The Seduction of Eve and Feminist Readings of the Garden of Eden

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1. First Reading

There is probably no episode of the Bible that has been subject to a greater variety of interpretations than the story of the Garden of Eden. This variety is due to the fact that no single line of interpretation has accounted for all the data. That is to say, no single meaning of the story has exhausted all its features. If every reading perspective leaves a remainder, the only question is whether one reading accounts for more of the data than another in a coherent way. Indeed, it may even take multiple readings to account for all the data. The claim to significance of the following reading lies in its capacity to minimize the remainder by providing a structure for illuminating the narrative that explains its overall thrust, accounts for the interaction of its characters, and sheds light on interpretational difficulties. Although the reading is primarily synchronic, focusing on the narrative as a whole, it takes into account literary issues raised by a diachronic reading.

I state this explicitly, since a reader has a right to expect a consistency of explanation or causation. Such an expectation is all the more important with regard to the opening chapters of Genesis where there are so many literary maneuvers available to a modern exegete to account for difficulties or rough spots in the smooth flow of one's proposed understanding. For example, some will account for such elements by ascribing them to specific etiological considerations or as part of a larger etiological orientation. Others will resolve alleged contradictions by falling back on source criticism. A variant of this postulates a coherent earlier form of the story, but imperfect elaborated final form. Still others will fill the alleged gaps by borrowing from comparable motifs from the Ancient Near East. The common denominator of these maneuvers is an account of the text by that which is not in the text. In any case, it is inappropriate to switch arbitrarily modes of explanation in order to maintain at all cost one's interpretation. To proclaim the composite artistry of the narrative when it supports one's interpretation but its sloppiness when it does not is problematic. Or to evoke source criticism only when one's interpretation means a bump in the narrative is disingenuous at best.
Among the ways of resolving sloppiness are attributing the obtrusive elements to another source, to imperfect embellishment, or to responses to ancient concerns. Since literary analysis is more of an art form than a science, there is always a judgment involved. In view of the different ways of making a sense of a narrative, the question is only how much mileage can be accrued from a reading strategy.[4]

Minimally, a reading of Genesis three worthy of the name has to deal with the Bible beginning its account of human history with a tree of knowledge, humans seeking to acquire divine-like knowledge, and serpents talking to women. In doing so, it must focus on the role of sexuality and birth pangs, blaming and guilt, nakedness and clothing as part of the human debut on the stage of life. Such a focus needs to account for the shift in the relationship between man and woman from parity to domination and for the link between morality and mortality within a revised divine-human relationship.

This reading of the Eden story argues that woman is not only the hero of the story but is representative of humanity.[5] Her representative status, as will be shown, explains why the story features both woman and serpent, why the serpent talks specifically to woman, why of all the ancient epics of origins Genesis alone gives the creation of woman separate billing, and why Genesis underscores the commonality between man and woman. By highlighting the significance of the woman, this reading makes for the remarkable combination of authoritarian theology and egalitarian anthropology.[6]

According to our reading, the Eden story reflects the perennial struggle of humanity to break out from its subdivine status only to come upon the chasm separating the human from the divine. Its organizing concern is therefore the links and barriers between the human and the divine. This theory will be argued through a series of readings followed by a close examination of the interplay among tree, serpent, and Eve.

The disarmingly simple manner in which these complex issues are presented in the biblical narrative contributes to the difficulty of interpretation. The simplicity and lack of explicit comment on the meaning(s) of the story have invited readers to fill in the gaps from personal knowledge and experience. Such gaps have elicited such a variety of interpretations, however, that there is little consensus on even the central concerns of the narrative.[7] The following analysis seeks to provide a reading experience that embraces many of the issues involved as well as to supply criteria for validating interpretations.

The initial frame of our reading is the Masoretic division which begins with 2:4 and ends with 3:24, except that we follow most moderns in allocating 2:4a to the conclusion of the previous narrative. This is based on the assumption that 2:4a recapitulates whereas 2:4b introduces. Such an understanding forms the basis of some of the better known modern divisions of the narrative. So, for example, S.R.

The nature of these works militates against their providing an explanation of their titles. Nonetheless, since the splitting of 2:4 is a literary judgment -- even source judgments are literary judgments, however disguised -- it would have been helpful to have had the titles of the chapter explained along the lines of some explicit literary criterion for framing the story rather than serving only as a summary of the major event(s) of the narrative.

One such way of framing the narrative consists of linking the beginning with the end and viewing the intervening material as an explanation for the transition. For example, since the identical expression "to till the soil" appears in both Gen. 2:5c and 3:23b, it creates an *inclusio* that frames the narrative. This way of reading allows for the assumption that since 2:5 points out that "there was no human to till the soil" whereas 3:23b states that man was banished "to till the soil," the intervening material explains how man came to till the soil. Although ostensibly outside the frame, both 2:4b and 3:24 can be seen as introducing and extending 2:5 and 3:23 respectively. A reading based on such surface patterning alone could then conclude that "Genesis 2-3 is basically a story about how land became vegetated and human beings became tillers of the soil."[8]

Even a cursory reading would find this account of the complexity of the intervening material inadequate and thus unqualified to be the framing idea.[9] The problem does not lie in the technique of linking beginning and ending in order to get a handle on the narrative, but in the belief that meaning can be generated by poetics alone. Structures of narratives are not self-evident data, but results of interpretation. There is no automatic transition from poetics or surface patterning to underlying meaning. The more sophisticated the literature the more difficult it is to correlate form and meaning in some regular systematic and ultimately mechanical fashion. In actuality, the relationship between the two is more dialectical, whereby change in one induces change in the other. In this sense, it is almost always the case that "interpretation both precedes and follows poetics."[10] That is to say, just as specific modalities of interpretation highlight specific structures or frames, so the highlighting of specific features renders possible specific interpretations. Just as some inkling of meaning precedes the determination of form, so the determination of form extends the quest for meaning and back and forth.[11]
In this case, it is the forthcoming interpretation that induces us to see these verses as framing ones. Once they are highlighted as framing verses, they in turn support and extend our interpretation. This can be illustrated by structuring the framing verses as follows:

A. No bush of the field was yet on earth,
B. no plant of the field had yet sprung up,
C. for the Lord God had not made it rain upon earth,
D. and there was no human to till the soil (2:5),
E. So the Lord God sent him away from the garden of Eden
F. to till the soil from which he had been taken (3:23).

This structuring makes clear that A and B are parallel in function, as are C and D. The former note what is missing, the latter explain why. Since C explains the deficiency of B as D does to A, that means that C is to B as D is to A, making for a structure of abba. This way of seeing allows structure and content to converge in order to make the point that there is no growth from the ground because God has not brought rain and there is no human to work it. Such a reading advances the thesis of the human role being a complement to that of the divine.

Initially, the tilling of the soil was to underscore the human role in the divine-human enterprise. E and F, however, have "the Lord God" and human acting not in consort, but in conflict. According to the previous verse (3:22), the crisis in the relationship is due to humanity impinging upon the divine. Lest humanity infringe upon the divine, it is expelled. This reading sees the shift in the narrative from one of partnership to one of disengagement. The crisis is precipitated by the junior partner seeking to play the role of the senior partner. The intervening material explains how the initial balance between the divine and the human went awry. The advantage of this reading over the previous one lies in it not being predicated on surface patterning alone. Instead, the problematic of the narrative is thrown into relief by the frame, as the frame is thrown into relief by the problematic of the narrative.

2. Second Reading

Our second reading adheres to the frame created by the speech elements from 2:15 to 3:19. This dialogic part of the narrative is characterized by the simplicity of its structure. Not only is each character introduced individually, but up to the denouement, where all three characters reappear together, each scene has only two participants, whereas the concluding punishment scene brings all four speaking parts back on stage. The structure is as follows:
It is clear from this way of structuring the narrative, that there is a subdivision of the text based on the presence of the serpent. The serpent appears on the scene in 3:1 and leaves in 3:15, whereas God, man, and woman remain constant. In addition, the serpent is the only character to have a specific designation. By being introduced as "shrewd" attention is focused on its significance for the turn of events. By the next verse, the focus is on the woman and the serpent. The reader watches to see whether she will be beguiled by the serpent's shrewdness or continue to comply with the divine prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The seduction of Eve, as she was to be called, occurs so rapidly and smoothly that it raises doubts about the idea of disobeying God being exclusively that of the serpent. If the serpent gets Eve and subsequently Adam to act out of character, then he, of course, functions outside of them. If, on the other hand, he is seen as providing them with an opportunity and rationale to extend previous inklings on their part, then he functions, dramatically that is, as an extension of them.

To answer the question regarding the relationship of the character of the snake to that of Eve, we need to compare the differences between God's enjoining of the primordial human and the subsequent report of the woman. Originally, Scripture says, "And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying, `Of every tree of the garden you (singular throughout) may eat, yea freely eat, but as for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, you must not eat of it, for on the day that you eat from it, you will die, yea surely die''" (Gen. 2:16-17). Correcting the serpent by emphasizing that God had not prohibited all of the trees of the garden, the woman says, "From the fruit of the other trees in the garden we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God has said: You (plural throughout) are not to eat from it and you are not to touch it lest you die" (3:2-3).

The differences between the original command and Eve's version are as follows:
1. God commanded  
2. freely eat from every tree  
3. tree of knowledge of good and evil  
4. you (singular)  
5. no eating of it  
6. surely die that day  

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<tr>
<th>Original (2:16-17)</th>
<th>Eve's Version (3:2-3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. God commanded</td>
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<tr>
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<td>tree in the midst of the garden</td>
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<td>4. you (singular)</td>
<td>we and you (plural)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. no eating of it</td>
<td>no eating or touching</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. surely die that day</td>
<td>lest you die&lt;</td>
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These differences are either the type of revisions characteristic of recapitulations, or they reveal the inner workings of Eve's mind. The latter position gains credence by noting the direction of the following six changes:

1. The `command' of God has been diluted to the `saying' of God (cf. 3:17).

2 God's generosity has been reduced to a general permission.

3. The ominous tree of good and evil becomes a nondescript tree in the midst of the garden.

4. The singular has become plural, making one into two (see below).

5. Touching has been added to the prohibition of eating.

6. The imminent penalty of death gives way to some future threat.

The differences add up to a diminishment of divine authority, a shift from generosity in the direction of arbitrariness, a reduction of the import of the tree to a location, a tinkering with the extent of the prohibition, through addition or subtraction, and a belittling of its gravity. Such changes and omissions are too consequential and systematic to be accidental. They point to a tendentious reformulation. Through them, the narrative signals Eve's suggestibility if not susceptibility to the snake's argumentation by showing the movement she has already made in that direction. In this sense, the snake functions to extend the direction of Eve's thinking rather than to instigate it. The idea that the snake serves to extend Eve's character becomes the basis of the interpretation below of the role of the snake in the story.

Once the awesomeness of the prohibition has been punctured, its severity downgraded, and the sense of indebtedness to the divine diminished, Eve
becomes fertile soil for the serpent's seeds of doubt. Listen to his deft attack: "Die, you will not die!" he says reassuringly. On the contrary, "On the day that you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will become like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). By linking up the knowing of good and evil with the becoming like God, the serpent dangles before Eve a grand future in order to persuade her that God is a god who begrudges their potential godliness rather than one who graciously grants them life and sustenance.

Discovering grounds for attributing the ban to a self-serving ruse to withhold divinity rather than a protective barrier to safeguard her life, Eve now finds the tree to be [1] "good for eating, [2] lustful to the eyes, [3] and desirable for wisdom/viewing "(3:6). These three characteristics contrast with the trees which were originally designated as only [1] "desirable to look at and [2] good to eat" (2:9). The anticipated gain from eating has reversed the order, making it first appeal to the palate and then to the eye. More than delectable and visually pleasing, the tree has become downright "lustful to the eyes." Clearly, this tree is far more than merely a tree in the middle of the garden.

What has changed, however, is not the tree but Eve's beholding. With eyes fixed on the tree, she is not able to banish the snake-implanted thought of being but a bite away from divinity. Lest the point be missed, the narrative describes her in words -- "And she saw that it was good..." (3:6a) -- which evoke the language of God's work of creation -- "And He saw that it was good " Thinking she was verging on the divine, "She took from its fruit and ate and gave also to her husband beside her, and he ate" (3:6b). Straightaway, "The eyes of the two of them were opened " -- just as the serpent had said. "And they knew " -- seeing how the serpent had correctly predicted the first part, the response of the reader is primed for similar precision with regard to the second, namely, that they "knew that they were God(like) knowing..." What a letdown to find out that they only -- "knew that they were nude " (3:7).

Since frustration of expectation calls attention to itself, the sudden awareness of their nudity must be a pivotal point in the story. The meaning of this awareness, however, is unclear since the fact of their nudity was pointed out at the outset. Those who argue that the awareness of nudity is what produces shame and that the tale can be reduced to a story about the introduction of shame into human consciousness should find the absence of the word "shame" in v. 7 bothersome. They should also be perplexed at why disobeying God should produce the type of shame between male and female that calls for covering up of nakedness. A shame-focused plot would have them covering up themselves from God, not from each other. The issue at this moment, however, cannot be nakedness before God, since they only flee from God afterwards upon believing that they heard the sound of God. Since the eating of the tree itself does not make them shameful before God, there is no strict theological sin-shame linkage here. The objections against the explanatory power of the shame theory can also be adduced to counter the conscience theory.
What is the tree of knowledge if strictly speaking it is neither a tree of shame nor a tree of conscience? To get a handle on this question, it is preferable to see how it functions in the story rather than asking about its essential nature. Accordingly, it is necessary to compare the reality before the act of eating with that afterwards. The differences should help explain its significance.

Let us first focus on the events immediately following the act. When Adam first saw Eve, he so focused on similarities - "she is bone of my bones; flesh of my flesh" (2:23) - that he called her isha; (woman), which, in the popular etymology of assonance, is nothing more than ish; (man) with a feminine ending. As (wo)man is a prefixed man, so ishah; is a suffixed ish;. The consciousness of difference, however, now creates division, requiring a loincloth of fig leaves to mask what sets them apart. At that very moment, "They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day" (3:8). Whence the sound of motion, if hitherto God had not been identified by any physical dimension? Thus the presence of the phrase "the breezy time of day." By informing the reader that "the sound of God" is really the rustle of the wind, the reader is informed that they heard only what they thought was the sound of God. This introduction of irony makes the reader more knowledgeable than the heroes. As such, it plants the seeds of doubt about the reliability and judgment of the two. We are not surprised, hence, to find our guilt-ridden couple hiding in "the midst of the tree(s) of the garden" -- the very place of the crime!

The stage is set. God asks Adam, "Where are you?" (3:9). Although this double-barreled question possesses both geographical and psycho-moral coordinates, Adam retorts, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid" (3:10). This does not answer the question, "Where are you?" but rather, "Why are you hiding?" What could have been taken as an innocent geographical inquiry was taken as an accusation, so brittle is Adam's confidence. With regard to the content of Adam's response, we have to ask what he means by relating his fear to his nakedness. Had he not just covered himself? Apparently, the nakedness of Adam cannot be covered by clothes. Within nine (Hebrew) words, Adam's "I" reverberates self-consciously fourfold. Such are the contours of guilt: rustles become sounds of God and cover-ups leave the exposed naked and alone. Loincloth or no loincloth Adam felt naked, unmasked and vulnerable, condemned out of his own mouth. Giving Adam a second chance to own up, God asks whence he knows of his nakedness and whether he had eaten of the prohibited tree. Caught, Adam counterattacks by implicating both God and Eve together. It was "the woman You put at my side -- she gave me of the tree, and I ate" (3:12). Following suit, Eve also shifts the blame one level down, protesting, "The serpent enticed me, and I ate" (3:13). Both adopt a strategy of letting the perpetrator feign victim.

3. Expanded Interpretation
The differences in the human situation before and after the eating take on an added dimension by widening the frame to include all three opening chapters. [24] Before the transgression, humanity had been described as being created "in the image of God." In ancient Near Eastern literature, "the designation of the king as 'image of the god' serves to emphasize the godlike nature of the king in his ruling function and power." [25] In its biblical context, the designation of humanity as "the image of God," serves to emphasize their godlike nature in being able to function as rulers. [26] It is that which enables and authorizes them to fulfill the mandate to subjugate and bring under control the physical world. As such, they are called upon to assume heretofore exclusive divine prerogatives. Humanity's first step in assuming the divine mantle, in ch. 2, consists in categorizing creation through the giving of names. Adam speaks and names the animals just as God had spoken and designated the place and the function of the elements of creation. What was once an exclusive divine prerogative becomes Adam's way of exercising the divinely granted power of mastery.

After the sin, man and woman shrink from the majesty of rulers to the pitifulness of rebellious subjects squirming in the presence of authority. Those who stood unflinchingly before the divine charge now cringe in God's presence, shirking all responsibility. What accounts for this shrinkage, as it were, in human stature? They who were once the climax of creation now slink about as whimpering earthlings. Before the transgression, the original couple together constituted the divine image as well as the primordial earthling, ha-adam, who was apparently neither exclusively male nor female, as it says, "... in the image of God He created it, male and female He created them" (1:27 - emphasis added). The word for "it" is normally translated as "him," but that makes little sense since what is called ha-'adam is male and female and referred to as them. Part of the problem is the absence of the neutral "it" in Hebrew. The shift from "it" to "them" may be indicating the paradoxical nature of a potential plural within a singular. As such it functions proleptically: what is now "it" is to become "them." The "it" is thus best understood as "humankind" which subsequently underwent differentiation to become "them," as it says, "Male and female He created them, and He blessed them, and He called their name Adam on the day of their creation" (5:3). [27]

Although this reading is not without its difficulties [28] the advantage lies in assuming that female was as much a part of the original command as was male. This explains the woman's recapitulation of the original prohibition in the plural. With hindsight it verily was "we." It also explains why she does not exculpate herself under the pretext of not having heard the original prohibition. [29] Although the male -- being a male -- underscores his priority and sees the female as emerging from him -- This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken (2:23) -- there is no reason to identify the narrative with one of its characters, even that of the male. Once the verse is seen as the narrative's way of representing a male perspective, the argument that male must precede female to explain whence she was taken is rebutted. [30] The fact that man views woman as
his physical and etymological extension does not itself negate the position that
male and female are coeval in the primordial earthling, or that the image of male-
female creation provides a "minimal base for an anthropology of equality."

Such a non-sexist reading also coheres with the allocation of one side (tsela,
2:22) to what became her and the other to what became him as well as
with a birth model based on female parturition. It also helps account for the
designation of female as "counterpart" or as the "one corresponding to him."

The argument against the parity model - based on the translation of the female
designation as "helper" and the contention that her role is solely to help fulfill the
command of Gen. 1:28, "be fruitful and multiply," is inadequate on both
linguistic and literary grounds. First, it separates the ezer from ke-negdo.
Such a move is unwarranted, for together they form an idiom which can only be
illuminated by context as it lacks any biblical parallel. Second, to explain chs. 2
and 3 in their own terms and then complement it by reference to ch. 1, as I have
been doing, is one matter, since the final redaction took both into consideration;
to make the meaning of ch. 2, however, dependent totally upon ch. 1 is a
different matter, for it assumes that ch. 2 and 3 lack any self-referentiality. Ch. 2
explicitly states that the splitting of ha-adam comes to resolve the problem of
loneliness, a problem more likely to be resolved by a counterpart than by a
helper. This role for woman also matches the part she plays in ch. 3, a part that
resembles more that of male complement than that of helper in any subordinate
sense. The parity model as opposed to the subordination model is further
supported by the reference to the male as "her man/husband" (3:6).

Since the original human was one, the narrative promotes the idea of male-
female union as a restorative act. Nonetheless, it is the male who is charged with
overcoming the obstacle to their reunification. He is to leave "father and mother
and cling to his wife." With the umbilical cord severed, man may cleave to
woman to "become one flesh" (2:24). Marriage becomes the rite of passage that
makes the man. Note that sexuality is not a consequence of recognition of
difference, but of familiarity short of identicalness. The difference here consists
of a significant variation within similitude, for it is precisely the "tension
between the same and the different that creates sexuality."

For life to continue, the conjugal link must replace the filial bond.

After the sin, awareness of their differences induces man and woman to cover
themselves in the hope of achieving at least visual similarity. To no avail, the
cover-up fails and the distance between them continues to grow. True, they hide
together, but once found (out) they are on their own. Adam iterates "I, I, I, I,
without so much as a hint of "we. Man not only fingers woman in order to
exonerate himself, but the ingrave also accuses God of placing at his side a
Trojan horse. His feminine complement is no longer "bone of my bones and flesh
of my flesh," but "the woman." Instead of being a source of union, difference
becomes a source of division. What was once complement is now the other.
The absence of remorse of either party shuts the door on any possibility of pardon albeit leaving it ajar for retribution. The punishment widens further the gap between man and woman. What once made them one flesh will now underscore their differences both physically and emotionally. Child conceiving and childbearing become pregnant with pain.[39] At the greatest fulfillment of womanhood will be the greatest experience of pain. Tragically, it takes the pain of near-death to bring about life. Precisely in the act of establishing social immortality, the fragility -- and therefore nondivinity -- of human continuity is highlighted.

Alas, female desire now makes for male dominance, albeit conditionally, as we shall see. The new connubial situation raises questions about whether conjugality is potentially a stage for aggression. It also raises the issue of whether inequality is an erotic necessity. If so, the intimacy of two bodies fitting so perfectly together to exchange life could double as a form of conquest. Once being on top is seen as an expression of dominance, [40] becoming one flesh, according to one reading, can spark memories of origins, with man looking down at the earth and woman looking up at man. [41]

According to the popular etymology of assonance, man, 'adam, is a contraction of the term for earth, adamah. [42] whereas woman, ishah, is an extension of the term for male, ish. [43] If etymologically the trajectories behind the words for man and woman are moving in different directions, it should not be surprising to find a play on assonance used to indicate how often male and female are psychologically at cross purposes. It thus seeks to deal with the question why that which fits so well physically is so often at odds psychically. In doing so, the all-too-frequent failure of the union of flesh to cover up the division of minds is amplified.

Does this mean, as psychoanalysis claims, that as sexual relations are tinged with subjugation, so marriage is characterized by dominance-submission pacts? Apparently so, for in our case the covenant of trust is so broken that, in the subsequent cursed world, males need to establish control before entrusting themselves to females. In the light of the cycles of intergenerational conflict, sibling rivalries, and conjugal misunderstandings throughout Genesis, it may not be too farfetched to portray its understanding of marriage as a stage for the working out of these conflicting feelings. At any rate, it is clear that henceforth sex is never just sex, but an encounter between two people lugging their past right into their carnal encounter. Bodily fusion is insufficient to overcome psychic combat. To become physically united with him, Eve, of course, must absorb what Adam offers. But it is now quite unclear what is being offered. Such are the wages of love east of Eden.

What accounts for such comeuppance? Maybe there is a connection between Adam's irresponsible blaming of Eve and his subsequent dominance of her. After all, it is only after man emerges as a moral midget that female subservience is
called for. It is worth considering whether this link between moral smallness and the need for control is what makes male dominance dependent upon female subservience. Alternatively, the need for dominance becomes an erotic necessity because sex now displaces feelings of powerlessness at least as much as it previously displaced feelings of loneliness. To claim that Adam's unresolved anger at Eve for precipitating his expulsion from Eden is what prevents him from fully facing Eve as an equal is anachronistic. It assumes that the information derivative of 3:17 is available to explain 3:16, something impossible in a first reading. In any event, moral failure provides an etiology for sexual imposition.

At any rate, man now has an authority problem. Those who presume that woman was totally a new creation from male can assume that repetition of the divine prohibition on his part sufficed to secure her compliance. Those who assume, and I believe correctly, that both together made up the primordial human lack evidence for any hierarchy of command and compliance. Whatever the case may be, the maintenance of authority now involves power plays. Such is the gap that separates the divine vision of parity from the human machinations of domination.

The implications of sexual subservience are not all that clear, since Eve's relationship with Adam does not otherwise undergo major alteration. Before the transgression, Eve's prominence is illustrated by the fact that it was she who talked with the snake and she who made the decision to eat and share with the man beside her who seems to have been silently standing by all along. He just eats. The alibi that he ate unknowingly never stocks his arsenal of excuses. After the sin, she continues to maintain her prominence, as is pointedly illustrated by the ceremony of naming. As long as there was only ha-adam, it did the naming. Admittedly, the male names woman(2:23) and calls her Eve (3:20), as she cannot very well name herself. In the very next scene, however, where either could do the naming, it is Eve who names Cain and Abel (4:1) and subsequently Seth (4:25). The significance of this is evident from the fact that Genesis takes pains to note that Abraham named his sons Ishmael (16:15) and Isaac (21:3); that Isaac named Jacob (25:25), as underscored by the singular use of the verb; and that Jacob's wives named each of their sons, with Jacob adding only the name of Benjamin to his last son. Also with Judah and his wife, it is specified who named which son (38:4-5). As name-giver, Eve maintains her prominence.

Male sexual dominance does not seem to be easily transferable to other domains. Domination in sexual interaction is no guarantee for domination in social interaction. On the contrary, it may incite compensatory moves in the opposite direction. In this case, male sexual domination seems to be contingent upon female passion. As such, the copula waw that begins the verse, "wawyour passion shall be toward your husband, wawhe shall rule over you" (3:16), should be understood as introducing a protasis with the sense "if" just as it regularly introduces the apodosis with the sense of "then." This understanding would allow
the waw to indicate "as long as."[49] Thus, as long as she is the more passionate, he would rule, but were he to be, she would rule. Passion and manipulation are seen as sides of the same coin. The reversal of one engenders the reversal of the other. In short, the greater the desire, the greater the subservience.[50] Since woman has to overcome the pain of childbearing, her desire appears to outweigh man's, whose comparable experience lacks pain. Thus it can be said, in a type of measure for measure scheme, that she is subjugated initially for instigating the compromising of divine dominion.[51]

There is inadequate warrant for subsuming the total male-female situation under the terms of domination. Were the interest in the total situation, there would have been an observation indicating woman's inferiority rather than an exclusive focus on the issue of passion, and even that in the context of pregnancy and birth. Moreover, since subservience is presented in the context of punishment, it is not surprising to find, in what may be an inner biblical exposition of this theme, a time when mutuality replacing subservience is destined to be restored to its pristine glory. As the woman says in the Song of Songs, in the only extra-Genesis occurrence of the term for passion (teshuqah), "I am my beloved's, and his passion is for me" (7:11).[52] As at the beginning, the issue is passion and only passion.

As with woman, so man's punishment is increased toil, physical and mental. Only in painstaking labor can he eke out his daily bread from a now refractory ground that incessantly reminds him of both origin and end. The etymology that originally underscored commonality, 'adam from adamah, and ishah; from ish:, now points to difference. With the former, this difference will ultimately lead to death; with the latter, to pain -- life-giving pain that is.

The change is also reflected in the two uses of the expression "plants of the field," in Gen. 2:5 and 3:18. Its reappearance in Gen. 3:18 makes the point that what was to have been a divine-human endeavor in 2:5 has become a human burden. Henceforth, the struggle for life will be shot through with the consciousness of death. Life-sustaining acts of eating and life-giving acts of procreating will both be characterized by toil and pain. In their cultural context, both punishments underscore the gap between the human and the divine. That which was to have been divinely blissful is now a constant reminder of their mortal status. The confounding of expectation is again refracted through a measure for measure scheme. In sum, the disruption of the divinely created harmonies -- which embraced God and humanity, humanity and nature, male and female, humanity and the animal kingdom -- will signify the disharmonious world from the expulsion on.

4. The Meaning of the Story

Although there is little agreement on the precise meaning of the Eden episode, there is a general tendency to present the first act of disobedience as a necessary
development in the growth of humanity. Such a tendency is reflected in the theories that deem the theme to be one of sexual awakening, of transition from childhood to adulthood, or that of growth in human culture. Common to all of them is the assumption that the first couple had to sin in order to grow up. In this sense, all three theories are taken in by the linkage between phylogeny and ontogeny. The act of Adam and Eve, according to them, epitomizes what humanity had to undergo in order to come into its own maturity. These theories tend to point to the transition from nakedness to clothes as indicating the Rubicon over which humanity had to pass. This rite of passage, as it were, is for them so evocative of childhood that it dominates their whole reading.

Besides the problems of the overall reading, which will be dealt with later, each theory has its own difficulties. We shall start with the objections to the theme of sexual awakening and to the attendant idea that the knowledge gained was that of sexuality. First, the prohibition against eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (2:17) was mentioned before the event of gender differentiation (2:22) and therefore cannot be a result thereof. Second, male's awareness of the female as counterpart (2:23) precedes rather than succeeds the event of disobedience, as does the image of man and woman becoming one flesh (2:24); thus gender differentiation, as does prospective sexuality precedes the act of eating. Third, the punishment of increased pain in sexuality (3:16), implies experience of a less painful sexuality. Moreover, both times the expression "to know good and evil" appears, it is associated with divinity (3:5, 22) not with sexuality, indeed, a divinity without any reference to sexuality. In fact, had it been associated with sexuality it would have implied that sexuality had heretofore been banned. To argue that "the Divine command to abstain from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil is ... designed to preclude the human discovery of procreativity," not only lacks textual support, but goes against the grain of the images of male-female relationships in chs. 1 and 2 and the stated positive attitude to procreation that involves both commandment and blessing. Finally, there is the simple cultural assumption that man and woman together naked would act accordingly. All these considerations undermine the nexus between sin and sexuality.

Nonetheless, though not determinative of the narrative, sexual motifs, as noted since antiquity, do figure prominently in the background. Rather than focusing on the prominence of these motifs, however, it is more important to note how a background so fraught with potential sexual/fertility symbols ends up producing a foreground of such ethico-religious content. The sexual flow, as it were, has been channeled into the religious and moral furrows that determine the course of the narrative. This needs to be underscored since those who conflate antiquity and modernity through retrojection find it so difficult to shake off the sexual reading.

The thesis that the generative idea of the story is that of humanity rising from childhood to adulthood also has its difficulties. The overall evidence points more
in the direction of movement to puerility than to maturity. Note how, before eating from the tree, humanity receives and complies with the original command, classifies the animal kingdom, interprets their relationship correctly, realizes that loneliness cannot be resolved by identification with the animal kingdom and has the capacity to cultivate the earth. This is not the profile of an innocent nondiscerning being in the state of nature. On the contrary, it is only after eating of the tree that humanity adopts the juvenile behavior of fleeing authority, dissembling, and faulting all but themselves. If the model of human growth is applicable at all, it is more in the direction of regression to childhood than progress to adulthood. [57]

One effort to salvage the growth thesis contends that Eve loses her "childlike innocence" and "acquires the knowledge of things -- cultural knowledge." "In this way," it is argued, "Eve wrests knowledge from the realm of the divine, takes the first step toward culture, and transforms human existence." Besides the ambiguous nakedness issue, the evidence for this conclusion is that they "are now able to sew themselves loincloths out of the available fig leaves." [58] This reading supposes that the expression "the knowledge of good and evil" is a merism implying a knowledge of all things and therefore the knowledge of culture, and that the first act of culture is sewing. The same objections that were leveled against the "innocence to maturity" thesis surely apply here. In addition, this thesis is faced with the problem of the pertinence of God's declaration, "Now the human has become like one of us knowing good and bad" (3:22), a declaration that is quite oblivious to the alleged portentous implications of learning how to sew. It is hard to believe that anyone would consider the act of sewing of sufficient theological import to provoke such a comment, especially since the act elicits no comment of its own. Moreover, if the story wanted the making of clothes to symbolize techogony, it would not have them making clothes of leaves, and surely would not have the clothes they wear upon being sent out to the real world made by God. If techogony or human culture is an issue, it only becomes so at the end of ch. 4. If ch. 3 does anticipate ch. 4, it does so, as shall be discussed, on the religio-ethical level and not on the technological level.

The story is similarly trivialized by seeing its point as underscoring the gap between the human and the animal by explaining "why humans wear clothes as opposed to animals." "The statement that before eating the fruit the man and woman were naked and not embarrassed (2,25) stresses the affinity and proximity of humans to the animals" [59] lacks evidence. Indeed, chapter two not only underscores Adam's prominence over the animal kingdom but that their lack of affinity is what necessitates a second human to overcome the loneliness of the first.

Seeking to maintain the model of human growth, some propose that knowledge of evil is a prerequisite for moral growth. The assumption is that knowledge of evil is predicated upon the experience of sin, and since Eve had not yet sinned
she could have no knowledge of evil. This interpretation is subject to objections on both philosophical and literary grounds. On philosophical grounds, as Plato argued in the Republic, there is no necessity for moral knowledge to be predicated upon the experience of evil. One need not commit murder to know it to be wrong. On literary grounds, the narrative does not attest to any growth in moral knowledge on the part of Eve. Moreover, since the tree is that of the knowledge of good and evil, whatever applies to good necessarily applies to evil. If she were bereft of the knowledge of one, then so of the other.

But did she lack such knowledge? In actuality, before she ate Eve was capable of telling the serpent about the interdiction, who prohibited it, and the dire results. Now, if one knows what is wrong, the authority behind it, and the consequences, where is the deficiency in the knowledge of good and evil? In terms of the narrative, by desisting and complying with the divine command, she had been good; by transgressing it, she commits evil. Heretofore, her Creator's prohibition, along with the threat of death, had deterred her. Once the serpent undermines both, she unrestrainedly seeks her putative benefit.

Then what was Eve missing, and what did she hope to gain by eating of the tree? Apparently, knowing what is wrong, acknowledging its authority, and being cognizant of the sanctions were insufficient. What was missing was an explanation for the proscription. Were such an explanation forthcoming it would remove the arbitrariness of the command, but at the price of sacrificing its divine authority. If her understanding were to determine the status of the prohibition, she would become the arbiter of its rightness. As such she would be the cnr, i.e. the source of the knowledge of good and evil.[60] This was not to be so.

In the creation narrative, God makes the rules. Humanity can aspire to be vice regent but may not usurp the divine role of determining what is right and wrong. In the garden, divine authority is established precisely by what appears to be arbitrary. By eating from the tree, Eve changes the rules of the garden and becomes, if only momentarily, as God -- the arbiter of right and wrong. Not satisfied with the role of servant of the law, she aspires to be its master and maker. By becoming maker of the rules, divine authority is displaced by her own.

Note that godlikeness here is not depicted in terms of immortality [61] or omnipotence,[62] but in terms of knowing. Eve fails not because of her frailty or mortality, but because of her deficiency in knowing; not, mind you, of right and wrong, which she does know, but in realizing the consequences of her act. As the source of the knowledge of good and evil, God alone makes such distinctions.

Scripture is walking a tightrope. Although it grants to humanity the right, indeed the duty, to play God in the subduing of the physical universe along with the ruling and classification of the animal kingdom, it withholds this prerogative in the realm of right and wrong. In this realm, calculations are not reducible to human considerations.
It is precisely human mastery of the physical universe that makes it so tempting to extend control to the moral universe. Indeed, were it not for the Sabbath at the beginning of ch. 2 intervening between the mandate of executive power in the physical universe and the subsequent limitations in the moral universe, we would have all the makings of that pathology of power that has haunted human achievement down through the generations. The Sabbath, which serves as an armistice in the struggle with nature, and mortality, which serves as a check on human endeavor, together can serve as brakes on the tendency of human power to go amok. Without the Sabbath, there would be no experience of the restraint of power; without mortality, as Gen. 3:22 notes, there would be no cause for restraint.

This issue of immortality in the story is not at all clear. Three possibilities have garnered support: (1) humanity was originally intended to be immortal but lost it through disobedience; (2) humanity was mortal from the start, but could have gained immortality through ingestion of the tree of life; and (3) humanity's immortality was dependent upon a diet of the tree of life.

The first option follows those codices of *The Wisdom of Solomon* (2:23-24) that read:

God created man for incorruption/immortality

*(aphtharsia)*and made him in the image of his own eternity

*(aidiotã)*

but through the devil's envy death entered the world.

This reading, adopted by many moderns, sees human immortality as a correlate of the image of God.

The second possibility has been championed recently by Barr.[63] Among his arguments is the assumed cultural assumption of human mortality and the explicit explanation for the expulsion. Barr argues that the case for mortality like that of sexuality can be culturally assumed. Such an assumption is apparently based on the proposition that characters in a narrative resemble their readers unless otherwise noted. Although this literary assumption is probably generally true, it begs the question whether the first humans are meant to be like their readers. It is just as possible that the narrative aims to show how the first couple became like their readers. After all, much of the primeval narrative shows how the world created by God became the world as experienced by the reader. Barr's assumption of the sexuality of the first couple may be more valid precisely because of the many notices of male-female interaction, including the very rationale for constructing a distinct woman. Since there are no such notices with regard to mortality, nothing can be said on the subject based on cultural assumptions or reader expectations. Thus the reading of *The Wisdom of Solomon* (2:23) that correlates human immortality with the image of God may be as valid as the reverse.
Barr's explanation for the expulsion is also questionable since it overemphasizes the fear expressed in 3:22 that they may take of the tree of life and go on living forever. Even Barr concedes the availability of another explanation for the expulsion, namely, to fulfill the punishment mentioned in 3:17-19. Thus, just as 3:22 and 3:24 correspond to each other as problem and solution, so 3:19 corresponds to 3:23. By bracketing 3:20-21, which deal with other issues, there emerges an \textit{abab} structure with \( a = 19, b = 22, a = 23, b = 24 \). This structure shows, as the story now stands, that there are insufficient grounds for privileging one explanation for the expulsion over the other.

The question then is why was the path to living now forever blocked? Divine envy does not explain it.[64] The evidence of divine power over these squirming humans is so overwhelming that any thought of divine-human equality or competition as a motif may be dismissed. Moreover, it has already been noted twice that all the other trees may be eaten, so why not the tree of life? We are left with the aforementioned third explanation and the conclusion that living forever presents a threat it had not had as long as they had complied with the prohibition. According to 3:22, the threat rises now precisely because they do know good and evil. Had they not eaten of the tree of knowledge, there would be no necessity to keep them from eating of the tree of life. Believing that they can determine good and bad, immortality is withheld from them lest that motivation for submitting to divine authority be vitiated.

By expanding the frame forward to include ch. 4, it is clear that even without immortality there are few constraints. In the very next scene, Cain follows through on the logic of his parents' act. The narrative makes this point by structuring the episodes of parental disobedience and sibling murder along parallel lines. In both cases there is human willfulness, cover-up (by loincloth or by burial), and spurning of responsibility. Both begin with the identically formulated rhetorical question, "Where are/is?" (3:9, 4:9). In fact, when God queries Cain, He asks both "where?" and "what have you done?" (4:10) thereby conflating the previous "where?" to man and the "what is this you have done?" to woman. Both use the words "dominate" and "passion" in the second strophe of a verse (3:16b, 4:7b) in comparable ways.[65] This is all the more telling since the term for "passion" (\textit{teshuqah};) has only one other biblical witness, which, as noted above, may be playing on Gen. 3:9. The link between the two episodes is forged ever more tightly by having Cain's punishment (4:11) recall that of Adam (3:11), except for the noose being tightened one more hitch. For Adam, the earth could at least be coerced into yielding its strength, whereas for Cain it will remain cursedly closed. Both experience a diminution of the presence of God and both are driven from their place eastward.[66] By having the second evoke the first, the narrative warns the reader of the slippage between sins on the divine-human plane and those on the interhuman plane. When the religious sin between humanity and God is replayed on the moral plane, Adam and Eve inevitably beget a Cain.
If human beings believe that they can displace divine authority by laying claim to be knowers, in the sense of being the source of the knowledge of good and evil, they can fall prey to the belief that the measure of good and evil is human. As the multiplication of people, however, brings about the multiplication of standards, it becomes convenient to believe that what is good for one is good, and what is bad for one is bad. It is not difficult for the idea of moral autonomy to deteriorate into the excuses of a facile conscience. In a universe of morally autonomous individuals, there is the ever present danger that Cain will believe that the elimination of his competitor, even brother Abel, is warranted and therefore good.

Whatever time is needed for the rejection of divine authority to precipitate moral chaos, the narrative telescopes this process into one generation. For Genesis, this telescoping accentuates the idea that the social dimension of sin is, within a generation, moral breakdown. In a world devoid of divine authority, warns the narrative, the threat of fratricide ever crouches at the door.

**5. Tree, Serpent, and Eve**

With this construction of the story in mind, let us now return to the question of the meaning of the tree, serpent, and Eve on the assumption that our reading can be supported through a careful construing of the interplay among them. First the tree: frustrated by a story so fraught with ambiguity, many have turned to ancient literature in search of parallels. The search has been singularly unilluminating. Not only are trees of knowledge absent in the cognate literature, but even parallels to the tree of life are limited references to plants, food, and water which bestow immortality or at least eternal youth. Indeed, the closest verbal parallel is the biblical tree of life in Proverbs (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) and in the Septuagint of Isaiah (65:22). But even if there were a parallel to the tree of life, it would be of little help since that tree has been marginalized to the borders of the story (2:9 and 3:22) and is totally absent from the central scene of the drama. For the purposes of Scripture, it is not the tree of life that is front and center, but the tree of knowledge (3:3), which has no ancient parallel. Its meaning is thus a factor of its role in the narrative, which, as we shall see, is part of the verbal play that characterizes both "serpent" and "Eve."

What about the serpent? Here the problem is the reverse. Abounding in mythology, literature, and culture, serpents symbolize too much. Although polysemous symbols resist being bound to any single interpretation, it is unclear which, if any at all, of the interpretations based on ancient mythology can be worked into the literary structure without doing violence to the narrative. Those who see the serpent as a symbol of fertility or immortality should be surprised to find it associated first with the tree of knowledge of good and evil as opposed to the tree of life, and then with pangs of childbirth, expulsion from the life-giving waters of Eden, and ultimately death. Those who find in it a symbol of healing, as associated with the likes of Aesclepius, should be struck at its
capacity for precipitating the sicknesses of humanity. Those who perceive in it a symbol of wisdom should find it hard to believe that such a sapiential figure could induce such folly. Even its vaunted mantic qualities turn out to be disappointing. [70]

So many of the alleged associations for the serpent have been undermined by a reversal of expectations that many have given up on explaining the behavior of the serpent. [71] An alternative to explicating the symbolic valence of serpents and then applying it to the one in the story is to propose a construction of the story in which the presence of specifically a "serpent" becomes meaningful.

In order to arbitrate among the conflicting interpretations, it is necessary to focus on the given data rather than on some general theory for the role of serpents in mythology or culture. General theories tend to spawn conflicting interpretations without providing the means for resolution precisely because they lack anchorage in the text. Examples of such are theories about the meaning of the serpent that depend upon the symbolism of its shape. Such interpretations expatiate on how Eve was taken in by the serpentine reasoning that makes moral autonomy the most seductive of human blandishments. Although such twisted, as it were, arguments made palpable by the suggestiveness of the reptilian form do support the thrust of our reading, there is no indication that the shape of the serpent is the key to its presence. [72]

Since the issue is not the meaning of serpents in general, but the function of the serpent-image in the narrative, any interpretation has to account minimally for what is noted in the text. The narrative specifies three elements, namely, that the serpent is called nahash; is arum (shrewd), and talks. The choice of the term nahash; for serpent, from among its biblical alternatives, generates three biblically attested images: a poisonous snake, [73] a metaphor for venomous speech, [74] and by homonymy divination and bewitchment. [75] By coalescing all three in the context of the narrative, an image of the venomous words of the serpent bewitching Eve by claiming to divine her future can be conjured up. Such use of equivoques allows the disparate meanings of the term to become equally relevant. Deploying a homophone as well as a homograph for nude (arum) in the very next verse to identify the serpent as shrewd (arum) also links "nude" and "shrewd" both phonically and visually. In the actual reading experience the overlap is extended. When the term appears in the adjacent verse, it initially or retrospectively continues the "nude" valence. By recognizing a sound already echoing in his consciousness, the reader automatically links up the two. Prospectively, however, and even this only fully in the light of the subsequent functioning of the serpent, the mind settles on the meaning of "shrewd" for arum. It is only through such retroactive reading that the potential double meaning can be reduced to a single meaning. [76] Nonetheless, since prior to the emergence of the "shrewd" meaning the "nude" meaning was entertained, nudeness and shrewdness are interlocked in the mind of the reader. As in a palimpsest, erased meanings remain just below the surface.
This play of sound and sense prompts the thought that the serpent was called 
arum for engineering the realization of the significance of being arum.[77] Once
the association is made, the reader is not surprised to find that, upon realizing the
import of being nude, Adam and Eve become shrewd in their venal efforts to
shift blame.[78] This rhetorical phenomenon of playing with homonyms through
the use of more than one sense, both physically and lexically, to enrich the
reading experience has been astutely called "polysensuous polyvalency."[79]

A similar rhetorical phenomenon lies behind the third association which involves
an intricate play on Eve's name. According to Gen. 3:20, the woman is named
Havva ostensibly for being the progenitress of all living.[80] But if that were all,
she would have been named Hayya, i.e. life-bearer. What havva adds to hayya is
an allusion to the serpent, for in Aramaic and other cognate languages "serpent"
is hivya. [81] Since there has not yet been found a Semitic source for the word
havva;[82] it may be adjudged a neologism, created to stand phonologically
between hayya and hivya in order to encompass both. Such portmanteau-like
words are coined to telescope two terms into one by exploiting the overlap
between homonymy and synonymy.[83]

This understanding of the fusion of hivya and havva is reflected in the post-
biblical paronomastic Hebrew comment that "the serpent is Eve's serpent and
that Eve was Adam's serpent,"[84] which was taken to mean that "the serpent
was the Satan of Eve and Eve was the Satan of Adam."[85] Although capturing
superbly the biblical play on "Eve" and "serpent," the remark overextends the
conniving of the serpent to Eve vis-à-vis Adam. The text never says that the
tempted became the tempter. In fact, whereas Eve protests that she was duped,
Adam makes no such claim. In short, there was a seduction of Eve, but no
seduction by Eve.[86]

Nonetheless, these observations do provide the basis for an interpretation that
can capture the richness of the double entendre through the suggestion that the
serpent is Satan who is the evil impulse. [87] By identifying the serpent with
Satan[88] and Satan with the evil impulse, the struggle is introjected into the
interior life of Eve.[89] Although the identification with Satan is here
inappropriate and likely anachronistic, the identification with the evil impulse is
attractive. Such usage is paralleled in ancient Egyptian literature where "the
serpent ... may well represent the Egyptian's king's alter-ego."[90] More
importantly, it coheres with the observation in part two that sees the serpent in
terms of an extension of human character rather than totally at odds with it. Here,
the vehicle of the serpent achieves for us visually what the tenor of the evil
impulse does for us psychologically. Together, the beguiling quality of the evil
impulse can be imagined in all its stark reality. Once the metaphor works for the
reader, Eve's plight is liberated from the restraints of past history order to
adumbrate the future struggles of humanity.
With the wiles of the serpent serving as a metaphor for the connivance of the evil impulse, it becomes explicable why this ancient symbol for primeval chaos is used to instigate the chaos in the individual soul that occurs upon usurping divine authority. The source of the opposition to divine structure, to repeat, is not some primordial monster but the human arrogation of authority.

The standard objection against the interiorization of the serpent is that the serpent is actually cursed. That, however, occurs prior to its literary metamorphosis into the human drive for divinity. Until the woman is designated by the serpent-sounding *Havva*, the serpent is to be grasped in all its vivid animality. That is what gives it its punch. Only at the end, in a moment of self-revelation, does the reader realize she has been had. This movement of the serpent from ontology to psychology helps explains why, of the three, God does not demand of the serpent an accounting. A separate accounting by the serpent would preclude its passage from external to internal reality. It also explains the reason for the punishment being so closely linked to humanity, and the reason the curse is not pronounced on it alone but on the ongoing relationship between its descendants and that of humanity. Thus the role of the serpent is a function of its interaction with Eve.[91]

This reading strategy is predicated upon the integration of temporality into meaning. What a story means is dependent on "when" a story means. Since individual images appear on a temporal axis, they are conditioned first by what precedes them and then by what succeeds them. Narratives are not taken in all at once, rather they are articulated through the past, present, and future of the reading experience. New meaning is therefore constantly coming into being as old meaning recedes in the face of emerging meanings. Although final meanings do not exhaust the meaning of the reading experience, they surely have a privileged position in the meaning that accompanies the reader into the subsequent narrative.[92]

To compound, if not to enrich, matters, note that *havva* can also denote "speech," or "declare."[93] An allusion to speech in the word *havva* would make it possible to hear, as it were, a speaking serpent in her name. Such charactonyms reflect the correspondence between name and deed or theme. Aware now that serpent, speech, and woman as life-giver can converge in the same word, the reader is provoked to consider the linkage among them.[94] These interanimations, or interpenetrations, of a single term can spark the idea that the serpent is hypostatically Eve's other and that the scene is one of Eve struggling with her own susceptibilities. As is so often the case, protagonist and antagonist constitute two sides of the same coin.

The reader realizes all this only at the end upon hearing that the woman is to be called "Havva" (3:20) and not as expected "Hayya." The new name draws in the reader in two ways: the reversal of expectation piques the curiosity of the reader
to reflect on its significance, whereas its hybrid morphology stirs the reader to seek out an explanation.

This also underscores the significance of the timing or location of Gen. 3:20 on the naming of Havva. Since the verse does not flow from the preceding verse nor flow into the succeeding one, its absence would not be noticeable. In terms of content, it could just as easily have been placed near the end of ch. 2 where the female was designated "woman." The meaning of the verse is therefore as much a function of its timing or location as it is of its content. Had it appeared at the end of ch. 2, the subsequent association with the serpent would have been aborted. Coming near the end of the story, it necessarily functions as part of the climax. By reverberating with the sounds of "serpent" and "speech" the name causes the ears to tingle with past sounds. By blending both sounds, the demarcation between Havva and the serpent becomes blurred. It becomes fuzzy. Why, one would ask, was she almost called "serpent?" What actually happened back there? Was it a woman speaking to a serpent (Did you say a talking serpent?), to her namesake, or perhaps to herself?[95]

Through such questioning the reader becomes aware of being privy to a give-and-take resonating in the deepest recesses of Eve's being. Of course, only a reader attuned to the serpentine wiles of human presumptiveness will comprehend how much one has been presented with the workings of one's own inner life where so often the borders between protagonist and antagonist become blurred. Others less conscious of the multitudinous times they have pleaded innocent under the pretext of irresistible temptation will see only a snake. Seeing only an ancient tale, they will remain oblivious to having witnessed the first bout of the ongoing struggle between human willfulness and divine authority.

This reading would have the reader see him/herself in Eve. It thus contrasts drastically with all those readings that view the story as one of humanity growing up. The ramifications for the reading experience are significant. Those readings that focus on the first use of clothes engender an air of superiority in the reader. Such a stance prevents identification with the characters in the belief that whatever happened only to them, and even then only at the dawn of creation, indeed at the dawn of their maturation.

6. Conclusion

Reader-response theory is helpful in accounting for the process of understanding illustrated in this study by underscoring the role of the reader in the creation of meaning. Predicated upon the convergence of reader and text, reader-response theory holds that meaning is actualized through the reader's response. Upon transforming the textual signals into a coherent matrix the meaning of the story is constituted. Several such signals are transmitted through the paronomasias on the Hebrew words for "tree," "pain," "serpent," "nude," and "Eve," as well as those for "earthling" and "woman." Without an exegesis of assonance, an exegesis that
demands considerable reader involvement, many of the keys to the story's meaning would be missing. There is nothing like a pun for covering up complexity by the illusion of simplicity. Moreover, without the imagination of the reader and his or her self-understandings coming into play, the full significance of Havva's name would remain opaque and much of the meaning of the story unfathomed. By bringing to bear the full complement of meanings, the skeleton of the text becomes enfleshed while the reader's self-understanding grows through understanding a Havva who has been reconstituted in the mind of the reader. "This structure pinpoints the reciprocity between the constituting of meaning and the heightening of self-awareness which develops in the reading process ..."[96] Standing in the penumbra of Havva's shadow, the reader's shadow is cast over hers, for while dressing Havva psychologically the reader becomes undressed morally. The more the reader enrobes Havva in meaning the more she, as Adam, moves from historical prototype to moral and literary archetype.[97] The result is a story that is as much the reader's as it was theirs.

Notes

Introductory Note

The biblical translations follow the renderings of The Torah or those of Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses (New York: Schocken, 1995).

[Editors' Note: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek and Sumerian have been transliterated to conform with HTML format.]


[5] Carol Meyers links this representative nature of the character of Eve to the wisdom motif of the story, a motif often associated with women in the Bible. It
appears, however, that she overstates the case in saying, "It [Genesis] portrays the female rather than the male as the first human being to utter language, which is the utterly quintessential mark of human life" (Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context, [New York: Oxford University Press, 1988] 91). It is true that the female is the first and dominant speaker in chap. 3, but the male clearly has the first word in Gen. 2:23. As Mieke Bal notes, "If the woman is the first to be signified, the man is the first to speak" (Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories, [Bloomington: Indiana University, 1987] 116). Nonetheless, it may be significant to note that it is the presence of woman that renders speechless earthling into eloquent man.


[7] See the survey of recent interpretations by Terge Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2-3 Reconsidered," JSOT53 (1992): 3-26, 3f., n. 2. He categorized them as "religio-historical, social, psychoanalytical and feminist approaches, and several 'structuralist' and semiotic approaches."


[13] The difference between "Adam" and "man" will be explained below.

[14] Although 3:8 mentions God, man, and woman as does the next unit, it still belongs in this section because there is no new speaker and the subjects of the verbs remain man and woman except for the sound of God which, as will be shown, is ambiguous.

University Press, 1991). According to him, the question that the serpent "puts to the woman in 3:1 is a deliberate misstatement..." (63).


[18] Both translations of le-haskil are noted since either one commits the reader to some overall scheme. The "viewing" translation keeps the issue open. According to Nahum M. Sarna "The Targums as well as the Septuagint, Latin, and Syriac versions all derive the verb from the stem s-k-l, 'to see, contemplate'" (The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis[Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989] 25, line 6). He endnotes 1 Sam 18:14,15; Jer 10:21; 20:11; and 23:5 (355, n. 5). Howard N. Wallace, however, states that the ancient translations "are all too ambiguous... The words they use could mean simply 'to look at' but often carry connotations of understanding or perceiving with the mind" (The Eden Narrative, Harvard Semitic Monographs 32 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985] 140, n. 97. Those who understand the word in terms of wisdom, as do most commentators from at least Gen. Rab. (19:5) on, do so retrospectively in the light of their understanding of the point of eating from the tree. Thus wisdom-based interpretations should tread carefully.

[19] Bal's statement that it is God's "appearance, not nakedness itself that gives shame" (Lethal Love, 120), disregards the fact that the effort to cover up their nakedness precedes their awareness of the presence of God.


[21] Apparently noticing this discrepancy, the Ethiopic Book of Adam and Eve 1:36 has Adam answering, "O God, here am I. I hid myself among the fig trees..."

[22] Sarna's understanding of "I was naked" as "Another evasion of the truth" demonstrates the pitfalls of taking the figurative literally. This literalness is continued in his follow-up comment, "The statement itself voices the Israelite ethos that it is improper for man to appear naked before God" (Genesis, 26). Neither comment coheres with the flow of the narrative nor do they explain how Adam could possibly have thought that he could fob off God with a barefaced lie about something so blatant.

[23] Jonathan Magonet argues "that the primary significance of the Hebrew word arum 'nakedness' is not sexuality at all but a state of defencelessness and

[24] Among those who argue for the unity of the first three chapters are Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1-11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985) who stress the unity of the whole first eleven chapters. Gary Rendsburg sees the first three chapters as a single redactional unit (The Redaction of Genesis [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1986] 8). According to Bal, Genesis 1-2 form "one coherent creation story" whereas Genesis 3 "elaborate[s] laterally upon the implications of the other specification of Gen. 1:27: he created them to his likeness" (Lethal Love, 119). Sarna notes some seven "leading ideas in the earlier account [which] are here reiterated" (Genesis, 16). To this list add the concept of a divine-human partnership intimated in both 1:27-28 and 2:5. In the former they share ruling responsibilities, in the latter they share vegetation-growing responsibilities.


[27] There is no single way of accounting for all thirty-four 'adam occurrences in Gen 1-5. Deciding whether an occurrence is a generic expression for humanity, the male, or a personal name cannot be resolved by any single formula. Each case involves a judgment that is as much contextual as it is philological; see Richard S. Hess, "Splitting the Adam: the Usage of 'Adam in Genesis I-V,"" in Studies in the Pentateuch, ed. J. A. Emerton (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990), 1-15. It should be noted that the issue was already a cause céè among medieval commentators. In his Commentary to Genesis 2:5-7, Abravanel says, "Ibn Ezra stirred the world by saying that the definite article which precedes the word adam contains a secret. By this he means that if adam were a proper noun, the definite article could not be prefixed, and therefore adam should be understood as a noun designating the genus of mankind, rather than an individual. To this I answer that 'adam represents a single man and at the same time mankind as a whole, since there was no one else of his kind. This is why the definite article
was added" (translated by B. Netanyahu, Don Isaac Abravanel [Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1968] 301, n. 46).

[28] As it is presented by Trile, Rhetoric of Sexuality, it has been accused of being anachronistic or ahistorical for ignoring "the findings of historical biblical criticism," (Ilana Pardes, Countertraditions in the Bible: A Feminist Approach [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1992], 22). Trile would have been more historical, it is charged, had she considered the larger context of priestly writings or how different documents have been meshed together as does, for example, Bird in "Male and Female He Created Them." The decision to link chaps. 1 and 2 together or to link chap. 1 with later priestly writings in order to understand 1:27 is a question of literary framing. Since both moves are literary judgments, whether it be the issue of framing or the reading of its strands, it is unclear why one should be dubbed "historical" and the other "literary." In actuality, the debate is not about being historical versus being literary, but about two interpretive strategies whose differences are not resolvable on historical grounds alone without the introduction of literary considerations.

An illustration of the mixing of literary and historical analyses is the study of Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them." She says in n. 13, for example, that "the present form of the composition of Genesis 1 is the result of a complex history of growth, stages of which are apparent in the received text, but can no longer be isolated or fully reconstructed." She never clarifies how stages of growth in a text can be apparent but not be isolated. If the phenomenon is not isolatable, it is probably not apparent. In any event, no criterion is provided for either. She then goes on to say, "the framing structure ... belongs to the final editor and gives evidence of selection, shaping and expansion of older material. I am less certain about the recovery of the underlying tradition or of the relationship of ... Announcement to ... Execution Report." This assumes that she can distinguish between older and newer material. If so, then why is she "less certain about the recovery of the underlying tradition"? Again we have the claim of a historian to be able to get behind the literary text to its "preliterary" history without providing a single criterion for doing so. The same kind of unsupported claim underpins her conclusion. "I find it necessary, in any case, to posit a prehistory of Israelite usage; Genesis 1 is in my view neither a 'free' composition nor a direct response to any known Mesopotamian or Canaanite myth, despite clear evidence of polemical shaping." There is again no explanation of why she finds it necessary to posit such a prehistory nor why "polemical shaping" is not clear evidence of a response to ancient myth. The result is not a historical analysis, but a series of assertions in the guise of history that are simply literary judgments.

To make this point clear I will cite another example from one of the more technically competent diachronic analyses of Genesis three. Such analyses claim to solve the problems in the text by dividing the narrative into a creation story and a paradise story; see Westermann, Genesis 255-267. Our example states:(1)
The paradise materials, the portions remaining after separating out the creation story, are less coherent as a narrative. (2) Certainly at their heart is a tale about sin in the Garden of Eden and expulsion therefrom, but the exact parameters and content of this paradise story are difficult to isolate and define. (3) This is because it may have already been a complex story or tradition, containing varied themes, when the Yahwist took it up and joined it with the creation story. (4) The difficulty is also due to the weaving of paradise materials in the creation story ... and creation story motifs and references into the paradise materials .... (5) In addition to all this, the Yahwist appears to have elaborated the received traditions using yet other traditions or creative imaginations. (6) Such elaboration is evident in the link between the stories provided in 2,25. (7) The appearance of the snake as seducer, the appearance of the woman in the seduction scene, and the curses in 3, 14-19, to mention a few major elements, may also be part of this elaboration.

(8) While it is difficult to sort out the development of the paradise material in Genesis 2-3 ... (Wright, "Holiness, Sex and Death in the Garden of Eden," 326.)

This analysis is subject to all the above strictures and more. According to this author, source analysis can actually reduce coherence. He claims (1) that the paradise materials are less coherent as a narrative after the creation story has been separated out without providing any criterion for establishing or discerning such coherence. Next he claims (2) to know what is at the heart of the paradise materials without being able to isolate or define the exact parameters and content. Normally the function of the maneuver of claiming sources is to argue for a once simple coherent stratum. The assumption of original simplicity is a pervasive prejudice of source criticism. Here (3) instead, the author explains the difficulty of isolating the stratum because "it may have already been a complex story or tradition, containing varied themes" before it was joined with the creation story. It thus manifests the same literary complexity of the final story thereby bringing us back to base one. Moreover, he does not explain how one can know so easily what is at the heart of "a complex story or tradition, containing varied themes." The other reason he claims there is such difficulty in isolating and defining the paradise materials is (4) "due to the weaving of paradise materials in the creation story ... and creation story motifs and references into the paradise materials." Usually upon recognizing the inseparability of the alleged strands, one entertains the possibility of a synchronic reading. Instead, our author adds to these difficulties by asserting that the redactor (5) "elaborated the received traditions using yet other traditions or creative imagination." Now it is unclear how one can account for difficulties in a text by postulating multiple sources or traditions along with creative imagination. Resolving a problem by postulating another source is difficult once creative imagination is allowed to come into play, for creative imagination has the capacity to eliminate any remainder or parameters. The author is apparently aware of this paradox since when specifying the additions he only claims that (7) these "elements may also be part of this elaboration." Indeed, he goes on to concede (8) that "it is difficult to sort out the
development of the paradise material in Genesis 2-3." Again we have a series of assertions in the guise of tradition history that are simply literary judgments.

To claim a "historical" or "scientific" reading for one's literary judgment is a tactical move and should be recognized as such. The fact that this is rarely acknowledged witnesses to the broad acceptance of certain interpretive strategies, so much so that they have achieved a taken-for-granted status. But as Stanley Fish has repeatedly pointed out, "Interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading; they are the shape of reading, and because they are the shape of reading, they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as is usually presumed, arising from them" (Is There a Text in This Class? [Cambridge: Harvard University, 1980] 13). "Indeed," he continues, "it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features" (14). It would be worthwhile ascertaining how pervasive an interpretive strategy within the academic community has to be before its judgments are stamped "historical" or "scientific" in order to privilege them.


[31] Bird, ""Male and Female He Created Them,"" 151. See Bal, Lethal Love, 118.

[32] It is not clear what has driven translators to the word "rib." Its other occurrences are all translated as "side" including 1 Kgs 6:15-16 where banah again appears tsela. Gen. Rab. 8:1 and 17:6 note the rendering "side" as does Rashi ad loc. (see Menahem Kasher, Torah Shelemah 2:241, n. 275) Although the translation that S. R. Driver works with reads "rib," he nonetheless notes, "The woman is formed out of the man's side: hence it is the wife's natural duty to be at hand, ready at all times to be a 'help' to her husband" (The Book of Genesis [London: Methuen Co., 1907] 42, n. 21, emphasis added). Sarna says, "The rib taken from man's side thus connotes physical union and signifies that she is his
companion and partner, ever at his side" (Genesis, 22, n. 21). Both comments in underscoring the time factor ("ready at all times," "ever at his side") continue the male overreading of the meaning of woman emerging from the side of the earthling. Jubilees 3:6, which may be the earliest "rib" reading, makes no comment on its significance. Philo, more circumspectly, notes that the side indicates a half of a harmonious whole (Genesis, Questions, 1:25).

[33] Bal allows for the possibility that since woman "appears first...[i]t is ... [she] who changes the meaning of ha-adam from earth-being into earth-man. In this semiotic sense, the woman was first formed, then the man" (Lethal Love, 116). The Talmud (b Berakhot 61a) also asks the question of priority, but concedes the absence of scriptural evidence.

[34] ezer ke-negdo - (2:20). So Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11, A Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 227, citing Gunkel and Speiser. Meyers suggests "suitable counterpart" (Discovering Eve 85). Admittedly, these translations serve, as Lanser says, "to validate what are in fact interpretive choices, not necessities of the Hebrew text," ("Feminist" Criticism in the Garden," 81, n. 13) but this is so for much of the story. Indeed, few interpretational difficulties here can be resolved by the "necessities of the Hebrew text." Translations, willy-nilly, are forced to make sense in view of some general understanding. Given the frequently indeterminate nature of the Hebrew, its meaning is more likely to be resolved on literary grounds rather than solely on grammatical or linguistic ones. Often the more subtle the literature the more oblique the relationship between grammar and meaning.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the more egalitarian "counterpart" reading is not just a Zeitgeistphenomenon. It is anchored in ancient, medieval, and modern commentary. The Septuagint underscores the idea of suitability by translating boethon kat' auton (see Jubilees 3:5a). Philo sees the idiom as referring to partnership (Gen, Questions, 1:17, see his use of koinwnia in 1:29) and uses the analogy of the lover as "another self." Commenting on 2:20, he uses the expression "a helper like himself," which he interprets to mean "a succorer and co-operator ... showing complete similarity in body and soul" (ibid. 1:23). Peshitta translates akhutah, Targum Yer. translates bedanfiq bei bar zug, and Targum Neof. translates zug kad nefaq bai i.e, a partner like himself. Kimhi and Hizkunni, ad loc., both underscore the element of equality in the idiom. The former uses the expression shavah bebiyah, and the latter the expression kenegdo min hadomeh lo betselem demut veriqamah. Westermann sees 2:20 as reinforcing the point of 1:27. On 1:27b he comments, "Humanity exists in community, as one beside the other, and there can only be anything like humanity and human relations where the human species exists in twos" (Genesis 1-11, 160), whereas on the literary form of chapter two he states the following as the "real meaning" of "the narrative as a whole (Geschehensbogen)... From beginning to end it is a question of the creation of humankind which is only complete when the man is given a companion who corresponds to him in the
woman. The creation of woman completes the creation of humankind" (Genesis 1-11, 192).

[35] Pace David J. A. Clines who argues that ezer "helper" points "to a secondary, subordinate position" (What Does Eve Do to Help? and other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament, JSOT up 94 [1990]: 25-48, 32). Following Ambrose and Augustine, he objects to any interpretation that smacks of parity. By opposing his former belief in the egalitarian reading, Clines shrewdly reverses the Pauline rhetoric of ingratiating from former persecutor to present believer.


[37] Meyers sees this as further evidence of the parity model: "Only in marriage are male and female complementary parts of the whole, for the parent-child relationship is an intrinsically hierarchical one in a way that the wife-husband one is not" (Discovering Eve, 86).

[38] Trible's description of the narrative as "A Love Story Gone Awry" has its problems. In an effort to underscore that woman was present in the original earthling as much as man, she asserts that the woman speaks and acts for them both. As shown, this point can be made without overemphasizing the pristine harmony, just as the discrepancies between the original prohibition and the woman's recapitulation can be accounted for without assuming that she speaks and acts for them both.


[42] Based on Quintilian's linking of the Latin homo and humus (Institutes 1.5.34), the English equivalent would be to dub Adam a humanoid. For other such suggestions, see Tikva Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddess: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth (New York: The Free Press, 1992) 249-50, n. 4.

[43] These two explicit wordplays alert the reader to be on the lookout for other wordplays; see infra. David Carr, "The Politics of Textual Subversion: A Diachronic Perspective on the Garden of Eden Story," JBL 112 (1993): 577-95, sees these two wordplays as pivots around which much of the story revolves, see 579-80, 584-5.
This discussion, which is informed by the work of Avodah K. Offit, The Sexual Self (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1983), is well aware of the dangers of such analysis being subject to the charge of retrojection. Nonetheless, since it is rare that scholarly analyses of the Adam-Eve relationship are not informed somehow by the psychological assumptions of the writer, it is better to state them explicitly rather than inserting them surreptitiously in the course of the discussion.

Nonetheless, Trible's emphasis on woman "becoming a slave" (Rhetoric of Sexuality, 128) serves her contemporary polemic more than her biblical exegesis.

Pardes sees this as representing the pinnacle of Eve's position. Indeed, she dedicates the third chapter of MDUL Countertraditions in the Bible MDNM to "The Politics of Maternal Naming."

George W. Ramsey's critique of Trible ("Is Name-Giving as Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" CBQ 50 [1988]: 24-35, 29) and that of Lanser ("[Feminist] Criticism in the Garden," 72-3) agree that calling is equivalent to naming, but cannot agree on the import of either. According to Lanser, they both imply mastery, thus the naming of female by male implies domination. According to Ramsey, naming does not determine what an entity should be nor extend any control, rather it "results from events which have occurred" (34) and is simply "an act of discernment" (35) of what is. If Lanser is right and naming implies mastery, then the sign of mastery shifts here from the Adam to Eve. If Ramsey is right and the act of naming is politically insignificant, then who names whom establishes no hierarchy. It is thus safer to use the term "prominence" not "dominance" with regard to the namer.

Thus the argument of Schmitt ("Like Eve, Like Adam," 2-4) that the husband does not function as ruler in Genesis is not counter evidence.

Every translator has to struggle with the force of the copula waw. Since knowledge of philology and syntax will not suffice, translations follow the overall sense of what is involved, as in the rendering of waw as "yet" (NJPS, NRSV, NAB); see Meyers, Discovering Eve, 96-7. Walter Vogels, "The Power Struggle between Man and Woman," Biblica 77 (1996) suggests translating "on the one hand... but on the other hand" (203).

Thus Trible and Bal's readings can be maintained without their contortions of Gen 3:16, pace Lanser, ("[Feminist] Criticism in the Garden," 75.

Lanser faults both Bal's and Trible's readings, saying, "For finally neither can explain why male dominance should be the particular consequence of a transgression for which both man and woman are equally, as they argue, responsible" ("[Feminist] Criticism in the Garden," 75). Although both, as she says, are blameworthy, the woman still bears primary responsibility for initiating

[52] For the speculations that the Song of Songs is an exposition of the Eden narrative, see Trible, Rhetoric of Sexuality, 144-65.


[54] Dragga, "Genesis 2-3," 5. He goes on to argue that the first couple become "creators themselves" by multiplying, but fails to cite any evidence in the text for his thesis that human procreation constitutes a threat to the divine. Dragga's thesis illustrates the pitfalls of importing ancient Near Eastern motifs without considering their appropriateness for the biblical narrative. The fact is, as Frymer-Kensky has noted, "Unlike Mesopotamia, Israel is never concerned with the danger of overpopulation" (In the Wake of the Goddesses, 97).


[57] Thus there is no basis for the description of the human couple as, "the naive children [who] have passed through rebellious adolescence, emerging as responsible adults" (Dragga, "Genesis 2-3," 11). U. Cassuto's extension of such a modernist reading has even less to say for it. He writes that Adam, "did not want to remain in the state of a child under the supervision of his father and always dependent upon him, but wanted to know on his own the world around him and to act independently on the basis of this knowledge" (From Adam to Noah, [Hebrew] [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1959] 74). The reverse tactic is taken by E. A. Speiser who argues that after the eating God "speaks to him as a father would do to his child: 'Where are you?' in order to evoke "the childhood of mankind itself" (Genesis, AB, [New York: Doubleday, 1964] 25). More recent readings of the story as one of maturing include Susan Niditch, Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation, (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) 30-31; Burns, "Dream Form in Genesis 2.4b-3.24," 3-14; and E. J. van Wolde, A Semiotic Analysis of Genesis 2-3: A Semiotic Theory and Method of Analysis Applied to

[58] Frymer-Kensky, In the Wake of the Goddesses, 109. Strangely enough, the same author later states that it is the "thirst for knowledge and divinity that makes her listen" (209) to the serpent. Even this statement would be more cogent were "knowledge and divinity" a hendiadys.


[60] The expression "to know good and evil" is another one of those expressions that remain indeterminate based on philological and syntactical analysis alone. Any understanding is predicated on a grasp of the overall meaning of the narrative, as is evident from the various options that have garnered support; see Westermann, Genesis 1-11, 242-5; and Bal, Lethal Love, 122-3. The closest parallel to our use is that of 2 Sam 14:17 where David is compared to an angel of God because of his capacity "to discern good and evil." For a comparative analysis of the term as an expression of authority with a conclusion that the theme here is the usurpation of divine authority, see W. Malcolm Clark "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of `Good and Evil in Genesis 2-3," JBL 88 (1969): 266-78, 277-8.

[61] There is no basis for Bal's assertion that the humans were tricked "into renouncing the childish fantasy of individual immortality" (Lethal Love, 124).

[62] Pace Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer 13, that "becoming like God" implies the power to create and destroy worlds as well as to slay and resurrect.


[64] For the claim that it does see the literature cited by Wright, "Holiness, Sex, and Death in the Garden of Eden," p. 319, n. 42.

[65]

3: 16 ve-el isheikh; teshuqateikh; ve-hu yimshol; bakh
4: 7 ve-eilayikh teshuqato; ve-ata tishmal; bo

[66] For a listing of most of these similarities, see Michael Fishbane, Text and Texture: Close Reading of Selected Biblical Texts (New York: Schocken, 1979) 26-7.


[70] See Joines, "The Serpent in Gen. 3," 4-7. As the above analysis shows, it is misleading to aver that "the `wise' snake turns out to be more right than God... about the knowledge that would come with eating the fruit" (Carr, "The Politics of Textual Subversion," 590).

[71] Thus B. Vawter states, "No explanation is given why the serpent chose to interfere in the affairs of men or to assist in the disruption of good relations between God and man ... The serpent remains as a consequence the symbol of an unexplained source of mischief and wrong for which no accounting is given" (Genesis: A New Reading [New York: Doubleday, 1977] 81). Trible also underscores her inability to explain the snake saying, "The motives of this animal are obscure ... he is a literary tool used to pose the issue of life and death, and not a character of equal stress. A villain in portrayal, he is a device in plot. The ambiguity of his depiction highlights the complicated dimensions of his nature without explaining or resolving them" (Rhetoric of Sexuality, 111). Calum Carmichael says, "Why, we might ask, must the serpent be given a role at all?" and answers "To depict the mystery of human curiosity whose origin is beyond comprehension." He then goes on to explain, "That the serpent is specifically chosen probably reflects the use of reversal in the construction of the story -- the serpent, perceived as the lowest of creatures, is chosen to depict the creature originally enjoying a status halfway between God and humankind -- rather than perhaps any influence from Near Eastern mythology" ("The Paradise Myth: Interpreting without Jewish and Christian Spectacles," in A Walk in the Garden, 47-63, 61 n. 9). Meyer's reduction of the snake, to "the etiological workings of the human mind" (Discovering Eve, 88) also promises much, but explains little.

[72] There is also no basis for the contention that "the movement of the serpent ... is intended to convey the mystery of sexual attraction" (quoted by Carmichael, "The Paradise Myth," 62, n. 20). On the whole issue of the serpent's physical characteristics, see Karen R. Joines, Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament (Haddonfield, NJ: Haddonfield House, 1974). A similar lack of textual support characterizes Bal's suggestion that "the serpent with its double-tongue, evolving into the dragon with its flaming tongues, may be read as the same creature as the cherubim with flaming sword of Gen. 3:24. It has similar features and similar function" (Lethal Love, 124). Although her comment could be applied to The Apocalypse of Abraham 23:7 ( The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. J. Charlesworth, 1:700), it has no basis in the biblical story.

[73] E.g. Jer. 8:17.

[74] As it says, "They sharpen their tongues like serpents; spider's poison is on their lips" (Ps. 140:4), see also Ps. 48:5 and Isa. 14:29.

[76] Resolving the problem in the reverse order, Targum Ps. Jonathan translates in both cases hakhim.


[78] In the Talmud (y Qiddushin 4:1, 65c) "the act of the serpent" (ma'aseh hivi) becomes a metaphor for deception.

[79] Shalom Paul, "Polysensuous Polyvalency in Poetic Parallelism," "Sharei Talmon": Studies in the Bible, Qumran, and the Ancient Near East Presented to Shemaryahu Talmon, eds. M. Fishbane and E. Tov (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1992) 147-163, 148-9. He cites the following definition of R. Gordis for its Arabic equivalent, the talhin, "In talhin the author's choice of a particular word instead of its synonym is dictated by his desire to suggest both meanings simultaneously to the reader. The one serves as the primary or dominant meaning and the other as the secondary concept, thus enriching the thought or emotion of the reader" (148, n. 7). See idem, Amos (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991) 64, n. 220. For some of the other paronomasias in Genesis, see A. Guillaume, "Paranomasia in the Old Testament," JSS 9 (1964): 282-90; Herbert Marks, "Biblical Naming and Poetic Etymology," JBL 114 (1995): 21-42, esp. 21, n. 1; and 23, n.4.

[80] Bal's statement that through this name "Eve is imprisoned in motherhood" (Lethal Love, 128) verges on being a projection of mother hatred, or, to put it more delicately, "Bal both mystifies the power of proper names and exaggerates the restrictive nature of Eve's motherhood" (Pardes, Countertraditions in the Bible, 41). More in tune with the biblical perspective is Bird's comment that sees "sexual reproduction as blessing ... It is God's gift and it serves God's purpose in creation by giving to humans the power and the responsibility to participate in the process of continuing creation by which the species is perpetuated" ("Male and Female He Created Them," 157).

[81] See Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 150; and especially Targum Onqelos and Targum Ps.-Jonathan to Gen. 3:1. Sarna notes that "In the Sfire inscription (1.A.31), the word for serpent is actually written "hvvh" (The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis, 29). The same bilingual punnings on "serpent" are found in 1 Kgs 4:13 as well as in Josh 9:7, 15, 20, and 21; see Moshe Garsiel, Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns(Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1991) 71, and 222. On punning in general, see Garsiel's whole book and Gary A. Rendsburg, "Bilingual Word Play in the Bible," VT 38 (1988) 354-357. On specifically unflattering examples of such literary etymology, see William W. Hallo, "$\text{Scurrilous Etymologies,}$" in Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom, ed. D. Wright et al., 767-776. With regard to the nature
of the vocabulary of 2:4b-3:24, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, The Pentateuch: An
Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1992)
65.

[82] See Wallace, The Eden Narrative, 147-50; and Scott C. Layton, "Remarks

[83] Had Layton, ibid. 29, appreciated this literary phenomenon he would, as he
says, still be intrigued by "the similarity between the woman's name and Old
Aramaic hwh, 'serpent'." Moreover, he would be able to meet his own objection
that "the same three consonants in the biblical name and in Old Aramaic hwh,
the two terms, the biblical PN hawwa and old Aramaic, hiwwa, are
phonologically different."


[85] Midr. Tanhuma, ed. S. Buber, Introduction 78b; see the Apocalypse The
Life of Adam and Eve 21:5 (The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, ed. J.
Charlesworth, 2:281).

[86] As 1 Timothy makes explicit, saying, "Adam was not deceived, but the
woman was deceived" (2:14); see Jean Higgins, "The Myth of Eve: Temptress,"

[87] Zohar (I, 35b), based on bBabba Batra 16a.

[88] As do Wis. Sol. 2:24; 2 Enoch 31; 3 Apoc. Var. 4:8; Rev. 12:9, 20:2. For a
survey of the role of Satan or the devil in the history of interpretation of the story,
see Winston, The Wisdom of Solomon 121f.

[89] Which is not the case if the serpent is only the instrument of Satan (pace
Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer 13).

[90] Betsy M. Bryan, "The Hero of the 'Shipwrecked Sailor," Serapis 5 (1979) 3-
13, 3. Reference courtesy of Professor Gary Rendsburg of Cornell University.

[91] As is the ass of Balaam in the case of the other biblical talking animal.
Literally, their roles overlap. Both Balaam and ass are confronted by a choice
between two masters, one divine and one human. The ass, seeing that the angel
"had stationed himself on a spot so narrow that there was no room to maneuver
right or left" (Num. 22:26), sits down, incurring Balaam's blows three times.
Balaam, however, believing there is room to maneuver, tries to serve both
masters incurring the wrath of both: that of God for circumventing Him, and that
of Balak for countermanding him three times. The irony of the situation is
underscored in Balak's rebuke: "I was going to reward you richly, but the Lord
has denied you the reward" (24:ll). In the end, Balaam is rebuked both by his ass
for having beaten him "these three times" (22:28) and by Balak for having blessed Israel "these three times" (24:10). In sum, Balaam is to Balak as the ass is to him except the ass is a better seer.


[94] As he would upon noting the triple play on "tree," "pain," and "birthpangs" (ets, etsev and etsavon). Cassuto (From Adam to Noah, 109-10) argued that this unusual term for the pangs of childbirth was deliberately chosen to link up the tree with its ultimate fruit, the pain and pangs. Similarly, the term etsavon is used for both her pangs (3:16) and his toil (3:18). For other such biblical triple puns, see Isaiah 14 with Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry (New York: Basic Books, 1985) 147.

[95] See Abarbanel, Commentary on the Torah 1:102-103. In fact, a version of the Jerusalem Targum actually translates Gen 3:20 as "And Adam called the name of his wife hiyyaya, snake." See Kasher, Torah Shelemah 24:214.


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