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VIRGINITY: TOWARD A FEMINIST PHILOLOGY

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The biblical book of *Judges* is an extremely violent book. Murder is, one might suggest, the basic event of the book. Some of these murders have young, innocent women as their victims. The best known victim is Jephthah's daughter, sacrificed by her father in Chapter 11. It is said of her that 'she had known no man' (11:40). In the afterlife of the story, Jephthah's daughter has become the nameless virgin, precursor of Mary. In this paper, virginity will be explored as a construct, a danger, and a misunderstanding; as a negation, suspension, and transition: as a gift, a ritual and a taboo. The question to be answered is: what is the meaning of the idea of virginity, and how can philology help, how does it help in practice, to understand the position of Jephthah's daughter?

The underlying issue is that of the relations between philology as an academic discipline, narrative, and the politics of gender. The choice of an ancient text to explore this question is motivated by the problem that, as I will contend, is central to these relations: that of distance, strangeness, otherness, and the tendency to counter these frightening features with naturalization, normalization, subsumation of the self. This tendency is generally cultural. As a consequence, the almost exclusive possession of the field of biblical scholarship by men — and the same, to a sometimes slightly lesser extent, holds for other fields — entails a systematic distortion of concepts which have a specific, gender-related meaning. Virginity is such a concept and the analysis of this concept *in situ*, in a specific text wherein it has a crucial position, makes a good case for the general point I wish to make about the interest-orientedness of philology. A semiotic approach that replaces the word in its context and takes signifying systems other than the sheer linguistic-historical into account is needed. I will

argue in the analysis that follows that narratology, anthropology and psychoanalysis are useful to support the evidence provided by an open, feminist philology. The input of other signifying systems can provide the tools for a reconsideration that opens up the text and gives the concept back to those whom it concerns.

Bath-Jephthah and Jephthah: the Daughter's Gift

The victim of the only fully explicit human sacrifice in the Bible is referred to as 'Jephthah's daughter'. It is arguably because of her namelessness that this character has become, in later rewritings of the story[1], the secondary character, qualified only as a virgin, obedient and submissive, even 'wise in her submissiveness'[2]. To name this nameless character is to violate the biblical text. Not to name her is to violate her with the text, endorsing the text's ideological position. The violation of the text is justifiable if it serves the purpose of better understanding it. I feel it is not only acceptable, but necessary, to take some distance from the alienating anonymity of the character without, however, losing sight of the structure of subjectivity that it signifies. Therefore, I will give this woman a name, but a name which stresses her dependence and her state. In order to make her speakable, I will call her what she basically is: Jephthah's daughter, Bath-Jephthah, or simply, *Bath*. Bath-Jephthah *versus* Jephthah: the inequality, the dependence, and yet the acknowledgment of her as a full character, resounds in her given name.

Bath's beginning underscores a discrepancy in the narrative status assigned to her. Not only is she nameless; she is unknown and conditionally described. These are characteristics of a certain conception of virginity: firstness, freshness, virtuality. Her firstness is modified by the formulation in Hebrew, where it is expressed in relation to the house of the father, and to separation from it/him.

> And Jephthah vowed a vow unto Yahweh and said: if you will indeed/fully deliver the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be, the goer-out of the doors of my house to meet me in returning in peace from the sons of Ammon shall be unto Yahweh and I will offer as a burnt offering (11:30-31).

As a speech-act, the vow is a combination of trade and promise. The deal concerns a military victory which Jephthah feels unable to accomplish himself. Yahweh's support was granted to him already: the point of the vow, therefore, is to perform this particular, ritual speech-act. Now this speech-act, the vow of a precious, personal gift, coming out of the chief's house to meet the victor, has been performed before: in Chapter 1, verse 12. Just as Othniel, there, deserves the chief's daughter as a bride, so Yahweh, the real victor, deserves Jephthah's daughter. The speech-act is almost identical in both cases, and so is the situation: a difficult military situation, a confrontation which the chief feels unable to go

through by himself. The vow ends with a difference: the daughter will not be given away as a bride but as a burnt offering. Object of promise, of trade, of gift and of offering by fire, Bath's position is already delineated before she is even mentioned. It is within this framework that she will be allowed to act.

Jephthah's vow is superfluous, since 'the spirit of Yahweh' had already come upon him. This points to a lack of understanding. Such a failure as the beginning mortgaged the vow itself. It is Jephthah's status as a failing focalizer[3], as a character who seeks too much and sees too little, who is unable to match speech and action through the mediation of insight, that determines Bath's fate. Jephthah fails to understand that he should refrain from speaking; the spirit come upon him being, paradoxically, physical[4], he should have acted upon it. Not satisfied to be an agent of deeds, he wants to know, and, not knowing, he replaces insight with a speech that acts[5]. If his actions are to be killing, his words, consistent with them, are to be killing, too. This symmetry is, so to speak, driven home to him[6].

The ritual in which young women came out of the house to meet the victor seems the most likely background for this vow. The 'normal' procedure of celebration after victory included the participation of his daughter as the dancing and singing maiden. However, and this is a way to look at Jephthah's ' unconscious ' motivations, the insecurity he just expressed implies that he does *not* consider himself the victor. His appeal to Yahweh in fact cuts off the possibility for himself to be welcomed as a victor. This contradictory feeling can be seen as a motivator of his 'error'. His preoccupation with his status as hero and the glimmering awareness that he does not deserve it, conflict, and produce the impasse.

So much for Bath's first presence/absence. How her state is worded, and by whom, is the next question. In the following discussion, I will not oppose Bath to Jephthah but to the narrator. I will analyze the discourse which is more directly devoted to the expression of the idea of virginity.

Negation and Denial of Womanhood

In the narrator's discourse, the episode of Bath's sacrifice is closed with the following statement:

> and she had not known man.

The narrator does not use the word *bethulah*, traditionally translated as ' virginity '. He uses the negative formula. This detail raises several questions which, however obvious they seem to me, have not been raised by philologists, since the phrase *seems* linguistically unproblematic. We may wonder whether the two expressions are synonyms. Secondly, the relevance of the phrase as the closure of the account of the tragedy and as a transition to the ensuing ritual must

be examined. Thirdly, the meaning and value of the idea it expresses, in its negativity, has to be interpreted. Finally, the use of the phrase on other occasions may be helpful in determining its meaning and function.

Bath herself, in contrast, does use the word *bethulah*:

> And she said to her father: let this thing be allowed to me: leave me alone for two months, that I may depart and wander upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity (11:37).

All translations which I consulted render *bethulah* as the direct object of the verb ' to bewail '. Such a translation relies on a conception of virginity that I contend to be alien to the passage's preoccupations. The latter can only be grasped if we realize who the subject of the statement is. The speaker, here, is Bath herself. It is her view of virginity, her focalization, that we can expect to encounter. Philological analysis has no problems here; the word means 'simply' virginity, and what virginity means is not questioned. If we do suspend the now common, negative meaning of the word, and use the methods of philology to grasp its meaning in this particular context, we can reach more interesting results.

A first doubt is cast upon the total synonymy between the two expressions by their frequent juxtapositions in the same sentence. This, in 21:12, the wife -hunters.

> found among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred young girls, 'virgins' that had not known man by lying with him.

The redundance of this definition of virginity apparently supports the casual translations of one of its components by the whole concept. But why should we assume redundance in the first place? In other cases, it is either the one or the other expression that is used. In 19:24, for example, the old host proposes to the rapists[7]:

> Behold, my daughter the ' virgin ' (*bitti habethulah*) and his ' concubine '; I will bring them out, and humble you them, and do with them what is good unto you.

Why would it be that the plunderers of Jabesh-gilead make such a point of the young women's state of virginity, using the negative phrase, while the host, here, only uses ' virgin ' and juxtaposes it to ' concubine '? Again, philologists, feeling that they *know* what these ' self-evident ' words mean, fail to raise the question[8]. However, if virginity in the negative sense were at stake, the juxtaposition of the two women would hardly be commendable, for virginity as a special attraction would then make the concubine less than acceptable as a trade for her husband's safety[9]. Lot, for example, offers his daughters in these terms: "they had not known man "; they are not referred to as *bethulah*. The difference in use suggests that what is offered in Jebush is two women who are for some reason useable for

the use that is required: rape, rather than virginity as such. The aspect of the daughter that allows her father to juxtapose her to the ' concubine ' who, as the story shows, is a newly-wed young woman, is nubility, rather than virginity; she is available, rather than unused.

The expression translated as ' to bewail my virginity ' has to be reconsidered in this light. A second argument against the traditional translation and the synonymy between the two expressions is the syntactical structure of the sentence. Keukens (1982) is the only philological essay I know of wherein this question is raised. He argues that the verb ' to bewail ' can also have a direct object introduced with the particle *et*[10]. This is not the case. The verb ' to bewail ' (*ebkeh*) is used with the particle *et* in comparable cases like *Genesis* 37:35, *Leviticus* 10:6, and *Deuteronomy* 21:13. It refers in these cases to the verbal expression of complaint. For the intransitive use of the verb as we have it here, the meaning ' to lament ', in some absolute sense, is appropriate. Now, the preposition *al* which accompanies the verb here is one of the most elusive of all Hebrew prepositions. The dictionary I use[11] gives at least twenty-eight meanings, one of which is the frequent confusion with *el*, another preposition with twelve meanings. For students with the positivistic agenda that most philologists have, this would be enough to reject the dictionary as a source. But the plurivalence of the preposition can also help in seeing new possibilities. If philology allows context to decide, our context here has another instance of *al*. In the same speech to her father, Bath uses the expression, *al-heharim*, when she asks permission to go ' to the mountains '. This repetition of the preposition before a three-syllable noun produces a ' broken parallelism ' (Kugel 1981; Berlin 1985; Alter 1985). With the spatial referent, the preposition refers to *direction*. In many other cases, it implies confrontation. If we combine these two features, we might wonder if the direction ' to the mountains ' involves also a confrontation with the mountains. The case under consideration could be modeled upon the first spatial one, and transfer to the temporal sphere the same idea: to go ' toward the mountains ' in order to be confronted with the solitude in the wilderness, and to lament ' until ' or ' toward ' some temporal, parallel state. We can try out the hypothesis that *bethulah* expresses the nubile state of the grown-up girl. It is a temporal indication of a phase of life:

> Das Wort macht keine Angebe über die Unberührtheit des Mädchen [the word gives no clue about the untouched state of the girl] (Keukens 1982).

The fact that virginity in the negative sense is clearly an important value for the Israelites, and determines the marriageability of a girl, does not entail the relevance of the feature *for the girl* in this particular instance.

If we take it that *bethulah* can refer to a life-phase, we can establish a series of nouns that also indicate a life-phase of the young woman. On the one side, then, there is the noun *na'arah*, young girl, which refers to a phase of near-ripeness

just preceding *bethulah*; on the other side, there is the *'almah*, the nubile, mostly already married woman *before her first pregnancy*. Between ' virgin ' and ' young wife ' the *'almah* is the woman already given away, who can still be repudiated; she has not yet proven to be worthy of her new state. As such, it is not a particularly enviable phase. The transition between *na'arah* and *'almah*, between the young woman as property of the father and property of the husband, is a phase of insecurity and danger. The young woman who fails to produce children will be the object of contempt, possibly of rejection. No wonder, then, that the transition is feared, rather than looked forward to. In this view, the state of *bethulah* is first and foremost that of a potential object of gift, a subject of insecurity. How will the girl be given, and to whom? How will her next phase, yet unknown to her, end?

If Bath had been given to a human victor, her fate would have been marriage. The phrase that she uses: ' to lament until/toward my nubility ' can be imagined as referring to a situation like Achsah's. After the victory, her father gives her to the hero, and the daughter undergoes a transition. It is to this transition that an implicit allusion can be read in Achsah's story. When, after the victory, she is about to join her husband, she comes to her father with a request. Where does she come from? It has been assumed that she came from some safe place where she had been hidden during the dangers of the battle. More likely to me seems the interpretation on the symbolic mode: she comes from a place ' in the mountains ', that is, from a phase of transition that prepared her for marriage.

Arnold van Gennep's concept of the rites of passage, and its structural-semiotic elaboration by Turner (1969) come to mind here. Several aspects of the fragment confirm this meaning. The mountains are the wilderness that represents the transition from one life-phase to the next as from one world to the next. They represent the solitude the initiate has to undergo. This is expressed in Bath's request when she asks to be left alone for two months. The solitude is requested and delimited, as can be expected in the case of the rite; it is her conception of what is her ' normal ' next phase. Moreover, Bath wishes to bring her friends. Usually, rites of passage are inflicted upon the entire age-group of the community. The friends may be assumed to be her age, to share her state. Both her friends and Bath will be *given away*, given to a man. The ripeness of the young women is going to be distributed by their fathers. They themselves have only power over the ritual that prepares them.

It is often noticed that Bath accepts her father's vow, indeed, encourages him to fulfill it. I venture the suggestion that what critics call her ' wisdom ' (Boling 207) may be seen in a different light. The praise of Bath is couched by Rabbi Lias in contradictory terms:

> no language is sufficient to do justice to the nobleness of this devoted woman. There are *no lamentations*, no reproach... (Cohen 258, my italics)

Lament is precisely what Bath chooses to use her last months for. This praise displays patriarchal values. Submission is interpreted as wisdom or as devotion to the cause of the nation. The submission cannot be denied. It can be read as slightly cynical if we realize that Bath may have understood her situation well enough to know that protest would be futile. Being narratively circumscribed as the absolute object, she can only act within, not against that position. Knowing that her father owns her, and owes the victor his daughter, she will in any case have to go through the transition that awaits all *bethulah*'s. She cannot protest, and neither can Achsah, nor her friends. But she can lament, and that is what she intends to do, in spite of Lias's admiration for her refraining from it.

The question that arises at this point is that of the status of the discourse uttered by this character. Her speech is embeded in narratorial discourse. Would the narrator, who does use the other expression, let his character walk away with her own language, that he could then only obediently quote? Of course, this ancient narrative is not a psychological novel, and standards of modern realism cannot be applied to it without anachronistic distortion. I see this differentiation of expressions in relation to the oral background of these texts, acknowledged but seldom exploited by philologists. Just as the formulation of Jephthah's vow is structured according to the standard principles of ritual vows, just so, Bath's discourse is modelled on the kind of language applicable to young women in transition. The discourse fragments were part of the culturally available formulas that narrators had at their disposal. It is not even certain that the composer of this text understood the full extent of the meaning of this "female" language. He knew it was around, and,therefore, useable. If this conjecture is acceptable, the phrase, like many others, can be compared to those wandering rocks, glacial tilts that travelled with the ice toward a new and alien world where they were put to a use foreign to their origin. They were used to form tombs, for example. Out of their original context, understood solely within the new context, yet indestructible, such wandering rocks are like female, ritual language as we have it here.

What we see so far is a confrontation between two different conceptions of ' virginity ' — a female and a male one: the one focalized by the subject of the state and one representative of the owner of the girl, the father. The comparison between the two expressions suggests that a difference in ideology is at stake. Conflating the two expressions in one idea of virginity, as it is seen today is, then, an act of repression, destruction of the wandering rock that is a rare and precious leftover of other traditions, adopted without being understood, to be subsequently erased.

Positive knowledge of negative facts

Freud's well-known essay, "The Taboo of Virginity," opens with an interesting sentence whose pseudo-objective, scientific tone hardly conceals interests similar to Jephthah's:

> The demand that a girl shall not bring to her marriage with a particular man any *memory* of sexual relations with another is, *indeed*, nothing other than the *logical* continuation of the *right* to *exclusive possession* of a woman, which forms the essence of monogamy, the extension of this monopoly over the past (193; my italics).

What is here ' logical ' will be ' justifying ' in the next sentence. The juridical term ' right ' as well as ' monopoly ' could do with some irony. But what is most striking is the word ' memory ', with its complement ' past ' that substantiates it. It reminds us of the biblical expression for virginity from the male perspective: to have known no man.

We are used to interpreting the biblical expression 'to know' (*jadah*) as a simple, if euphemistic synonym of sexual intercourse. As we could expect, however, the choice of one expression over its synonymical alternatives is never innocent. When read against Freud's description of the motivation for the valuation of virginity, it is not so much the case that ' to know ' means sex, but that sex means ' to know '. The importance of sex is the knowledge in which it results. The lost innocence is the loss of ignorance, as the story of the paradise of Eden and its loss has taught us[12]. The fact that knowledge, rather than, for example, defilement, is at stake is consistent with the concern about ' right" and ' monopoly '. This meaning of sex as knowledge is, in the valuation of virginity, extended to the past. Thereby, knowledge becomes memory.

I do not think that the Hebrew expression for sexual intercourse is a euphemism, an expression that softens the crudeness of its content. I think to the contrary, that it is a specification that sharpens the content. What the expression conveys, as does its extension ' memory ', is that the threat of sexual intercourse, with someone other than the exclusive possessor, is the knowledge that turns the woman who experiences it into an *other*, an autonomous subject. It is that subjectivity which comes with sexual experience that, apparently, threatens the exclusivity of the possession. But — and this detail deserves special emphasis —the effect of the extension of the monopoly over the past is to conflate the husband with the father. This is a major concern in the book of *Judges*.

Love at first sight

The second mention of Bath occurs in verse 11:34. This time she is described, not as the potential but as the actual object of the vow: she is the 'comer-out' of the doors of Jephthah's house to meet him. The verse has, again, philological problems which a broader, semiotic perspective helps to exploit. Cohen (257) translates:

> And Jephthah came to Mizpah unto his house, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

Soggin (1981) adds an element that deserves some attention: 'she was his only child, *much loved* '. The modifier also appears in a footnote of Cohen's text, where this translation of the word *yechidah* is defended by analogy to the case of Isaac. The argument is revealing. The analogy with Isaac is motivated for Cohen by the existence of Ishmael, the son Abraham already had with Sarah's slave Hagar. Since Abraham already had a son, Cohen argues, Isaac cannot be the only son. Hence, the word *yachid* in *Genesis* 22:2 (the male form of *yechidah*) cannot mean 'only' but must denote 'a favorite child' (Cohen 257). Modern logic is called to whitewash an ideologically disturbing message. For it is Yahweh who, in *Genesis* 22:2, uses the word; in the eyes of the twentieth century scholar, the bypassing of the older child is dubious; therefore, it is not willingly ascribed to the deity. The story of Abraham's sons, however, makes the priority of Isaac an obvious issue, and does not allow us to deny the complicity of Yahweh in the rejection of the son who, like Jephthah himself, had no solid legal background[13]. Isaac is called the only child with a clear purpose: to state that Ishmael does not count.

The philological twist is even more dubious because in *Genesis* 22:2 the phrase 'the one you love' is added to the modifier *yachid*. There is little reason to expect the pleonastic doubling. On the other hand, the two expressions may very well have an explanatory relation: the son is loved *because* he is the only child. As we know, Abraham had been promised numerous descendants, although he remained childless until a very advanced age. The only son, then, is the only means to fulfill the promise. The 'love' referred to seems, then, closely related to the interest of the history of the patriarch. Indeed, Abraham's status as patriarch, his very being in other words, depends on his son. The son is part of himself. The modern, romantic idea of love is hardly appropriate to express this motivation, although male love may be shaped by it. Being the only son guarantees Isaac the protection the father owes to himself. This is how forms of male love shape male identity through the father's domination.

In *Judges* 11:34 the modifier *yechidah* does not receive such a complement. The daughter is bound to the father by interests other than the male line of descent: namely, by possession. As a daughter, she cannot provide the father with sons. Or can she?[14]. The modifier 'only' without its complement receives an altogether different meaning. Where it held protection for Isaac, it holds exposure for Bath. She is not simply 'only' ; she is alone. The only child, the only one to come out of the doors of the house, the only one to confront the father. No one protects her. God, the beneficiary of the gift, is silent. No mother comes to her rescue. She seeks relief within the constraints of the solitude assigned to her: ' leave me alone ', will she reply in the next verse.

The verse poses a second problem to the translators, this one not of the subject's definition but of her sheer delimitation. What they all translate as ' beside *her* he had neither son nor daughter ' is literally ' from *him* ' or 'besides him' . Cohen gives interpretations by the rabbis who argue that Jephthah had adopted other children but that Bath was the only one 'from him' (Kimchi) or even, that he was completely childless; 'from himself' he had no child; the girl

was his stepdaughter (Malbim). Soggin, casual as usual, states:

> MT[15] has 'apart from him' but this has to be corrected to *sebirin* (214).

Boling presents the same conjecture, with the addition of an argument, however slight[16]:

> which represents a contamination from the preceding *lo*, 'to him' (208).

In the light of so much certainty about what the text *should* rather than what it *could* mean, as the rabbis at least try to examine, it seems tempting to explore the possibilities of interpretation of the text as it stands; the unexpected masculine pronoun may be used deliberately or instead represent a copyist error of the less innocent kind we call a 'slip.' We have here the most convincing case for the need to appeal to semiotics for the development of a meaningful philology. It is only when we adopt the semiotic possibility of the motivated symptom that a possible copyist error is not, simply, an easy way out of our own impotence.

Firstly, the preposition *men* denotes separation[17]. Separated from him, the narrator writes regretfully, he had no child: no other child or — if we take the separation in the temporal sense, as the one to come — no child left. What seems to be implied, then, is the regret over the separation the father has to endure when he gives his daughter away. Reversing the temporal aspect, the separation is experienced as alienation of the self. In the sense of 'beside', a sense that can very well resound simultaneously with the other meaning, the illogical confusion between self and object that the phrase would entail no longer sounds impossible in view of Freud's essay. The slip — for then it becomes one — betrays the identification, the self-centeredness, the confusion that the next verse is to express with explicitness and pathos[18].

The identification represents the daughter as so much a part of the father that he ceases to exist apart from her; her departure severs him from himself. With less words, and less awareness, the slip does express an issue similar to, *and* different from, 'the one you love' in *Genesis* 22:2. The contamination now is not linguistic but psychological, even if the latter informs, rather than excludes, the former. It becomes a figure that wonderfully expresses what is at stake in this encounter. As a *mise en abyme*[19], it shows us what Freud, in his essay, did not manage to say on the rational, scholarly level, but what he somehow expressed on the discursive level: the core of virginity. The absolute property of the father, the virgin-daughter does not only belong to him, as a metonymical extension of him; she is part of him, as a synecdochical integration which causes her loss to be the loss of himself. His wholeness, rather than hers, is threatened with loss. As soon as the preposition *men* means not only spatial but also temporal separation[20], the temporal aspect, introduced in the concept of separation, reminds us of the

meaning of Bath's request: let me lament until my nubility. It is the separation to come that constitutes the *narrative of virginity* of which Bath's story is the most dramatic representation.

A second feature of the verse that deserves some attention is its visual aspect, implied, though not explicitly mentioned, in the vow itself. The first one to *meet* Jephthah must, however, be the first he sees. Has this optic dimension a more specific meaning? Is meeting perhaps deadly because it involves seeing? Seidenberg (1966-1967) suggests as much, on the basis of another temporal reversal. 'Sacrificing the first you see', as the title of his essay rephrases the story, becomes 'sacrificing the first you *saw*'. The sacrifice of the daughter ultimately represents for him the renunciation of the mother[21]. The replacement of the mother by the daughter presupposed by this reversal is in its turn based on the replacement of the daughter by the mother, performed by Freud in order to turn the virgin into the phallic mother. Freudian discourse allows for all these reversals, which it legitimizes by the term *over-determination*. *Judges* 11:34, however, stresses a more pointed confusion. *Behold*, the oft-used narrative modifier that introduces a shift, or an extension, of focalization, is introduced here at a very specific moment of the narrative. From the moment of the vow on we have been wondering whom it might concern, 'looking forward' to the meeting of Jephthah and his victim, of vow and fulfillment, of present and future. The clause *wehinne batho* forms one rhythmical unit. Rather than 'behold, his daughter', I would therefore read: 'behold his daughter!' Identifying with the position of the focalizer Jephthah, who has so much interest in the content of the focalization, the reader holds her breath. What is *seen* is, for the time being, none other than *batho*, his —daughter. Father and daughter expressed in one word, the one that, according to Boling, triggers the contamination we have just discussed. Indeed.

Enhanced by the suspense of her slow introduction, and by this pointed word that inserts the visual aspect of the scene, Bath is the object of vision rather than the subject of the action that follows. Thus read, the following part of the sentence becomes less verbal and more descriptive. *Batho*, his — daughter, came out to meet him with timbrels and dances. What we behold, then, is a hero and a virgin, brought together for a celebration. It had been said that the ritual aspect of the dancing maiden could have been foreseen by Jephthah. Maybe he did not foresee it because he did not see a victory ritual but a different one: that of the gift of the daughter. The scene repeats the promise of the gift of Achsah, and represents a rehearsal of the dancing maidens of Shilo, to be captured at the end of the book. What is more, the host at Gibeah will also say: 'behold my daughter.' What we see is less a victory ritual than a wedding. And as the contamination of 'him' and 'her' has revealed, it is the wedding that destroys the father. He 'knows' that the dance celebrates not him but the real victor, to whom the daughter is due because she will soon enter *bethulah*, be nubile and torn away from him. The ultimate and founding displacement of this scene is the threat of the replacement of the father by the still abstract husband. It has

become unavoidable, with the approach of *bethulah*, unless a way is found to avoid it. That avoidance is, at least, what Jephthah is trying hard to bring about.

The text pursues this line of visuality, of the *view* of the daughter:

> and it came to pass, when he saw her...

The meeting was a spectacle rather than an act, its account a description rather than a narration. The crucial event of the entire vow-and-fulfillment episode, the moment of decision, is inscribed in this verb: when-he-saw-her. No wonder the view makes Jephthah 'rend his cloths' in mourning. This symbolic gesture mediates between the two isotopies of the victory-ritual and the wedding. Jephthah is not the first biblical hero to rend his cloths both for death and for non-death, for losing a child to death or to sexuality, maturity, autonomy[22]. Jephthah's speech develops the confusion we have seen already:

> Alas my daughter, *you* have brought me to kneel, and *you* have become the cause of my undoing. For *I* have opened my mouth unto Yahweh...

In the light of the preceding remarks, this "blaming the victim" becomes consistent: he blames her for her willingness to leave him for the real victor, in other words, for reaching *bethulah*. The meeting between father and daughter becomes a confrontation in time: the confrontation with the transition, with the impossibility of postponement of the gift of the daughter that will destroy the identity of the father [23].

It will indeed, for so many have interpreted the lament of the daughter as regret of childlessness. Such an interpretation is, again, based on a conflation of father and daughter. It is a way of taking Jephthah's side. If, indeed, a woman's life receives meaning only through motherhood, it is because it is thus that she provides off-spring to the father. The father-line is at stake[24]. Within such a system, the daughter can only bring off-spring to the father if, like Tamar in *Genesis* 38, she becomes his bride. The one whose memory will die out is Jephthah, not Bath, as we shall see.

Bath's survival

We will end this exercise of semiotic philology with an analysis of how the separation 'from him' takes place. The importance of the new interpretation of the departure toward the mountains and toward nubility is confirmed by the repetition, in verse 38, of the ambiguous preposition. Indeed, as if to enhance the goal-orientedness, the narrator now juxtaposes the spatial and the temporal use:

> and she departed, she and her campanions, and lamented until/toward her nubility toward the mountains (*al-bethuleiah al-a-herharim*).

The symbolic function of the mountains, the wilderness that spatially symbolizes time, is once again enhanced.

In relation to the results obtained so far, we will now turn to the final sentence of the chapter, and accustomed as we are now to regarding as symptomatic the near-unanimity of the philologists, we will have to challenge again the traditional translation[25]. Cohen translates the final sentence as follows (I italicize the words which will be discussed):

> and it *was* a *custom* in Israel, that the *daughters* of Israel went yearly to *lament the daughter* of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

The philologists agree that the noun *chok* means 'custom'. My dictionary translates this frequently occurring word in many different ways. We can distinguish two groups of translations: 1) rule, law, prescription, and 2) duty, task. The difference between the two groups lies in the involvement of the subject of action. The difference between the two groups lies in the degree of coercion exercized to obtain obedience. Thus, Joseph in Egypt, running the food-supplies as well as Pharaoh's finances, establishes the rule? law? that one fifth of every gain should be paid to Pharaoh (*Genesis* 47:26). Between rule and law, there is the relative autonomy of the subject. If the subject accepts the rule for the good of public welfare, then we speak of a rule; if the subject is not consulted but the rule simply enforced, we have a law. 'Custom' is a weaker version of this group: it is a rule by virtue, not of conscious consent, but of a traditional produced sense of the 'naturalness' of the act. In the second group of translations, the subject is supposed to act herself, not just to give, pay or refrain from action. The duty, again, is enforced, while the task may include the subject's willing collaboration.

Bath's friends, her companions who go with her to the mountains, can be seen as the first generation of 'daughters of Israel' who take it upon themselves to perform the task described in the concluding verse. Members of the coextensive category to which the victim belonged, they conceive of the 'custom' as a task. The translation 'task' enhances their subjective activity, while 'custom' represents them in a more passive role. The noun 'daughters', in combination with Israel, is obviously referring to a social role, based on the familial metaphor[26]. Being a 'daughter of Israel', then, means having a specific place in society, a place in relation to the other categories, especially to the fathers. Bath's friends, near-nubile girls like herself, property of their own fathers, *accompany* ('companions') her, both in the spatial-evenemential sense (they go with her) and in the emotional-empathetic sense (they feel, with, for her). The other, subsequent daughters of Israel extend this group further in time.

Translating *chok* as custom, then, is taking it in a rather flat, innocent and passive sense. What is repressed is the *motivation* of the subjects performing the task. The fellow-'virgins' who feel it as their task to perform the ensuing ritual, yearly return to the site of Bath's fatal initiation-rite. What do they do there?

What, in other words, does the ritual consist of, and how does it make sense in relation to Bath's fate? Cohen's translation 'to lament' for the verb in question, is one of those suspect near-unanimous ones; Boling has 'to mourn'. Soggin, translating 'to commemorate', is the differing one that raised suspicion, and comes exceptionally close. The verb *tanah* is not the one used earlier in the chapter for 'to lament'. It is, quite to the contrary, the one that Deborah uses in 5:11 to celebrate Yahweh's righteous actions. There, the translation 'to sing', in the transitive sense of ' to recount for celebration ', seems the obvious one. The commentators rightly assume that the occasion in the concluding verse of Chapter 11 is hardly appropriate for a cheerful celebration, although it is equally true that the wedding-isotopy in the encounter-scene would make the ironic reversal of Bath's initial celebration activities plausible enough. But we do not want to use the tricky, all-too-slippery concept of irony, so often used defensively.

The verb has as its central feature the speech-act of recounting, in order not to forget. The book of *Judges*, like the whole endeavor of historiography, is undertaken in order to 'remember' by language: to fixate the history of the people in its beginnings, for deeply patriarchal motivations. *Tanah* is the response to the daughter's sacrifice. Memoralization, a form of afterlife, replaces the life that she had been denied. If interpreted in this manner, the verb *tanah* becomes of central importance both in this particular story and in the book as a whole. We reach here yet another dimension of the concern with memory that was verbalized in Freud's opening paragraph.

The verb 'to remember' is also present in the Hebrew modifier 'male', *zakhar*. Disregarding attempts to relate this word to a form meaning 'penis', the association is telling anyway. The concern with memory is either the original motivation or, at least, part of its actual semantic content. With this word of maleness, the possibility of memoralization, of history, has become, not only a male necessity, but also a male prerogative. Where children receive the name of the father in order to establish the father's memory, the nubile girls of Mizpah and the daughters of Israel provide the anonymous daughter, all prepared for oblivion, the only alternative form of survival. But if writing history has become a male property, oral history can still be a female prerogative. For that is, in my view, the content of the 'task' as of the Song of Deborah: to perform oral history, the history, in this case, of Bath-Jephthah. If the sons of Israel make history by fighting wars, the daughters of Israel recount the price that such a history requires. What has happened must not be forgotten.

This interpretation is further supported by the particle/preposition *le*. The ' neutral ' translation ' to lament the daughter ' leaves aside the twice repeated *le* that introduces the infinitive of the verb and the object of the action. Such neutral renderings are acceptable, but the rules of grammar do not forbid us from enhancing the preposition and giving it meaning. Thus the first *le* becomes 'in order to', with the purpose of; the second, 'for', 'on behalf of'. The daughters went yearly [to the mountains] in order to pay their tribute to Bath, in order to

sing, and by singing, to commemorate, on behalf of the daughter. The difference between Cohen's flat translation and mine, which enhances the interests of the daughter, produces the space between what the text may allow and what modernity has done to it — between the wandering rock and the tombs built with them:

> And it was a custom in Israel / and it became a task in Israel / that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament / in order to recount / the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite / on behalf of Bath-Jephthah from Gilead / four days in a year.

Jephthah's slip comes true: he eliminated himself from the survival that befalls his daughter. The daughter separated from him will be the only addressee of the oral history. Born from a "harlot' , killing the 'virgin' -daughter, Jephthah can only return to war, and try again to becom a *gibbor*, a hero, replacing by personal might, by 'heroism', the place in history he cannot achieve through the father-line. That is, indeed, what the second half of the Jephthah story is about —the half where no daughter exists.

The critic who suggests that Bath's anonymity is deserved punishment for her submission to the father's desire, instead of protecting herself as was her duty (Seidenberg 1966:55-56) misses the point of the story as it is interpreted here. The daughter cannot but submit, but within the limits assigned to her by patriarchy and the unlimited power over the daughter it assigns to the father, she exploits the possibility left open to her. Using oral history as a cultural means of memoralization, she makes her fellow-virgins feel that solidarity between daughters is a task, an urgent one, that alone can save them from total oblivion. Although she can only be remembered as what she never was allowed to overcome, as Bath-Jephthah, it is she, not the man who does have a proper name, who is made immemorial. She is remembered as she was, in submission to the power of the father, a power over life and death, exclusive possession, which he decided to exercise until death did them part.

NOTES

[1] See Sypherd for an account of the rich traditions around this story, and Alexiou and Dronke for an analysis of some of these traditions.

[2] See Cohen for a quote to which he subscribed with enthusiasm: "The pathos of the situation and the readiness of her submission must elicit admiration" (258).

[illegible] the traditional one of "point of view", see Bal, 1985.

[illegible] of the "spirit of Yahweh" is most clearly demonstrated in the case of [illegible] daughter, not to understand. See Bal, forthcoming, for a fuller account.

[illegible] the tripartite division of narrative as proposed in Bal, 1985: text, [illegible] on each level: speech, vision, action.

[illegible] panstakingly argued that the architecture of the houses in the ancient [illegible] suggestion that Jephthah could have expected an animal to be the first [illegible] This is a typical strand of argumentation that betrays its apologetic [illegible] effort to prove the hero's innocence. This never really works; Boling, for [illegible] drawing (208), but the drawing itself shows the pointedness, in the vow, of [illegible] of the house. And how can an animal be ascribed the intentionality [illegible]

[illegible] part of the most horrible scene of the entire Bible: the gang-rape, torture, [illegible] of the innocent young, nameless woman referred to, but wrongly so [illegible]

[illegible] Phyllis Trible simply assumes this, and repeats the traditional renderings [illegible] interpretation of the woman of chaper 19 on the "lowly status" of [illegible] contradictions this interpretation entails. See Bal, forthcoming.

[illegible] to Genesis 19, where Lot offers his two virgin-daughters to [illegible] male hosts. The type-scene character (Alter, 1981) provides [illegible] usually read in the pair virgin/concubine.

[illegible] direction, since both the accusative construction and [illegible] But it is precisely because both are possible, and the one [illegible] the other, that I make it my point to try out the other one. This [illegible] a remote "counter-philology".

[illegible] a dictionary which is slightly out of use now. I prefer it to the [illegible] Briggs [illegible] it holds on many of the archaic meanings of [illegible] "prostitute", [illegible] away by BDB.

[illegible] "knowledge" which is called at other times "the tree of [illegible] chapter of *Femmes imaginaires* for an analysis. See also [illegible] in paradise, initiates the acquisition of sexual [illegible] blamed on her. Any man who requires virginity of his [illegible] to keep the initiative to himself. For an analysis of [illegible] Jacobus, 1986 and Bal, forthcoming.

[illegible] in Genesis. It is helpful to realize how much the [illegible] Genesis, so much so that we must assume it [illegible] indeed, that straight patriliny was not a firmly [illegible] establishing itself polemically against other systems. [illegible] in the Bible, and Jay, forthcoming, for an [illegible]

[illegible] a long development that I cannot offer here. See [illegible] the patrilineal system and the one which [illegible] call matriarchal. Morgenstern, 1929, 1931.

[illegible] Masoretic text, the standard manuscript of the [illegible]

[illegible] "styles". Cohen uses the rabbis as authorities, [illegible] slight sometimes overdoing the case, and Soggin [illegible] arguing them. Each of these three types of [illegible] interests. Apart from the male bias, we can [illegible] Soggin is Roman Catholic, Boling Protestant, and [illegible]

[illegible] Jephthah is the hero of separation. He leaves his [illegible] the father-line from others, in the famous *shibboleth* [illegible] as cutting and castrating.

[illegible] Jephthah bluntly accuses Bath of *his* undoing, a neat [illegible]

[illegible] within the text, see Dällenbach, 1977, and Bal, 1986

[illegible] the same parallel doubleness as the preposition *al*. [illegible] See also Simon.

[illegible] what could just as well be the evidence of [illegible] the garment stained with blood.

[illegible] the rites of transition in Turner's version, and [illegible] Turner's concept of liminality. According to [illegible] status reversal and status-elevation are only

relevant for those who have status in the first place, and who will have access to status after the transition. This cannot hold for women in societies where women have no status. The liminality of women, then, exists only in the view of them held by men.

[24] I would have called this the *patriarchal line* if it were not for the crucial difference in precisely this respect, between *Genesis* and *Judges*. The patriarchal line that is the central motivation of the patriarchal narratives in *Genesis* is either absent, or highly problematic in *Judges*. See my forthcoming study of *Judges*.

[25] Parallel to the "hermeneutics of suspicion" dear to feminist biblical scholars, I am practicing a philology of suspicion, which is a critical metaphilology.

[26] Similarly, the "sons of Israel" who do the fighting in the book, are not actual sons of Jacob-Israel.

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