth Wave feminists. Hearkening back to Aviva Cantor and

Carol Meyers' historical and archaeological analyses, it is important to note that Lilith

never disappears from the pre-Israelite, Israelite, and post-Israelite mindset: She remains,

sometimes at the forefront, and sometimes lurking in the background as a necessary

answer to questions about Genesis' two creation accounts, or even why children needed

to be protected during the Exile. Despite these reasons, Lilith continues to fascinate

modern Jewish and non-Jewish feminists alike. Why is it that Jewish and non-Jewish

feminists alike feel the need to hold on to Lilith, when there is a plethora of female

biblical figures waiting to be reclaimed? Why do Christian and Jewish feminists feel the

need to ground themselves and their status in society in the Bible and its female figures?

The article "Lilith, or the Black Moon" by M.T. Colonna, written on the cusp of the Third

Wave of Feminism in America answers these questions in a particularly existential way:

> With the new wave of feminism we now return to a refurbishing of Eve's
> myth. The Western woman of today searches to re-grasp religious,

mythical and ancestral grounds for her psychological and moral emargination and of her 'guilt' or 'fault.' As in the Adam-Lilith controversy regarding her desire to be 'on top.' It seems, then, that the myth of Lilith suggests a way to break the fixation with 'being below,' repressed and maltreated…[118]

The reason for looking into the Genesis text, as Elizabeth Cady Stanton did, and as other Jewish and Christian feminists continued to do afterwards, is to find justification for the treatment of women throughout the centuries in an attempt to improve, and at the same time understand, the reasons behind the repression of women. Lilith is provided by M.T. Colonna not only as the answer to repression and oppression, but also a means of understanding that women should not be placed into the categories of "demure housewife" or "frigid witch" (to borrow Cantor's terms). The recognition that gender categories are obscure and unnecessary is a crucial step in the progression of women's rights and especially with regards to the Fourth Wave of American Feminism.

Throughout this thesis, the conclusion that is drawn from the analyses and interpretations of Judith Plaskow, Aviva Cantor, Yiskah Rosenfeld, Phyllis Trible, and Carol Meyers is that Christian and Jewish feminist interpretations of Genesis cannot truly be separated from one another. As evidenced in Judith Plaskow's collaboration with Christian feminists in the creation of her midrash on Genesis, both Eve and Lilith are presented as equals: representations of Jewish and Christian feminists of the Second and Third Waves in dialogue with each other and reaching an understanding of their respective identities through a community of sisterhood that emphasizes their differences as much as their commonalities. Transformationist Jewish feminists do have their own identities and methods of biblical interpretation, but as we enter the Fourth Wave of

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[118] Colonna, M.T., "Lilith or the Black Moon," *The Society of Analytical Psychology*, 25, no. 4 (October 2006), 326, 336.

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Feminism, it becomes increasingly clear that in dealing with similar religious texts, exegetical traditions, and socio-religious and socio-political struggles, interpretations and self-identifications with biblical figures become blurred. Since the very First Wave of American Feminism, it is easy to see similar concerns and hopes for the improvement of the status of women via institutional means, whether it is a social/political institution or religious institution. The fact remains that no matter the institutional changes, feminism has always had a religious dimension. As Judith Plaskow stated in response to her midrash:

> Were I reflecting today on the religious dimensions of feminism, I would
> try to remain close to the experiences being described rather than impose
> on them the foreign vocabulary of any particular [religious] tradition.[119]

According to Plaskow, the importance of specific religious language in the Third, and even in the Fourth Wave of American Feminism in a way constructs a barrier that prevents the process of consciousness-raising or the creation of an all-encompassing feminist community. However, in certain cases specific religious language allows feminists to develop various exegetical methods and interpretations, for, as was pointed out by Schungel-Straumann in my third chapter, language constructs meanings that are specific to a particular group and cannot always transmit the same meaning to another group of people, whether this refers to a Greek translation of a Hebrew word that loses its original intended meaning in the process of interpretation or just something lost in conversation.

Despite Plaskow's intentions to create an all-encompassing feminist community, her analysis of Eve and Lilith concentrates on the presence of patriarchal ideas in biblical

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[119] Plaskow, Judith, "Lilith Revisited," 84.

exegesis. Plaskow's concentration on the presence of patriarchy detracts from her ability

to be all-inclusive in her vision of a feminist community. Clearly, Plaskow's desire to

participate in such a community is not indicative of every feminist's desires. However, if

we take her desire in connection with the goals of Fourth Wave American Feminism, it

becomes clear that Plaskow is not actually all-inclusive. Although her midrash reveals an

attempt at bringing both Eve and Lilith to the forefront, the larger theme of creating a

feminist community falls short. For example, men and women currently engage in

feminist dialogue and will continue to do so in the Fourth Wave, but in Plaskow's

midrash men are not equals in feminist dialogue. I firmly believe that the Fourth Wave of

American Feminism will allow (and indeed, must allow) men to enter into dialogue with

women on feminist issues, as well as individuals whose gender identities do not lump

them into the categories of either "male" or "female." True inclusiveness would allow for

dialogue not only between religions, but also individuals of all gender identities.

Just as the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* and the text of Genesis 1-3 are in constant

dialogue with and inform one another, so are the figures of Eve and Lilith. Like Eve,

Lilith has no direct communication with God, but only with the angels Snvi, Snsvi, and

Smnglof, who approach her in the desert on behalf of God to bring her back to the

Garden.[120] Lilith, like Eve, contains a degree of wisdom, since she is said to know the

Ineffable Name of God. And it is Lilith whom early Christian scholars and exegetes

speculate to have tempted Eve with the forbidden fruit. The common "dialogue" between

these figures and their texts influences dialogue between feminists of all faiths, and will

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[120] Mirsky, Mark J., David Stern, 182.

continue influence dialogue between feminists in general in the coming Waves of

Feminism.

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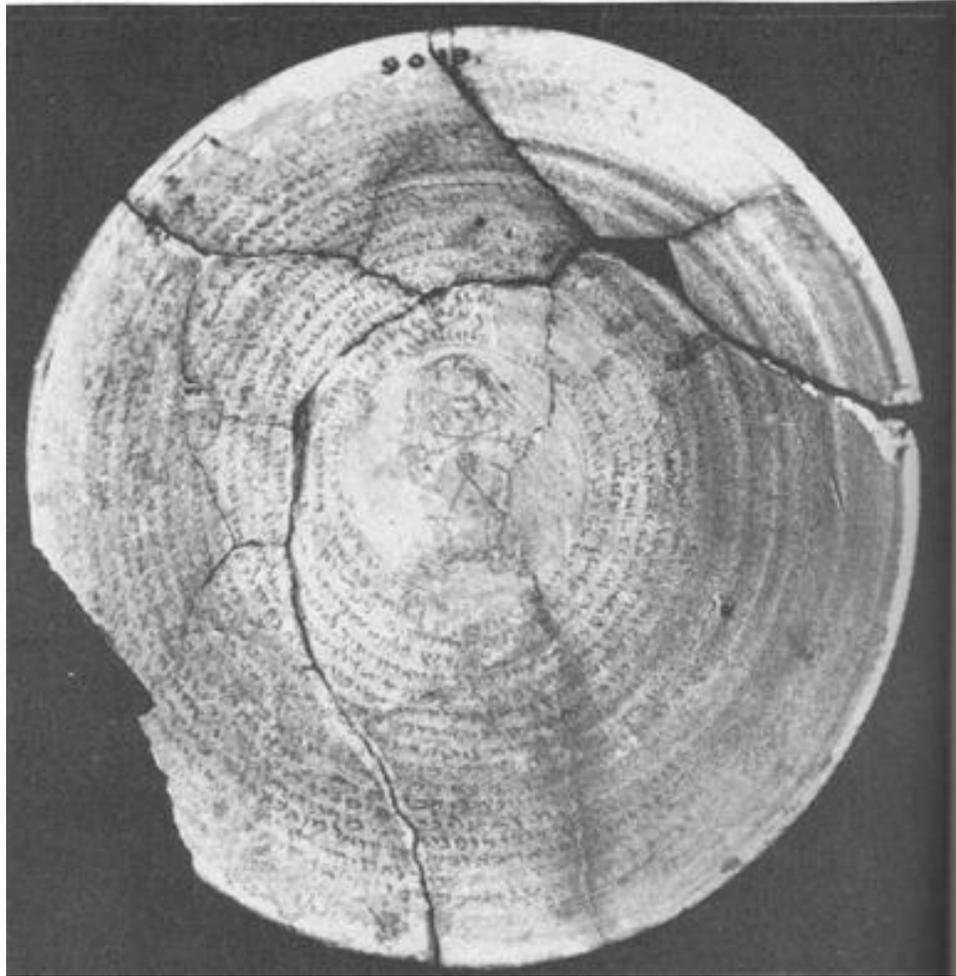
Appendices

Fig. 1. The Burney Relief. http://jwa.org/teach/golearn/sep07/Lilitu.jpg

Fig. 2. Aramaic incantation bowl with Lilith in the center (6th century C.E.). (Courtesy of University Museum, University of Pennsylvania). Patai, Raphael, *The Hebrew Goddess,* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), Plate 32.

Fig. 3. Adam, Eve, and Lilith. Sistine Chapel.
http://www.reversespins.com/pics/expulsion.jpg