

EDWARD ULLENDORFF

The Bawdy Bible

THE FIFTH SACKS LECTURE

OXFORD CENTRE FOR
POSTGRADUATE HEBREW STUDIES
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THE BAWDY BIBLE*

By EDWARD ULLENDORFF

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Although the Hebrew Bible is a literary document of relatively limited size, containing only a certain segment of what must have been a considerable body of literature,¹ there is little doubt that even those remnants which have come down to us include some areas of the vocabulary of lewdness which have not always been recognized, either intentionally or unintentionally. While I do not hold the view that the Old Testament is either exclusively or even primarily a 'religious' text, it is unquestionably true that the criteria of admission into the canon were governed by considerations not entirely divorced from the element of likely divine approval. Yet even within those books of the Hebrew Bible whose orthodox propriety was never in any doubt there are embedded thoughts as well as expressions that fall within the field and broad range of the present paper. And this is, *a fortiori*, the case with regard to those compositions which had to struggle hard to gain admission into the canon of the Old Testament.²

The flavour of 'bawdy' does not travel well across language boundaries: there is nothing directly comparable in Hebrew, classical or modern, and פָּרוּץ or זָמָה belong to a different linguistic register altogether.³ The same is true of Arabic فاجير or داعر, and of French 'obscène'; in German 'derb-drollig' may possibly reflect the appropriate notion. In English, 'lascivious', 'lewd', 'lustful', 'prurient', 'lecherous', 'erotic', 'salacious', 'smutty', are not synonyms of 'bawdy' but belong to an adjacent semantic field. 'Ribald', 'coarse', 'loose' are, perhaps, closest. Thus in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (II, i, 10):

* Somewhat differing lectures, based on the substance of this paper, were delivered to the Postgraduate Hebrew Centre at Oxford (as the fifth Sacks Lecture), at the kind invitation of Dr. David Patterson, and to the Society for Old Testament Study meeting at St. Andrews University under the presidency of Professor William McKane (on 18 May and 18 July 1978, respectively).

¹ Cf. Ullendorff, 'Is Biblical Hebrew a language?', *BSOAS*, 1971 (= *Studies in Semitic Languages and Civilizations*, Wiesbaden, 1977, pp. 3-17). See also references to סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי סֵפֶר הַיְיָ (1 Kings 14: 29, etc.), to סֵפֶר הַיְיָ (Josh. 10: 13, 2 Sam. 1: 18), and to סֵפֶר מַלְחָמוֹת יְהוָה (Num. 21: 14); cf. Benzinger, *Bücher der Könige*, pp. xi-xiii. The large apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, and Qumranic literatures show the extent of extra-biblical sources.

² Especially Song of Songs, Qoheleth, and Esther (incidentally never referred to in the New Testament), dealing with love, doubt, and patriotism, respectively.

³ There are, of course, various circumlocutions in modern Hebrew, such as גַּס בְּלִי מְכַסְּיִים, lit. 'rude without trousers', i.e. obscene, lewd (D. Ben-Amotz and N. Ben-Yehuda, *World Dictionary of Hebrew Slang*, Jerusalem, 1973, 50).

O would it so had chaunst,
That you, most noble Sir, had present beene
When that lewd ribauld, with vile lust advaunst,
Laid first his filfthy hands on virgin cleene.

The Hebrew *zimmah* need be no more specific than 'plan, device, intent', as in Job 17: 11

My days are past,	יְמֵי עֵבְרוּ
My purposes are broken off,	זַמְתִּי נִתְקַד
the thoughts of my heart	מִרְשֵׁי לִבִּי

But more generally it connotes lewdness, wickedness, evil devices, as in Ezekiel 23: 44 *אֵשֶׁת הַזֹּמָה* 'lewd women' (incidentally rendered by the Septuagint as *τοῦ ποιῆσαι ἀνομίαν* = *לעשה זמה* 'to do lewdness'—no doubt on account of the unaccustomed plural *אֵשֶׁת*).

There are various ways in which biblical redactors, Massorettes, and commentators have responded to the requirements of good taste: by substitution of an offensive word—as in Job 1: 5 where Job was worried that his sons might have sinned *וַיְבַרְכוּ אֱלֹהִים בְּלַבְבָם* i.e. cursed (rather than blessed) God in their heart. In fact, in Psalm 10: 3 both the original, offensive, word and the substitute have survived in the text: *וַיִּבְצַע בָּרֶךְ/נֹאֵץ יְהוָה* 'and the profiteer blesses/curses the Lord'.⁴ In other cases the Massorettes have had recourse to the ample possibilities offered by the consonantal skeleton of the Hebrew text which could be endued with differing interpretative garbs. I shall need to return to this important phenomenon of euphemisms later on. The Hebrew text could thus be tampered with in a variety of different ways, by introducing vowel changes, by altering suffixes, by consonantal metathesis, as well as by other means to be discussed presently.

The instances of intentional or unintentional misinterpretation or failure to grasp the true meaning of the text are, perhaps, of a more complex character. One example may suffice at this juncture: Proverbs 26: 6 seems to me a passage where the text is in some disarray and where the underlying bawdiness has remained unrecognized. The merit of proposing a suitable solution for this age-old *crux interpretum* belongs to the late H. Torczyner/Tur-Sinai.⁵ This chapter deals with the antics of the fool: 'a whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back. Answer not a fool according to his folly . . . lest he be wise in his own eyes', etc. And then we read in v. 6: *מִקְצָה רַגְלִים חָמַס שְׁתָּה-שְׁלַח דְּבָרִים בְּיַד כֹּסֵל* 'He that sends a message by the hand of a fool is like someone who cuts off his legs and imbibes violence'. Tur-Sinai proposed to make some changes in the vovelling of the passage without touching the consonantal text and he thus read the first hemistich without touching the consonantal text and he thus read the first hemistich *מִקְצָה רַגְלִים חָמַס שְׁתָּה*, i.e. like someone whose legs are cut off and thus uncovers, lays bare, his buttocks, his behind. In other words: do not send a confidential message by someone who is so obviously unsuited to carry it,

⁴This is, of course, a well-known phenomenon in English as well: Gosh for God, Gee for Jesus, Holy Cow for Holy Christ, etc. Or in French *bleu* for *dieu*, etc.

⁵*ZDMG*, LXXII, 1918, and *The Book of Job*, Jerusalem, 1957, 259-60. I am sorry to see that W. McKane, in his fine study of Proverbs (SCM Press, 1970, 597), is inclined to regard the emendation as 'improbable' and the interpretation as 'far-fetched'.

who cannot keep a secret. The following verse seems to confirm this interpretation: v. 7: 'Like the thighs of the lame lifted up, so is a parable in the mouth of fools'. It is, of course, impossible to tell whether those who pointed the Hebrew Bible tried to avoid the coarseness by re-pointing this hemistich or were altogether unaware of the probable original significance. The latter possibility derives support from the fact that the ancient versions, such as the Septuagint and Targum, were quite unable to do anything sensible with this verse.

Oddly enough, the New English Bible adopts the Tur-Sinai solution in a somewhat attenuated translation ('He who sends a fool on an errand cuts his own leg off and displays the stump'), but the Brockington source volume, though reading שְׁתֵּה חֲמִים, fails to indicate its provenance.⁶

שֵׁל in the sense of buttocks occurs, of course, also elsewhere, notably in 2 Sam. 10: 4 where David's well-intentioned mission to the Ammonites to condole with them on the death of their king encounters the somewhat unexpected and coarse reaction of having half their beards shaved off and their clothes cut in the middle to reveal שְׁתוֹתֵיהֶם 'their buttocks'—a humiliating and crude gesture.

While Tur-Sinai's ingenious and earthy proposal to read
'To send a secret by a fool is surely farce

Equivalent to cut-off legs and laying bare one's arse'
may well reflect the direct and bawdy approach of the redactor of the book of Proverbs, it has occurred to me that the Massoretic שְׁתֵּה חֲמִים רַגְלִים מְקַצֵּה may possibly represent an old Hebrew idiom closely parallel to the English 'to cut off one's nose to spite one's face'.

Rabbinic literature, in so far as it serves to explicate the text of the Hebrew Bible, pursues the somewhat conflicting aims of either rendering harmless explicit notions or of attaching a somewhat prurient sense to passages which do not naturally bear such an interpretation. Thus there occur two patently innocent expressions in the story of the Queen of Sheba's visit to King Solomon (1 Kings 10: 1-13) which have been exploited to produce the widespread tale of the union of king and queen in either marriage or concubinage⁷: the queen 'came to Solomon and communed with him of all that was in her heart' (v. 2). The Hebrew verb בוא 'to come, to enter' is also used as the technical term for coitus, though no such interpretation could possibly be attached to the passage in 1 Kings 10. Yet in Talmud *Baba Batra* 15 b Rabbi Jonathan asserts that Sheba was not a woman but a kingdom; he obtained this result by pointing מלכת שבא not as 'Queen of Sheba' but as 'Kingdom of Sheba'. Indeed, in the Targum's rendering of Job 1: 15 we find that the seemingly innocuous 'Sheba' is rendered 'and suddenly Lilith, the Queen of Smaragd, fell upon . . .'. Here then we possess two early indications of the Queen of

⁶ This is, of course, the usual procedure in this volume—so justly described by James Barr as 'surely the greatest anticlimax in the history of biblical scholarship' (*Heythrop Journal*, Oct. 1974). Baumgartner-Kutschler and others, I, 316, advocate the reading *homoes seto*, but curiously (because of the late E. Y. Kutschler's close contact with Tur-Sinai) assign the credit to Gensser who wrote 45 years after Torczyner.

⁷ Cf. Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, 131-45; *idem in Solomon & Sheba* (ed. J. B. Pritchard, Phaidon Press, 1974), 104-14; I. H. Silberman in *op. cit.*, 65-84. The most detailed Jewish source is the *Targum shevi* to Esther and the most explicit the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* in which intimate relations between Solomon and Sheba are first discussed (*Ethiopia and the Bible*, 139, footnote 2). See also M. H. Segal, *Sefer Ben Sira haššalem*, Jerusalem, 1953, 44.

Sheba's role as temptress, although detailed literary reflections of this legend appear only later.^{7a}

In verse 13 of 1 Kings¹⁰ we are told that 'Solomon gave unto the Queen of Sheba *all her desire* . . .'. Rashi, in his commentary to this verse, emphasizes that this refers exclusively to *לימוד חכמה*, the teaching of wisdom; but the very fact that Rashi felt impelled to stress this aspect demonstrates quite clearly that he was aware of less innocent embellishments to this verse. In fact, there is a bracketed interpolation printed in Rashi's commentary which is attributed to the sixteenth century Kabbalist, R. Isaac Luria: 'כל חפצה: בא אליה ונולד ממנה נבוכדנצר והחריב הבית . . . all her desire: he came unto her and there was born from her Nebuchadnezzar and he destroyed the temple . . .'. We shall have further opportunities of observing the manner in which Rabbinic literature treats biblical themes and motifs of this character in its search for allusions and hints—and thus giving currency to lewd ideas by the very process of endeavouring officiously to discount them.

The original and ideal situation between the sexes is described in Genesis, ch. 2. 'It is not good for man to be alone' (v. 18) and God determined to make a helpmeet⁹ for him. When man found that woman was bone from his bone and flesh from his flesh (v. 23), the natural state was for him to leave his parents and to cleave (*dbq*) to his wife, so that they became one flesh (v. 24). However, while they were both naked, they had no feeling of shame towards each other (v. 25). It was only after the serpent had seduced⁹ the woman and both she and her husband had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge that their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked (*'erummim*) and made themselves loincloths (3: 7). And again, it was only after their expulsion from the garden of Eden that Adam 'knew'¹⁰ (4: 1) his wife Eve, i.e. desired her and lay with her, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. This surely means that the Fall of man was necessary to bring about the consciousness of human nakedness which in its turn gave rise to man's desire and thus to the propagation of the human race. It is that desire, this time by woman for her man, that forms part of the divine condemnation (3: 16) *ואל אישך תשוקתך והוא ימשל בך*. The NEB is uncharacteristically coy in translating *təšūqah* 'you shall be eager for your husband' (with a footnote 'or feel an urge'), whereas *təšūqah*¹¹ plainly means 'lust' in the most earthy sense. And thus Rashi: *lətašmīš*, i.e. desire for intercourse.

But the last part of the verse *והוא ימשל בך* has always been conceptually separated from the preceding section, i.e. 'and he shall rule over thee' (AV) or 'and he shall be your master' (NEB). No such expression of 'male chauvinism' is, however, called for in the present context which deals exclusively with woman's sexual predicament. The passage has thus been consistently misunderstood as an assertion of woman's general subservience to man, whereas in reality the two parts of the second hemistich hang closely

^{7a} Cf. Scholem, *Tarbiz*, 19, 1948, 165-72, an article which, culpably, I saw only after completion of this paper.

⁹ Derived from a misunderstanding of Gen. 2: 18: a help meet (i.e. suitable) for him, and later made into one word, probably by confusion with helpmate.

¹⁰ *השיאני* (3: 13) is 'seduced' in the sense of 'tricked', while 'seducing' in the meaning of arousing desire is *פָּתָה* related to Ethiopic *fālāwā* 'to desire' and Ugaritic *pty* 'to copulate'

(Gordon, *UT*, 2129; text 52: 39); cf. Ullendorff, *SSL&C*, 192.

¹⁰ The Hebrew verb *yd'* in this and similar meanings will be discussed below.

¹¹ *šwq*, *šqg*, and indeed *hšq*; cf. Ullendorff, op. cit., 169-61; *idem*, *BSOAS*, 1974, 450.

together: since woman lusts after her husband, she is placed, by virtue of this desire, in a position of vulnerability. Mediaeval Jewish commentators had no doubt about the correct interpretation of this verse. For although she may hanker after intercourse, she must not have the effrontery to claim it expressly,¹² for the initiative is his alone (thus Rashi).¹³ And similarly Ibn Ezra: for you, woman, have to gratify his desire.¹⁴ As far as I know, all modern scholars and modern exegesis have neglected to place this verse in its proper context and have invested it with a general assertion of male dominance which is not only plainly out of keeping with the writer's intention but which fails to address itself to the narrowly sexual character of the divine curse—as part of the admonition addressed to serpent, woman, and man, respectively.

Biblical stories are not only reasonably informative on the sexual customs and mores of the world of the Old Testament but they also deal with aberrations, such as incest, prostitution, homosexuality, bestiality, phallic symbols, etc. Concubinage and polygamy were considered legal but, in view of the extremely wide time-range of the Old Testament extending over a millennium or so, it must be realized that customs changed and developed a good deal during this long period.

Although there was no formal harem (حريم = חרם sanctuary, forbidden place) in Israel, segregation of the sexes was a general facet of oriental life. This meant that women were expected to shun the company of men other than their husband, while men were enjoined to avoid temptation. In *Abot* I: 5 men are warned against excessive conversation with women, i.e. their own wives, let alone someone else's wife.¹⁵ And in *Berakhot* 61 a it is suggested that a man should not walk behind a woman in the street¹⁶ (to avoid unchaste thoughts). Ezra is said to have decreed the wearing of a type of chastity belt by women (*Baba Qamma* 82 a).¹⁷ The relevant term *sinnar* does not occur in the Hebrew Bible, but this does not, of course, mean that the concept was unknown. While we are remarkably well informed about the ornaments and finery worn by women in biblical times, the vocabulary of their ordinary apparel is much less well represented. I do not know how the tradition of women wearing this chastity garment was attributed to Ezra, but Talmudic sources are quite clear about its use. Thus in days of ritual uncleanness the *sinnar* interposed between husband and wife; e.g. in *Shabbath* 13 b where Rashi¹⁸ comments that the wife is wearing this belt which reaches from the waist downwards.

I do not know of any express and unambiguous mention of such a garment in the Old Testament, but we know that priests wore כד מכנסי 'linen drawers' from the waist downwards for the specific purpose of covering their private

¹² This is also the interpretation of Gen. 3: 16 in the Talmud (*Eruv.* 100 b): the expression כן הוא ימשל בך teaches שהאשה תובעת בלב האישי תובע בפה 'while the wife solicits with her heart, the husband does so with his mouth'.

¹³ תשוקתך לתשמיש ואעפ"כ אין לך מצח לתובעו בפה אלא הוא ימשל בך הכל ממנו ולא ממך

¹⁴ כי את ברשותו לעשות חפצו

¹⁵ ואל תרבה שיחה עם האשה באשתו אמרו. ק"ץ באשת חברו

¹⁶ לא יהלך אדם אחורי אשה בדרך

¹⁷ *Sinnar* is almost certainly ζωνάριον (ζώνη), 'belt, girdle'; cf. Od. XI: 245: λύσε δὲ παρθενίην ζώνην 'he unloosed her maiden girdle'.

¹⁸ פורציני'ט: סינר, no doubt med. French *pour ceindre* 'for girding' or *pour ceinte* 'for her to be girded'—or whatever the appropriate form in old French may have been; simply 'ceinture', according to Arsène Darmesteter, in *Les gloses françaises dans les commentaires talmudiques de Raschi*, 1929.

parts¹⁹ (Ex. 28 : 42). Jeremiah explains (13 : 11) how close-fitting to the waist an אָוֶרֶךְ 'a belt' of this kind should be; and Isaiah (3 : 18-26) provides a remarkable inventory of women's garments which includes the phrase 'and instead of a girdle (*hagorah*) a *nigpah*'. Now the latter noun is a *hapax legomenon* which, purely from the context, has usually been guessed as 'rope'. But Jewish commentators, ancient and mediaeval, have rightly explained it as 'wound, bruise, sore spot'—and thus in Rabbinic writings; cf. also Rashi and Redaq *ad locum*.²⁰ Isaiah continues his condemnation of the unchaste women of Zion : 'and instead of a *paṭigil* a girdle of sackcloth'. This strange word is again a *hapax legomenon* but this time of markedly non-Hebraic appearance. The usual guess 'party dress' is once more highly inappropriate. Redaq's explanation 'a wide silk girdle' fits the context much better, while Rashi connects it with the womb. It seems very likely, therefore, that some of the various types of belt referred to here and elsewhere (and particularly in the context of the fallen women of Jerusalem) are, in fact, some kind of protective garment for women—well known both in classical antiquity in adjacent parts of the Eastern Mediterranean world as well as in early Rabbinic literature. I do not think one can exclude that the mention of *hgr* (twice in Prov. 31, verses 17 and 24) in connexion with the accomplishments of 'ešet *hayil*, the virtuous or capable woman, relates to such a chastity garment.²¹ If this were so, the usual interpretation of these verses would need to be modified. But I do not wish to press this point any further.

Among several instances, in the book of Genesis, of the wife/sister syndrome (i.e. the recurrent pattern of a wife being presented by her husband as his sister, particularly if she was good-looking and likely to attract other men, in order to save his own skin—a curiously ungentlemanly attitude to a wife's virtue and a husband's duty²²) there is the instructive narrative of Isaac declaring his wife Rebecca to be his sister (26 : 7). But when Abimelech, King of Gerar (who appears to have had an unfortunate penchant for Hebrew women—see Gen. 20 : 2), looked out of a window he observed that Isaac and Rebecca were indulging in some horseplay (26 : 8) that was clearly inappropriate for a brother : sister relationship. The expression אֵת מִצְחָק occurs only here; the AV's 'sporting with' seems just right, but the NEB's 'laughing together' is as insipid as it is off beam. Skinner (ICC to Genesis, 364) translates it, correctly if somewhat demurely, as 'exchanging conjugal caresses'; but the real import of the unique collocation אֵת מִצְחָק (and indeed of מִצְחָק בֵּי in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, see below, in Gen. 39 : 14, 17) is a good deal bawdier than that.

¹⁹ Despite the transvestite prohibition (see below) in Deut. 22 : 5, clothing was remarkably unisex in the ancient Semitic world.

²⁰ See also *Shabbath* 62 b for a similar explanation. At the same place (*Shabbath* 62 b) *paṭigil* (Is. 3 : 24, see presently) is bawdily explained by the Talmud as גִּילָה לִידֵי הַמְּבִיאִין פְּתָחִים פְּתָחִים הַמְּבִיאִין לִידֵי גִילָה 'openings that lead to (sensual) joy'.

²¹ According to Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*², 437, note 2, a girdle of this type is worn by Arab girls, by women during their period, and during the circumambulation of the Ka'ba by worshippers in general (comparable to the linen drawers worn by Israelite priests to hide their private parts).—James Barr very kindly draws my attention to *διαφανῆ λακωνικά* in the LXX of Is. 3 : 22/3, rendered by Marti (*Jesaja*, 46) as 'lakedämonische Gazezewänder' and by Liddell-Scott (1968, 1025) as 'female garment' *simpliciter*.

²² Cf. Gen. 12 : 11-20; 20 : 2-18; 26 : 7-11. It is, incidentally, not without interest that in Gen. 20 : 12 Abraham reveals that Sarah was, in fact, his half-sister, daughter of his father but not of his mother and could thus become his wife, despite the later prohibition in Deut. 27 : 22 (see Daube, *Biblical law*, 79). Cf. now also Pitt-Rivers, *The fate of Shechem*, 159, as well as 151-2, 155, 157.

Though merriment between the sexes is not generally a feature of Old Testament stories, there is another *pi'el* verb with *et* in a similarly unequivocal context: In Deut. 24:5 a newly married man is pronounced exempt from military service, for his first duty is *שָׂמַח שֶׁח אִשְׁתּוֹ* 'to gratify his wife'; and none of the usual genteel renderings do justice to the Hebrew original.^{22a}

While the Hebrew Bible vacillates between the outspoken sensuousness of the Song of Songs (see below), the detailed recital of the full inventory of all the sins of fornication in Ezekiel's castigations, and the cruel, indeed well-nigh incomprehensible, injunction in Deut. 25:11-12 (whereby a woman's hand was to be cut off if she were to catch hold of a man's genitals,²³ in order to save her husband from an assailant), post-biblical literature reveals at times a remarkably tolerant attitude. Thus the Talmud is clearly exercised over the severity of the punishment and reaches the conclusion that cutting off her hand means only a monetary fine (*B.Q.* 28 a), but this is plainly contrary to the pentateuchal text which expressly adds: 'and show her no mercy'.²⁴ Commentators are, however, at pains to emphasize that she ought to have found some other means of rescuing her husband; that she must not lay bare what is to be hidden and concealed.

The Talmud—always basing itself, directly or indirectly, on Scripture—has some very modern-sounding things to say on carnal passion. If a man has an overwhelming desire for a certain woman, the doctors (i.e. the physicians, not the sages) suggest that his lust should be gratified. When the rabbis object to this, the doctors propose a less radical course: 'let her stand before him in the nude' (*San.* 75 a). R. Isaac argued that since the destruction of the Temple sexual pleasure has been taken from those who practise it lawfully and has been given to the transgressors (*ibid.*); and this is based on the scriptural authority of Prov. 9:17: *מִים עֲבוּיִם יִמְחָקוּ וְלֶחֶם סְתוּרִים יִנְעֵם* 'stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant'. Even Shimon ben Gamliel, when seeing a beautiful gentile woman while he was standing on the Temple mount, exclaimed: 'how great are thy works, O Lord'; and R. Aqiba said as he observed the wife of a Roman soldier 'that such beauty has to decay in the dust!' (*Abodah zarah* 20 a). This attitude contrasts sharply, I think, with that of the New Testament where *τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκὸς ἔχθρα εἰς θεόν* (Rom. 8:7) 'the carnal mind is inimical to God'.

Potiphar's wife and her role as temptress and seductress are described in some detail in Genesis 39:7-19, a classic piece of imaginative writing. This passage offers much illumination on the relationship between the sexes and the taboos that were implicit in such widely differing societies as the Hebrew and Egyptian attitudes represented. Echoes of these aspects of the *comédie humaine* may be found in ample measure in the book of Proverbs, especially in ch. 5 which includes some very outspoken advice on the snare of the seductress and the pleasures of conjugal love (v. 19).²⁵ The general theme of the Potiphar's

^{22a} Cf. also Scholem, *Zohar*, 34-7.

²³ The term *məḥūšim* 'pudenda' occurs only here. Ibn Ezra (*ad locum*) is very specific in his explanation and points out that it is a very vulnerable spot: *במבשׁוֹ: ביצוֹ ממֶרֶת בּוֹשֶׁה: וְהוּא עוֹזֵת מִצַּח לְגִלּוֹת דְּבַר הַנִּסְתֵּר שְׁהִיא עֲרוּהָ גַם הוּא מְקוּם מִסּוּכָן.*

²⁴ *לֹא תְחַוֶּה עֵינֶיךָ.* Oddly enough, the Talmud evinces great severity towards those who touch their own genitalia; their hand is to be cut off (*Shabbath* 108 b).

²⁵ Why the NEB should have chosen to produce so different a text and so strange a rendering I cannot fathom. See, however, on this entire problem James Barr's masterly review in the *Heythrop Journal*, October 1974.

wife-type of seduction is, of course, fairly ubiquitous and occurs in Egyptian, Greek, and other literatures.²⁶

Another kind of seduction is involved in the bawdy cycle of magnificent legends attached to Samson and his exploits (Judges 13 to 16). He was plainly unlucky with both his Philistine wives and the Philistine prostitute. The descriptive details lavished on the final dénouement in ch. 16 and the deployment of Delilah's wiles (particularly the manner in which she lulls him to sleep in v. 19) constitute a masterpiece of narrative art.

The story of David's infatuation with Bath-sheba, whom he had observed bathing, has a much more serious tenor (2 Sam. 11). The Uriah letter and the stratagems employed to secure possession of Bath-sheba incur the divine wrath and the reader's displeasure.

Another instance of trickery, though of a totally different character, is described in Gen. 31 : 35. Before Jacob's flight from Laban, Rachel had stolen her father's *terāfīm*, his domestic idols (v. 19). When Laban comes in pursuit, an elaborate search is instituted. Rachel had meanwhile hidden these household-gods in her camel's saddle and was sitting on it; and when Laban approaches her she makes effusive excuses for her failure to rise in her father's presence—entirely because the 'way of women' was upon her. ארה כנשים here or דרך נשים (in Gen. 18 : 11 when Sarah had reached the menopause) or the physiological details vouchsafed in Lev. 15 : 19 ff. demonstrate the powerful taboos associated with this condition which is so frequently described in the Old Testament and, subsequently, has a vast corpus of customary law attached to it in Rabbinical literature. But here, in Genesis 31 : 33-5, the search for the *terāfīm* and the recourse to elaborate subterfuges are depicted with great skill and with a humour that arises both from the incongruous situation and from verbal dexterity.

Among illicit sexual relations (Lev. 18) are those which involve various degrees of consanguinity, such as your parents, your father's wife (i.e. not your mother, but her *'erwah* is your father's nakedness²⁷), your sisters or half-sisters,²⁸ your grand-daughters,²⁹ your aunt (father's sister or mother's sister or father's brother's wife), your daughter-in-law, your sister-in-law, and congress with both a woman and her daughter or grand-daughter (as are that woman's blood relations, such conduct is described as *zimmah* 'lewdness', v. 17). Nor are you allowed to take the sister of a woman with whom you have sexual relations, as long as that woman is alive (v. 18).³⁰ The prohibitions about approaching a woman during her menstrual period are explicit, repeatedly stressed, and later on form the subject of a considerable body of Talmudic exegesis.³¹

A man must not have carnal knowledge of his neighbour's wife (v. 20), principally no doubt because such conduct constituted a violation of that man's property. In a world of polygamy, adultery—although a capital offence—meant sexual intercourse between a married woman and any man other than her

²⁶ Cf. Gaster, *Myth, legend, and custom in the O.T.*, 217-18, 379.

²⁷ The NEB's translation here, in contrast to the AV, is highly idiosyncratic.

²⁸ The male-centredness (in contemporary parlance) of the Bible is such that illicit relations with brothers are never specifically mentioned; the person addressed (and not only in Hebrew grammatical terms) is always the man. Incidentally vv. 9 and 11 express the same thought in different words.

²⁹ Lest this contingency should appear contrivedly far-fetched, there was a case reported in *The Times* recently of a twenty-year-old boy wanting to marry his grandfather's former wife, aged 77, pending the clarification of legal problems not entirely unconnected with Lev. 18 : 10.

³⁰ In my view, the NEB's rendering is an interpretation, rather than a strict translation, which goes a good deal beyond the plain text.

³¹ E.g. *Niddah* 31 b.

husband. But a married man was not precluded from carnal knowledge of an unmarried woman. I am not aware of any detailed study of the semantic and legal characteristics of the Hebrew term נָאֵף³² 'to commit adultery'. While it can be applied to both a man and a woman,³³ it would appear that the question of intent and motive, of *mens rea*, was introduced only in Talmudic sources (one would adduce particularly the term אָנִס in this connexion).

Apart from the legal enactments against the various forms of incest^{33a} (Lev. 18 and 20; Deut. 23: 1), there is also the story of Lot's two daughters inebriating their father, in order to obtain offspring from him (Gen. 19: 31-6). That this form of incest was considered wrongful even then, becomes plain from the fact that they had to intoxicate him for the commission of this act. However, the presentation and wording of this and similar biblical narratives reveal an innocent straightforwardness far removed from leering prurience. The Old Testament may at times be bawdy in both substance and expression; it never is lascivious, salacious or sly.

There are also specific injunctions against bestiality, but it is interesting to observe that this prohibition (in both Lev. 18: 23 and 20: 15-16) is repeated separately and in differing wording for men and women. On the other hand, the interdiction of homosexual conduct (described as lying with a man as with a woman, Lev. 18: 22; 20: 13) is not followed by a similar prohibition against lesbianism. This might mean either that such conduct was not known in the biblical world or that it was more readily condoned than its male counterpart.

The *locus classicus* of sodomy is, as the term implies, in Gen. 19: 5-8 where the men of Sodom demand to have Lot's male guests delivered up to them 'so that we may "know" them'—the well-known euphemism for carnal knowledge. Lot's standards of hospitality are such that he prizes this oriental obligation more highly than the virtue of his two virgin daughters whom he offers to the clamorous crowd in lieu of his guests.^{33b} A replica of the main theme of this story occurs in Judges 19: 22 ff. where the Levite's concubine is cruelly sacrificed, in the place of the man guest, to satisfy the hooligans' indiscriminate lust (see also below, p. 436).

Sight of the naked body connotes loss of dignity. One need only think of the embarrassment of Shem and Japhet upon hearing from Ham that he had seen their father Noah lying naked in his tent (Gen. 9: 21-7). They went into the tent backwards and covered their father's naked body ('*erwah*') with a cloak while averting their gaze. Later on, their brother Ham was cursed by Noah when he realized what had happened. Similarly, any form of indecent exposure must be avoided on sacred ground; ³⁴ that was as true on the steps of the altar (Ex. 20: 26) as it still is near the Ka'ba. One might also compare Deut. 23: 1 where the idiom לְגִלוֹת כֹּהֵן אֵב is a euphemism for uncovering the naked body.³⁵

³² In Daube's *Biblical law* the term is not subjected to any examination. On the other hand, Daube equates לָקַח with marriage and שָׁכַב with copulation (p. 79), no doubt correctly so.

³³ Cf. esp. Lev. 20: 10.

^{33a} Note 22 above has shown that the law against marrying a half-sister was not yet known in Abraham's day—nor, more surprisingly, was it operative at the time of Amnon and Tamar (2 Sam. 13: 13). Amnon's crime was rape, not incest. See now also J. Pitt-Rivers, *The fate of Shechem*, 151-2.

^{33b} Cf. Leach, *Genesis as myth*, 19.

³⁴ See also p. 429 above.

³⁵ See Baumgartner-Kutschera and others. *sub* גָּלָה and כֹּהֵן.

Leach's interpretation of this passage and of Gen. 9: 21-7 as homosexual incest (*op. cit.*, 19) goes far beyond the textual evidence.

Genesis, ch. 38, recounting the story of Judah, his son Onan, and his daughter-in-law Tamar, is a gem of narrative art for which the first book of the Pentateuch is so justly renowned. It is a bawdy tale of prostitution and aberrant sexual practices, but it is told in a style of beautiful simplicity, straightforward and wholly unsalacious, earthy and humorous—with the name of the Lord only lightly invoked. It is a story of tribal lore describing the sexual and social customs and constraints that prevailed during that era.

The main strand of the narrative is concerned with family relationships, levirate law, prostitution, and many of the taboos of the period. I shall revert to some of these aspects presently; but at this moment I wish to deal with **מְעֵשֶׂה אֹנָן**, Onan's deed.

The bare facts are briefly as follows: Judah got separated from his brothers and married a Canaanite woman. She bore him three sons. In due course Judah found a wife, Tamar, for his first-born. When the latter died, Judah ordered his second son, Onan, to have intercourse (**בָּא אֵל**) with his brother's widow and to do his duty as the deceased husband's brother (**יָבֵם**) and to raise up seed (or issue) for his brother (38:8). But Onan was aware that any offspring would be considered his brother's and not his; hence when he had intercourse with Tamar, his widowed sister-in-law, he spoilt (**שָׁחַת**) the semen by spilling it onto the ground (38:9).^{35a} This action incurred divine displeasure and Onan was killed, a punishment which must appear somewhat excessive.

It is interesting however that, while Onan's name has entered the ordinary vocabulary of many languages (*onanisme*, *onanismo*, *Onanie*, etc.—even Hebrew **מְעֵשֶׂה אֹנָן**), the deed he committed has come to connote masturbation, i.e. self-gratification. In reality he did nothing of the sort; what he practised was plainly *coitus interruptus*, the age-old device of withdrawal to prevent conception.

While later Hebrew connives (as we have seen) at the general tendency of using this misnomer, Talmudic sources are, as far as I know, quite clear about the distinction between Onan's action, masturbation, and *coitus interruptus*. The hand of men who touch their genitals is to be cut off, while this does not apply to women who are considered less sensitive (*Niddah* 13 a). The emission of semen in vain (*ibidem*) is considered a mortal sin (in the terms of Gen. 38:9). R. El'azar interprets Isaiah 1:15 (**מִלְאֵי יְדֵיכֶם דָּמִים מִלְאֵי**) 'your hands are full of blood') as committing adultery with the hands; and the commandment **לֹא תִגְאָר** (Ex. 20:14) is expounded as including the practice of masturbation by hand (**הַמְנַאֲפִים בְּיָד**). The use of the *pi'el* form of *n'f* is in itself not without interest (see footnote 32 above). The other term for masturbation is **דֶּרֶךְ אַבְרָיִם**, i.e. by way of limbs (*Niddah* 13 b); but nowhere is the name of Onan invoked in connexion with masturbation. Where Onan is mentioned (*Yebamoth* 34 b), it is done correctly as a depiction of the detested practice of spoiling the seed by *coitus interruptus*.

A brief word on those who are excluded from *qahal Yhwh*, the assembly of the Lord. The reference, in Deut. 23:2, to one with crushed or severed testicles seems to imply deliberate mutilation to produce the condition of a eunuch, perhaps in the service of a heathen deity. The Talmud considers, however,

^{35a} David Daube (*The duty of procreation*, 4 ff.) is, of course, right in saying that Onan's crime was not the spoiling of his seed but his failure to fulfil his levirate obligations. See now also J. Pitt-Rivers, *op. cit.*, 169, whose work—despite an air of amateurism in matters of Biblical interpretation—repays careful study.

various ways of accidental mutilation (*Yebamoth* 75 a-b). Both the terms employed דִּכָּה (or דִּכָּא) and שִׁפְכָה are *hapax legomena*; the latter is, in fact, the urethra. What is clearly considered important by the Hebrew Bible as qualifying for the service of the Lord is ritual cleanness in the widest sense and complete sexual soundness in particular. This is, of course, also the reason why a menstruating woman as well as a man after מִקְרָה לַיְלָה (Deut. 23: 11; I Sam. 20: 26) are excluded.

As to the prohibition in Deut. 22: 5 against women wearing men's clothes and men women's clothes (cf. note 19 above), it is not explained what the precise nature of this particular objection was. It may have been an indication of sexual abnormality (and hence worthy of condemnation) or a form of cultic transvestitism rampant in Canaan and as such deserving proscription. Since the outer garments worn by the two sexes were not markedly different (as I have already indicated), the reference must be to underclothes and ornaments.

A woman reaches sexual maturity in stages (בוגרת-נערה-קטנה),³⁶ and when she eventually marries, her virginity must be above suspicion. The tests applied to ascertain בתולים are described in Deut. 22: 13-21, together with the severe penalties incurred by those who fail to satisfy the criteria laid down. That those tests are far from infallible is never seriously considered.³⁷

In the legal sections of the Pentateuch the notion of rape is not as such fully explored or defined. In Ex. 22: 15-16 the case of the seducer is discussed: if a man seduces (פָּתָה) a virgin who is not betrothed, he has to pay the bride-price and must marry her. If her father disallows the marriage, then the seducer shall pay in silver a sum equal to the bride-price for virgins.

The case of a betrothed woman being subjected to intercourse against her will is treated as adultery. This means that the crime of rape is subsumed under two separate heads: (a) seduction, if the girl was not betrothed; (b) adultery, if she was betrothed. Case (a) is treated relatively leniently (as we have seen), while (b) incurs the full rigour of the law, i.e. death for the perpetrator. There is, however, a curious anomaly here (Deut. 22: 23-7): If the act took place in a town both parties are deemed guilty and will be executed, because the girl would have been heard had she cried for help. If the act occurred, however, in the country, the girl is given the benefit of the doubt: she is presumed to have cried for help, alas in vain, and the man alone is to die. There is a slight, but perhaps significant, difference in the wording of the two contingencies: in both cases the man 'comes upon her' (מָס'), but only at the meeting in the country are the words והחזיק בה (Deut. 22: 25) 'and take hold of her' added.³⁸ This appears thus to constitute an additional element in the presumption of her innocence in the second instance. The anomaly, to which I have referred, lies in the fact that no such bifurcation of the crime, in accordance with the place where it was committed, is contemplated in the case of a married woman. Here both the man and the woman are to die unconditionally (22: 22).

The Hebrew verb usually employed to express the notion of intercourse

³⁶ *Niddah*, 45 b, ff.

³⁷ See S. R. Driver, ICC to Deuteronomy, 254 ff.

³⁸ In the case of the unbetrothed girl, the verb is וַתִּפְתָּהּ. I cannot think of any material

distinction between these two terms and do not believe that there is any warrant for the NEB's translation 'rapes her' and 'forces her', respectively. In Judges 21: 21 the not dissimilar verb *hif* 'to snatch' is used.

without consent, i.e. rape, is נָפַח (Gen. 34 : 2 ; Deut. 22 : 29 ; Judges 19 : 24 ; Judges 20 : 5 ; 2 Sam. 13 : 14, etc.), though it is scarcely a technical term, like rape, for it is used in many other contexts connoting ' to inflict pain, to humiliate '. In post-biblical Hebrew *'ns* is the appropriate legal term, though it does duty also outside the limited range of enforced carnal knowledge.

In the narrative parts of the Old Testament, there are four particularly notorious cases of rape : two were committed not only from lust but were accompanied by genuine love (Gen. 34 and 2 Sam. 13) ; the third is an example of mob violence of a particularly disgusting kind (Judges 19 : 24-5 ; see above p. 433) ; and the fourth was actively connived at by the tribes of Israel (Judges 21 : 16-23).

In Gen. 34, Shechem, the son of Hämor the Hivite, really loved Dinah, Jacob's daughter by his wife Leah. He felt remorse for having raped (וַיִּצְנַח 34 : 2) and defiled (וַיִּמְחַל 34 : 5) her, and prevailed upon his father to discuss matters with Jacob and ' to get him this girl for a wife ' (v. 4). Hämor's pleading on behalf of his son is an eloquent and affecting passage and scarcely deserved the deceitful and cruel response at the hands of Dinah's brothers who could not become reconciled to the dishonour done to their sister.^{38a}

The story of Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar is too well known to require recounting here (2 Sam. 13). I have already pointed out that this splendidly told narrative derives its notoriety from rape rather than incest (note 33a) or at any rate from failure to request the King's permission.

The appalling rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19 : 22-30) had the gravest consequences, which are described in great detail in Judges, ch. 20 and 21, and led directly to the rape, by connivance and collusion, of the women of Shiloh. As a result of the outrage perpetrated at Gib'ah the tribes of Israel had vowed to withhold their daughters from marrying any man of the tribe of Benjamin.³⁹ But later on they rued this oath when they realized that strict adherence to it would inevitably lead to the extinction of one of the tribes of Israel. The Benjaminites were reminded of the annual festival at Shiloh at which the girls would come out to dance : ' Go and lie in wait in the vineyards, and when the girls of Shiloh come forth to dance, rush out from the vineyards and snatch each one of you a maiden for his wife—and then go back with them to the land of Benjamin ' (21 : 19 ff.).

The parallel with the legend of the rape of the Sabine women is, of course, obvious. When Romulus had difficulty in providing his followers with wives, he invited the men of the neighbouring tribes to a celebration of games. In the absence of the menfolk, the Roman youths raided the Sabine territory and carried off all the women they could find. This story has several times been the subject of pictorial art, Rubens' canvas depicting the scene (in the National Gallery, London) being probably the best known example. Alas, I know of no painting showing the rape and abduction of the women of Shiloh.

There are several important facets which arise from the constitution of Old Testament society as being predominantly polygamous (i.e. polygynous, never polyandrous), notably the use of concubines and the relationship between members of the harem. We have already seen that a husband could, therefore, not commit adultery (in any technical sense) with an unmarried woman ; only

^{38a} Cf. Pitt-Rivers, op. cit., especially 146-7, 156-7.

³⁹ The episode is discussed in its ramifications in Israel and elsewhere in a fine section in T. H. Gaster's *Myth, legend, and custom in the O.T.*, 444 ff. See now also Pitt-Rivers, op. cit., 158.

carnal knowledge of a married woman amounted to adultery and was as such punishable.

While under the Judges and the monarchy the possession of many wives was not uncommon, in earlier (and indeed later) days the number of wives was usually small. Adam was plainly monogamous—and so was Noah. Abraham was urged by his wife Sarah (when she feared she was barren) to take her Egyptian maid, Hagar, as wife or concubine (Gen. 16: 1 ff.). We shall see later on what occurred when she conceived. Abraham evidently liked the idea, for he took another woman, named Qeṭurah (Gen. 25: 1); and he is known to have had several concubines, since the word *pīlegeš* occurs in the plural (25: 6). Incidentally, the likelihood that *pīlegeš* is of non-Semitic origin (probably Indo-European, by way of the Philistines, connected with Greek *παλλακίς*) does not, of course, imply that the institution of concubinage was not indigenous to Israel. The fact that *paramour* is of French provenance does not connote that illicit lovers are indigenous to France and alien to Britain.

Jacob had two wives, sisters even, but the arrangement arose from Laban's disingenuous conduct. However, both sisters supplied their maids as concubines as well, Rachel because she was barren (Gen. 30: 3) and Leah because she could no longer conceive (30: 9).

In Gen. 35: 22 Reuben lay with his father's concubine, Bilhah, Rachel's maid, but we are not told what happened when Jacob heard of it, for the sentence peters out in aposiopesis. When Absalom is intent on showing his independence of his father David, he has intercourse with his father's concubines (2 Sam. 16: 20–3), proof of his defiant attitude.

The institutions of polygyny and concubinage were clearly important enough and sufficiently established to be enshrined in legislation. Deut. 21: 10–14 deals with women captured in war who may be brought back as wives or concubines.⁴⁰ Deut. 21: 15–17 then goes on to discuss the inheritance and property rights of lawful wives who do not enjoy equal affection in the eyes of their husband. The co-existence of several wives or concubines was apt to lead to friction. The moment Hagar had conceived (Gen. 16: 4 ff.), her mistress Sarah lost authority. And when the latter complained to Abraham, he told her she could do what she liked, for after all Hagar was Sarah's *šifhah* and as such under her authority. This was a view shared by the angel whom Hagar encountered during her flight and who advised her to return to her mistress and to submit to ill-treatment (16: 9).

Rachel, though the loved wife, was jealous of her sister Leah's fertility (Gen. 30: 1), and Peninnah used to torment Hannah (1 Sam. 1: 6) both because she was barren and because Elkanah loved Hannah. The very existence here of the word *šarah*, 'rival', demonstrates the complexities of polygynous marriages. When Reuben, Leah's son, found some mandrakes, love-apples, and brought them to his mother, Rachel asked her sister for some of the mandrakes (Gen. 30: 14–17). But Leah remonstrated: is it not enough that you have taken my husband's love and now you wish to take my son's mandrakes as well? Rachel was, however, sufficiently keen to obtain some of the mandrakes to barter her turn that night in Jacob's bed for a portion of the love-apples.⁴¹ And when Jacob returned home that night, Leah came towards him and

⁴⁰ The use of the verb *'innah* in this context (21: 14) makes it clear that its meaning is not only 'to rape' (see above) but occurs also in a wider sense as having one's will with a woman.

⁴¹ Mandrakes were well known as an aphrodisiac and as an antidote to barrenness. In the Song of Songs 7: 14 the availability of mandrakes is held out as an additional inducement to the lover. The play on words—*dudā'im: dodī*—is, of course, obvious.

announced: 'You are to sleep with me tonight, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes' (30:16). If Jacob was disconcerted by the terms of this arrangement, he did not show it—or at any rate the Bible is silent on this point. No doubt he was used to squabbles in his harem; and we are fortunate to catch such a glimpse into the inner workings of his polygamous household.

The Old Testament attitude towards prostitutes and the institution of prostitution is somewhat ambiguous and depends not only on the contextual framework of a given narrative but also, and perhaps primarily, on the period of composition and the intentions and aims of the writer. In the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen. 38 relations with a prostitute are mentioned entirely as a fact of life with ut any moral attitudinizing; and the same is true in the case of Samson (Judges 16:1) or of Rahab (Josh. 2) and elsewhere. In prophetic literature, on the other hand, the *zonah* and everything connected with *zonūt* and *zonūnīm* have become terms of opprobrium. But here, too, it is not so much the actual individual deed that incurs the prophets' wrath but rather the notion of prostitution, harlotry, and promiscuity in a transferred ethical, religious, and political sense. True, a man who consorts with harlots dissipates both his wealth (Prov. 29:3) and his physical vigour (Prov. 31:3), but he is guilty neither of any crime nor of any clearly stated moral transgression.

We have already seen that Tamar, after the death of her husband, Judah's son, is wronged by her husband's brother Onan who fails to provide issue. And when Onan, in his turn, is killed, Judah promises her his third son Shelah. But this promise was never fulfilled, and Tamar now resorts to a ruse whose detailed description affords an excellent insight into the appurtenances of prostitution (Gen. 38). When Tamar was told that Judah, her father-in-law, was coming up to Timnah, she removed her widow's clothes, covered her face with a veil, and sat at a crossroads on the way to Timnah—presumably a place where prostitutes could usually be found.

When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute (38:15) כִּי כִסְתָהּ פָּנֶיהָ (AV), but the NEB interprets this 'although she had veiled her face', for prostitutes and slaves were not supposed to be veiled (Benzinger, *Heb. Archäol.*³, 84). In verse 21, however, Tamar is referred to not as a common *zonah*, prostitute, but as a *gadešah*, a temple-harlot or hierodule; and the latter were apparently veiled (Benzinger, *op. cit.*, 85; Skinner, ICC to Genesis, 453-4). In the present case, however, the veil was essential, for otherwise Judah would have recognized his daughter-in-law. In any event, he turned to her and asked her for her sexual favours in very direct terms. She insisted on first agreeing the appropriate remuneration. He suggests a kid from his flock as the proper price. While she consents, she demands as an interim pledge his seal with its cord and the staff in his hand. Intimacy then took place and Tamar conceived.

When Judah subsequently sent an emissary to recover his pledge, the prostitute could not be found, for Tamar had meanwhile returned to her widow's garb. At that point a slightly extraneous element enters into the otherwise matter-of-fact narrative: 'Oh, let her keep the pledge lest we incur contempt' (38:23). I would argue that the idiom פֶּן נוֹהִיָּה לְבוֹז is closer to 'lest we become a laughing stock' than to the NEB's 'or we shall get a bad name'. It seems to me that Judah is more concerned about any bawdy or ribald comments, if enquiries after the prostitute were pursued further, than about moral indignation on the part of the local populace.

When Judah heard that Tamar was with child, she had—according to the

canons of her society—conceived in harlotry **הָרָה לְזָנָיִם**. His first reaction was to have her burnt, but when she returned his pledges he realized what had happened and that he was at fault for having withheld his son Shelah.^{41a}

This remarkable story tells us a great deal about prostitution in the patriarchal age: the attire of prostitutes, the places where they would ply their trade, the scale of remuneration, the unselfconscious directness of the initial approach and subsequent arrangements, and the absence of any moral overtones—a business transaction like any other.

When Joshua despatched his two spies, they went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab **רִשְׁכָּבִי שֹׁמֵה** (2:1). It is clear that Rahab was no ordinary prostitute: her establishment was evidently well known; she possessed a house and did not ply her trade in the streets or by the crossroads. I doubt whether *škb* in the present context can be rendered 'and they lodged there' (AV) or 'and spent the night there' (NEB), though the latter translation is probably much closer to what is intended.⁴² *škb* is normally a technical term (Daube, *op. cit.*, 79), and the use of *šammah*, rather than **אָתָּה** or **עָמָה**, suggests that Rahab was the madam in charge of this **בֵּית אִשָּׁה זָנָה** rather than the lady who necessarily dispensed favours in person.

Another and apparently well-known haunt for prostitutes of a different kind was near the entrance to the *'ohel mo'ed*, the Tabernacle. We know that Eli rebuked his sons for copulating with the women who frequent (**הַצְּבֹארוֹת**) the entrances to the sanctuary. It would seem that Eli's wrath was directed against the shameless conduct of *his sons* in the sight of all the people of Israel (1 Sam. 2:22) rather than the institution of prostitution or even the particular venue chosen by these ladies. They may, of course, have been *qadešot*, hierodules.

The *locus classicus* for the lewd vocabulary of prostitution in particular and any kind of sexual licence in general is Ezekiel, ch. 23, dealing with the whores Oholah and Oholibah. The sermon against these prostitutes and their perversions is long (49 verses) and detailed, if somewhat repetitive, and never shrinks from calling a spade a spade. They played the whore in Egypt while still girls and let their breasts be fondled and their virgin bosoms pressed (v. 3). They were infatuated with Assyrian lovers and pleasure boys (5, 6). Oholibah was even worse than her whoring sister and carried prostitution to yet greater lengths by looking at phallic⁴³ symbols carved on the wall (14). Babylonians copulated with her upon a bed of lovers and defiled her with their fornication; she was quite open about her whoring ways and exhibited her nakedness (17, 18). Both sisters were infatuated with their male prostitutes whose 'members were like those of asses and whose genitals⁴⁴ like those of horses' (20).

Some modern scholars have seemed very worried about such outspokenness, and König detects here some 'want of delicacy' as well as the need 'to explain and to excuse certain passages in Ezekiel', notably ch. 23. He adds: 'it must be admitted that the prophet could equally have achieved his purpose by a

^{41a} I agree with J. A. Emerton's views as against those of M. C. Astour, *VT*, xxv, 3, 357–60.

⁴² I think one might in that case have expected **רִשְׁכָּבִי שֹׁמֵה**.

⁴³ See below for further details on the subject of phallic representations.

⁴⁴ I entirely agree with W. McKane (*Nida Festschrift*, 73), Baumgartner-Kutschera and others, 270, *BH*, and *LXX* (*αἰδοῖα*) that we should read this noun mstathetically: *uzamorat susim zamoratam*; thus the word for 'penis' is not only represented euphemistically in the OT as *yad* (see below) but also expressly as in later Hebrew (*Jastrow* I, 402).

different method of treatment. In like manner, the description of the "navel" and the "belly" (Cant. 7 : 2 ff.) is somewhat too realistic'.⁴⁵ It is, perhaps, fortunate that König did not appear to have grasped the full range of the lexicographical potential of the author of the Song of Songs, for much of his beautiful poetry goes far beyond the mention of navel and belly. However, Ezekiel was plainly a man of strong invectives, though free of all prurience; certainly tedious at times in his repetitiveness and not a poet on the scale of the writer of Canticles. Any squeamishness on our part would not only misconstrue the true *Sitz im Leben* of his speeches but would attribute criteria of judgement and taste (which have radically changed even within our society during the last 25 years) to a totally disparate social milieu 2500 years ago.

We must now turn to one of the most significant aspects of our subject, i.e. all those facets which may be subsumed under the important term 'euphemism', in Hebrew נִקְיָה לְשׁוֹן. There are a number of distinct issues that fall to be discussed under this head: the use of less specific and more acceptable expressions for something considered lewd or offensive to good taste; substitutions for words that were temporarily out of favour; the avoidance, in some cases, of disturbing anthropomorphisms—treated, together with similar instances, under the general subject of *tiqqune sofərim* (in this connexion W. McKane's excellent article in the *Nida Festschrift* is of particular value); Massoretic attenuations on the grounds of delicacy, such as 2 Kings 6 : 25 or Isaiah 36 : 12; and some misunderstandings by translators of either perfectly innocuous expressions or else of some pretty drastic terms in the original.

I need not at this point reiterate my earlier observations on the yawning gulf in taste, sensibilities, and social conventions between Ezekiel or Deborah, on one hand, and E. König or G. A. Cooke⁴⁶ in the early years of this century, on the other. But König's animadversions (loc. cit., see note 45 above) are rather silly when he pontificates in a major encyclopaedia article that 'there are only a few passages where it appears to us that Biblical writers might have shown a little more reserve in dealing with "the secrets" [Deut. 25 : 11—the passage on *məbūšim* "pudenda" referred to earlier on]. We have no exception to take to those instances in which "shame" is employed (Is. 20 : 4⁴⁷ and 47 : 3), for this is still a veiled epithet'. Thus far Professor König; I shall not revert to him.

The use of phallus and phallic symbols is, of course, much more widespread in the pictorial and literary arts of Israel's neighbours⁴⁸ than it is in those exiguous remnants of classical Hebrew literature that have entered the canon of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, a few instances survive. I have already referred to Ez. 23 : 14 and 20 with its representation of phallic symbols in murals and in its comparisons with the genitals of asses and horses. An even bawdier interpretation belongs to Ez. 8 : 17 which has been treated in detail and with accustomed good sense by McKane (op. cit., 71 ff.). The words אָפֶם הַיָּנִים שְׁלָחִים אֶת הַזְּמוּרָה אֶל אָפֶם have been the object of Rabbinic interference, for the offensive (in that it might be taken to refer to God) *appi* has been changed to *appam*. It is plain from this that those responsible for this *tiqqun*

⁴⁵ E. König in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, extra volume*, 164-5.

⁴⁶ G. A. Cooke, in ICC to Ezekiel, p. 247, is worried about the 'repulsive details' in Ez., ch. 16 and 23.

⁴⁷ This is a particularly poor example from König's point of view (evidently not understood by him) with its reference to 'exposed buttocks' (*šēl*), etc.

⁴⁸ Cf. *inter alia*, Benzinger, op. cit., 322 ff.; Robertson Smith, op. cit., 456-7.

soferim had a pretty good idea of what the real connotation of these words was.⁴⁹ And so had the Targum, Rashi and Redaq; they were all conscious of the element of בְּהִתָּה, the unspeakable shamefulness,⁵⁰ implied by those words in Ez. 8:17. It is, therefore, scarcely to be doubted that the offending passage represented a lewd idiom or saying current in Ezekiel's time, something like 'and they fart in my face' or, more literally, 'and they stick their penis in my nose'.⁵¹

The starkness of such expressions is by no means an isolated phenomenon in the Hebrew Bible, even though Ez. 8:17 may be a particularly drastic example. The use of the euphemistic *yad* for 'penis' (and similarly of אִמָּה and אֶצְבֵּעַ)⁵² is fairly widely attested in biblical and post-biblical literature and indeed in Ugaritic and elsewhere. It is likely that many of the *massebot*, obelisk-like stone monuments, were phallic symbols.⁵³ It is distinctly possible that *Yad Absalom* (2 Sam. 18:18) and the *massebah* which Saul established for himself as *yad* (1 Sam. 15:12) belonged to this category of structure. Moreover, there were other such *massebot* symbolizing female parts, especially the vulva. Herodotus (2, 106) reports that he saw such monoliths in Palestine with γυναικὸς αἰδοῖα, female pudenda, engraved on them.

Before I come to discuss some further biblical examples, recognized or unrecognized, let me briefly cite one entirely unambiguous case from the Dead Sea Scrolls. It occurs in the Manual of Discipline 7:13 and reads 'ואשר יוציא ידו מתחת בגדו והוא פוח ונראתה ערותו ונענש שלושים יום'. 'A man who brings forth his genitals from underneath his clothes and is exposed with his private parts visible shall be mulcted for thirty days'.

In Isaiah 57:8 we hear of whoredom with stones and trees and mountains, of the establishment of symbols (זכרון) — so patently to be associated with זכר 'male'), of the cutting and moulding of figures (i.e. ונתכרת לך מהם), and then 'lying down with them contemplating the phallus' (אהבת ממשכם יד חיות).⁵⁴ Or in the highly evocative, transferred and metaphorical language of the Song of Songs where few things mean what staid translators have chosen to render. Thus in 5:4, in a context of opening and closing and love-making, we read 'דודי שלח ידו מן החור ומצוי המו עלי' 'When my beloved slips his organ through the hole,^{54a} my innermost parts stir about him'.

yad in this sense occurs in Ugaritic as well:

tirkm yd il kym

wyd il kmdb⁵⁵

'the organ of El grows long as the sea
and the organ of El like the ocean'.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ The NEB has a rendering so totally awry that I am quite unable to correlate it with the Hebrew text. Brockington's volume offers no help.

Professor Oliver Gurney has been kind enough to draw my attention to some similarly stark expressions (of at times uncertain interpretation) in Akkadian love lyrics published by W. G. Lambert (*Unity and diversity*, edited by H. Goldicke & J. J. M. Roberts, 1975), especially 104-5 (lines 7-11 of col. iii), 122-3 (lines 4-17).

⁵⁰ Apart from McKane, see Baumgartner-Kutschler and others, 270; Jastrow, 402; Cooke (ICC to Ezekiel), 100, 103.

⁵¹ The use of rods as phallic representations is described in some detail in Gen. 30:37-42.

⁵² Cf. for all these Baumgartner-Kutschler and others, and Jastrow.

⁵³ Thus Benzinger, *op. cit.*, 322 ff.

⁵⁴ Cf. Baumgartner-Kutschler and others, 370; Marti, *Jesaja*, 368.

^{54a} Thus also Baumgartner-Kutschler and others, 334: 'erotisch'—vagina. Cf. Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus*, 1728.

⁵⁵ Gordon, *UT*, 52:33-4; No. 1072; Driver, *Canaanite myths and legends*, 122-3.

⁵⁶ See also Ullendorff, *SSL&C*, 137, note 16.

The female pudenda are normally subsumed under the general term *rehem* 'womb'. In Judges 5 : 30, in Deborah's song, we have the bawdy רחם רחמתים 'one wench or two' for each man. However, in Is. 3 : 17 we find (according to the AV) 'the Lord will smite with scab the heads of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts'. The second hemistich reads יצרה פתהן יצרה, and there is nothing very wrong with the AV's understanding.

The verb יצרה is 'to lay bare, expose', and פת is the rare word for 'vulva'.⁵⁷ This is also the understanding of the Talmud which adds some very rude interpretations of its own.⁵⁸

A few examples where the NEB discovers some unseemly or improper meanings. In Gen. 24 : 63 we read : ויצא יצחק לשוּחַ בשדה לפנות עֶרֶב and the second part continues 'he looked up and saw camels approaching'. The first hemistich, whose Hebrew text I have cited, is rendered by the NEB⁵⁹ : 'One evening when he had gone out into the open country hoping to meet them' or 'to relieve himself'. The two sets of words which I have italicized seem to do justice neither to the Hebrew text nor to the general contents of the passage. I am ignorant of the detailed justification of the two interpretations canvassed by the NEB, but one's guesses in that direction do not inspire confidence in either. Ibn Ezra (ad loc.) explains לשוּחַ as ללכת בין השיחים, i.e. to walk among the bushes, *not* to go behind the bushes. His is a popular etymology, not of course a justification for the translation 'to relieve himself'. Nöldeke (*Beiträge*, 43-4) had clearly seen that, despite the somewhat irregular sibilant correspondence, שוּחַ tallies with سَاح 'to take a stroll'. The sense of Gen. 24 : 63 is really perfectly plain : 'And when Isaac went out to take a stroll in the fields towards evening, he looked up and saw camels approaching'. Any reference, in this particular context, to relieving himself would not be improper ; it would be wholly inappropriate.

In Deut. 23 : 13-14, on the other hand, there is an express reference to relieving oneself in the general context of maintaining cleanliness in a military camp : וירד תהיה לך מחוץ למחנה ; *yad* is usually translated as 'place' (following the Targum's *ajar*). The NEB's 'You shall have a *sign* outside the camp showing where you can withdraw' is much too free a rendering, particularly in respect of the words italicized. It seems to me that *yad* may again have to be taken as a euphemism here, something like 'exposure of your pudenda shall be outside the camp', etc. The next verse deals with the burying of excrements away from the camp precinct.

In Judges 3 : 24 and 1 Sam. 24 : 4 the expression מְסִיף את רגליו 'to cover one's feet' means to relieve oneself, i.e. the posture assumed when evacuating the bowels, with the long clothes covering everything unchaste and unclean. This has always been the understanding of interpreters (cf. Josephus, vi, 13, 4) ; thus the Targum and mediaeval Jewish commentators (Rashi, ad loc., explains this, rightly, as defecating (נקבים גדולים) and not urinating, though in his commentary to the relevant passage in *Yebamoth* 103 *a* he speaks of מגי רגלים (מ). All expressions of this kind are referred to (loc. cit.) as לישנא מעליא, i.e. decent, elevated language. Incidentally, the same place in the Talmud has a midrashic

⁵⁷ Cf. Gesenius-Buhl¹⁵ ; Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus*, vi, 5295 ; Redaq to Is. 3 : 17 : פת : הוא 'an expression for the place of the [female] pudenda'.

⁵⁸ *Shabbath*, 62 b—and then concludes : אושי ירושלים אושי שחץ היי 'The men of Jerusalem were lewd'.

⁵⁹ I owe this reference to Mrs. James Barr.

interpretation of Judges 5 : 27 where the verbs **כרע**, **נפל**, **שכב** occur seven times with **בין רגליה** 'between her legs' and are said to refer to seven **בעילות**, seven acts of intercourse, committed by Sisera against Ya'el.

The preoccupation with absolute cleanness seen throughout in the law and lore of the Hebrew Bible is an expression of the maxim 'cleanness is next to godliness'.⁶⁰

In Josh. 15 : 18 and Judges 1 : 14 we have an interesting doublet : Achsah instigates her husband to ask of her father a field ; she alights from her ass, and Caleb asks her what she wants, and she says : do me a favour, please. . . . Now, the words **הצונה מעל החמור** 'she slipped off the ass' are translated, inexplicably, by the NEB 'she broke wind'. We do not know why this utterly improbable rendering was allowed to stand (for I do not believe that G. R. Driver (see bibliography) adhered to his earlier views on the subject), but James Barr is surely justified in exclaiming that 'competent scholars are left open-mouthed, asking one another how the translators obtained from the Hebrew the meanings that they did. Renderings such as that at Judges 1 : 14 [and Josh. 15 : 18] "as she sat on the ass, she broke wind" are an invitation to ridicule, and deservedly so'.⁶¹ Alighting from an animal is a mark of respect : cf. Gen. 24 : 64 ; 31 : 34-5 ; 1 Sam. 25 : 23. Although the meaning of **snh**⁶² is deduced from the context only and we possess no safe comparative etymology (the verb occurs—as far as I know—in Ethiopic only where it is 'to wait'), its semantic range is completely clear and safely established from some of the parallel contexts cited. And, if the meaning of a word is its use, then there could be no better support than we have in the present case. The indispensability of comparative philology (in this connexion) must not be overstated (cf. Barr, *Comp. Phil., passim*).

It would, incidentally, not be correct to assume that all bodily functions are expressed euphemistically and delicately in the Hebrew Bible. One need only think that the word **mas̄tin** 'pissing' occurs no fewer than six times (1 Sam. 25 : 22, 34 'any that piss against the wall' ; 1 Kings 14 : 10 ; 16 : 11 ; 21 : 21 ; 2 Kings 9 : 8) and is rendered as such by the AV. Yet the NEB has in each case a wholly different translation whose justification eludes me.

The term haemorrhoids is not one that might be expected to occur with any frequency in a text of the limited size and subject-range of the OT ; yet it does appear more than half a dozen times—and in rather unusual circumstances. I am not here concerned with the precise nature of this particular affliction and I am, of course, utterly incompetent to pronounce on its medical details.^{62a} What does, however, concern us in our context is the fact that two words are attested for this disease and that one of them occurs generally in the consonantal text, while the other is a Massoretic substitution in the *Qərē*. The plain inference must be that one of the expressions was considered offensive to good taste and the other possessed a greater measure of acceptability.

In Deut. 28 : 27 the *Kəṣīb* is **עסלים** and the *Qərē* **טחוררים**. The pointing applied

⁶⁰ John Wesley, but derived from a saying by R. Pinhas ben Ya'ir **טהרה מביאה לידי אבודא זרה** ('*Abodah zarah*, 20 b).

⁶¹ Barr, *Heythrop Journal*, 387.

⁶² In contemporary Hebrew it is 'to parachute'. I am grateful to James Barr for drawing my attention to E. W. Nicholson's valuable article on *snh* in *ZAW*, 1977, 2. Ernest Nicholson has placed me in his debt not only by furnishing an offprint but also by supplying other bibliographical indications. Alas, there remain no doubt many regrettable gaps in my bibliographical knowledge of this subject. I saw Arthur Gibson's study of *snh* only after completion of this paper ; I agree with many of the author's points.

^{62a} Generally described in Rabbinic literature as boils on the **פי הטבעת**, i.e. anus.

to the former is, in fact, the pronunciation pattern of the latter. The same phenomenon recurs in 1 Sam. 5 : 6, 9, 12 (as part of the Lord's punishment meted out to the Philistines) and in 1 Sam. 6 : 4. In 1 Sam. 6 : 11 and 17, on the other hand, *ṭāhorim* appears in the text itself; that it is semantically identical with the apparently offending *'afolim* clearly emerges from the context. But we do not know what made *'afolim* so particularly obnoxious and *ṭāhorim* evidently so much less so. One can only presume that the former possessed an obscene association that the latter lacked—at any rate at the time of the Massoretes or in the traditions upon which their work was based.

An alternative explanation would be founded on the etymology of *ṭl* which appears to connote a hill or elevation—hence the swelling in the region of the anus. But a word designating such an offensive affliction in so awkward a region must not be brought into any sort of relationship with Ophel, one of the mounds on which Jerusalem is built.

A related, though marginally different, case is that of the verb שגל for which the Massoretes have regularly substituted the verb *škb* in the *Qərē* in all the three or four places where it is attested. Here we have little reason to doubt that *šql* was considered particularly obscene in its semantic range from 'copulate' to 'ravish' and that its substitution by the milder *škb* was made in the interests of good taste and modesty. That such amendments for the sake of greater reticence were not carried out in any consistent manner need not surprise us when we take into account the complex history of the canon and the notorious vagaries in determining what constitutes good taste in any given period.

The entire subject of substitution for the sake of decency as well as of reading and translating certain passages of Scripture is ventilated in *Megillah* 25 *a* and *b*. There we are told that expressions written לענאי are read לישבח, such as the לענאי - שגל and עפלים - טחורים passages which we have already discussed. To these have to be added חריותים (probably 'pigeon-dung') to be substituted in reading by דביתים (2 Kings 6 : 25); or Rabshaqeh's tough words about the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18 : 27) when men will have to שניהם לאכל את חריהם ולשתות את שניהם with the *Qərē* demanding the reading לאכל את צואתם ולשתות את מימי רגליהם i.e. 'to eat their own excrements and drink their own urine'—in either version. To our eyes and ears there is little genuine difference between the alternatives offered by the written text and the reading postulated. And, finally, the word מחראות (no doubt to be placed with the חריהם or חריהם of 2 Kings 18 : 27 and Isaiah 36 : 12, respectively) which appears in 2 Kings 10 : 27 and whose pointing and *Qərē* is מוצאות. Here the position is quite clear: the *Keṭib* is 'place of excrements', while the *Qərē* means 'place one goes out to, privy'.⁶³

Other Massoretic interferences with the text or *tiqqune soḥarim* (apart from those already discussed) do not fall directly within our present concerns. For full details, in terms of technique and substance, of the *tiqqune soḥarim* I would once more invite attention to McKane's study in the *Nida Festschrift*.

At this point I would add one or two further isolated instances of euphemistic expressions in the Hebrew Bible—notions which do not appear to have incurred Massoretic censure or attention of any kind. These are, of course, simply examples of a literary device which cannot here be explored in all its manifestations and ramifications.

We have already, earlier on, referred to the frequent use of *yd'* in the

⁶³ See also Ullendorff, *SSL&C*, 24.

sense of having carnal knowledge, one of the most obvious and well-attested euphemisms in the language of the OT. James Barr, in his important *Comparative Philology*, 19 ff. and 328, has collected some of the meanings and concepts that have been attributed to this verb; one might further consult *JJS*, vi, 1, 1955, 50-2, 56; and especially J. A. Emerton's study in *JSS*, autumn 1970, 145-80. In our present case we need not, however, have recourse to any of the other alleged meanings of *ydl'*, for the semantic development is plain; it is also paralleled in Akkadian, Syriac, Greek and no doubt elsewhere. Cases like Gen. 4: 1 or 1 Kings 1: 4 admit of no other interpretation. It is, however, worth pointing out that *ydl'* is not only employed with a man as subject of the action but may also be used with a woman having carnal knowledge of men (Gen. 19: 8)—or indeed in homosexual conduct (Gen. 19: 5; Judges 19: 22).

The verb טחן 'to grind' appears in post-biblical Hebrew as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (a simile well known in other languages as well), but it is more than likely that this meaning is already represented in the OT. Job 31: 9-10 reads: 'If my heart has been seduced for the sake of a woman, or I have lain in wait at my neighbour's door; then let my wife grind (or better in the *nif'al* as טָחַן with most exegetes: "be ground") by another, and let others crouch⁶⁴ upon her'. This interpretation is attested already in the *LXX*, Targum, Talmud (*Sotah* 10 a: לשון עבירה אלא טחינה אין טחינה אלא לשון עבירה) and then follows Job 31: 10), and in mediaeval commentaries.⁶⁵

There are one or two places in the Hebrew Bible where the innocuous and ubiquitous verb אכל 'to eat' has been given the sense of 'to enjoy intercourse'. Prov. 30: 20 speaks of the adulterous woman who eats and then wipes her mouth and says: I have done no wrong. אכלה in this context has long been interpreted as a euphemism for enjoyment of her adulterous conduct; thus *Ket.* 65 b where this verse is discussed at length, in Rashi, and indeed by Baumgartner-Kutscher, and others, 45, and by McKane, *Proverbs*, 658. One might also compare Cant. 4: 16 which will be explicated below.

The thigh (יָרֵךְ) as the seat of procreative powers is a standard figure of speech in Hebrew—as in the frequent idiom יוצאי ירכו (Gen. 46: 26, etc.), his descendants, those who issue from his thigh. This corresponds, of course, to the less often attested female equivalent 'those who issue from between her legs' מבין רגליה in Deut. 28: 57. But there is a special and less obvious context in which *yarek* plays an important part, i.e. in connexion with taking a solemn oath. In such cases the hand has to be placed underneath the thigh which (according to the *Dictionary of the Bible*, iv, 751 or Baumgartner-Kutscher, and others, 419) is the seat of 'the genital organ' or 'Gegend der Geschlechtsteile beim Schwur'. It is in this sense that we have to understand Abraham's request to his trusted servant to place his hand under Abraham's thigh as part of the ceremony of swearing an oath (Gen. 24: 2 and 9) or of Jacob's similar demand of his son Joseph in Gen. 47: 29. The sacredness attributed to this organ would lend special solemnity to an oath of this character. And Jewish sources have explained this by way of proximity to ברית מילה 'the covenant of circumcision'.

There is one last expression I wish to discuss under this head. In 2 Kings

⁶⁴ *kr'* in the same meaning as previously discussed in respect of Judges 5: 27.

⁶⁵ Despite the references to rape in Lam. 5: 11, I do not think that 5: 13 encourages any interpretation of *tsbon* other than the literal one of grinding corn (pace Baumgartner-Kutscher and others, 358). Daube (*Mnemiosyne*, xxx, 2, 177-8) rightly adverts to the similar meaning of *hrš* in Jud. 14: 18 (cf. Jastrow, 507) as a euphemism for *fututio*.

2: 23-5 Elisha went up to Bethel; on the way he encountered some small boys who jeered at him 'get along, baldpate, get along'. Elisha was so incensed at this that he cursed them and 42 children were mauled by two bears. This surely seems a most cruel and disproportionate punishment for a minor act of bad behaviour and shows Elisha as a humourless old man. That is, of course, if we take the term קַרְחַ 'baldhead' at its literal meaning, but plainly there must have been more to this expression to appreciate the prophet's fury and indignation. We know, of course, that hair was regarded as the visible manifestation of virility. 'Accordingly, a bald man was ... an object not only of fun but also of opprobrium, because he was believed to have lost his vital essence and consequently to be impotent.'⁶⁶ It is only in this light that one can understand Elisha's fierce reaction.

Even a cursory reading of the Hebrew Bible demonstrates the importance attached to the role of the prostitute, the whore, the harlot, זונה and קדשה. While the former was the common prostitute offering her body for gain, the latter played a significant part in the cult and worship of the inhabitants of Canaan and the neighbouring regions.^{66a} It was thus both the reality and the powerful symbolism of whoredom that constituted such a constant and central theme in the literature of Israel. The existence of the harlot and her trade was a well-established fact in Israelite society—and indeed in all societies of the ancient Near East. It was, therefore, not so much the moral peril of common prostitution that endangered the fabric of the monotheistic state but rather the much greater threat represented by the insidious force of types of religion deifying the reproductive powers of nature. This led to licentious rites and orgies in which the *qodešah* played a central part and in which the harlot was invested with sanctity and protection.

Much of the moral condemnation in prophetic literature was expressed in terms of the symbolism of prostitution and licentiousness. Chapter 23 of Ezekiel (which we have already discussed) is but an extreme example of this form of vituperation. It occurs almost everywhere in this literary genre and obviously referred to a type of immoral behaviour the people could understand and appreciate in all its gravity. Isaiah castigates the women of Zion (3: 16 ff.) and uses the simile of the prostitute (23: 15, 16); Jeremiah asks how those who assemble in the harlots' houses can be forgiven (5: 7); Ezekiel displays an almost obsessive attachment to this symbolism: 'you disgrace your beauty and spread out your legs to every passer-by and multiply your whoredoms' (16: 25); the book of Proverbs is redolent of warnings against the harlot and adulteress.

And then, of course, there is Hosea. His marital problems, real or symbolic, have engaged the attention of Old Testament scholars for generations. I am not a Hosea specialist, but I would have thought that a real-life experience with an adulterous and whoring wife was taken as the background for his prophecy and for his description of the relationship between God and Israel. It so happens that the picture of the harlot and the adulterous woman makes a very effective literary symbol for a people lusting after pagan cults and after all the visible and tangible allurements of religious practices and customs more readily comprehensible than the stern moral doctrines of an invisible God of Israel. Peter Ackroyd is surely right in saying that 'for Hosea and his followers it was the *meaning* of the events rather than the events [of his marriage(s)]

⁶⁶ Gaster, *op. cit.*, 517.

^{66a} Cf. now also Pitt-Rivers, *op. cit.*, 158.

themselves which was significant—and here is the strength of the allegorical interpretation . . . The husband-wife symbolism of the opening chapters is echoed elsewhere in the book, especially in allusions to Israel's apostasy'.⁶⁷

The matter-of-fact manner in which the prophets refer to prostitution and harlotry underlines the ubiquity of this institution in the life and cult of the people. But it is also clear, in terms of style and presentation, that the gentleness of Hosea, the earthy outspokenness of Ezekiel, or the poetic artistry of Isaiah did not offend good taste when dealing with subjects of such delicacy. Frankness and candour, even immodesty of language or of subject, depend crucially on the seriousness of the treatment accorded to such a sensitive sphere. The prophets could speak of whoredom and lust, and even describe in detail the aberrations and perversions of sexual conduct, without detracting from the earnestness of their purpose and without incurring any suspicion of prurience.

I think this last statement will hold true even of the Song of Songs when it is interpreted neither as an allegory of the loving relationship between God and Israel nor necessarily as an expression of conjugal love but as a supreme example of love poetry in the most general sense. I agree with James Barr who deprecates⁶⁸ the introduction by the NEB of rubrics designating the speakers as bride and bridegroom, rubrics which do not appear in the Hebrew text. Like Barr, I would accept Eissfeldt's analysis:⁶⁹

The attempt everywhere here to discover married love or at any rate the love of bride and bridegroom is vain, and would be to confine to the sphere of narrow and middle-class legitimacy songs which extol love as a powerful force, often outspokenly, while always profoundly and inwardly.

Rabbi 'Aqiba thought that there was no day in the world as worthy as that on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel. While all the hagiographa were holy, the Song of Songs was the holy of holies.⁷⁰

A general study of this important work of poetry is, of course, entirely outside the province and competence of this paper.⁷¹ The time is overdue for a detailed examination of the language and linguistic symbolism as well as the allusions and covert references contained in this book. It is a rich mine for those to whom the symbolism of psycho-analysis has a powerful appeal, and I imagine it will have been studied in this connexion, though my bibliographical ignorance is such that I have hardly seen any papers devoted to this subject.^{71a}

I have already invited attention (p. 441 above) to one instance of startling directness in the Song of Songs.^{71b} There are, of course, others, but it is not my intention to collect them here systematically. A compilation of this nature

⁶⁷ In Peake's *Commentary on the Bible*, 603.

⁶⁸ *Heythrop Journal*, 399-400.

⁶⁹ *The Old Testament: an introduction*, Oxford, 1965, 488 (as quoted by Barr, loc. cit.). This is also the interpretation advocated by A. S. Herbert in Peake's *Commentary*, 469.

⁷⁰ Mishna *Yad*. 3: 5.

⁷¹ Cf. in particular N. H. Tur-Sinai, שיר השירים אשר לשלמה in *Hallushon w'hassefer* II, 351-88; Gordis, *The Song of Songs*.

^{71a} It was only several months after completion of this paper (in Dec. 1977) that Marvin H. Pope's monumental translation, introduction, and commentary reached this country (cf. *TLS*, 7/7/78). This is precisely the type of work I had in mind, and indeed most of my suggestions can be found in Pope's book—amounting at times to a startling confirmation of how identical or very similar conclusions can be reached completely independently. Whatever reservations of detail one may have about Pope's vast opus (it is, e.g., not possible to rely on Gleave's 1951 Ethiopic ed.—p. 20), this is unquestionably a work of the greatest significance.

^{71b} Now corroborated independently by Pope, *Song of Songs*, 1977, 517 ff.

will have to await the painstaking *sondage* to which I have referred and will have to be carried out with considerable methodological rigour, both in the areas of language and allusive symbolism (see now note 71^a).

The Talmud had already clearly recognized that the verb *חזה* is at times used of gazing, looking in a leering manner: 'The generation of Job was dissolute with lewdness; this is proved by Job 27: 12: "behold, all of you have been gazing" and indeed by Cant. 7: 1: "Return, return, o Shulanite, return so that we may gaze (*חזה*) upon you" . . .'.⁷² We had earlier on discerned the same meaning in Is. 57: 8 and I would suggest that Micah 4: 11 calls for a similar interpretation: 'let her (the daughter of Zion) be ravished and let our eye gaze upon her'.⁷³

Daniel Lys, in his 'Notes sur le Cantique',⁷⁴ has assembled a few instances of sexual interpretations in the Song of Songs. There is no need to agree with the details of each of his exegetical endeavours, but it seems to me that he is basically on the right track. And, of course, he has collected only three or four examples and has not so far subjected the entire book to detailed examination (this has since been done in Pope's *Song of Songs*).

In 2: 15 M. Lys considers that the little foxes which attack the vineyards represent the imagery of the deflowering of the young girl. In 2: 17 he derives *בְּתָר* from the Semitic root *bt* 'to divide, split', so that the text would be rendered 'think of yourself, my beloved, as a gazelle or young goat upon the twin hills'—and the cleft hills would, of course, be the cleavage of the female breasts.

The old crux *תלפזח* (4: 4), which is simply transcribed by the LXX, is taken by M. Lys as *tel piyyot*⁷⁵ 'un peu comme en français "mamelon" indique à la fois un sein et une colline'. The tower of David is the neck, and the metaphor continues with the breasts, the gorge which is protected by the tower.

The last of M. Lys's examples to which I would like to refer concerns 7: 3, and in particular the word *שִׁרְרָךְ*, generally translated as 'navel'. I agree with his conclusions that *šor* here must clearly denote the vulva, and I also accept that the etymology does not greatly matter (whether we should compare *šrr* and think of the umbilical cord, or *š'er* 'flesh, body', or some connexion with Arabic *sirr* 'secret' part); but I feel confident that the conclusions should be reached by a different route and not by looking at this obscure word in isolation. The enumeration of the Shulamite's charms is proffered quite systematically from foot to head (vv. 2-6): feet, thighs, then the operative *šor*, followed by belly, breasts, neck, nose, eyes, etc. This sequence does by itself betray the real significance of the noun in question. Now every one of her desirable attributes is either further described or illustrated by some likeness. In this case: *שִׁרְרָךְ אֵן הַסֶּהַר אֵל יְחִסָּר הַמָּנֵן* 'Your vulva is like a moon-shaped basin, it shall never lack moisture (or mixture)'. Rabbinic literature refers to *aggan hassahar* 'like a waxing half-moon'⁷⁶; and *mezeg* is

⁷² *Baba Batra* 15 b.

⁷³ Thus also Baumgartner-Kutschera and others, 289.

⁷⁴ *Suppl. to Vet. Test.*, xvii, 1968, 170-8. I owe this reference to my friend, Professor George Anderson of Edinburgh University.

⁷⁵ Already Talmud *Berakhot* 30 a explained this as *תל שכל פיות פונים בו*, i.e. the elevation towards which all mouths turn.

⁷⁶ See Jastrow, *Dict.*, 960; Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus*, 46: pelvis.

also employed to express 'discharge'; hence Baumgartner-Kutscher⁷⁷ are right to consider 'sperm, semen'. The general meaning of this hemistich, especially in its overall setting, can thus scarcely be in doubt. I might just add that Gesenius-Buhl¹⁵ adduce *membrum mulieris* for *šor*, and M. Lys compares Akk. *hurdatu* (described by v. Soden, *AHW*, 358, 535 as 'weibliche Scham') in the well-known verse in Gilgamesh, VI, 69: 'stretch out your hand and *luput hur-da-at-ni* touch our vulva'.

I now turn to some further examples selected at random. There is no need to labour the point that *kerem* (1: 6; 8: 12) is capable of bearing a markedly erotic connotation.⁷⁸ Even Gordis (p. 46) accepts that the maiden had left her own 'vineyard' (rightly placed between inverted commas) unguarded, being too prodigal with her favours. The Talmud avers (*Shebu'oth* 35 b) that every mention of Solomon in the Song of Songs is sacred—except 'my vineyard, my own, in front of me' (8: 12); and the Rabbis also accept as secular 3: 7, i.e. הנה מטרו שלשלה 'behold it is the bed of Solomon'.

In 2: 3, the second hemistich has to be interpreted in a somewhat more robust manner than is usually done: בצלו חמדתי ופריו מתוק לחכי 'in his shade I ardently desired⁷⁹ (the *pi'el* of *hmd* occurs only here) and I crouched down and his fruit was sweet to my palate'. צל, though related to the trees.

may well refer here to the physical position of the lovers, while פרי is rightly described by Gesenius as 'Bild des Liebesgenusses'. In the next verse, 2: 4, 'his banner (דגלו) upon me means love' is perfectly feasible, provided it is taken as an erotic symbol. No audience in this day and age, nurtured on those Freudian concepts which seem assured, needs to be reminded of the significance of such sexual symbols as sticks and poles and trees, on one hand, and apples, fruit, woods, hills, and thickets, on the other.⁸⁰ Even Gordis, *op. cit.*, 85, accepts that the הר המור 'mountain of myrrh' and the גבעת הלבונה 'hill of frankincense' are 'obvious symbols for the body of the beloved' (4: 6). For this reason I can see no compulsion to make the (admittedly very minor) emendation (in 2: 4) from דגלו to רגלו which has been proposed by some. It seems to me that the author of the Song of Songs was too good a poet to say 'his leg upon me means love'.

The apples and raisins, referred to in 2: 5 as comforts and refreshments, are of the same kind as the mandrakes we discussed earlier on, i.e. aphrodisiacs and symbols in fertility rites described by Hosea.⁸¹

In 2: 7 הפץ plainly means to be sexually aroused, to be willing and ready (as Baumgartner-Kutscher and others, 326, and the NEB have recognized). This entails that the preceding תעירו and תעוררו cannot here express 'to arouse, to stir up' but rather 'to disturb, interrupt' (again as the NEB and Gordis, p. 81, have clearly appreciated).

4: 12 to 5: 1 reveal some of this love symbolism, unfeigned and beautiful: גן נעול 'a locked garden' is my beloved, מעין החום 'a fountain sealed', is the

⁷⁷ P. 535, following Haller, *Handbuch zum Alten Testament*, 18, 41; Gordis, *Song of Songs*, 93, dismisses this without offering any reason (he should have emulated Ibn Ezra!).

Moisture in the vulva is also referred to in the Akkadian love lyrics published by W. G. Lambert (112-13, lines 1-16, of the article cited in note 49 above). This is also the interpretation of this verse in Canticles proffered by Pope, *op. cit.*, 593 and 617 ff.

⁷⁸ See the remarks on 2: 15 above.

⁷⁹ Jastrow, 475: 'to be carnally excited'.

⁸⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (translated by Joan Riviere), London, 1922, 129 ff.

⁸¹ Hosea 3: 1; cf. also Gordis, *op. cit.*, 81.

lover's plaint; followed soon after by the invitation: *יבא דודי לגנו ויאכל פרי מגדיו*: 'let my lover come into his garden and eat its delicious fruit'—and, finally: 'I have come into my garden . . . I have plucked (*אָרִיתִי*) my myrrh, I have eaten my honey and drunk my wine' (5: 1).

Among symbolistic verbs we find *רעה* and *לקט* (6: 2): 'my lover has gone down to his garden . . . to *graze* in his garden and to *pick* the lilies. I belong to my lover and he to me, he who *grazes* among the lilies' (6: 3). Both *ירד* and *עלה* are employed in this emblematic sense: the lover *goes down* into the garden (6: 2) and he *climbs up* (7: 9) into the palm-tree and to the clusters of grapes which are like her breasts.

I need hardly add that these desultory observations have barely scratched the surface of a subject which encompasses a vast body of biblical material and entails the recovery of Hebrew lexical layers which have at times remained unrecognized—quite apart from the veritable mountain of post-biblical and Rabbinic literary reflections and echoes to which I have only occasionally drawn attention. I hope that one aspect at least of our subject has emerged clearly and unmistakably: there is in the Hebrew Bible, in prose and in poetry, in religious admonition and in secular love songs, a healthy and unabashed outspokenness which, in a sense, constitutes one of the great glories of the Old Testament. It can and does touch upon subjects and issues, candidly and ingenuously and with unvarnished vigour, and will give offence only to the squeamish and the lecherous.

WORDS DISCUSSED

- אבר mainly post-biblical
- שפת אבר
- אגן הסהר Cant. 7: 3
- אונן Gen. 38: 4
- מעשה אונן
- אורר Jer. 13: 11
- אכל Prov. 30: 20; Cant. 4: 16; 5: 1
- אָמָה (Jastrow, 75)
- אנס cf. ענה
- אצבע (Jastrow, 110)
- ארה Cant. 5: 1
- ארח כנשים Gen. 18: 11 (cf. דרך נשים)
- אשת חיל Prov. 31
- בא *passim*
- ביאה
- בַּהֲתֵא cf. בוש. בוש. ערוה
- בוגרת cf. קטנה - נערה
- בעל
- בעולה Gen. 20: 3
- בעילה (Jastrow)
- ברך Job 1: 5; Ps. 10: 3
- מבושים (בוש) Deut. 25: 11

- בשר Gen. 2:24; Ez. 23:20
 - בתולים Deut. 22:14
 - גבעה Cant. 4:6
 - גלה Deut. 23:1; Ez. 23:18; Lev. 18:9
 - גן Cant. 4:12
 - גס (Ben Yehuda, *Thesaurus*)
 גס בלי מכנסים (Hebrew slang dictionary)
 - דביונים 2 Kings 6:25
 - דבק Gen. 2:24
 - דבר אחר (Jastrow, 278) euphemism
 - דגל Cant. 2:4 (Rashi, ad loc., אשרייט — perhaps *girouette* ?)
 - דוד Cant. *passim*
 - דודאים Gen. 30:14-16; Cant. 7:14
 - דכה Deut. 23:2
 - דרך נשים Gen. 31:35 (cf. ארץ כנשים)
 - הר Cant. 4:6
 - הרי בתר Cant. 2:17
 - הרה לזוניה Gen. 38:24
 - השיאני (השיא) Gen. 3:13 (cf. פתח)
 - זונה
 תזנות, זוננים, זנות
 - זכר male
 - זכרון Is. 57:8 (Baumgartner-Kutscher and others, 260)
 - זמה lewdness, fornication
 אשת הזמה; שטוף זמה (Ez. 23:44)
 - זמורה Ez. 8:17; 23:20 (cf. Gesenius-Buhl, 198; Jastrow, 402; McKane, 71)
 - זרע seed, semen
 - חגורה (cf. סיגור) Gen. 3:7; Is. 3:24
 - חור Cant. 5:4
 - חזה Is. 57:8; Cant. 7:1; Micah 4:11
 - החזיק Deut. 22:25 (cf. תפש)
 - חטף Jud. 21:21
 - חמד Cant. 2:3
 - חמס Prov. 26:6 (cf. Baumgartner-Kutscher and others, 316)
 - חפיץ Cant. 2:7
 חפץ 1 Kings 10:13
 - הראיהם Is. 36:12
 חריהם 2 Kings 18:27
 - חריונים 2 Kings 6:25
 - חרש cf. footnote (65)
 - חשק Deut. 21:11
 - חתום Cant. 4:12
 - פי הטבעת anus (cf. commentators to 1 Sam. 5:6 ff.)
 - טחורים 1 Sam. 5:6; 6:11 (cf. עפלים)
 - טחן Job 31:10 (cf. Gesenius, etc.)
 טחינה (Jastrow)
 - טמא Gen. 34:5, etc.
 - יבם Gen. 38:8
 - יד Is. 57:8; Cant. 5:4 (cf. Baumgartner-Kutscher and other dictionaries)
 יד אבשלום 2 Sam. 18:18

- ידע Gen. 4:1; 19:5; Jud. 19:22: *et passim*
 - ירד Cant. 6:2
 - ירך Gen. 24:2; 47:29
 - כנה Deut. 23:1
 - כרם Cant. 1:6; 8:12
 - כרע Jud. 5:27; Job 31:10
 - לישנא מעליא euphemism
 לשון נקיה
 - לקט Cant. 6:2
 - מבושים (מבשים) Deut. 25:11
 - מוצאות 2 Kings 10:27
 - מזג Cant. 7:3
 - מחראות 2 Kings 10:27
 - מטה Cant. 3:7
 - מילה covenant of circumcision
 ברית מילה Gen. 17
 - מכנסי בד Ex. 28:42
 - מעין Cant. 4:12
 - מצא Deut. 22:23, 25
 - מצבה 1 Sam. 15:12; 2 Sam. 18:18
 - מקרה (קרי) Deut. 23:11
 - מליליה Gen. 3:16
 - נאף Ex. 20:14; Hos. 3:1; Prov. 30:20
 - נאץ Ps. 10:3
 - נבלות Hos. 2:12 (cf. Gesenius; Jastrow)
 - ננע Gen. 20:6; Prov. 6:29
 - ננש Ex. 19:15
 - ננול Cant. 4:12
 - נערה (קטנה - בוגרת)
 - נפל Jud. 5:27
 - נקב to perforate
 נקבים גדולים - נקב (Rashi to Jud. 3:24)
 יצא לנקביו
 נקבה *perforata*, Gesenius; Jastrow
 - נקפה Is. 3:24
 - סינר cf. Jastrow, p. 983
 - עורר - עורר Cant. 2:7
 - עלה Cant. 7:9
 - ענה (אנס) Gen. 34:2; Deut. 22:24; Jud. 19:24, 20:5; 2 Sam. 13:12
 - עפלים cf. טחורים 1 Sam. 5:6
 - ערה
 ערוה Lev. 18: *passim*
 בית הערוה Redaq to Is. 3:17
 ערום - עירום naked
 - פורציינט see סינר (Rashi)
 - פילגש Gen. 25:6
 - פרוץ cf. Ben Yehuda, 5225 ff.
 - פרי Cant. 2:3
 - פת Is. 3:17 (1 Kings 7:50) cf. Gesenius, *Thesaurus*, 1096-7: *cardo, interstitium pedum*;
 hence *pudenda muliebria*; cf. Mishna, *Kelim*, 11:2
 - פתה (cf. השיא) Ex. 22:15-16

- פתיגיל Is. 3:24
 - צחק ב/אתב Gen. 26:8; 39:14
 - צל Cant. 2:3
 - צנה Josh. 15:18; Jud. 1:14
 - צרה 1 Sam. 1:6
 - קבה Gesenius, 692
 - קדשה Gen. 38:21
 - קטנה (נערה-בוגרת)
 - קרב Gen. 20:4; Lev. 18:14
 - קרח 2 Kings 2:23
 - קרי cf. מקרה; Jastrow
 - רגל
 מבין רגליה Deut. 28:57; Jud. 5:27
 מי רגלים Is. 36:12
 מסיף את הרגלים Jud. 3:24
 - רחם womb
 רחם רחמתיים Jud. 5:30
 - רעה Cant. 6:2
 - שאר cf. Jastrow
 - שגל Deut. 28:30
 - שדים Cant. 4:5 *et passim*
 - לשוח Gen. 24:63
 - שחת Gen. 38:9
 - שכב *passim*
 - שמח Deut. 24:5
 - תשמיש intercourse
 תשמיש המטה Rashi to Gen. 3:16 *et passim*
 - שפכה Deut. 23:2
 - שררף Cant. 7:3
 שר
 - שת Prov. 26:6; Is. 20:4
 - השתין 1 Sam. 25:22
 - תבע to solicit intercourse, to take the initiative
 - תלפיות Cant. 4:4
 - תפוח Cant. 2:3, 5
 - תפש Deut. 22:28
 - תשוקה Gen. 3:16
 - תשמיש see under ט

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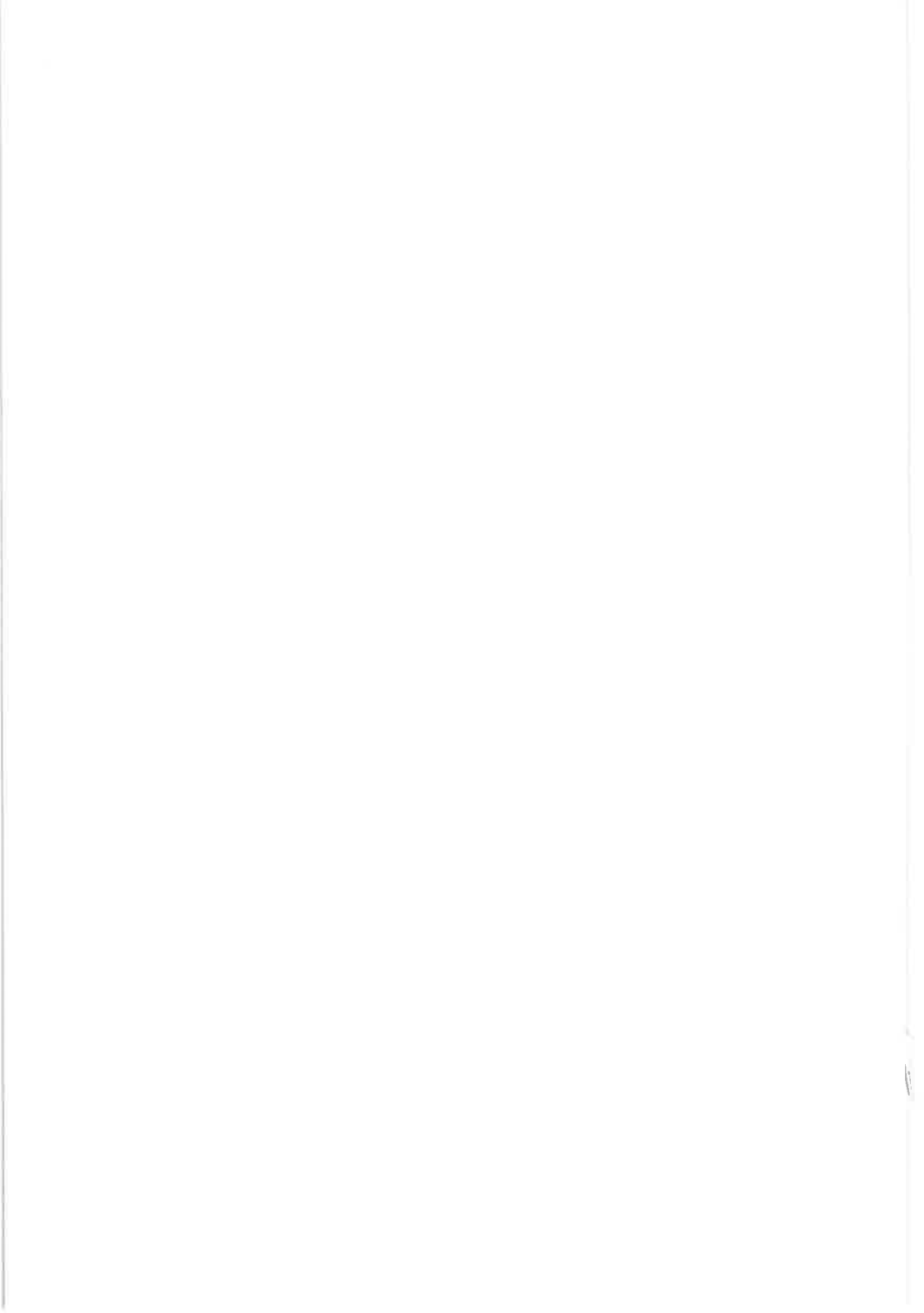
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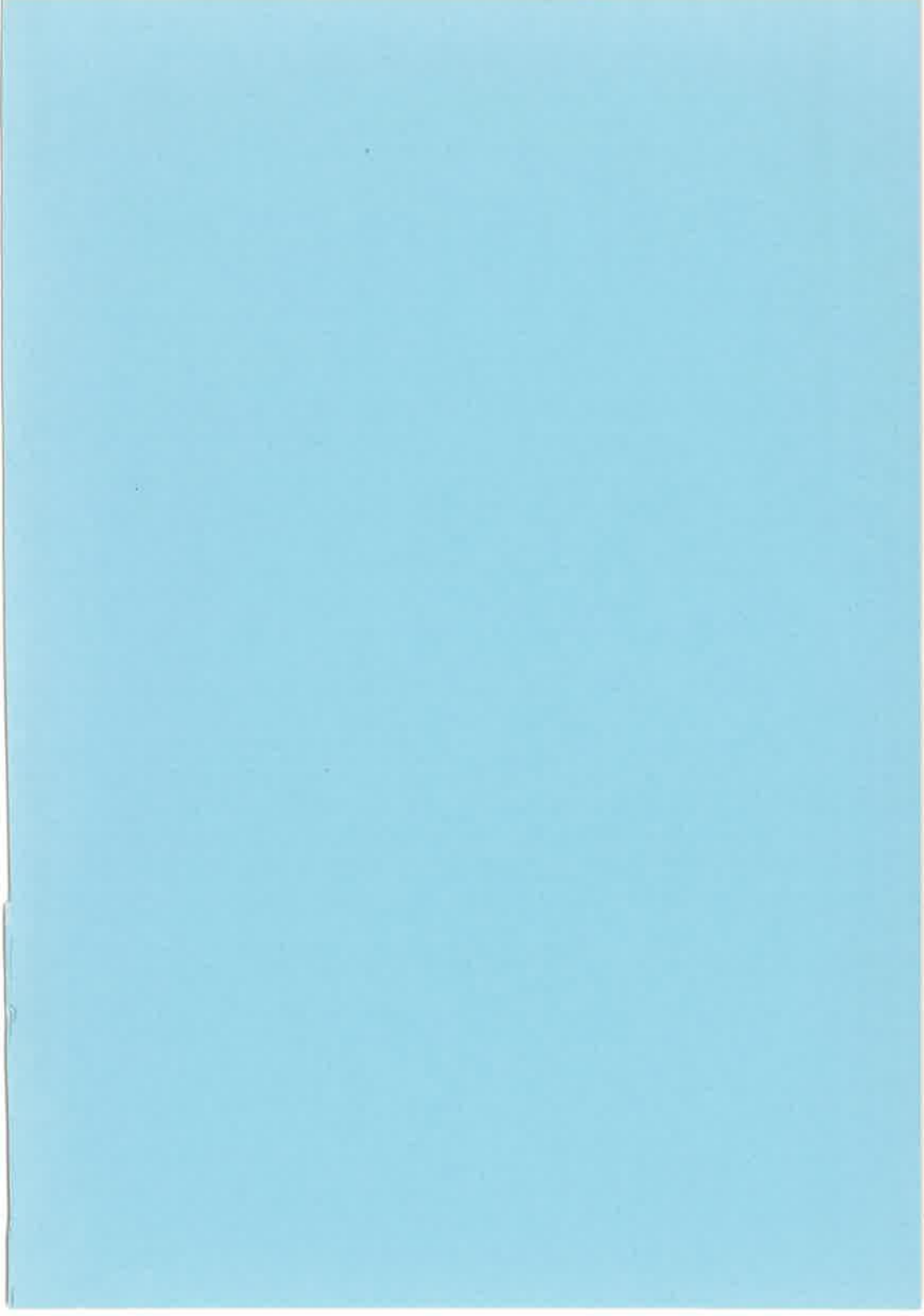
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Postscript

It was only some time after completion of this paper (in December 1977) that a new and very important commentary on Song of Songs reached the U.K.: Marvin H. Pope: *Song of Songs* (The Anchor Bible, Doubleday), New York, 1977.

AHW	<i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i>
AV	Authorized Version
BH	<i>Biblia Hebraica</i>
BQ	<i>Baba Qamma</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
ICC	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
JE	<i>Jewish Encyclopaedia</i>
JJS	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
JSS	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
LXX	<i>Septuagint</i>
NEB	New English Bible
SSL&C	<i>Studies in Semitic Languages and Civilizations</i>
UT	<i>Ugaritic Textbook</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
ZDMG	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>





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