

On the Cusp of Christianity: Virgin Sacrifice in Pseudo-Philo and Amos Oz

Yael S. Feldman

It has been our mortal shame that only Christian scholars have concerned themselves with our own ancestral heritage of the end of the Second Temple and the beginning of the post-Destruction period. By this book the shame is somewhat alleviated. Yet in this time of revival the Jewish people must return to their ancient possessions and build a new life on the national-humanistic ideals that earlier generations had bequeathed to it.

Joseph Klausner, 1921–26

Rightly is thy name called Seila, that thou shouldest be offered for a sacrifice . . .

The Biblical Antiquities of Philo

She'ula, they called after her, for Pitda is *she'ula* to the Lord, a bride of blood.

Amos Oz, 1966

BREACHING THE CANON: "WILD MAN" AND PSEUDO-PHILO

OVER A CENTURY has passed since the modern rediscovery of the intertestamental *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, or *The Book of Biblical Antiquities*, known mostly as Pseudo-Philo.¹ The vicissitudes of this fascinating text, both in the last century and the preceding two millennia, have been often told from the time it was first introduced by Leopold Cohn in his pioneer-

1. Named so in modern scholarship because, though anonymous, it had been erroneously attributed to Philo of Alexandria. In this article I will refer to the *Biblical Antiquities* as Pseudo-Philo, referring in all cases to the work, not to the anonymous author.

ing essay "An Apocryphal Work Ascribed to Philo of Alexandria," published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* in 1898.² Despite some disagreement, there is currently a scholarly consensus that this text dates from the first or second century, and that it falls into the category of the "rewritten Bibles"—such as *The Book of Jubilees* and the *Genesis Apocryphon*—yet with a strong ancient, pre-rabbinic, midrashic streak.³

While studies of this text flourished in Western languages, it had little impact on Hebrew culture. Like most intertestamental literature, it remained on the periphery of the Hebrew Renaissance, as Joseph Klausner's early plea above bears witness.⁴ Even after the publication of Artom's Hebrew translation in 1967,⁵ it continued to sit on the sideline in Israeli education and popular consumption, while only academics occasionally mined it for the curious flourishes of its rewriting.⁶

Against this background, it may sound odd to suggest that Pseudo-Philo had a significant impact—heretofore unacknowledged—on a major Israeli author, in fact, one of Israel's most canonical writers, Amos Oz (né Klausner!). To complicate matters, the story in question, "Ish Pere'" (Wild Man), had been published in 1966—a full year before Artom's *Sefer kadmoniyot ha-mikra'* appeared in print.⁷ As we will see, the young Oz had fortuitously stumbled on a Hebrew rendition of a fragment of

2. For recent scholarship, see Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum with Latin Text and English Translation*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1996). My epigraph is cited, however, from the first English translation by M. R. James (London, 1917), in its republication by Ktav, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York, 1971), with an extensive prolegomenon by the editor, Louis Feldman.

3. For the later dating argument, see Alexander Zeron's Ph.D. dissertation, "Shitato shel ba'al kadmoniyot ha-mikra'" (Tel Aviv University, 1973), in which Zeron argued inter alia for a longer span of dating ("after the Destruction, and perhaps after the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, but before the 8th Century," 45–54), and hence for a closer relationship with rabbinic midrash.

4. *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, "General Note" to part 2, "The Books of the Apocrypha and Pseudoepigrapha," signed 1921–26 (p. 153 of the Hebrew original [Jerusalem, 1927], and p. 247 of the English translation by W. F. Stinespring [London, 1956]). My translation is somewhat modified, however. All translations from the Hebrew are mine unless otherwise stated.

5. E. S. Hartom, *Sefer kadmoniyot ha-mikra'* (Tel Aviv, 1967). Remarkably, *Biblical Antiquities* is not included in the entry "Apocrypha" in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, although by the time of its publication *Biblical Antiquities* had been already compared to *Jubilees* and other apocryphal books.

6. Such as the exotic adventures of Kenaz, an otherwise rather obscure biblical figure (talks with Yaira Amit, Yaakov Elboym, Avigdor Shin'an).

7. Amos Oz, "Ish Pere'," *Kesbet* 9.1 (Fall 1966): 86–104.

Pseudo-Philo, though he clearly had no idea about its provenance, as it had been published without any attribution.⁸ Obviously, Oz was unaware of the problematically marginal source of the text. It is also questionable whether he knew of his great uncle's call, four decades earlier, for renewed interest in intertestamental literature. Yet I would argue that it was precisely the marginality, or perhaps liminality, of this text that offered him a different vantage point, an "extraneous" perspective, from which he could reenvision and intertwine the two troubling sacrificial narratives of the Hebraic (and Jewish, and Zionist) canons: the Akedah, or Binding of Isaac, and the sacrifice of Jephthah's nameless daughter.

True, to the modern mind there is nothing unusual in the coupling of these two narratives, seemingly woven with the same mythical yarn (and this despite the obvious differences between them, as Søren Kierkegaard famously reminded us in *Fear and Trembling*).⁹ Yet I daresay that this perception represents a Christian tradition, which is quite different from the Judaic one. My emphasis is on "tradition," since in *contemporary* culture the linking of the two sacrificial narratives is commonplace¹⁰ (with the exception of Derrida's essay, *The Gift of Death*,¹¹ to which we will later return).

My argument, then, is that by weaving these two stories together Oz breached the Hebraic canon. Moreover, by doing this in 1966 he also unobtrusively anticipated both the feminist critique of the Jephthah story and the Israeli psycho-political assault on the Akedah, commonly blamed on the 1967–73 wars. Most importantly, I propose that the particular amalgam created by Oz was greatly facilitated by one of Pseudo-Philo's celebrated narrative extravagancies: its magnification of the role of Jephthah's daughter (among other women characters),¹² *who is named here for*

8. *Nashim ba-tanakh* (Women of the Bible), compiled and edited by Israel Zmora (Tel Aviv, 1964), 94.

9. Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton, N.J., [1941] 1970), 68–69.

10. To name just a few examples: Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry* (Chicago, 1988), 109–13; Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, Conn., 1993); Alicia Ostriker, "Jephthah's Daughter: A Lament," *Cross-Currents* (Summer 2001). My thanks to Alicia for many inspiring conversations.

11. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. D. Wills (Chicago, [1992] 1995).

12. Since the late 1980s, scholars have explored in detail the special attention that the author of Pseudo-Philo had lavished on his female characters. Pieter W. Van der Horst even suggested that the book could not have been written by a male author! See his "Deborah and Seila in Ps-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*," *Messiah and Christos: Studies in the Jewish Origins of Christianity*, ed. I.

the first time, and who daringly identifies herself—consciously and enthusiastically—with the sacrificed (rather than bound) Isaac.

Before I unfold my three-tiered argument, however, the first question to ask is why is this story the least-known short fiction in the corpus of this masterful craftsman?

Well, technically, “Ish Pere’ ” is available only in its 1966 journal publication, which appeared closely after Oz’s first collection of stories and apparently got totally eclipsed by the debut of the young author.¹³ At that time, it must have confronted its readers with a sense of foreignness, both thematically and stylistically. Unlike most literary protagonists of the time, the wild man of the title of this story is not a contemporary Israeli but rather Jephthah, the infamous biblical judge who in less than two taut chapters succeeded in delivering the Israelites from the oppressive Ammonites but also committed two heinous crimes: the sacrifice of his nameless daughter, and the slaughter of some 42,000 hapless Ephraimites who could not distinguish between the sounds ‘Sh’ and ‘S’—a historical irony to be revisited in the final section below. Moreover, the title of the story points to an even earlier archetype, Ishmael—the wild man of the patriarchal sagas, the *ish pere’* of Genesis—thereby signaling a generic choice, the homiletic/midrashic mode, that felt quite out of place, certainly unexpected from a young Israeli author. Moreover, though centered on Jephthah, this story in fact attempts a synthesis of the major fraternal and filial dynamics that run through the family sagas from Genesis through Judges and while so doing totally reinterprets them in ways that seem alien to mainstream Judaism.

That this choice was no coincidence became clear only a decade later, when the story was expanded, given a new title, and republished as the closure of the second edition of *Artot ha-tan*.¹⁴ The new title, “‘Al ha’adamah ha-ra’ah ha-zo’t” (Upon This Evil Earth), reflects a deliberate effort at creating a mythological palimpsest by superimposing on Jephthah and Ishmael an even more primordial figure, Cain. Cain is of course the first in a line of *unfavored* biblical siblings, the one whose sacrifice resulted in fratricide, which in some traditions marked as “evil” the earth/ground on which human history was doomed to unfold. As we will see, the new title provides a clue to additional intertestamental sources, thus far unidentified, that have apparently inspired Oz’s “midrash.”

Gruenwald, S. Shaked, and G. Stroumsa (Tübingen, 1992), 111–17. Cf. Cheryl Anne Brown, *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women* (Louisville, Ky., 1992).

13. Oz, *Artot ha-tan* (Tel Aviv, 1966).

14. Oz, *Artot ha-tan* (Tel Aviv, 1976), 200–43; *Where the Jackals Howl*; trans. N. de Lange (New York, 1981), 168–217.

It was in this later guise that the story drew some critical attention. Of the few reviewers, however, just two mentioned in passing its “foreignness,” cautiously touching on its “messianic delusions” (Porat) or “Christian martyrdom” (Weiss).¹⁵ Yet neither has analyzed the sources or the implications of this “foreignness,” nor has anyone considered its meaning in the context of its original composition, namely, Israel of the 1960s. For between the publication dates of the two versions of the story, 1966 and 1976, Israeli cultural climate was considerably transformed.¹⁶ This is particularly true for the public and literary Israeli discourse on *national sacrifice*. Any ideas that were taken for granted at the later date would not have been so a decade earlier.

To my mind, therefore, Oz’s early story is a subversive midrash on sacrifice, past and present. Furthermore, this subversion is constructed via several previously unacknowledged intertexts—biblical, intertestamental, and modern—that facilitate the author’s own startling take on sacrifice. In the following pages I offer an analysis of these intertexts, which include not only the liminal rewriting by Pseudo-Philo but also the seditious teachings of the Gnostic sect known as “the Cainites,” those who are believed to have produced the recently “discovered” (and much publicized) “Gospel according to Judas.”

My reading, informed by recent debates on the ethics and gender of human sacrifice in both pagan mythology and the Judeo-Christian tradition, ultimately compels us to rethink some of the assumptions of these debates, as well as to antedate a major turning point in the Israeli psychopolitical discourse on national sacrifice.

HUMAN SACRIFICE—JEWISH VS. CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES¹⁷

I assume that the biblical story of Jephthah and his daughter from the book of Judges 11–12 needs no repetition here. The careers of its two

15. Zefira Porat, “The Golem from Zion,” *Molad* (1976): 481–89; Hillel Weiss, “Remarks on ‘The Binding of Isaac’ in Contemporary [Hebrew] Literature” (Hebrew), *Ha-tokheḥab ve-ha-‘akedab* (Fathers and Sons: Myth, Theme and Literary Topos), ed. Z. Levy (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 1991), 31–52.

16. For the political and cultural roots of Oz’s early thematics and poetics, see Nurit Gertz’s monograph *Amos Oz* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv, 1980). Although the story treated here is not even mentioned in passing in her otherwise thorough exploration, the latter provides an appropriate setting for it. My analysis adds, however, another context, one rooted in the postbiblical, apocryphal, and gnostic literatures that were being published at the time and to which the young writer was apparently exposed in his years at the Hebrew University. See Gertz’s emphasis on his dialogue with his *academic* reading public (p. 13).

17. An early version of this section, and of the final section below, was published in *Ha’aretz Literary Supplement* (June 12, 2005) under the title “Was Jeph-

main characters in postbiblical literature do bear recalling, however. As can be expected, this unsavory biblical episode has raised many an eyebrow over the past two millennia. Jewish tradition had mostly found Jephthah culpable for the senseless death of his daughter, which was perceived as a punishment for his pride and his rash vow. The midrashic tales swerve drastically from the biblical narrative, allowing the daughter to antagonize her father, and empowering her—contra Scripture, and contra the readings of contemporary feminists¹⁸—to argue for her life, either from knowledge of the law concerning vows or from biblical narrative prooftexts.¹⁹ Medieval exegetes, on the other hand, from David Kimhi (Radak) to Isaac Abravanel made a valiant effort to save both Jephthah's morals and his daughter's life by arguing from language ("his *only* daughter") and syntax for an analogy between their story and the Akedah.²⁰ From this analogy they concluded that, like Isaac, Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed at all but rather was consecrated to a life of ritual service.²¹ In the Bible there were of course only male precedents for such a solution, most notoriously Hannah's son Samuel (yet another intertextual link to be explored below). This medieval reading is reminiscent, however, of certain versions of the Iphigenia myth, such as Euripi-

thah's Daughter Really Named She'ila and How Did She Become a Christian Martyr?"

18. E. g., Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry*; Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," and J. Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," both in *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield, 1993), 116–30 and 131–44, respectively. My thanks to A. Brenner for fruitful conversations on this issue.

19. Shulamith Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," and Phyllis Silverman Kramer, "Jephthah's Daughter: A Thematic Approach to the Narrative as Seen in Selected Rabbinic Exegesis and in Artwork," both in *Judges: The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield, 1999), 48–66 and 67–92, respectively.

20. They also read the "and" connecting the two parts of the vow (Jgs 11.31) as meaning "or," thereby justifying the survivalist interpretation. See David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* (Lubbock, Tex., 1986), 8–9 et passim; David M. Gunn, *Judges* (Oxford, 2005), 141.

21. See Elisheva Baumgarten's recent suggestion that Ashkenazi Jewry could not have accepted the Provençal interpretation due to their traumatic experience in the Crusades. I thank E. Baumgarten for sharing with me her essay "'Remember that glorious girl': Jephthah's Daughter in Medieval Jewish Culture," *JQR* 97.2 (2007): 180–209, prior to its publication. A similar distinction had been suggested by Shulamith Elitzur, "The Binding of Isaac: With Tears or Joy? The Impact of the Crusades on the Biblical Story in the Liturgy," *Et Ha-da'at* 1 (1997): 15–35; my thanks to Yaira Amit for calling my attention to this essay.

des' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, where Iphigenia, having ostensibly been rescued at the last minute by the goddess Artemis, serves as a priestess in her temple in Tauris, and, of course, of the Catholic practice of cloistered virginity of which the Provençal sages must have been aware.²²

The "survivalist" reading, as it is called in the scholarship, had quite a stormy history in the Christian Church, serving as a lynchpin in the Catholic/Protestant controversy over the appropriateness of female monasticism.²³ Early Christianity, on the other hand, had eagerly accepted the enacted sacrifice and even elevated Jephthah to a status of a great "hero of faith" on a par with Samuel and David (Heb 11.32). In early medieval visual representations he is also compared to Abraham.²⁴ In the high Middle Ages, however, his daughter began to take center stage, consequently becoming an emblem of the Virgin Mary and of female asceticism in general, and even a model for Christian maternal martyrdom and child oblation (just like the biblical Hannah, who consecrated her son Samuel to God).²⁵ A rich history of literary and artistic representations attests that eventually both father and daughter were embraced as prefigurations of the ultimate willing sacrifice, Jesus Christ. As such, they became analogous in Christianity to another great sacrificial pair: Abraham and Isaac.

In a different guise, the divergence between Western and Hebraic symbolic constructions continued in modern times as well. The Christian approval of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter seems to be alive and well in the ostensibly secular school of European political thought, from Hobbes and Locke to Rousseau, where she had been apparently appropriated as a model for the "good subject/ citizen" whose life is wholly dedicated to the service of his sovereign (and later, of his fatherland).²⁶ In Israel, on the other hand, it is Abraham's sacrifice, not Jephthah's, that has come to stand for national sacrifice—in a way a more "natural"

22. Recently Joshua Berman suggested an earlier (Karaite) source for this reading; see his "Medieval Monasticism and the Evolution of Jewish Interpretation to the Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *JQR* 95.2 (2005): 228–56.

23. Anna Linton, "Sacrificed or Spared? The Fate of Jephthah's Daughter in Early Modern Theological and Literary Texts," *German Life and Letters* 57.3 (2004): 237–55.

24. See Baumgarten, "'Remember that glorious girl,'" who argues *inter alia* that Jephthah's status was waning just as his daughter's status began to rise.

25. I thank Barbara Newman for the copy of chapter 3, "Cruel Courage: Child Sacrifice and the Maternal Martyr in Hagiography and Romance," in her book *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist* (Philadelphia, 1995).

26. My thanks to Danielle S. Allen for her book *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago, 2004), and for referring me to the chapter "Sacrifice and Citizenship," 37–49.

choice, given the sex difference between the progeny sacrificed in the ostensibly analogous stories.²⁷

Rabbinic Judaism, however, had vehemently rejected any imputed analogy between Abraham and Jephthah. In fact, the only rabbinic text that brings these two sacrificial narratives together does this precisely in order to deny their similarity. This midrash, frequently cited in the talmudic corpus, begins with a question: Why, out of the three or four biblical personae who asked “improper questions” (Eliezer, [Caleb], Saul, and Jephthah), was one only, Jephthah, answered in an “unfitting manner,” thereby bringing about an unfathomed tragedy?²⁸ In some of its versions this midrash explains the difference between Jephthah and the others by placing him alone in the paradigm of human sacrifice, in tandem with Abraham and Mesha, King of Moab. Yet as soon as this paradigm is used, it is passionately negated, only to stress the chasm separating Abraham’s act from those of Jephthah and Mesha.²⁹ This is particularly evident in a later retelling of this midrash in Tanḥuma, where the quandary in fact ends with an anguished outcry that brings home the total impropriety of human sacrifice and repeats the demand for symbolic or monetary substitution for it:

Then the Holy Spirit proclaimed: Did I desire you to sacrifice [human] lives to me, [lives] *which I never commanded, never spoke for, and which never entered my mind* (Jer 19.5)? Which I never commanded Abraham, that he slaughters his son. Instead I told him: *Do not raise your hand against the lad* (Gn 22.12) . . . I never spoke to Jephthah to offer up his daughter as sacrifice to me, nor did it ever enter my mind . . . that Mesha king of Moab should offer up his firstborn son to me as sacrifice (2 Kgs 3.27). (*Beḥukotay* 7)

The Holy One said to Israel: If you bring before me your value equivalents, I will ascribe it to you as if you had offered up your lives before

27. Given this difference, one may indeed wonder how the “social contract” has overcome the lack of fit between Jephthah’s *daughter* and the male sex of the typical soldier-citizen of the new political-military constellation.

28. This midrash appears in some variations in tractate *Ta’anit* in the Babylonian Talmud, and in Genesis Rabbah, Leviticus Rabbah, Tanḥuma, Yalkut Shim’oni; see Valler, “The Story,” for a detailed analysis. Cf. Weiss, “Remarks.”

29. This absolute divergence somewhat dissipates when we remember the allusions to the implementation of the Akedah collected by Shalom Spiegel in his monumental “*Me-’agadot ba-’akedah*” [1950]; English translation by Judah Goldin, *The Last Trial* (New York, 1967). Spiegel’s findings were further elaborated and annotated by Levenson.

me. It is therefore stated, *When anyone explicitly vows to the Lord* (Lev 27.2), The Holy One said: By virtue of the value equivalents I am saving you from Gehinnom. (*Beḥukotay* 8)³⁰

It is hard to overestimate the gulf between the interpretative positions of the Jewish and Christian traditions vis-à-vis the resemblance and divergence between the stories of Abraham and Jephthah. This gulf highlights the uniqueness of Oz's biblical story, precisely because he situated at the core of his rewriting the very amalgam that classical Judaism had rejected.³¹ Hence our first challenge is to inquire why and how Oz has conjoined two sacrificial narratives that the Jewish tradition had only grudgingly and rarely linked together. A second, not unrelated query would be: How has this choice affected his revision or perhaps revisioning of Jephthah's daughter?

Let us begin with the latter. It is quite evident that Oz's construction of Jephthah's daughter is very different from her midrashic image, and even more so from the medieval one. First, she is endowed with a proper name, the absence of which in both the Bible and the midrashic retellings has aroused the ire of all feminist critics.³² More importantly, not only does she not object to fulfilling her father's vow; on the contrary, she willfully *chooses* to go out and greet him—not innocently, as the traditional reading of Judges 11 would have it, but with full awareness of his vow.

To render this act psychologically credible, the author creates a startling psychological family economy, which I will describe below. However, it still remains to be seen whether an act of conscious choice suffices to release the daughter from being a victim and whether it empowers her as a subject in her own right—an expectation often voiced in recent scholarship. I propose, on the contrary, that despite Oz's proto-feminist choices, and notwithstanding the daughter's construction as a named person, her narrative is ultimately absorbed by and subjected to the paternal metanarrative. In the final analysis, "Ish Pere" turns out to be yet an-

30. Translations follow (with some emendations) John T. Townsend's English edition of *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Jersey City, N.J., 1997), 2:368–69. I thank my colleague Jeffrey Rubenstein for his help with the midrashic sources.

31. It is still an open question whether this rejection continued also in the many fictional rewritings of the Jephthah story in Jewish literature. See note 65 below for Lion Feuchtwanger's treatment of this issue.

32. Beginning with Elizabeth Cady Stanton in *The Women's Bible* (1895, 2:25–26), but mostly heard since the 1980s in the pioneering work of Tribble, Bal, Fuchs, Brenner, Exum, et al. It should be noted, however, that in the rich literature since the Middle Ages the daughter has been endowed with many different names.

other incarnation of the *revised Aqedah story* that had just begun to make its rounds in Israeli fiction of the time.

FROM BINDING TO SACRIFICE IN ISRAEL

Following S. Yizhar's famous attack on "Father Abraham" in his massive War-of-Independence novel, *Yeme Ziklag*,³³ this new narrative had slowly transposed the "binding" of Isaac to "sacrifice." I believe, however, that in none of the many rewritings of this narrative were the ethical and ideological revisions so extreme and the critique of sacrifice so audacious as in Oz's story, and this precisely due to its unique fusion of male and female sacrificial narratives.

To appreciate this point, we need first to recall that despite the rejection of what was perceived as a diasporic psychology of Isaac-like obedience, Hebrew Zionist culture maintained—its secularism notwithstanding—the traditional representation of the Aqedah as a voluntary mission, carried out by father and son together. To this point, demonstrated elsewhere,³⁴ I would like to add that the psycho-ethical dynamics of this willingness for self-sacrifice, for martyrdom, especially in its modern-secular manifestation, is of necessity different from the dynamics Derrida identifies as "the gift of death," the label he applies to Abraham's ultimate sacrifice of love to his chosen (divine) "other," for whom he feels a singular responsibility. By focusing his deliberations on the first portion of Gn 22, rather than on its closure or its diverse postbiblical versions, Derrida manages to exclude Isaac, whether as sacrifice or martyr, and to explore, just like Kierkegaard before him, Abraham's affair of love and responsibility unto death. (In this case it is not Abraham's own death, of course, but rather the near-death of his human "other," Isaac.) As a result, the Knight of Faith's "gift of death" does not represent the perspective of the sacrificed but rather that of the sacrificer. Hence both Kierkegaard and Derrida view it, and correctly so, as marked by an economy of betrayal (of the victim), which like any act of betrayal dictates a behavioral code that is asocial (and some would say unethical)—secrecy, silence, isolation, internalization.³⁵

33. S. Yizhar, *Yeme Ziklag* (Days of Ziklag) (Tel Aviv, 1958).

34. See my "Isaac or Oedipus? Jewish Tradition and the Israeli Aqedah," *Biblical Studies/ Cultural Studies: The Third Sheffield Colloquium*, ed. J. C. Exum and S. Moore (Sheffield, 1998), 159–89. For an updated bibliography see the Hebrew version in *Alpayim* 22 (2001): 53–77. Cf. my forthcoming "Whose Sacrifice Is It, Anyway? The Rise and Fall of Abraham in the 1950s" (Hebrew), *Mikan* 12.3 (2007).

35. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, 53 et passim.

Derrida's attraction to this economy, especially in its Christian ritual embodiment (the *Mysterium Tremendum*), begs the conjectural question: In what direction would his deliberations have developed had he been familiar with the full range of the manifestations of this mytho-religious trope in the Hebraic *post*biblical corpus? How much more so in modern Israeli literature, which almost since its inception has been torn between the economy of self-sacrifice and that of the sacrificer; between willingness unto death and the rebellion against it; and this, not under the cloak of individual mystification, nor the cover of furtive singularity, but rather under the glaring light of a public, uncompromisingly caustic, political reality.

Indeed, with but few exceptions,³⁶ Hebrew literary representations of self-sacrificial economy had continued through the 1950s, ultimately reaching their peak in Haim Guri's famed poetic "judgment" of Jewish "inheritance": "They are born with a knife in their heart."³⁷ In fact, the majority of what is known as the "palmaḥ generation" accepted Isaac's "sacrificial inheritance" as a tragic fact of life, though without much rebelliousness or defiance. In their literature there was no room for a blaming finger at "the Fathers," as embodied, for example, in the notoriously sarcastic English poem "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young," composed by Wilfred Owen shortly before his demise in the trenches of World War I.³⁸ This continuity at the heart of the Zionist revolution was not a coincidence. Both the founding fathers and their progeny, rebellious sons in other respects, mostly identified with Isaac's martyrological position. Substituting national ideology for divine injunction and immediate political necessity for religious persecution, they bound themselves willingly, so to speak, paradoxically preserving not the memory of the biblical Akedah but rather that of the later or *post*biblical one.³⁹

36. For a glaring exception, a little-known 1953 (!) story by Moshe Shamir, see my article, "*Bemo yadenu*" (With Our Own Hands), *Iton* 77 (July-August 2006): 26–30.

37. Hayim Guri "Yerushah" (Inheritance), in his *Shoshanat ruḥot: Shirim* (Tel Aviv, 1960), 28.

38. Amazingly, this Akedah poem, published in 1920 and being since then the banner of protest poetry in Europe (see the reception speech of the 2006 Nobel Laureate, Harold Pinter) was translated to Hebrew [by Rina Litvin] only in 1970, when it was included in the program of the Israeli Philharmonic's performance of Britten's *War Requiem*. It is *not* included in the only collection of his poetry, which appeared in Hebrew as recently as 2002 (trans. H. Nir [Tel Aviv, 2002]).

39. My genealogy contradicts Avraham's Sagi's view, who argues that the secularist Israeli interpretation of the Akedah stems from a distorted understanding

An open critique of this position exploded in the late 1950s, with S. Yizhar's brazen words, put in the mouth of his protagonist: "I hate our father Abraham, on his way to bind Isaac. What right does he have over Isaac. Let him bind himself."⁴⁰ With this expletive, Yizhar joined a secularist tradition that had long judged the intergenerational sacrifice from an ethical and psychological rather than religious perspective. Ironically, this protestation inverts the separation or even contrast between "the ethical" and "the theological" which Kierkegaard had famously drawn in response to Kant's ethical secularist critique of the sacrifice of Isaac.⁴¹

GENDER AND THE "GIFT OF DEATH"

Yizhar was not, however, the first Israeli to voice such a critique. Curiously, but perhaps expectedly, the earliest forerunner of this ethical position was a woman: Margot Klausner (1905–75, no relation), a German-born devout Zionist, who had immigrated to Palestine in 1932 and was instrumental in the development of Habimah, a Hebrew theater in Jewish Palestine (and who after a fallout with the theater went on to build up a colorful career of her own). In a little-known 1949 (!) theater review, the Berlin-raised former administrative director of Habimah lumped the medieval exegesis of Jephthah's daughter together with the commonplace (literal) reading of Gn 22 as "proof" for the loving, non-aggressive solutions offered by the Hebraic tradition for the ubiquitous intergenerational conflict.⁴² In so doing, she had unwittingly aligned herself with a female reappraisal, as old as at least the nineteenth century, of the Christian apotheosis of both Abraham's and Jephthah's sacrifices. It

of the Jewish tradition, by which he apparently means Halakhah, to the exclusion of imaginative literature [midrash and liturgy], which I consider major sources for the modern Hebrew and Israeli take on the Akedah. See his essay "The Meaning of the Akedah in Israeli Culture and Jewish Tradition," *Mehkare Hag* (September 1996): 66–85.

40. *Yeme Ziklag*, 2:804.

41. On the veiled link between Kant and Kierkegaard (although the latter mentions only Hegel by name), see Robert L. Perkins, "For Sanity's Sake: Kant, Kierkegaard, and Father Abraham," *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling: Critical Appraisals*, ed. R. L. Perkins (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1981), 43–61. See also Avital Ronell's fascinating analysis in *Stupidity* (Urbana, Ill., 2002), 164–68, 278 et passim. Special thanks to Avital for her comments on an early draft of this essay.

42. See her review of Mossinsohn's play *Be-'arvot ha-Negev* (In the Wastes of the Negev), *Molad* 4.2 (1949): 379–80; on both the play and the review, see Y. Feldman, "'The Most Exalted Symbol for Our Time'? Rewriting 'Isaac' in Tel Aviv," *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006): 253–73.

was Elizabeth Cady Stanton who, in her *The Woman's Bible*, had notoriously criticized both fathers, thereby undermining Kierkegaard's attempt to draw a distinction between them: "What right had they to offer up their sons and daughters in return for supposed favors from the Lord?" Moreover, she composed her own reply, putting in the daughter's mouth a protest that should by now have a surprisingly familiar ring: "You may sacrifice your own life as you please, but you have no right over mine."⁴³

Indeed, there is a startling similarity, even across the Atlantic, between the positions taken by Stanton and Yizhar's protagonist (cited above). The question is how we should interpret this similarity. One possibility is to challenge the conventional wisdom that narrowly frames Stanton within a feminist discourse.⁴⁴ One can argue that both her position and Yizhar's (as well as M. Klausner's, Owens's, and many others) derive perhaps from a general (some would say extreme) liberal ethics wherein fierce inalienable individualism often translates into a political pro-peace agenda that advocates non-aggression and therefore objects to sacrifice.⁴⁵

By the 1960s such positions were gaining ground in Israeli literature. Yizhar was slowly joined by a number of his contemporaries.⁴⁶ A frontal revolt, however, began by the young generation, led by A. B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and Hanoch Levin, in whose fiction and drama a new Akedah narrative was emerging, *rewritten à la Freud*. In this compromise solution between the biblical-Jewish model and the Greek-Oedipal model, Isaac was beginning to wrestle with Abraham qua "Laius."

One of the earliest stories written in this vein was Oz's well-known

43. *The Woman's Bible* (1895), 2:26.

44. On the women's peace discourse from the nineteenth century on, see my "From Essentialism to Constructivism? The Gender of Peace and War in Gilman, Woolf, Freud," *Partial Answers: A Journal of Literature and History of Ideas* 2.1 (January 2004): 113–45.

45. In Israel, this position was forcefully adumbrated by the late Leon Shelef in his book *'Avanim Shotim be-Gan 'Eden* (Tel Aviv, 2002). Shelef ends his chapter "Intergenerational and Inter-Denominational Relations" with this plea: "It is high time we save not only Isaac from the *Akedah*, but also the true message of his story" (162).

46. See novels of the late 1950s and 1960s by Moshe Shamir, Aharon Megged, and even Haim Hazaz. On the analogous (though slightly later) development in poetry, see Ruth Kartun-Blum, *Profane Scriptures* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1999), 17–65. Cf. Michal Govrin, "Martyrs or Survivors? Thoughts on the Mythical Dimension of the Story War," trans. B. Harshav, *Partisan Review* (2002–2003): 274–97. For a general overview, see Yael Zerubavel, "Krav, bakravah, korban: Transformations in the Patriotic Sacrifice Ideology in Israel," in *Patriotism: Ohavim otakh moledet*, ed., A. Ben-Amos and D. Bar-Tal (Tel Aviv, 2004), 61–99.

"*Derekh ha-ruah*" (The Way of the Wind/Spirit), first published in 1962.⁴⁷ Much ink has been spilled on the motif of the Akedah in this tale about a kibbutz "founding father" who is implicitly blamed by the narrator for the senseless (though psychologically sensible) self-imposed death of his "poetic," "effeminate" son.⁴⁸ Much less known is another Akedah story of the same period, the one under scrutiny here. Differing from its predecessor in its unusual weaving together of the Jephthah and Isaac stories, "Ish Pere'" enabled the author to dig deeper into the psychological economy of sacrifice. Unlike his contemporaries, Oz engaged here not only the unconscious yearning of the sacrificer *but also the martyrological yearning of the sacrificed*—thereby anticipating the Israeli critique of Isaac that began to take center stage in the 1970s.⁴⁹

Moreover, the direct use of the biblical materials, not as a metaphor or intertext of a contemporary narrative (as, for example, in Aharon Meged's 1965 best-seller *Ha-hai 'al ha-met* [Living Off the Dead] or Yariv Ben-Aharon's 1966 novel *Ha-krav* [The Battle]), encourages a subversive reading of the biblical sources themselves. In fact, the superimposition of the two sacrificial stories resurfaces a deep structure which Jewish culture was not too happy to acknowledge—the model of virgin (female) sacrifice. This model is commonplace in Greek mythology, and Jephthah's daughter is generally perceived as its Hebraic analogue. But to my mind, Isaac's story too falls into this category, with all its gendered implications. I refer here to the martyrological attitude shared by the sacrificed maidens and Isaac, especially in the postbiblical, rewritten Akedah narratives.

The cultural interpretations of this female model have been the subject

47. Amos Oz, *Artsot ha-tan*, 43–63; *Where the Jackals Howl*, 168–217. Cf. the novel *Menuḥah nekbonah*, which was published in 1982 (Tel Aviv: 'Am Oved) but was actually started in the 1970s (*A Perfect Peace*, trans. H. Halkin [San Diego, Calif., 1985]).

48. E.g., Yair Mazor, "Not Like the Wind and with No Perfect Peace," *Moznaim* 5/6 (1989): 176–181.

49. Isaac was most notoriously put on "the psychoanalytic couch" in Shlomo G. Shoham's essay "Akedat Yitzhak," which between 1975 and 1979 enjoyed a rather broad circulation in Hebrew and English; see "The Isaac Syndrome," *American Imago* 33 (1976): 329–49; and chapter 8 of his *The Myth of Tantalus* (Queensland, 1979). For an interesting response to his arguments, see Shulamith Hareven's essays, especially "What Should We Do about Myth?" (Hebrew, 1989), *The Vocabulary of Peace*, trans. M. Weinstein et al. (San Francisco, 1995), 14–29. See my analysis of both in "Isaac or Oedipus?" and "'Our Myth of Primary Violence': Shulamith Hareven's Peace Politics," *Midstream* (Spring 2005): 26–30.

of fierce debates among scholars of Greek mythology, because it often challenges the passive/ active dichotomy historically applied to psychological gender differences.⁵⁰ Jewish tradition presents us with an even more complex picture, because its models of female martyrdom exhibit a mixed behavior, both active and passive, as the mother of the seven sons (popularly known as Hannah) and the mothers in the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles may remind us. Unlike either the Greek maidens or the Spartan mothers, these “Mother Abrahams,” as I call them, sacrifice both their own lives and their sons’ (or daughters’).

Although this problematic historical topos has recently attracted the attention of scholars of different persuasions, we still lack a feminist analysis of it.⁵¹ Such an analysis must confront several divergent, even contradictory theoretical approaches. It needs first of all to ask how we can reconcile these images with the popular attribution to women, qua mothers, of a “different [moral] voice” (Gilligan), or even “maternal thinking” (Ruddick), which “naturally” identifies them with pacifism and protest movements that object to aggression and sacrifice.⁵² On the other hand, we must ask if these Abrahamic mothers would lend support to Julia Kristeva’s diametrically opposite conjecture that women have a special

50. For a summary of the debate, see my “Isaac or Oedipus?”

51. Galit Hazan-Rokem’s fascinating gendered analysis of Miryam bat Tanhum, the mother of seven sons in *Lamentation rabbah*, is not applicable, for example, to the analogous stories in 2 or 4 Maccabees, where the anonymous mother is constructed as a mouth to speak of the patriarchal system, rather than as site of a “different voice.” See *Web of Life: Folklore and Midrash in Rabbinic Literature*, trans. B. Stein (Hebrew, 1996; Palo Alto, Calif., 2000): 108–28. The question that should be asked is from whose/which perspective the Maccabees’s narrators present their maternal characters and what added value (if any) female readers derive from it. A similar question can be directed at the medieval [Crusade] mothers, who were recently described by Avraham Grossman, “Women and *kidush ha-shem*” (Hebrew), in his *Hasidot u-mordot* (Jerusalem, 2001), 346–72; Mordekhai Broyer, “Women and *kidush ha-shem*” (Hebrew), *Facing the Cross: The Persecutions of 1096 in History and Historiography*, ed. Yom Tov Assis et al. (Hebrew; Jerusalem, 2000), 141–50. For some varieties of gender analysis see, Susan Eibinder, “Jewish Women Martyrs: Changing Models of Representation,” *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 105–27; Elliot Wolfson, “Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism in Twelfth-Century Ashkenasic Piety,” *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. M. A. Signer and J. van Engen (Notre Dame, Ind., 2001), 171–220; Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God* (Philadelphia, 2004), 106–29.

52. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982); Sara Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Towards A Politics of Peace* (Boston, 1989). Gilligan herself has qualified her position in her recent book, *The Birth of Pleasure: A New Map of Love* (New York, 2002). For further discussion of this issue, see my “From Essentialism to Constructivism?”

proclivity to political and religious extremism precisely because of their “maternal masochism,”⁵³ or whether, on the contrary, their appropriation of a traditionally male role (“the sacrificer”) should be rather interpreted as a response to a system that has, as Nancy Jay argues, universally excluded them.⁵⁴

“Ish pere’” appears to bypass these difficult choices because it confronts us not with a martyrological mother but rather with a martyrological daughter. Still, it raises a question about the particularity of virgin sacrifice and, by implication, about the gender and ethics of the Akedah, as I hope to demonstrate in the following sections.

INCEST AND THE WEDDING-SACRIFICE

Despite its brevity, “Ish Pere’” exhibits an excessively midrashic ambition. As hinted above, this short tale attempts a synthesis of both the fraternal and filial dynamics present in the biblical family sagas,⁵⁵ perhaps in the tradition of Thomas Mann’s *Joseph and His Brothers*, which appeared in Hebrew in 1957.⁵⁶ On the surface, the story reworks its skeletal biblical kernel in familiar ways. Stylistically, it offers a dense yet delightful pastiche, shuffling around phrases from one biblical scene to another, calling our attention to the numerous parallels and “type scenes” that crisscross the biblical corpus;⁵⁷ it also employs a poetic, incantation-like narrative voice, one that often brings to mind the repetitive cadences of M. Y. Berdyczewski’s lyrical prose (not to mention his familiar thematic and psychological concerns);⁵⁸ and most importantly, it makes good the prom-

53. Kristeva repeats this idea in “Stabat Mater” and “Women’s Time,” both in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (New York, 1985), 187–213; 160–86.

54. Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity* (Chicago, 1992): chapter 4. Cf. Carol Delaney, *Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth* (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

55. On the difference between these two dynamics, see Juliet Mitchell, who has recently called for a general revision of psychoanalysis, promoting the significance of the “lateral” sibling dynamics: *Siblings: Sex and Violence* (London, 2003). I had earlier argued the same for biblical narrative, in my “‘And Rebecca Loved Jacob’, But Freud Did Not,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 1.1 (1993): 72–88; reprinted in *Freud and Forbidden Knowledge*, ed. P. Rudnytsky and E. Spitz (New York, 1994), 7–25.

56. Thomas Mann, *Yosef ve-ehav* (Joseph and His Brothers), trans. M. Avi-Shaul (Tel Aviv, 1957).

57. The concept was suggested by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York, 1978).

58. Oz’s indebtedness to Berdyczewski is well known, as he himself acknowledged early on; see *Be-or ha-tkhelet ha-‘azab* (Tel Aviv, 1979), 30–36; *Under This Blazing Light: Essays*, trans. N. de Lange (Cambridge, 1995).

ise of its subtitle, “A Ballad”: By adding characters that fill in the narrative gaps of the terse biblical tale, it turns an ancient enigmatic tale into a psychologically motivated modern drama.

Under the author’s deft treatment, the *dramatis personae* of our tale grow from two to six major characters, not counting a large cast of minor roles. Jephthah is provided with more than a nuclear family: a fully characterized father; a frail stepmother, who, in perspective free from stereotype, herself feels uprooted and alienated, unhappy in a new, unfamiliar place;⁵⁹ three named and reasonably characterized stepbrothers; and a doting mother—the Ammonite concubine named Pitdah [= topaz]. Significantly, this is also the name Jephthah confers on his “beautiful and dark” daughter, a matronymic doubling the implications of which are not difficult to guess. This guess is in fact facilitated by the narrator’s foreshadowing “summary” in the opening pages of the story: “Toward the end of his days, they became one in his mind (*be-libo*).”⁶⁰ To complicate matters, Jephthah’s family romance includes also a surrogate father—the intriguing king of Ammon, Getal. Getal comes equipped with his own “god,” thereby establishing a dramatically opposite option to Jephthah’s father Gilead and his Israelite god.

This impressive cast seems to be such an “improvement” over the tight biblical script that we may ignore a major lacuna that binds the two versions: just as in Judges, Jephthah lacks a wife; his daughter lacks a mother. In a kind of Freudian repetition compulsion, Jephthah sires his daughter with a nameless Ammonite, who quickly drops out of the picture when he exhausts the urban pleasures of Ammon and heads back to the wilderness. This detail raises an interesting question: Why did Oz stay faithful to this single feature of the biblical plot? Indeed, this feature contrasts starkly with the artistic “mending” carried out by most literary rewriters of the story, from Pseudo-Philo on. These authors have apparently felt the need to triangulate the twain, so to speak, by providing Jephthah with a wife, the mother of said daughter.

It seems to me, however, that Oz’s reading of the psychology of the biblical plot is more astute, since it correctly intuits the explosive potential of the terse biblical style. It is precisely the reduction in the household structure that may engender a forbidden erotic intimacy that is bound to

59. She is the first in a line of by-now familiar Oz mothers, the biographical source of which has been recently unveiled in his memoirs, *Sipur shel ahavah ve-ḥoshbekh* (Jerusalem, 2002), *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, trans. N. de Lange (New York, 2004). She is central to the “masked autobiography” or “family romance” aspect of this story, which I develop elsewhere.

60. P. 87. Subsequent page references will appear in the body of the text.

explode and wipe out the small family unit. Oz pushes this potential to its logical conclusion. His story constructs in fact a fully developed dynamic that allows for a textbook oedipal loving rivalry between Jephthah and his father (!), but also for Jephthah's pathological erotic attachment to his identically named mother/daughter. In contrast to Oedipus, who unknowingly "desires" his mother, Jephthah unknowingly transfers his unconscious desire from his mother to his daughter, whom he loves "wildly" (*abavat pere'*, 98) according to our narrator, thereby adding another twist to the meaning of the story's title.

The symbiotic father-daughter relation cuts both ways, of course. Lacking a mother figure from early childhood, Pitdah is entrapped in a dyadic economy (in contrast to the family triangle postulated by Freud) and fully returns her father's attachment. Though no incest is actually acted out or openly articulated, it is clearly intimated through a sequence of dreams by both father and daughter.⁶¹ Pitdah typically dreams about herself in a wedding gown while her groom is faceless—a scene well familiar from Freud's dream analyses which established the presence of the so-called Electra complex. Jephthah, on the other hand, cannot tolerate any thoughts of future bridegrooms and even dreams that his own father vies with *him* for Pitdah.

It would seem that here, as in the rest of Oz's oeuvre, the wilderness signifies more than a physical location; it stands for a mental state, one that ignores the ancient taboos imposed by civilization.⁶² It is also possible that the violation of sexual taboos is a component of the Gnostic antinomianism that had played a significant role in this construction of Jephthah, as I show below. Moreover, by transposing this theme from the narrow confines of the kibbutz (or of the *shtetl*, as in the work of his admired precursor Berdyczewski) to the boundless wilderness of biblical antiquity, Oz seems to be letting go of social and other circumstantial alibis, facing instead the ostensibly naked, uncivilized truth of human desire.

Yet this is just a first, perhaps misguided impression. A second look at the figurative language of the dream sequence reveals another possible reading: The father-daughter potential incest is slowly transformed into

61. The incestuous interpretation was made more overt in the later version of the story, where autoerotic or homoerotic shading was also added (cf. Weiss, "Remarks"). This is just one of the many modifications introduced into the expanded version of the story (1976), a topic that requires, however, a separate discussion.

62. The opposition "wilderness vs. culture" is but one of the ideational and poetic tensions that scholars have exposed in Oz's work (e.g., Gertz, *Amos Oz*).

a fantasized sacrificial erotic intercourse between a divine presence and a virgin human. If in the first dream Pitdah can only feel the groom's hot breath (p. 100), in the second she dreams that he comes in "*be'av-'arafel ve-ḥosbekh, uve-kol demamah ḏakah ḏiber*" (p. 101). Does Hebrew know anyone else but God whose appearance is shrouded in clouds and darkness and who speaks in a "still small voice"?⁶³

To be sure, Oz's imagination roams here far and wide, to the realm of pagan myths and rituals. Without any trepidation he daringly grafts a fantasized coupling of heaven and earth, often associated with Greek myth,⁶⁴ on some of the most anti-mythological and abstract biblical allusions to the God of Israel. Moreover, as the dream continues, it takes on an erotic color, in the tradition of maidens' sacrifice in Greek and other pagan myths. These myths make use of the virginity of the victim to construct a "domesticating" narrative, one that interprets the dismemberment of the body by the ritual knife as the equivalent of deflowering, and the offering up as a sexual encounter, or even as a marriage with the divine receptor or his human representative: father or priest.⁶⁵

Traces of this pagan erotic script, in which the human and divine male figures are often fused together, have continued to thrive in Christianity, in female monasticism, and especially in female (virgin?) martyrdom.⁶⁶

63. 1 Kgs 19.12; Ex 19.9.

64. Recently popularized by Roberto Calasso in *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, trans. T. Parks (New York, 1993), but also leaving its trace on Gn 6.2.

65. This mythological topos is hinted also in Lion Feuchtwanger's historical novel *Jeftha und seine Tochter* (Berlin, 1957), the Hebrew translation of which (by Ruth Livnit) appeared in 1960 (Tel Aviv). This novel also alludes to a strong special bond (though not necessarily incest) between father and daughter (named here Ja'ala, after the heroic Ja'el [Yael] of Jgs 4). Unlike Oz, however, Feuchtwanger fills the biblical gap by adding an (Ammonite) mother, who objects strongly to the enactment of the sacrifice (as in most rewritings of the story). In any case, after Ja'ala is informed of her father's vow, the narrator ascribes to her an erotic attachment to a fused father/god image: "[S]he shuddered. Yet at the same time she felt pride and joy; for the thing at which she shuddered held the highest happiness, true happiness, the only one that was right for her. Already in anticipation she felt her union with Yahweh, and her father and Yahweh merged into one for her, and she was at peace." *Jephtha and His Daughter*, trans. E. Wilkins and E. Kaiser (New York, 1958), 305.

66. See Mieke Bal's discussion of Freud and Girard on this issue (*Death and Dissymmetry*, 52–68, 95–113). Cf. Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Palo Alto, Calif., 1999), who argues for the eroticism of martyrdom in general. To my mind, however, eroticism is attached more often than not to female sacrifice/martyrdom. See, for example, Ostriker, "Jephthah's Daughter," and most tellingly, Ton Hilhorst's analysis of "the Bridal Chamber" imagery in Isaac's speech in a fourth-century Greek (probably Chris-

This sexual mythological “difference” has been rarely considered in traditional (male) Judeo-Christian discourses about human sacrifice, the Binding of Isaac, or the Christian ritual. As late as 1992, Derrida argued, for instance, that sexual difference does not count “in the face of death.” Although he seems to be aware of gender criticism (briefly mentioning the-by-then often-discussed lack of maternal presence in the biblical narrative of the Akedah), he still claims that sexual difference is “a being-[only] *up-until-death*.”⁶⁷ Feminist critics, by contrast, have since the 1980s questioned the broader implications of the differences between the various ways in which female and male characters die in Greek myth and drama. According to their assessment, these differences do count, as does the exclusivity of the male sex in the role of the sacrificer.⁶⁸ This critique was applied to biblical women as well, among them Jephthah’s daughter, who was even given a name by one defiant scholar.⁶⁹

By placing Pitdah’s sacrifice within this problematic tradition, Oz *seems* then to have anticipated feminist criticism. Yet to my mind, his turn to pagan mythology was otherwise motivated. Virgin [female] sacrifice provided him with an Archimedean point from which he could *unbingle and deconstruct the mystification of sacrifice at large*.

CAIN, ELECTION, AND THE DEMIURGE

If my reading sounds too far-fetched, this is the moment to introduce the second strand of Oz’s sacrificial narrative, because it is immediately after Pitdah’s last dream that the two strands are spliced together.

tian) poem, “To Abraham”: “*I wonder if Isaac here features as a bride. . . .* [W]e are invited to regard Isaac’s imminent sacrificial death *as a wedding*. Through his death, Isaac will enter heaven immediately, and thus share the heavenly wedding feast . . . [T]he mention [of the marriage] is quite positive, evoking the idea of a mystical union. Generally speaking, the idea is typical of martyrs” (106; emphasis added). Typically, however, *Hilborst’s examples are all female* (Blandina and the mother of the Maccabean martyrs). See “The Bodmer Poem on the Sacrifice of Abraham,” in *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, ed. E. Noort and E. Tigchelaar (Leiden, 2002), 96–108.

67. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*: 45. Cf. p. 75.

68. See Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*, trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), and notes 51–53 above.

69. Bal, *Death*, 41. The suggestion to rehabilitate Jephthah’s daughter by calling her *Bat* [Heb. for ‘daughter’, unfortunately transliterated as *Bath* by Bal] strikes me as somewhat off target because it emphasizes her relational dependence on her father rather than her independence, which was highlighted by the various names she was given in many of the postbiblical and modern rewritings of the story from Pseudo-Philo on. Curiously, Bal shows no familiarity with this tradition.

As we may recall, in the book of Judges Jephthah is banished from his father's estate by his stepbrothers, who fear for their inheritance. This sibling rivalry is played out early on in "Ish Pere'" with the help of all the familiar precedents from Genesis. Jephthah's mother is associated with Hagar, the banished other woman, and he himself with Ishmael, the stranger, the son of the other woman (p. 89). His stepbrothers similarly play the role of Joseph's brothers, while Jephthah himself contemplates the cold "stars in heaven," which have no compassion, he says, for any of their brethren when they fall down (p. 91). Yet Jephthah does more than watch falling stars. He seeks actively to understand the workings of divine election and, being the youngest son, even tries to apply to himself the principle of election operating in Genesis (p. 92).

But in vain. In contrast to the biblical elect, from Abraham and Moses to Samuel and Saul, who were actually courted by God with signs and omens, Jephthah is reduced to hunting for signs by himself. His life is in fact controlled by an *idée fixe*, a compulsive search for a sign, a test, a revelation. This is a drama of reversed hide-and-seek, in which God is hiding and Jephthah desperately asks *ayeka* ("where are you?"), if I am allowed to paraphrase Yehudah Amichai's famous words.⁷⁰ It is only natural that the Akedah, being the ultimate test of the elect, will also appear here in an inverted and distorted fashion. In fact, it makes a double appearance.

First, the young Jephthah tests himself by "passing his hand in fire." Though a familiar pagan test of courage, a rite of passage of sorts, the language in which it is couched here cannot fail but to evoke the warnings against child sacrifice, constantly reiterated in the Bible (highlighted here by the wordplay *yaḏkha = binkha* [your hand = your son]).⁷¹ At the crucial moment, however, Gilead's call, "My son, do not raise your hand," turns this pagan test into a mock Akedah. Two conflicting mythologies are superimposed here, foreshadowing the dramatic dénouement.

Needless to say, Jephthah does not heed his father's call. And just as in Genesis, his mother dies shortly after he passes his test. From now on he is on his own, loving-hating his father and intensely searching for signs of his father's god.

At the height of this search is a long interior monologue (or rather a one-sided dialogue) in which he totally turns around not only the received

70. "Now God is hiding and Man is asking *ayeka*"; Yehudah Amichai, *Be-merḥak shṭey tikvot* (Tel Aviv, 1958), 17.

71. See 2 Kgs 16.3, 23.10; Jer 32.35; Ez 16.21. Cf. Weiss, "Remarks."

reading of the “competition” that caused the Bible’s first murder but also the traditional image of the God who judged this competition:

God, my brother Azur is not like Abel, and I am not Cain . . . Gather me to you, for in the image of your loathing (*mastemab*) was I made, *God of the wolf* of the wild at night . . . The one you love you consume by *burning wrath* (*ḥaron*), for you are a *zealous/jealous* (*kana’*) God, and your son loves and loathes [*be-mastemab*] too . . . You paid heed to Abel and his offering, but I know your secret, God, I know you loved Cain. This is why you spread your veiled loving kindness on Cain, not on Abel . . . Did you not send *Cain, the son whom you loved*, to roam the earth and stamp it with your image. Cain bore witness to your image, the image of God, the god of lightening in the forest and *fire* in the field. I loved my mother the Ammonite and she clove to my father from the depths, but my father clove to you from the depths. Give me a sign. (p. 95)⁷²

“Hatred,” “loathing,” “burning wrath,” envy, zealotry, fire—what a single-minded list of attributes for the biblical god of mercy and loving-kindness! Indeed, Jephthah’s god is reminiscent of the image of the Creator of the ancient Gnostic heresies, the Demiurge who clumsily and incompetently fashioned “this evil earth.” Moreover, his take on the primordial sibling conflict and the first fratricide is a telling trace of the teachings of the Cainites, the rebellious, subversive sect that reversed all cherished biblical values, beginning with the first pair of brothers, antinomianly making Cain the *beloved, elected* son.⁷³

This sect has recently emerged from obscurity as the originators of the much-advertised “Gospel according to Judas.”⁷⁴ Yet their teachings had been known many years before the “discovery” of this gospel. Given the presence at the Hebrew University of Hans Jonas, the father of the mod-

72. The translation is my adaptation of Nicholas de Lange’s translation of the longer [later] version of the story. Emphases added.

73. For this particular interpretation of Cain, see Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (2nd ed.; Boston, 1963), 95. Special thanks to Daniel Boyarin for this reference. See also the entry “Gnosticism” in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York, 1971) where David Flusser also cites Cain as his example of the interpretative methodology of the Gnostics.

74. See Gedaliahu Guy Stroumsa, “Ve-hayu ha-bogdim le-giborim,” *Ha-aretz Literary Supplement* (April 14, 2006); cf. Yael Feldman, “Cain, the Son You Loved” (Hebrew), *Ha-aretz Literary Supplement* (October 1, 2006).

ern study of Gnosticism, it is plausible to conjecture that as a student (of Gershom Scholem, among others) in the early 1960s Oz too was attracted to the risky allures of Gnostic defiance. That this kind of ancient counter-reading would fascinate the young author is no doubt clear. His fiction is replete with fanatics and uncompromising romantics of all kinds, some of whose models he has recently exposed in his elegant memoir, *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Yet as he had been deeply wounded in his youth by the darker power of such emotional forces, his rewriting of the Gnostic subversion is itself subversive, meant to undermine rather than underwrite it.

Thus, in contrast to a theological dualism which postulates an unknown “wise” Godhead, the true God concealed behind the inferior Demiurge, Oz’s Jephthah-Cain puts the unknown under erasure, offering an interpretation that turns the Gnostic heresy on its head: Cain was saved because it is he who was born “in the image” (*be-tzelem*). His own hatred and envy are perceived here as a direct reflection of God’s “true” essence. This is the essence of that rival, double, or “alter ego” of the God of Mercy, the one who has always incited him to test his beloved sons—from the Satan in the book of Job, through Prince *Mastemah* in the intertestamental *Book of Jubilees* (whose name clearly reverberates in the repetitions of this noun in Jephthah’s monologue),⁷⁵ to Lucifer and Mephistopheles of the modern romantic myth (as in Milton and Goethe, for instance). Whereas, due to his syncretistic, Ammonite-Israelite origin, Jephthah considers himself heir of this antinomian theology, the narrative (or the implied narrator) signals behind his back a critique of one of the principles that had *not* changed even here: *the ideology of self-sacrifice*. Ultimately, Jephthah’s ostensibly Gnostic monologue *undoes* the seams that mask the Judeo-Christian “gift of death” as a sacrifice of love/responsibility/faith/ethics-beyond-the-ethical. Instead, it floods it with the cold and unforgiving light of literal semantics, of the sort that read “death” as a synonym of hate [*mastemah*], not love.

Moreover, though Jephthah is seeking a sign from heaven, he demands it on his own terms. The author endows his hero with rhetorical mastery

75. Artom’s Hebrew translation of *The Book of Jubilees* [*Sefer ha-yovlot*] came out also in the 1960s (1965). It is worth noting that in the later version of this story, “On this Evil Earth” (1976), Oz replaced the noun *mastemah* by more common synonyms, such as “anger,” “hatred,” and “wrath” [*hemah, sin’ab, za’af*], thereby covering the traces of this possible intertext (which is naturally totally lost in translation).

that equals his own, reinforcing the qualities that anticipate Mieke Bal's evaluation of the biblical Judge.⁷⁶

But still to no avail. No sign is forthcoming. Jephthah's desire for the divine is not reciprocated. God is silent. Not temporarily silent or "eclipsed," as in Martin Buber's post-Holocaust apology, but rather silent in the sense of that demonic/divine ambiguity caught by Johannes de Silentio (namely, Kierkegaard): "Silence is the snare of the demon, and the more one keeps silent, the more terrifying the demon becomes; but silence is also the mutual understanding between the Deity and the individual."⁷⁷ Jephthah is therefore driven to an even more audacious reinterpretation of the foundational patriarchal test. If the Gnostic reversal of the "lateral" sibling rivalry does not work, he will compel the "God of the wolf and the viper" to accept a reversal of the "vertical" (intergenerational) dynamics of the Akedah proper.⁷⁸ Thus, immediately after a dream in which he drives away "princes and counts" (and even his own father) who desire his daughter, because "to someone better and more awesome the dark-and-beautiful was destined," Jephthah tries his God once more:

God, your servant is ever a stranger, but you have not touched him yet. Raise your hand to your son, to Jephthah; burn him with a scepter of fire. *Here I am before you* on one of the mountains, the lamb offering in my hand, and here is the fire and the wood and *where is the sacrificial knife*. God of the shrill birds of prey, I desire the shelter of your shade all my life . . . *Touch me with your wrath* so I will be marked by it. You are so lonely [*ariri*, lit. 'childless'], you shall have no servant before me . . . (p. 99) (Emphases added)

On the face of it, Oz's Jephthah echoes the ethical critics of the Akedah, those who have refused the leap of Kierkegaard's and Derrida's Knights

76. Bal, *Death*, 270: "He does not want to be elected by Yahweh by the arbitrary procedure that turns the hero into a blind instrument of divine predestination; he wants to negotiate, to fulfill his ambition and obtain, through speech-acts, a more permanent status, based on more individual merit."

77. Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relations between Religion and Philosophy* (1952; Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1988): 127–29; Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, 97. Cf. Oz's preoccupation with divine silence in his later study, *Sbetikat ha-shamayim* (Jerusalem, 1993); *The Silence of Heaven: Agnon's Fear of God*, trans. B. Harshav (Princeton, N.J., 2000).

78. For the difference between the two dynamics, see Feldman, "And Rebecca;" Mitchell, *Sibling* (n. 55 above). For another fictional interweaving of the two dynamics, see, for example, Oz's "The Way of the Wind/ Spirit," mentioned above.

of Faith, those who ask, together with Kant, Stanton, Yizhar, and many others, what right anyone has over someone else's life, let alone the life of his/her son or daughter. On first blush it seems that this seeker of election implores his "father" in heaven to "touch" *his own* life, not his progeny ("Raise your hand to your son, to Jephthah"), thereby turning over the familiar economy of the "gift of death" in general and of that of the biblical Jephthah (or Abraham) in particular. Yet, even as we are led to believe that this Jephthah is going to replace sacrifice with martyrdom, the ominous contiguity of the two dreams, the father's and the daughter's, leaves no room for error: It is the "dark-and-beautiful" daughter who is destined to be "touched."

Ironically, then, the hero's active search for election/self-sacrifice advances a double, perhaps contradictory move. To begin with, the narrative appears to turn on its head the familiar sacrificial economy of the elect; but in the final analysis, it reestablishes the economy of the Akedah, the logic of the double gift of death. It is the next generation's readiness to die *instead of* the father, and the father's readiness *to accept* this gift, that guarantees the continued special relation between the elect and the one electing him.

"COME, MY BRIDE, ARISE, FOR THE TIME HAS COME"

I can still remember how shocked I was when I read Jephthah's monologue for the first time. His active search for sacrifice, of any kind, flew in the face of everything I thought I knew about Jewish tradition. In my book, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter was a horrible wrong, if not a crime, conceived in hubris, while the Akedah was only a test, a parable for the total rejection of any human sacrifice, let alone one's beloved son or daughter.⁷⁹

Of course, I still had a lot to learn about the zeal for sacrifice and martyrdom in the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles and liturgy, and about the way they have been read and reread by historians and textual scholars over the past century.⁸⁰ But on second thought, is Oz's "biblical" protago-

79. This is of course the ethical (majority?) perception of the Akedah, in contrast to the religio-theological (minority?) perception. See Louis Jacobs, "The Problem of the Akedah in Jewish Thought," in Perkins, *Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling* (n. 41 above), 1–9; cf. Sagi, "The Meaning;" Shelef, *Avanim*.

80. Beginning in their first modern publication in the 1890s, through the surge in scholarly studies about them since the 1970s, with Spiegel (1950) as a crucial interpretative link along the way. For recent treatments, see Israel Jacob Yuval, *Shne goyim be-vitnekh* (Tel Aviv, 2000) (English: *Two Nations in Your Womb* [Berkeley, Calif., 2006]); Susan Einbinder, *Beautiful Death* (Princeton, N.J., 2002); Jer-

nist so much different from his *contemporary* “sacrificing fathers,” like Shimshon Sheinbaum (“*Derekh ha-ruah*”) or Yolek (*Menuḥab nekhonab* [Perfect Peace])? Or from other fatherly incarnations in Israeli fiction of the 1970s? As I have shown elsewhere, in these contemporary novels the sacrificial knife is not only a poetic image for Jewish history, Israeli destiny, or the enemy; it is a knife raised by aggressive fathers—against a son, in a transparently symbolic dream; against a wife, in a psychological fantasy; or against an innocent substitute (the neighbor’s dog), in a quasi-realistic interior monologue.⁸¹ In these novels a knife is raised by a flesh-and-blood father, a father whose violence flows from an ideological righteousness and uncompromising principles. These fathers are portrayed as spreading havoc all around them, sacrificing their families on the altar of compulsive ideologies.

Yet if the fathers are not so different, the offspring are. In Oz’s midrash a sacrificial wish materializes through a daughter, rather than through the expected son. Even more, unlike the sons in those 1970s analogues, Pitdah is a *willing* sacrifice, perhaps a willful one, a sister to the “willful sons” painfully incriminated by the psychologist Shlomo Shoham in his 1975 essay “The Isaac Syndrome”: “The son who accepts joyfully, perhaps even chooses, willfully and enthusiastically, the yoke of the Law, the commandments, rules and regulations (*’ol torah, mitzvot, hukim u-klalim*). This is the compulsively obedient son who sees in the compliance with laws the crowning goal of his life.”⁸²

In our story, obedience and enthusiastic willfulness are structurally intimated through the splicing together of the two narrative strands. Jephthah’s search for a sign escalates after the Gileadites, headed by his

emy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God*; Shmuel Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (Cambridge, 2005). I thank my colleague Robert Chazan for his help in this area.

81. Respectively, Oz, *A Perfect Peace*; A. B. Yehoshua, *Gerushim me’uḥarim* (Tel Aviv, 1982; in English as *A Late Divorce*, trans. H. Halkin [New York, 1993]); Yaakov Shabtay, *Zikbron devarim* (Tel Aviv, 1977; *Past Continuous*, trans. D. Bilu [New York, 1985]). For an analysis of these novels, see my “Zionism on the Analyst’s Couch in Contemporary Israeli Literature,” *Tikkun Magazine* (November–December 1987): 31–34, 91–96. Revised version, “Back to Vienna: Zionism on the Literary Couch,” *Vision Confronts Reality: Historical Perspectives on the Contemporary Jewish Agenda* (*Herzl Yearbook* 9), ed. D. Sidorsky and R. Kozodoy (Madison, N.J., 1989): 310–35.

82. Shoham, “‘Akedat Yitshak,” *Halikhe Tantalus* (Tel Aviv, 1977): 241–54, 257. Unsurprisingly, this particular sentence is not included in the English version of the essay in *American Imago*. I discuss this issue in the Hebrew version of “Isaac or Oedipus?” in *Alpayim* 22 (2001).

own father and stepbrothers, beg him (in a scene that echoes the meeting between Joseph and his brothers in Genesis) to take command and save them from the Ammonites. To their chagrin, Getal, the Ammonite king, also tries to gain Jephthah's loyalty by offering him, Pharaoh-like, a position at his court (p. 100). At this turning point the role of dreamer shifts from father to daughter. Now Pitdah begins to dream about her wedding. And it is in this context that we should understand Jephthah's response, "reading" the daughter's dreams as the sign and proof of election for which he has been yearning all along.

The final confirmation he craves arrives in a form of a terse statement, uttered, according to Pitdah, by the ostensibly divine groom of her dream: "Come, my Bride, arise, for the Time has come" (p. 101). For Hebrew readers, the first part of this invitation, "*Bo'i kalab*," makes immediate sense, as it is taken from the Sabbath liturgy *Lekha dodi* (Come, Bridegroom, Let's Go), which celebrates the Sabbath as a festive wedding night. The relevance of this intertext, with all its allegorical and classical layers, is quite clear, as it creates an appropriately erotic atmosphere for the foreshadowed wedding of the dream. But what about the second part of the invitation, "*ki ba'ab 'et*" ["for the Time has come"]? Which Time? Time for what?

The intertext of this phrase is harder to decode, not because it is more arcane but because it is more contemporary. Moreover, once recognized, it ushers in an unexpectedly oxymoronic tension, for its context is diametrically opposite to the first part. In fact, Oz harnessed here together, in a startling zeugmatic linkage, an enticing promise for a most joyous event and an ominous summons for sacrificial death: For the phrase "*ki ba'ab 'et*" is borrowed directly from the opening of one of the most anthologized and recited lamentations of 1948, Haim Guri's canonic poem "Tefilah" ('Prayer'). This eulogy for his peers who sacrificed their own lives on the altar of the fatherland opens with the following words: "*Have' berakhah la-ne'arim, ki ba'ab 'et . . . Re'eb otam shotekim ve-domemim*" ('Bless these youths [my God], for the time has come . . . Look at them, still and silent').⁸³

Jephthah has no inkling, of course, of the message the author sends to the Israeli reader behind his back. Nor can he know that the dream invitation reported by his daughter is an invitation for tears, not for joy.⁸⁴ From his perspective, it is the answer to his own dreams, the sign for

83. Haim Guri, "*Tefilah*," *Pirhe'et* (Flowers of Fire, 1949) (Jerusalem, 1964), 58.

84. It will take two wars and another decade for an open invitation to weep to be articulated by an Israeli soldier, the kibbutz member Arnon Lapid. See his "*Hazmanah le-bekhi*," *Shdemot* 53 (Winter 1974): 50.

which he was waiting. His daughter's "gift of death," her readiness to take on herself the role of the postbiblical Isaac, to willfully offer herself up on the altar, might compel the god of his father to elect *him*, to bestow on him that Abrahamic status he covets, the recognition that would remove his own mark of Cain, of his being an outsider, the son of the other woman.

It is only now, after hearing the dream, that Jephthah makes his vow, *in public*, in the presence of everybody, including his daughter (p. 102). There is no need to reiterate here, I believe, how far this communal scene is from the secrecy/ privacy/ singularity that Kierkegaard and Derrida attribute to the Knight of Faith's gift of death. In her turn, Pitdah too answers him publicly and instructs the preparation of her wedding gown, the gown she will wear to greet her father/ lover, the gown in which she will go to her death, like Iphigenia or Antigone. Predictably, when the sacrificial ritual does finally take place, it is described as a wedding (just like many other maiden sacrifices, but also like the Akedah in some midrashim): "Later the tribesmen would speak of the great joy they had both shown, she as bride on her marriage couch, he like a lovesick groom" (p. 103).⁸⁵

Notwithstanding this joy, Jephthah is still waiting for a sign, even at the altar. He is still hoping to become Abraham; to be accepted; to enter that Kierkegaardian singular "mutual understanding" with his deity. But no heavenly intervention halts his sacrificial knife. It is not up to humans to force the Divine into action. In the final analysis, our contemporary Jephthah fails to undo the sacrificial-erotic economy that tradition has inscribed on the body of his daughter (among others). Sacrifice, even by two mutually consenting adults, cannot enforce election or redemption.⁸⁶

Reading Oz's rendition of Jephthah's story in hindsight, through the harsh Akedah revisionism from the 1970s on, his rewriting raises some

85. Cf: "Abraham looks as if he is marrying off his son and Isaac as if he is getting married," cited in H. N. Bialik and Ch. Ravnitzki, *Sefer ha-agadah* (Tel Aviv, 1987), 1:31. On the widespread use of the wedding imagery in the Akedah liturgy, see Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, and Elitzur, "Akedat Yitshak." The similarity between this Jewish sacrificial trope and the imagery of the virgin (female) wedding sacrifice is Greek myth reinforces my gendered understanding of the former. On the wedding-sacrifice of Greek maidens, see Loraux, *Tragic Ways*, 31–48; Ken Dowden, *Death and the Maiden: Girls' Initiation Rites in Greek Mythology* (Oxford, 1989); J. N. Bremmer, "Sacrificing a Child in Ancient Greece," in *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, ed. Noort and Tigchelaar, 21–43; cf. Hilhorst "The Bodmer Poem," n. 66 above.

86. Cf. Yuval, *Two Nations*, on the use of sacrifice as a way to force God into action and vengeance in Hebrew Crusade Chronicles.

compelling literary-historical and psycho-political questions: Why did he break with the *contemporary* plots of his own (and others') fiction and why did he turn to a midrashic mode? Is it possible that already *by the mid-1960s, even before the Six-Day War*, he felt that the trope of the willing sacrifice, which had accompanied Hebrew literature since the poetry of the early pioneers in the Land of Israel, had exhausted itself? Is it possible that already by the mid-1960s Oz felt ill at ease using a male (Isaac) figure to represent a willing sacrifice,⁸⁷ and hence his innovative use of a virgin (female) sacrifice, as the Greeks had always done?

Perhaps. Indeed, the failed effort of Oz's Jephthah ultimately brings home a startling realization: the fact that despite the vehement denials of the rabbinic tradition, Abraham and Jephthah do meet. As a result, the implemented sacrifice by the latter exposes the lie of the near-sacrifice of the former—and this a decade before such critiques had become part of mainstream Israeli cultural and political discourse.

In the 1960s, however, Oz still felt obliged to rationalize his characters' sacrificial zeal by recourse to insanity. No surprise then that both father and daughter are reported to have acted "like madmen" at the wedding-sacrifice (p. 103). What does surprise us is the new name by which the "wretched nomads" call Pitdah before that dramatic moment: "*She'ula* they called her, for she is *she'ula* to the Lord, a bride of blood" (ibid.; emphasis added).

In Hebrew, it is not difficult to identify in the twice-repeated participial epithet *she'ula* (predictably missing in the English translation⁸⁸) a feminine version of the name *Sba'ul* (as in King Saul). Moreover, the full phrase in which it is set clearly alludes to a popular etymology that the biblical redactor applies to the name of the prophet *Shmu'el* (Samuel), and this despite its transparent phonetic link to the name *Sba'ul*.⁸⁹ *But what exactly is this problematic etymology doing here, and why?*

87. As I have recently shown, even after the 1967 war the shift did not evolve "naturally," of its own accord; rather it was the result of a conscious act of cultural provocation that was also politically motivated; see my "Bemo Yadenu," *Iton* 77 (July-August 2006): 26–30.

88. "Wretched nomads . . . said: She is stranger, the daughter of a stranger, no man may approach her and live." *Where the Jackals Howl*, 216. This is a translation of the later version—no translation of the original short story is available. In a personal conversation de Lange admitted that he skipped this clause in the translation because "it would make no sense in English."

89. There is no consensus to date about the reason or meaning of this semantic conflation, yet this is not the concern of the following analysis. See Yaira Amit, "He Is on Loan to God," in *Hagut ba-mikra* 4 (Tel Aviv, 1982): 27–33. My thanks to Yaira for many fruitful conversations on this and other subjects.

SHE'ULA ON THE ALTAR OF HER FATHER/LAND

The answer to this question necessitates our return to Pseudo-Philo, with which I opened this essay. As mentioned above, one of the hallmarks of this rewritten Bible of the late Second Temple period, known in medieval times in both Jewish and Christian circles, was the embellishment of the figure of Jephthah's daughter, whose name in the Latin manuscripts is Seila. When the text was rediscovered in the late nineteenth century, modern scholarship quickly established that Seila was probably a corruption of the Hebrew *She'ila*.⁹⁰ However, why she was named so and what the name actually meant was more difficult to determine. Only a decade ago, after a full century of study, it was suggested that the original Hebrew name must have been *She'ula* (!) and not *She'ila*, as previously assumed.

Before I proceed to unpack the significance of this late development and its implication for my understanding of Oz's early story, several questions must be raised: Why did Oz double-name his heroine, and how did he come up with "She'ula" (rather than *She'ila*) some four decades ago? What did he mean by this appellation? And most importantly, why should we care?

We should indeed care, I would argue, because there is more to this semantic quibble than meets the ear; because *behind the century-long blind spot of Pseudo-Philo scholarship looms the difficulty of coming to terms with this text's nascent "theology of sacrifice," the one that would establish itself as a new norm for the next two millennia, and the one with which Oz and his contemporaries continue to struggle to this very day.*

In this new theology both Seila/Sheila/Sheula and Isaac were perceived as active participants in their own sacrifice. However, the phonetic/orthographic corruption of the daughter's name made it difficult to appreciate the novelty that her name was actually meant to reflect. Interestingly, while Cohn hesitantly suggested (marking his suggestion with a question mark) to read "Sheila" as a *passive* participial formation of the verb *sh-'l*

90. The corruption was apparently occasioned by the lack of distinction in Greek between the sounds Sh and S—ironically reminiscent of the Ephraimites' tragic "shibboleth" in Judges! I am indebted to Steven Bowman for this observation.

The correction of the name has been first suggested by Cohn in his 1898 essay, and was in fact one of the linguistic and etymological proofs that bolstered his argument for an original Hebrew text. It was promptly accepted by his contemporaries as well as by twentieth-century scholars (Louis Ginzberg, in *The Legends of the Jews*, and Micha Yoseph Berdyczewski, in his Hebrew anthology, *Minekor Israel*).

("she who was demanded"?; p. 300), popular consensus voted for an *active* interpretation, deriving the name from either the favor she *asked* (demanded?) of her father (the two-month extension to roam the hills and lament her maidenhood), or from the hard questions she asked the sages in the midrashic retellings, perhaps *demanding* the repeal of her father's vow.⁹¹ These popular interpretations were, however, only partially on target. In context, the daughter's name has nothing to do with her queries of any kind, yet has everything to do with her being offered in sacrifice. Pseudo-Philo's Jephthah himself appears to justify the name by a popular etymology of his own: "Rightly is thy name called Seila, *that thou shouldst be offered for a sacrifice*."⁹²

Rightly or not, this rationalization seems highly questionable, even as "popular etymology." At first blush there seems to be no semantic link between the Hebrew root *sh-'l* (especially in its [reconstructed] form "Sheila") and the roots of the nouns *'olah* ('whole burnt offering) or *korban* ('sacrifice'). Not surprisingly, this key sentence is missing from the relevant section in *The Chronicles of Yerahmi'el*, a medieval Hebrew anthology that is the only other extant source for this ancient retelling of Judges 11.⁹³ This lacuna raises a question, which to the best of my knowledge has not yet been asked: Why did the compiler or copyist of this anthology skip this crucial sentence?⁹⁴ Did he have a different manuscript, as pro-

91. These interpretations often erroneously assume that the name She'ila has a midrashic provenance. See Feuchtwanger, *Jesta und seine Tochter* (Hebrew, 217), and Baumgarten, "Remember that glorious girl." I believe that a possible source of this error is Ginzberg's chapter on Jephthah, which begins with the narrative of Pseudo-Philo, naming the daughter *Sheilah*, and then seamlessly goes on to tell the different midrashic versions, in which she is *not* named. Since the references to his various sources appear only in the sixth [last] volume of the full edition, the average reader is not aware that Ginzberg's "organic" narrative is in fact made up of various pieces.

92. James, *Biblical Antiquities*, 191; see my epigraph. Cf. Jacobson, "Rightly was your name called Seila, that you would be offered in sacrifice" (*Commentary* 1:160).

93. This medieval Hebrew anthology of midrashic sources includes *translations back into Hebrew* from the Latin Pseudo-Philo, as the original Hebrew had apparently been lost already by the time it was assembled (late eleventh–early twelfth century). Like Pseudo-Philo, this text was rediscovered in the late nineteenth century and was translated to English by Moses Gaster in 1899. A Hebrew scholarly edition was published for the first time only recently: Eli Yassif, ed., *Sefer ha-zikhronot, hu' divre ba-yamim le-Yerahmiel* (Tel Aviv, 2001). I thank Eli Yassif and Steven Bowman for an ongoing conversation about the intricacies of this text and its cultural surroundings.

94. Yassif cites the missing Latin phrase but does not explain its significance. *Sefer ha-zikhronot*, 209, n. 86.

posed by some scholars?⁹⁵ Or perhaps he decided to pass it over because the etymology it suggests made no sense to him?

We may never know for sure. What we can reconstruct, however, is the hidden link behind Pseudo-Philo's awkward etymology. To see it, we need to activate yet another biblical intertext, the story of Hannah, the barren mother of Samuel, who had vowed that if God gave her offspring she would "give" him her son.⁹⁶ This quasi-sacrificial story is permeated by the root *shb'-l*, which functions here as a *Leitwort*, to borrow Buber's useful formulation. What begins in 1 Sam 1.17 as a wordplay on "request" or "ask" is echoed in verse 27—*she'elati asher sha'alti* ("The Lord has given me what I *asked*. What I *asked for* I have received"), only to be suddenly diverted in a new semantic direction (while still playing on the same root) in verse 28: "For now I *lend* him to the Lord; for his whole life he is *on loan* [loaned] to the Lord" (. . . *hish'iltibu . . . sha'ul*).

It is this latter meaning of the root (lend, loan, borrow) that is activated in Pseudo-Philo too. "Seila" is clearly a corruption of "She'ula" (not "She'ila"), a transparent play on Hannah's *sha'ul*, both semantically (lend, give up, offer up) and morphologically (feminine form of the same passive participial formation). It seems then that the analogy between Jephthah's and Hannah's vows inspired the anonymous author to link the two names, thereby equating the daughter with the son and along the way expressing his great appreciation of her *willing* sacrifice.⁹⁷

Now that we unraveled the secret behind She'ula's name, Oz's early use of it appears rather uncanny. Could the superb ear of the creative artist help him anticipate Pseudo-Philo scholarship by three decades?⁹⁸

95. See Howard Jacobson, "Thoughts on the *Chronicles of Yerabmeel*, Ps-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, and Their Relationship," *Studia Philonica Annual: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* 9 (1997): 239–63; however, he does not point out the variation I am indicating here, although it could have bolstered his own argument.

96. In the Bible, the verb "give" is often associated with sacrifice, as Levenson reminds us. *Death and Resurrection*, 18.

97. This appreciation might have been construed by the rabbis as "proto-Christian" and may have consequently contributed to the text's relegation beyond the pale. As mentioned above, the rabbis used the analogy between the vows in the opposite direction, allowing Jephthah's daughter to cite Hannah's vow as a precedent for the substitution of ritual service for an enacted sacrifice.

98. Jacobson (*Commentary*, 2:960) correctly suggests that the name must have been Sheula, without, however, elaborating on the interpretative potential of this intertextual link, as I suggest here: "The name is evidently שְׂאִילָה [SHEULA] (rather than שְׂאִילָה [SHEILA] as Cohn thought; the corruption, if such it be, is trivial), the feminine counterpart of שְׂאִיל [Shaul] . . . It is however possible that

Possibly. Yet a bit of detective work has uncovered that the uncanny intuition involved here belongs not to Amos Oz himself but rather to an anonymous translator, one more participant in this fascinating chain of “Pseudo-Philo transmission.” For the very first modern writer to rename Jephthah’s daughter She’ula was the Hebrew translator of a short fragment of Pseudo-Philo that appeared in print in Israel already in 1964.⁹⁹ Unfortunately, both this translator’s She’ula and Oz’s version of her have remained relatively unknown, patiently waiting their turn to be exposed at this late date.¹⁰⁰

I found this fragment, unattributed, in a rather forgotten anthology, *Nashim ba-tanakh* (Women of the Bible).¹⁰¹ This 600-pages-plus tome of women’s literary representations, culled from Hebrew legend, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, passed almost unnoticed.¹⁰² Nonetheless, it did catch the attention of the then young kibbutz member Amos Oz, when it was sent as a gift for the high holidays to the subscribers of the then popular Labor daily, *Davar*.¹⁰³

the name means ‘she who has been borrowed,’ i.e., that God has lent Jephthah his daughter and now reclaims the loan. *Strangely*, similar etymologies are used in the Bible for Samuel (see 1 Sam 1:20, 27–8).” (Emphasis added.)

99. “Rightly is your name called She’ula, for you are on loan (*she’ula*) to God, to be offered up on his altar.” Zmora, *Nashim ba-tanakh*, 94.

100. Amazingly, in his 1967 Hebrew translation, Artom preserved the Latin *Seila* (סַיִלָּה), which yields no etymology or meaning. Artom was inexplicably oblivious to the fact that the name had been understood as Sheila ever since Leopold Cohn’s 1898 exposition.

101. The anthology was compiled, annotated, and edited by Israel Zmora (1898–1983), who admits to have borrowed “the general idea” from *All the Women of the Bible*, a collection of “biographies” and scholarly entries, edited by Edith Deen (New York, 1955). As he correctly points out, his book greatly differs from the American anthology in its overall organization (let alone in the fact that it uses only Hebrew sources). I thank Cheryl Exum for her help in identifying Deen’s anthology.

102. The only review of the anthology I could find (M. Ungerfeld, “Nashim ba-tanakh,” *Ha-Tsofeh* [July 7, 1964]: 4) has little to say about the fact that in contrast to the “scores and even hundreds” of studies on biblical women written in other languages which the reviewer mentions, he could cite only three such previous Hebrew books. Indeed, feminism did not make any inroads in Israeli culture until the 1980s; see my *No Room of Their Own: Gender and Nation in Israeli Women’s Fiction* (New York, 1999).

103. It is today still within reach in Oz’s home library in Arad, as per my conversations with him in May 2004 and at the conference in his honor at the University of Pennsylvania in October 2004. My thanks to the organizers and participants of this conference for their support and enthusiastic reception.

The budding author could have no inkling of course of the provenance of the brief tale titled "She'ula."¹⁰⁴ He had no idea that by accident he had stumbled on a subversive intertestamental rewriting, very different from the other midrashic tales featured (and attributed) in the same anthology. But it was no doubt the very otherness of this text that fired his imagination. This otherness comes through clearly in the words the anonymous author of Pseudo-Philo had put in the mouth of Seila/She'ula in response to the bad news:

ותאמר לו שאולה בתו: "מי אשר יוכל להתעצב על מותי בראותי את העם כי נושע? האם לא תזכר אשר היה בימי אבותינו, אשר הקדיש האב את בנו לעולה ולא ימרה את פיו, כי אם יאות לו בשמחה? ויכון אשר העלה וישמח אשר העלה. ועתה אל תפר דבר מאשר נדרת וכאשר יצא מפיו כן עשה לי, אבי! . . ."¹⁰⁵

Seila his daughter said to him: "Who is there who would be sad to die, seeing the people freed? Or have you forgotten what happened in the days of our fathers, when the father placed the son as a burnt offering, and he did not dispute him but gladly gave consent to him, and the one being offered was ready, and the one who was offering was rejoicing? Now do not annul anything you vowed but do it all, my father."¹⁰⁶

The gap between this response and the one reiterated in various rabbinic midrashim is unbridgeable. Not only does She'ula make no attempt to protest her fate and save her life; rather, she calmly draws a full analogy between her case and Isaac's! The question is how we understand this analogy.

While all modern commentators are impressed by the "deep significance" that this parallel must have held for the author of Pseudo-Philo, they differ slightly in their specific interpretations of it. For Philip Alexander, for example, Seila has become "the feminine counterpart of the Akedah,"¹⁰⁷ and for van der Horst her sacrifice is similarly "a second

104. Nor do I. One possibility is that Zmora or his translator found it in Ginzberg's *Legends of the Jews* and identified the implied wordplay and its allusion to Samuel. Special thanks to my friends and colleagues (Amit, Ben-Amos, Brenner, Elboym, Hazan-Rokem, Hever, Miron, Shinan, Valler, Yassif) for their support in trying to solve the riddle of the translator's identity. So far, however, all our efforts have failed. The possibility that the editor was also the unidentified translator could not be confirmed.

105. Zmora, *Nashim ba-tanakh*, 94.

106. Jacobson, *Commentary*, 1:160.

107. Philip Alexander, "Retelling the Old Testament," *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture*, ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge, 1988), 110.

akedah, completely on a par with the first.”¹⁰⁸ Bruce Fisk, on the other hand, questions whether Seila is indeed “a new Isaac” because for him it is Isaac who is “re-created here in the image of Jephthah’s daughter.”¹⁰⁹ To my mind, however, *the covert issue of this academic dispute is less the status of Seila than the status of Isaac*. Indeed, there is a strong possibility that in She’ula’s analogy the Akedah is perceived not as a “binding,” namely, an aborted sacrifice, but rather as an enacted sacrifice. Add to this the motif of rejoicing and the use of the typological nouns “father” and “son” (rather than the named Abraham and Isaac, or the pronouns used in the midrash, “*zeh . . . ve-zeh*” or “*ba-’ehad . . . ba-sheni*”),¹¹⁰ and we may understand why Pseudo-Philo has been recently defined as a liminal text, an early midrash formed in the undifferentiated no-man’s land before rabbinic Judaism and Christianity embarked on their own separate paths.¹¹¹ (Unless of course we entertain the possibility that the text’s “proto-Christian” coloring is a late addition, the contribution of the Greek or Latin translator—a familiar phenomenon in other fourth-century Latin adaptations, such as Josephus.¹¹²)

Moreover, a close look at the full text of Pseudo-Philo exposes astonishing deviations precisely in the treatment of the Akedah (which may well explain a certain suspicion on part of the sages). First and foremost, the Akedah does not appear at all in the chapters dedicated to the patriarchal stories. The narrative simply skips the whole event. It is mentioned briefly in Balaam’s prophecy and is fully described only in the Song of Deborah, which turns here into a short prose history of the Israelites.

108. Van der Horst, “Deborah and Seila,” 115.

109. Bruce N. Fisk, “Offering Isaac Again and Again: Pseudo-Philo’s Use of the Aqedah as Intertext,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 42.3 (2000): 497–501; see also “Seila’s heroic virtue and courageous submission are mapped back onto Isaac,” *ibid.*, 500.

110. This is a subtle stylistic difference that escaped Fisk’s attention in his otherwise cogent argument, yet it problematizes his smooth comparison between Pseudo-Philo and rabbinic midrash (p. 498).

111. See Brown, *No Longer Be Silent*; Boyarin, *Dying for God*, and *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004). Interestingly, Feuchtwanger, who is familiar with the name She’ila and even uses it to name one of the daughter’s friends, draws an analogy between the two sacrifices but follows rabbinic tradition by insisting on their *difference*.

112. See “The Fall of Jerusalem,” a Christian theological treatise based on *The Jewish Wars* and attributed to [Pseudo]-Hegesippus. In the tenth century this text was de-Christianized and re-Hebraized by the anonymous author of *Sefer Yosipon*. See Albert A. Bell Jr., “Josephus and Pseudo-Hegesippus,” *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, ed. L. H. Feldman and G. Hata (Detroit, 1987), 349–61. Special thanks to Steven Bowman for this reference.

Again, the text is surprisingly innovative, even when compared to other rewritten Bibles: Abraham's and Isaac's famous silence on the three-day journey to Mount Moriah is replaced here by a dialogue. *The father declares his intention* and the son responds with a detailed speech in which he volunteers to be sacrificed for the startling reason that "through me nations will be blessed and through me the people will understand that the Lord has deemed the human soul of a man worthy to be a sacrifice."¹¹³

Scholars have usually brought this passage as proof for the early stages of the process that turned Isaac into a martyr, volunteering for self-immolation.¹¹⁴ Yet it seems to me that a stronger argument is possible: that an unimplemented Akedah could *not* have served as a precedent for the enacted sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, and that the same analogy that facilitated the medieval reading of Jephthah's story as an *unimplemented* sacrifice, *could, under the pressure of different historical circumstances, facilitate a reading of Isaac's story as an enacted sacrifice.*¹¹⁵

To sum up: The scholarship of Pseudo-Philo has long admired Seila's long, impassioned lament, the very lament that had turned her into an inspiring model for virgin martyrdom and saintly self-abnegation. From the perspective of Jewish tradition, however, and all the more so Israeli culture, it is not Seila's model that is crucial but rather what she implies for Isaac's sacrifice. Clearly, the translated Pseudo-Philo fragment inspired Oz's unique take on the "binding" qua "sacrifice." But to what end?

I suggest that the *gezerah shavah* ('verbal analogy') that She'ula draws between the two narratives, the father/son's and the father/daughter's, offered Oz a singular way to cope with his own darkness—and ours. For

113. Pseudo-Philo 32.3. (Jacobson, 1:149; cf. James, 175). It is worth noting that a similar rewriting also underlines the Qur'anic version of the sacrifice of a (nameless) son by a (nameless) father (Q 37.102–7).

114. Geza Vermes, "Redemption and Genesis 22—The Binding of Isaac and the Sacrifice of Jesus," in his *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden, 1961), 193–227; followed by Levenson, *Death and Resurrection*. Cf. Fisk, "Offering Isaac," and, especially, van der Horst, "Deborah and Seila," 115, who reminds us also of the "blood" of Isaac mentioned in Balaam's "blessing" (in Pseudo-Philo 18.5). For a recent summary, see Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge, 2004), 33–36 et passim.

115. A similar reading might also loom behind the celebrated analogy that the author of 4 Maccabees (dated to the same period) draws between the mother of the seven sons and Abraham. See 4 Macc 15.26–29 and 16.19–21, respectively. James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (New York, 1985), 2:560–61. Cf. Fisk, "Offering Isaac," n. 57.

his most intriguing achievement in this early story is the deconstruction, or at least reversal, of values of its source materials. Whereas Pseudo-Philo stands on the threshold of an epoch that made human sacrifice an ideal (Isaac, She'ula, Jesus), "Ish pere'" turns this ideal on its head. About two and half decades before A. B. Yehoshua declared publicly an open revolt against the Akedah,¹¹⁶ Amos Oz had exposed its dangers in this unassuming and unfamiliar short story. Pitdah-She'ula's insistence on the enactment of the sacrifice—and not hers alone but her model's as well—uncovers the danger involved in the persistence of a myth in which a knife always hovers in the air. One can only imagine the shock to Joseph Klausner, the author of *The Messianic Idea in Israel*, had he lived long enough to read his grand-nephew's transvaluation of his own cherished sources.

For this was a story of "dreams and darkness"—indeed, this phrase, a close variant of the title of Oz's recent mature masterpiece *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, was already in evidence in this miniature gem, the topaz, the *pitdah* of his early work. This unexpected link exposes Oz's youthful apprehension, less than a year before the outbreak of the Six-Day War, that it was indeed She'ula's gift of *death*, rather than the story of the *saved* Isaac, that epitomized the dreams of darkness of his generation.¹¹⁷

116. See A. B. Yehoshua, *Mar Mani* (Tel Aviv, 1990); English: *Mr. Mani*, trans. H. Halkin (New York, 1992), and the following controversies, documented in my "Isaac or Oedipus?" and "Between Genesis and Sophocles: Biblical Psychopolitics in A. B. Yehoshua's *Mr. Mani*," *History and Literature: Festschrift for Arnold Band*, ed. W. Cutter and D. C. Jacobson (Providence, R.I., 2002), 451–64. It should be noted, however, that *Mr. Mani* is only the apex of Yehoshua's continuous wrestling with the Akedah, begun in the 1960s with his story "Three Days and A Child" and sustained throughout his career until his latest novel, *Friendly Fire* (Hebrew = *Esheb yedi'utit*) (2007).

117. This article is based on a chapter of my forthcoming study, *From Jesus and Iphigenia to Oedipus: Rewriting 'Isaac' in Tel Aviv*. My most profound thanks to my graduate students whose enthusiasm and inspiring seminar papers in Fall 2003 sustained my prolonged work on this essay, and to my sister Leah Shulman, whose proficient and generous archival research made the completion of this project possible. I am also indebted to the organizers and participants of the CrossCurrent summer Research Colloquium, and especially to the *JQR* readers of the first draft of this essay whose relentless critique pushed me to go the extra mile.