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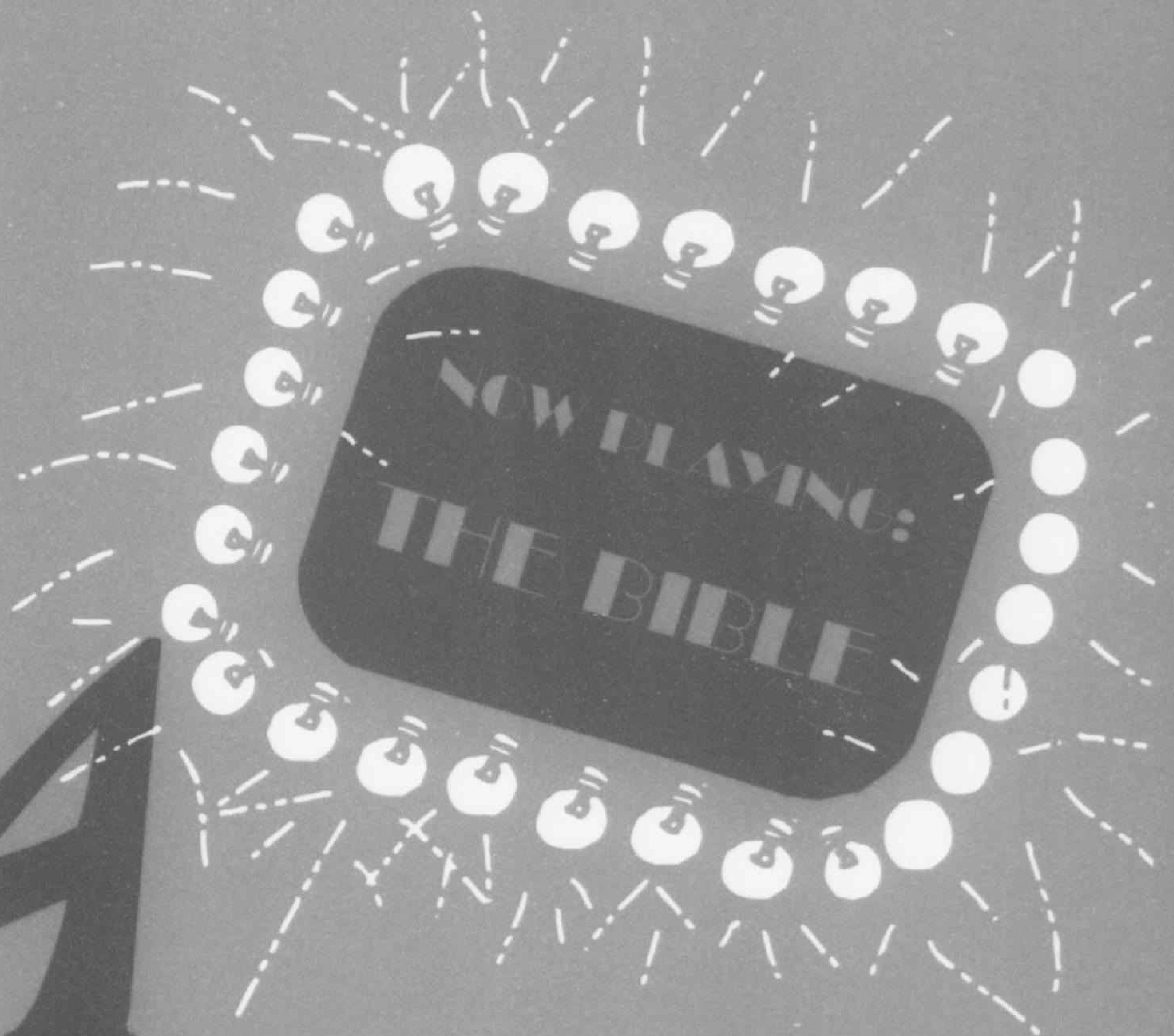
an experimental journal for biblical criticism

Biblical Glamour and Hollywood Glitz



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BIBLICAL GLAMOUR AND HOLLYWOOD GLITZ

Editor: Alice Bach

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FIGURE 1. "Throw them to the lions, Sire." (Credit: MOMA Film Archives.)

"THROW THEM TO THE LIONS, SIRE": TRANSFORMING BIBLICAL NARRATIVES INTO HOLLYWOOD SPECTACULARS

Alice Bach
Stanford University

Most filmgoers are familiar with these words spoken by a shiny-helmeted British-accented Roman centurion who eagerly awaits the battle between the lion and the Christian. For some of us, one of these Fifties "Sword and Sandal" films was our first clue that Christians had not started out as the winners. And if one had read of Christian martyrdom, or imagined the sound of Jesus' voice delivering the Sermon on the Mount, one's interest in the formative period of Christianity was certainly heightened by hearing parts of the Gospel of Matthew recounted in *King of Kings* through the voice-over narration of Orson Welles, speaking a mix of prose written by Ray Bradbury and the Gospel writers.

As I have argued in my article in this volume, as well as in my forthcoming book *Women, Seduction and Betrayal in Biblical Narratives*, cultural representations of biblical figures affect one's interpretation of biblical narratives. If one stores a collection of images of a particular literary figure, or setting, or style of costume, that collection is not stored mentally in a chronological order. It does not matter whether I have seen Rita Hayworth's Salomé before viewing Gustave Moreau's painting or after reading the version in the Gospel of Mark. All the representations collide and coalesce in my construction of the figure of Salomé. In our postmodern image culture, readers are also spectators. The basic components of a "reading," even of a biblical text, need to acknowledge that our impressions come from films, paintings, TV, ads—all of which have been coded ideologically and influence our interpretations of biblical literary figures. Like the queen of Sheba in King Vidor's *Solomon and Sheba* (1959), I find myself moving toward Jerusalem with my graven images in tow, wondering at the spectacle. "All that for a God they don't even see," she remarks. Having spent most of the past year working with cinematic images and other media, I suspect that the queen of Sheba would have benefited from a few days at the Cineplex. "All that so that they can see God," she might have said and put her faith in the images.

The articles in this volume do not reflect the tensions of the much-publicized culture wars, in which intense conflict occurs between those conservative forces who wish to maintain the established order and rite of biblical studies and those who wish to transform them. Perhaps because *Semeia* is "an experimental journal of biblical criticism," its contributors feel encouraged to map and guide the construction of the present and the future of the discipline. Or perhaps there is no longer a definable category of biblical studies, only varied agendas, perspectives, and politics of our own era that create borders and areas for mutual discourse. Living in a borderland between the old and new, as biblical scholars do, creates a sense of "betweenness," an uncertain search for transitions and methods that include the contours of the historical ages that have risen and fallen since biblical epochs and the cultural repetitions of the biblical landscape and figures that are found in our contemporary cultural productions. As the articles gathered here illustrate, films and other forms of media culture provide a bridge from the present to the past.

Reading films politically (as Weisenfeld, Pardes, and Glancy do) provides insights not only into the ways that film reproduces existing social struggles within contemporary American society, but also gives fresh insight into the social and political dynamics of the era in which the films were produced. Schaberg uses the conventions of Hollywood, and the very particularized genre of Jesus bioepics, to illustrate how such stock interpretations preclude positive portrayals of the figure of Mary Magdalene. Schaberg's article reflects the salutary effect a feminist reading can have upon traditional biblical stigmatization. Another popular cinematic genre, that of the Western, is the scaffolding on which Koosed and Linafelt hang their analysis of Clint Eastwood's award-winning film *Unforgiven*. Looking for biblical tropes within this film suggests interesting possibilities for engagements with the religious and spiritual dynamics of films that are not specifically "biblical" or "religious" in their setting, plot, or characterization.

On opposite sides of the Atlantic, Cheryl Exum and David Gunn began cultural studies of the figure of Bathsheba, using both imagistic and cinematic versions of the Bathsheba and David tradition. Noted for their close readings of biblical texts, both Exum and Gunn show the efficacy of reading pictures and other visual images—in order to add to the scholarly tools in their arsenals, a vibrant mixture of theoretical analysis and concrete discussions of influential forms of media culture. In his virtuoso "playing" of his computer, and the lyricism of his software-generated combination of verbal and visual connections, David Gunn tempts us to invade the technical realms of media reproduction in order to tame the

confusion of images that flicker in and out of consciousness. A subtext of his article raises the ever-growing question: Who owns this image? And its companion question: What is the original and what is the copy of this image?

"MOSES, MOSES"

While some filmmakers scripting biblical narratives thought they had paid attention to questions of historical realism, few felt the burden of historical accuracy as deeply as Cecil B. DeMille, who suspected that a historian had a far easier job than a filmmaker. In a book published by the University of Southern California Press to "describe the endeavors and contributions of research toward the making of *The Ten Commandments,"* the enormity of DeMille's cinematic project is impressed upon the reader from the opening paragraph. "To accomplish the vast research work for the film, 950 books, 984 periodicals, 1,286 clippings, and 2,964 photographs were studied" (Noerdlinger: iii). DeMille and his associates created the book *Moses and Egypt* to support and validate the facticity of their film. The argument according to DeMille goes like this: if a historian does not know something, he can leave it out, avoid it entirely. But a filmmaker must *know* what kind of food Pharaoh ate, what sort of clothes Delilah wore, and perhaps most difficult of all, how to split that pesky Sea before Moses and the Israelites could escape from Egypt. As DeMille reflected on his craft, "We had to set a date for the Exodus...A precise historical period had to be established—an actual pharaoh had to sit upon the throne....An historical void can not be portrayed upon the screen" (Noerdlinger: 5).

One of the ongoing tensions for a biblicist analyzing a film like *The Ten Commandments* is related to DeMille's understanding that film demands the filling of certain kinds of gaps in the narrative. Lest anyone think that DeMille is playing the truth/realism game alone, there is the memory of my Hebrew language professor who praised the film for its accuracy in depicting proto-Hebrew letters with their proper descenders inscribed on the stone tablets. Most of us have experienced the dislocation of being simultaneously scholar and consumer. The scholar must occupy the space between the delight in watching "miracles" unfold on the screen and the absence of representation that allows miracle to survive as myth. The articles in this volume explore this dichotomy. As will soon become apparent, regardless of the order in which one reads these articles, each author is concerned with more than a superficial brew of Pop Culture Lite. Like most cultural critics, we are engaged with cataloguing the

power relations and the macropolitics that shape cultural representations of biblical tropes and narratives.

Part of the fascination of cinematic interpretation for the biblical scholar is, in my opinion, what it tells us about our own culture as well as what it tells us about the interpretive process. As Jennifer Glancy notes in her article on the film *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, the conception of first-century slavery has been distorted by the impressions overlaid by eighteenth-century American slavery, and most important, by the fact that Greco-Roman accounts of slavery have been described by the masters and not the slaves. "The figure of the male slave in Hollywood," Glancy writes, "epitomizes in a predictably ironic way what it means to be a free man." The dynamics of such a romanticized slavery, then, can be understood through an analysis of the heated screen chemistry of slave/gladiator Victor Mature and his saucy "mistress" Susan Hayward.

The transformation of biblical miracle into Hollywood spectacular is certainly of more theoretical interest for scholars than the success of the cinematic tour de force. A concern with film and its relation to narrative time and space is just beginning to entice biblical scholars, although such questions have gripped scholars from other disciplines since the earliest days of silent films. Walter Benjamin understood well the paradox of the disappearance of history and its corollary effect, a life in the perpetual present. In his work "On the Concept of History," Benjamin argued that

> The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again.... For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.

For the historical critic, there is the concern with the reconstruction of the biblical or Greco-Roman world in *our own time*. If the question of the portrayal of time marks the concern of the historian, there is in the study of film a paradoxical history. While one can be convinced of the materiality of the biblical world through the visual clues of antiquity, stimulated by the costumers and set designers who labored for Mr. DeMille, the spectator is simultaneously transported into a world of timelessness produced by the "confusion" of contemporary film stars playing mythical biblical figures. In a statement about television and film, as "effective means...of reprogramming popular memory," Michel Foucault wrote,

> People are shown not what they were but what they must remember having been...Since memory is a very important factor in struggle...if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism. (92)

The question of time and representation of historical events thickens when one considers modern or recent events, which are either enhanced or distorted by their visual compilation in film. If historiography is concerned with presenting the effect of facticity, then film and other visual media are examples of the widening of media that present versions of "what happened." Anton Kaes has indicated this historiographic concern in the conclusion to his recent study of postwar West German filmmaking, *From Hitler to Heimat: The Return of History as Film.*

> A memory preserved in filmed images does not vanish, but the sheer mass of historical images transmitted by today's media weakens the link between public memory and personal experience. The past is in danger of becoming a rapidly expanding collection of images, easily retrievable but isolated from time and space available in an eternal present by pushing a button on the remote control. History thus returns forever—as film. (198)

Thus, a film that deals with the Holocaust has a sense of familiarity based on the spectator's previous experience of Holocaust films. The accuracy of the film seems heightened if there is actual footage of death-camp survivors intercut with the fictive elements of the film. Of course it would be a rare spectator who could detect genuine footage from technologically "flickered" footage shot ten days ago. As the past is dissolved as a real referent and is reconstituted by the cinematic images that displace it, it is the "look" formed by the expanding collection of images that convinces us that we are watching something real.

As a young boy, filmmaker Martin Scorsese had just such an intense experience.

> I'd always wanted to make a film of the life of Christ, ever since I first saw Him portrayed on the screen in *The Robe* when I was eleven years old. I was an altar boy, and I was taken by our diocesan priest on a little field trip up to the Roxy. He hated the film for its absurdity, but I'll never forget the magic of walking down the lobby and getting a glimpse of that gigantic CinemaScope screen for the first time. And when I heard the music in stereophonic sound, it became confused in my mind with the Gregorian Chant for the Mass for the Dead, at which I used to serve every Saturday morning at 10:30. (117)

While Scorsese saw the power of the medium to bring "realism" to a boy embued in the mystery of the Church, many of us share the viewpoint of the priest, who hated the film for its absurdity. Bound by the theological viewpoint in which he had been trained, the priest was perhaps irritated by the presence of characters not found in the Gospel accounts. Suspicious of those scholars who might get down with folks by writing about popular films such as *The Ten Commandments* or those scholars who ana-

lyze Barbara Hershey's performance as the Magdalene instead of a textual gap about the Magdalene, some contemporary scholars, like Scorsese's priest, find film and cultural theories applied to biblical literature as ephemeral and surprising as unearthing a collection of writings and ink sketches revealing hair styling tips and method of ab crunches from the Madonna.

The question of factuality, of "the truth," of ancient biblical stories being portrayed on film is a question that concerns a wider group than filmmakers. The profitability of things biblical connected to the visual storytelling abilities of the popular cinematic media has resulted in an explosion of media, on CD-ROM, on cable TV, dealing with biblical and religious subjects. As the VCR has become a common household appliance, and as both cable TV producers and WEBmasters acquire and exhibit historical archives, still photographs and documentary films, as well as Hollywood productions, our visual and cinematic past is accessible in ever more direct ways. Over the past two years the TNT Bible series has presented cinematic miniseries versions of the stories of the biblical patriarchs: *Abraham* with Richard Harris and Barbara Hershey; *Jacob,* with Matthew Modine and Lara Flynn Boyle; and the Emmy-winning *Joseph,* with Paul Mecurio, Martin Landau, and Ben Kingsley. According to Turner Productions, their goal is to get the entire sweep of the Bible on video by the Millenium. One quite tempting article, in my view, would be to compare Ben Kingsley's mystic Gandhi (1982) with his bewigged, somewhat twitchy Moses.

Since Ilana Pardes has presented an analysis of DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* within the context of the Fifties, I shall present as a contrast a quick overview of the 1996 made-for-TV Turner spectacular, *Moses.* While DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* is romantic, lavish, and colorful, *Moses* is more subdued. Many scenes have a soft, yellow-tinted glow, as if that long-ago world were in a perpetual twilight. *Moses* was filmed on location in Morocco, as were the other Turner biblical series and Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ.* "There have been a lot of films shot there," *Moses* producer Gerald Rafshoon says. "There are some wonderful, natural settings...There are villages that are 4,000 years old and haven't changed." (George Stevens's stand-in for Israel in the Fifties is the American Southwest, with the Grand Canyon as a backdrop.)

Kingsley, who in 1995 had played the Egyptian Potiphar in TNT's *Joseph* miniseries, was one of the few actors not intimidated by the prospect of following Charlton Heston as Moses. "That's ridiculous. When I played Hamlet, everyone said, 'That's Larry's (Laurence Olivier's) part.' But I created an alternative Hamlet." And play Moses he did. Even Mr.

Kingsley's voice changes drastically from one stage to another. The most memorable scene is the one that begins with Kingsley pushing a stolid Moses into an escalating tug of war with Pharaoh, played by a wide-eyed, bemused Frank Langella. My favorite special effect occurs during this scene, when the Nile turns to red-red blood and the wooden staffs morph into hissing black cobras. Another scene that reflects the difference between the pageantry of the DeMille Moses and the attempted naturalism of the contemporary version is the one in which Moses comes upon the burning bush. The crackling vegetation announces from an echo chamber, "I am the God of your fathers." Kingsley wonders if "maybe I was dreaming or I was mad from the sun." The cinematic technique, as well as the characterization of the biblical characters in these two films, made in the USA forty years apart, illustrates the present approach to historical consciousness, called by Hayden White "willing backward."

> Willing backward occurs when we rearrange accounts of events in the past that have been emplotted in a given way, in order to endow them with a different meaning or to draw from the new emplotment reasons for acting differently in the future from the ways we have become accustomed to acting in our present. (150)

The Bible as interpreted through popular culture, both TV and multimedia based, seems to connect the idea of transforming narrative into film with the belief that this linkage between past and present opens up possibilities for engendering a historical consciousness. Look for a moment at one of the most important examples of the feedback loops of willing backward: the evangelical Christian broadcast networks. Disguising a strong theological agenda behind the use of lavish classic paintings, long panning shots across medieval illuminated manuscripts, and state-of-the-art animation, these Christian producers claim to retell the biblical history and narratives as they "really happened." The productions of these networks have not been studied in detail, as examples of media culture of the Bible in their sociopolitical, economic, and theological context, to see how the internal constituents of these multimedia texts encode relations of power and domination, serving to advance the interests of evangelical Christians at the expense of other believers.

One of the most pungent concerns is related to their technique of crosscutting and montage in their presentation of biblical narratives. Taking full advantage of the narratological conventions of cinema (closure, mimesis, realism) disguised in modern technological attire, the agenda of orthodoxy that wants to reinforce the veracity of the Bible is augmented. If the modern viewer can watch the Bible on TV, can be assured that the

biblical figures are as real and vibrant as soap-opera dynasties, then the passion for biblical narrative remains alive. The desire for one's own religious tradition becomes a viable part of everyday life. If the wily secular humanists want to devalue the truths of the Bible, the vulnerability of the ancient world to the microscope of skepticism can be bolstered. When one "reads" the cinematic Bible, it's not to reach the end of the story, but to keep the story going. In order to understand the function of the new media biblical religion, one needs to analyze the role of the reader within everyday culture. Rather than inhabiting the world of indeterminacy, in which no one is in control, the cultural world of evangelical TV encourages the viewer to live in a world in which God in the person of the televangelist is in charge and transmitted into your home as kindly pink-cheeked Mother Angelica or earnest but worldly-wise Pat Robertson.

Print publishers are getting into the media game as well. Zondervan Publishing House, the evangelical giant of Bible publishing, went interactive with a new CD-ROM Bible for kids. Click on the cartoon of Mary riding into Bethlehem and watch a yellow "Baby on Board" sign pop onto the side of her donkey. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reports that Zondervan Bible sales climbed from $29 million in 1991 to $54 million in 1995. "Zondervan has specialty "niche" Bibles for kids, teens, men, women, couples, seniors, and people struggling with drug and alcohol abuse. It has Bibles with vinyl covers, velvet covers, canvas covers, quilted covers, and needlepoint floral covers." It has also gotten into the digital world of electronic publishing. Its new interactive storybook for children, the "Read With Me Bible," features eighty Bible scenes with music and some surprisingly irreverent animation. If you click on Eve in the Garden of Eden, for example, she offers a plate of barbecue and asks, "Ribs, anyone?" For those who are interested in material culture, three other recently produced Bible-based games have sold more than one million "pieces" in the Game Boy format: "Noah's Ark," "Save Baby Moses," and "David and Goliath." A major bestseller is no less vulgar, no less popular: *Charlton Heston's Voyage Through the Bible* features Charlton Heston as a guide through the Holy Land via full-motion video theatrical performances, including walking tours of ancient sites like the veritable "Fertile Crescent." Mr. Heston also performs dramatic orations of great Old Testament stories including the Creation, the Garden of Eden, Cain and Abel, and the Exodus. Genuine artwork from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia flashes before the viewer while Heston talks us through the stony, dusty desert world. The CD-ROM also features "an interactive tour of the Ramesseum, the largest Egyptian temple built by Ramses II during the Exodus era, via stunning 3-D animation." Media analysis of these contemporary biblical

artifacts certainly will provide answers to Jane Schaberg's proposed question about the influence and control (hidden or overt) exerted by ecclesiastical powers and their funding sources.

"Bring on the Dancing Girls... "

"Bring on the dancing girls" is a command that opens up the possibility of spectacle and demonstrates what analysis of the genre of sword-and-sandal film can add to narrative description and feminist interpretation. Pursuing a feminist corrective to previously gender-blind work, the contributors to this volume present varied analyses of cinematic spectatorship, as well as an analysis of the impact of gender and subjectivity of such an interminably recycled, ever-accessible past. The cliché "Bring on the dancing girls" marks the sort of stock phrase that heralds the major focus of feminist film theory, the cinematic representation of the female body and voice. If there is any unifying thread in this collection, it is each writer's desire to consider the context for these biblical representations, to emphasize the effects of cinematic spectatorship of the psychic and social construction of gender in the context of the everyday world, popular culture.

One area that needs exploring is class. In spite of the ethnic "clash" between the Israelites and the erudite Romans, shown through the well-modulated tones of the British-cast centurions and praetors, most Hollywood sword-and-sandal films portray all characters as European-American. Class is delineated in terms of power and powerlessness, master and slave, citizen and barbarian. The question of Israelite or Christian, in contrast to the politically and economically powerful Roman, presents a problem, since the film is produced for the Christian consumer. Roman monarchists are not a group represented sympathetically by Hollywood producers. In the 1959 King Vidor version of *Solomon and Sheba,* the title roles were played by Yul Brenner and Gina Lolabrigida, two Hollywood stars (albeit European) whose screen personae transcend nationality or class. The Showtime version of the story, produced in 1994, cast Jimmy Smits and Halle Berry in these roles. Presenting people of color in these leading roles is not the only notable difference in the two versions. Almost fifty years after the first version, Berry plays a strong-minded, independent queen of Sheba, instead of an Italian courtesan flirt, and Smits gives us a somewhat hesitant, sensitive Solomon. "Sensitive male" is not an appellation that describes the work of the actor Yul Brenner, whether he is playing a Hebrew monarch or an Egyptian pharaoh. Both characterizations reflect the cultural values of the times.

Using a cultural studies approach to deal with the representations of people of color in American film, the article by Judith Weisenfeld is directly concerned with the portrayal of African-Americans within Hollywood films. Weisenfeld examines the ways in which social and political discourses represent specific positions of race within U.S. society. Weisenfeld's analysis shows that while some elements of white films articulate reactionary forms of racism—"nurturing mammies, contented slaves, bowing uncles, dancing children, and lazy and corrupt black leaders"—media cultural analysis is a contest of representations of race that reproduce existing social struggles and political discourses of a particular era. "Wherever the Negro face appears," reflects James Baldwin, "there is confusion, there is danger. Wherever the Negro face appears, a tension is created, the tension of a silence filled with things unutterable." As Weisenfeld argues, the framing of blackness, even in contemporary films, has not taken place outside the context of the white-controlled film industry.

If the construction of the black as maid or servant or other marginal figure in a white world leads to stereotyping, at the other end of Hollywood stereotypes is the Marlboro man, that is, the cowboy, the sheriff, and the freelance lawman of the American West (only white men filled these roles according to Hollywood although not according to social history of the American West). As anyone who has seen a Marlboro ad knows, the cowboy figure is a "real man," the conjunction of masculinity, power, and nature. Emphasizing this world without women constructed in the classic Western, Koosed and Linafelt, in their article "How the West Was One: Delilah Deconstructs the Western," focus on the naming of the character Delilah in the film and from there to allusions to tropic similarities they have found within the Deuteronomistic History. Clearly this is a reading that would be generated only by biblicists!

The connection between a resistant or feminist spectator and the traditional interpretation of a major female wicked character is of interest to David Gunn and to Cheryl Exum in their separate considerations of the figure of Bathsheba, in my own analysis of the figure of Salomé, and in Jane Schaberg's responses to Mary Magdalene on film. Let us focus for a moment upon the character of Mary Magdalene, who while not quite a dancing girl, certainly has the potential to deliver exaggerated sexual excitement. The character of the Magdalene is described by Barbara Hershey, one of the strongest and most memorable of her interpreters, as "a whore and a victim, a complete primal animal, and then [she's] reborn, virginal and sisterlike." (See Schaberg's article, "Fast Forwarding to the Magdalene," p. 35.) Barbara Hershey's performance in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) helps the spectator to see what a difference a sensual

woman (and a generation of filmmakers) makes to the understanding of the sexual tension between Jesus and this complex woman. As Schaberg sees it, a sensual Magdalene helps to "drain all power from the all-male scenes that follow" (p. 42). Instead of the pious, pinup version of Jesus Christ as glory-of-God interpretation found in the earlier *King of Kings* (1961) and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965), Scorsese's film has emphasized Jesus' humanity through his love of Mary Magdalene, rather than "His glow-in-the-dark quality." By casting a movie-star like Jeffrey Hunter or Max von Sydow as Jesus, and intentionally making the actor resemble the Jesus familiar from traditional visual images, the Sixties bioepics guaranteed a stereotypic interpretation, entertaining an unchallenged spectator. Scorsese understood that casting Willem Dafoe would give his interpretation greater depth since the spectator would not be blinded by the star quality of the actor. While the earlier films are clearly not interested in personalities, "no individual characterization of the disciples nor any concern for Christ as a person" (Elley: 47), Scorsese, a director for whom character is foremost, describes the earlier *Greatest Story*.

> Stevens' film had an antiseptic quality about it, a hermetically sealed holiness that didn't teach us anything new about Jesus. Of course, there's a whole school of thought which argues that Jesus isn't to be identified with, that He is above sin. But in 1965 [the year the film was released], with Vietnam, the United States went into a whole different consciousness and the message needed to be made alive and accessible. (Scorsese: 133)

In contrast to these earlier pageant-epic stories, as heavily stylized as classic paintings, Scorsese emphasizes Jesus as a man trying to understand his unique role. Part of that role had to do with the "problem" of Jesus' sexuality. Scorsese worried that constructing Mary as a temptress was too obvious. "And the fact that she became a whore specifically because He rejected her [in the Kazantzakis novel] is almost as bad as the Hitchcock movie *I Confess* (1953), where Montgomery Clift becomes a priest basically because he was jilted by Anne Baxter" (Scorsese: 143). Hershey worked on her character from the outside in (see p. 36) to establish Mary as a woman who felt both pleasure and pain, who would be understandable to a feminist or skeptical spectator, not merely one eager to see traditional interpretations and stock characters reproduced on the screen. Her recollection of filming the scene in the brothel speaks to her involvement in the process of characterization.

> I had to be in the throes of making love in front of these people with Willem [Dafoe] watching, and the skeleton crew—we had closed the set. It was very difficult. And Magdalene was supposed to be fantastic to warrant the fact that men would come from throughout the world to see her. Finally we

> were done with the first man and he left. Then the second man came, and he was *horrible*. He started mauling me, and Mary screamed, "Stop! Stop! Stop!" I turned to Marty and I saw horror and panic in his eyes.... I turned to him and I said, "Do you want me to express this on film?" And he said, "Absolutely." He rolled the camera and I expressed what it felt like to have this man molesting me and I was in profound pain. (Scorsese: 226)

Similarly, Scorsese worked to add nuance to the character of Judas, played by Harvey Keitel, because a figure who would betray his friend either for money or for political reasons seemed simplistic. Keitel recalls his and Scorsese's collaboration on refining the characterization of Judas.

> [Judas was] a man who was outraged at the injustices of his time—the economic inequality, the oppression of religious freedom, the rape of his people, and a man's spirit rebelling against that, willing to give his life for it. Marty and I spent hours and hours and days and days discussing religion, discussing theology. These weren't just discussions about what the dialogue would be, or the historical Judas; there were discussions about things we believed—things we didn't know, but felt. Our blood went into it. We felt we had to make a total commitment, because that's what people had given before us, thousands of years ago, up until the present time—their blood for these beliefs. (Kelley: 213)

Scorsese's studied responses to the major characters of the Jesus narratives, as he understood them and as he wanted to film them, reflects how close the filmmaker's vision is to the theologian's. Both attempt to get closer to Jesus through an intensive concentration upon every aspect of the narrative. How different from the films of DeMille, the Hollywood interpreters, who responded when asked why he made biblical films, "Where else would I get 2,000 years of pre-production publicity?"

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FIGURE 1. "Moses Goes Down to Hollywood..."

MOSES GOES DOWN TO HOLLYWOOD: MIRACLES AND SPECIAL EFFECTS*

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ABSTRACT

In keeping with current reconsiderations of popular culture, this article shows that Hollywood is central to our understanding of the Bible and of biblical exegesis. Hollywood's various presentations of biblical doxa merit serious study. Popular exegesis in modern consumer culture is undoubtedly different from those of the early modern period, but this does not mean that spectators are helpless victims or manipulated consumers. In this analysis of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), I trace the desires, hopes, and beliefs of the audience as reflected in the film.

I begin with an image. It is a photograph taken by J. R. Eyerman of a drive-in theater in Salt Lake City that shows a dark metallic sea of big American cars—it's the Fifties—facing a huge screen where a white-bearded Moses in a red robe, surrounded by semi-lit blue clouds, stretches out his arms, holding a long rod in his right hand. It is a moment before the parting of the Red Sea in Cecil B. deMille's famous film *The Ten Commandments,* and the young and majestic Moses is Charlton Heston in his first leading role in a Hollywood historical epic.

With its humorous juxtaposition of Holy Moses and a drive-in theater, this photo reminds us that the circulation of the Bible in the twentieth century poses an intriguing challenge to the demarcation between canonical and popular, holy and profane. Scripture is not only circulated in traditional sites of worship such as churches, synagogues, or domestic gatherings. It also proves a rich source for Hollywood plots and as such is viewed in theaters by millions all over the world. *The Ten Commandments* alone was seen by 98,500,000 by 1959 (three years after its release) and by many more since.

* I am greatly indebted to Robert Alter, Arner Ben-Amos, Alon Confino, Ruth Nevo, Adi Ofir, and Michael Rogin for their insightful comments and suggestions.

Hollywood has surely brought about the most drastic change in the circulation of the Bible since the invention of print in the 15th century.[1] The American film industry turned Holy Writ into a book to be seen, available to all, literate as well as illiterate, for the reasonable price of a ticket. It offered a reconstruction of the biblical past that was unprecedented in its mode of realism and power to make-believe. And yet Hollywood's biblical films have received little scholarly attention. Despised for their bad taste, simplistic interpretations, and extravagance, they have rarely been considered as a topic worthy of investigation by biblical scholars.

In keeping with current reconsiderations of popular culture, I will show that Hollywood is central to our understanding of the Bible and of biblical exegesis. If Scripture has acquired compelling force in Western culture, it is precisely because it forms part of a variety of cultural practices, ranging from religious rituals to scholarly, political, and popular modes of reception, all inextricably connected.

The study of Bible reception must thus entail a consideration of different cultural practices without falling into the trap of rigid definitions of high and low culture. The Bible itself challenges such hierarchies. It is the most canonical of all books and a best-seller of all times, a heteroglot text that gives expression both to official accounts and popular voices. From the inception of biblical scholarship in nineteenth-century Germany, the question of the Bible and folklore has been a central one. Hermann Gunkel's groundbreaking work, *The Folktale in the Old Testament*, first published in 1917, is an important landmark in this connection. Relying on German folktale scholarship, Gunkel sets out to trace folkloric elements within the Bible. He foregrounds stories that embody well-known folktale motifs—tales about giants, about younger brothers, tales of magic—and sees them as a window to the understanding of Israelite popular religion, as distinct from the orthodox and official faith of Israel (17). Gunkel is somewhat apologetic in his approach to folklore. He assures his readers that the Bible "tolerated the folktale as such at almost no point" (33). He fails to see what Mikhail Bakhtin reveals in his wonderful reading of Rabelais: the unyielding and revolutionary power of popular traditions, their capacity to resist official censorship.

The reception of the Bible repeats the composite character of its composition. The Bible has the curious capacity of appealing to diverse interpretive communities of different classes and social backgrounds. It has

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[1] For an insightful analysis of the impact of print on the circulation of the Bible see Newman.

never been solely the book of elite groups. Religious institutions from time immemorial have striven to maintain a monopoly on biblical exegesis, but the people—whether peasants, craftsmen, or slaves—have always held fast to their interpretive rights.

Historical research has recently put forth fascinating findings concerning the clash between popular and canonical exegesis in the early modern period. Natalie Zemon Davis offers an insightful analysis of the religious debate over the vernacular Bible in sixteenth-century France. Underlining the anxieties of the learned in response to the sudden availability of biblical texts to large numbers of "ill-educated city people" (82), she quotes an exchange between a doctor of theology and a craftsman. "Do you think it's up to you to read the Bible," asked the Inquisitor in a Lyon prison in 1552, "since you're just an artisan and without knowledge?" "God taught me by His Holy Spirit," said the craftsman. "It belongs to all Christians to learn the way of salvation." The debate between the great Jesuit Emond Auger and a young Protestant pastor is another case in point. "God does not want to declare his secrets to a bunch of *menu peuple*," said the former. "Intoxicated by I know not what phrases from the Apostles, badly quoted and even worse understood, they start to abuse the Mass and make up questions." The pastor answered that "the pope and his doctors of theology forbid the Bible to everyone but themselves, because they know that once their lives and doctrine are examined by the Word of God, they will have to give money to the poor and work with their hands" (82).

Carlo Ginzberg proceeds in a similar vein in *The Cheese and the Worms*, where he offers a case study of a sixteenth-century Italian miller named Menocchio, who was detained by the Inquisition for his heretical interpretations. Menocchio ventured to fashion a cosmogony of his own, according to which "all was chaos" at first, "that is, earth, air, water and fire mixed together, and out of that bulk a mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were angels...and among that number of angels, there was also God" (5–6). Menocchio could not resist the temptation to reinterpret Scripture, for, as he explains to the Inquisitor: "My mind was lofty and wished for a new world and way of life, because the Church did not act properly, and because there should not be so much pomp" (13). What makes *The Cheese and the Worms* so fascinating is its insistence on taking Menocchio's exegesis seriously. Ginzberg painstakingly uncovers the sources of the miller's worldview, highlighting the fluidity between high and low, for Menocchio was equally influenced by the canonical literature of the time and by oral culture, primarily peasant beliefs of a utopian bent.

Let me suggest that Hollywood's interpretations of the Bible merit serious study. Popular exegesis in modern consumer culture undoubtedly differs from that of the early modern period. Modernity relegated artisanship to the margins both in culture and material commodities. Hollywood films are products of the film industry and do not emanate directly from the community. But this does not mean that the viewers need to be construed as helpless victims of manipulation or passive consumers. "My consumers, are they not my producers?" asked James Joyce. Lawrence Levine uses Joyce's provocative question to reinforce his claim that "the folklore of industrial society" is not indifferent to or detached from its audiences. "It is important to remember," Levine writes, "that not all mass culture was popular. Many mass-produced books went unread, many films unseen, many radio programs unheard by substantial numbers of people...The significance of this is clear: choices were being made; in every popular genre, audiences distinguished between what they found meaningful, appealing, and functional and what they did not" (1373). Hollywood films may not be a clear-cut representative of the common voice, but the most popular products of the industry seem to address the desires, hopes, and beliefs of the audience. [2]

The Chosen Medium

I will focus on Cecil B. DeMille's second production of *The Ten Commandments*, one of the most successful Hollywood adaptations of a biblical topic. DeMille initially set out to tackle the topic of the Exodus in 1923 when he made the silent version of *The Ten Commandments*. In 1956, toward the end of his career, he was determined to try his hand at it once again, only this time the movie was a "talky." [3]

DeMille is exemplary in his concern about the attitudes of the audience. In his autobiography, he recalls the decision to preview *The Ten Commandments* in Salt Lake City. "I always preview my pictures away from Hollywood," he writes, "because it is almost impossible to get a typical audience reaction so close to the center of the motion picture indus-

[2] One needs to bear in mind that such problems in defining popular voices are not foreign to historians of the early modern period, who often need to recover "the voices of the historically inarticulate" from sermons or judicial records (see Davis, 1992:1413). Ginzberg's *The Cheese and the Worms* and Davis's *The Return of Martin Guerre* are but two prominent examples.

[3] For more on the making of the two versions of *The Ten Commandments* see DeMille's autobiography (1959: 411-37).

try: Hollywood people react as professionals or would-be professionals rather than just people, and I make my pictures for people" (433).[4]

Indeed, the very resolution to remake *The Ten Commandments* is rendered as a response to public demand. "For more than twenty years ...people had been writing to me from all over the world, urging that I make *The Ten Commandments* again." Their request became all the more urgent, claims DeMille, in the face of the "experience of totalitarianism," whether fascist or communist (411).

Although the Bible has lost something of its religious aura in the twentieth century, it remains an emblem of a most cherished cultural heritage, especially in the context of America. In the Cold War rhetoric of the fifties, as Alan Nadel puts it, "America became a nation 'under God,' thus distinguishing itself from the totalitarian atheist bloc of communist-dominated countries" (416).[5] The Bible, accordingly, was defined as the Book of Freedom and Democracy. In the publicity material for the film, one finds a drawing of Charlton Heston standing beneath the Liberty Bell, holding it high. The note below explains that the biblical verse on the Liberty Bell, the divine mandate "to proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants" (Lev 25:10), is taken from the writings of the prophet Moses. What Heston with the Liberty Bell adds to Puritan typol-

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[4] Elsewhere in his autobiography, DeMille defines his profession as "making motion pictures for popular entertainment." "To be sure," he claims, "there is a place for the specialized little theater, the experimental film, educational radio, documentary television" but such art is not meant for the public at large. "To produce films for one's pleasure or for the admiration of a small, like-minded coterie is an honorable occupation, as long as the producer is not using up other people's money under false pretenses. To produce films for the entertainment of the people is no less honorable" (213). It is noteworthy that his decision to preview the film in Salt Lake City is also motivated by his attempt to reach a religious audience in addition to the regular motion picture audience. "If the deeply religious, serious-minded Latter-day Saints of Salt Lake City approved of *The Ten Commandments*," writes DeMille, "so would millions of others, of other faiths, throughout the world" (433). On other occasions, DeMille sought the response of religious leaders of all sorts in his fashioning of an American melting pot (435 and *Citizen News* "Cardinal, Rabbis, Ministers in Praise of 'Ten Commandments,'" Oct. 22, 1956).

[5] For more on *The Ten Commandments* in the context of the Cold War, see Edward Said. See also Michael Rogin's cogent analysis of Hollywood in this period. Note that DeMille went so far as to omit the word "red" from the dialogue on the shore of the Red Sea. He claims that he chose to do so because "the expanse of water was so beautifully and deeply blue that the audience might have laughed at hearing it called red!" (427). The political implications of this move in the Fifties red-baiting period are rather conspicuous.

ogy is the notion that America has now mastered the best strategy of "proclaiming liberty throughout the land": motion pictures.

DeMille was aware of the great potential of the medium in disseminating the Word. In an address on the occasion of receiving the Milestone Award on January 22, 1956, he read from a letter he had received from the Prime Minister of Pakistan while shooting *The Ten Commandments* in Egypt: "God has given you a most powerful medium for the projection of thoughts and ideas and I sincerely hope that you will undertake with missionary zeal the task of producing films which will have a definite objective in view...so as to safeguard our free and democratic way of life" (Essoe and Lee: 15).

This is precisely DeMille's own view of his calling, though he perceives himself at times not simply as a missionary of God, but as even closer to the Almighty's position. In the souvenir book that accompanied the film, he does not hesitate to regard *The Ten Commandments* as a tool God needs to employ for the salvation of the world. One can hardly blame DeMille for his hubris. With its tremendous budget ($13,282,712), huge sets, casts of thousands, glamorous costumes, and famous stars, *The Ten Commandments* does seem, much like the Tower of Babel, to approach divine proportions. "It makes you realize," James Thurber is alleged to have said of the film, "what God could have done if he'd had the money."[6]

The remaking of *The Ten Commandments* was in many ways a second Exodus. DeMille insisted on having it filmed in Egypt, at the "original" site, "so that the hundreds of millions who will see 'The Ten Commandments' [could] make a pilgrimage over the very ground that Moses walked." He sought to resurrect the past for his audience as it "really was" and was moved most by letters from admirers who claimed that the picture "made God real to them" (435). The film was meant to provide a window to biblical events. It offered a vivid portrayal of famous episodes such as the morning of the Exodus against huge images of Egyptian landscapes. Curiously enough, DeMille spent enormous sums on constructing sets of pyramids for the film (although he had a hard time getting his budgetary requests approved). To journalists who teased him for not being satisfied with the real ancient ones, he wittily replied that the pyramids he had built were "white and unweathered, as the real pyramids were in Moses's time" (427). Filming the "original" pyramids at the "original site" required, ironically, a sophisticated apparatus of simulation. DeMille's quest for origins has its absurd moments, but it also reveals a

[6] Quoted in Fraser (xii).

mind that is determined to explore the past and ventures to imagine at all cost.

DeMille's Mosaic

DeMille's interpretive strategies require close examination. In the film's prologue, he draws the posh curtains of a movie theater and appears on stage to address the audience in person. Admitting that this move "may be seen as an unusual procedure," he claims that it is justified because he is dealing with "an unusual subject: the story of the birth of freedom." From the outset, he attempts to create a special atmosphere, affirming that topics such as the Bible and Freedom require unique treatment, given their significance in the real world. If other films ignore the real world, the projected curtain suggests that *The Ten Commandments* offers its true image (see Nadel: 416).

To emphasize the seriousness of the project, DeMille goes on to depict the meticulous reconstruction of Moses' life that the making of the film involved. The gap in the Bible regarding Moses' deeds from his birth until he is thirty years old, DeMille assures us, is filled in accordance with the writings of the renowned ancient historians Philo and Josephus. These are but two of his sources. The souvenir book provides an extensive list of sources used in every scene. In addition to Philo and Josephus we find references to the Midrash, *The Legends of the Jews* by Ginzberg, the New Testament, popular American historical novels such as *Prince of Egypt* by Dorothy Clarke Wilson, and the findings of archaeologists, in particular James Bearsted. Even the decision to date the Exodus during the rule of Ramses II in the thirteenth century BCE is in keeping with scholarly consensus.

Although *The Ten Commandments* has often been ridiculed, like other historical epics, for getting history wrong, it is striking to see how eager DeMille was to get the story straight.[7] He employed various scholars (mostly from the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago) whose names are listed in the acknowledgements. A book was published by the University of Southern California Press on the history of Egypt as a result of the work Henry Noerdlinger had done for DeMille. Academic research on the Bible isn't as detached from Hollywood as is often assumed. The various modes of biblical reception intersect in unexpected ways.

I'm not suggesting that DeMille's reliance on academic consultants or on historians of the ancient world makes his history "truer"—historio-

[7] For an insightful discussion on historical epics, see Sobchack.

graphical renditions of the past are themselves narratives (as Hayden White and others have taught us)—rather, I'd like to accentuate DeMille's efforts to provide his audience with the most accurate version of all. And what makes it all the more urgent for him to attain such accuracy is the fact that in this case sacred history is at stake. "We're not here to create a story," he tells us in the prologue, "but rather to be worthy of a divinely inspired story created 3,000 years ago."

DeMille strives to present the original story, but—like any other interpreter—ends up creating his own story. Even more fascinating, he duplicates the very process by which the Bible itself is thought to have been created. To begin with, the writing of the script for *The Ten Commandments* was a collective project. A team of four worked under DeMille's guidance for three years. If indeed the composition and editing of the various biblical strands was a product of collective work, as biblical scholarship argues, Hollywood can teach us something about how it may have been done. What is more, DeMille's script writers, much like the biblical writers and redactors, shaped their text by combining a number of earlier traditions (and I regard the scholarly sources on which they rely as one such tradition). What we get here is "composite artistry," to use Robert Alter's term for the artful montage of antecedent literary materials by the redactors of the Bible (140). Hollywood's composite artistry, though, is far more homogenous: no seams or contradictions expose the tension between the selected sources.

Interestingly, this patchwork includes visual traditions as well. DeMille's art designers consulted the Masters' interpretations of the topic in creating the various sets; and even the casting of Charlton Heston as Moses was determined, in part, by previous artistic traditions. Apparently, it was Heston's resemblance to Michelangelo's *Moses* that got him the role. "If it's good enough for Michelangelo," said DeMille, "it's good enough for me" (Essoe and Lee: 215, 262).

DeMille's filling of the gap in the biblical text concerning Moses' life at Pharaoh's court (to which he calls our attention in the prologue) forms a significant portion of *The Ten Commandments*. Relying on Josephus, Philo, and the Midrash, he assumes that Moses' adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (whom DeMille calls Bithiah after the Midrashic tradition) granted him the position of a prince at Pharaoh's court. What kind of prince was he? That Moses was exceptionally good-looking is not merely DeMille's invention. Hollywood is not alone in its need for handsome heroes. All of the above mentioned ancient sources emphasize Moses' good looks, although the Bible, in a typical stylistic move, gives us no information about his appearance.

Josephus allows DeMille to turn the handsome prince into a brilliant general who succeeds in conquering Ethiopia, the archaeologist James Breasted provides him with Ramses as the rival prince, the New Testament with a characterization of Moses "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," a man "mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22), and Philo, whose *Life of Moses* seems to have influenced DeMille the most, offers a poignant portrayal of Moses as a man of Spirit, capable of resisting the various temptations of the Egyptian court.

How does DeMille combine these sources? Charlton Heston's entrance is most impressive. He appears on a chariot, standing upright with a scepter in his hand, surrounded by a cheering Egyptian crowd. He is greeted on his victorious return from the battle against Ethiopia with cries of joy: "Moses, Moses." The camera then shifts to the palace balcony where Nefertiri (Anne Baxter), the beautiful Egyptian princess, looks down, calling out, like the people below, "Moses, Moses," incapable of hiding her love and admiration. Once the name "Moses" is endowed with power, love, and an erotic touch, Moses can enter the luxurious reception hall of the Pharaonic palace. He steps in, walking toward King Seti I (Sir Cedric Hardwicke) with an enormous entourage and a sample of conquered, yet dancing, Ethiopians. From the ensuing dialogue, it becomes clear that Seti is very impressed by Moses and prefers him to his rival, Prince Ramses (Yul Brynner).

But there is one more test that awaits Moses on his way to the throne. He must build a city for Seti in Goshen and prove his gifts as ruler by turning the Hebrew slaves into efficient workers (something Ramses failed to do). Moses turns out to be no less competent as a city builder. Interestingly, when he appears at the pavilion with a proto-telescope in his hand, planning the next phase of construction, he seems more a film director than an architect. If, for Philo, Moses' success meant that he had to be a superb philosopher, for DeMille he had to be, among other things, something of a film director. In any event, the effect of the huge sets that rise up at Moses' command, especially the tall obelisk which is lifted before Seti's eyes, makes clear that Moses, rather than Ramses, will be the chosen one.

Moses has it all: the admiration of the Egyptian people, the love of Nefertiri, Seti's approval; and yet, he finds himself suddenly involved with the Hebrew slaves—even more so when he discovers that he himself was born a Hebrew. Like Philo's Moses, he is unmistakenly a man of Truth, for he prefers his humble origins to the worldly goods of Egypt. The Platonic principle underlying Philo's reading, the opposition be-

tween mind and body and the quest for the victory of the former, plays a prominent role in *The Ten Commandments*.

DeMille adds much drama to Philo's terse depiction of Moses' conduct at court; and he gets his sense of drama, he reports, from the writings of the "great Puritan poet, John Milton," particularly from Milton's famous claim in *Areopagitica*: "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all its baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian" (Essoe and Lee: 17). His Moses isn't quite the man of Spirit from the outset. Like the true "warfaring Christian," he becomes one only after apprehending the "baits and pleasures" of the Egyptian court and resisting them. Thus the temptations of the royal palace are presented in detail. Nefertiri, the enchanting princess, a Cleopatra of sorts, is the epitome of Egyptian seduction. She is attractive, powerful, and willing to do anything (even kill) so that Moses will succeed as heir to the throne and she will be his bride and queen. What is more, she, far more than Pharaoh, doesn't let go. Even when Moses becomes a filthy slave, even after her state marriage to Ramses, she does not hesitate to tempt him time and again. Prince Moses is not indifferent to the pleasures of the flesh. We see the two caressing and kissing in her opulent bedroom with a good deal of erotic heat. Moses indeed comes close to losing his head over her, but ends up rejecting the woman "who holds him captive" in favor of his quest for his true roots. He is no Anthony.

How is all this related to the Bible itself? "I'm sometimes accused," DeMille once explained, "of gingering up the Bible with lavish infusions of sex and violence, but I wish that my accusers would read their Bibles more closely, for in those pages are more violence and sex than I could ever portray on the screen" (Essoe and Lee: 195). DeMille has a point. The Hebrew Bible indeed offers an abundance of sex and violence, tropes that have undoubtedly added to its popularity. Moses' story entails much violence but reveals little about Moses' amorous life (this is a problem DeMille doesn't encounter when he recreates *Samson and Delilah*). Moses' most intimate moments in the Pentateuch are kept for God. DeMille is surely interested in Moses' special relation with God, but to turn Moses into a Hollywood star, he must furnish him with a substantial love life as well.

DeMille's Moses may have made a clear-cut decision as to his preference for austere monotheism over Egyptian culture, but DeMille himself seems to opt for a paradoxical combination of both worlds. The Egyptian court of *The Ten Commandments*—with its wealth and glamour, its bathing girls at the Nile's swimming pool, and sexy dancers—resem-

bles Hollywood far more than any ancient realm (or the Soviet bloc for that matter). DeMille describes his Egyptland with loving detail: he is, after all, part and parcel of what Hollywood represents and seems (in clear contradistinction to the Bible) to know more about the ins and outs of Pharaoh's palace than he does about the wilderness. And yet, at the same time, he decisively rejects Egyptian customs in an attempt to free himself from Hollywood's "gold rush" atmosphere. "The greatest danger from within the [film] industry," claims DeMille, "is the worship of the golden calf—the temptation to care nothing about what we produce as long as it makes money" (Essoe and Lee: 16).

The last film DeMille made, *The Ten Commandments* serves as a legacy or dream of wish-fulfillment. The film represents his desire to lead Hollywood out of Egypt and turn it into a respectable Holy Land; it displays his attempt to prove that, despite their bad reputation among censors, motion pictures are the best bearers of the Word and the American Word in particular. But somehow the New Hollywood he envisions requires no loss of riches. Even after the Exodus, the sets continue to be huge, the colors on screen are strong and vivid, the film stars remain beautiful despite the harsh sun of the desert, and the hand of God offers its best performance of special effects.

Reproducing Miracles

One of the keys to the success of *The Ten Commandments*, I propose, lay not in its pious pretensions or didactic rhetoric, but rather in its capacity to resurrect the biblical *vox populi*. DeMille's focus on Egypt may be construed as a response to the popular demand in the wilderness to return to the days of the fleshpots. While the official line in the Bible repressed the memory of Egypt (so little is said about the four hundred years spent in Goshen), the children of Israel, at points in which their voice erupts, insist on retrieving scenes (fragments of non-canonical texts?) from their Egyptian past.[8]

DeMille is at his best, however, in his innovative reinterpretation of miracle stories, a well-known component of folklore.[9] If God can perform miracles, so can Hollywood. By means of special effects, staffs turn into snakes, the Nile becomes red, a pillar of fire leads the people, and the sea parts as Moses lifts his rod. DeMille's special effects provide a glimpse

[8] I deal extensively with the popular yearnings to return to Egypt in "Imagining the Promised Land: The Spies in the Land of the Giants."

[9] On miracles and folklore in the Bible, see Pritchard and Ben-Amos.

not so much of the "Truth of God" (to use his terms) but rather the "Truth" of the people. Miracles are meant for the people. When Moses is sent on his first mission and dreads the incredulity of the people, God supplies him with the rod of wonder, the key to the people's heart (Exod 4:1–6). Indeed, to God's dismay, the children of Israel always crave more miracles. Gideon's provocative question illustrates this point: "And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites" (Judges 6:13). What Gideon's question also makes clear is that stories of miracles formed part of Israelite oral culture and were precisely the kind of stories that were passed on from parents to their offspring (see Zakovitch and Ben-Amos: 48).

Such traditions were popular for good reason. Miracles, particularly in Exodus, are collective scenes of divine revelation that include breathtaking triumphs over the Egyptian oppressors, from the victory of Aaron's rod in the competition with the Egyptian magicians to the drowning of Pharaoh's soldiers in the Red Sea. These rare carnivalesque moments mark temporary liberation from the prevailing order.[10] Hierarchies are suspended. God reveals Himself not to the select few, but rather to the community as a whole. All are regarded worthy of witnessing divine deeds. All are regarded worthy of deliverance. And as God descends from heaven, unsettling power relations in the human sphere, the weak Hebrew slaves defeat their masters against all odds. Fears dissolve and the excitement of total freedom is in the air.

There is a certain immediacy and vitality in revelation through the sight that revelation through the word does not convey. No knowledge, no cognition, can weaken the impact of a wondrous sight (Buber: 75). The visual experience of God's presence has the power to transform (however briefly) the skeptical children of Israel into a community of believers, to lead to a sudden sharp in-sight. Once the people "saw" the "great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians" at the Red Sea, they could not but "[believe] the Lord and his servant Moses" (Exod 14:31).[11] It is a euphoric moment. The entire community bursts out singing. Sights intermingle with sounds. The fast tempo of the Song of the Sea imitates the unexpected break in the rhythm of natural phenomena, created by the

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[10] I rely on Bakhtin's definition of the dynamics of carnival in *Rabelais and His World*.

[11] Daniel Boyarin (1990) aptly shows that the intensity of the visual experience of God in the Bible generated an "ocular desire" to relive such moments in exegetes from the time of the Midrash.

rise and fall of the two enormous walls of water. Israel is now ready to tear apart the old world and to take a leap of faith into the new one.

To be sure, DeMille offers simulated and secularized miracles. The parting of the Red Sea was made possible by melted gelatin filmed backward and by a blend of shots taken at the Red Sea itself. But his illusionist art reminds us that a miracle is a *spectacle*, a magnificent show that cannot but astonish as it explodes the fixed boundaries between high and low, between dream and reality, between sights and sounds. Hollywood in a sense produced a new and fascinating interpretation of the famous verse in Exodus: "And all the people saw the sounds" (Exod. 20:14). Seeing the sounds is something Hollywood can surely offer. For contemporary viewers DeMille's special effects may seem extravagant and ludicrous, but in the Fifties such cinematographic tricks—and one needs to bear in mind the CinemaScope screens on which they were presented—evoked a collective experience of wonder. It is not accidental that the only Oscar DeMille received was for the scene of the parting of the Red Sea. Nor is it surprising that this is the most memorable moment in the film. "The sequence in which the Red Sea is divided and then closes again is likely to be acclaimed the most spectacular special effects sequence ever conceived and produced since movies were invented," writes Arthur Rowan in *American Cinematographer* shortly after the film was released. With its advanced technology, Hollywood made the impossible possible, and this is precisely what miracles are all about.

Miracles are an integral part of biblical historiography, but one can trace a certain unease with the popular craving and demand for the wondrous. In addition to their revolutionary force, they have too much in common with polytheistic practices, above all, with magic.[12] The competition at Pharaoh's court is a case in point. The differences between Moses, Aaron, and Pharaoh's magicians is far from clear. All have rods (a traditional tool of magicians) and can turn them into serpents. Are Moses and Aaron simply better magicians? Popular traditions probably presented them as such, but the redactors of the Bible sought to endow these practices with different connotations. The monotheistic God, as Kaufmann put it in *The Religion of Israel*, "is supreme over all. There is no realm above or beside him to limit his absolute sovereignity. He is utterly distinct from, and other than, the world; he is subject to no laws, no compulsions, or powers that transcend him" (60). That is why He cannot possibly be manipulated by magical spells or rods. Officially, the true power is not

[12] See Yair Zakovitch's insightful discussion on miracles and magic (74–85). On the question of magic and popular religion, see Davis, 1974.

in the hands and rods of Moses and Aaron, but rather in the Hand of God. Even the Egyptian magicians realize it when they fail to produce lice. "This is the finger of God" (Exod 8:19), they claim and withdraw from the competition. Similarly at the moment of the parting of the Red Sea, the presence of God's hand behind Moses' outstretched arm is accentuated time and again. But the tension between the human and divine hands remains as does the tension between popular and official exegesis.[13] The Bible both acknowledges the resonance of popular voices and attempts to limit it. Is this why Moses' second attempt to draw water by striking a rock with his rod is viewed as a sin (Num 20:1–13)? [14]

In *The Ten Commandments* the biblical *vox populi* looms large on screen at the moment of the parting of the waters. The magical rod in Charlton Heston's strong hand seems to have the power not only to rupture the Red Sea but also to open up the semi-lit sky, to summon God through the clouds. In her introduction to *Moses Man of the Mountain,* Zora Neal Hurston speaks of Moses with the rod, "the great one of magic" (xxil), as a concept that surpasses that of Moses the Lawgiver in the popular imagination. DeMille called his film *The Ten Commandments* in order to accentuate the Law, but ended up, despite himself, conjuring up the image of Moses the magician, the man who could do the impossible.

THE END

I would like to end with a more recent treatment of miracles in Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*. Consider the theological debate between Jules and Vincent, which takes place, as one recalls, after the two discover that although they were the target of six booming shots nothing happened to them:

Jules: We should be fuckin' dead!
Vincent: Yeah, we were lucky.
Jules: That shit wasn't luck. That shit was somethin' else.
Vincent prepares to leave.
Vincent: Yeah, maybe.
Jules: That was...divine intervention. You know what divine intervention is?
Vincent: Yeah, I think so. That means God came down from heaven and stopped the bullets.

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[13] Daniel Boyarin provides a cogent reading of this tension in his analysis of Midrashic responses to the parting of the Red Sea (1990).

[14] See Zakovitch's persuasive argument in this connection (64).

> Jules: Yeah, man, that's what it means. That's exactly what it means! God came down from heaven and stopped the bullets.
> Vincent: I think we should be going now.
> Jules: Don't do that! Don't you fuckin' do that! Don't blow this shit off! What just happened was a fuckin' miracle!
> Vincent: Chill the fuck out, Jules, this shit happens.
> Jules: Wrong, wrong, this shit doesn't just happen.
> Vincent: Do you wanna continue this theological discussion in the car, or at the jailhouse with the cops?
> Jules: We should be fuckin' dead now, my friend! We just witnessed a miracle, and I want you to fuckin' acknowledge it! (139)

We're obviously at a different point in Hollywood's history. Tarantino has no intention of turning Hollywood into a Holy Land; and yet the question of miracles hasn't lost its power to seize the popular imagination. What this scene makes clear—through its humorous insertion of a theological debate into the world of gangsters—is that the Bible is the book of the people, by the people, for the people, and that Hollywood too participates in the definition of what counts as a miracle.[15]

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[15] It is noteworthy that *Pulp Fiction* calls into question the rigid boundaries between high and low not only by (mis)using biblical materials, but also by reshaping pulp fiction (to quote the definition of "pulp" in *The American Heritage Dictionary,* with which the film begins: "A magazine or book containing lurid subject matter and being characteristically printed on rough, unfinished paper.")

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Fast Forwarding to the Magdalene

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ABSTRACT

Feminist film criticism trains us to look at who is looking at whom, who is not looking, the power relations depicted or hidden. It trains us to examine our experience as female and male and feminist spectators; to interrogate the gaps (in logic or story line or character delineation) as apertures through which the patriarchal/kyriarchal ideology shows in its process of suppressing, revising, omitting. I look at the Magdalene in five contemporary films, especially the portraits in Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) and Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988). While there are sparks of unique interpretations, each film's Magdalene is the conflated figure of the doxa, the repentant whore.

After I said I'd do this paper,[1] I had serious second thoughts. First of all, because I hadn't yet read much feminist film criticism, which began in the early 1970s. But this became an opportunity to look at some intriguing questions. In what specific ways is reading a film different from reading a book? How do film versions fit into the history of interpretation? What is the special, lasting power of the visual image? What is the complex process involved in a movie (reflecting its own culture) interpreting a text (which has influenced that culture but also reflects its own culture)? In terms of so-called religious films, what influence and control, hidden or overt, are exerted by ecclesiastical powers and their funding sources? Where does one look for an author: original writer/script writer/editor/director/ producer/actor, etc. etc?[2] We know as well from conversations in the lobby to expect how in the dark each of us sees differently, so we know better than to claim absolute authority for our own viewings. Alice Bach's work on Salomé and Cheryl Exum's on Bathsheba inspired me to try to move beyond my inexperience and hesitancies. I look forward to Alice's and Cheryl's important works-in-progress on biblical films.

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[1] For the Gender and Cultural Criticism Consultation at the AAR/SBL Meeting 1995 (theme: the Bible as cultural icon).

[2] Given the state of biblical illiteracy in the U.S., we also are sometimes unsure whether we are watching a subtle midrashic insight or ignorance.

The other downside of writing about the Bible on film is that I'd have to watch films on the Bible. Tedious religious films; stale reworkings of the stale, worn-out story of Jesus; Jesus with eyes as blue as Jack Nicolson as a wolf[3] (and the saccharine music doesn't help). Hence the title: fast forwarding to the Magdalene (which is a metaphor for my scholarly interests today, and perhaps for some feminist scholarship in general).[4] I thought of what seems to me the apparent incompatibility of the film medium and the Bible, and yet of its popularity in film. I thought of the fact that no Andrei Serban or Elizabeth Swados has appeared to rethink this "classic" as they have Greek classics. The Bible is not a feminist or postmodern subject in film except in fragments, such as the use of 1 Cor 13 in Krzysztof Kieslowski's "Blue." These things, but especially my own lack of pleasure in the prospect of viewing the films (near-nausea is not too strong a phrase), seemed worth analyzing. The project proved more interesting than I initially thought it would.

Feminist film criticism trains us to look at who is looking at whom, who is not looking; the power relations depicted or hidden. It trains us to examine our experience as female and male and feminist spectators; to interrogate the gaps (in logic or story line or character) as apertures through which the patriarchal/kyriarchal ideology shows in its process of surpressing, revising, omitting. And it trains us to view subversively, sometimes to try to reverse the thrust(?) of the film. Producing readings against the grain, oppositional readings, gives information about our positioning as spectators, and makes an intervention, a disruption in meaning. We spectators can construct different meanings.

I looked at the Magdalene in five contemporary films: *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965); *Jesus Christ Superstar* (1973); Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977; made for TV); Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988); and Dennis Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal* (1989). All are commercial, mainstream films and all are available as video rentals. The first three attempt to harmonize and adapt the four Christian Testament Gospels to a script. Scorsese's is based on Kazanstakis' 1955 novel of Jesus' temptations to abandon his destiny and his ultimate triumph over temptation. Arcand's is the story of a small troupe of five professional actors hired to do a Passion Play on church property, and of their conflict with church authorities and forces in the advertising industry, leading to the cancellation of the play

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[3] The eyes of Max von Snydow, Willem Defoe, and in Zeffirelli's film, Robert Powell.

[4] Representations of the Magdalene have to be seen/analyzed in the total picture, since her sexuality is bound up with the sexuality or asexuality of Jesus and the male disciples.

and the accidental death of the actor playing Jesus. My concentration here will be on Zeffirelli and the Magdalene.

Let me also mention a coming attraction: writer/director Paul Verhoeven is at work on a Jesus film, tentatively titled *Fully Human*. His other work includes *Robo–Cop, Total Recall, Basic Instinct,* and *Showgirls*. Asked last year if he planned to include a love interest for Jesus in this film—a Magdalene, Verhoeven is reported to have replied with a grin, "Of course. But I'm aware that the feminist scholars emphasize the fact that Jesus had female disciples, so [*sic*] it will probably be platonic. Besides, Jesus doesn't have time. He's always on the run."[5]

Each film's Magdalene is the conflated figure of legend, the repentant whore. So much for modern scholarship which tries to undo the conflation between the Christian Testament figure and the nameless women of other stories—the conflation which became the essential aspect of her image. But this film conflation is somewhat strange in light of the fact that all of the films show some awareness of scholarship from the 60s, of the S. G. F. Brandon/Hengel types, on the issue of Jesus' Zealot sympathies, and Arcand actually makes references to controversial and dangerous scholarly theories and to the mode of crucifixion based on the ossuary find at Giv'at ha–Mitvar. Arcand also seems to show some familiarity with the Gnostic materials, in the scene where his Magdalene actor encourages the others not to lose heart. Barbara Hershey, who played the Magdalene in *Last Temptation*, speaks in a scarey way to the fascination of this conflated figure: "The thing that fascinated me about Mary Magdalene is that she represents all aspects of womanhood: she's a whore and a victim, a complete primal animal, and then she's reborn and becomes virginal and sisterlike. She evolves through all phases of womanhood, so it was a wonderful role in that way...I felt that I was put on earth to play this part."[6] Singer/songwriter Patty Larkin writes a ballad of Mary Magdalene who doesn't quite "evolve" in that way: "I think I saw her coming out of the subway at rush hour": "I'm all broke up/I'm

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[5] Allen: 28. The interviewer says she was mentally casting Sharon Stone as Mary Magdalene.

[6] Lemos: 126, 124. The Lifetime Channel series "Biography" did present the conflation as distortion (she is "one of the most misunderstood women in history"; "not a prostitute but she stands for love"). But the idea of the "sexy saint" was also promoted. The host of the program, Anne Hollander, spoke of the good side of the myth, its complexity. Susan Haskins (author of *Mary Magdalene, Myth and Metaphor* [London: Harper Collins, 1993]) remarked "There is no evidence they [Mary Magdalene and Jesus] were lovers, though it'd be lovely to say so."

FIGURE 1. "My most important scene, as a prostitute in Magdala, was also the most difficult, because I was going to show Magdalene with a series of men. Even though Marty's films have a lot of sexuality, there hadn't been any nudity in them—and he asked me if I wanted a double, so at first I said sure. Every atom of me wanted a double. But I didn't feel a double would be Magdalene. I didn't feel she would move like I would move. I knew if I did the scene, I'd really feel like a whore." Barbara Hershey (Scorsese: 225) (Credit: MOMA Film Archives)

all broke down./ Got turned around somehow/ Who is my savior now?"[7]

On reflection, the film medium shows us how conflation is a narrative necessity, a dramatic necessity. The character who is so important to the action and resolution at the end of the story as the basic witness to the

[7] Conflation is taken to its ultimate logic in the Scorsese film: according to the angel/devil guide of Jesus, "There's only one woman in the world" with many faces. So when Mary Magdalene dies, Martha and Mary of Bethany replace her in Jesus' dream of ordinary life.

crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb cannot—should not—come out of nowhere (as she does in Mark, Matthew, and John; and almost in Luke, except for 8:1–3). This conflation plugs a gap[8] with another story (or stories, Luke 7 and John 8) felt intense enough to explain the Magdalene's loyalty. She is explained by gratitude, when her out-of-bounds sexuality is "forgiven" by Jesus. If we ask what story might a feminist reader have used or invented to stop this gap, the question makes us realize yet again the dearth of strong women characters in the Gospels.[9] In the depiction of the Magdalene as a prostitute, the scene that exercises greatest power is, of course, Luke 7: "a woman of the city, a sinner," anoints and cries on Jesus' feet, and dries them with her hair; she is forgiven and told to sin no more.[10]

The feminist viewer reflects on the fact that the very concept of prostitute has meaning only within the ideology of male sexual domination and is produced by this system of sexual values, as Andrea Dworkin notes.[11] Modern feminism sees the prostitute primarily as victimized (listening to former prostitutes' description of their experiences in organizations such as Whisper); but they are also sometimes seen as entrepreneurs, with a right to their form of sexual freedom (listening to organizations such as Coyote). I think it would be safe to say most women today view the prostitute with ambivalence and discomfort, probably in part because of the realization that "male domination of the female body is the basic material reality of [all] women's lives." [12] In that ambivalence, we can learn something of the on-going power of this conflation.

The choice of actresses for this role is important. Zeffirelli chose Anne Bancroft, an intelligent actress with a short fuse, perhaps—we can

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[8] See Bal (1987:18–19) on the inadequacy of frame-theory as a key to the filling of gaps. "Gaps" are spots in the text where the information is insufficient, which provokes questions for the reader, according to critics like Perry and Sternberg. Bal wonders to what extent the text "provokes" and how this personification of the text is used to cover a reader's response that cannot be accounted for outside the position of the reader as a subject. See also her discussion of questions not answered, that later become obsessions in the reader's mind or are abandoned.

[9] The Syro-Phoenician woman and the Samaritan woman are not from Magdala; and Herodias won't do.

[10] The Magdalene as prostitute appears in Zeffirelli, Scorsese, Webber and Rice. In Arcand the actor or actors playing the Magdalene are not professional prostitutes (one is a priest's lover ["It gives him so much pleasure and me so little pain"] and the other a model ["I used to show my ass to sell soap and beer"]). The Magdalene as the woman caught in adultery (John 8) appears in *The Last Temptation* and *Greatest Story* but perhaps in the latter, in a careless misunderstanding of the law concerning adultery, the woman in John 8 is assumed to be a prostitute.

speculate—on the basis of her portrayal of Mrs. Robinson in "The Graduate" ("Jesus loves you more than you can know, ho ho ho, ho ho ho"). It is casting that backfires, I think, if Zeffirelli wanted his regular ending as filmed to be powerful. Or perhaps there is miswriting here, or misdirecting, or subversive acting. Who knows?

Zeffirelli first introduces Mary Magdalene at work. She is a woman alone, unprotected by father, husband, lover, pimp. Her economic status is comfortable. While a client waits inside, she runs out in a screaming rage at some boys who are setting fire to her house, and angrily faces down the insults and laughter. Back inside, as she gets paid and helps her client dress, rebuffing his advances with disgust, he speaks to her of Jesus. This is the beginning of her "conversion."[13] No film, including Arcand's, depicts an unrepentant Magdalene who continues to work at prostitution. Zeffirelli's Magdalene doesn't enjoy her work with this client who considers her "scum" and hides his face as he goes out; she is

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[11] Andrea Dworkin (9). Throughout history, it is primarily women who have been prostitutes, called harlots or whores, sluts, cunts—terms applied to males only in an extended or figurative sense. "Men have created the group, the type, the concept, the epithet, the insult, the industry, the trade, the commodity, the reality of woman as whore" (Dworkin: 200). The "oldest profession" is accepted as an inevitable aspect of patriarchal society: the whore's sexual services to married or unmarried men maintain an illusion of monogamy or even polygamy, the myth of the male's greater sexual needs, and the posssibility of fulfilling these needs without violating another male's "rights" to his wife. The professional prostitute has no husband, no sexual obligation to any other male. She also has no protection; she is vulnerable and out of bounds. Reduced to her sexuality, she is experienced as dangerous to those men who want to and do resist her temptation or who don't. Blamed for provoking their sexual desire, enflaming their lust, she is often the target of male sexual aggression and hostility, moral outrage and condemnation. Think of the serial murder of prostitutes.

[12] And all struggle for dignity and self-determination is rooted in the struggle for actual control of one's own body (Dworkin: 203). A sexist interpretation of this solidarity distinguishes the prostitute from other women not in kind but by degree. Dworkin quotes Weininger ("There are certainly no women absolutely devoid of the prostitute instinct to covet being sexually excited by any stranger") and D. H. Lawrence ("If a woman hasn't got [a tiny?] streak of a harlot in her, she's a dry stick as a rule...[R]eally, most wives sold themselves, in the past, and plenty of harlots gave themselves, when they felt like it, for nothing." As Dworkin points out, the "tiny streak" is woman's sexual nature.

[13] She responds with suspicion ("A man will often forgive a man but a woman's sins—that's another story") and apparent lack of interest (says she sleeps during the daytime so can't go see him).

clearly above it—and above him.[14] When she is alone, she sits on her bed and lets the coins he has given her drop to the floor. She appears next at the feeding of thousands, peering at Jesus from behind a tree, looking disgusted/discouraged/confused. She receives bread, tears off a piece and eats; cries and laughs oddly. The "conversion" seems complete.

Her scene at the house of Simon the Pharisee I find very difficult to watch. It combines with Luke 7 (a) the question that introduces the parable of the good Samaritan from Luke 10, and (b) the anointing for burial from Mark 14, which Luke omitted and which is collapsed here into Luke 7. She enters screaming at those who would keep her out, but then utters a long, embarrassing series of wordless sighs and whimpers, as she grovels at Jesus' feet, refused a discourse.

In the words of one of my students: "Gag me." The gazes of Simon, Jesus, and the other male guests fix her, as she glances fiercely around and then adoringly at Jesus. The anger at the beginning and end of this scene frames, to my mind, a jarring unreality of character. Is this really a woman who would grovel and snivel like this? She moves from representing somebody's idea of the force and danger of female sexuality and male fear of it, to representing sexuality tamed. Jesus' acceptance and forgiveness brings her under control, under his protection. In contrast to "the Last Temptation," where her sexuality threatens to draw Jesus away from his goal, and where she must die at least in his dream, Jesus here is invulnerable to her, does not desire or fear her, smugly calls her "daughter" in spite of the difference in the actors' ages.

What is he forgiving?[15] The sin that patriarchal society says she is guilty of: prostitution. That labelling passes unquestioned in the mutual look(s) exchanged by the Magdalene and Jesus. Also disturbing here is the underlying assumption that the prostitute voluntarily chooses her profession, is only under the slightest duress. Because she chose it, she can un-choose; she can be converted and forgiven. The whimpering seems to mean sorrow, repentance, relief. Her body is presented through the eyes of the men in the scene. In a series of tight shots looking down on her; in a closeup framed by Jesus' hands. We ask how the scene would look if presented from her perspective, with the camera on the floor beside her? How might a feminist writer/director reconceive the scene of

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[14] Contrast Scorsese's introduction of the Magdalene at work, watched at her work by the viewer and by a waiting room full of men including Jesus.

[15] What gives the scene its power is its ambiguity: Jesus does not say she should be punished for the "many" "sins" which evidently gave her no pleasure—but that she is forgiven—without being punished—or are the tears and whimpering evidence of having been (self?) punished enough?

this meeting between Jesus and a prostitute? What if she were allowed to speak?

How might a female spectator's experience of this scene differ from a male's? If a woman spectator identifies with the Magdalene as represented here, is she identifying with a sign that represents something in the male unconscious: fearsome, immoral female sexuality? Is she forced to participate in a masochistic fantasy: the Magdalene blamed and blaming herself, internalizing her guilt, from which she is then released by the paternal Jesus? The Magdalene here is a powerless, victimized figure reinforcing a sense of worthlessness and sexual shame, moving through that, almost out of sexuality.[16] More importantly, there is in identification a recognition of the system of domination. "As long as it does exist," says Andrea Dworkin speaking of pornography (224), "we must understand that we are the women in it: used by the same power, subject to the same valuation...." What other options are there here for viewing?[17]

Between her exit and her next scene, when the crowd in Jerusalem is calling for the release of Barabbas, there are shots of the disciples and Jesus on the road, camping out around fires, with no women present.[18] Luke 8:1–3, which mentions the women in the company, is not visualized in Zeffirelli's film. [19] Mary Magdalene is not seen as a follower; she is absent, relegated to the outskirts of the movement. The change in her appearance in the Barabbas scene is startling: her black clothes signal that

[16] Contrast this to Arcand's non-servile Magdalene, one of a group of friends. Her love and self-esteem, however, are also based on gratitude for his defense of her—in this case when he overturns the equipment at the advertising studio ("I love you, you crazy nut," she tells him).

[17] If a female spectator identifies with the active male subject, Jesus, then what? What about a male spectator's identification with either character? We ask also: How do different women of differing social, ethnic, economic, and sexual locations view such a scene? Trying on multiple viewpoints destabilizes and deepens the identification process.

[18] Male bonding is depicted again and again by Scorsese: Jesus sleeping with Judas, John the Baptist and Jesus kissing on the mouth, Judas kissing Jesus on the mouth.

[19] It is visualized only fleetingly in *Greatest Story*, where we see a flash of her red shawl or the Magdalene paired never with other women but with with Sal Mineo, the lame man cured. In Scorsese's film, she is in black at Jesus' side in several scenes, silent, serving. Barbara Hershey comments, "Marty had me walking with Jesus and the disciples in many scenes. The only scenes I couldn't appear in were the ones at the temple where women weren't allowed. He even embraced the idea of Christ's having women at the Last Supper" (Kelly: 205; I want to thank Alice Bach for this reference). Arcand achieves the depiction of working together: they are a troupe, some sharing an apartment; the sexual arrangements are unclear.

she is no longer a prostitute, though she is still treated as one. How does she earn a living? Who knows? Who cares? The extreme long shots underline her isolation; she is surrounded by men. When she screams over and over for Jesus' release, one of them smacks her in the face and silences her: "Shut up, you slut."

Painterly shots of the Crucifixion depict the Magdalene alone until she is accepted by the mother of Jesus (Olivia Hussey) in a moment of female bonding. When she attempts to move close to the cross, the centurion (Ernest Borgnine) stops her. She says she is "one of the family." Jesus' mother, startled, looks back over her shoulder and then confirms this: "Yes, she is one of the family."

At the deposition in the rain, the Magdalene kisses the feet of the corpse, her trademark. At first only her hands on the right of the screen appear, on his feet; and then as at the scene at Simon the Pharisee's, she is seen grovelling.[20] She is displaced in her grief by the mother of Jesus (John's crucifixion scene overpowering the synoptics; John is taken to be the Beloved Disciple, and other male disciples are present also in this harmonizing). She will claim to be family again to guards at the tomb, taking the leadership of the two other women (Martha and Mary?) come with spices. Zeffirelli ends that tomb scene with the women running from the tomb, the Magdalene in front holding out the winding sheet, a shot that can be compared with Arcand's of the Magdalene actor running from the light in a dark tunnel.[21]

Her final scene begins with a knock and ends with a door banging shut. It contains the Magdalene's only self-defense—as far as I know—in the history of interpretation. When she is disbelieved in Luke 24:11 and Markan Appendix 16:11, there is no defense. In the Gnostic literature Jesus or Levi defends her (see King: 615). Here she comes to the hiding disciples and narrates how she has "seen the Lord." They are silent, then embarrassed, evasive. She turns to John as the one who will surely believe her, but he does not. Mary Magdalene and John face to face are in a power struggle; the lighting is harsh, suddenly overexposed; she is old, washed out by the light, wrinkled.[22] He tells her she's tired: "Please, please go." As she gives up and moves angrily toward the door, one of them mutters, "women's fantasies." Here the anger of the Bancroft Magdalene comes to

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[20] *Jesus of Montreal* stands the women around an operating table, making the decision together to donate Daniel Colombe's [Jesus'] organs. *The Last Temptation* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told* show women in black in the crowd at the cross, but not together.

[21] There is no tomb or resurrection in Scorsese's treatment, only light, bells, drums. Compare to the abstract ending of Arcand's.

a healthy head: Medusa–like, she glares with contempt for the disciples, and turns around the movie game of gazing. She growls, "Was his death a fantasy?...Why should he not appear to me?...[then coldly] He told me to tell you, and I have done so."

She flings back the bar on the door, and slams out.

The door slowly springs back open. The doorway is empty.

The movie, however, is not over: it proceeds to its ending in an all-male world where the viewer is supposed to follow. First we have discussion about who among the disciples believes and who doesn't. Eventually it becomes clear Peter (James Farrentino) believes ("because he [Jesus] said so"). "I have always believed," he says. Talk turns to forgiveness, and Peter speaks of a "we" that excludes the women: a we who are all cowards, all betrayed, all abandoned. But "we" are all forgiven. The viewer is supposed to be drawn into that "we" by Peter's direct look at the camera.

The Magdalene's message about an empty tomb is disappearing under the weight of Peter's belief. And her meaning is reduced again to forgiveness, and even that appropriated, blotted out, by the character of Peter.

Big deal: he's forgiven, we're all forgiven, and the Magdalene is gone. Her function has been to bring a message to the men who matter. She confronts, she leaves; they appropriate her belief; they go on. It's not like she left an outfit she was a part of; no one has asked her to stay; no one goes after her; her absence isn't mourned; no one in the story gives her a thought when she's gone. Domination of her is easy dismissal, the culmination (just as violent and crude, but smoother) of the rejections of her from scene to scene. She was a woman who knew too much.

In the final scene of the film, Jesus comes to the disciples; they gather around him and are sent out to make disciples. Visually echoing the Magdalene teaching, Jesus teaches. I am with you always, *blah blah, blah*. The power of the Magdalene's last scene and the empty door, for me as a viewer, has drained all power from these all-male scenes that follow it. It makes them look hokier than usual, even more false. It un-ends the ending. The film cannot end on that note it seems intended to end on, of firm resolution which would enable the spectator to put it out of her/his mind. In spite of Peter's attempt to pull us in, the resistant viewer has been long gone, out the door with the Magdalene.

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[22] Barbara Hershey comments on the months of delay in making *The Last Temptation*: "My inner fear was that I might someday be too old to play Mary Magdalene" (Kelly: 205).

Where does she go? into pre-Christian, and/or post-Christian space. At the cross she joined a family; is she alone again now, or in the potentially subversive world of female bonding? There has been a glimpse of female self-empowerment, and female bonding—and most importantly, more than a glimpse of female anger. The female spectator has been allowed to feel anger. The ideal viewer, the viewer the film tries to create, is not meant to follow the Magdalene in imagination out the door. But the powerful absence she leaves in the final scene lingers in the memory of the resistant spectator. Daly has made her exodus, her escape. Anna has left the Doll's House.[23] The question as I read it isn't whether she will return, but whether Torvald will get out.

Looking at various treatments of the Magdalene in film we glimpse all the choices to be made, even in the case of a classic text, known by heart to many viewers. In my opinion the Zeffirelli film presents elements in the gospel stories and even in the Magdalene legend that work against the kyriarchal ideology. In the words of another of my students: "Is she a woman or a man?" Another comments, "We know how the story ends, but this shows us we *don't* know how it ends; we have to write a new ending." The patriarchal/kyriarchal structure is not "cleanly sealed" to use theatre critic Jill Dolan's phrase (201). The master narrative challenges itself. "Patriarchal texts," says Cheryl Exum (201), "can neither fully nor successfully ignore or suppress women's experience." Even in films based on her legend, not history, the Magdalene is a focalizer of the experience of early Christian women. And her absence in the open, empty doorway, she is a focalizer of the experience of many women and men with patriarchal religions. I read the doorway as leaving open the

[23] HELMER. Nora—can I never be anything more than a stranger to you?

NORA. (taking her bag) Ah, Torvald, the most wonderful thing of all would have to happen.

HELMER. Tell me what that would be!

NORA. Both you and I would have to be so changed that—. Oh, Torvald, I don't believe any longer in wonderful things happening.

HELMER. But I will believe in it. Tell me? So changed that—?

NORA. That our life together would be a real wedlock. Goodbye. (She goes out through the hall.)

HELMER (sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands). Nora! Nora! (Looks round, and rises.) Empty. She is gone. (A hope flashes across his mind.) The most wonderful thing of all—?

(The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.) (Ibsen: 311–12).

possibility not that she will come back, but that the men can get out.[24] It is the exit to a tomb that is not (yet) empty.

The resistant viewer wonders: what is she doing out there? As the movie moves on, we move out.

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Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted[1]

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ABSTRACT

"Plotted" in the title of this essay refers to the narrative handling of the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. "Shot" invokes the camera, since my analysis considers how Bathsheba is treated in movies based on the biblical story. I also discuss some famous paintings of Bathsheba, from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. My primary interest in the comparison between narrative, painting, and film is in the representation of the female body; specifically, the essay investigates how Bathsheba, a paragon of sensuality, is portrayed as the object of sexual desire and aggression, and it inquires how her body is focalized, first in the text itself, and then in visual representations of it. Since the essay self-consciously looks at looking, I invite its readers to join me in looking at our own gaze—at our collusion, or complicity, or resistance when faced with the exposure of female flesh for our literary or visual consumption.

You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure.

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*

To be given in free exchange, to be willingly kept in ocular circulation, to serve as object for readerly and visual reception, not to hold out on the viewer, is already surely an act of generosity, if not forced.

Mary Ann Caws, "Ladies Shot and Painted: Female Embodiment in Surrealist Art"

"Plotted" in the title of this essay refers, of course, to the narrative handling of the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11. "Shot" has nothing to do with Bathsheba's death, which is not recounted in the Bible, but rather invokes the camera, since I want to consider how Bathsheba is

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[1] This essay is based on my inaugural lecture as Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Sheffield. A shorter version was delivered in the series, The Bible in the 21st Century, at the 1994 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Chicago, IL, for which I gratefully acknowledge a travel grant from the British Academy.

treated in movies based on the biblical story. I also want to look at some famous paintings of Bathsheba, from the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries. My primary interest in the comparison between narrative, painting, and film is in the representation of the female body; specifically, I want to investigate how Bathsheba, a paragon of sensuality, is portrayed as the object of sexual desire and aggression, and to inquire how her body is focalized, first in the text itself, and then in visual representations of it. I shall be looking, then, at women—for we're dealing with more than one Bathsheba here—as the object of the male gaze. And I shall be arguing that there is more to Bathsheba than meets the eye. Since I shall be self-consciously looking at looking, I invite the reader to join me in looking at our own gaze—at our collusion, or complicity, or resistance when faced with the exposure of female flesh for our literary or visual consumption. Surely female and male readers and spectators will react differently to the textual and visual images. The female reader or viewer, like it or not, is identified with the body observed. To the extent we view the naked woman as object, we are co-opted into objectifying our own bodies and reading the textual and visual representations against our own interests. I shall return to this point later.

BATHSHEBA PLOTTED

The biblical story of David and Bathsheba holds a place in popular imagination both as a tale of unbridled lust and also, curiously, as a famous "love story." It is, in fact, as a love story that producer Darryl F. Zanuck and director Henry King presented *David and Bathsheba* in their 1951 film. What is it about David and Bathsheba as a topos and about us as consumers of this topos that makes us so eager to imbue their encounter with feeling—with *mutual* feeling—rather than dismissing it as an isolated incident, a gratified whim of the king with disastrous consequences for him and his kingdom? The biblical version is no love story. Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, is "sent for" by King David, who has sex with her in a moment of passion. That brief encounter might have been the end of it but for one complication: Bathsheba becomes pregnant. Unlike King's film version, where David and Bathsheba romp about the countryside enjoying bucolic trysts, in the biblical account David and Bathsheba do not have sex again until after she has become his wife. Nor is there any evidence in the biblical version to suggest that David *wanted* Bathsheba either for his wife (as the film is at pains to show) or his paramour. On the contrary, the text makes clear that David would prefer to have Uriah assume paternity of the child and, presumably, continue in his marriage to

Bathsheba as before. David has Uriah killed and then marries Bathsheba only because his ploy to get Uriah to "go down to his house"—that is, to have sex with his wife (11:11)—fails.

In the biblical account, David's erotic involvement with Bathsheba occupies only one verse of narrative time.

> David sent messengers and took her. She came to him and he lay with her, while she was purifying herself from her uncleanness. Then she returned to her house (2 Sam 11:4).

Since Bathsheba will become pregnant, the clause, "while she was purifying herself from her uncleanness," is necessary to establish David's paternity. Apart from this essential information, only five actions—three on David's part and two on Bathsheba's—are minimally described. He sent, he took, and he lay: the verbs signify control and acquisition. In contrast, only her movement is described: she came and she returned.

This encounter is set in a narrative context of aggression and violence. "All Israel" (2 Sam 11:1)—that is, all the men except the king— are away at war, besieging a city, while David is at home, taking a woman.[2] Is Bathsheba, like Rabbah of the Ammonites, taken by force? We cannot be sure, for although "sent" and "took" indicate aggression on David's part, "came" and "returned," the two verbs of which Bathsheba is the subject, are not what one would expect if resistance were involved. The king sends for a subject and she obeys. Does she know for what purpose she is summoned? For news about her husband Uriah, who is away on the battlefield (which is the pretext used in the film *David and Bathsheba*)?[3] Or for sex? An actual demand for her sexual services is not necessary to make her feel she must agree to sex. David is, after all, the king; is she free to refuse?

Both the placement of this scene within the account of the Ammonite war and its consequences suggest force. When, as part of his punishment, David's children reenact his sins, David's adultery with Bathsheba is replayed as rape, not once but twice. First Amnon rapes his sister Tamar (2 Samuel 13) and later, to signal his takeover of his father's kingdom, Absalom rapes ten of David's wives. The ten women are raped in a tent on the roof, a location which serves both to remind us of the place where

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[2] See Fokkelman: 41–70 and Bal, 1987:10–36 for discussion of the combination of war, sexuality, and violence in 2 Samuel 11. For other explorations of the connection between women, war, and metaphors of sexual violence, see the essays in Camp and Fontaine.

[3] In the film, David tells Abishai to invite Bathsheba to dine with him so that he can reward her for Uriah's valor in battle.

David sinned and to fulfill Nathan's prophecy that God will do to David in the sight of the sun and all Israel what David had done in secret (2 Sam 12:11–12; 16:21–22).

Whether or not David rapes Bathsheba is a moot question, and one I do not feel compelled to argue, since I am not interested in subjecting a literary creation to cross-examination.[4] What Bathsheba might have done or felt is not the point; the point is we are not allowed access to her point of view. The issue of force versus consent, which is crucial for constructing the woman's point of view, is not raised. Nor does the text describe an attempted seduction, which would give the woman a role, even if one in which she is manipulated.[5] Bathsheba's rape is semiotic; that is to say, her violation occurs not so much *in the story* as *by means of the story*. By denying her subjectivity, the narrator violates the character he created. By portraying Bathsheba in an ambiguous light, the narrator leaves her vulnerable, not simply to assault by David but also to misappropriation by those who come after him to spy on the bathing beauty and offer their versions of, or commentary on, the story. In particular, the withholding of Bathsheba's point of view leaves her open to the charge of seduction.

Both the 1951 film *David and Bathsheba*[6] and the 1985 *King David*,[7] for example, are unable to resist the appeal of seduction in order to make David less guilty at Bathsheba's expense. *David and Bathsheba* is sensitive to the possibility of coercion: is Bathsheba free to say no? "You are the king," says Bathsheba. "What other answer can I give, sire? You have sent for me and made known to me your will, what else is there for me to say?" This response represents Bathsheba as a subject who feels she cannot refuse her king, one who yields to his authority, and at this point we may think that the film is out to restore Bathsheba's honor.[8] But pursuing this characterization of Bathsheba would cast King David in too negative a light. David therefore responds to Bathsheba's submission to his will with a long speech in which he prides himself for refusing ever to take

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[4] For an approach that attempts to flesh out female characters by giving them narrative life in the reader's consciousness, see Bach.

[5] On the problem with the rape/seduction opposition, see Rooney.

[6] Twentieth Century Fox; produced by Darryl F. Zanuck; directed by Henry King; screenplay by Philip Dunne; and starring Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward.

[7] Paramount Pictures; produced by Martin Elfand; directed by Bruce Beresford; and starring Richard Gere. Alice Krige has a minor role as Bathsheba. For interesting comments about his role as advisor to the film, see "My Part in the Fall of 'King David,'" in Magonet.

[8] The fact that the film uses it at all shows, I think, how compelling an interpretation it is of the narrative silence. It also makes Bathsheba appear more manipulative: she does not yield to David until she has him in the position she wants.

anything by force, not even the kingdom: "So I said nothing to you until you told me that there is no love in your marriage. Yes, you told me that, and so did Uriah...."[9] Only when he tells Bathsheba that she may leave, proving his respect for her right to refuse, does Bathsheba confess to having planned the whole thing! She watched him walking on his balcony every evening and knew she could count on his being there to see her. She had heard he had found no woman to please him. *She* wants to be the woman who will make him happy. *She* wants to be his wife.

In the 1985 film *King David*, drastic changes are made to make David look better. He sees Bathsheba bathing, but does not send for her. He has sex with her only after their marriage, which takes place after Uriah is dead (a death David arranges to rid Bathsheba of an abusive husband). As a result of these and other distortions of the story line, nothing that happens later in the film makes much sense. In particular, the disasters that befall David's house now appear arbitrary and random rather than as connected to his sin and his punishment in kind. Though Bathsheba is not clearly guilty of planning the affair, as in *David and Bathsheba*, she is nonetheless complicit in letting herself be seen bathing. When David first meets her face to face, he says, "I've seen you once before," to which she responds, "I know."[10]

What I have described is not just a contribution of Hollywood. Biblical scholars draw similar conclusions. When commentators on 2 Samuel 11 suggest that Bathsheba shares the blame, are they picking up on a latent message in the text, or are they reading their own gender stereotypes back into it? George Nicol, for example, maintains:

> It cannot be doubted that Bathsheba's action in bathing so close to the king's residence was provocative, nor can the possibility that the provocation was deliberate be discounted. Even if it was not deliberate, Bathsheba's bathing in a place so clearly open to the king's palace can hardly indicate less than a contributory negligence on her part. (Nicol: 360)

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[9] In the film, Uriah has already indicated to David that he prefers the soldier's life to the marriage bed. Making Uriah into an insensitive brute is part of the film's strategy to make David seem less guilty.

[10] Why she has come to petition David is another aspect of the film that makes little sense, for, although she tells David that Uriah beats her and shows him her wounds, she reminds him that a woman has no redress against her husband. She can tolerate the beatings, she says, but she wants a child. David says she shall have one, to which she replies, "Not while my husband lives." The scene thus suggests that she puts the idea of killing Uriah into David's mind, and the very next shot is of Uriah's death letter being sealed.

Similarly, in his commentary on the books of Samuel, Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg says, "We must, however, ask whether Bathsheba did not count on this possibility," and then quotes Alfons Schulz—"one cannot but blame her for bathing in a place where she could be seen"—before concluding, "not, of course, that this possible element of *feminine flirtation* is any excuse for David's conduct."[11] Though he holds David accountable, Hertzberg manages to blame the woman also. He goes on to propose that, although we know nothing of Bathsheba's point of view, "her consciousness of the danger into which adultery was leading her (Deut 22:22) must have been outweighed by her realization of the honour of having attracted the king" (310). I find it more than a little disquieting that what is arguably a violation and certainly an objectification has so easily, in the view of the conventional commentator, become an *honor*.

Why is it that (male) interpreters are so quick to blame Bathsheba for appearing on the scene in some state of undress? What about the responsibility of the narrator, who made the decision to portray her in the act of washing?[12] It is, after all, the biblical narrator who, using David as his agent, makes Bathsheba the object of the male gaze. When biblical commentators imply that Bathsheba desired the king's attentions and when popular renditions of the story attribute such motivation to her, they let the narrator off the hook at the woman's expense.

We also are involved in the narrator's pretense. By introducing Bathsheba to us through David's eyes, the biblical narrator puts us in the position of voyeurs: "...he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful" (2 Sam 11:2). I have discussed the voyeuristic nature of this scene in my book, *Fragmented Women* (see esp. 174–75, 194–95). The narrator controls our gaze; we cannot look away from the bathing beauty but must consider her appearance: "very beautiful." We presume she is naked or only partially clad, and thinking about it requires us

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[11] Hertzberg, 1964:309, italics mine. In the German original (1960), the term is "Koketterie."

[12] Berger (51) makes this point about visual art, but it applies as well to narrative: "You painted a naked woman because you enjoyed looking at her, you put a mirror in her hand and you called the painting *Vanity*, thus morally condemning the woman whose nakedness you had depicted for your own pleasure." To the extent that the narrator implies culpability on Bathsheba's part, he, too, is being hypocritical—morally condemning her for the nakedness he has created imaginatively for his pleasure, David's, and that of his ideal readers. He could have, for example, had David see Bathsheba in somewhat the same way that another biblical "lover," Samson, sees the woman he wants: "David went out in Jerusalem and he saw a woman who was the right one in his eyes."

to invade her privacy by undressing or dressing her mentally. The intimacy of washing is intensified by the fact that this is a ritual purification after her menstrual period, and this intimacy, along with the suggestion of nakedness, accentuates the body's vulnerability to David's and our shared gaze. A woman is touching herself and a man is watching. The viewing is one-sided, giving him the advantage and the position of power: he sees her but she does not see him.[13] Readers of this text are watching a man watching a woman touch herself.[14] Can male and female readers possibly react in the same way to the scene? For my part, I am uncomfortable being put in the position of voyeur, watching a naked woman being watched.

Nor are we and David the only voyeurs: "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (v. 3). It is not clear who says these words, whether David[15] or an attendant,[16] but in any event, "Is this not Bathsheba?" suggests that someone else is looking too. The woman is focalized through the male gaze:

> ...and he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful.

How does David, through whose eyes we see the woman's body, react to what he sees? The sight of Bathsheba's body arouses his desire, and he acts on it: he sends for her and has sex with her. Lustful looking is the prelude to possessing. The story thus raises the question of the relationship between looking, desiring, and acting on the basis of desire.[17] Fortunately, not every voyeur acts on his lustful impulses. The text condemns David for doing so, but only because the woman is another man's property. The voyeuristic gaze at the female body that can lead to appropriation is permanently inscribed in the text, and we, its readers, are implicated in

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[13] Looking at the female body is a cultural preoccupation for both men and women. Women look at women, as the genre of the fashion magazine—the how-to manual for capturing the gaze—well illustrates. Looking at women is an expression of male sexuality. Men are the owners of the gaze. Men look at women to assess us, to take stock of us, to decide how to treat us. Women look at women (including ourselves), among other reasons, in order to determine how to attract the gaze (or how to avoid attracting attention), in order to become like or unlike the image before us.

[14] If we accept the testimony of literature, art, film, and pornography, men are aroused by watching a woman touch herself. Even more arousing perhaps is the sight of another woman touching a woman—a scene exploited in the film *King David* (see below).

[15] So, convincingly, Bailey: 85.

[16] So most commentators and most translations.

[17] My discussion of this issue owes much to Bal's analysis of the story of Susanna (1993).

it. With all this looking, it is little wonder Bathsheba has become the quintessential object of the gaze in literature and art through the ages. Her "punishment" for being desired is to be forever visualized as the sensual woman who enflames male lust.

This is how the paintings and films I want to consider treat her, dramatically reinscribing the text's voyeuristic gaze at the naked female body. As readers or spectators, we are implicated in this gaze, but as gendered subjects, we are implicated differently. The biblical story, it is fair to say, was written by men for men. To the extent that female readers assume its male perspective, we are forced to read against our own interests: to accept the concept of woman as a source of temptation that can bring about a man's downfall. Even if we do not identify with Bathsheba, we cannot escape feeling implicated in the indictment of woman that she represents.[18] The paintings of Bathsheba are also by men[19] and for assumed male spectators and male owners. In commenting upon the Western artistic tradition, John Berger observes,

> In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there. It is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity. But he, by definition, is a stranger—with his clothes still on.[20] (54)

Finally, the films, like most Hollywood movies, are produced and directed by men, and in spite of the fact that their audience consists of women and men, the naked female body remains focalized through the

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[18] The position of the female reader is well described by Fetterley: 507.

[19] There were not many women artists, and women were not admitted to academies where nude models were used until the end of the eighteenth century according to Miles: 13–14. It is illuminating to compare Artemisia Gentileschi's "David and Bathsheba" to the Bathshebas discussed here. Gentileschi gives us a sympathetic Bathsheba who appears to want to shield herself from the gaze.

[20] Kenneth Clark's often discussed distinction between naked and nude is neither relevant for my purposes nor compelling; for critiques of the gender assumptions in Clark's discussion, see Miles: 13–16; Nead: 12–33. Nead deconstructs Clark's binary opposition between the naked and the nude, a binary opposition retained but reversed in Berger's study. As Nead (16) remarks: "The discourse on the naked and the nude, so effectively formulated by Kenneth Clark and subsequently reworked, depends upon the theoretical possibility, if not the actuality, of a physical body that is outside of representation and is then given representation, for better or for worse, through art; but even at the most basic levels the body is always produced through representation....There can be no naked 'other' to the nude, for the body is always already in representation."

male gaze. The woman holds the look; she plays to and signifies male desire (Mulvey: 19). As Laura Mulvey has argued in her classic study on "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema": "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (19; italics hers).

The male viewer of the paintings and the films, like the male reader of the biblical story, is invited to take David's symbolic position as the focalizer of the gaze: he can look through David's eyes; he can fantasize himself in David's place. The woman is naked for his pleasure. The female spectator's involvement is more complicated. Our position is that of both surveyor and surveyed, or, to use Mulvey's terms, we are both the image and the bearer of the look. The male spectator is invited to identify with the male protagonist and to desire the female image. The female spectator is also invited to look at the female image with the phallic power of the gaze, yet we are identified with that image as well. Identification and desire, which for the male spectator remain separate operations, are collapsed for us.[21] We might find the male perspective we are asked to assume uncomfortable, and therefore reject it and, with it, the pleasurable cinematic experience. Or we might enjoy the control and freedom of action that identification with the male protagonist gives us.[22] Either way, it would seem that it is not possible for our desire to be acknowledged.

BATHSHEBA PAINTED

The story of David and Bathsheba provides both theme and pretext for artistic representations of a naked woman. Female nudity in the art of the Christian West, argues Margaret Miles, carries associations of shame, sin, and guilt. In the case of Bathsheba, the paintings imply what the cinematic representations will make explicit: Bathsheba's exhibitionism. But they also problematize it, and with it our voyeurism also.

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[21] See Doane, 1987:157, 168–69. As Kaplan (31) notes, "... men do not simply look; their gaze carries with it the power of action and of possession which is lacking in the female gaze. Women receive and return a gaze, but cannot act upon it." It should be obvious that I am pursuing a heterosexual reading, since the premise of the paintings is heterosexual and mainstream, classical Hollywood cinema represents heterosexuality as the norm. I hope it is equally obvious that I am not insisting that the approach taken here is the only way to look at this material; many factors will cause individual readers and viewers to react differently.

[22] See Mulvey: 29–38. The nature and the possibilities of a female gaze is a subject of debate among feminist film critics; see Kaplan: 23–35, 200–6; Doane, 1987:155–83; Doane, 1991:17–43; Silverman; and the essays in Gamman and Marshment.

I should explain briefly how I intend to "read" the paintings discussed below. I am neither an art critic nor an art historian. I find art history somewhat like historical criticism in biblical studies: it asks questions about origins, about the artist's historical situation and influences on the artist's life, and it talks about composition and style, particularly in terms of contemporary trends and distinguishing characteristics. But it doesn't seem very much interested in the "story" the picture has to tell, in what Berger calls "the plane of lived experience."[23] The mystification of art by art historians that Berger deplores is much like the mystification of the Bible by professional biblical scholars—how many people really care if a particular text was written by J, D, or P?

When I look at Rembrandt's famous painting of Bathsheba (fig. 1), I am not particularly interested in the artist's age or his financial circumstances when he painted her. It does not matter to me that the subject was probably the artist's common-law wife, Hendrickje Stoffels (though this may account for her sympathetic portrayal). Nor is my interpretation affected by the question whether the letter she holds in her hand represents Hendrickje's summons before the Dutch Reformed Church for "living in sin with Rembrandt the painter" or whether the painting itself may have incited the church authorities to issue the summons.[24] This is not to say that I am not interested in what historical critics of the Bible have to say or that I do not appreciate knowing something about the background of a painting. But what I see when I view these paintings is a naked woman identified either by the painter or someone else as Bathsheba, and I cannot help reading the painting in the light of what I know of the story. What I am advocating here is a reader response criticism of art. I intend to read the paintings semiotically, as if, like texts, they have a story to tell. In their case, the story is often compressed, with various elements of the story represented in one moment in time. More importantly, I want to raise questions about the interaction between painting and spectator similar to the questions I am asking about the interaction between text and reader.

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[23] Berger's satiric critique of the mystification of art by art historians has emboldened my "reading" of these paintings. Berger acknowledges his debt to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (217–51), anticipates much modern art and film theory. The other important influence of my use of the visual is Mieke Bal's *Reading "Rembrandt"* (1991).

[24] See the discussion of this issue in Bal, 1991: 224–27. The quotation is from Bal, p. 226, citing Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt: His Life, His Paintings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 292.

FIGURE 1: Rembrandt, *Bethsabie au bain,* Louvre (© Photo R.M.N.).

The striking thing about this nude is that David is not looking, we are. We replace David as voyeur, as we view what we assume he has viewed already. This assumption is predicated on the letter summoning her to the king, which Bathsheba holds in her hand—an intertextual reference to Uriah's death letter, since in the story Bathsheba receives no letter from David. I cannot help thinking if she has had time to be seen by David and receive the letter and still hasn't put her clothes on, she must spend a good deal of her time naked.

The imagery is essentially frontal because the sexual protagonist is the spectator/owner who is looking at it.[25] Bathsheba's body, however, is

[25] Berger (56) makes this point about most post-Renaissance European painting of the nude.

slightly twisted, as if she were in the act of turning away, and her crossed legs are a modest gesture in relation to the spectator. The pose is ambivalent, making it difficult to decide: is she or is she not an exhibitionist? In a brilliant discussion of this painting in her book, *Reading "Rembrandt,"* Mieke Bal calls attention to a distortion of structure that requires explanation. The letter in Bathsheba's hand points to the locus of the distortion. Her legs are crossed, the right leg over the left leg, but her right foot remains at the right side of her knees. The distortion, Bal argues, draws attention to the artificiality of the display of the woman's body; it exposes itself as an exposure.

> The navel, the center of the body, had to be displayed so that the viewer could collude with David's voyeurism, but the display itself—its artificiality—had to be emphasized. (1991: 244)

Whereas Bathsheba's body is turned toward us, offering itself to our view, her head is turned away, indicating her reluctance to be seen. The expression on her face suggests an interiority that we cannot penetrate, a private, inner space that is hers alone. She is pensive, perhaps even melancholy. Should we interpret the look on her face as signifying resignation or hopelessness? We might read it proleptically as expressing mourning for her husband Uriah (2 Sam 11:26) or grief for her dead child (2 Sam 12:15–24), or, more generally, as regret over all the misfortune the letter in her hand will cause. The painter gives Bathsheba what the biblical narrator did not: a measure of subjectivity. He has managed to reveal an inwardness and an inaccessibility in the expression of her body and face. This humanizing of the female nude tells the spectator that she is not simply naked for him.[26]

In Hans Memling's Bathsheba, the only remaining panel of a triptych (fig. 2), once again we, and not David, are the voyeurs. David is in the background, in the upper left-hand corner of the painting. Given his distance from her window, he cannot see or have seen her very well. Indeed, she seems fairly well shielded from his view since her back is to him and her attendant, holding ready her dressing gown, stands between them. Clearly her nakedness is for the spectator's benefit. We—and, again, I mean specifically the male spectator—are invited to identify with David's perspective by means of the woman's body, which signifies his sexual arousal. What we see is female nakedness as the cause of male de-

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[26] On such "exceptional nudes" in European oil painting, see Berger: 60–61; but cf. the caveat of Nead: 15. See also Bal's discussion of this painting (1991:219–46). Something similar to Rembrandt's humanizing of his subject occurs later in the narrative, when pregnancy gives Bathsheba power and voice.

sire, with the slipper and the pot by the bed providing conventional symbols for sex.

FIGURE 2: Hans Memling, *Bathseba im Bade*, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

Bathsheba has the long limbs and rounded belly that were standards of female beauty in the fifteenth century. The rounded belly also foreshadows Bathsheba's pregnancy, which will lead to David's downfall. Her naked body therefore suggests both the allure and the danger of female sexuality. Here, too, it seems to me, there is an awkwardness to the pose that draws attention to itself. The suggested movement appears unnatural: it is hard to see how she can keep her balance, and it seems rather awkward for her to be slipping into her dressing gown while still in the process of climbing out of such a high bath. The painting thus gives greater meaning to the precariousness of Bathsheba's position.

Neither Rembrandt's nor Memling's Bathsheba meets our voyeuristic gaze. Both are staring into space. Rembrandt's Bathsheba stares ahead pensively. Memling's stares vacantly as if she were a sleepwalker getting out of her bed. The fact that these Bathshebas do not acknowledge our gaze heightens the voyeuristic effect and conveys a sense of shame on their part in relation to the spectator.[27] Not looking back is what we tend to do when we are self-conscious about being observed, as if by ignoring the observer we can feel less aware of being watched. In addition,

[27] This is not to say that female subjects of voyeuristic painting do not look back at the spectators; Rembrandt's *Susanna and the Elders* is good example. Looking back can have various meanings: accusation, appeal for help, acknowledgment of responsibility, etc.

FIGURE 3: Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem, *Het toilet van Bathseba,* Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (©Rijksmuseum–Stichting, Amsterdam).

by averting their eyes from the viewers, the naked Bathshebas cannot accuse us of looking.

An alternative way of looking offers itself to us in these paintings. Both paintings show a servant attending Bathsheba. Neither looks upon her naked mistress: the old woman in the Rembrandt Bathsheba, so elaborately dressed as to make Bathsheba's nudity conspicuously artful, is absorbed in her work; Memling's servant modestly looks down from behind Bathsheba as she helps her into her robe. By looking elsewhere, these women make us aware of, and thus enable us to share in, their self-consciousness at the idea of looking. In other words, they problematize our voyeurism by drawing attention to the alternative: looking away. They invite us to look away from the naked woman even as the naked Bathshebas avoid returning our intrusive gaze.

In the painting of Bathsheba by the Dutch artist, Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem (fig. 3), David is absent, as in Rembrandt's Bathsheba. Here, however, there is no clue that he has seen or will soon see her. The complete absence of any reference to David in this painting (he cannot see

FIGURE 4: Carlo Maratti, *David and Bathsheba* (Photograph: Courtauld Institute of Art).

from the roof of the castle far in the background) dramatically illustrates that Bathsheba is naked for the spectator's pleasure. So too does the fact that Bathsheba's attendants are also naked and thus join her as objects of the voyeuristic gaze. Their nudity, in turn, dramatizes hers, since she alone is fully exposed (except for the translucent cloth hiding and marking the place of her genitals).

The women appear to be in a magnificent garden, and almost at the center of the painting is a tree in the middle of a landscaped area, like the tree of (sexual?) knowledge in the midst of the garden of Eden. Bathsheba's body is brightly illuminated in strong contrast to the servant at her side, whose darkness strengthens the impression of otherness and the exotic of which the woman is already an example. The black attendant is positioned as the dark place between the two pale figures. As representative of the new, mysterious dark continent that fascinated Europeans of the time, she symbolizes the dark and dangerously seductive mystery of woman.

Particularly noteworthy are paintings of Bathsheba in which she is shown looking at her reflection in a mirror. Not only does the mirror function to accuse Bathsheba of vanity, it also permits her to join her voy-

FIGURE 5: Hans van Aachen, *David und Bathseba,* Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

eurs in the act of looking. She thus not only colludes with but also participates in making herself the object of the voyeuristic gaze. This is most striking in the painting by Carlo Maratti (fig. 4). Bathsheba gazes at herself, while King David looks on from the balcony in the background. Bathsheba's two servants look at each other, not at her. Yet again it is clear that the woman's nakedness is for the sake of the spectator, who alone is offered the full frontal view. Bathsheba's legs are parted, suggesting availability, though the traditional piece of cloth covers her genitals, and her left arm covers her left breast.

Bathsheba's reflection in the mirror is difficult to make out. Given the position of the mirror, we ought to be able to see her shoulders and arm, but all we can see is her face, the reflection of which appears reversed. In the painting by Hans van Aachen (fig. 5), Bathsheba's reflection is also, and more arrestingly, reversed. This distortion, like that in Rembrandt's painting of Bathsheba, draws attention to itself, and alerts the viewer that something is awry. We might take it as foreshadowing the reversal of the fortunes of Bathsheba, Uriah, and, of course, King David. Or, alternatively, as a hint that there is another side to the story, and even another side to Bathsheba. The image in the mirror is not an accurate re-

flection of the lovely face of the woman but a transformation of her almost innocent beauty, prefiguring perhaps the formidable woman she will become (1 Kings 1–2).[28] As a perversion of perspective, it calls our attention to the perversion of the voyeuristic gaze that leads in this case to appropriation.

Who is the figure looking over Bathsheba's shoulder and holding the mirror? A servant? According to the description in the museum catalogue, the figure is a female servant (*Dienerin* [1995:63]), but the features, especially the neck, are rather mannish. Could this figure represent David's voyeuristic gaze (David is barely visible in the distance, on the rooftop), so that Bathsheba looks upon herself reflected through his eyes, as it were?[29] Or is it a reminder of Uriah, who is away on the battlefield, and his claim to possession of the woman (and the gaze)? Another, earlier painting by van Aachen presents a suggestive point of comparison. In *Scherzendes Paar mit einem Spiegel (Der Künstler mit seiner Frau)* (fig. 6), van Aachen has painted his wife, Regina di Lasso, who served as the model for Bathsheba, looking at her reflection in a mirror. Her breasts are bared to the spectator. The artist, laughing, looks over her shoulder directly at the spectator. With one hand he holds the mirror, displaying his wife for the spectator's pleasure. His other hand rests on his wife's shoulder, and he wags his finger at the spectator in a knowing gesture, as if playfully (or mockingly) saying, "I am offering this to you to enjoy, but shame on you for looking."

The similarities between this painting and *David und Bathseba* are striking. The same woman is the subject of both paintings. A figure stands behind her, looking over her shoulder and holding a mirror in which we see her reflection.[30] *David und Bathseba* assumes two spectators, David on the roof, who cannot see the woman very well, and the viewer of the painting, whose view is close-up and direct. *Scherzendes Paar* has only one, the viewer. The artist both invites the voyeuristic gaze by exposing the woman (his wife) and at the same time implicitly criticizes it: David ought not to be looking; the viewer of *Scherzendes Paar* is chided for it. If

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[28] The reflection is not as unflattering in the original painting as it appears on the reproduction, though there appears to be a distorting mark on the face from below the ear just about to the chin. A sign of vanity? A *memento mori*?

[29] As, for example, in the miniature from the Codex Germanicus 206 (c. 1454), which represents David on the roof as well as standing next to the bathing woman.

[30] The Kunsthistorisches Museum catalogue refers to *Scherzendes Paar* as a moralizing allegory (62). What looks on the reproduction like a crack in the mirror appears in the painting to be a sliver of light, a reflection of some unseen light source such as a window or door, perhaps to show that this is a mirror and not a portrait.

FIGURE 6: Hans van Aachen, *Scherzendes Paar mit einem Spiegel (Der Künstler mit seiner Frau)*, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

the figure looking over Bathsheba's shoulder is not Uriah, at the least she or he stands in the position of the husband who cooperates, even to the extent of holding the mirror, and whose presence simultaneously accuses the viewer of looking.[31] Is the subject—and the moral—of the paintings the same? Not that it constitutes an argument, but I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the photographs of the paintings appear on the same page of the museum catalogue for the 1995 exhibit with the titles reversed!

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[31] In another painting of Bathsheba with a mirror, Pieter de Grebber's *Toilet of Bathsheba* (Rijksmuseum), a child is holding the mirror. Like the artist in "Scherzendes Paar," the child returns the spectator's gaze as if to acknowledge our joint complicity in the viewing. In this painting, the letter summoning her to the king momentarily takes Bathsheba's gaze away from her image in the mirror. De Grebber's Bathsheba is less available to the spectator than those discussed here; a translucent wrap covers much of her body, and her left arm hides her breasts. A servant points to the window, through which we can make out the faint outlines of the balcony from which we assume David will have seen her. The mirror reflects Bathsheba's hand, holding the letter, thereby calling attention to the letter's fateful consequences.

BATHSHEBA SHOT

Our gaze does not permit the naked Bathsheba to leave her bath or the canvas. The cinematic Bathshebas, in contrast, are in motion, and our gaze at them is both guided and interrupted. We can gaze only at what the camera chooses to show us. Unlike the canvas Bathshebas—frozen in time, ever available to our intrusive gaze—these movie stars are performing for the gaze. Susan Hayward knows that theater audiences are watching along with Gregory Peck. During her bath, she looks around in all directions, making a pretense of not noticing her attendants, or David, or us, all of whom are looking at her, while coquettishly casting a glance at the camera. Alice Krige in the role of Bathsheba strikes a pose that tells us she is looking back at David, returning his and our shared gaze.

Film is by nature a voyeuristic medium: we sit passively in a darkened theater and spy on other people's lives. We watch anonymously and with impunity. The replacement of David with the viewer as voyeur is achieved in both films by means of zoom shots, overcoming a difficulty of perspective the paintings could not. The close-ups of Bathsheba bathing create the illusion that what we see is what incites David, but, of course, he is back on the roof and not in the room with the camera, the woman, and us. We are privy to more than David can see. In addition, the films contribute something lacking in the paintings, since our voyeurism includes David's response as well as Bathsheba's bath. The paintings show us Bathsheba through David's eyes but do not expose him to us, as the films do by recording on his face his reaction to what he sees (he does, of course, like Berger's spectator of the nude painting, have his clothes on).

When David spies Bathsheba bathing in the 1951 film, *David and Bathsheba*, the timing of the scene and the music add to the titillation. We are watching David as the camera moves back and forth between his face, as an indicator of his arousal, and what he sees, the image that activates his lustful gaze. Through the window, we glimpse, through his eyes as it were, the woman bathing. From a distance, we watch her slip out of her robe and step behind a screen, which is where her bath will take place. Then we see David's face, attentive and interested. Next we see the woman again, through the window, which is framed and illuminated as if it were a movie screen, with David in the position of moviegoer in the shadows (see fig. 1 pg. 75). Again we see his face, fixed on the screen/scene before him. He munches on grapes he has plucked from an overhanging branch—a rather obvious sign that his sexual appetite has been whetted by the sight of Bathsheba.

Our next view of Bathsheba is a zoom shot into the room. Drawing on the iconographic tradition, the film shows Bathsheba attended by two servants, whose blackness, as in the painting by van Haarlem, lends a sense of otherness and the exotic. In this close shot, one attendant is washing Bathsheba, but because Bathsheba is bathing behind a screen, we cannot see her hands, and so we do not see her actually touching Bathsheba. Both the hierarchy of status and the hint of intimacy between women appear calculated to intensify male arousal. David's superiority to Bathsheba is mirrored in Bathsheba's superiority to her attendants, who, however, enjoy greater access to Bathsheba's naked body than David has—at the moment—and also, at the moment, their gaze, like ours, is not from a distance, like his. Unlike David and us, they are allowed on Bathsheba's side of the screen.

In the next shot, the camera lingers on David's face for what seems to be a much longer time than it actually is. The slow pace allows the spectator to imagine, perhaps even to participate in, his arousal: when the camera shifts back to Bathsheba again, what will we see? I said earlier, with regard to the biblical text, that we cannot look away from the woman but are forced to think about her appearance. Of course, we *can* read the text without visualizing the naked woman, especially if we are casual readers. The pacing of the cinematic scene forces us to do what the text implicitly calls for: to take account of the woman's body. Since this is a Fifties movie, the answer to the question "What will we see?" is: not much. We are watching David's face when Bathsheba steps from behind the screen, and when we see her again, she is already pulling her robe about her and leaving the room, the outline of her body barely but tantalizingly visible through her transparent robe against the light behind her.

This scene in the film *King David* is very similar to that in *David and Bathsheba*. It begins with the same illusion, with David in the role of moviegoer and Bathsheba framed as if on a movie screen. Again the camera moves back and forth between David and Bathsheba; in this case, a total of five times as compared to four times in the 1951 film. This film uses lighting more effectively than the earlier one to create a mood of sensuality. Bathsheba is bathing in the open air (in what looks curiously like ancient ruins) and the fire that heats her water and keeps her warm represents the flame of passion. She is filmed in hues of red and orange, colors that, as in the painterly tradition, suggest sensuousness and concupiscence, while David is filmed in the cold blue of the evening. The 1980s production, however, leaves less of the erotic for the imagination. From David on the roof, the camera moves to Bathsheba bathing, seen from a distance that represents David's perspective. Then we see his face

again, and a slightly closer view of her bathing. She is naked, and she is not, like Susan Hayward, bathing behind a screen. David, and we—in ever closer views he cannot share—can see her entire naked body. She has an attendant, who is not black (this is an Eighties film), and both she and her attendant are rubbing her body. Again we see David's face, the camera moving closer in on his face just as it moves in on her body. The camera now shows an even closer shot of her and her attendant running their hands over her body. Back again to his face, followed by an even closer view of her, from the waist up. She and the attendant are washing her breasts—rather thoroughly I would say. Indeed, there are suggestions of homo-eroticism and nymphomania—certainly not innocent washing—in the way Bathsheba enjoys her bath. We then have yet another close shot of his face, followed by an even closer view of her in which her head, neck, and shoulders fill the screen. The hint of intimacy between women I mentioned in *David and Bathsheba* is even stronger here, as both Bathsheba and her attendant caress her body repeatedly. This is a performance designed to titillate male desire. No woman bathing is going to let herself be touched like this by another woman, unless they have an intimate relationship (and we need to keep in mind that this is a servant and her mistress).

Bathsheba Framed

Biblical style typically suggests a causal connection by means of simple juxtaposition:

> . . .he saw from the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. So David sent and inquired about the woman. He said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers and took her.

Because Bathsheba was seen bathing, she was sent for. It is thus the woman's fault that the man's desire is aroused. Bathsheba is guilty of being desired, but the text hints that she asked for it: she *allows* herself to be seen. By having Bathsheba plan or know she is being seen, the films go beyond the biblical text in making Bathsheba's complicity in the viewing explicit. For them, David may be a voyeur, but Bathsheba is an exhibitionist. The effect is to lessen David's guilt at the woman's expense, because she *wants* to be seen. As representations of a single moment in time, the paintings stand somewhere between the biblical account and the films with regard to accusing the woman. In them, because Bathsheba's body alone (and not David's face, as in the films) communicates and explains David's desire, her nakedness becomes a sign of her guilt.[32]

In the biblical account, David's crime is twofold: he had Uriah killed and he took Uriah's wife—both are crimes against Uriah and against God. But they are not treated as crimes against Bathsheba, who is defined solely in terms of her relation to Uriah. Having sexual intercourse with Bathsheba is a crime because it violates another man's marital rights.[33] David's punishment for adultery is that *his wives* will be raped. What he did to another man will be done to him, only more so; in neither case is the women's point of view represented.

Although the story is about *David's* guilt, it does not follow that Bathsheba is blameless. When she is introduced in the story, Bathsheba is bathing. Guilty of being seen, the beautiful woman is responsible for arousing male desire. Gender is an important factor here; a man bathing would not raise the same questions about provocativeness because what is being provoked is *male* desire. Bathing is sexually suggestive in our story because a woman is doing it and because a man is affected.

In 2 Samuel 6, David exposes himself when he dances before the ark of the Lord wearing only a loincloth. The degree of exposure is ambiguous, as in Bathsheba's case, but in both instances we are led to imagine at least partial nakedness. The sight arouses a woman's anger, not her desire. When David's wife Michal criticizes him for his exhibitionism ("How the king of Israel has honored himself today, exposing himself today in the eyes of his subjects' women servants..."), he boasts of the attention he has received ("among the women servants of whom you have spoken, among them I shall be held in honor"). This situation, where a woman views a man's nakedness, is not quite the reverse of 2 Samuel 11, where a man watches a naked woman, for David is in both cases the focal character, first as exhibitionist and then as voyeur. The women are not there for themselves but for what they reveal to us about him. In a clever twist, the film *King David* has Bathsheba watching David dancing—thus she sees his nakedness before he sees hers. She desires him before he desires her. Male display of sexuality is active: David is dancing. It is public: he is in control, and he lets himself be seen by women and men alike. As David's response to Michal shows, he is not ashamed of his nakedness. Female "display" of sexuality, in contrast, is passive and private: Bathsheba is observed while bathing.

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[32] Miles (123) makes this point with regard to Susanna.

[33] Adultery is always a matter of the woman's status: a married woman who has sex with a man other than her husband commits adultery; a married man who has sex with a woman other than his wife commits adultery only if that woman is another man's wife. On adultery in ancient Near Eastern law, see Westbrook and the references cited there.

This notion is reproduced in the Western artistic tradition, where, as Margaret Miles has demonstrated, the male appears as glorified nude and the female as shamefully naked. Whatever else nakedness signifies, its connection with sexuality is never far from view. In our two scenes, nakedness and sex are linked. Michal sees David's nakedness and objects to it. As a result (the causal connection is created simply by juxtaposition), she has no children. A reasonable conclusion is that David does not again have sex with her because she objected to his (public) nakedness.[34] Bathsheba is seen naked, and it leads to her becoming pregnant.

Interestingly, both our films juxtapose the scene between David and Michal to the scene between David and Bathsheba, whereas in the biblical account they are separated by four chapters of narrative in which time passes and various significant events take place. In *David and Bathsheba*, Michal loves David but he no longer loves her; in *King David*, we have the reverse: he loves her, but she wants to return to her second husband. Both films pick up on the portrayal of Michal in 2 Samuel 6, to cast Michal as haughty and petulant, but they move beyond the biblical account in implying that the rift between them is not really David's fault.[35] In both films, no sooner have David and Michal quarreled than he walks out the door onto the balcony from which he spies Bathsheba, suggesting that if you can't get along with one woman, you can always find another. Using the unhappy relationship with one woman as a backdrop enables the film makers to explain David's emotional vulnerability to Bathsheba (in the Bible, he just takes her). It makes his behavior more excusable, again placing him in a more favorable light at a woman's expense.

The connection between the desire to see (voyeurism) and the desire to know needs to be considered in comparing these textual and visual representations of the female body. "It is evident that sight has always been both a central faculty and a central metaphor in the search for truth," writes Peter Brooks (96).

> The erotic investment in seeing is from the outset inextricably bound to the erotic investment in knowing, in the individual's development as well as in the Western philosophical and literary traditions. And the value given to the visual in any realist tradition responds to the desire to know the world: it promotes the gaze as the *inspection* of reality. (99; italics his)

[34] Another possibility is that Michal refuses to have sex with David, which would not be out of character for her. Or responsibility could lie with the deity, whom the Bible describes as opening and closing the womb.

[35] For further discussion of Michal's portrayal, see Exum, 1995.

In the examples I have discussed, men control representation. What is represented is the female body, seen through the male gaze. This representation has a social function. In her analysis of film, Mulvey discusses voyeurism as knowledge that leads to control.[36] Similarly, Miles sees portraits of the female body in the Western artistic tradition as attempts to capture the complexity of woman on canvas. It is a man's way of managing the threat women pose. "Figuration works to displace threat in that women seem to be understood in advance of any relationship with a real woman" (82). In her study, *The Female Nude*, Lynda Nead, too, argues that artistic representations of the female nude can "be understood as a means of containing femininity and female sexuality" (5–33). I have made similar claims about the portrayals of women in biblical literature: they serve to define women and keep them in their place, where their threat can be perceived as more manageable (1993).

Just as representation is gender-determined, so too is interpretation. Since meaning is constructed through interaction between text or image and reader or spectator, we will decide for ourselves whether or not we feel called upon to be voyeurs when we read the "story of David and Bathsheba" or view these paintings or films. Women and men are likely to decide differently, largely but not wholly along gender lines, based on the different demands they perceive the story or image to be making upon them. Some of us will resist the phallocentric premises of the text and its visual representations more than others. I have argued elsewhere that the biblical story of David and Bathsheba invites a kind of voyeuristic complicity between the narrator and his assumed or ideal male readers (1993:196–97). The narrator not only controls our gaze at the naked or partially naked female body, he excuses it by letting us look without any blame being attached, which is more than he does for David. The text insinuates that David has no business looking, since it leads him to sin. He should be away at war with "all Israel" instead of at home taking a long siesta. By setting it up so that what we see through David's eyes becomes part of our judgment against David, the narrator gives us the moral high ground. This makes it possible for readers to gaze upon the naked woman without embarrassment, or at least without feeling guilty about it. Possible, but not inevitable, and harder, I think, for women for reasons I've tried to suggest.

The narrative strategy of allowing us to look guiltlessly and, if we wish, to blame the woman at the same time is the premise behind the story's representation in painting and film. In this essay, I have sought to

[36] Mulvey: 14–26; similarly, Kaplan: 23–35.

problematize our position as consumers of images, to draw attention to its gendered nature, and to make it difficult to view unreflectively both texts and images that invite our collusion in voyeurism. Resisting such textual and visual claims upon us does not mean advocating the removal of nudes from museums or the deletion of sex scenes from movies—though, personally, I would like to see more censorship of films. Nor does it mean "cleaning up" the Bible—which, interestingly, both films I have discussed attempt to do in other respects. Resisting, as I see it, involves interrogating these materials with the aid of an interpretive strategy that takes seriously the sexual politics of both representation and interpretation. Resisting involves being aware of what is at stake when we see texts and images in certain ways, and it means taking responsibility for our interpretations.

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BATHSHEBA GOES BATHING IN HOLLYWOOD: WORDS, IMAGES, AND SOCIAL LOCATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Word-image associations often surreptitiously control our reading. A case in point is the common interpretation and depiction of Bathsheba as bathing naked (2 Sam 11:2). This paper asks what nakedness and bathing have meant in Western culture and how changing meanings have related to changing visual depictions of Bathsheba, from medieval manuscript illuminations and reformation Bible illustrations to the 1951 "woman's film," *David and Bathsheba* (with Susan Hayward and Gregory Peck). It argues that critics and artists have, as a matter of course, seen mirrored in this famous biblical verse images of their own (protean) social locations.

It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. (2 Sam 11:2, NRSV)

FIGURE 1

> ...just as in the Susanna case, [the biblical story of Bathsheba's bath] itself mentions the woman's nakedness, the enticing effect it has on the voyeur, and the subsequent (attempt at) rape. The story is utterly doxic [sic], so much so that even serious and sophisticated scholarship fails to do justice to the details of the text. For the knowledge the viewer may have of the Biblical text is not innocent of later readings superimposed on it... [M]ost people have a vague "memory" that Bathsheba was responsible for her own rape...an interpretation...imposed on the story through an unacknowledged word-image interaction. (Bal: 225)

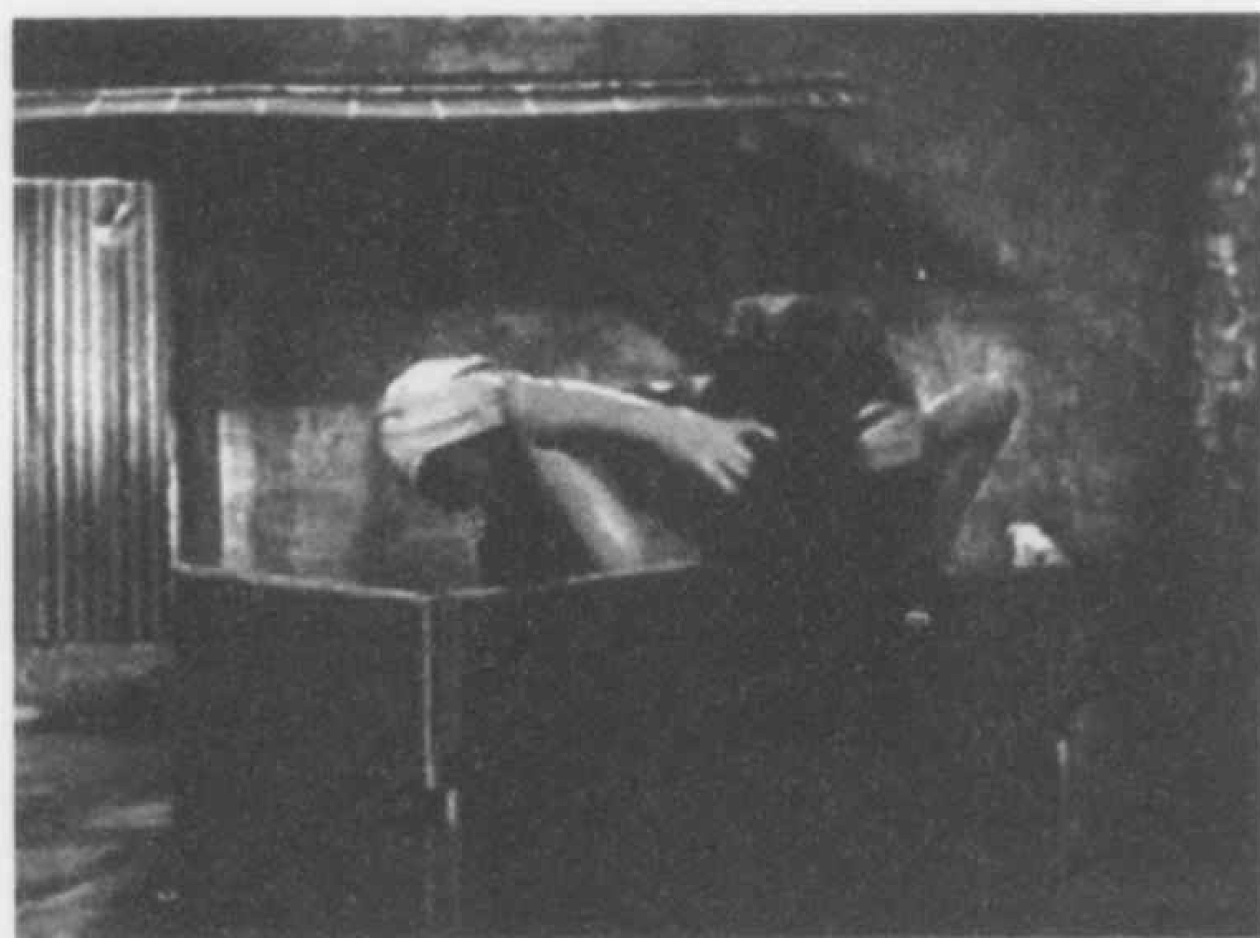


FIGURE 2

David and Bathsheba (figs. 1, 2)—produced by Darryl Zanuck, directed by Henry King, with a script by Philip Dunne—was a major money-winner for Fox in 1951, and won some Oscar nominations. Many critics, however, were unconvinced: "Susan Hayward is beautiful as Bathsheba," wrote *Movieland* at the time, "but she makes a rather wooden temptress...."

Nearly thirty years later, Eduardo Moreno echoed that judgement: "The ballyhoed sequence of Bathsheba's bath was brief and disappointing. She was not naked, of course, and the shots could have been closer" (69).

Commenting on the originating text in the Bible Cheryl Exum writes:

> The narrator controls our gaze; we cannot look away from the bathing woman but must consider her appearance: 'very beautiful.' And we presume she is naked, or nearly so; at any rate, we are forced to think about it, to disrobe or partially robe her mentally. Is not this gaze a violation, an invasion of her person as well as her privacy? Nakedness makes her more vulnerable, and being observed in such a private, intimate activity as bathing, attending to the body, accentuates the body's vulnerability to David's and our shared gaze. A woman is touching herself and a man is watching. (174–75)

Both Mieke Bal and Cheryl Exum raise fundamental questions of gender and the cultural preoccupation of looking at female bodies. Mieke Bal also draws attention to the importance of word-image interactions when reading texts and inad-

vertantly demonstrates the point: the text itself, she writes, mentions Bathsheba's nakedness. Actually the text is silent on this point. Nakedness is the product of a word-image association.

Nakedness, bathing, and the visualization of Bathsheba's bath: let me address these topics before coming back to the movie. I start by asking how others—artists, artisans—have construed this text.

Most of the medieval and many of the early Renaissance pictures of Bathsheba bathing are located in a religious space, notably a biblical or theological commentary, a psalter, a book of hours (a layperson's devotional book), or a Bible.

FIGURE 3

At Auxerre the space was the south portal of the cathedral (fig. 3). Margaret Miles has shown convincingly that, in general in the West, female nakedness came to be presented "as a symbol of sin, sexual lust, and dangerous evil. In depiction of the naked female body, interest in active religious engagement, exercise, and struggle is often subordinated to, or in tension with, the female body as spectacle" (82). Certainly there is no struggle here and there is spectacle. But did the thirteenth century gazer, whether male or female, simply assume that the half-naked body of Bathsheba signified sexual lust? Probably not, though that may have been a competing meaning.

FIGURE 4

Unlike Eve's naked body, symbol of the Fall, this body belongs in a pictorial sequence (in six parts at Auxerre) that issues in marriage to King David and enthronement as queen mother at

FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

the right hand of King Solomon. This looks like a story of triumph, not defeat. And indeed medieval exegetical tradition, textual as well as pictorial, determines the text's meaning along the lines of that larger plot. For example (fig. 4), Bathsheba is a type of the church, the bride of Christ (whom David regularly prefigures), and her bath is baptism in the manuscript illumination (a thirteenth century Bible Moralisée); her naked upper body in a tub (in the upper frame) matches the body in the baptismal font (in the lower frame), making the point visually, just as the accompanying text does verbally. Elsewhere, as in the Speculum Humanae Salvationis or the fifteenth century block books known today as the Biblia Pauperum, Bathsheba as queen mother is a type of Mary, crowned by Christ as Queen of Heaven. (The key text is 1 Kings 2:19, where Solomon, understood like David as a christological figure, has a throne brought for his mother to be seated at his side.) And what of Uriah? He is the devil, who stands between the church and her true spouse.

Yet at the same time a literal-moral reading of Bathsheba's body as a mirror of David's sexual lust is well known. The thirteenth century Psalter of St. Louis, for example (fig. 5), historiates its initial letter (the B of "Beatus vir," Psalm 1:1) with the bathing scene in the upper loop of the B and in the lower loop its moral, that is to say, its official meaning—David in penitence before the enthroned Lord. As usual, Bathsheba is angled so as to face the viewer and away from David, raising some question (as my students years ago were quick to observe) as to whether David's view or that of a

male viewer of the picture were the more important compositional consideration.

In medieval Books of Hours the scene usually appears with the first of the penitential psalms, Psalm 6: Domine ne in furore tuo arguas ("Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger") (figs. 6, 7). The text underscores the moral, though *which* moral may well have been a matter of difference. Not only is the female body made the site of David's sin, for a *woman* that cry of penitence could easily have been assimilated from David's voice to Bathsheba's and thus, as woman, to her own. What sinful disposition of her own dangerous body had she made, even if unawares? As it happens, Books of Hours were often commissioned by wealthy women, or given to them by their husbands or liege lords. The naked Bathsheba was composed to be looked at not only by men.

FIGURE 7

What did the bathing scene mean to men? Subliminally at least, the message is that the female body is dangerous; but also that the male gaze is dangerous. The alternative illustration for this penitential psalm in a Book of Hours is David kneeling in penitence (fig. 8). The Bible Moralisée makes the message of the dangerous gaze even more explicit (fig. 9).

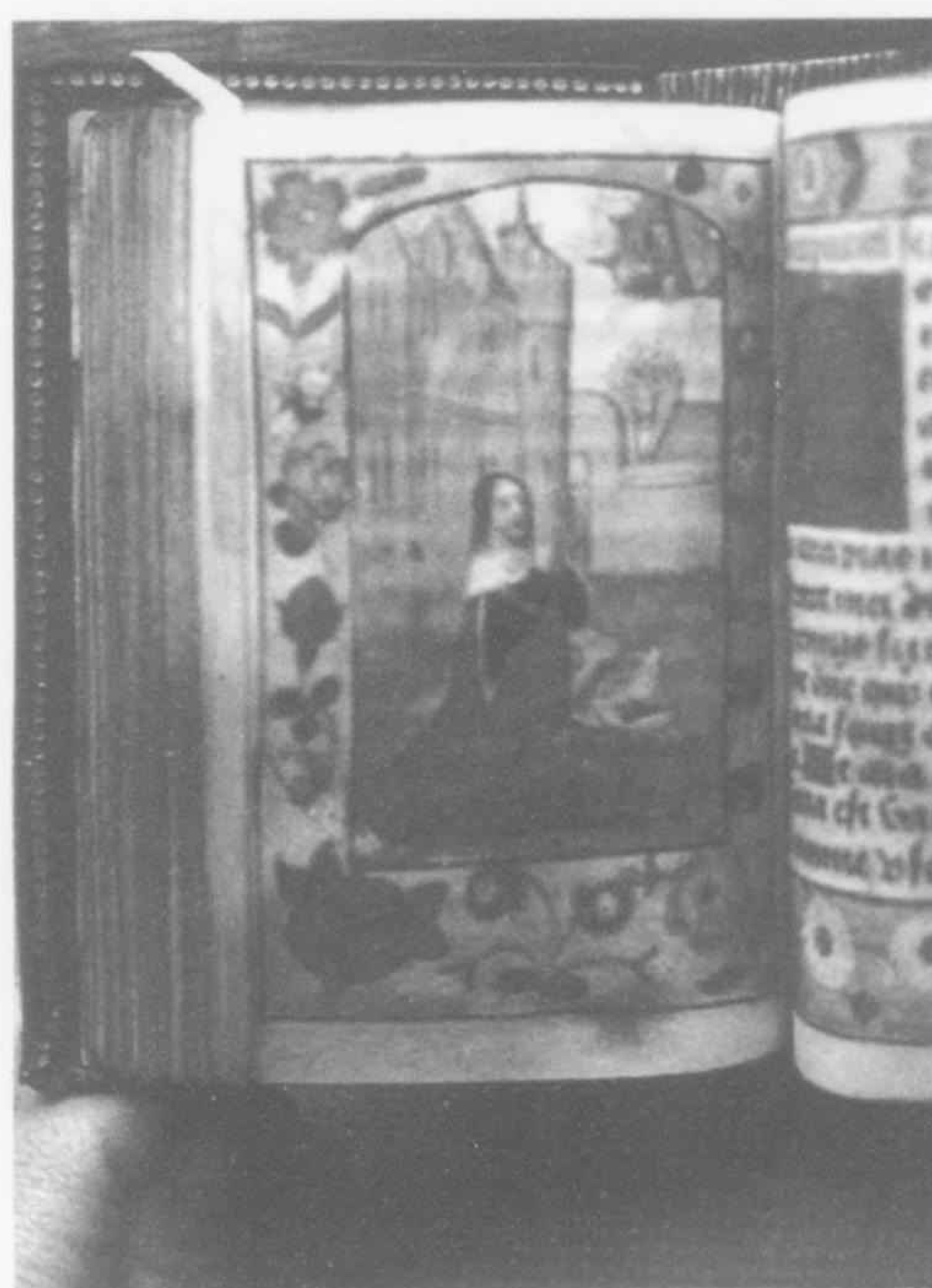


FIGURE 8

And if the naked body elicited a sexual response, the immediate context of the naked body (not to speak of the context of viewing the body in the course of devotions) must have

Figure 9
A medieval Bible Moralisée: The pictures and text relate (above) the biblical story and (below) its contemporary moral. The sin is lust, which enters the body through the man's eyes in the shape of small devils.

tended towards inscribing that response with a certain guilt—Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger! Hence, perhaps, the naked body is seen not as invitation to violate but as negative reinforcement against looking, let alone acting.

With Memling's free-standing painting near the end of the fifteenth century (fig. 10) the scene begins to be dissociated from the penitential (or other moralizing) context. It may be that such painting, with its loss of determining context, helped in the long term to undermine the use of these pictures in Bibles and other religious books. At any rate, towards the end of the fifteenth century, as printed Bibles begin to circulate and artists in both Italy and northern Europe produce increasingly naturalistic representations of the naked human body, Bathsheba begins to get dressed.

FIGURE 10

FIGURE 11

FIGURE 12

In many pictures of this period and throughout the the sixteenth century, including printed Bible illustrations (figs. 11, 13), we find her sitting in the open below the palace, with her feet in a pool, stream, or moat, no longer with her back to David as in the Books of Hours but either angled to face partly the viewer and partly David or with her back to the viewer.

Lucas Cranach in Berlin in the 1520s is amazingly restrained (fig.12), given his penchant elsewhere for gazing at female nakedness. Even more modest is the first complete Luther Bible (Wittenberg, 1534) (fig. 13). And this interpretation continues into Bibles of the seventeenth century (along with increasingly sporadic illustration of

FIGURE 13

the naked Bathsheba). By then, all pictures were disappearing from Bibles, not to reappear until around 1800. In the nineteenth century, when pictures for a time flourished in Bibles, there were no naked Bathshebas. Today, of course, in Bibles pictures are rare and naked Bathshebas unknown. So what happens around 1500 that there is such a marked change? We need now to consider the social construction of bathing.

Georges Vigarello argues that it is a mistake to equate bathing or washing and the social meaning of cleanliness (*Concepts of Cleanliness,* germinal for what follows). In most periods from the Middle Ages on, washing hands and (to a lesser extent) face and feet with water is considered part of hygiene. For other parts of the body it is a more complex matter.

FIGURE 14

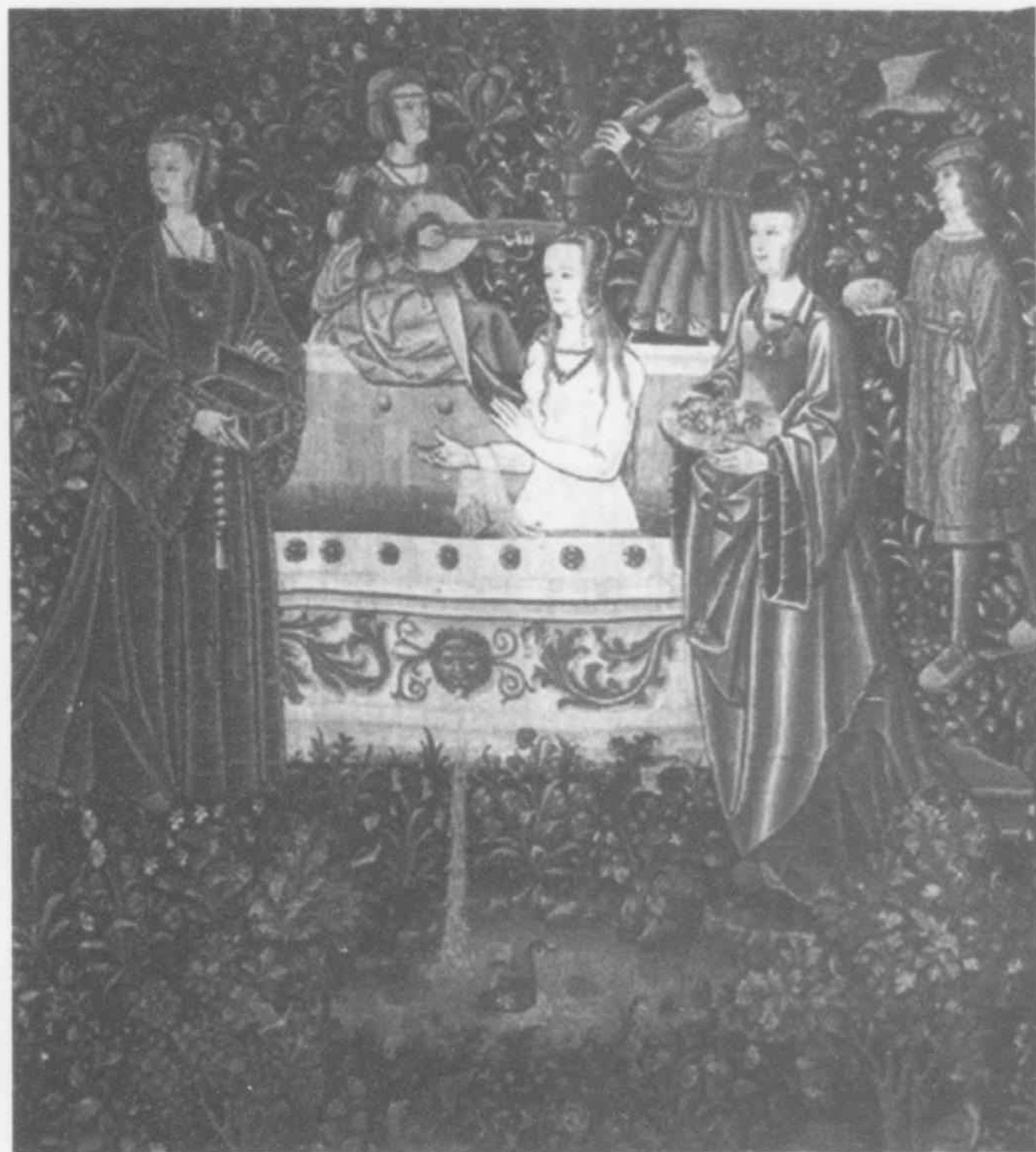


FIGURE 15

In the late Middle Ages bathing was largely understood as a social pleasure: water was above all for enjoyment, impropriety even (fig. 14) (see also Braunstein: 535–60, Régnier-Bohler:

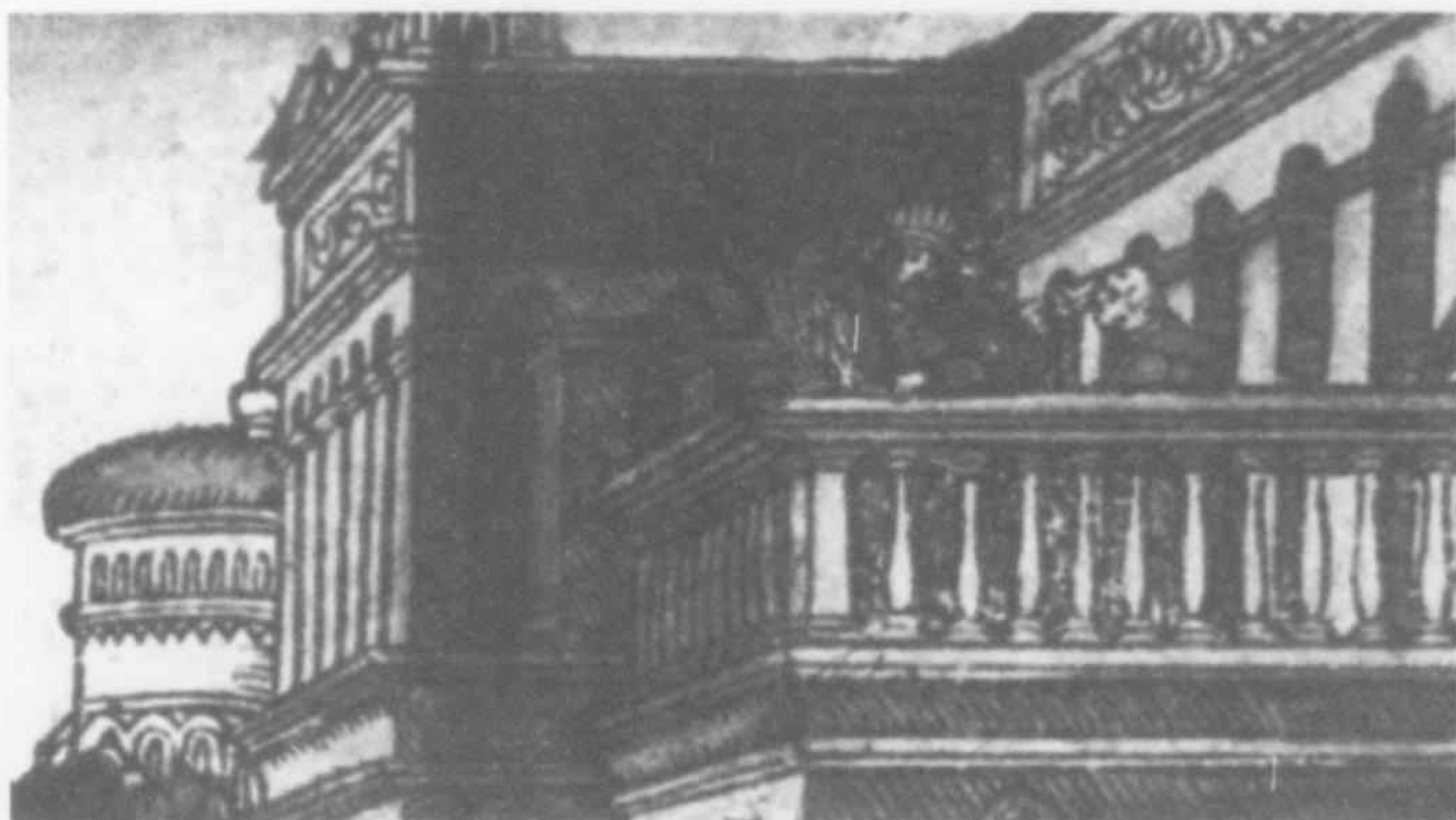
(358–73). Washing (for hygiene) was not the real point and so bathing was often not a solitary pastime. Thus, "in the Hôtel de Ville at Damme, "observes Vigarello, "people bathe in [the] same tub, while fellow guests and servants circulate about. Such mixing of sexes and age groups, nude, reveals a lost sociability" (29). To understand bathing thus is to understand the company—servants or social peers—that often attends the bather and so, too, the food being offered or the music being played—to understand, too, why the naked Bathshebas of the Books of Hours, for example, are doing no washing but rather simply "hanging out" and often eating (fig. 6; similarly in the tapestry, fig. 15). Such an understanding also suggests that nakedness in the context of bathing always had a potential public dimension (even though, as texts and pictures make clear, it was still possible to "spy" on a bather, depending upon the social acceptability/unacceptability of the gazer and the intention of the gaze).

Figure 16

But back to bathing as a specific meaning of nakedness. For most people in Europe the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries brought a drastic change. Plagues and, in the early 1500s, syphilis devastated the towns. Doctors protested against the bathhouses. Since it was universally known that water, especially warm water, can penetrate the skin, the bath-house (often with steam baths) (fig. 16) became an obvious site of the infiltration of pestilence into the body. Increasingly, too, the bath-houses had become associated in the view of many with dissipation and social disorder .

What, then, became of bathing? As washing, it could still mean hands, and perhaps face and feet. The dry cleanse—rubbing—served sometimes for other hygiene, and along with it (given wealth) a growing emphasis on perfume and powder. Above all, through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a clean linen shirt became the accepted sign of cleanliness.

Viewed within this changing social context the clothed Bathshebas of Cranach and the Luther Bible (detail, fig. 17) make perfect sense. What else would David be seeing, if he were watching from his palace a woman bathing/washing (German *waschen*, not *baden*), especially if that action is conceived, given the normal locations of washing, as being somewhere in the open and so visible from high up in a building? Hardly her hands for which she would have less need to come outdoors. Her feet in a pool or basin of a public water fountain, or stream, or the castle moat, perhaps?



My suggestion, therefore, is that these clothed, foot bathing, Bathshebas of northern Europe may be understood not only as a response to a Protestant theology that was increasingly literalist and moralist in its treatment of the Old Testament, but, like the vernacular Bibles in which the pictures are so often found, an attempt to make the Bible accessible and contemporary for "ordinary" people. This Bathsheba, then, is how she "really" would have looked.

FIGURE 17

What also interests me is that it is with this almost fully clothed Bathsheba that we first find a woman who gazes back boldly at the gazing king (figs. 18, 19). Do clothes empower her? Or does the artist, deprived of the conventional codes of the naked body, now attempt to signal female culpability, and woman's dangerous association with love, by the gaze? Whatever the case, the gaze constitutes an ambiguity. At some level of meaning it cannot do other than construct a new kind of subjectivity for Bathsheba. This is a strong woman, a *femme forte*, like the biblical

Judith (fig. 20). The bold stare suggests to me that she was finding a place in the heated controversy, the *Querelle des Femmes*, which grew during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries around "women's awakening consciousness that their status was not divinely ordained but man-made," and that their presumed inferiority was indeed debateable (Garrard: 138).

FIGURE 18

FIGURE 19

FIGURE 20

Bathsheba continues for at least another century to be depicted naked (occasionally the nakedness is deflected onto a servant), for the most part in work of Italian provenance or influence. If anything is being washed, it is usually her feet. And even the feet are not always depicted in the act of being washed. Indeed, in the mid-seventeenth century two of the finest paintings of Bathsheba's bath—pictures that strongly contest the usual male coding of the female body—remove her feet wholly from the water. So Rembrandt in the Netherlands (the version now in the Louvre).

So, too, Artemisia Gentileschi in Italy in the early 1640s (fig. 21). Artemisia's Bathsheba (like the Bathsheba of the Wittenberg Bible) gazes intensely away from David, towards her attendant, or the jewelry held out to her, or perhaps into her own thoughts. She leans against and at the same time supports a dark flat object: I believe it is a screen (fig. 22). It is placed precisely between her body and the gazing king in the far distance left. He can see only her shoulders and turned head—perhaps not even that, for the dark figure of a woman combing Bathsheba's hair interposes herself. This Bathsheba has the intensity of other women Artemisia painted—including Judith, Lot's daughters, and the artist herself.

FIGURE 21

Private bathing was largely an upper class event,

FIGURE 22

when it happened (which was infrequently), and even by the early eighteenth century it was still not a solitary matter. Yet much was changing. From the 1730s we see the beginnings of an onrush of privacy, first in the great houses as wash-rooms and closets are incorporated, then increasingly in the houses of the bourgeoisie and with increasing specialization. At the same time, as Vigarello shows (ch. 8), the understanding of the body was being completely rethought: now it was known to have its own inner resources which needed vigorous encouragement, by cold bathing, for example. Washing the whole body began to be equated with cleanliness and "hygiene." And with the equation came increasing attention to all the details of the body, all its nooks and crannies.

But how to bathe, ever more "intimately," and be private, unseen, and modest at the same time? The nineteenth century saw this dilemma elaborated (fig. 23):

> Prudery was more directly at issue when it came to the undressing, and above all the touching, required when washing was for cleanliness. Both what had to be done and what was seen were suspect. Drying the genital organs, for example, was problematic. 'Shut your eyes', suggested Mme de Celmart [writing for women in 1833], 'until you have finished.' (Vigarello: 175)

FIGURE 23

By the late 1800s the bourgeois bathroom was understood in terms of absolute privacy. It became "a sanctuary into which no-one, not even a loved husband, in particular a loved husband,

should penetrate," to borrow Mme Staffe's description of 1892. A private space, to be entered alone. The door to be locked:

> The insistence on privacy had probably never been so clearly demonstrated, and the history of cleanliness never associated to such a degree with that of a space; an ever more private place was created, where one attended to oneself without witnesses.... (Vigarello: 215–16)

The invention of privacy and the pursuit of hygiene brings us into the twentieth century and back to the bathing scene in our movie.

Strikingly, given the understanding of privacy that Americans had inherited by the mid-twentieth century, we see attendant women as witnesses, looking and touching even (fig. 24). Yet this feature of the scene is not finally, I think, at odds with contemporary (1951) mores, an element of convention-disturbing exotica designed to conjure an ancient place and time. Rather we might observe that, like the occasional forebear in

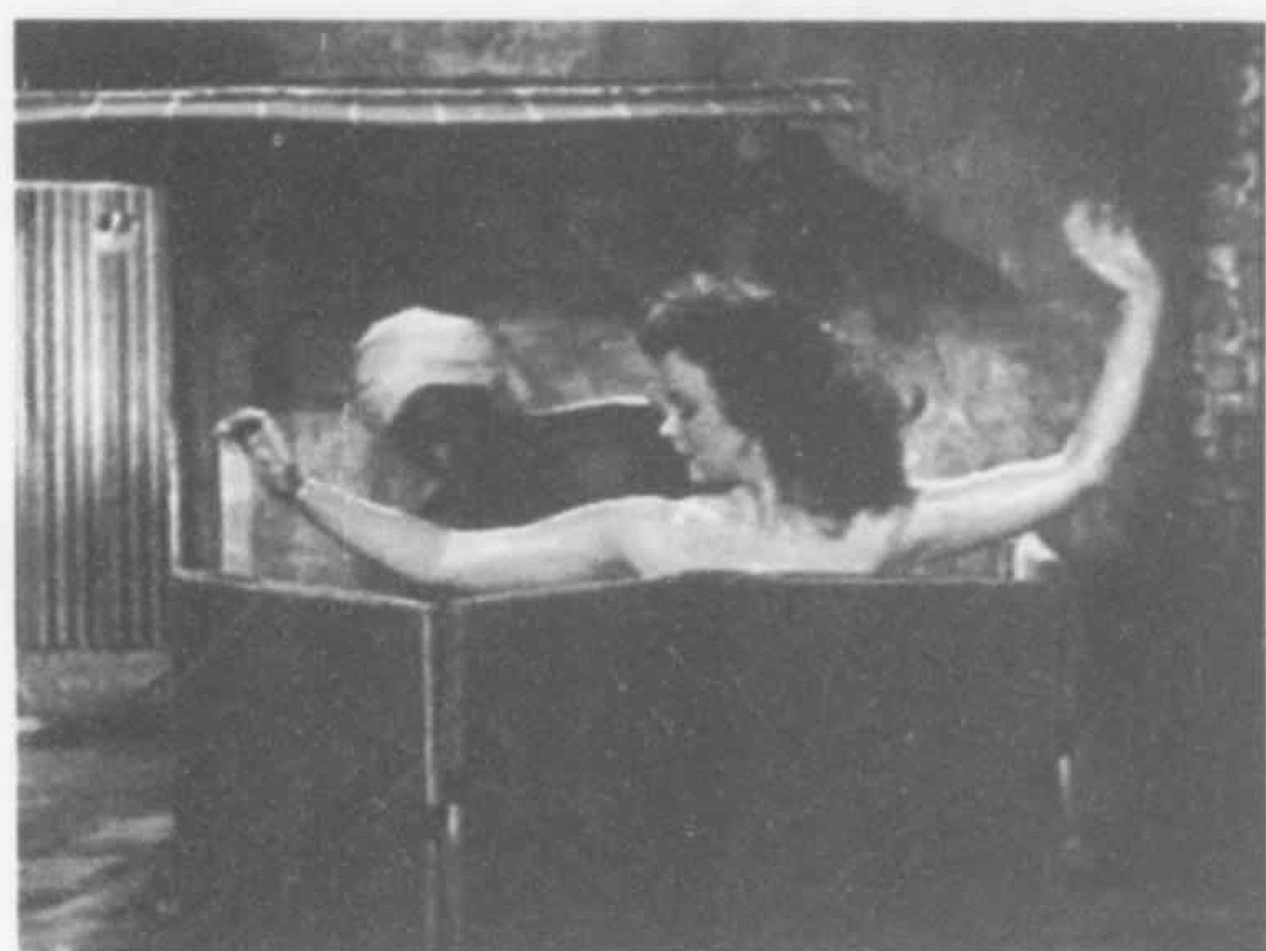


FIGURE 24

this scene (figs. 25, 27) or others in the same genre (fig. 26), these women are black. So were large numbers of domestic servants in the United States in 1951. Perhaps because the race/class hierarchy of 1951 America coded them as powerless and socially inferior, these two black attendants could be understood to be present purely as functionaries rather than intimates. Hence they need not disturb too profoundly the moral sensibilities of movie-going Americans (perhaps particularly women) concerning the witnessing of naked bathing and women washing other women (in a space distinct from that of illness and old age).

In the same manner, Emilie, Marquise du Châtelet (and mistress of Voltaire), felt no embarrassment in 1746 as she undressed before her valet, Longchamp, and sat naked in the tub as he poured the water and kept the temperature constant. "The conditions of mistress and valet were too far apart for decency to be threatened" (Vigarello: 93). (Nevertheless, by

FIGURE 25

FIGURE 26

the end of the same century the understanding of privacy had changed sufficiently that only women attended such high-born women in their baths .)

While the movie scene's dominant image is of the head, shoulders, and arms above the screen, two other main images from the past are repeated as a frame (fig. 28): at the beginning, a glimpse of a white (but not

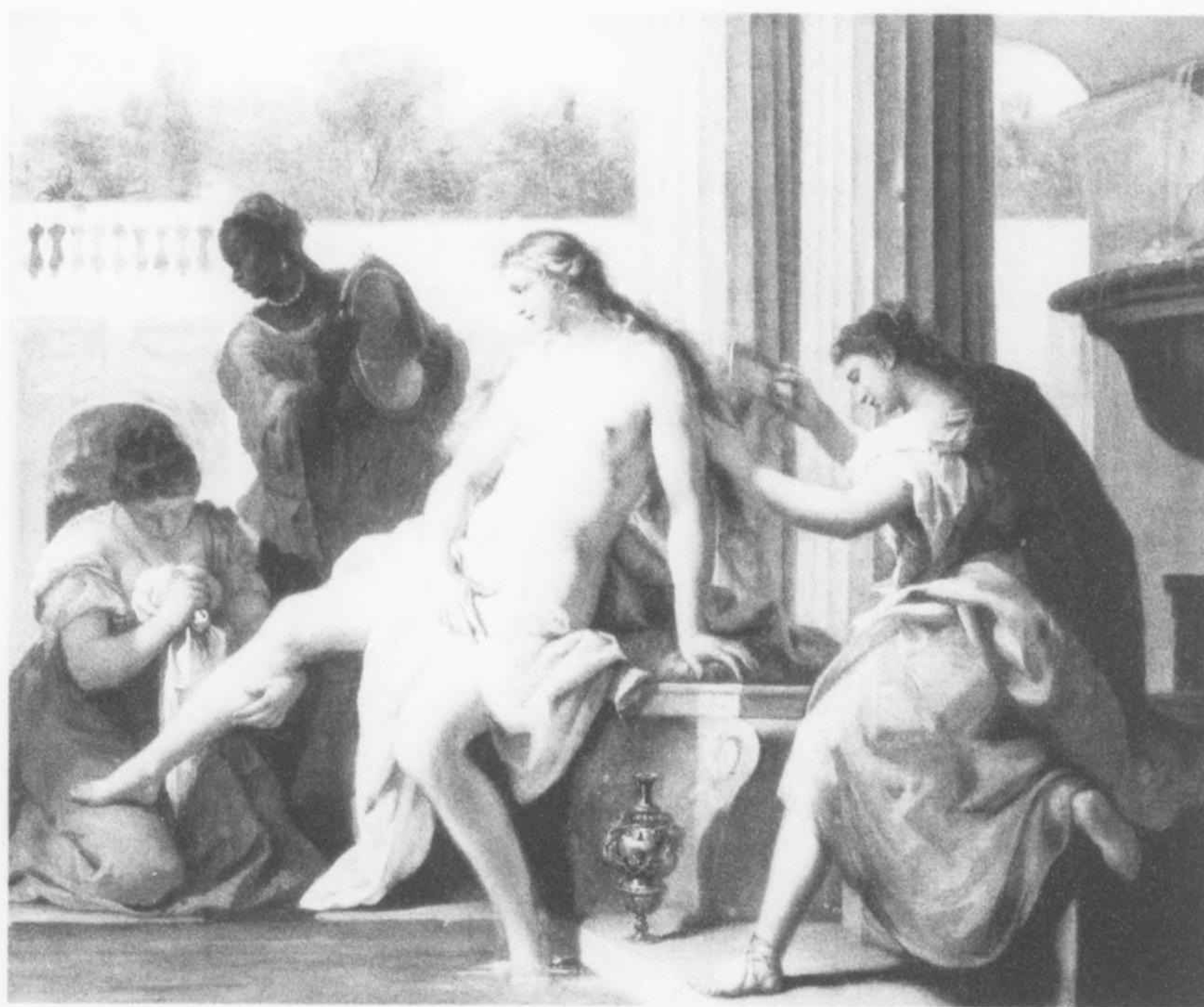


FIGURE 27

actually naked) body, from the back, and the draped figure at the end, the naked body signaled in this case by the back-lighting. But the dominant image *is* the figure behind the screen. A very solid screen. Of course, the resulting pose conveys its own codes (fig. 29), as the designer of this children's book of Bible stories knew well (fig. 30). Yet I am struck by the solidity of that screen in the early '50s when its analogue is plainly the semi-translucent (or semi-opaque!) glass shower screen. Certainly the Hays rules prohibited any lingering shots of a naked body. Yet, as other "biblical" movies show, claiming biblical warrant was a proven excuse for pushing the envelope of sex, violence, and scanty costume. Here nakedness could surely have been more adventurously conjured. This screen is remarkably solid. And the male critics were bored!

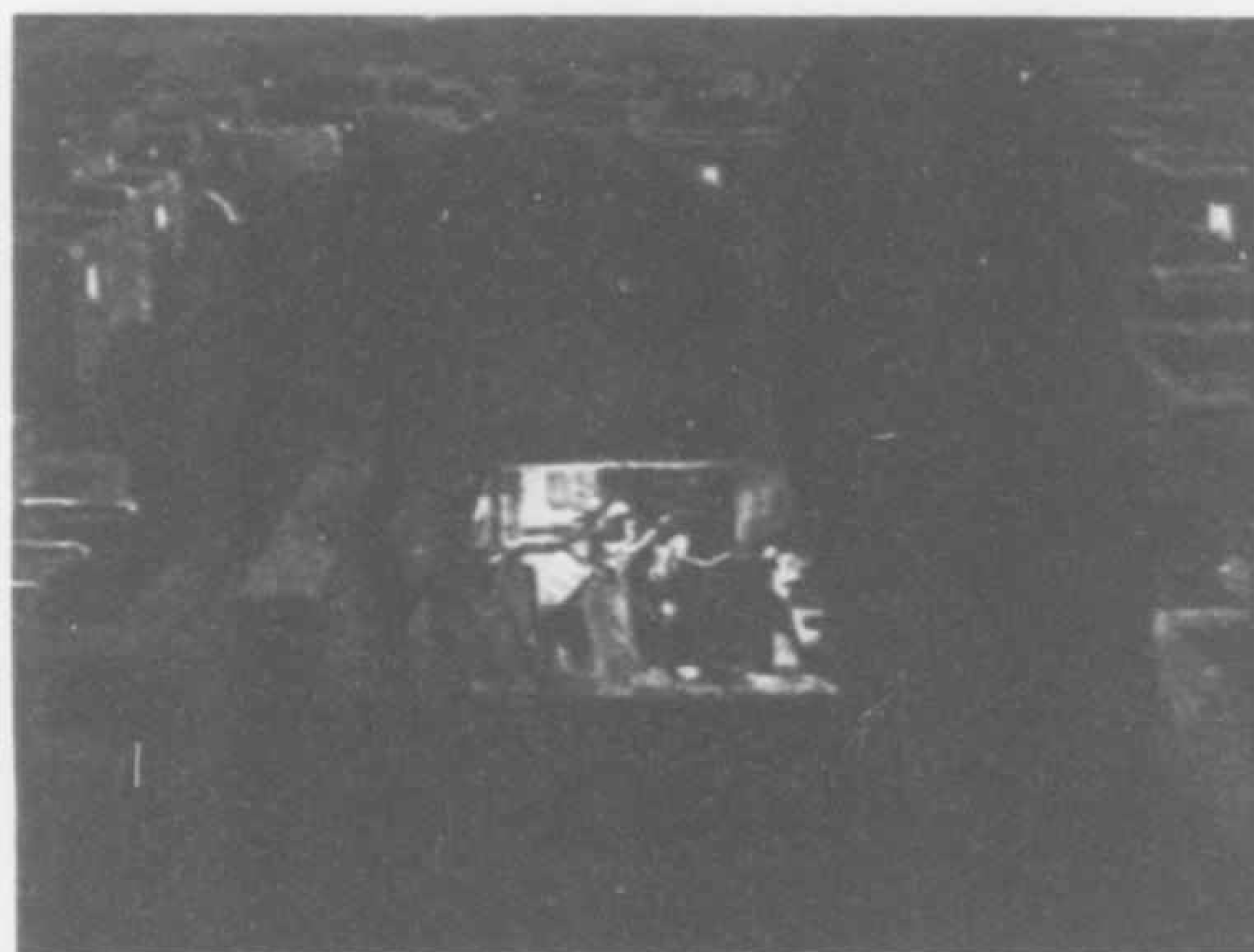


FIGURE 28

FIGURE 29

27

David's Sin

2 Samuel 11—12; 1 Chronicles 20

DURING the war against the Ammonites, David stayed in Jerusalem. One afternoon he got up from his nap and walked around on the flat roof of his palace. He saw a woman bathing in her house, and she was so beautiful David sent a messenger to find out who she was.

"That's Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite," was the answer.

FIGURE 30

"Slow and tedious," comments one critic of the movie. Yet it made money and on any reasonable estimate probably the majority of that came from women viewers. Did they view the film in the same light as the male reviewers? What might they have seen as they appropriated David's gaze? (fig. 31).

In terms of genre, biblical movies are generally considered in the category of epic (fig. 32). Action, spectacle, and great public events are their stock in trade. This movie, however, has at its center David's world weariness, his isolation from his family, cynicism about religion, and his search for meaning. It is a movie, in other words, about a man's mid-life crisis. This context helps delineate a role for Bathsheba: she is the Other Woman who enables his recovery of both love and faith. Here, then, is a domestic love story centering around a searching man and a strong woman. In 1951 that places it in an interesting relationship with a family of movies that critics call "the woman's film." In such movies Susan Hayward had made her reputation.

FIGURE 31

Throughout the '40s, during World War II and its aftermath, and into the early '50s until the advent of television soap operas, a large number of movies were made expressly to meet what producers understood to be primarily a market of women.

> The narrative structure [of the Woman's Film] revolves around the female protagonist's quest for happiness, a quest played out thematically around issues of sexuality, marriage, the family, and independence. What the majority of these female protagonists quickly discover, however, is that in the patriarchal society of their diegetic world, there is no place for an active, independent woman....[O]nly through renunciation and sacrifice [do] they achieve their ultimate goal; indeed, have any hope of achieving it.... Directed to women, but rarely by them, these films entertained, superficially, while beneath the surface they laid out rigid guidelines which informed woman as to the correct path to take, the right choice to make. (Morrison: 49)

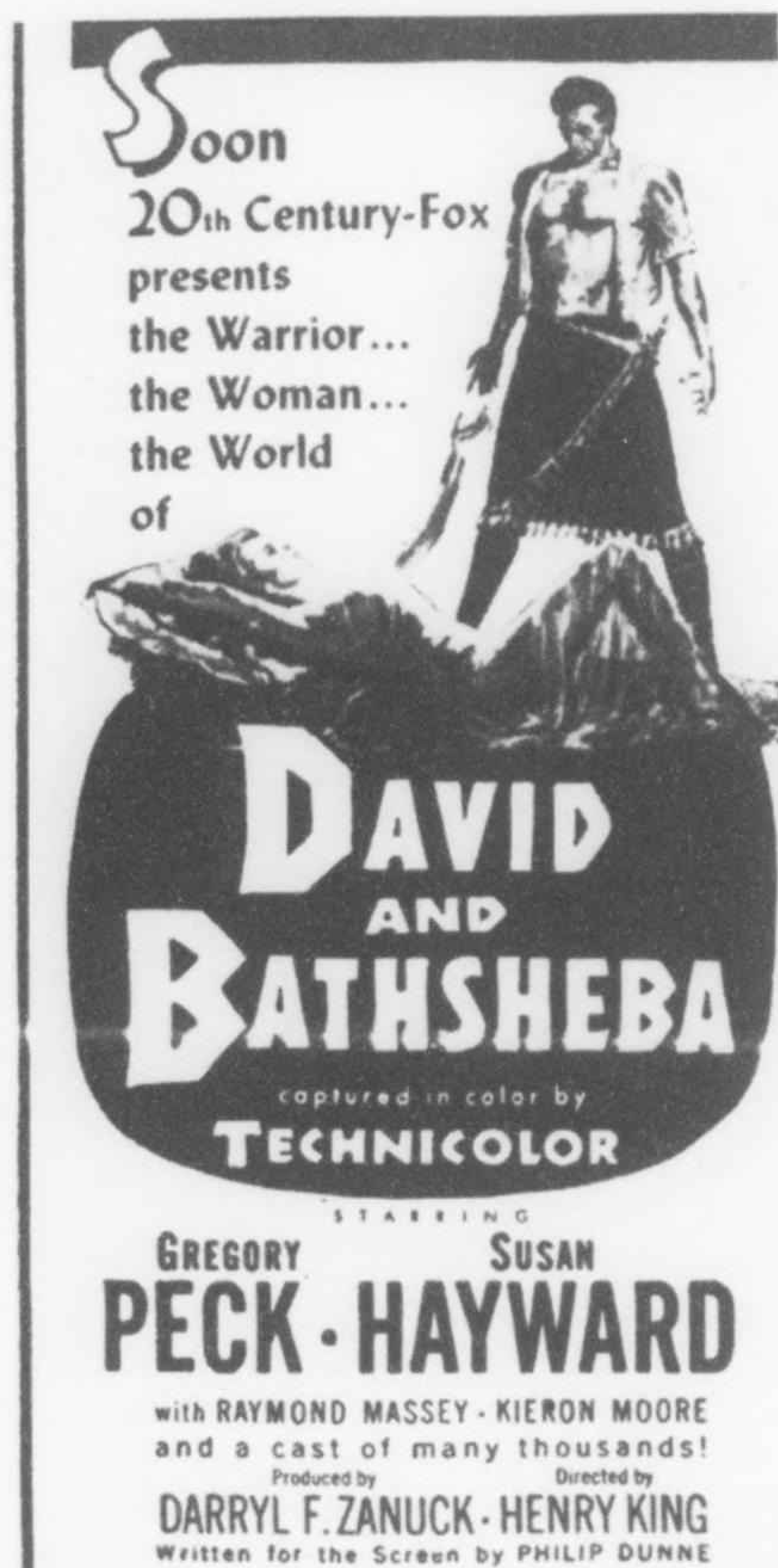


FIGURE 32

One of the sub-genres of the Woman's Film is the "love story": both central to but also marginal to the discourse of classical Hollywood cinema. It is marginal because it purportedly "speaks to" a female spectator. Thus when confronted by the love story, the little boy, as a sign of his masculinity, averts his gaze. Not surprisingly, the love story "is frequently consigned to the ghetto of film history," as Mary Ann Doane puts it (96). (Fig. 33)

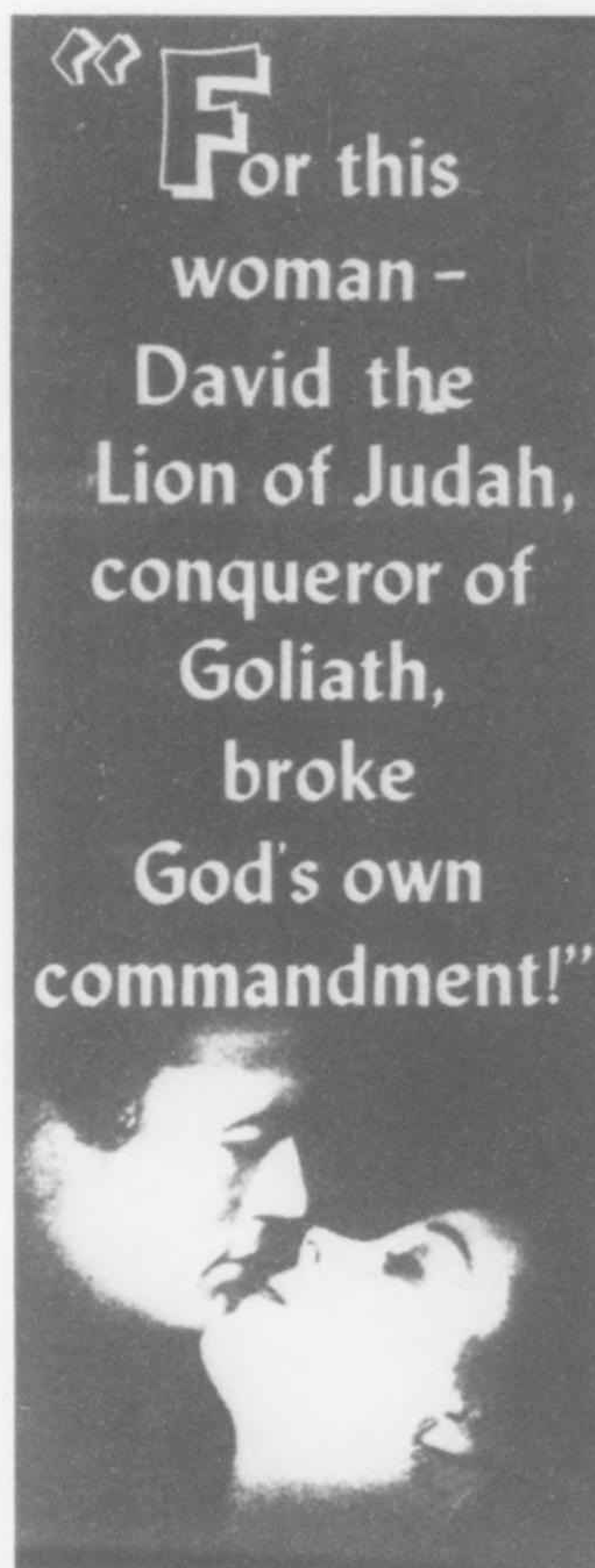


FIGURE 33

Now although Bathsheba is not strictly the protagonist, she plays a pivotal role without which the script would collapse. While her search for happiness is subordinated, structurally, to David's, it is not eclipsed as a source of interest or motivation in the plot. She is depicted as desiring and being in love with him. Yet her refusal to countenance the murder of Uriah, her rebuke to David when he insists on proceeding with the marriage (why had he left her alone for so long if he truly loved her?), and her stony faced acquiescence (fig. 34) all speak of struggle within her. Sexuality, marriage, the family, and independence are all thematic issues.

Conventional, too, in this movie is the "woman's film" theme of

FIGURE 34

FIGURE 35

waiting. But even more striking is the film's use of another characteristic of the genre, namely the identity of the male protagonist as an artist (fig. 35). The love

story has a way of feminizing the male, argues Mary Ann Doane, and art is "the only culturally sanctioned and simultaneously 'feminized' activity" (97). David's rediscovery of his harp, and through it his identity, marks the final turning point of the movie. David is not only king but God's musician (fig. 36).

FIGURE 36

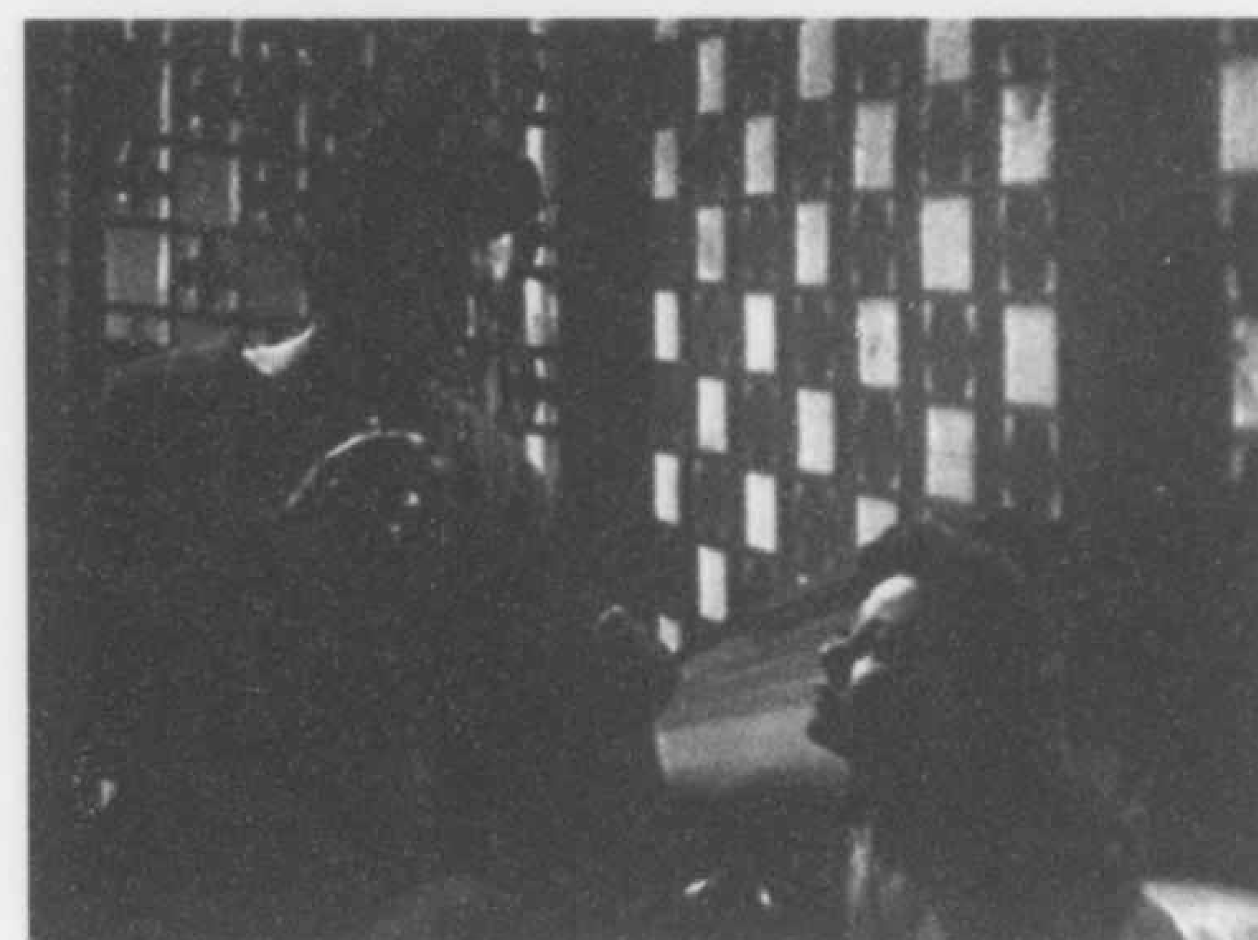


FIGURE 37

Of signal importance for the resolution of the plot, the discovery is engineered by Bathsheba (fig. 37). So we end with Bathsheba as St. Cecilia. Or simply Bathsheba as the wife (as she is now) every man of creative genius in a mid-life crisis needs.

But there is something odd about this movie which has to do with the biblical text which parents it as much as the particular manner of

its construction. Normally in the Woman's Film, the woman's desire cannot be sustained—she must renounce it or be subject to filmic sanctions: separation from her lover (often by her self-sacrifice) or even death. Indeed, in the movie, Nathan, Michal and David's neglected sons demand just that—death for her for adultery. This does not happen, however, because in this particular film the biblical text which parents it insists on the marriage both happening and continuing. (This is the same plot pressure that shapes the typological scenes of Bathsheba's enthronement at Auxerre and elsewhere; cf. fig. 38). At the same time, the film's orientation around its male protagonist creates a pressure for a happy ending in the man's interest— having found his identity again how could we see David left in the only other possible solution, namely stuck in yet another unhappy marriage (on the model of his marriage to Michal)? So the movie ends not only with the miracle of the rain that relieves the drought, but with the miracle of David rededicated to his lover-wife. Thus they walk hand-in-hand, happily into the rain-drenched sunrise (fig. 39).

FIGURE 38

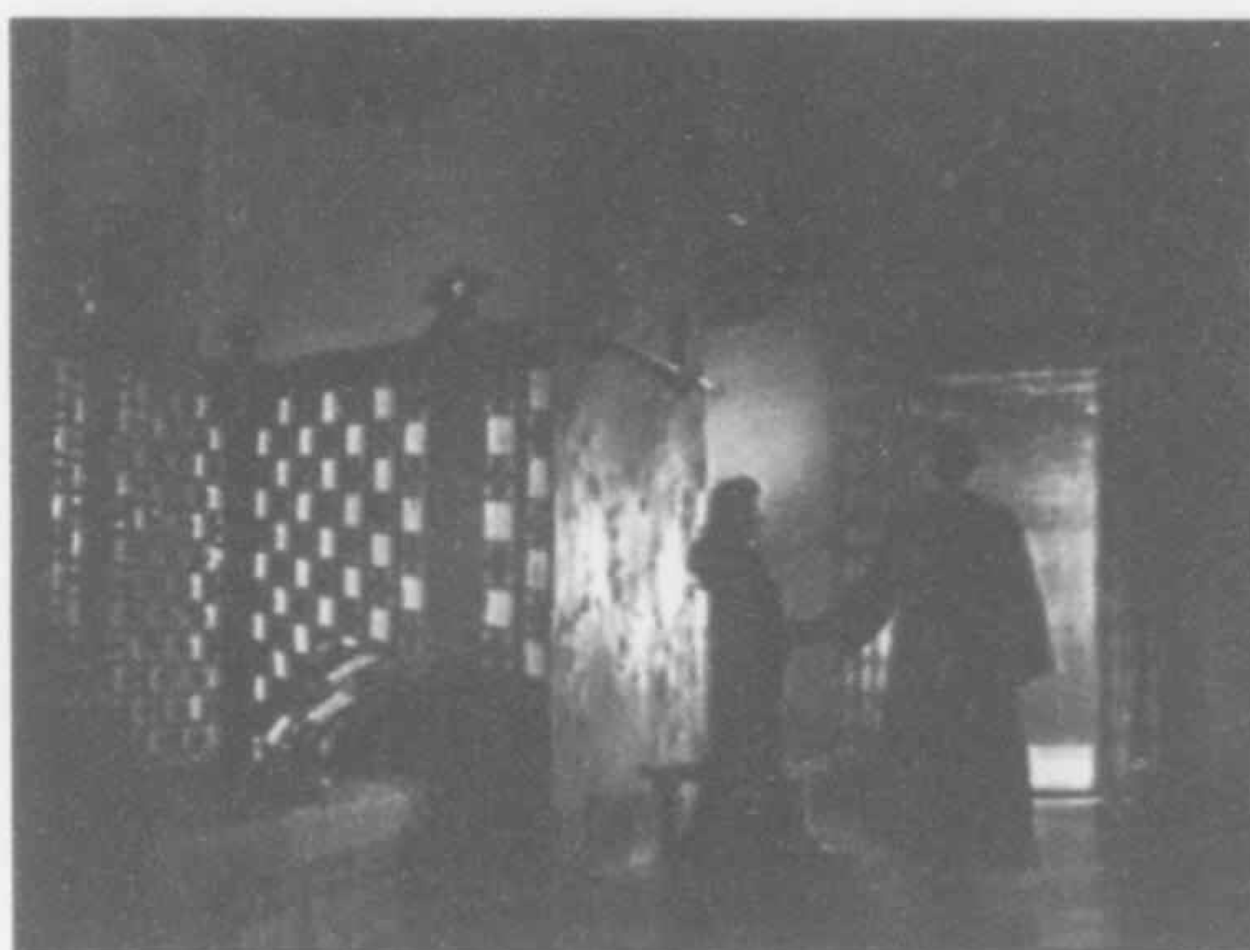


FIGURE 39

So she gets away with it!

Not only that. The movie surfaces some words about women's subjectivity that must have been disturbing to some men in 1951.

The scene is between David and Uriah (fig. 40), whom the king has summoned from the battlefield upon learning that Bathsheba is pregnant. David invites the soldier to speak

FIGURE 40

with him alone. After assuring David that Joab, the general, is confident of success, Uriah seeks permission to return to the field. David replies that there will be dispatches for him to take back and suggests that he might desire to stay in Jerusalem longer. "My only desire is to serve my king," replies Uriah. "I might believe that," observes David, "but you have a wife."

> U: My wife is nothing sire, beside my duty....
>
> D: A woman does not always share her husband's devotion to duty. Have you ever tried to think of things from her point of view?
>
> U: No sire.
>
> D: Well supposing her wishes and yours come into conflict?
>
> U: A woman's wishes cannot conflict with her husband's, sire. That is the law.
>
> D: The law. The law can only control what we do, not what we think. What does your wife think, Uriah?
>
> U: I do not know, sire.
>
> D: Is it possible that you believe she does not think or feel? A woman is flesh and blood, Uriah, like us. Perhaps even more so because we give her so little to think of but matters of the flesh. In all our history, only a handful of women have been permitted to write their names beside the men. Miriam, Deborah, Jael, one or two more. A woman's occupation is her husband and her life is her love. But if her husband rejects her love, if he puts another love before it, if he denies her the only meaning her life can have, is it not understandable that she seeks a meaning for it elsewhere?

Something is happening in this movie that is exploiting the fundamental ambiguities of the social and ideological forces that created the genre in the first place. As women during the war moved rapidly into the workforce outside the home (the "Rosie the Riveter" phenomenon) their economic power grew, as did their perceptions of their capabilities as independent agents in many other areas of public and private life. This was a critical growth point in the history of women's subjectivity in this country and in the West. The Woman's Film encoded the tension between the emerging desire of women as subjects—and women were willing to pay to see themselves as such—and the latent anxiety of men as subjects over the impending collapse of their privileged status.

FIGURE 41

I wonder, then, if the bathing scene may not be viewed as an emblem of the ambiguities of the film,

FIGURE 42

the genre, and the social order of the early fifties as it related to women. Does Bathsheba beckon David or her women viewers (fig. 41)? Does she beckon at all? As she turns, her eyes seem fleetingly to meet the camera. Is her gaze towards David, or the viewer? Or nowhere in particular—her own space? What about that solid screen? Does it invite the male gaze behind it to contemplate her nakedness? Or does it mark off her body as her own to give? Her boundary—to be crossed at her choice? Does the screen signal that her body is a source of vulnerability, needing protection? Or does it constitute a shield for battle, signalling that the body behind it has a power over the man (fig. 42)? If so, what (given the movie's outcome) is the moral nature of that power? Is she a victim? A survivor? A schemer? A *femme fatale*? A *femme forte*? All or none of the above? Can she slip out from behind the viewer's labels as easily as she can slip out from behind the screen?

In the last analysis I would not argue that these ambiguities are finely balanced. The patriarchal rules are still in place at the end. Certainly the messages are mixed. Even the speech for women's liberation has to be spoken by the man. Yet it is spoken, self-serving as it may sound on David's lips. *And* Susan Hayward plays no stereotyped steamy "seductress" as many male critics desired but instead she brings dignity to a character of multiple dimensions (figs. 43–45):

FIGURE 43

> D: Better go....Uriah is a fool. When I looked on you from my terrace tonight, I knew that every future moment spent away from you would be a moment lost. Yet he has found only six days for you in seven months. The perfume of his beloved is the stink of war. Does he think that a man was made only to

FIGURE 44

> know the agony of battle? Does he call that manhood? Has he no blood, no heart?... Be thankful that I'm not Pharaoh. At least I can console myself with the thought that your modesty matches your beauty.
>
> B: Perhaps you would prefer truth to modesty, sire. Before you went away, I used to watch you every evening as you walked on your terrace. Always at the same hour, always alone. Today I heard you had returned.
>
> D: And you knew that I...
>
> B: You'd be on your terrace tonight? Yes. I had heard that never had the king found a woman to please him. I dared to hope I might be that woman.
>
> D: Why are you telling me this now? Why not before?
>
> B: Because, first I had to know what was in your heart. If the law of Moses is to be broken, David, let us break it in full understanding of what we want from each other.

FIGURE 45

A character of multiple dimensions: A woman who desires, perhaps initiates and certainly collaborates in an affair, makes love, refuses to harm her husband, calls the king on his failings, entertains fear, despair, hope, and happiness. A mundane list (not that of Strauss's *Salomé*, whose dance music, in pastiche, accompanies the bath). A Woman's Film that

was truly a Man's Film would have done a much better job of making her the "scarlet woman," the *femme fatale*. And the screen would not have been so solid.

To bathe, to take a bath, to wash, waschen, baden, bagno, baigner, laver, lavare, louein, viptein, plunein, rahats—what's in a word?

> It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman washing; the woman was very beautiful.

Now what do you see?

Note: This paper was first delivered, with video and slides, to the Gender and Cultural Criticism Consultation at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 21, 1994. It draws on materials relating to the figure of David that I have been exploring over the past twenty years, helped considerably (especially in locating pictures) by Elisabeth Kunoth-Leifels' monograph. As I trust is obvious, it owes a large debt to Georges Vigarello's book for its present conceptual framework. My thanks go also to Robin Hutchins at TCU who first drew my attention to the pertinence of the Woman's Film to my subject. A fuller (and more fully documented) version of the paper, which also addresses the question of what (little) is known of the practice and meaning of bathing in ancient Israel, is forthcoming in my book, *Goliath's Head: Sex, Politics, and the Authority of the Bible* (Routledge, London).

CREDITS:

Figs. 1, 2, 24, 28, 29, 31, 34, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45: *David and Bathsheba,* Twentieth Century Fox, 1951; Directed by Henry King, produced by Darryl F. Zanuck, written for the screen by Philip Dunne.

Fig. 3: Detail from the south portal, Auxerre Cathedral, 13th cent.

Fig. 4: Bible Moralisée, 13th cent. (Oxford, Bodleian Lib., 270b).

Fig. 5: Psalter of Saint Louis, 1253–70 (Paris, Bibl. nat., ms. lat. 10525).

Fig. 6: Book of Hours, 15th cent. (Musée Condée, Chantilly).

Fig. 7: Book of Hours, French, 15th cent.

Fig. 8: Book of Hours, 15th cent. (Bib. mun., Amiens, ms. 203).

Fig. 9: Bible Moralisée, 15th cent. (Paris, Bibl. nat., Cod. Vindobonensis, ms. fr. 166).

Fig. 10: Hans Memling, c. 1485 (Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie).

Fig. 11: German Bible, published in Nürnberg by Anton Koberger, 1483.

Fig. 12: Lucas Cranach, the elder, 1526 (Wiesbaden, Neues Museum.).

Figs. 13, 17: First complete Luther Bible, published in Wittenberg, 1534.

Fig. 14: Codex de Sphaera, Modena, 15th cent.

Fig. 15: "La vie seigneuriale: le bain"; tapestry, 15th cent. (Paris, Musée de Cluny).

Fig. 16: Albrecht Dürer, early 16th cent.

Fig. 18: German printed Bible, 16th cent.

Fig. 19: Details from two German printed Bibles of the first half of the 16th cent. In each case, David is seated at a large open window across the moat/stream from Bathsheba who gazes directly at him.

Fig. 20: Judith as femme forte, from Lescalopier, Les Predications, engraved by Abraham Bosse, 1645. [In Garrard 1989:169.]

Figs. 21, 22: Artemisia Gentileschi, Naples, early 1640s.

Fig. 23: Paris, Bibl. nat. [In Chartier 1989:188.]

Fig. 25: Cornelisz van Haarlem, Netherlands, 1594 (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum).

Fig. 26: Jean-Léon Gérôme, France, early 1880s (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Mildred Anna Williams Collection).

Fig. 27: Sebastiano Ricci, Venice, c. 1708–11 (?) (Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest).

Fig. 30: From Eve B. MacMaster, *God's Chosen King* (Scottdale, PA, and Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1983); illustrated by James Converse; p. 144.

Figs. 32, 33: Newspaper/magazine advertisements, 1951.

Fig. 35: German, early 1970s.

Fig. 36: Detail from the north rose window, Chartres Cathedral, 13th cent.

Fig. 38: Detail (Solomon and Bathsheba seated at his right [sic] hand, as type of Christ and Mary Queen of Heaven) from a typological scene in a Biblia Pauperum, 15th. cent.

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CALLING THE SHOTS: DIRECTING SALOMÉ'S DANCE OF DEATH*

Alice Bach
Stanford University

ABSTRACT

One of the female figures who most completely engaged the fin de siècle male imagination was Salomé, whose image, like that of the Sphinx, has become embedded in our imaginations so effectively that we can recall representations in the verbal, visual, and musical arts. In spite of her shadowy appearance in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, one can create a full-bodied, dangerous Salomé through the examination of these fin de siècle and popular cinematic representations of the mysterious dancing girl who became an icon of seduction. In this paper, I shall compare the biblical text, in which Salomé is not even named, with the cinematic versions in which she is constructed as a major biblical virago.

Actually there is no story for which the question
as to how it continued would not be legitimate.
The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to take
the smallest step beyond that limit at which
he invites the reader to a divinatory realization
of the meaning of life by writing "Finis."

Walter Benjamin

During and after the first waves of feminist theories, in the second half of the nineteenth century, a flood of visual and verbal images were produced that focused upon the dark, dangerous, voluptuous, and viraginous woman: "sharp-teethed, devouring Sphinxes, Salomés, and Delilahs, biting, tearing, murderous women." According to intellectual historian Peter Gay, "no century, depicted woman as vampire, as castrator, as killer, so consistently, so programmatically, and so nakedly as the nineteenth" (Gay: 101–7).[1] Gay constructs the era as a dialectic of action

*A fuller analysis of the cultual history of Salomé appears in my book *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge, 1997).

[1] Bordo points out that this period shows an obsession with the medical control of female sexuality. "Treatment for excessive sexuality and sexual excitement included placing leeches on the womb, clitoridectomy, and removal of the ovaries (also recommended for troublesomeness, eating like a ploughman, erotic tendencies, persecution mania, and simple cussedness)" (161).

and reaction in which women's demands shape male anxieties and, conversely, these male anxieties encouraged further social and political activity by women (Gay: 207). One of the female figures who most completely engaged the fin de siècle male imagination was Salomé, whose image has become embedded in our imaginations so effectively that we can recall representations in the verbal, visual, and musical arts. In spite of her shadowy appearance in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, one can create a full-bodied, dangerous Salomé through the examination of these fin de siècle and popular cinematic representations of the mysterious dancing girl who became an icon of seduction. In this paper, I shall compare the biblical text, in which Salomé is not even named, with the cinematic versions, in which she is constructed as a major biblical virago.

The Pre-text of Salomé

While the biblicist may well have read the Gospel versions of the so-called Salomé narrative before considering other cultural appropriations of the story, a reader not as conversant with the Bible may well have read the Gospel accounts after seeing a Hollywood version of the story, after reading Wilde's *Salomé,* or Flaubert's *Heródiade,* after attending a performance of the Strauss opera. Regardless of the order of one's reading, what is immediately apparent is the difference between the story as reported by the biblical writers and the later literary, musical, and visual interpretations of the figure of Salomé.

Salomé in the Gospel accounts is an unnamed young woman, daughter of Herodias and Philip, step-daughter of Philip's brother Herod.[2] The character of the young girl, later called Salomé, exists narratively for only a few verses in the Gospels of Mark and Matthew. The name Salomé appears only twice within the New Testament, in Mark

---

[2] The complicated Herodian genealogy is not important to this article. Briefly, Herod Antipas was married to the daughter of Aretas IV, king of Nabatea, until Herod fell in love with Herodias, who was married to his half-brother Philip. Herodias agreed to marry Herod Antipas after he divorced his first wife. She returned to her father Aretas, who subsequently went to war against Antipas, soundly defeating him in battle. A thorough investigation of the figure of John the Baptist and his relation to the reign of Herod Antipas is found in Webb.

For most of the significant early Christian references to Salomé, see Smith. For a discussion on the identity of this Salomé—is she both disciple and sister of Jesus, or are there two figures sharing the name—see Bauckham; Smith. Bauckham provides detailed Patristic references in his effort to correct Smith's mistaken conflation of the sister of Jesus and the second Salomé, whom Bauckham identifies as the namesake of the disciple of Jesus (246).

15:40 and 16:1. In both verses the name refers to one of the three female disciples of Jesus. This Salomé figure appears again in extracanonical traditions and in subsequent Christian midrashic literature. Josephus gives the name Salomé to the daughter of Herodias although he does not credit her with a dance that results in either Herod or John the Baptist losing their heads (*Ant*. 18.5. 1–4). He understands the death of the Baptist to be politically motivated and credits the inplaying of the decadent Herodian clan with the crime. In their theological readings, both the biblical authors and Josephus connect Herod's beheading of the Baptist with the Tetrarch's subsequent loss of power.

> But to some of the Jews it seemed that Herod's army had been destroyed by God, who was exacting vengeance (most certainly justly) as satisfaction for John, who was called Baptist. For Herod indeed put him to death, who was a good man and one who commanded the Jews to practice virtue and act with justice toward one another and with piety toward God and [so]to gather together by baptism. (*Ant*. 18.116–17)

Josephus considers John to be a good man (*ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα)*, who has God on his side. The historian clearly is on the side of the Jews who consider John to have been unjustly killed by Herod.

The biblical versions of both Mark and Matthew are structured as flashbacks, indicating that the surprise effect of the demand for the severed head is not of interest to the biblical storytellers. The audience knows that John has been beheaded before the story of his imprisonment is related. The reader of Mark and Matthew is first offered the link between Tetrarch and prophet: Herod's understanding that Jesus is John "raised from the dead" (Mk 6:14,16; Matt 14:2). The story of the Baptist's silencing and death also points to the political unrest in the Jewish community, provides a reason for the military defeat of Herod Antipas by Aretas, and functions narratively to foreshadow unjust actions taken by a Judean ruler on behalf of Rome. But these two elements of the story are not the primary explanation offered for the death of the Baptist. As I read the text, the political struggle between Herod Antipas and his enemies is not the precipitating event for the Gospel writers that it is for Josephus.

In the final version of the Markan account the effect of intercalating the story between two stories of Jesus' expanding ministry underscores the deep connection between the baptizer John and the one who shall baptize by fire and the Holy Spirit. As John's ministry is coming to its close underground, his enemies struggling to still his prophetic voice, Jesus is beginning to instruct his apostles (*ἀπόστολοι*) on their ministry (6:7–13). As Jesus is becoming more visible, John is fading from sight. One can hear the Baptist, through his berating of Herodias, but it is Jesus who

has become visible and central to the narrative. Regardless of the biblical text's lack of concern with formulating a character for Salomé, the killing of the prophet is clearly assigned to the female Herodias. First, her act of adultery has ignited John's wrath, and then her machinations result in his death.

The Matthean account parallels the Markan narrative quite closely. After explaining parables, Jesus, surrounded by his family, begins to make himself known to the people, not without irony and foreboding. "Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor except in their own country and in their own house" (Matt 13:57; Mk 6:4 par.). Immediately following in both biblical accounts is the narrative of the death of the Baptist, a startling reminder of a prophet without honor, or life, in his own country. In the Matthean account Herod connects Jesus with the troublesome Baptist, prophesying from the dank prison below ground, although not in the specific direct discourse of Mark, "But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised'" (Mk 6:16). In the Matthean version the scene between Herod and the daughter of Herodias is not as dramatic, for the ruler's foolish vow is not presented in direct speech, as it is in Mark: "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom" (Mk 6:23). In addition, the interchange between Herodias and the daughter is indirect in Matthew, flattening the account. Because of the lack of direct speech in the

FIGURE 1. "Bring me the head of John the Baptist," from the film version Salomé (1953).

FIGURE 2. Detail.

Matthean account, the audience does not realize that the daughter has amended her mother's account.

> She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer."
>
> Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist ON A PLATTER." Mk 6:24–25

Thus, although the information gleaned from the accounts is equivalent, the Markan account allows more of a spectacle to emanate from the account. The reader of the Markan account is faced with the carnality of the execution, emphasized in the repetition of the phrase "head of John the Baptist." The gore of the scene is grayed by the indirectness of the Matthean style.

The biblical accounts provide no narrative hint that the daughter of Herodias possessed the glitter that transforms her into the belle dame sans merci of fin de siècle Europe. First it is highly suspect that a young girl would have appeared at all at a *symposium* or banquet. In the first century, proper women of the Court would have been secluded from male entertainment (the *symposium* following the banquet). Even Queen Herodias's presence would have been doubtful. Men and respectable women celebrated such occasions separately, both in Greco-Roman and in Hellenistic Jewish practices (For detailed descriptions of Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Jewish-Christian meal practices, both ritual and banquet settings, see Corley, esp. Chapter 2; Murray). The only women to be found at such gatherings were "evil" women, ones who danced or entertained the men after the meal. Thus, Herod's request for a dance shows the ambiguous nature of his desire for Salomé, who performs as a *hetaira* (courtesan or party girl). Here one can compare the success of Herod in turning his stepdaughter into a courtesan and the failure of Ahasuerus's attempt to force Vashti to perform such a dance, which would change her role from that of Queen/wife to the role of *hetaira*.

In describing the daughter of Herodias, the Markan author uses the word *κορασιον*, a diminutive of *κορϵ*, the Greek word for girl or maiden. Young, uncultured, she would be connected metaphorically to the wildness of Artemis, her elements being "thorny plants and acorns." Before becoming marryable, she would have to rid herself of the wildness, become a creature of wheat and bread. (Detienne: xv). That progression of the female figure from girl to wife is precisely what is missing in the Salomé version of the *κορϵ* story. Herodias has not rid herself of wildness; on the contrary, as the Baptist relentlessly reminds the reader, her wild-

ness is an offense against the Jewish community; her refusal to become a creature of wheat and bread is an offense against God.

A secondary meaning of the word κορε is pupil of the eye. I like to think that there is a connection between the two meanings because of the tiny reflected image found there. Thus, a young girl like Salomé could see herself reflected in the male gaze; she would know that she was the apple of Herod's eye."[3] And just as the mythic Kore is abducted and shut away in the underworld by Hades, so Salomé has been living in the underworld of Herod's mind. Given the widely varied cultural appropriations of the figure of Salomé, the reader may well have gazed at the girl, and taken her captive in the underworld of the mind, long before reading the Gospel account. Simultaneously wild and held captive by her mother's power, the young Salomé is lead toward her violent request by her mother, making clear that she is not mothered by a the female guardian of grain and nourishment. In the ordinary development of the myth, the κορε (virgin) is contrasted with the γυνη (wife), a woman of different age and status. Κορε, not its later diminutive form κοραισον, was used in classical Greek to refer to maiden goddesses, such as Kore and Artemis. The word indicated virginity, the period up to that of bride. Thus, the κορε was a term familiar to ancient readers for a young girl, not one schooled in seductive practices. But Herodias remains in part a κορε, the apple of Herod's eye, a κορε who has never lost her wildness, never acceded to the cultivated state of grower of grain, producer of the family bread. What makes Herodias doubly dangerous is that she has shed the innocence of the virgin, but has ripened into a viraginous woman, not a mother figure. Perhaps Salomé's embellishment of the request, to present the head of the Baptist *on a platter* is an unconscious reflection of the murderous mother, who offers the food of death instead of the bread of life. This elision of the mother-daughter that is sometimes found in versions of the story can be explained as an erasure of the necessary distinction between κορε and γυνη, virgin and wife. Both female figures occupy the same liminal space, each casting a shadow into the category forbidden to her. The κορε acts in a sexual manner, tempting the male to do her bidding; the γυνη puts her own daughter and husband in danger, and thus does not act with the expected selflessness of the mother.

Central to my reading, then, is the oscillation between the two women, found in the crucial detail that the girl is obeying her mother in mak-

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[3] κορασιον is also the word used in Mk 5: 41, 42 to describe Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter who is cured by Jesus. The LXX reading of the book of Esther uses κορασιον to describe Esther and the other young virgins in the harem trying to gain the favor of King Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes in the Greek version).

ing her ghoulish request. In both Gospel accounts, it is Herodias, the wife of two men, who is constructed as the phallic mother, the woman who ignites male sexual desire and fear. The young girl is fulfilling her mother's wish to have the troublesome Baptist silenced, not her own. The Baptist has threatened Herodias because she has not lived as a good wife and mother; by "marrying" Herod Antipas she has scoffed at the laws that protect a woman's womb for her legal husband, Philip. An indication that leads the reader to a "cool" reading of the girl's dance is the Greek word ἀρεσεν that defines the kind of pleasure that the daughter's dance evokes (Mk 6:22), a word that refers not to erotic pleasure but rather to "accommodating someone, or doing something that someone will approve, or find pleasant" (Anderson: 122). Other New Testament uses of ἀρεσεν as accommodation appear in Acts 6:5; Rom 8:8; 15:1–3; Gal 1:10; I Cor 7:33, 34, 10:33; I Thess 2:4, 15, 4:1; 2 Tim 2:4. One can connect this sort of innocuous pleasure with the girlishness of the *κοράσιον*. Matthew uses the same verb and refers to the girl as *κοράσιον* (14:11)) and also calls the daughter of Jairus *κοράσιον* (Matt 9:24, 25).[4] Flaubert also has understood the character of the biblical Salomé as the virginal tool of her overbearing mother, the genuine figure of power in the text. The daughter is not the subject of power, but rather its carrier. Nineteenth-century French writer Gustave Flaubert fills the gaps in the story with a similar innocent carnality. He imagines a girl who is not personally eager for the head of the Baptist, but rather a girl who is not yet the central character in the story.

> The girl depicted the frenzy of a love which demands satisfaction. She danced like the priestess of the Indies, like the Nubian girls of the cataracts, like the bacchantes of Lydia. She twisted from side to side like a flower shaken by the wind. The jewels in her ears swung in the air, the silk on her back shimmered in the light, and from her arms, her feet, and her clothes there shot out invisible sparks, which set the men on fire. A harp sang, and the crowd answered it with cheers.

I read with Flaubert; the biblical account of the dance is innocent, a child charming an adult audience. In both my reading and in Flaubert's *Heródiade* the female power belongs to Herodias, who controls the movements of her daughter. Because Herod liked to listen to the Baptist (6:20), the Queen's options in annihilating her enemy were limited. The cleverness of Herodias in manipulating her daughter and the foolishness of

[4] Mark refers to the daughter of Jairus as both *κοράσιον* (5: 41, 42) and *παιδίον* "Why do you make a commotion and weep? The child (*τὸ παιδίον*) is not dead but sleeping." (5:39; also 5:40 (twice). Mark "translates" Jesus' Aramaic *talitha* as *κοράσιον* (5:41); while Matthew does not use the Aramaic, but simply refers to the young girl as *κοράσιον* (9:24; 25).

King Herod's open-ended promise combine to cause the death of John the Baptist. She is the femme fatale, who choreographs the performance that mesmerizes the male ruler. Herodias seems, therefore, to confound the power of patriarchy, gaining agency through the body of her own daughter. However, it would be a feminist misreading to understand Herodias as a heroine in the narrative; she is not the subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears about feminism. Doane has recognized the seductive trap for the feminist who accepts the femme fatale as a sign of strength and warns such a reader to recognize that the construction of the femme fatale involves "an unwritten history [that] must also and simultaneously involve an understanding and assessment of all the epistemological baggage she carries along with her" (1991: 3). Acknowledging the connection of the femme fatale or viraginous woman with deception or secretiveness within these narratives encourages a feminist reader to exploit the figure's more disruptive connotations, to unveil male fears about her.

A ruler's similarly foolish promise is found in the book of Esther, where besotted King Ahasuerus at a banquet promises the young Queen Esther, also termed *korasion* in the LXX, the apple of his eye, that she may have anything she desires up to half his kingdom. Both stories involve women manipulating men through wining, dining, and gazing at delicious feminine beauty. Each of the all-powerful kings ends up ordering a man killed although he may not truly want to execute the man. Each ruler violates legal authority with impunity because each has had his mind "poisoned" by desiring a very tasty female dish. What is ambiguous in the Salomé story is who that dish is—Herodias or her daughter. As I read the story, the child-daughter is as compliant as a daughter should be. The central importance of the wickedness of Herod and his "illegal" wife Herodias is shown through John's repetitive warnings that they are breaking of the law. Herodias is desperate to silence the righteous and holy voice of the prophet. The seriousness of the crime of adultery to the Jewish audience, underscored by the prophet's citing of the Levitical law, is played against the frivolity of the dance of the unnamed daughter. While the girl's dance is the overt act that leads to the death of the Baptist in both New Testament accounts, the dance is of minor narrative importance. There is no suggestion of the perfumed heat of the *issah zarah*, who would have transformed the princess from a young obedient girl (*κορασιον*) to a steamy courtesan (*πορνή*). The audience might have thought simply by the presence of Herodias and her daughter that "extravagant wantonness" was occurring at Herod's banquet. Afterall, he and Herodias were already being berated by John for living as adulterers.

Whether the young daughter would be swept along by the tide of their guilt is not clear, especially since the Markan author emphasizes twice that the girl asks the mother what to request and then presents the trophy head to her. Salomé seems to be a mere conduit, or condiment, to the main course of female evil.

The Markan text connects the two banquets of betrayal, the birthday celebration of King Herod and the seder which became the Last Supper of Jesus and his disciples, through the use of the word εὐκαίρου, "opportunity," a term referring to a history-changing rent in the fabric of plain time. "But an *opportunity* (εὐκαίρου) came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee" (6:21). The Gospel writer uses the term at a second crucial moment in the narrative, Mk 14:11, "So he began to look for an *opportunity* (εὐκαίρως) to betray him," where the noun designates Judas' determination to find the opportune moment to betray Jesus. Thus, the betrayal of John foreshadows the betrayal of Jesus. Herodias/Salomé becomes an eroticized iconic Judas, who presents the storyteller with the added dimension of sexual betrayal to the legend.

Since the accounts of the banquet and the after-dinner entertainment seem to be of little interest to the biblical storytellers, one is impelled to unearth possible reasons for these male authors not lingering upon such a tempting narrative dish. Unlike classical narrations of banquets and erotic entertainments, these texts are striking for their omission of the details of steaming platters of food, flagons of drink, women clothed in softly woven fabrics, jewels glinting in the firelight, the *plink* of a lute or lyre accompanying the dance. The Markan and Matthean writers dutifully report that the daughter of Herodias[5] danced, but they do not imagine her dance.[6] She is not of central interest to writers concerned with a theological agenda. What is at stake is the connection between the Baptist and Jesus, not the sexual politics of an imagined banquet evening. The hegemony of the theological code explains the insertion of the story into the

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[5] The familial connection between Herod and Herodias is immediately apparent in the closeness of the two names. Josephus records that Herodias had two husbands: Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, the figure mentioned in the Gospel account, and earlier, a second Herod, possibly Herod Philip, another son of Herod the Great (*Antiquities* 18:5–14). Marriage to a brother's wife (while the husband is still alive) is forbidden to Jews in Lev 18:16, 20–21. This explains the fierce antipathy between John the Baptist, who was continually speaking out against the breaking of Jewish law by the Hellenized Tetrarch and his wife Herodias. Not incidentally the punishment for the woman for adultery (the situation of Herodias since Herod Philip was very much alive) was death by stoning.

Gospel accounts as parallel narratives of the public betrayal of John the Baptist and Jesus. The erotic elements of the narrative can be restored through a gendered reading, or through the desire to imagine the erotic, as in Oscar Wilde's fin de siècle *Salomé*.

If one were to read through the historical-political code in each text and disregard the gendered aspects of the story, the character of Herodias would have no parallel in the Esther story. If she were to have a parallel, ironically, it would be to one of the political male characters in the text, Mordecai or Haman. Mordecai is a pious man, obeying Jewish law, making a comparison with the Jewish adulteress unlikely. And Haman, while a confidant of the king, as is Herodias, and surely as narcissistic as she, loses his power and his head to his enemy, while Herodias uses her daughter to destroy her enemy and gain his head. "Half a kingdom" is offered to both Salomé and Esther by their male admirer-rulers, forging an echo in the mind of the Gospel reader familiar with the Esther story. The Babylonian ruler, who must be guided by Esther and her advisor Mordecai in order to do the "right" thing, to halt his kingdom's legal persecution of the Jews. There is no ethical or "right" voice to guide Herod, since Herodias is as corrupt as her husband and the courtiers do not figure into the story. The only pious Jewish voice, that of John, is ignored, then silenced, whereas the voice of Mordecai is heard through Esther. If the Gospel story were a parallel instead of a reversal of the Esther story, then Salomé would be guided by the Baptist to reform her mother and stepfa-

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[6] What Salomé danced is one of the narrative gaps that has been filled spectacularly by choreographers and visual artists from Victorian times to the present. Michael Fokine choreographed the Dance of the Seven Veils to the music of Strauss for a staging of Wilde's play in St. Petersburg in 1908 starring the Russian dancer and actress Ida Rubinstein. Leon Bakst designed the sets and costumes for this staging and for a later production in Paris in 1912. Tamara Karsavina danced in Diaghilev's 1914 Paris production of Robert d'Humiéres' poem *Le tragédie de Salomé* set to music by Florent Schmitt. Karsavina made her entrance on stage in a peacock cape inspired by Beardsley's designs. The Schmitt piece was first performed in 1907 by Loie Fuller, "who reportedly finished in the nude" (Pressly: 16). The popular dancers of the early decades of this century capitalized on the new-found interest in the exotic Dance of the Seven Veils, making it as erotic as the theater owners would permit. The most popular interpretation was Maud Allen's *Vision of Salomé*, first performed in Munich in 1907, and in London the following year, where it played for 200 performances. Mlle Dazié starred in the first of the Ziegfield Follies in New York in 1907 as a lushly choreographed Salomé. For further descriptions of performances of Salomé see Pressly and for a short history of Rubinstein's life in the theater, as well as other descriptions of the figure of Salomé interpreted in dance, see Koegler. For a colorful and engaging history of the fin de siècle decadent dance as it relates specifically to the figure of Salomé, see Ellis and Showalter.

ther. Ironically the closest "match" to this version of the story is the interpretation found in the Fifties Hollywood version of the Salomé story that I shall discuss below.

Salomé Gone Hollywood

As my gaze shifts to cinematic appropriations of the character of Salomé, a word needs to be said about representation itself. Every representation exacts some cost, in the loss of immediacy, in the gap between intention and realization, between original and copy. Too often one must agree with Browning's painter that

> "Paint
> must never hope to reproduce the faint
> Half-flush that dies along her throat"

In film, as in painting, when gazing at "her" face, the spectator shares with Browning the knowledge that the picture represents "my last Duchess painted on the wall," but it is removed from the woman herself, "*Looking as if she were alive.*" Film has presented us with a similar representational gap to fill, that between life and death. As postmodern scholars have argued widely in works of film and cultural theories, there are only copies now. What is an original, if not a copy of something earlier?

The tension between original and copy is central to this study because it extends the scope of biblical narrative, which usually focuses solely upon texts produced in the ancient Mediterranean world. As I have argued elsewhere, one's mental representations of characters, whether they be from films, novels, paintings, or children's responses to the doxa, reflect backward onto the biblical text and serve to fill the reader's gaps. Thus, acknowledging and analyzing these later literary and visual representations help to trace the process of characterization as it functions in the interpreter's mind. Such an analysis prevents the reader from harmonizing or universalizing characterization—Salomé as loyal daughter and dishonorable Jew, Salomé as virgin or virago—and creates a healthy web of antagonisms among all these cultural representations.

Film theory, like the narrative theory from which it draws its primary strength, presents the opportunity to examine the fluid relations between narrative versions of Salomé and iconographic interpretations.[7] The analysis of the process of reading acknowledges that a visual image (or images) is in itself a reading, or retelling, not merely an illustration of a reading, but a new text in itself. Like verbal analysis, cinematic analysis

assumes that both readers and viewers bring to texts and images their own cultural assumptions. The medium of film underscores that there is not one chair from which to view the narrative in this virtual space beyond the word-image opposition. Meanings collide and swirl much like the various Salomés in their dancing. When viewed together, the images provide testament to the lack of coherence in this sweep of cultural images of Salomé. Reading through the director's lens gives a Technicolor testament to the absence of a universal story of Salomé. More than stamping out similar interpretations, a montage combining visual, cinematic, and verbal images shows how each cultural production makes of the biblical icon a reflection of its own values, not of the ancient culture in which the story was rooted. Each of the Hollywood Bible films proclaims itself as a recitation of shared cultural history, but also accedes to the strong current of belief in its intended Christian audience. A topic that merits further exploration is the anti-Semitic current that overwrites the portrayals of Jews within these modern adaptations of Hebrew Bible narratives.

My film montage of these images of Salomé, "Calling the Shots" (shown at the 1994 SBL Annual Meeting) provides just such a visual and verbal experience of images of Salomé and John the Baptist as they have been changed by the cultures that have created them. Due to complexities of copyright law, I can not distribute the actual film to readers and thus refer to the visual montage as a verbal metaphor, which is not my first choice. It is possible, however, for any reader, to set in motion a montage of the literary characters they hold in their minds.

My initial reasons for creating a film seemed quite clear. I wanted to explore the challenge of juxtaposing iconographic and narratologic elements to create a new work. Instead of imitating the linear versions presented by the Jesus spectaculars, I have created a circuitous strategy, so that the spectator feels as though s/he is continuously moving, watching the film from many angles. Computer technology to create a montage of still pictures, film clips, audio tracks, is readily available, so that the print

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[7] Feminist film theory is particularly helpful to this study because a major aspect of its developing concern focuses on the spectator and the effect of the film's subject (usually male) and object (usually female) on the spectator, who was first assumed to be male. See esp. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema," and Mulvey's response to her own assumption that the spectator is male, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema,' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*, *Framework*, no. 15, 16, 17 (1981) 12–15); E. Anne Kaplan, "Is the Gaze Male?"; Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* vol. 23, no. 3 & 4 (1982) 74–88; also Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*, esp. Chap. One, "Desire in Narrative." Special issues of *Screen*, *Wide Angle*, and *Film Reader* deal at length with this subject.

or oral presentation of interpretive work can no longer claim priority. Probably the most compelling reason was to make a visual text that would illustrate some of Mieke Bal's theories in *Reading "Rembrandt,"* in which she creates links between visual and textual appropriations of biblical icons. Her book showed me that images meant to illustrate well-known biblical stories may function as a replacement for texts but they do so "on the basis, not of total redundancy or replication, but, on the contrary, of overwriting the previous text." While these reasons are easy to articulate verbally, the film, a predominantly visual medium, showed the power of images over theories. The artistic process exerted itself, claiming a discontinuity of images, at the same time a basic narrative thread reasserted itself. The process of interpretation continues; the film offers an alternate interpretive view that takes the reader/viewer further from the doxa while simultaneously returning narrative attention to the pre-text found in the Gospels.

In order to explore the connections between visual and verbal readings, I shall use the device of an imagined film montage that will focus

FIGURE 3A. Salomé (Nazimova) lusts after John in the 1922 cinematic version of the Oscar Wilde version of *Salomé* (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

FIGURE 3B. John reacts differently from the biblical version (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

upon the visual culture that has grown up around the biblical figure of Salomé. My imagined film encompasses Victorian images, fin de siècle drama, and various films ranging from a 1920s two-reeler adaptation of Oscar Wilde's *Salomé* (1894) to Rita Hayworth's Technicolor dance in the Hollywood of the Fifties. I also include Salomé's moments in the Jesus bioepics of Nicholas Ray (*King of Kings,* 1961), George Stevens (*The Greatest Story Ever Told,* 1965) Franco Zeffirelli (*Jesus of Nazareth,* 1977), and Martin Scorsese (*The Last Temptation of Christ,* 1988). One advantage of en-

visioning a cinematic metaversion of Salomé is that I can create a twirling circular narrative that is not situated in a single spectatorial view, recounting the story of Salomé in linear motion. Following the metaphor of the dancing Salomé, the film follows many rhythms that have changed the nameless girl who danced at her uncle's birthday banquet in the New Testament into the femme fatale whose erotic dance dominated artists' and writers' visions almost two millennia later.

I have attempted to chart Salomé's cultural trip from bit player in a religious drama to female sphinx, whom no man can resist. The first hint of the fin de siècle Salomania to come is Henri Regnault's painting exhibited in 1870 that presents a petulant, self-indulgent Salomé, hair flowing, dressed in exotic Orientalized attire. One can almost hear her sigh with impatience, imagine her swinging her bare foot, as she anticipates the head to be placed on the ornate silver charger. Or perhaps the head has already been removed and she carries the charger like armor, as the icon of her triumph. In many of the paintings, the artists' fascination with the exotic ancient Hellenic world is apparent.

Painters' fantasies about Salomé are clearly defined in their portrayal of her facial expression: there are crude sensual Salomés, narcissistic pouty Salomés, vacant expressionless Salomés, gilded golden Salomés. Herod, John the Baptist, Salomé, and Herodias are all figured differently by film makers, visual artists, and choreographers.[8] Nevertheless one motif recurs: the young woman who could awaken the sleeping passions of men, "bewitching, subjugating more surely his will with her unholy charm, as of a great flower of concupiscence born of a sacrilegious birth, reared in a hothouse of iniquity" (Huysmans: 56). The painters, as well as the male subjects in their paintings, are mesmerized by the pale young girl—she is neither pale nor young, but rather, the sprite that dances in each one's unconscious.

In looking at the "sword and sandal" genre of Hollywood films containing the story of Salomé, my central focus is on the treatment of the character of as she is played by a major star, Rita Hayworth. In comparison, other "unknown" cinematic Salomés swirl and slither around her. In comparing Dieterle's *Salomé,* both with the Wildean stage version which preceded it by fifty years and the later Hollywood versions in which Salomé was played by an unbilled actress with a fashion model's disen-

[8] In October, 1994, I saw a performance of Salomé, loosely adapted from the Wilde play in which Salomé was played in classic Japanese style by an aged Kabuki actor. There is just a squint of familiarity in the staging of this two-actor play when one looks at the Beardsley pen and ink drawings, almost one hundred years earlier, that evoke a Japanese style.

gaged sensuality, one gets the picture of American puritan sexuality and the treatment of women in the Indian summer of Hollywood's heyday. In 1953, the time of the Cold War and the organization man, Rita Hayworth's dance of the seven veils was filmed as a Technicolor confection that drove Charles Laughton into an overfed, pudgy-fingered frenzy. In contrast to the out-of-control Tetrarch, the ideal film audience doesn't overdose on Rita's goodies. Moviegoers by the mid-Fifties were trained in having their cake and eating it too. They were experienced in responding to these dramas of temptation and would "never swallow the lures and desires, allowing them to override their fundamental morality" (Sklar: 95).

The body stocking constructed for Rita's dance made headlines in the popular press. No actress had revealed so much skin, albeit stockinged, in a feature film. It was reported that Marlene Dietrich ordered an identical garment for her private use. Rita's dance compared with the other cinematic Salomés, whose task it is to seduce Herod, is as salacious as the heroine of a hygiene film made for bored seventh graders. Her perfect-postured virginal portrayal reveals more about the Hollywood star system and male fears and fantasies of the Fifties than it shows a Lolita-sexy Salomé figure. Indeed the entire montage is most effective at showing how many different interpretations there are of this ancient princess who danced to please her step-father and her overbearing mother.

In the glitzy Fifties version, the most telling plot point is that Rita was a good girl, indeed she was trying to *save* the Baptist. The girl next door, even in a body stocking and seven Technicolor veils, is a proper subject of male fantasy. An out of control dominating sex goddess was the subject of horror films; hardly the domain of a box office star like Rita, who was not the sort to be cast against audience sympathy. In her most well-known role, *Gilda*, Hayworth had a carefully choreographed dance, in which she was also a sex symbol, not a sex goddess. Slowly unpeeling her long black satin gloves, she teases the male audience into imagining her revealing much more than her supple beckoning arms. Film theorist Mary Ann Doane reads the striptease in *Gilda* as more of a cleansing than a seductive act. The striptease is metaphoric for the narrative peeling away of the evil, the lip-licking luscious availability that is the surface persona of Gilda/Rita. "Evil on the part of the woman is only a discardable garment—her threatening aspects can be detached, peeled away like layers from a core, which is basically "good" (107–8). It is the good girl, of course, that has hold of the spectator's imagination. As Gilda, the ever-popular Rita wasn't really crooked, just a little out of line. Similarly in *Salomé* as the veils drop, the spectator "sees" a girl so devoted to saving

the Baptist that she is willing to dance for her stepfather, who is drawn as solidly evil, with no inner goodness to relieve the audience of its distaste for him. Continuing Doane's argument, I would add that the striptease is reversed by the spectator, who is more invested in the goodness of the heroine than in peering at her body. Doane thinks that in spite of the intended protecting of the "goodness of Hayworth, the striptease works too well in *Gilda*. For Doane Rita's dance overpowers the metaphoric inten-

FIGURE 4. Rita Hayworth dances as Salomé (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

tion of the narrative. Gilda exudes too much heat to retreat into holiness. I do not agree. In both roles Hayworth is oddly wooden as a coquette, as though she really has no interest in the men she dazzles.[9] It is quite easy

[9] According to *People*, the weekly magazine that chronicles popular culture, Hayworth developed in a short time from pinup queen to major star and finally to goddess. "By 1941's *Blood and Sand* (with Tyrone Power), studio execs had changed a dark-haired Rita into a strawberry blonde. [Hayworth's] place as a goddess was secure after her heated performance in 1946 *Gilda* (with Glenn Ford), in which she provocatively peeled her gloves....'A girl is a girl,' noted Hayworth, 'It's nice to be told you're successful at it,'" 1 June 1987.

for a spectator to domesticate the Hayworth heroine as the girl who had a bad break, fell in with the wrong crowd, was misunderstood. In Salomé the actress seems to be focusing on a choreographer's instructions. One can imagine her counting her steps rather than the admiring glances from the men of the Court.

In Dieterle's *Salomé* the death-dealing demand for the head of the Baptist as the final delicacy to be served at the banquet is put into the mouth of Judith Anderson. No sexual fantasies gone awry there. The casting of Judith Anderson is inspired: she was well-known for her portrayals of monstrous maternal figures on both stage and screen: she played the title role in *Medea* (1947 and 1949) and Mrs. Danvers, the housekeeper in Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940). The older woman, no longer an object of the male gaze, can scheme and even kill with a calculated impunity. Her evil is political, thoughtful, not the erotic temptation of the Eve figure who makes men forget their responsibilities and obligations. Like the rest of the characterizations in this version, there is no nuance or subtlety here. Anderson's Herodias is a one-note venomous character, dependent upon her daughter's beauty to save her own life. In Stevens' interpretation Rita Gam is a classically beautifully Herodias, costumed like an Italian statue of Nefertiti. It is easy to see why her Herod would risk breaking the Law

FIGURE 5. Rita Hayworth dares the guys to "Put the Blame on Mame" in *Gilda* (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

to possess such a woman. In Stevens' version Salomé has become petulant, languorous, and diffident to her powers to hold in thrall the entire court of Judea. Her mother is manipulating the scene, but with a featherlight touch. Gam's Herodias is much more threatening than the horrific Anderson because Gam is still an object of male desire, a much riper fruit than her adolescent daughter.

Herod in the silent film is a grinning fool, wearing a rakish crown of olive leaves as a reminder of his royal but pagan bearing. He is a buffoon, as are the members of his Court. As he and Herodias slug it out with exaggerated gestures, it is difficult to connect them with rulers of any civilized country. Charles Laughton gives his a Herod a pudgy, studied, lip-

FIGURE 6. Herod would rather not fulfill Salomé's wish—in any film.

licking sexuality in the 1953 *Salomé*. In Nicholas Ray's *King of Kings*, Herod is played by an unknown actor, Frank Thring, whose obese sybaritic posturing bears a striking resemblance to the caricature of Oscar Wilde that Beardsley has playfully included in his drawing of Herod. None of these three Herods seems intellectually capable of performing the duties of a Tetrarch, much less to survive the political machinations of the Herod family. But the ruler of a wanton Court, a ruler who would destroy Christian values, provides a formidable connection for a Cold War audience who had less than a decade earlier lived through the madness of Hitler (For an analysis of Fifties Bible films as cultural responses to the Cold War, see Forshey, esp. p. 27–55; Driver; and Gow).

José Ferrer, the pale, cerebral Herod in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* is the only Hollywood Herod who gives a nuanced performance. Stevens is also the only director whose Herod projects an image of stony authority. The sexual debauchery that underlines the corruption of the Herodian court is absent from this film, in which Ferrer plays Herod as a troubled politician frightened by the spiritual unrest in his kingdom. The relax-

ation of sexual mores in the 1960s in the USA may be responsible for the less stereotyped sexual interplay. Like the short-lived Camelot of the Kennedys, Ferrer's Herod contains aspects of both the intellectual governor and erotic dreamer. The dance in this version is performed in half-light for Herod alone. It is an idyllic fantasy in which the female remains veiled and the camera rests on Ferrer's face, eyes closed, expressionless. Stevens tries to soften the pious aspect of his film by emphasizing that he is making a film about ideas, not about religion. This was the time of change in the Roman Catholic Church under the rule of Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council; Protestants were experiencing a burgeoning ecumenical movement; technocratic control increased as the race into space program and military-industrial complex were reshaping American ideas of the sacred and the ethical. At the same time sex and rock and roll, peace and love were being affirmed in the youth counterculture. As Forshey points out, Stevens wanted to be relevant to his time, but in doing so he ended up making the wrong film at the wrong time (102–4). His audience was the mainstream churches at the very moment at which the social order was being rent by wide divisions of ethical opinions. Two weeks before the film opened, cultural images bombarding the news were those of African-Americans being beaten as they tried to cross the Edmund Petrus bridge in Selma, Alabama. A month after the film opened, the first teach-in against the war in Vietnam was held at the University of Michigan. (For a classic analysis of the profound American religious shifts in the Sixties, see Cox.)

The figure of John the Baptist plays a larger role in my montage than in most of the films themselves. In the Wildean version the Baptist, like Salomé herself, is transformed from a biblical figure to an icon of a very secular sort. Wilde conceives of the Baptist as a symbol of pure beauty, pure truth. Like Rita Hayworth, Alla Nazimova recognizes that John is the embodiment of Truth. Unlike Rita, the girlish actress, a dead ringer for Mary Pickford, does not ally herself with an armored man to save John. Pouting and pursing her lips, feverishly trying to coerce an unresponsive ethereal prophet into selling out his faith for her, Nazimova plays the role as a little girl, not understanding the consequence of her lascivious poses or indeed of her death-dealing demand. Showalter provides a succinct but vivid sketch of this Russian-born actress who at the age of forty-four played a girl less than half her age.

> She became a brilliant success in New York in productions of Ibsen and Chekhov. Her movie career was even more dazzling; her house on Sunset Boulevard had a swimming pool in the shape of the Black Sea and her wild parties were the talk of Hollywood. . . .Salomé first appears as a Mack Sen-

> nett bathing beauty in a sequined gym suit and a wig of big bubble-shaped pearls on little antennae, copied from one of the Beardsley drawings of Salomé's curls. (163)

Of particular note in the 1922 production is the dance of the seven veils, in which Nazimova seems to get caught or trapped inside the fog-colored diaphanous veils with her ping-pong-curls bobbing suggestively. For the decadents of the fin de siècle and the early film-makers of the 1920s, Salomé is more a figure of ridicule than a fully conceived sex goddess. It is difficult to imagine her as an erotic figure, seducing men other than the equally ridiculously drawn Herod. Perhaps, from the days of the decadent versions of Salomé, the erotic element came out of her defiance of the Baptist's sacred authority and Herod's secular rule. "Both in dramatizing a rebellious woman and in portraying male-male desire," argues Dellamora, "*Salomé* puts normal masculine representation under pressure."

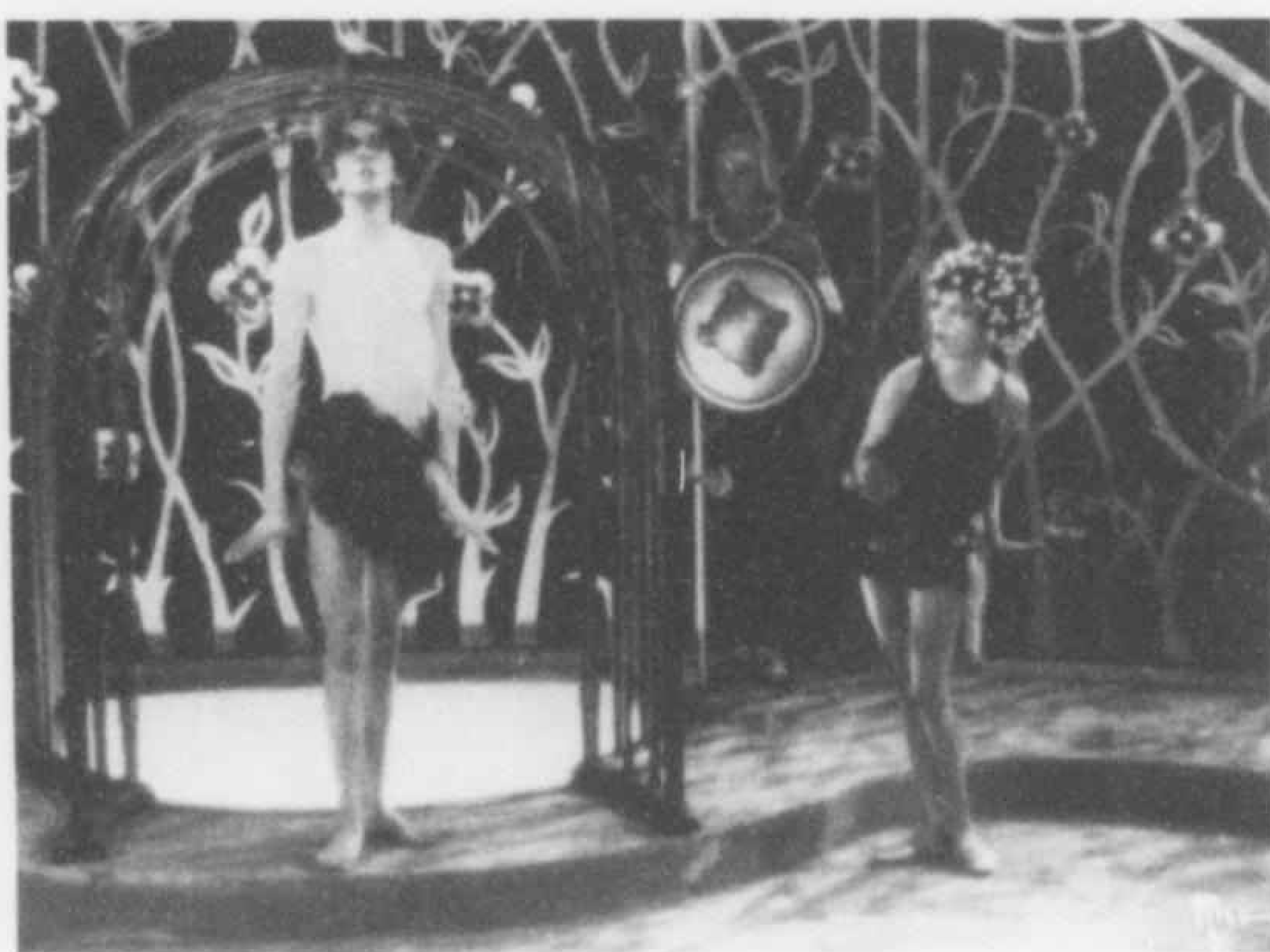

FIGURE 7. Alla Nazimova first sees the mysterious Baptist (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

Salomé can be possessed by men only in death. They are no longer threatened or mesmerized by her limp unresponding figure. Bristow suggests that Wildean eroticism is fated because "there is no escape from the doom-laden consequences of desire" (Bristow: 49; note particularly "Wilde's Fatal Effeminacy," 16–55). As she claimed the head of John, seemingly unaware that the head once was joined to a living body, so the courtiers of Herod claim her body. But through Wilde's words and Beardsley's sharp pen-and-ink drawings, her position has moved from peripheral to central, from nameless girl to obsession. The costumes and sets for the 1922 film production of *Salomé* were adapted from Beardsley's drawings and set designs.

A more market-driven Hollywood, not willing to let a box-office baby be martyred, or indeed be the cause of male viewer discomfort, banishes all thought of Rita/Salomé as genuinely wicked. The scriptwriter handily converts her to Christianity after an intimate meeting with the Baptist in the dungeon. When her dance calculated to buy time for a rescue of the Baptist from the dungeon has the opposite effect, the scriptwriter constructs an even holier happy ending as she is reunited with

Stewart Granger, a handsome Roman centurion, also a secret convert to this new religion. In the film's final scene they are seen with a cast of thousands crowded onto a Jerusalem hillside, like college students at a rock concert, listening to the Sermon on the Mount broadcast from a divine echo chamber. Through a stiff scream of horror, Salomé has been exonerated from the crime. Eagerly embracing the teachings of the new prophet, listening to the words of Jesus himself, perhaps the martyred John reborn, Rita/Salomé remains a good, virginal maid, looking forward to a happily-ever-after life, now and in the world to come.

The final visual image that is central to the Salomé story is the head itself. The head renders Salomé a demonic, castrating figure. I find most interesting the images of the head shown separate from an image of Salomé. An anonymous polychrome-painted, carved, wooden head appears to be a Christ-like ascetic head resting upon a platter that functions as the Baptist's mark of martyrdom, his halo. On closer comparison a surprising number of these heads show John's lips slightly parted and a sly smile upon his lips. He appears to be a man who has just been sexually satisfied. Even without the seductive dancer or the executioner, the head is easily recognized as *the head* of John the Baptist. If the severing of the head is not an image meant to brand Salomé and her kind as castrating women, why not demand an ear, his prophetic tongue, perhaps a thumb or hand? Because such demands are merely bizarre. Requesting the head is a double-edged blow to the masculinity and power of the male figure.

FIGURE 8. Stewart Granger takes the newly converted Rita Hayworth away from the pagan kingdom. In the next scene the two lovers attend the Sermon on the Mount. (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

WHY SALOMÉ?

Male narratives, whether visual or verbal, about beautiful women seducing men with food or wine and killing them instead of soothing them possess basic similarities, regardless of later interpretive salves or salvos. The female figures whose beauty draws the male to them represent a generalized male fear of courtesan as killer. In the confrontations

of Jael and Sisera, Judith and Holofernes, Salomé and Herod, the man is not the husband or suitor of the woman, but rather a man powerless to resist the sexuality that the woman exudes. Samson is the suitor of Delilah, but it is a wrong match, and ends with the same defeat of the male figure. Esther is the only wife who uses the combined effect of her beauty and a banquet successfully to negotiate for the death of her enemy, but her husband is not the object of her plan. Haman, like Sisera and Holofernes, is a national enemy, whose death is desired by the ideal reader. The figure of Salomé, then, can be regarded as a place-holder for all the biblical literary figures caught in the tropes of wine, women, and death.

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THE MISTRESS OF THE GAZE: MASCULINITY, SLAVERY, AND REPRESENTATION

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ABSTRACT

Demetrius and the Gladiators is a big-budget 1950s Hollywood production about an enslaved Christian gladiator. Its projection of masculinity as spectacle refocuses the classic Hollywood gaze. The film constructs its dialectic of slavery, gender, and race in the context of concern for politics (sexual, racial, and otherwise) characteristic of the early Cold War era. But then, all our imaginings about ancient slavery reveal traces of our location in space and time. This is true not only for "low culture" productions like *Demetrius and the Gladiators* but also for "high culture" productions of scholarship on slavery in the classical/biblical world.

SLAVES OF THE COLD WAR

Hollywood's renewed interest in producing biblical epics in the early 1950s was largely a response to technological innovations. Americans were beginning to buy television sets in large quantities; attendance and revenues were down at the movies. To enhance the movie-going experience, Twentieth Century Fox introduced CinemaScope, whose wider, curved screen offered a novel viewing experience. *The Robe* was the first film audiences saw on the CinemaScope screen. Pageantry, costumes, scenery, and a larger-than-life story showcased the wonders of the new technology and enticed audiences out of their living rooms and back to the theater (Forshey: 36). Even before *The Robe* was in theaters production was underway on its sequel, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*.

Just as technological innovations of the early 50s mark these elaborately staged biblical-era epics, so do post-War politics (including sexual politics) mark their characters and plots. In *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, the protagonist is a Christian slave whose struggle to establish his legal identity as free is secondary to his personal struggles with issues of autonomy and masculinity. I will argue that the particular terms in which those issues are enunciated are characteristic of the historical era in which the film was made. This effort is part of a larger project in which I am

studying the representation of slaves and slavery both in ancient sources and in contemporary scholarship (Glancy). Just as social biases shape Hollywood's construction of the image of the slave, social biases affect the construction of the image of the slave in ancient literature and in modern historical scholarship.

Ostensible depictions of slaves and slavery recurrently become meditations on what it means to be a free man, and discourse about slavery seems inevitably caught up in discourses of gender. While ancient sources are likely to depict a male slave as "the reverse of a free man, that is, a subversive incarnation of incompleteness and disorder" (Garlan: 19), the figure of the male slave in Hollywood films epitomizes in a predictably ironic way what it means to be a free man. Discourse about slavery often says less about what it means to be a slave that it does about self-understandings of what it means to be free; in a parallel way, of course, much male discourse about femininity ultimately circles back to masculine self-understanding (Irigiray). In the past fifteen years classicists have noted that ancient representations of slavery yield remarkably few insights into what it meant to be a slave. Yvon Garlan writes, for example:

> There is hardly any documentation, written or archaeological, which can be claimed to provide an authentic or original image of slavery to set alongside these portraits of slaves constructed by the literary elite of free men and accordingly quite literally 'mastered' by them. (18)[1]

Demetrius and the Gladiators, like *The Robe*, is among the big budget Hollywood productions to picture the early Christian movement against a visually spectacular Roman Empire. Early in the film, the Christian freedman Demetrius is forced back into slavery as a gladiator, almost certain to die in combat. His struggles with self-mastery overlap with his struggles to establish his freedom from external domination, so that the drama of a man striving for individual freedom against the forces of an evil empire structures the film. Demetrius embodies the often contradictory masculine ideals of America in the Fifties. We will see that the drama turns on the exposure of those contradictions: Demetrius is at once a fighter and a pacifist, a man consumed by sexual desire and the chaste admirer of a virgin Christian woman, an impetuous hothead and a man in careful control of his desires and actions. Hollywood's treatment of the Roman Empire reflects the preoccupations of post-War America in the process of transforming itself into the self-proclaimed champion of the free world, staving off the Communist threat. Babington and Evans sug-

[1] For similar arguments, see also Bradley (1984:136) and Finley (117).

gest that the early Cold War shapes the dialogue of *The Robe* (210–13), although they suggest a different direction than I do for this influence. Their comments are worth noting. The screen writer for both *The Robe* and *Demetrius* was Philip Dunne, a liberal who must have been aware of the impact of the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC) on the film industry. Babington and Evans suggest that the dialogue of *The Robe* echoes some well known phrases from the HUAC hearings. For example, the emperor's demand for "names" may parallel HUAC's obsession with "naming names" of alleged Communists. When Marcellus reminds Caligula that he, Marcellus, and not the emperor is on trial, Babington and Evans hear an echo of John Howard Lawson's 1947 comment to HUAC: "I am not on trial here, Mr. Chairman. This Committee is on trial here before the American people." Whether Dunne was aware that the dialogue for which he was responsible echoed these phrases is less certain than Babington and Evans imply; no contemporary reviewers of *The Robe* picked up on the language, and it is uncertain how many in the audiences of *The Robe* would have associated HUAC with tyrannical and arbitrary authority. While resistance to the spirit of Cold War furor may be a subtext of *The Robe* and its sequel, it seems much more likely that audiences would have responded to the representation of Rome as a tyrannical empire as a surrogate for the emerging Eastern bloc, and to the representation of Demetrius as the prototype of the rugged, individualistic American man.

Toni Morrison notes in *Playing in the Dark*, "The subject of the dream is the dreamer" (17). Morrison's extended essay revisits the legacy of white American literature, generally believed to have developed with minimal reference to the increasingly controversial presence of an enslaved Africanist (Morrison's term) population. She argues instead that America's vaunted self-image, the rugged, individualistic, hence utterly free man (and gender is relevant here) builds itself in contradistinction to the ubiquitous existence of a large number of enslaved Africans and their descendants upon whose labor the young country's economic and social structures were predicated. Morrison suggests a number of tropes that have yet to be fully explored, including "the Africanist character as surrogate and enabler... the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free" (51–52). She encourages critics to analyze "the manipulation of the Africanist narrative (that is, the story of a black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected) as a means of meditation—both safe and risky—on one's own humanity" (53).

I will return explicitly to the question of race and *Demetrius*; the American experience of a racially-based slave system inevitably haunts

American representations of other systems of slavery, including the slave system of the Greco-Roman world, which did not share the racial configuration of American slavery. The questions Morrison proposes remain generally relevant for my treatment of Hollywood's spectacle of masculinity and slavery. In constructing the subjectivity of the free man, what is embraced and what rejected? How does the trope of slavery underwrite the discourse of freedom and manhood? That these are not new questions will be evident to many. In one version or another, they have dominated the European philosophical tradition since 1807 when Hegel published *Phenomenology of Spirit* with its pivotal dialectical moment between master and slave.

Although the American context invites a particular articulation of these questions, defining a dominant masculine self against a dominated "other" is hardly a new phenomenon. Masculinity is always local, delineated within a particular political and cultural context, but it is not "an ephemeral quality which is sometimes present and sometimes not" (Brittan: 2–3). Gender is at once protean and persistent. David M. Halperin, for example, elaborates the construction of classical Athenian masculinity in his analysis of the function of prostitution in that society. According to Athenian norms, the citizen body (either individual or corporate) was defined in contrast to other bodies: those of respectable, free wives and daughters; enslaved foreign women readily available as prostitutes; and disenfranchised male prostitutes, slave and free, at the margins of the polis. They all embodied "the social liabilities from which the citizen himself, by virtue of being a citizen, had been freed" (104). Athens promoted:

> a new collective image of the citizen body as masculine and assertive, as master of its pleasures, and as perpetually on the superordinate side of a series of hierarchical and roughly congruent distinctions in status: master vs. slave, free vs. unfree...customer vs. prostitute, citizen vs. non-citizen, man vs. woman...[T]he democratic constitution of Athens sought to establish the political and ideological incompatibility of citizenship and prostitution, thereby incorporating prostitution...into the symbolic codes of classical Athenian political and personal life. (102–3)

What is notably rejected in this example of masculine self-definition is the role of prostitute, yet by this very exclusion the prostitute becomes a necessary figure, the irreducible other who allows the citizen body to define what it is not. As we will see, when Hollywood envisions the theoretical set of ancient Rome, it finds slavery to be an irresistible lure—not as a subject in itself, but as a pretext for a meditation on what it means to be free and male. Whereas in the elite discourses of classical Greek antiquity,

prostitutes and slaves highlight what masculinity excludes, Hollywood embraces slaves such as Demetrius to highlight what masculinity is.

In *Demetrius*, as in *The Robe* and *Spartacus*, "slavery is defined as the cancer destroying Rome from within" (Babington and Evans: 183). *The Robe* and *Spartacus* highlight the sale of slaves, a particularly dehumanizing aspect of slave systems; *The Robe* even begins its action in a slave market.[2] All these films focus on slaves fulfilling the most dangerous and degrading roles of Roman slaves: miners, gladiators, prostitutes, and others available for sexual exploitation. Whether Roman slaves understood prostitution as degrading is not something we can easily infer, especially because Roman sex workers did not leave a record of their attitudes toward their labors. When I call this role degrading, I am reflecting the attitude that Americans in the Fifties publicly held toward sex for hire. Is this a fair depiction of slavery in the Roman world? America in the Fifties was racist and segregationist, but as the centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation drew near, America saw itself as the land of the free. Clearly, these films reflect American horror at the concept of compromising the freedom of individuals. Shall we conclude, then, that these films anachronistically and naively condemn Roman slavery by projecting mid-century American preoccupations with individual freedoms onto an ancient Mediterranean screen?

In order to answer this question, one logically turns to the work of classicists and biblical scholars who have written about Mediterranean slavery. Publication of M. I. Finley's *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* in 1982 was a watershed for classical scholars studying slavery. Finley noted that virtually all extant literature from the ancient Mediterranean reflects elite perspectives, from which it is dangerous to draw conclusions about the experiences or attitudes of slaves themselves. In 1990 Dale Martin noted that biblical scholars have lagged behind classicists in their understanding of the complexity of biblical slavery (xvii). I concur; biblical scholars have largely continued to assume that the descriptions of slaves and slavery penned by slaveowners and sympathizers offer insights into the reality of what it meant to be a slave in the Greco-Roman world.

Typical of New Testament scholars writing about slavery is S. Scott Bartchy.[3] During the past twenty years he has highlighted aspects of the Roman slave system that he believes alleviated the harshness of the institution. Given the scope of the present paper, I will focus on a single aspect

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[2] See the passionate discussion of the slave trade in antiquity in Bradley (1992).

[3] It should be noted that Bartchy's views continue to evolve, taking into account recent developments in scholarship on slavery in Greco-Roman antiquity (1996).

of Bartchy's work, one that argues primarily that "the majority of urban and domestic slaves could legitimately anticipate being emancipated by the age of thirty" (1992:66). (Elsewhere he makes a still broader claim: in the Roman empire, manumission at age thirty was the rule [1988:420]). Bartchy reiterates his argument that most urban slaves could validly anticipate manumission despite the strong rebuttal of this position by Thomas Wiedemann, who surveys both literary and inscriptional evidence and concludes that at best urban Roman slaveholders celebrated the notion that a faithful servant should be manumitted as an ideal: "One suspects that the formula 'nulla fides [leads to] nulla manumissio' may have been adduced very much more frequently in real life than the formula 'fides [leads to] manumissio'" (165). Bartchy cites Wiedemann's article (1992:70) and notes that Wiedemann argues that inscriptions commemorating a variety of acts of manumission "represent a Roman ideal but not a standard practice." But he responds to none of the arguments.

Hollywood may have naively viewed Roman slavery through a lens left over from the American experience of slavery; American rhetoric concerning what it means to be a free man certainly infects the dialogue of *Demetrius* and *Spartacus*. However, constructions of ancient slavery in scholarly literature written at the height of the Cold War were equally shaped by contemporary political preoccupations. The name of Joseph Vogt is prominent among classicists who wrote about slavery beginning in the early Fifties. Vogt introduced some key themes to which Bartchy still returns, e.g. how reliance on slaves as doctors and child-care workers humanized Greek and Roman slavery: "But it was here that the oppressed, because other human beings were entrusted to them, were elevated above slavery" (Vogt: 120). Vogt argued in 1953 that the achievements of classical civilization justified the enslavement of human beings, since the labor of slaves freed poets and philosophers to pursue their spiritual projects: "Slavery and its attendant loss of humanity were part of the sacrifice which had to be paid for this achievement [Athenian literature and philosophy]" (25). In an essay on ancient portrayals of Mary of Nazareth, Vogt finally transmutes his interest in ancient slavery into a meditation on Christian liberty experienced by those who open themselves as slaves to God, a benevolent master (146–49), a particularly telling slippage between discourse concerning the historical institution of slavery and meditation on personal freedom.

Finley discusses Vogt's ideology at length, situating the development of Vogt's work in the context of Cold War Germany. For Vogt and his disciples ancient slavery became a "springboard for a larger political polemic" against Marxist historians, particularly those from the emerg-

ing Eastern bloc (Finley: 63). Vogt's anti-Marxism is coupled with his desire to "'rescue' the record of Christianity" with respect to slavery (Finley: 64), setting the agenda for his own research projects as well as the projects undertaken by his disciples.

Although Bartchy is careful to distinguish himself from the Vogt school, his work echoes this anti-Marxist agenda. He writes that slaves in the ancient world did not exhibit group self-consciousness: "For this reason, any such call as 'slaves of the world, unite!' would have fallen on deaf ears" (1992:66). However, very few Marxist historians would claim that slaves in the ancient world had class-consciousness, which in a Marxian universe unfolds historically among workers under capitalism.

Hollywood was certainly naive and uncritical toward its own presuppositions when it projected Roman slavery onto the big screen; but then, influential works on slavery written in the fields of classics and biblical studies have equally been shaped by their author's presuppositions about the nature of slavery in the ancient Mediterranean. Not surprisingly, since *Demetrius* appears within a year of the publication of Vogt's earliest essay on ancient slavery, the Cold War was a major influence on both Hollywood and post-war scholarly writings. Cold War sentiment reflected in *Spartacus* and *Demetrius* results in the construction of individual men striving for freedom against tyranny. In the scholarly writings we have considered, Cold War sentiment has the opposite effect: Vogt in particular downplays negative aspects of ancient slavery in order to vindicate classical civilization, perceived to be an antidote to atheistic, materialistic Marxist expansionism.

The remainder of this paper, then, will focus on the interlocking ways that *Demetrius and the Gladiators* constructs slavery and masculinity. Clearly *Demetrius* does not accurately portray the conditions of Roman slavery, but I shall not enumerate anachronisms and errors in Roman history and historicity represented in the film. When Hollywood projects Roman slavery onto the CinemaScope screen, a parade of masculine pageantry ensues.

MASCULINITY AND REPRESENTATION

The first slave depicted in *Demetrius and the Gladiators* is a future emperor of Rome: Claudius. After an exchange in which Claudius is threatened by the emperor Caligula, who is his nephew, Claudius' wife Messalina privately urges him to stand against Caligula. Claudius says to Messalina, "Men do not kill what they despise—only what they fear." He continues gathering wood for a fire, and Messalina implies that he has not

called a slave to gather the wood because he enjoys being on his knees. Claudius tells Messalina that when one lives under a tyrant, "It is better to live on your knees that to stand erect and be killed." Claudius, one of the highest ranking persons in Rome, lives like a slave, in fear and abject deference. He is not even master of his own wife, who we quickly learn is mistress of her own games of pleasure and politics. According to the film's dialectics of freedom and gender, it will take a slave to demonstrate what it means to be a truly free man, one who exercises his liberty to stand up for himself, others, and his beliefs, even at the risk of death.

In his opening exchange with Claudius and Messalina, Caligula decides to pursue return of the robe worn by Jesus that has been passed among his followers. The narrative of *Demetrius* takes up where *The Robe* leaves off. After the martyrdom of Marcellus Gallio and Diana (Richard Burton and Jean Simmons), the robe continues to circulate in the Roman Christian community. The robe is in the possession of Demetrius, played by Victor Mature, a freedman formerly the slave of the martyred Marcellus. When Caligula's forces go in search of the robe they threaten Lucia, a young Christian woman. Demetrius intervenes by striking the soldier who has threatened Lucia. Demetrius is arrested. Because he cannot produce papers documenting his manumission, he is returned to slavery as a gladiator.

Demetrius' forays into the gladiatorial arena are central to the development of the film. Each combat scene marks a crucial moment in the plot. More importantly, Demetrius' struggles to liberate himself from external dominion are also struggles for self-mastery. Gladiatorial action becomes the arena for the contestation of notions of masculinity and the production of the image of the free man. Thus, although the film bears the title of a character who is alternately a freedman and a slave, slavery becomes a trope that deflects attention from itself to a meditation on what it might mean to be free.

The viewer of the film watches the gladiatorial action over the shoulders of Messalina. Representation of Demetrius and the other gladiators as objects of the audience's gaze affects the film's construction of gender. As Laura Mulvey has demonstrated, Hollywood cinema typically relies on a gendered bifurcation of the gaze: men look, women are looked at. Active looking connotes masculinity; passive "to-be-looked-at-ness" connotes femininity. According to Mulvey, in the classic Hollywood organization of gender, a plot shifts not because of what women do but because of how they are seen. How then to account for a film such as *Demetrius*, where the camera situates the spectator to share Messalina's desiring gaze at the gladiators who are battling in the ring? The gladiato-

rial scenes represent crucial moments in the development of the plot not so much because of what Demetrius does but because Messalina gazes at him. Her voyeurism leads at several junctures to shifts in the plot.

Some critics have suggested that films that encode masculinity in terms of "to-be-looked-at-ness" construct a cryptic male homosexual viewer. Steve Neale includes *Spartacus* and *Ben Hur* in his discussion of films that represent men as the object of the gaze while disguising the eroticism of that gaze as part of a game of covert homoerotic looking. Such a reading of gladiatorial scenes assumes a monolithic viewing audience consisting of men uncomfortable with erotic feelings aroused by images of other men. Babington and Evans argue that Victor Mature's portrayal of characters such as Demetrius undermines Neale's thesis because these films attracted audiences dominated by heterosexual women, apparently eager to view the "erotic exhibition of the male star" (233). They note that Miriam Hansen's work on female spectators and the films of Rudolf Valentino offers a more relevant perspective on the cinematic construction of masculinity as the object of the gaze.

Hansen asks: "If a man is made to occupy the place of erotic object, how does this affect the organization of vision? If the desiring look is aligned with the position of a female viewer, does this open up a space for female subjectivity? "(10). Hansen's work avoids reducing spectatorial experience into a facile division between male and female pleasures; she recognizes the complex subjectivities of viewers, regardless of their gender identification. Two aspects of her argument are especially significant for our discussion of the construction of gender in *Demetrius*.

The first aspect of Hansen's work that is relevant to a discussion of *Demetrius* is her treatment of what happens to the construction of the male body when it is figured as the object of the gaze. By placing the male body in an unfamiliar context and displacing the usual organization of vision, the film denatures masculinity, features it as something that is made, not given. Hansen writes, "To the extent that Valentino occupies the position of primary object of spectacle, this entails a systematic feminization of his person" (11). So also in Hollywood's construction of the male Roman slave. The camera's emphasis on costume, such as body-revealing gladiatorial garb, mimics Hollywood's obsession with female fashion (see Figure 1 in Introduction). At the same time, Hansen notes:

> The more desperately Valentino himself emphasized attributes of physical prowess and virility, the more perfectly he played the part of the male impersonator, brilliant counterpart to the female "female" impersonators of the American screen such as Mae West or the vamps of his own films.

This holds equally for Victor Mature's Demetrius, as Susan Sontag writes in "Notes on 'Camp.'" Sontag claims that camp sensibility relishes "the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms," singling out Victor Mature as a case of "exaggerated he-man-ness." She continues, "Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It's not a lamp, but a 'lamp'; not a woman, but a 'woman'" (279–80). And Victor Mature plays Demetrius not so much as a man but as 'a Man.'

Influenced by Joan Riviere's classic psychoanalytic essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade," Judith Butler offers a thorough examination of the notion of gender as performance. To call attention to the myriad ways that women and men *enact* femininity and masculinity is ultimately to call into question the naturalness of the categories of gender. In the case of Victor Mature's performance as Demetrius, his bulky masculine presence parodies the audience's expectations of manliness and so reveals the constructed character of the male persona.

To gaze with Messalina at Demetrius' combative body unsettles expectations of gender; the male body appears strange, as though we had not really seen it before. It is not a given. Masculinity becomes "what must be explained." Surely masculinity is not innate, for other male characters are hardly "men"—Caligula, the emperor, cannot control his own rages; Claudius, future emperor, would rather grovel than stand erect. Their power derives from their positions in society, not from themselves. It is up to slaves to fight for masculinity in the gladiatorial arena. In their struggles to transcend their enslavement, Demetrius and the other gladiators become "men" and in the process define what it is to be free.

The second aspect of Hansen's work on Valentino films that is relevant to a discussion of *Demetrius* is the presence of two prominent female roles: the good woman, the compliant object of Valentino's gaze, and the lustful woman who gazes at Valentino. Demetrius offers a similar construction of feminine screen presence. Debra Paget as Lucia and Susan Hayward as Messalina enact the two sides of cinematic femininity. The camera never represents the virginal Christian Lucia gazing at Demetrius, but returns repeatedly to shots in which Messalina gazes at Demetrius. As I have noted, Messalina's voyeurism advances the plot at a number of junctures. Hansen points out that when the camera follows the gaze of the lustful woman, the viewer shares that perspective, creating a scopophilic space for women viewers to transgress societal inhibitions on looking too lustfully at men. Because the viewer shares the forbidden pleasure of looking, Valentino films ultimately do not judge their vamps harshly. Similarly, although Messalina tempts Demetrius to compromise the very qualities that distinguish him as a man, she remains a sympathetic char-

acter throughout: one who repents in the end, possibly easing the anxiety of women viewers who have shared her scopophilic delights. As one reviewer said of Messalina, "By implication, her less desirable traits of character are attributed to her being a crazy, messed-up kid in a bad environment" (Walsh: 345).

Demetrius is configured as the object of a transgressive female gaze precisely because he is a slave. This is literally true: the scenes where the camera shares Messalina's gaze most explicitly are scenes that prominently feature Demetrius as a slave, especially in the gladiatorial arena. I am suggesting more strongly, though, that the film represents Demetrius as the object of an erotic gaze because he is of lower status than the woman who desires him; the intersection of masculinity with slavery opens the possibility for heterosexual female viewers to explore their feelings of active desiring for the male body. That sexual contact between respectable matrons and their slaves was forbidden in ancient Roman society has no impact on the construction of the Hollywood gaze. Messalina can play at being the mistress of the gaze because she is, literally, the mistress, the owner, of the men she surveys. Difference in social status enables her to transgress conventional cinematic limitations on the female gaze (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Susan Hayward assesses her new gladiator (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

SLAVERY AND REPRESENTATION

Messalina and Claudius own the gladiatorial school, which they visit on the day of Demetrius' arrival. Demetrius tries to escape but is caught in a net (immobilized) and brought before Claudius and Messalina. When Demetrius asserts that cowardice is not the cause of his running, Messalina looks him up and down and ventures to back his assertion. Demetrius explains why he has attempted to escape: "God didn't put men on earth to kill their own kind, or women to enjoy their agonies as they die." This statement succinctly challenges understandings both of femininity and masculinity. Demetrius challenges a possible definition of manhood—that masculinity is established through fighting another man, potentially to death. Although Demetrius' statement is straightforward, the film is ambivalent. Demetrius enunciates a Christian ideal of pacifism, by which he tries to live; however, America in the early Fifties was in the early years of the military-industrial build-up of the Cold War. The audience of Christians viewing the film would not be comfortable with the idea that Christian ideals conflict with self-defense or the honorable defense of others. Throughout the film a paradox pervades the representation of masculinity. To live as a man Demetrius must live by his principles; to survive Demetrius must establish his prowess in the gladiatorial arena.

Demetrius' words on female pleasure accord with standard Hollywood condemnation of woman as the subject of the gaze, thereby underscoring Messalina's transgressive status. Messalina accepts the statement as a challenge and orders that Demetrius fight on the next day.

Messalina likes to watch. Her voyeuristic pleasure extends to a seat at a banquet for the gladiators on the eve of combat. Women, presumably slaves, dance for the men's entertainment. This scene seems to rely on the stereotypic code of woman as the object of the voyeuristic gaze, but the dancing is not erotic. Later in the film, women dance in a gratuitous scene at Messalina's villa, and the figuration of women playing at an exaggerated femininity seems to be a parody of itself. In *Demetrius* masculinity rather than femininity is emphasized as spectacle. The determining gaze in this particular scene belongs to Susan Hayward, seated in a box to the side. Men engage her gaze. As she watches, the gladiators roll dice to determine who will fight Demetrius, who has sworn not to defend himself—an easy kill.

The winner of the roll approaches Demetrius and slaps him, asking, "Is it true when you strike a Christian, he must turn the other cheek?" The camera rests on the face of Demetrius as the exaggerated features of Vic-

tor Mature register a crisis of masculinity: to respond is to fail his principles as a Christian, to fail to respond is to surrender control of the scene to another man. Just as Demetrius seems to be resolving the agon with himself, reigning himself back from returning the violent gesture, a gladiator named Glichon knocks down Demetrius' assailant. Glichon, an African (whom the film refers to as a "Nubian"), challenges the others: "Anyone else? I'm no Christian." Glichon's action eases the tension of the scene but not the paradox at the heart of its construction of masculinity. The tension between protecting others as a badge of masculinity and a belief that abstention from violence is necessary for Christians recurs in the film. Rather, the presence of both Demetrius and Glichon allows the expression of contradictory masculine impulses.

This drama of masculinity has been played for Hayward's eyes. The conflict of the men is important not only for what it reveals about their characters; the conflict is important for the development of the plot because of how the men appear to Messalina. She announces that Demetrius' opponent in the ring will be Glichon. Throughout the film only slaves approach the ideal of the free man, and William Marshall's Glichon is the most unequivocally free man of the entire film. Morrison notes that in American discourses "black people ignite critical moments of discovery" (viii), which Marshall's presence in the film repeatedly does for the viewer and for Demetrius. Just before they enter the arena, Glichon advises Demetrius to take his sword and feign a fight, with the precarious hope of clemency for both. He thus puts himself at risk for Demetrius. As the crowd begins to jeer, recognizing that the two men are not really fighting, Glichon urges Demetrius to defend himself. Demetrius does defend himself and wins the fight, but he refuses to kill Glichon, announcing to Caligula that he is a Christian and will not kill. The viewer watches the entire scene alongside Susan Hayward, an avid spectator in Caligula's box. When Caligula orders a soldier to go to the ring to kill Demetrius, Messalina begs to extend her scopic pleasure: Hayward asks Caligula to send a sequence of tigers to fight Demetrius. The camera shifts from sharing Messalina's view of the ring to focusing on Hayward as she leans forward breathlessly to catch each move. What Messalina sees is Demetrius, his exaggerated body barely covered in the gladiatorial costume, his legs encircling each of the tigers he fights.

Demetrius' contorted figure problematizes the male body, configured as the unfamiliar object of a female gaze. The scene plays on a contradiction inherent in Demetrius' masquerade of masculinity. To be a man who lives freely by his own principles, he must refuse to kill another man; however, to prove his manhood he must be able and willing to fight.

The resolution of the scene permits him to do both without resolving the tension inherent between the two. The scene thus renders masculinity both strange and impossible.

Finally, the presence of Glichon presages an awareness of what a truly free man would be and do. Given the disastrous history of slavery and racism in the U.S., it is not surprising that race haunts this American representation of slavery in the Roman empire, where race was not a determining factor. Babington and Evans argue that in a country slowly embarking on the road to an integrated society, the representation of an enslaved African as the freest and most manly character in the film is a bold and positive move (224–26). Although this position has some merit, I am more influenced by Toni Morrison's argument that the American literary tradition has not been interested in the Africanist character herself/ himself, but rather in the Africanist character as a catalyst to self-reflec-

FIGURE 2. Fearsome fighters (Credit: MOMA Film Archives).

tion on the part of the white subject, a "metaphorical shortcut" in this case to an exploration of freedom and masculinity (Figure 2).

Watching the fight has confirmed Messalina's desire for Demetrius, who is invited to serve as her house servant. Once again, Messalina's voyeurism serves as a conduit both for the viewer's pleasure in the act of looking and for the viewer's desire for narrative consummation. As Victor Mature and Susan Hayward exchange words and drawn-out glances, the camera establishes their mutual desire. About their desire the film is ambivalent; desire is the cinematic prerogative of the gazing man, not of the woman who should be content (if somewhat embarrassed) to be the object of the gaze. Another contradiction emerges in the film's construction of masculinity. To desire is a masculine trait, but again Demetrius' principles lead him to exercise control over that trait. To remain true to his principles he must remain chaste. Again, the film does not resolve the contradiction. When Demetrius reluctantly but firmly resists Messalina's seduction, she arranges that he will be returned to the gladiatorial arena.

Another bout is scheduled for the arena, another night of festivities precedes the match. On this occasion, the virginal Lucia disguises herself and sneaks in with the prostitutes who spend the night with the gladiators before they go into the ring. Debra Paget expresses her love for Victor Mature, who looks at her kindly but without a hint of lust. Susan Hayward is again a voyeur at the banquet; when she sees Demetrius and Lucia seated demurely side by side, she guesses that she is Demetrius' lover and insists that they be separated. To do this, she must disbar Demetrius from the next day's fighting, and he is returned to a nearby cell. A gladiator approaches Lucia and attempts to rape her. The other men stand by and applaud and laugh (presaging the rape scene in *The Accused*). The camera follows Demetrius' line of vision as he is forced to watch this from his cell. He cries, "God...if you are a god, help her." The camera frames his exaggerated response, the image of a man deterred from a free defense of a vulnerable person. As the scene ends, Lucia has collapsed, seemingly dead, in her assailant's arms.

The next scene tests Demetrius' understanding of himself as a man. He is not scheduled to fight, and Christian precepts prevent him from killing. However, the code of masculinity (certainly the code known to the movie audience) obligates him to avenge Lucia. As the gladiatorial action begins he insists on taking a sword; Glichon supports his plea. Demetrius enters the arena and kills Lucia's assailant; Glichon sends into the arena the others who were present, and Demetrius executes each in turn. At the end of the scene, Demetrius disavows Christianity and the god who abandoned Lucia. As always, the scene has been focalized through

Susan Hayward, who watches this new Demetrius with lusty anticipation. At the end of the fighting Caligula manumits Demetrius and elevates him to tribune.

The next scene, which continues to rehearse and test notions of masculinity and freedom, occurs at Messalina's villa, where she and Demetrius are sequestered. Scenes of the vigorous Demetrius lolling about with Messalina as women dance for their entertainment suggest the decadence of their life together, and the degree to which Demetrius has compromised principles by which he previously defined himself.

Peter, whom the audience has not seen since early in the film, appears at the villa. Messalina tries to keep him from Demetrius, but does not succeed. Peter reminds Demetrius of his former life with Jesus: "Anything that was base he could make noble...He found you a slave and he made you free...Now you've won a victory over him, haven't you, tribune? You've made yourself a slave again." After Peter leaves, Demetrius confronts Glichon, whom he has freed and who is serving as a guard at the house. Glichon admits that he has become a Christian. Demetrius asks Glichon what he has told Peter. Glichon says, "I asked him if someone who had killed thirty men in the arena, as I have, could ever hope to sleep at night." Demetrius grabs Glichon and orders him never to see Peter again. Glichon tells him to remove his hand and says calmly that he will not follow that order—he chooses his own friends. Demetrius says, "We were friends once," and Glichon responds, "I know," acknowledging the gulf that has arisen between them. Once again, Glichon's self-control, resistance to corrupt authority, bravery, and adherence to principle establish what it means to be a free man; the African character catalyzes the white character's self-awareness. As the scene ends, Demetrius dashes his glass on the floor, out of control. His manumission has produced a freedom that is a chimera obscuring his real bondage.

The film exposes but does not resolve several contradictions in notions of masculinity and freedom. Early in the film Demetrius' ideals of pacifism and chastity prevent him from acting to defend his honor when gratuitously slapped and from responding to Messalina's advances. Glichon's defense of Demetrius allows the film to enact contradictory aspects of masculinity without compromising the protagonist. Demetrius' disillusion with Christianity after the scene of Lucia's rape leads him to victory in the gladiatorial arena and a demonstration of his potential as lover. Having established these credentials of masculinity, the film can return Demetrius to the fold of Christianity. Having proved himself as warrior, Demetrius can be a man of peace. Having established his virility with Messalina, he can choose a love apart from lust.

In the final scenes of the film, Demetrius discovers that Lucia did not die the night of her rape. His faith is restored, leading to a confrontation with Caligula and a return to the gladiatorial arena. For the first time, Demetrius absolutely refuses the role of gladiator. At this point in the film he is able to do so without compromising himself as man: his dramatic earlier fights establish that he can win if he chooses. Demetrius stands, ready to die for his beliefs, when the action of an assassin interrupts this fate. Caligula dies; the film ends with a truce between Claudius, the new emperor of Rome, and Demetrius. Messalina stands by her emperor husband like a good wife; Glichon flanks Demetrius as a loyal friend. This unlikely, almost surreal, ending allows the viewer to avoid a confrontation with the real costs of living by one's principles, or thinking too seriously about the irreconcilable demands of masculinity the script imposes.

A film ostensibly about slavery in the early Christian era says very little about the lives of Roman slaves. Instead, it develops its ideal of freedom in the character of Demetrius, who struggles with tyranny and masculine weakness as threats to his freedom. His foil is the African Glichon, whose demonstration of freedom throughout the film serves as a catalyst for Demetrius' own transformations. The film constructs its dialectic of slavery and gender in the context of concern for politics, sexual and otherwise, characteristic of the early Cold War era. The social climate of the Fifties leaves its traces throughout the film. This is not surprising. As I argued at the outset, all our imaginings about ancient slavery reveal traces of our location in space and time. This is true not only for "low culture" productions like *Demetrius and the Gladiators* but also for "high culture" productions of scholarship on slavery in the classical/biblical world. The Vogt school originates in the same Cold War era as the resurgence of the biblical epic, and in its own way is equally marked by the concerns of that time. What it meant to be a slave in the ancient Mediterranean world remains an enigma; we only know the stories that others have chosen to tell (and choose to tell) about that reality.

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For Rent, "Cabin in the Sky": Race, Religion, and Representational Quagmires in American Film

Judith Weisenfeld
Barnard College

> In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics. It is this which defeats us, which continues to defeat us....Wherever the problem touches there is confusion, there is danger. Wherever the Negro face appears a tension is created, the tension of a silence filled with things unutterable.
>
> James Baldwin
> *Notes of a Native Son*

In 1941 when African-American filmmaker Spencer Williams released *The Blood of Jesus*, black audiences' cinematic choices also included Gary Cooper in *Sergeant York*, Maureen O'Hara and Roddy McDowell in *How Green Was My Valley*, Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine in *Suspicion*, and Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*. In segregated theatres, in church basements and in community centers, African-American audiences participated in the Hollywood process of making American identity through the viewing of films. For them, however, constructions of African-American identity proved a complex and disturbing process. Preston Sturges' film *Sullivan's Travels*, also released that year, made telling use of the image of black audiences of Hollywood films. Sturges sends his main character, film director John Sullivan, on an odyssey through American poverty in search of material for his next film. What begins as a tourist's view ultimately leads Sullivan to prison, sentenced to six years at hard labor. One evening the prisoners, treated to a picture show in a local black church, enter at the end of the service and find the congregation singing "Go Down, Moses...let my people go." The prisoners and the congregation then watch the films together. In the course of viewing the Disney cartoon before the feature and hearing the laughter about him, Sullivan has an epiphany and comes to "understand" the role that humor and comedy play in the lives of the poor. Finally rescued from prison by the studio heads, he determines to make comedies rather than political advocacy films in order to reach the masses more effectively. That Sturges chose to set the climactic scene of the film in the physical space of a black church

provides particular insight into the questions I take up here. Sullivan's epiphany, that popular culture serves primarily as an escape for the masses, rather than as a tool for educating and promoting social change, applies most especially to African-Americans as religious beings, for Sturges. In this presentation, the black church becomes the ultimate diversion from social and political problems for the most downtrodden of Americans who seek nothing more than their "cabin in the sky" (to borrow the title of a 1943 Vincente Minnelli film).

The issue of representations of people of color in American film has long interested me, a voracious consumer of old movies from the days of my childhood. As a child of color I could not help, in seeking to place myself in the images framed on the screen, but notice the literal marginalization of African-Americans in particular in this body of work. At the same time that the romantic travails of Ingrid Bergman or Ava Gardner compelled me and the dangerous situation in which Humphrey Bogart or Barbara Stanwyck found themselves moved me to the edge of my seat, the African-American maid, butler, or porter in the background drew my eye as well. What were *they* thinking? What were *their* lives like? Finding black characters in any context in which they appeared as multi-dimensional human beings in these films indeed proves a daunting task. Nurturing mammys, contented slaves, bowing uncles, dancing children, and lazy and corrupt black leaders abound at the edges of the stories of white heroes and heroines. Certainly, similar issues face viewers examining the presence of other people of color in American films.[1]

Representations of African-Americans as religious—generally within the context of Christianity—proved to be an important key to finding those often fleeting moments in which black characters emerged as complex subjects in Hollywood films. Time after time in these movies, the shuffling, bowing butler or porter suddenly stands up straight and a depth of emotion and personality emerges from the normally silent maid or cook when he or she utters a prayer in the background. And, indeed, I found these characters often praying. For example, after having viewed

[1] I do not use the example of African-Americans in American film as a simple stand-in for a discussion of "race" in these works. My work makes use of a growing body of literature that deals with race as a socially-constructed discourse concerned with the fluid nature of categories of race and their relation to the structuring of community boundaries and levels of power within communities. In this examination of the ways in which films participate in the process of formulating ideas about race, I make use of the specific case of images of African-Americans as part of a larger project on race, religion, and film in which I also address other racialized groups (Appiah; Fields; Higginbotham).

Alfred Hitchcock's 1944 *Lifeboat* many times and having consigned the African-American ship's porter who joins the passengers in the lifeboat to a "yessah" role, I recently noticed another aspect of this character. When the baby of a passenger, whom the porter had struggled so desperately to save, finally dies, the group aboard the lifeboat bury the child at sea. Some of the men look out on the water and search for the words to the 23rd Psalm, but falter. The porter appears in the frame with his head held high, filling in the words and completing the recitation of the psalm. As I have discovered in many of these Hollywood films, black characters often appear as most fully drawn when pictured in as participating in Christianity. Certainly, representations of African traditional and African-derived religions rarely move beyond depictions of savage cannibalism; but in American film, African-American Christians present an unusual opening.

Many years later, I became exposed to black independent cinema, now garnering increasing attention from scholars in many fields, and have come to see African-American religious subjectivity occupying an important place in this body of work. The struggle for a black independent cinema is nearly as old as commercial film in America, beginning with such early films as the 1919 *Birth of a Race*, made in response to D. W. Griffith's 1915 *Birth of a Nation*. Griffith's film, so innovative in its use of the medium, proved wildly popular among white viewers and, through that popularity, projected established literary representations onto a new level. Responses to the potential of film to operate as a means of reinforcing white supremacy took a number of approaches. In addition to protests against the film mounted by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, black producers like George and Noble Johnson of the Lincoln Motion Picture Company and directors like Oscar Micheaux and Spencer Williams strove in the years following to use film to present a range of images of African-American life. This process of "framing blackness," as Ed Guerrero (1993) has termed it, never took place entirely outside the context of the larger, white-controlled film industry, and rarely did it *not* involve the participation of whites. Thomas Cripps' work on the genre of black film emphasizes that it is not defined by an aesthetic, authentic "blackness," to the exclusion of white, but, rather, by what it has to say about black life. Cripps writes, "No other genre, except perhaps the American western, spoke so directly to the meaning and importance of shared values embraced by its audience" (1978: 12). These films, collectively known as "race movies," produced over a period of thirty-six years, may be marked by the boundaries of the 1912 film, *The Railroad Porter* and the 1948 *Souls of Sin* (Bowser).

These early films elucidate a significant struggle over images of African-Americans in the evolving medium. In this essay I will explore some of the ways in which African-American religious practices became a playing field on which both white and black filmmakers worked out the potentials of film with regard to issues of race and representation.My contention that, in early American film, some white filmmakers used film in ways that sometimes generated and often perpetuated racist stereotypes of African-Americans is admittedly not a novel one, nor that African-American filmmakers mounted responses to such images. Yet the ways in which a constructed African-American religious subject position figures as a multivalent trope in both Hollywood and black independent cinema has not been fully explored. Moreover, I argue that this trope occupies a central place in the ongoing struggle over race and representation in American film through World War II. As a preliminary venture in this area, this essay examines three films that provide productive readings of some of the contours of this struggle: *Within Our Gates* (1919), a silent film by African-American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux; *Hallelujah!* (1929), by white Hollywood director King Vidor; and *The Blood of Jesus* (1941), by African-American filmmaker Spencer Williams.

While I see religious subjectivity as figuring largely in a contest over representations of African-Americans, I explicitly reject an interpretation of this contest in which white Hollywood directors emerge with the scale tipped irredeemably against them in weighing "positive" and "negative" representations over time. I hope, here, to complicate considerably the definitions of these terms in order to interrogate notions of a normative cinematic image of African-American people. In addition, I resist the desire to measure these representations of African-American religious life in American film against something called "real" African-American religious experience. Rather than presupposing the existence of a univalent African-American religious experience, these films, perhaps, provide a window on a process of constructing, bounding, controlling, and/or expanding that experience. In the same way, rather than merely enter a battle over cinematic successes and failures in putting forth positive and negative images, I choose, instead, to view a complex of representations that, in their very conflicted natures, reveal the power and potential of the filmic trope of African-American religious subjectivity.

The three filmmakers whose films I examine here had varied relationships with the filmmaking industry that influenced, to some degree, their approach to their work. Black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux (1884–1951), who wrote, produced, and directed at least forty-five films between 1919 and 1948, remained, throughout the era of the silent film, the

most doggedly independent of white financial or artistic control. Financial difficulties after 1928 did force Micheaux to seek support from white investors. Spencer Williams (1893–1969), also an African-American filmmaker, who wrote and directed nine films between 1941 and 1947, had a much closer working relationship both with the Hollywood machine and with white-owned production companies. Beginning in the late 1920s, Williams worked for Hollywood studios in the capacities of screenwriter, assistant director, and actor, becoming best known in this period for his roles in a group of popular black westerns, including *The Bronze Buckaroo, Harlem Rides the Range, Two-Gun Man From Harlem,* and *Harlem on the Prairie,* as well as the 1937 first all-black horror film, *Son of Ingagi,* for which Williams also wrote the script. His productive working relationship in these years with white producer Alfred Sack led to Sack's funding of Williams' independent films in the 1940s. King Vidor (1894–1982) was one of the white directors who helped to make Hollywood, with a career spanning forty years and three major studios—MGM, Universal, and United Artists (Lloyd and Fuller; Finler). The three filmmakers, then, represent a variety of possibilities on a spectrum of the relationship between institutionalized, white-controlled mechanisms dominating the production of American films and questions of race, religion, and representation. I will begin with brief summaries of the plot lines of the films, as well as some of the major themes related to our topic, and then turn to a comparative discussion.

WITHIN OUR GATES (1919)

While neither religious institutions, nor religious subjectivity occupy center stage in Micheaux's *Within Our Gates,* images of African-Americans as religious beings provide a significant undercurrent in the plot. The film tells the story of Sylvia Landry, an African-American teacher in a Southern school for black children, founded by Rev. Wilson Jacobs, "an apostle of education for the black race."[2] Rev. Jacobs and his sister, Constance, oversee the school which serves the nearby community of poor African-Americans and has come upon serious financial difficulties. Moved by the need and sincerity of her students, Sylvia spends sleepless nights during which she can "think of nothing but the eternal struggle of her race and how she could uplift it." She finally volunteers to go north and help raise funds to save the school. Sylvia announces to Rev. Jacobs, "It is my duty and the duty of each member of our race to help destroy ignorance and superstition. I'm going up north where I'll try to raise the money we need. May God be with us!"

In Boston, Sylvia meets Mrs. Elena Warwick, a white philanthropist who agrees to consider donating the money the school needs to survive. Warwick calls on Mrs. Geraldine Stratton, a rich white Southern woman visiting Boston, to advise her on the best way to help African-Americans in the South. Stratton unleashes a tirade in response to Warwick's queries about the needs of Southern blacks. "Lumber-jacks and field hands. Let me tell you—it is an error to try and educate them. Besides, they don't want an education. Can't you see that thinking would only give them a headache? Their ambition is to belong to a dozen lodges, consume religion without restraint, and, when they die, go straight up to Heaven. Wasting $5000 on a school is plain silly when you could give $100 to old Ned, the best colored preacher in the world who will do more to keep Negroes in their place than all your schools put together."

The scene fades and the title introduces: "Old Ned as He Is" (his only appearance in the film), preaching a sermon on "Abraham and the Fatted Calf." Ned preaches, "Behold, I see that black people will be the first and will be the last. While the white folk, with all their schooling, all their wealth, all their sins, will all fall into the everlasting inferno! While our race, lacking these vices and whose souls are most pure, most all will ascend into Heaven! Hallelujah!" Old Ned jumps and points and shouts, and the congregation becomes increasingly involved in the sermon, some jumping out of their seats and shouting, participating in the sermon. Ned quickly takes advantage of their attention to coerce a large offering from the members of the church.

The next day Ned visits "his white friends," who ask his "opinion" on a newspaper article on African-American voting. Ned tells them, "Y'all knows what I always preach. This is a land for the white man and black folk got ta know their place. Let the white man go to Hell with his politics, wealth, and sins. Give me Jesus!" The white men applaud as Ned continues, "Leave it to me gen'men. I always preach that the vices and sins of the white folk will end them up in Hell. When the Judgement Day

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[2] All quotations from *Within Our Gates* are taken from the titles, reconstructed by Scott Simmon, for the Library of Congress Video Collection edition of the film. The film had been "lost" until the late 1970s when Thomas Cripps identified a print of the film in Spain under the title *La Negra*. Scott Simmon and the Library of Congress restored the film and reconstructed the titles by translating the Spanish-language titles in the Spanish print, through the use of four surviving English-language titles from the film, by using the model of another of Micheaux's extant silent films, and through readings of Micheaux's novels. See Scott Simmon, information booklet for The Library of Congress Video Collection, Volume I: "The African-American Cinema I: Oscar Micheaux's *Within Our Gates* (1919)."

comes, more Negroes than white will rise up to Heaven." As Ned prepares to leave, one of the white men kicks him in the rear and Ned leaves with a smile, saying, "Yessir, white folks is mighty fine." Once outside the room, Ned's anger shows on his face and we read his thoughts (in the titles), "Again I've sold my birthright, all for a miserable 'mess of pottage.' Negroes and whites—all are equal. As for me, miserable sinner, Hell is my destiny." Returning to Warwick and Stratton, Stratton concludes, "And so, my dear, you needn't trouble yourself over this illusion of educating the Negro. Leave it to those of us who know them—and who know just what they need."

By the film's end, Mrs. Warwick gives, not $5000, but $50,000 to save the school, having been convinced by Sylvia's presentation and horrified by Stratton's attitudes. The climax of the story comes, not with Warwick's assistance to the school, but with the revelation of Sylvia's life story as she tries to escape blackmail by her cousin's criminal friend, Larry, who believes that Sylvia had had an affair with a white man. We learn that Sylvia, adopted by a poor, sharecropping family, became the center of the family's hopes, because her education allowed her to keep her father's books, a direct threat to the sharecropping system that kept farmers in perpetual debt. When Jasper Landry, Sylvia's father, is wrongly accused of the murder of Philip Gridlestone, the landowner, the entire family flees. Sylvia's parents and brother do not escape the mob of whites seeking Gridlestone's killer and, in a terrifying sequence, a member of the mob shoots the young brother and the group lynches the Landry parents. Sylvia, hiding in an empty house, is pursued by Gridlestone's brother, who finds her and attempts to rape her. When he sees the scar on her chest, Gridlestone realizes that Sylvia is his daughter and he sends her north to be educated. This is the white man with whom Larry mistakenly believes that Sylvia has become involved. The film closes with the audience assured that Sylvia will marry the successful, educated, and politically active Dr. V. Vivian of Boston.

Micheaux's chilling depiction of the lynching of a family generally receives the attention of contemporary scholars, particularly because Micheaux released the film in 1919, known as "Red Summer" (because of heightened violence against African-Americans following the return of black soldiers from the war in Europe). The potential for additional urban race riots as a result of the showing of Micheaux's film aroused great controversy and forced him, at times, to remove part or all of the lynching scenes. While this scene represents an important moment in black independent film history, we leave it aside, and turn instead to Micheaux's attention to aspects of African-American religiosity.

In *Within Our Gates,* as well as in other of his films, Micheaux continually questions institutionalized forms of Christianity in African-American communities, particularly those institutions that do not explicitly engage in projects aimed at improving the political, social, and economic conditions of all African-Americans. Thus, Micheaux promotes Rev. Jacobs as a model because his school does not foster class conflict, but seeks to "uplift the race" through education. Nevertheless, Micheaux's work does rely on a vision of African-Americans as "naturally" religious and, therefore, susceptible to the desires of any unscrupulous con artist. Old Ned, then, appears as a particular incarnation of a character who makes his way into many of Micheaux's films and whom he develops most fully in *Body and Soul,* a 1924 film in which Paul Robeson plays a con man/preacher who wreaks havoc in a small community. Indeed, the similarities in the set, the stock characters in the church pews and the sequence of shots in Old Ned's scene in *Within Our Gates* and the central preaching scene in *Body and Soul* indicate related concerns. In both cases, Micheaux presents an African-American religious community that blindly follows its unscrupulous minister to its own detriment.

Micheaux does not present the possibility for deception as the "essence" of Christianity, however, and his films do not reject Christianity—the dominant religious orientation of African-Americans. In one example in which Micheaux makes a particular claim for Christianity, we see Dr. V. Vivian engaged in study. He reads a text that we also see on the screen: "The Negro is a human being. His nature is not different from other human nature. Thus, we must recognize his rights as a human being. Such is the teaching of Christianity." We are to assume, because of the linguistic distance placed between the author and "the Negro," that the author of this text is white and that Micheaux not only sees positive possibilities in Christianity for African-Americans, but also sees it as having the potential to bridge white and black communities of a particular social strata. Thus, Micheaux sets Old Ned's religious belief and practice against Dr. V. Vivian's and Rev. Jacobs', with *Old* Ned, markedly representing a past in which Christianity among African-Americans functioned to benefit racist whites. Vivian and Jacobs point to a future in which African-Americans embrace Christianity for the benefit of their own communities.

King Vidor's Hallelujah! (1929)

King Vidor's *Hallelujah!,* an all-black cast film made for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, concerns itself with the relationship between religion and sexuality for African-Americans. Reflecting on his motivations for

making this film at a time when Hollywood studios feared producing movies that would be perceived as targeting black audiences, Vidor, a white Southerner, wrote, "For several years I had nurtured a secret hope. I wanted to make a film about Negroes, using only Negroes in the cast. The sincerity and fervor of their religious expression intrigued me, as did the honest simplicity of their sexual drives. In many instances the intermingling of these two activities seemed to offer strikingly dramatic content" (Kisch and Mapp: xx; Cripps, 1977: 237).

Zeke Johnson, the film's main character, is the eldest son in an extremely large family of cotton sharecroppers who, although engaged in back-breaking labor all day in the hot sun, all still have energy to sing and tap dance in the evenings. Zeke, sent to town to sell the crop, becomes entranced by a woman, called "High Yella," who enters into a scheme with "Hot Shot," a local gambler; both trick Zeke into gambling his family's earnings away. The fight that ensues once he realizes what has happened leads to the death of Zeke's younger brother, sent along to assist him in the selling of the crop. Zeke returns home devastated by the consequences of his actions and, at his brother's funeral, has a transforming experience in which God "shows him the light."

The next time we see Zeke, he is a well-known preacher travelling with his family (all now neatly-dressed and scrubbed) conducting camp meetings under the name "Ezekiel the Prophet" (figure 1). High Yella and Hot Shot stand with the crowd and realize that the preacher is the same country bumpkin they had tricked in another town. High Yella goes to the camp meeting to heckle Zeke, but, instead, becomes converted by the power of his preaching. The lure of sexuality, however, remains too strong for Zeke who, becoming aware that "the devil is on him," tries to rid himself of his problems by proposing to Rose, the plain and virtuous family friend travelling with them. Still, that evening at another service, when Zeke sees High Yella, he runs off with her and the two move in together. The drudgery of everyday life does not suit High Yella, and, when Hot Shot returns to find her, she leaves with him. Zeke follows and murders Hot Shot after High Yella is killed in a fall from their wagon. After serving a sentence in the penitentiary, Zeke returns to the bosom of his loving family and to Rose, who still loves him. Mrs. Johnson's offer of chitterlings and spare ribs signals the resolution of all Zeke's problems.

On one level, Vidor makes a grossly simplistic connection between the impulses that drive religious fervor and sexual desire that, in his own reflections on the film, hold especially true for African-Americans—always stereotyped as "nature's people," to use Nell Painter's term—*naturally* religious and *naturally* sexual in ways over which we have no

FIGURE 1. "Ezekiel the Prophet" in King Vidor's 1929 MGM film *Hallelujah!* (Credit: Photofest).

control. Zeke cannot check his sexuality, not just where High Yella is concerned, but also around Rose who, nevertheless, appears as a more appropriate mate for Zeke. In another example, early in the film, a neighboring couple accompanied by their many children, interrupts the Johnson family's evening revelry to ask Zeke's father, who we are to assume is some sort of religious official, to marry them. Amused by the lateness of the wedding—given the large number of children the couple already have—Mr. Johnson nevertheless performs the ceremony. In the context of the wedding, Vidor edits in a scene in which Zeke attempts to rape Rose. Vidor, then, moves from the image and words of a religious ceremony to the image of Zeke, with the face and body posture of an uncontrolled animal, advancing on Rose shrinking in terror. Beyond merely indicating the simultaneity of the action of the wedding and the attempted assault, Vidor's editing decisions also underscore for the viewer the association between religion and sexuality for African-Americans and what religious fervor camouflages.

For High Yella, her drive for gambling, for money, for men, for dancing, for drinking, and for religion emerge as deeply interrelated passions. After Zeke baptises her, along with the other camp meeting converts, High Yella collapses and Zeke carries her into a tent. Both Zeke and High Yella, now aroused with religious emotion, succumb to the pull of sexual expression, and Mrs. Johnson discovers them kissing. Mrs. Johnson chastises High Yella, telling her to get up because she's "got more religion than is good for her." Too much of anything for African-Americans, even religion, leads to dissipation in the world of this film.

Vidor does present the possibility within religious leadership of conferring "manhood" on African-American men. Only when Zeke sings religious songs or preaches does he appear neither as a grinning clown, nor a mesmerized hypersexual animal. At those moments his face calms, his voice deepens, and his posture straightens, and, as preacher, he inspires confidence in people and moves them to conversion. On the level of African-American communities, Vidor poses religion as that force which has the ability to help black folk resist vice by channelling sexual energy away from sex. The faith of the Johnson family, expressed in communal reading of the Bible and family prayer, keeps them together. Furthermore, we are meant to interpret Zeke's difficulties as resulting from his contact with the evils of the nearby town. Thus, in order to resist vice successfully, black folk must know that their place remains on the plantation. One reviewer in *Variety* emphasized the centrality of this theme to the film, writing,

> Whites will accept [*Hallelujah!*] as a camera reproduction of the typical southland with its wide open cotton spaces, where the good natured, singing negro continues to eke out a bare existence; where he lives untrammeled by city ways unless he invades their riotous precincts; where he has his moments of joy, passion and religion. It brings realistically to the screen how he lives in nondescript surroundings, with continual evidence of illiteracy that even remains unpolished when becoming hysterically religious; of the happier side of plantation life, the carefree, syncopating singing and dancing cotton pickers whose lives run uneventful until death stalks in their midst or sordid tragedy drops into their gayety (August 28, 1929).

Thus, for this reviewer, death and sordid tragedy of their own making, rather than lynching, segregation, economic discrimination, and the withholding of civil rights, constitute the primary difficulties in the lives of carefree, rural African-Americans.

It becomes clear that Vidor's characterizations apply specifically to African-Americans, and his work rests on the interarticulation of religion and constructions of race. The religious practices of the African-Americans that Vidor presents function differently than religion does for white

Americans because, for Vidor, race necessarily mediates religious experience and possibility. For Vidor, in his own words, even "the polished Negro...possesses, under the surface, the rhythm and abandon, the love song and laughter of those in a primitive state (Cripps, 1977: 243)," and therefore every African-American's experience of Christianity becomes filtered through this primitive state, just as this primitivism propels African-American religiosity. Despite Zeke's valiant attempts to recreate himself as a mature, responsible, and thoughtfully religious man, his underlying, racially-marked nature continually emerges. A reviewer in *Literary Digest* noted Vidor's success in conveying race as a mediating element in religious experience when he wrote that the film affirmed that "the Negro is as different from the rest of us as we are from the Russians, the Germans, or the French" (October 5, 1929). Another *Vanity Fair* reviewer put it simply, "If the picture is limited, its boundaries are inherent to the subject" (August 28, 1929).

The Blood of Jesus (1941)

Spencer Williams' film, *The Blood of Jesus*, opens with the image of an African-American man plowing a field, followed by rural images to set the scene, with a soundtrack by Rev. R. L. Robertson's Heavenly Choir singing "Good News, the Chariot's Coming," and "Go Down, Moses." A voice-over begins:

> Almost gone are the days when peace ruled the earth with a firm and gentle hand, when fear of God dwelt in the hearts of men and women and children, when the ten original commandments were the accepted laws of every civilized country and nation on the face of the globe, when those who went to church on Sunday did not go back home to prey on their neighbors the remaining six days of the week, when religion was practiced with unfalse solemnity and honest sincerity and when soul salvation was a heritage from heaven for not merely a few thousand, but for many millions. Those days are almost gone from the earth...almost.

The main action begins with the central character, Martha Jackson, about to be baptized. We learn from the gossiping church women on the banks of the river that Martha's husband, Ras, has not been baptised, does not belong to the church, and has, in fact, gone off hunting for the day. One of the gossips, Sister Jenkins, accompanies Martha home and they find Ras sitting on the porch with a sack of stolen hogs that, when discovered by Jenkins, he argues that he stole only to feed his family. Later Martha encourages Ras to pray and "get religion" because this would make them much happier, and he agrees to try. As Ras sets his shotgun down it falls

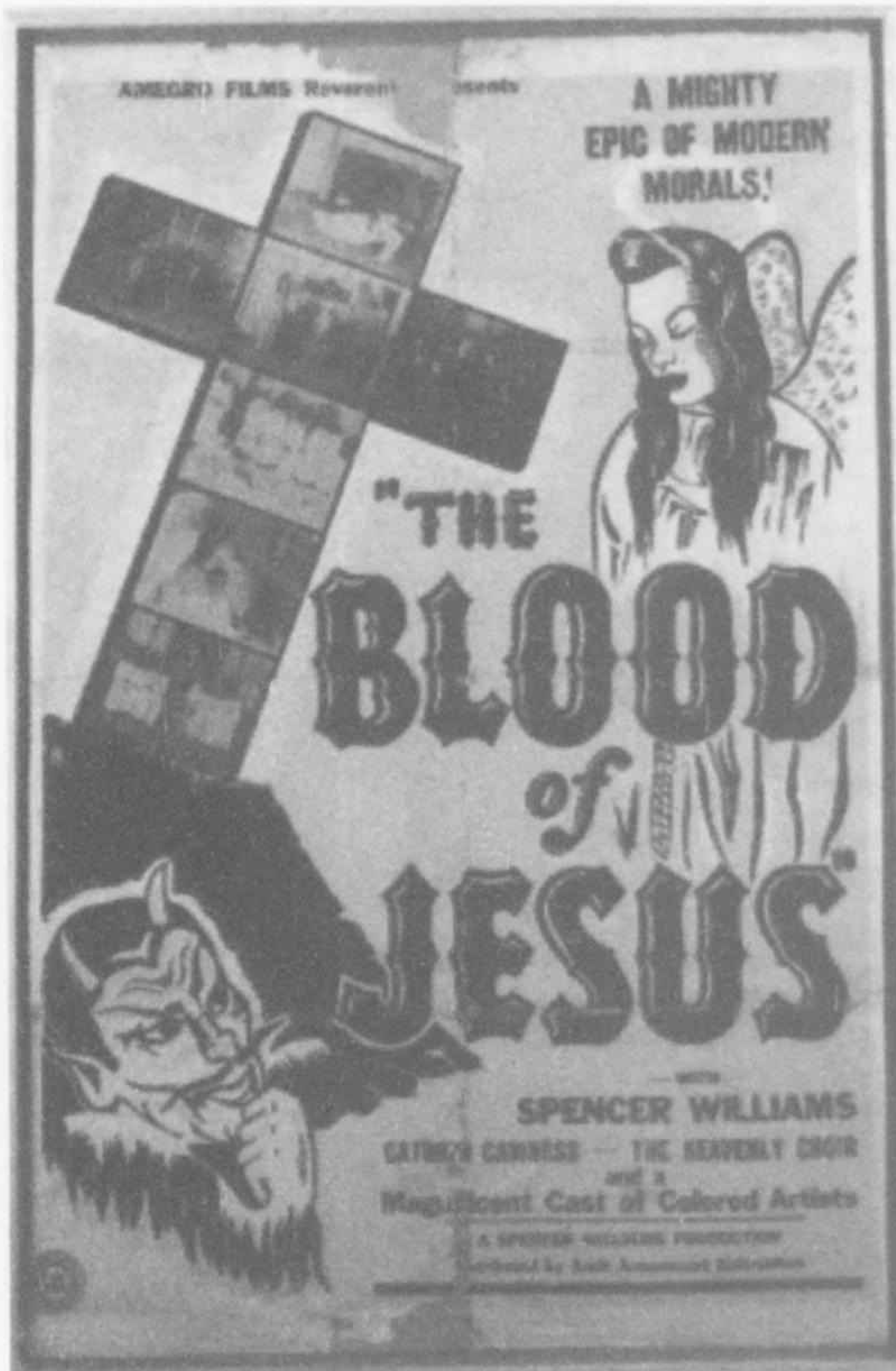

FIGURE 2. Poster for Spencer Williams' 1944 *Blood of Jesus* (Credit: Photofest/Jagarts).

and discharges, shooting Martha as she gazes lovingly at a picture of Jesus on the wall near the bed.

As members of Martha's church pray over her and sing, Ras sits in the corner crying and praying himself. Then, as Martha's body remains on the bed, we see her spirit respond to a beckoning angel and rise from the bed. They leave the house and walk along the road, coming to a point where shadowy figures pace back and forth. Martha asks the why these people remain in mourning. The angel replies, "They mourn because their efforts are yet unrewarded, because the unjust have struck down the good and the unselfish, because sin is enthroned in the seat of power." But, she informs Martha, her time has not yet come and, thus, Martha must make the journey home. The angel points her to the highway of life, warning of the choice she must make at the crossroads—to the right, life and to the left, death, hell and destruction. Significantly, the highway of life leads through "the city," and Martha must avoid the temptations therein.

Satan appears at the side of the road, dressed in a shiny red suit and, through his agent, Judas Green, successfully distracts Martha by presenting her with a dress and matching shoes and accompanying her to a nightclub. There Judas introduces Martha to Rufus Brown, who offers her a job. The three then go to Rufus' small juke joint where Martha realizes that Rufus expects her to work as a prostitute. Martha flees, followed by a group of male patrons from the juke joint who have mistaken her for another woman who picked the pocket of one of the customers. She comes to the crossroads where a sign before her points the way: "Hell" to the left and "Zion" to the right. Satan makes one last attempt to distract her, but this time Jesus, through a voice-over, intervenes and frightens him away. When the men reach Martha, Jesus again intervenes, and the biblical incident of the attempt to stone the prostitute is recapitulated. Collapsing

from exhaustion, she lies under the crossroad sign, now a crucifix. As Martha prays, the blood of Jesus begins to drip in large, thick globules from the crucifix, falling on her face. The scene dissolves, and the film ends with Martha in bed again, waking up. Ras and the church members gather and Martha's guiding angel reappears.

In one sense *The Blood of Jesus* may be interpreted as depicting the decline of an idyllic rural past into the decay and alienation of urbanization. One of the messages of the film is indeed that, like Martha Jackson, African-Americans as a community have been lured from the enveloping safety of the small town and the community church. Williams seems to be telling his audience that it is God's wish, even God's plan, that African-Americans reclaim or cling to the rural past. Martha's path is one that, significantly, passes *through* the city and, with the aid of Jesus and the angel, brings her back to her family and community. From this perspective, Thomas Cripps' assertion, in *Black Film as Genre*, that Williams' message is a "fundamentalist" one and exists only on the surface has some merit, as the film is grounded in belief in the redemptive power of the crucifixion and in the reality of miracles in the lives of good Christians. Yet the proclamation on the lobby cards and posters for the film that this is "a mighty epic of modern morals," contains within it a key to a deeper interpretation (figure 2). It is a story of *modern* morals for the community from Williams' perspective, and thus much more than a plea for a return to an idyllic past.

At every juncture, Williams problematizes the rural contexts and insistently refuses to romanticize the Southern black folk as maintaining a pure and authentic traditional life. In keeping with many films of the period that investigate the future of small towns in an industrial age (Levine, 1993), Williams' work evidences some degree of nostalgia for rural life. It seems unlikely, however, that African-Americans at the end of the Depression—an era that followed a heightened period of urban race riots and Southern lynchings, following the period in which segregation developed, following the failures of Reconstruction, following slavery—would identify the glorious past that the voice over describes in opening of the film with any point in their own history. Did any moment in the history of the American South correspond to the narrator's time "when the ten original commandments were the accepted laws for every civilized country and nation on the face of the globe?" While Williams affirms some aspects of rural life by juxtaposing rural images with the opening narrative, the disjuncture between the idyllic fantasy and the realities of sharecropping, perpetual debt, scarce access to education, and the spectre of terrorism by whites calls into question an interpretation ac-

cording to which the film asserts that in this Southern setting the black folk maintain a pure and authentic traditional life untroubled by any outside concerns. In addition, the use of the spiritual, "Go Down, Moses," with its refrain of "let my people go" against the scenes of a man engaged in back-breaking agricultural labor suggests a call for a rethinking of the traditional connection between African-Americans and the rural South.

Williams also refuses to romanticize the folk of the community. When, for example, the members of the church observe Martha's baptism, they gossip, and they continue to gossip every time they appear, even when they are engaged in prayer. Importantly, the black church itself does not escape unscathed in Williams' story. The minister of this church community appears as ineffectual and, largely absent, particularly from the community's watch over Martha's bedside. The real spiritual center of the congregation's life is not the minister, but Sister Jenkins, one of the women attending Martha at her baptism, a strong woman and a multidimensional personality who leads the community in prayer. The frictions evident within the community, as well as between the rural and the urban become clear in the ever-present tension between the spirituals and the blues on the film's soundtrack.

In *The Blood of Jesus*, Williams presents a story larger than that of one woman's spiritual journey. As viewers of the film we do not, for one moment, think that Martha will not successfully come through her trials in "the city." Indeed Martha's experience in the city hardly seems beyond her powers of comprehension, but, instead, figures as an almost inevitable experience that must be processed by all. Martha's experience serves instead as a vehicle for the transformation of both Ras and the church community. While this text functions on one level as a cautionary tale against certain elements of urban life, Martha journeys back not to a preserved community, but to one that came together and evaluated itself in the face of their experiences and of her "trip" to the city. Williams' prescription for African-Americans at this time calls for uniting as a Christian community that is emphatically not fundamentalist to the degree that it excludes its own members, but rather as one that can embrace varieties of experience. As the tension between the spirituals and the blues ultimately gave rise to gospel music, a form that integrates aspects of both, so too African-American Christians are called to bring together seemingly incompatible and disparate elements into an organic whole in order to advance the community.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS

Although produced in substantially different historical moments, each film addresses questions of African-American identities and the relation of these communities to the nation. Micheaux positions black Americans, emerging from the experience of the First World War, as fully American and as a group within the national body with as much complexity and potential—religious and otherwise—as any other group. Vidor's film sits at the cusp of the Depression era, and he offers the support of black families and communal effort as a means of withstanding the hard times ahead. In Williams' work, a strong communal ethos also functions to build hope for the future as America faces war in Europe.

In addition to addressing broad questions of national identity, religious experience and practice emerge as a central means of constructing a range of racialized identities for African-Americans in each of these films. Although the practice of Christianity by African-Americans holds within it the possibility of bridging the gap between white and black Americans for both Micheaux and Vidor, they differ on the question of how wide the gap and who controls the bridge. In Vidor's *Hallelujah!* the self-contained black world he constructs exists merely as a shadow of an absent, yet strongly-implied white world that sets a standard for "true" religiosity unreachable by Zeke and his family. What we are led to admire is their constant attempt to approximate that standard of Christian experience and expression despite the inescapable mediating factor of race. Micheaux's approach differs considerably in that he presents African-Americans as able to construct a bridge between themselves and sympathetic white Americans through the *practice* of Christianity. Through the characters of Sylvia, Rev. Jacobs, and Dr. V. Vivian, Micheaux rejects attempts by some whites to use Christianity as a means of controlling the potential of African-Americans to challenge the prevailing social order. Micheaux's work stands out among both race films and Hollywood all-black cast films in that he refuses to exclude white people from the world of his films and insists on portraying them as a social group filled with complexities and issues of identity construction and maintenance, just as he depicts African-Americans. Significantly, Micheaux can envision cooperation between black and white Americans on ground and terms set by African-Americans and chooses to emphasize this possibility in *Within Our Gates*.

The films also present a variety of perspectives on the role of the Bible in constructing African-American religious subjects. Micheaux's character of Old Ned illustrates the dangers of an illiterate minister and

congregation. Despite Ned's conflation of Bible stories into a sermon on "Abraham and the fatted calf," his congregation seems neither surprised nor dismayed at his mangling of the Bible, nor does his error interfere with their ability to engage the sermon with high emotions. In the end, Ned uses the fervor of his congregation and their biblical illiteracy to his financial benefit. Micheaux holds up literacy as the key to the advancement of African Americans in spiritual terms as well as political and economic. In *Hallelujah!* Vidor presents a poor but not uneducated family, at its best when gathered around the Bible in the evening. We come to understand that Zeke's situation has become too much for him when we witness his sermon at the camp meeting, one that seems to lack a grounding in the Biblical text. His return to the family and the Bible mark the resolution of his difficulties. In contrast to Micheaux and Vidor's use of biblical literacy as an important marker, the Bible as text remains conspicuously absent in Williams' *The Blood of Jesus*. The religious ethos of the film relies heavily on African-American folk religious traditions established through the period of slavery and transformed thereafter. The ubiquitous presence of slave spirituals as the musical setting underscores the ground in slave religion. As Lawrence Levine's (1977) work on slave culture emphasizes, spirituals functioned, in part, to expand the boundaries of time and space, both backward and forward, and allow enslaved African-Americans to bring the biblical past into the present time and to project themselves into a future in which justice prevails. In addition, through spirituals, biblical figures became real and active in the world. In Williams' film, instead of reading the text of the Bible, the characters interact with Satan, with Judas, and other figures made real, and thus evidence a biblical literacy not dependent on the ability to read.

All three films make use of images of African-American religious excess and all counsel moderation in religious expression, but each puts these images to different uses. For Vidor, excess is the "natural" mode of African-American expression, whether in sexuality, joy, religion, or general vice, and should not be encouraged and, indeed, should be limited wherever possible. Thus, Zeke's role as public, popularly-supported evangelist finally becomes more than he can handle with integrity. The resolution that Vidor provides for Zeke requires that he no longer be in the public spotlight, that he no longer have the access to material goods that the profession of preaching afforded him, that he no longer have access to a woman he finds attractive, and that he no longer look outside the bounds of his own family for anything. In Williams' *The Blood of Jesus*, moderation in religious expression becomes a means for broadening the boundaries of Christian community. Those on whom Williams calls to

moderate their expression of Christianity are those who create a rigid behavioral standard for admission into the community of Christians and yet themselves behave in ways that impugn those standards through gossip, jealousy, suspicion, or selfishness. Micheaux's religious prescription for African-American communities calls for an approach to religious practice that is more intellectual than emotional but does not, however, rest on class distinctions among African-Americans. Although educated and elite African-Americans appear at the center of Micheaux's narrative, they do not retain exclusive control of the characteristics that Micheaux seeks to promote. He presents hard-working, steadfast, intelligent although poor and uneducated people as individuals with as much access to Micheaux's advocated religious subject position as the elite. Similarly, members of the privileged class of African-Americans are equally likely to engage in vice in Micheaux's film world.

I have meant for this essay to be primarily suggestive of the possibilities of exploring cinematic representations of African-Americans as religious subjects in American film. Each film provides a simple and superficial reading which renders African-American people as religious in transparently sincere ways that, for better or worse, ground them in an all-black world that always "pales" in comparison with white worlds. I hope that this examination of these three films, albeit brief, serves to point the way to more complex readings that accord African-American religious life an important place in examining ways in which American film functioned to negotiate a complex and ongoing process of constructing African-American and American identities.

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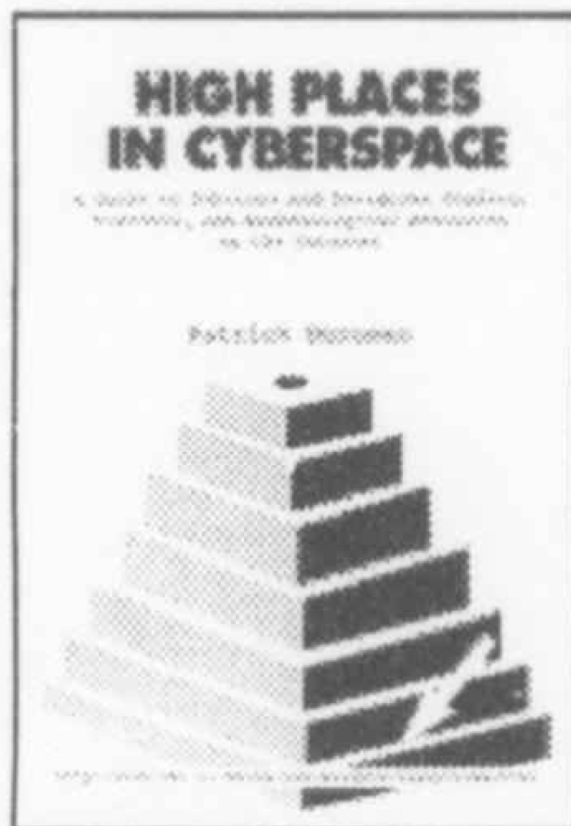

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How the West Was Not One: Delilah Deconstructs the Western

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ABSTRACT

In the climactic scene of Clint Eastwood's 1992 film *Unforgiven*, the character of Little Bill (Gene Hackman) is staring down the barrel of William Munny's (Eastwood) rifle, when he intones the helpless statement, "I don't deserve this ...to die like this; I was building a house." The film alludes here to Deut 20:5 (cf. Deut 28:30; Jer 29; Isa 65; 1 Macc 3:55), where the act of house-building is one of the three activities that excuses one from military conscription. Daniel L. Smith has linked this with a concern for the survival of the community during times of warfare. This analysis fits well with the function of Little Bill's house-building throughout the movie, which is a trope for his desire to maintain the borders of a stable community within which he can peacefully retire. But his community crumbles, and his house remains unfinished because he constructs both on the presumed absence of women.

The attempt to construct a world without women is a standard element in the Western genre. But unlike previous Westerns, *Unforgiven* foregrounds, rather than assumes, this impossible absence and in fact makes it a central drive of the plot, manifested not the least in a character named Delilah. Having identified the concern for house and the figure of Delilah from the Deuteronomistic History, we may begin to see numerous allusions in the film to this biblical work. Drawing on Derrida's article "Force and Signification" and Irigiray's book *This Sex Which Is Not One*, we may also see how *Unforgiven* mobilizes biblical discourse in its construction of an ambiguous but immediately recognizable identity as a Western, even as it effectively deconstructs the genre's most consistent element: the notion of a self-sufficient "masculinity" without reference to the "feminine."

If one watches enough reruns of the 1960s TV Western series *Bonanza*, one inevitably begins to wonder how it has eluded the attention of Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigiray. Leaving aside for the moment the thrilling action scenes and the jovial yet heartwarming banter of the Cartwright clan, episode after episode exhibits a structural integrity worthy of Jean Rousset and a repression of the feminine that would confound even Freud. But for some inscrutable reason, *Bonanza*—and the Western genre as a whole—managed to escape both Derrida's analysis of Rousset and structuralism in his article "Force and Signification" (1978) and Irigi-

ray's analysis of Freud and the feminine in her book *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985). In this paper we will do our bit to rectify this oversight, bringing Derrida and Irigiray to bear on the Western and finding unlikely allies in Clint Eastwood and the Bible.

Derrida Does the Ponderosa, or, Structure, Sign, and Gunplay in the Discourse of the Western

The Western is a genre that lives or dies on structure. We see this both in what Derrida calls "geometrism," as well as what he calls "preformationism." In geometrism, the figures of rhetoric are understood in terms of spatial patterns: the familiar binary oppositions, but also the curve, the helix, and the ring (Derrida, 1978:16–17). The Western evinces clear spatial boundaries, most graphically epitomized in the circular figure of the corral. The corral represents the structural border *par excellence*: the inside/outside distinction here functions to separate nature from civilization. Horses kept inside the corral are domesticated, tamed, and separated from their wilder brethren on the mesa. Once outside the corral, the energy of the horse must be literally "harnessed" in the service of men (masculine noun intentional), lest the animal break away and take to the great wide-open spaces. Likewise with the cattle herd, who on the range represent a great seething beast, on the verge of stampeding at any moment and thereby pulverizing any thing or person that gets in its path. But once in the corral, the *Thundering Herd* (the title of a Zane Grey novel) becomes a group of much more prosaic "cows," little more than steaks-on-legs waiting passively to be eaten.

Following the ring structure outward concentrically, the next border we encounter is that of the ranch. The ranch depends for its very life on the corral, and while it surrounds and incorporates the corral into itself, it represents the next level of order or culture over against the wildness of nature. This wildness exists outside the borders of the ranch; the ranch or homestead is carved out of the midst of the desert, and it must constantly be maintained against the threatening chaos.

A third level in the ring movement may be seen in the Western town. As the ranch depends on the corral, so the town depends on the ranch. The cowboy tames the wild herd in order to turn a profit, and the town tames the wild cowboy to turn its own profit. Each boundary ring exists to keep the lawlessness of nature at bay; yet each space marked off by the boundary must incorporate into itself something of that lawlessness in order to survive. As with any structural system, the moment of border crossing is the moment of greatest threat, and so the liminal must

be guarded meticulously. In Clint Eastwood's 1992 film *Unforgiven*, we see this very clearly in a scene where Little Bill, the Sheriff played by Gene Hackman, viciously beats English Bob, a wandering gunman played by Richard Harris, while the entire town looks on.

All this concern for the maintenance of boundaries is represented synecdochically in the body of the gunman. This border must finally be maintained at all costs. The gunman of the Western must be in total control over his body. Consequently, he talks little, eats little, and is rarely portayed as having sex. The body of the hero is nearly completely closed off to the outside world and is ruled over by his iron will.[1] The classic Western is less about escaping the constricting aspects of law and culture (i.e. the East), as is often supposed, than it is about establishing an even stricter code of law and conduct. The fact that the setting is the wide open, lawless western territories only serves to accent the necessity for strict enforcement.

The ultimate threat to all these borders is the badman. The badman threatens to rustle the cattle, shoot up the town, and—the ultimate threat—put holes in the body of the hero. So we find that alongside the geometric structure of the world of the Western is the deep stucture of its plot, which moves inexorably toward the confrontation between two gunmen, one bad and one good. This type of stucturalism is what Derrida refers to as preformationism, a term drawn from biology indicating that "the totality of hereditary characteristics is enveloped in the germ, and is already in action in reduced dimensions that nevertheless respect the forms and proportions of the future adult" (1978:23). In other words, we know what's going to happen right from the beginning. One could make a strong argument that such structural regularity is the appeal of all popular culture. One knows that in every action film the hero will survive all the explosions to save the plane, train, or bus he is on and that he will always encounter a conveniently placed young, single woman; one knows that if a Smashing Pumpkins song starts out slow and introspective that the power cords and angst are not far behind. The Western is no different. One knows that the force of good (or law and order) will be challenged by the force of evil (or lawlessness), leading to a final confrontation in which good triumphs over evil, and law and order are decisively reestablished.

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[1] Jane Tompkins (56) notes, in this regard, Octavio Paz's definition of the "macho" as "hermetic being, closed up in himself."

A key element in each of these structural construals of the Western is violence. The violence of the drunken cowboy or of the evil gunman is what both the *spatial* stucture of the town and the *teleology* of the plot movement attempt to neutralize. The central irony of the Western is, of course, that only through the counter-violence of the hero can the evil violence be neutralized. The Western takes into itself the very thing it attempts to keep out. The dynamic is not unlike that of the practice of scapegoating explored by Derrida in "Plato's Pharmacy" (1981:120–34). In ancient Greece, the scapegoat (or *Pharmakos*) was ejected from the city in a ritual of purification. Derrida writes:

> The city's body proper thus reconstitutes its unity, closes around the security of its inner courts...by violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression...Yet the representative of the outside is nonetheless *constituted*, regularly granted its place by the community...in the very heart of the inside. (1981:133)

The line between inside and outside is not so secure. The threat of violence, projected onto the gunman-from-outside, already exists in the figure of the gunman-on-the-inside. The Western genre (at its best) is not unaware of this irony, so that even the protagonist is felt to harbor a certain intrinsic danger just beneath the cool surface. But it is exactly this danger and violence that the Western imagines it has controlled; more than that, it imagines to have reduced it to a single, pure moment of ritual violence (Derrida's "ceremony of the pharmakos" [1981:133]). Zane Grey's protagonist, Buck Duane, in *The Lone Star Ranger* anticipates this ceremony as he goes to a gunfight:

> He forced into mind the image of Poggin—Poggin, the tawny-haired, the yellow-eyed, like a jaguar, with his rippling muscles. He brought back his sense of the outlaw's wonderful presence...Poggin was his supreme test. And this abnormal and stupendous instinct, now deep as the very foundation of his life, demanded its wild and fatal issue. (299)

The wild and fatal issue of the Western is thus a man-to-man contest between noble warriors in which one must inevitably give way in the face of the skill and training, and sheer animal agility, of the other.

Or so the Western imagines. But with *Unforgiven* Clint Eastwood recognizes, like any good poststructuralist, that spatial structures cannot finally achieve "the simultaneous comprehension of a homogeneous reality in a unifying operation" (Derrida, 1978:14), and that the "ceremony of the pharmakos...ceaselessly undoes itself" (Derrida, 1981:133). That is, structural boundaries cannot remain secure, and the ritual shoot-out can-

FIGURE 1. Clint Eastwood prepares to settle accounts as gunfighter William Munny in *Unforgiven*, a Warner Bros. release. © 1992 Warner Bros. Inc.

not remain pure.[2] And Eastwood, perhaps *not* like any good poststructuralist, uses the Bible to tell us so.

Consider for example the penultimate scene of *Unforgiven*, when Eastwood's character, William Munny, steps into a saloon crowded with Little Bill (Gene Hackman) and his deputies. Munny shoots the proprieter Skinny for displaying the dead body of his partner Ned Logan (Morgan Freeman). In a chaotic gunfight, Munny then shoots a number of the scared and inept deputies, as well as Little Bill himself. Before the final shot that will finish him off, a wounded Little Bill intones the hopeless line, "I don't deserve this...to die like this; I was building a house." Little Bill's statement makes no sense until one realizes that it is an allusion to Deut 20:5, which occurs there in the midst of instructions about the preparation for war:

[2] Though we refer throughout this article to *Unforgiven* as Clint Eastwood's film, we are not unaware of the collective nature of film making. No doubt much of the subtlety with which *Unforgiven* appropriates biblical and religious imagery and language, for example, is attributable to screenwriter David Webb Peoples, who also wrote the screenplays for *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Twelve Monkeys* (1995).

> Then the officers shall speak to the people saying, "What man is there that has built a new house and has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his house lest he die in battle and another man dedicate it."

The act of building a house is presented—along with the planting of a vineyard and betrothal—as an activity that exempts a person from military conscription. These are activities that are too important to the future well-being of the community to allow them to remain unfinished in case of the individual's death.[3] People engaged in these activities, in the words of Little Bill, "don't deserve to die": the survival of the community depends on them. And the implication is that if one guards these activities and those engaged in them, then a stable community can be maintained in spite of the violence of war.

What makes this more than just a passing allusion in *Unforgiven* is the extent to which the trope of house-building is integrated both into the film and into the Deuteronomistic History. It functions throughout the film as a metaphor for Little Bill's own concern to maintain the stability of a community in the face of violence; not the violence of all-out war as in Deuteronomy, but the violence of wandering gunmen, which we have seen is a central concern of the genre. So the borders of the community are rigorously policed. In *Unforgiven,* all guns are to be turned over to Little Bill and his men when entering town, and are returned when leaving. Violence is to remain outside the town limit (or ring), but Little Bill and his men must be armed and willing to resort to violence in order to disarm and render nonthreatening those who would invade the town.

What the classic Western has left virtually unchallenged, and what *Unforgiven* quite literally blows away in the scene above, is the notion that the violence practiced by the good guys is qualitatively different from the violence practiced by the bad guys, and that the community can in fact host this "limited" violence within it for the sake of maintaining its essentially "peaceful" nature.

Irigiray and the Scene of Riding, or, This Sex Which Is Not a Gun

The tightly constructed world of the Western strives to be, and often nearly is, a world without women. Jane Tompkins (28-45) has argued that the genre arose as a male reaction against the domestic novels—written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Susan Warner, Maria Cummins and others—

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[3] A good recent treatment of this subject can be found in Daniel L. Smith: 133–37. See also Carmichael.

of the 19th century. These novels were often concerned with religion, took place in the confines of the home, and featured female protagonists. The Western systematically exorcised all these elements. It ignored or belittled religion, took place in the wide open spaces of the mesa or the public space of the saloon, and, most emphatically, it featured men being men. Or to quote a line from the movie, *The Santa Fe Trail*, "Kansas is alright for men and dogs, but it's pretty hard on women and horses."

In other words, it would be difficult to find a more convincing example of what Luce Irigiray has called "the phallocratic law of order" than the Western. Irigiray's critique of psychoanalytic discourse—that it "implies that there are not really two sexes, but only one" (86)—could not be more appropriate to the Western. As with an unproblematized psychoanalytic discourse, the feminine exists in the Western only as the negative or the lack in relation to the male. "Westerns insist on this point by emphasizing the importance of manhood as an ideal. It is not one among many, it is the ideal..." (Tompkins: 17–18). This repression of the feminine is manifested to a near-cartoonish extent in *Bonanza*, which not only focuses on an all-male family of four, but which—given the fact that the three sons all have different but equally deceased mothers—requires its audience to concur in a not-so-subtle pathological need to kill off women. The series works diligently to maintain this absence of women. After a few episodes, a pattern becomes apparent. A woman arrives from "outside" in a stagecoach. One of the Cartwright boys develops an interest in her and sometimes even proposes marriage. At this point we know the woman is doomed either to death or to some unforeseen circumstance that requires her to return "East"; anything to keep her from invading the all-male preserve of the Ponderosa.

But just as we saw with the element of violence, the Western cannot completely exclude women. First, as Tompkins puts it, "The women and children cowering in the background of Indian wars, range wars, battles between outlaws and posses, good gunmen and bad legitmize the violence men practice in order to protect them" (41). Second, as none other than Michael "Little Joe" Landon himself pointed out about *Bonanza* in an interview with Johnny Carson, people begin to get a little nervous about the virility of these men who spend so much time together without women. So the Western must make room for women, if only to give men something to fight about or to prove that they are not queer.

Women who do show up in Westerns are severely constrained in their roles. Though the protagonist is never married, he nearly invariably has a "love interest" who is opposed to the strict code of masculinity by which the gunman lives. She represents the soft life of the East, education,

society, and a feminized Christianity. As a traditional-minded critic puts it: "She is against killing and being killed, and [the man] finds it impossible to explain to her that there is no point in being 'against' these things: they belong to his world" (Warshow: 436). Again we see a pattern emerge. The woman pleads that the man give up his guns and refuse to go out to meet the badman. If he engages in violence, she will leave him. The man occasionally wavers in the face of the woman's onslaught. Immediately preceding the scene in *The Lone Star Ranger*, quoted above in section I, in which the protagonist Buck Duane goes out to meet the outlaw Poggin, Duane is saying goodbye to his love, Ray Longstreth.

> She was throbbing, palpitating, quivering, with hot wet cheeks and arms that clung to him like vines. She lifted her mouth to his, whispering, "Kiss me!" She meant to change him, hold him. (298)

It is a wonder that the gunman ever makes it to his battle! But in the end he always goes to the gunfight, and the woman always takes him back. This victory over the woman becomes as important to the genre as the victory over the badman.

At the center of any phallocratic symbolic order is, by definition, the phallus. The phallus is the guarrantor, within the family economy, of the Law of the Father. It "assures and regulates the economy of libidinal exchanges" (Irigiray: 61). In the Western, the most obvious representation of the phallus is the pistol. The pistol hangs low on the gunslinger. It is his ultimate tool for proving his virility. And the pistol is quite explicitly the guarrantor of the symbolic order that the Western works so hard to maintain. There is a wonderful scene in *Unforgiven* that makes explicit, with a sly wink, the identification of the pistol with the phallus, and that does so in the context of a subversion of the imagined ideal of skillful man-to-man combat. Little Bill is describing to a writer the way a gunfight actually took place between English Bob and Two-Gun Corcoran, as compared with the romanticized version the writer has published. He tells the writer that Two-Gun Corcoran never in fact carried two guns, but that he got his nickname because "he had a dick that was so big, it was longer than the barrel on that Walker Colt that he carried." He goes on to tell the writer that English Bob was not defending the honor of woman (as he claimed) and that it was not a fair fight. English Bob was "too damn drunk" to shoot straight and when Corcoran's gun backfired, Bob walked right up to him and shot him in the liver.

The scene is indicative of the subtle line that *Unforgiven* treads in maintaining a recognizable identity as a Western film, while at the same time working against the grain of that genre's "strict set of formal and

thematic codes" (Tompkins: 25). Instead of naively reiterating these codes, the film manipulates them in order to expose and subvert the ideologies they represent. We saw this above with the notion of a noble and necessary violence. *Unforgiven* functions similarly in relation to gender, exposing the instability of the masculine construct and making women's experience the drive of the plot.[4]

The starting point of the film's plot is a prostitute named Delilah. The opening scene is the brutal slashing of her face by one of her cowboy customers. The violent outbreak of the man is triggered by Delilah's laughter: when the cowboy (a pointedly large man, remniscent of Samson) unzipped his pants, Delilah "gave a giggle" at the size of his penis. Irigiray writes that "in our social order, women are used and exchanged by men" (84). As commodities, women are objects of transaction: they have no voice, nor do they have any qualities of their own; they can only reflect the qualities of men. Prostitutes are inscribed in this order in the most apparent way, but all women experience it. Delilah, however, rejects her position in this order with a single laugh. She is neither lack nor flaw. Instead, she points out the lack of the man—his "teeny weeny pecker" as the character Alice puts it—and by so doing strikes at both the foundation of his masculinity as well as the guarrantor of the symbolic order of the Western. Delilah has no penis envy. Through the speech-act of laughter, she moves into the subject position and makes the man the object of exchange.

The cowboy—who must have been reading his Freud—reacts with fury. He grabs a long knife and begins to slash Delilah's face, violently attempting to reinstate himself as the subject of their interaction. The long, sharp knife penetrates the woman as the phallus could not. Delilah emerges from the ordeal silenced, de-sexed, and scarred. Such is the reactionary force of an ideology under threat.

The prostitute's name-sharing with the biblical "temptress" extraordinaire is not incidental. It is another example of *Unforgiven* employing biblical allusion as a primary tool to destabilize the boundaries of the

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[4] The issue of whether *Unforgiven* subverted or reinforced the strictures of the Western genre was a matter of debate among film critics. The judgment of Jane Tompkins and Paul Smith in favor of the latter is no doubt influenced by the fact that both had just written books in which the structural and thematic regularity of the genre was extolled (Tompkins; Smith 1993). As this article makes clear, we tend to agree with those critics, like Eleanor Ringel of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and Gilbert Adair of the London *Sunday Times*, who see the film as exhibiting a much more complex and ambivalent relationship to the genre. See especially Adair: 196–7.

Western genre. In this case, there is an interplay between the biblical Delilah, the film's Delilah, and the Delilah of popular culture in general. Contrary to popular wisdom, the Delilah of the Bible does not use trickery to obtain the secret of Samson's strength. She is, in fact, remarkably straight-forward. Mieke Bal (1987) has examined the popular commentaries on this story, as well as its treatment in children's books. Considering the ambiguity in the biblical account, Bal uncovers a remarkably uniform response. The image of Delilah is consistently negative: Delilah is beautiful, but "false, unreliable and greedy" (Bal, 1987:39). The reasoning behind this judgment is a circular process of mythification and naturalization, wherein the reader conflates motivation with moral character and then explains both in terms of the other: Delilah's betrayal of Samson was a bad thing, which demonstrates that she is a bad woman, which explains why she did a bad thing. Delilah becomes the paradigm of the wicked woman, seducing and betraying, exploiting all men's one weakness: desire for the female body. Delilah, both in the Bible and in popular culture, symbolically castrates Samson by cutting his hair. The supplied motivation turns her into "the castrating bitch," envious and therefore after masculine strength, masculine potency, and masculine genitalia.

But the character Delilah in *Unforgiven* is not evil. She is young, inexperienced, even innocent. The symbolic castration she accomplishes (by verbal belittlement) is not because she is wicked or envious. As Alice says, she just "didn't know no better." Respect and desire for the phallus is not something that women intrinsically feel, nor is it that which defines their sexuality. It is something that they learn. Delilah's "error" was that she had not yet learned that she was supposed to envy the male sexual organ—an envy that is expressed in submissive awe by good women and in castrating rage by wicked women.

If the cowboy in *Unforgiven* has been reading his Freud, then Delilah has been reading her Irigiray, who writes: "It is not a matter of toppling that [masculine] order so as to replace it—that amounts to the same thing in the end—but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an 'outside' that is exempt, in part, from the phallocratic law" (68). Delilah neither reveres nor rages against the phallus, and therefore places herself outside the phallocratic order and simultaneously calls attention to the "smallness" of its foundation.

The violence of the cowboy toward Delilah quells for the moment the "disruptive excess" (Irigiray: 78) that threatens the masculine. Here we begin to see the complexity of the inter-relatedness of gender and violence in the Western, since this type of violence against women is necessary to keep women in their place and maintain the masculine ideal. The

economy of exchange goes into immediate effect. Little Bill arrives to do damage control. Skinny, the proprietor of the Saloon and the prostitutes' pimp, demands restitution: he has a "lawful contract" demonstrating an "investment of capital," and now the whore is "damaged property." The crime is against Skinny, not Delilah, and Little Bill assesses a fine against the cowboy and his companion, to be paid to Skinny. If the episode ended there it would simply be absorbed into the phallocratic economy without causing more than a tremor. But this does not happen.

For classical psychoanalysis, one of the results of penis envy is that the young girl turns away from her mother because the mother does not possess the valorizing organ. "This rejection of the mother is accompanied by the rejection of all women" (Irigiray: 69). In *Unforgiven*, exactly the opposite happens. The prostitutes, led by Alice (the "mother"), band together around Delilah and proceed to "jam the theoretical machinery" (Irigiray: 78) of the Western. The women pool their resources to hire gunmen to kill the cowboy who cut Delilah. When some of the women express doubts, Alice (Frances Fisher) states:

> Just 'cause we let them smelly fools ride us like horses, don't mean we gotta let them brand us like horses. Maybe we aint nothing but whores, but by God we aint horses.

FIGURE 2. Gene Hackman, as small-town sheriff Little Bill Daggett, talks to prostitute Strawberry Alice (Frances Fisher) about the hiring of bounty hunters in *Unforgiven*, a Warner Bros. release.
© 1992 Warner Bros. Inc.

Alice acknowledges her position as less than human when she engages in the commerce of her body, but she refuses to be treated as less than human in any other circumstance. The phallocratic law is pervasive, but it is not all-comprehending; there is (as Irigiray suggests) an "outside" from which one may "disconcert the staging of representation according to exclusively masculine parameters" (Irigiray: 68).

The women in *Unforgiven* disconcert the staging of the Western with a vengeance. By putting out a call for gunmen who will avenge the cutting of Delilah for money, they effectively reverse the prostitution dynamic. It is no small irony that, mirroring the reduction of women to their function in servicing male desire, the women turn exactly that which is most sacred to the male economy, the ability to wield the phallic pistol, into a simple object of exchange in its own right. It is important to note that the women in *Unforgiven*, unlike the protagonists in the recent models-with-guns movies *Bad Girls* and *The Quick and the Dead*, do not attempt to claim a pre-existing "masculine" subjectivity by picking up guns and doing the job themselves. To do so within the libidinal economy of the Western would be tantamount to accepting the notion of penis envy. By engaging in the much more symbolically disruptive move of subjecting the phallic pistol to the economy of exchange, the women are able to expose the fallacies inherent in the imagined structural integrity of the Western's ideal world.

Judging the Western

It should be clear by now that our two organizing themes for this paper—violence in the service of the maintenance of borders, and the absence of women—are too closely related to be separated. The presumed "absence" of women is actually the *violent exclusion* of women. Rather than repressing this violent exclusion, as *Bonanza* so successfully did, *Unforgiven* foregrounds it and makes it the central drive of the plot. In the false naivete of the film's frame—it opens and closes with scrolled writing that describes in blatantly hokey terms William Munny's wife who dies of smallpox, but who remains an absent presence throughout the film—this exclusion of women is caricatured. In the banding together of the women around Delilah, the return of the repressed has dire consequences for the community that imagines to have contained it. The house that Little Bill is literally building throughout the movie, is one in which he plans to retire peacefully, sit on the porch, and watch the sunset while he smokes his pipe. It is significant that there is no indication that Little Bill was ever married or ever will share the house with a female partner.

In this, Little Bill's house represents the ideal Western community. But it is no less significant that the house he is building, despite his constant attention to it, is full of leaks and gaps and crooked angles. (As one of his deputies says of Little Bill, "He aint scared, he just aint no carpenter.") With the return of what has been repressed, the community he has tried to maintain crumbles around Little Bill, despite his bewildered protestations that he was building a house.

The house-building trope and the character of Delilah have brought us into the realm of the Deuteronomistic History. At this point we cannot help but wonder if *Unforgiven* evinces an even closer relationship to this work. A scene in which Alice helps Ned and the Kid escape out her window from Little Bill and his men mirrors Rahab's similar actions to the two spies who come to her in Jericho (Joshua 2); the call to vengeance based on the story of a "cut-up woman" mirrors the story of the Levite and the woman he cuts up and "sends throughout all the territory of Israel" (Judges 19); English Bob's judgment that the barbarism of America is due to the fact that it has a president instead of a monarch mirrors the statement that "in those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did as he pleased" (Judges 21:25; cf. 18:1, 19:1); the Kid's assassination of the big cowboy in the outhouse while his body guards wait for him mirrors Ehud's assassination of "the very stout" (JPSV) Eglon in his "cool upper chamber" where his body guards imagine he is relieving himself (Judges 3). Within the Deuteronomistic History, the film has the clearest affinities with the book of Judges. As Mieke Bal has pointed out (1988:170ff.), Judges is concerned again and again with the boundaries of "the house" (whether it be the mother's house, the father's house, or the house of a host). In Judges, as in *Unforgiven*, the house gives no protection from violence.

> It is a common view that houses are one side of an opposition between public and private, between danger and safety, between freedom and bondage, between communal and individual. Reading Judges, we quickly discover that those neat oppositions do not work and perhaps never do because they rely on the myths we are used to about the home, homeliness, and the family. (Bal, 1988:171)

In this regard, Judges functions in relation to the Book of Deuteronomy in a way similar to how *Unforgiven* functions in relation to other Westerns: both incorporate structural elements from their precursive texts, while making manifest the cracks and gaps in the ideology of those texts.

Deuteronomy imagines a unified Israel on the eve of their successful march westward into the promised land of Canaan. By the time we get through the book of Judges, we find a nation that has splintered into war-

ring factions and in which lawlessness is rampant.[5] The classic Western also imagines the successful march westward of America into its promised land of manifest destiny. By the time we get through *Unforgiven*, the picture of noble men doing battle for the stakes of law and order has degenerated into random murder. But most importantly, both Judges and *Unforgiven* know that a public order cannot be based on the violent exclusion of women. Both texts question the myths of how the "West" was *won*, even as they state quite clearly that it was never, in fact, *one*.

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"TOTO, WE'RE NOT IN KANSAS ANYMORE": FROM HISTORICAL CRITICISM TO FILM THEORY

Kathleen S. Nash
Le Moyne College

One of the first courses I taught after my arrival at Le Moyne College eight years ago was a fairly traditional introduction to the Hebrew Bible/ Old Testament. Several weeks into the semester, after what I thought had been a successful, humorous presentation on and discussion about Exodus 1–15, one of my students followed me to my office. I was surprised and delighted that he wanted to prolong the classroom experience; in fact, I congratulated myself on my ability to have finally gotten this particular student's attention. Up to that point, he had seldom contributed to class discussions, opting instead for cat naps or research on cloud formations outside the classroom window. Fantasies of "Teacher of the Year" danced in my head.

This student did have questions about the text we had just read. They weren't my questions, however; nor were they questions I could or wanted to answer. The student (his name is Larry) was disturbed. Why didn't the Exodus story mention the name of Pharaoh's daughter? Why was Moses such a weakling? Why no mention of his military victories? Why did Charlton Heston know so much more about Moses than the Bible did? As I listened to this student describe a fascination with Heston and with biblical movies in general, a great dread fell upon my heart. Not only did I have students in class who thought the Bible was literally true; now I had a student for whom *The Ten Commandments* was more accurate than the biblical text.

The Muses were, however, at work. Later in the semester Larry and I worked together on a project he would present instead of a final paper, a comparison of several biblical movies (e.g. *The Ten Commandments, Samson and Delilah*) with their biblical texts. Other students volunteered to respond to his project and to describe how the alterations and additions of the biblical movies modified their understandings of the original narratives, even though for some of these students, like Larry, the film was more original than the text. In a course on the Israelite prophets, several semesters later, one group of students made a video of the book of Jonah, using college life as a setting, with a female Jonah bolting away on a

moped every time a phone rang. For a long time, I kept my copy of that video hidden deep in a file cabinet, convinced it represented irresponsible pedagogy and the end of my academic career.

Those paradigm-shattering semesters were for me the first phase of my own journey away from viewing the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible as an enclosed linguistic/social/historical world whose interpretation is determined more by past concerns than by its location in contemporary culture. My experience of reading and thinking about the eight articles in this *Semeia* volume highlights the importance of including film theory and cultural studies within the parameters of biblical studies. Without the addition of new approaches to the biblical text, we end up merely paraphrasing the text or, as Cheryl Exum points out, theorizing about extratextual issues and engaging the text itself only as an afterthought. The yellow-brick road I stumbled on because of my students continues to take this recovering historical critic to some subversive places. Writing this response is one of them.

These issues guide my response to these articles: (1) how the staging of biblical film, the attempts at recreating the biblical world, affect me, a traditionally trained scholar with expertise in biblical languages, ancient Near Eastern history, and archaeology; (2) how I view a more cultural approach to the study of the Bible.

In "Moses Goes Down to Hollywood: Miracles and Special Effects," Ilana Pardes observes that in the Fifties Hollywood "offered a reconstruction of the biblical past unprecedented in its mode of realism and power to make-believe." About *The Ten Commandments* in particular she writes that "the film was meant to provide a window to biblical events." Pardes' essay and my own reaction to yet another screening of this movie remind me that I as a traditionally constructed biblical scholar am hardly this film's most appreciative viewer. The aspect of biblical films as a "window to biblical events" and their staging trouble me most. Biblical narrative offers little description; in that sense it is fluid. Even though the reader takes for granted that the narrative takes place in ancient Israel (if indeed such a place is available to us), the text itself does not restrict us to one setting, one visual interpretation (as Archibald MacLeisch demonstrated with *J.B.*). That is not the case with film. With its dedication to facticity, for example, DeMille's production freezes myth into history, popularly understood as "what really happened." By anchoring the narrative to so specific a physical setting and by claiming to interpret details so precisely, most biblical films represent a troubling literal reading of their texts. Biblical films look like "the real thing" when, in fact, they are the "reel

thing." These films do not carry disclaimers that they are interpretations; a film with footnotes is absurd theater, even in a cultural wasteland.

A second distressing element about these films is the uncritical image of the deity they portray. Ilana Pardes writes that DeMille conjured "up the image of Moses the magician, the man who could do the impossible." Not too far behind this Moses is the magician God, the one who does the impossible. That representation makes me squirm, since there is enough evidence within (all those female characters surrendered up to assorted forms of violence, for example) and without the biblical text (all those women and children, for example, abandoned to domestic and military violence on a daily basis) to challenge that construction and to demand the creation of new models for or the destruction of the very concept of some personal superpower concerned about human beings and their suffering.

At the same time, as Bach, Glancy, Exum, and others point out, these films serve the agendas of their makers (as, of course, biblical authors/editors used their narratives to promote their own interests) and reveal more about contemporary culture than they do about the biblical world. The ideal spectator of the Fifties may have longed for this kind of a deity; *The Ten Commandments* and some of its siblings legitimate this longing in such uncritical ways. As biblical scholars and cultural critics, we may counter these literal presentations by producing insightful "readings" of biblical films, accurately portraying them as cultural myths and explicating their ideologies. But we cannot forget that our own readings and responses are themselves ideological.

More attractive to me than DeMille's explicit and literal use of the Bible in *The Ten Commandments* and his overly factual representation of the biblical world are the allusions to the Deuteronomic History, particularly the book of Judges, in *Unforgiven*. As Jennifer Koosed and Tod Linafelt point out, the book of Judges and the Eastwood movie share a common plot, the futile attempt to create a masculine world that excludes women, and a name of the female character, Delilah, who drives that plot. The movie, though, works itself out in a setting different—geographically, historically, culturally—from the biblical story. The reality that both Judges and *Unforgiven* know, that a public order cannot be based on the violent exclusion of women, is not bound to one specific representation of plot. It is repeatable, in other settings and other times, with different characterizations. I prefer such allusion to DeMille's realism. Furthermore, *Unforgiven* does not invoke a magician deity for salvation; by presenting unexceptional, flawed men and women as agents of order and justice, the film empowers spectators to view themselves as the one hope,

however fragile that hope may be, for a just and compassionate social order. No magician's rod rules *Unforgiven*'s celluloid world (although at different times in the film the finite phallic symbols of penis, knife, and gun struggle for primacy). God does not restore order here; men and women do.

These articles also highlight the importance of continued reflection on the social and cultural construction of gender, on the veiling and unveiling of the female body that is part of this construction, and on the body's subjectivity and objectivity. Alice Bach's perceptive essay on the continuation in narrative, art, and cinema of the story of Salomé demonstrates the tendency of Western European culture to demonize her (Salomé, not Alice) as a castrating Virago. Driving this characterization is androcentric society's fear of and desire to control and marginalize the sexually alluring, sexually assertive female. Equally provocative is the juxtaposition, by Cheryl Exum and David Gunn, of biblical text, movie stills, and works of art in their interpretive readings of the David and Bathsheba story. In each element—text, still, work of art, interpretation—Bathsheba becomes a mirror for the authors' / painters' / movie makers' / critics' own "social location." The differences between the two interpretations is striking. Gunn's focus is limited to the bathing scene and its representation in religious books, some free standing art, and in the 1950 *David and Bathsheba*, with particular emphasis on Susan Hayward's characterization of Bathsheba. Exum's article adds the 1985 *King David* and a detailed reading of the 2 Samuel 11 narrative. Gunn's analysis of the movie is that it subtly subverts the genre of Woman's Film, for, unlike most leading ladies, Bathsheba gets what she desires—David. Further, the bathing scene is full of ambiguity: the nature of Bathsheba's gaze into the camera, the function of the solid screen, the moral power of her body. For Gunn, Bathsheba is a character of multiple dimensions, mirroring "the [social] tension between the emerging desire of women as subjects...and the latent anxiety of men as subjects over the impending collapse of their privileged status." While male agendas, centralized in David, still control the movie, Bathsheba is a co-victor, as much subject of her own construction as she is object of anyone's gaze.

Unlike Gunn, Cheryl Exum does not acknowledge any such tension. Rather, in both painting and film she sees a narrative strategy that lets us "look guiltlessly and, if we wish, to blame the woman at the same time." I agree with her call for an interpretive strategy that resists this invitation. As Alice Walker teaches us, "Resistance is the secret of joy." Bathsheba may be victorious in the Hayward-Peck film and even in the biblical narrative. The price of such victory is, however, both visual and textual vio-

lation; there are other modes of triumph available for women in a man's world. As Exum indicates, responsible interpretation must distinguish these modes.

Jane Schaberg's "Fast-Forwarding to the Magdalene" also demonstrates how the reading of a film reveals the social location of the interpreter. Christian feminists once heralded Magdalene as the "first real apostle," the earliest preacher of the Resurrection. Schaberg, however, reads Zeffirelli's Mary Magdalene as a representation of Ibsen's Nora; believing no longer in "wonderful things happening," she flees a patriarchal, androcentric community that hardly notices she is gone. Even though the film continues for a few scenes, the feminist spectator, female or male, has departed with her, finding in Magadelene a "focalizer of... [their] experiences with patriarchal religions."

The essay that deals most extensively with the issue of social location's influence on shaping the representation of aspects of the ancient and/or biblical world is Jennifer Glancy's "The Mistress of the Gaze: Masculinity, Slavery, and Representation." While New Testament and classical scholarship is even farther afield for me than film theory and cultural studies, I found Glancy's work engaging from two perspectives. First, there is the link she establishes between the influence of social biases on Hollywood's construction of the slave and the influence of similar biases on the image of the slave in ancient literature and in modern historical scholarship. Her essay is a reminder that objectivity remains an elusive (perhaps non-existent) reality even in the scholarly world. Second, Glancy underscores the role the feminine plays in the social construction of masculinity in her analysis of the film *Demetrius and the Gladiators*. For example, Demetrius and the other slaves achieve masculinity in the arena as they struggle against their enslavement and "in the process define what it is to be free," all under the watchful gaze of Messalina who desires what her seeing constructs, a free man. As Glancy demonstrates, gender is a complex phenomenon, constituted by looking and performance, as well as by social expectations and constrictions.

Judith Weisenfeld's essay, "For Rent, 'Cabin in the Sky': Race, Religion, and Representational Quagmires in American Film," offers yet another category where biblical studies, film theory, and cultural studies intersect: the construction of African-Americans in film through religion. This characterization probably grows out of an association of African-Americans with the same categories of Otherness with which the feminine has been associated: the realm of nature, the non-rational, mystery, intuition, imagination. Particularly striking is Weisenfeld's observation about the role of spirituals in slave religion, a role that these hymns also

play in the film *The Blood of Jesus*: "Spirituals functioned, in part, to expand the boundaries of time and space, both backward and forward, and [to] allow enslaved African-Americans to bring the biblical past into the present time and to project themselves into a future in which justice prevails. In addition, through spirituals, biblical figures became real and active in the world." If we think back to Pardes' essay on *The Ten Commandments*, we realize that this film and others like it serve an identical function for white America in the Fifties. Both films respond to this hunger for accessibility to the biblical world and, by extension, to the Sacred.

To prepare for writing this response, I raided my neighborhood video store for copies of the films mentioned in these articles. I watched them all, early into several mornings. I also looked at *Jezebel, Pulp Fiction*, and *Fatal Attraction*, favorites of mine for one reason or another, so I could test out what I had learned. I read the biblical texts behind the films, the obvious ones (David and Bathsheba, the beheading of the Baptizer, the Magdalene passages) as well as the Jezebel passages from 2 Kings, the Wisdom Woman and the Foolish Woman in Proverbs, and the NT parables about the domain of God. David Gunn's question—Now what do you see?—I took as my guide. I also added a second question: How do you see? Differently, I must admit; I see differently than I did when my student Larry followed me to my office. I see texts differently; I read films differently. *Pulp Fiction*, for example. Now, whenever I read or think about New Testament parables, I look for the motorcycle named Grace that speeds characters off into second chances and new life. To discuss the Wise Woman and the Foolish Woman of Proverbs, I invoke the demure, domestic/ated Beth and the wildly sexual Alex of *Fatal Attraction*. Bette Davis descending the stairs in an off-the-shoulder gown is forever fused with the image of the queenly Jezebel dressed in her finest to mock Jehu from a second-story palace window, as she engineers her own death. In the Emerald City, at least, readers are also spectators.

Putting Flesh on the Bones of God: Enacting Sacred Texts[1]

Victoria Rue
California Institute of Integral Studies

Recently, at a conference in Gelnhausen, Germany, that explored the theme of "Biblical Drama and Taboo,"[2] a professor of religion began to work with the story of Lot found in Genesis 19. The professor chose the moment when the men of the town of Sodom are clamoring outside the door of Lot's house, calling, as the professor termed it, "for a homosexual act," with Lot's two guests (men/angels).

> Before (the two men) lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot: 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them'. (Gen 19: 4–5)

We know the rest of the biblical story. The townsmen persist and are blinded by the two men/angels. Lot's family is warned to leave Sodom since it is about to be destroyed by God along with the city of Gomorrah "because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord (Gen 18:20)". This story of Lot and his family has historically been as potentially explosive as the bituminous mines recently found in the geographic area of Sodom and Gomorrah.[3]

Editor's Note: Performance artist, director, and feminist theologian, Victoria Rue's voice in this issue represents the other side of the camera: if the other scholars contributing to this issue are cast in the role of spectator, Professor Rue is the performer. Her ideas on performance as key to mystical experience and as performer and re-visioner of biblical hermeneutics will provide another aspect of the study of media and religion. Rue has written performance pieces that explore sexuality and mysticism. Among them are *The Landscape of My Body* and *Cancer-Bodies: Women Speaking the Unspeakable.*

[1] I am indebted to Elenna Rubin Goodman who during my course "Enacting Mysticism" defined mysticism as "putting flesh on the bones of God."

[2] Second European Bibliodrama Congress, May 6–10, 1996. Burckhardt Haus, Gelnhausen, Germany.

[3] *New York Times,* December 16, 1995, "Geologists Zero In on Sodom and Lot's Wife." "Saturated soil and highly flammable bitumen, rather than God's wrath, was apparently behind the demise of the cities, the report suggested."

Having just finished teaching a course "Biblical Drama: Overturning the Texts" in which we focused on the story of Lot, I found myself uneasy at the professor's characterization of the story. The professor proceeded to create biblical drama by asking for volunteers to play "Mrs. Lot," Lot, his two daughters, and the two angels. Turning to the audience, primarily teachers of biblical drama from various parts of Europe, the professor asked us to be the townsmen who were calling, as he phrased it, "for a homosexual act."

From the audience came shouts of "Hey good looking, get out here!" (laughter); "Nice piece of ass you've got," (more laughter); "Sure would like to have some of that." The audience gained energy as they shouted taunts. "Bet you'd like me to come in there and get you, buddy."

I was now more than offended, I was outraged. I stood up, and said "STOP! You must stop this! " There was silence. "As a lesbian and theologian, I'm shocked and offended that the scene has been set up in this manner. You've not only forced us into playing stereotypes—but they have nothing to do with the story!" The professor looked blankly at me. "There is a great deal of scholarship on this story that challenges the stereotypical way in which this story has been used for centuries against gay and lesbian people. What the townsmen are calling for is not a homosexual act!"

Later, over lunch, in a discussion with the professor, I was able to tell him of the work of Nancy Wilson and Gary Comstock, who have shown that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was the sin of inhospitality, especially inhospitality to strangers. This interpretation inspired a student in my course to rewrite the Sodom story by characterizing the two angels as gay, and therefore as potential victims in the Lot story. Her interpretation made the townsmen into heterosexual men. Reviewing the early work of D. S. Bailey and others, Wilson points out that the text does not deal with homosexuality at all. If the men of Sodom were threatening to inflict sexual violence on the two men/angels, it would be rape and is a "common way that *heterosexual* men humiliated other men, especially in the context of conquest" (97). Wilson names the act of rape in the Lot story as "a means of physical, mental, and spiritual domination. It is an act of ruthless power: the annihilation of the other. The sin of Sodom, I believe, is the sin of ethnic and sexual violence" (Wilson: 168). For Gary Comstock violence of the men toward the angels is "paradigmatic for the classic gay basher's defense that we often hear today: 'He made a sexual advance, so I had to beat or kill him'" (1993:141).

Particularly within educational situations, such as the Gelnhausen conference, I believe it is paramount that the enactment of biblical stories

and other sacred texts be informed by both the creative process and critical scholarship. Whether one is enacting sacred texts from the point of view of psychodrama, theater, or film, stories need contexts, especially stories that have been used to hurt and exclude. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza states:

> The "advocacy stance" of liberation theologies cannot accord revelatory authority to any oppressive and destructive biblical text or tradition. Nor did they have any such claim at any point in history; such critical measure must be applied to all biblical texts, their historical contexts, and theological interpretations and not just to the texts on women. (Schüssler Fiorenza: 37)

To simply retell, or reenact the story of Lot repeating age-old misinterpretations serves only to reinforce age-old stereotypes. I am not suggesting we exclude passages that have been used to "clobber" homosexuality, women, and so on. I am suggesting instead that these stories can be made into opportunities for education and expansion, for breaking down false barriers.

To this end, at the biblical drama conference in Gelnhausen, my presentations addressed the suffering caused by and healing needed in biblical passages that deal with sexuality and spirituality. In various sessions, I engaged conference participants in creating living "sculptures" from biblical passages that have come to be called "clobber passages." We utilized the injunctions in Leviticus against homosexuality, passages from Paul that identify the subordinate place of women, and other passages that view the body and the flesh as sinful. These passages have historically been used to separate, denounce, denigrate, batter, and maim anyone differing from the current cultural norm.

In ten groups of six people, each group had a different "clobber passage." They were directed to create two sculptures—one sculpture reflecting the existing clobber passage, using the text and non-verbal sounds; another sculpture would be made by rewriting the clobber passage and creating a new image. Encouraging the discussions and words to move into creating sculptures, the question became "what does the feeling of that passage look like?" Three assumptions are operating in this question: one, discussion/words are the first and easiest way to enter into the passage, since most people need encouragement to begin engaging their bodies in the exploration; two, using the word "feeling" propels us past the cognitive into the experiential; and three, our bodies respond more quickly to feelings than ideas, and are able to create vibrant images.

One group worked with 1 Cor 14: 33b–35, a passage about how women should keep silent and learn from their husbands. In this group,

there were four women pastors. These women recounted their painful struggles as women moving toward ordination and how within their present congregations people continue to question in a subtle way their knowledge and authority. The image the group created had all the women in painful physical contortions, their mouths taped shut, with two male voices speaking the text menacingly (this also had great resonance since the conference was held in Gelnhausen, a city that has its own *Hexenturm*, "witches tower," where countless women were burned during the Inquisition).

Another group took the passage Lev 20:13 which says that if a man lays with another man, it is an abomination and both shall be put to death. Using Gary Comstock's research on the Book of Leviticus, this group first examined the historical background of Leviticus, noting that it was compiled by returning Babylonian exiles to establish their special privilege and power (Comstock, 1993:41). In rewriting the passage the group emphasized inclusivity. It became: when a woman lies with another woman, even the angels in heaven are made glad for eternity!

As each group shared the fruits of their discussions and explorations, it was palpably clear how painful these clobber passages were. As one participant said, "We have to live with this negativity, in black and white." Tears and rage were threaded through each initial sculpture—from women and men. Rewriting and reimaging the clobber passages were ways to begin to touch/feel the power of our own interpretations. Each passage became an opportunity to exorcise and enact. People's reactions sounded like this:

- Up until now, it has been a taboo to speak of sexuality and spirituality together in one breath.
- There is no word in German that unites both aspects of sexuality and spirituality (compared to the Hebrew word "to know").
- I received a gift because you are out, because you live your sexuality, because you bring sex and spirituality together and you have found your source of energy in this connection.
- I'm trying with the old words of my religious socialization to try new things. When you find such clobber passages, I have learned to open them to life and joy.

Sacred texts are alive with questions and prickly with the incongruities of our own experiences. In such an atmosphere, we begin to realize that there is always a hand behind a text, always a point of view being offered.

It is in the midst of multiple inventions, interpretations, and combustions that the threads of the sacred are perceived.

TEXTUAL BODIES/BODY TEXTS: A THREAD OF THE SACRED

In describing her love for words Anna Deavere Smith tells the story of remembering the words of her grandfather and writing them in her journal—"If you say a word often enough, it becomes your own." Traveling home to Baltimore to her grandfather's funeral a year after writing this, she mentioned it to her father. Her father corrected her. Her grandfather had actually said, "If you say a word often enough, it *becomes* you" (xxiii). Put differently, words of another person hold a piece of that person's identity. If a word "becomes your own," you are simply possessing it as you would an object. But if you allow words "to become you," you are ingesting a piece of the other's identity. Thus, in the memorizing of another's word/words, a meeting of self and other takes place. This meeting can be so intimate, the union so seamless—I would say it becomes a mystical joining.

I have worked in the theater for some fifteen years as a director, playwright, and teacher. In the course of teaching actors, I began to notice spiritual power connected to the simple act of memorization. Gradually I understood that an actor invites someone else's words into their being. With constant repetition, allowing her body to find movement from the words, the actor both creates and surrenders to her character. The paradox is that the actor is wholly present as well as being inhabited by the energies and psyche of another. Some have referred to this phenomenon as a kind of possession. Perhaps this is too strong a word. There is a fusion, but not an obliteration of self. I prefer to think of the union between actor and character as an experience of mysticism.

My study of mysticism led me to the body. The women mystics of the Middle Ages, in particular, spoke of God as a sensory experience. "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth!" invites Teresa of Avila. Mechthild of Magdeburg expresses the anguish of desire with words: "God burning with His desire looks upon the soul as a stream in which to cool His ardor." At Union Theological Seminary, in interviews I conducted with lesbians about sexuality and spirituality, I noticed that during lovemaking, women experienced their bodies as open and vulnerable, the body acted as the site for sensing unity/wholeness/God. I was reminded of the words by turn of the century actress Eleanor Duse describing the experience of acting, "I become a crystal tube and allow the universe to flow through me" (Le Gallienne: 14). It was clear to me that mysticism

was not solely an encounter with the Divine in one's head but also a moment full of sensory physical experience.

In the theater, one of the keys to building a character is contained in the words of the script: their rhythms, choice of words, thought progressions, what is not said. "If you say a word often enough, it (the words) becomes you." I began to wonder to what extent a person could memorize a text of a mystic, and in creating the character of the mystic through speaking her/his words, to what extent could that person enter into the mystic's experience.

The visceral nature of union with the Divine through studying and enacting the sacred texts of historical and contemporary mystics became the focus of a course I teach entitled "Enacting Mysticism." In it we journey into a mystic's life through speaking/enacting /embodying their sacred texts as well as studying the social context of their lives. Some years ago, at Union, Dorothée Sölle suggested the phrase and goal "*democratizing mysticism.*" In her course, we journey toward its accessibility for everyone, not just those renowned mystics who lived in seclusion. We discover through expanding the definition of who may be termed a mystic that our everyday lives can hold mystical experience. Pushing the boundaries of what is mysticism and who we call mystics, my students have worked with texts from varied religious traditions and sources: the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, the medieval mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg, African American poet Audre Lorde, Etty Hillesum—mystic of the Holocaust, poet Adrienne Rich, and Catholic activist Dorothy Day.

A major focus of my work is an exploration of that moment in time when the performer/student crosses over into the vision of the mystic. Our goal is to see the remarkable similarities between embodied mysticism and the process of acting and creating a character. In a course on biblical drama, we use this same technique of memorization and character creation. Jude Bell, a student in both courses, speaks about her experience of working with the texts of Thich Nhat Hanh, Dorothy Day, and the story of Ruth and Naomi.

> The enactment of sacred texts can create a state of mind in which our usual sense of "me" and "them" dissolves. In my own experience this has meant suspending judgment so that I can enter fully and willingly another person's experience. It means observing another person's words by making myself open to that character's way of being in the world. I exchange my physical being for hers, my history for hers. By being willing to temporarily relinquish my own identity to assume that of another, I've realized how fluid our supposedly fixed identities really are.
>
> On another level, enacting sacred texts is a way of allowing ourselves to be "used" by the spirit. As actors we make of ourselves instruments by means

> of which the characters can express themselves. We allow the message of the writer and thus the energy of the spirit, to flow through us.
>
> In yet another way, the enactment of sacred texts changes us by giving us direct access to the mystical experience itself. Perhaps because this result has been more elusive, I have found it to be all the more transformative. What I am trying to convey are rare moments in which the sacred text ceases to be "the script" and becomes instead direct experience. In these moments, I am granted the exquisite privilege of sharing the mystic's insight, the intensity of his/her merging with the mystery.[4]

Jude's boundaries were dissolved. She sensed something larger than herself moving through her. She experienced transformation from participating in the mystic's mysticism. Another student, Suzanne Schaff, reacted equally strongly. "I felt more connected to all of humanity when speaking the words." Both reflections point to the illuminating power of enactment. When enactment uses sacred texts, our embodied experience can participate, as the medieval Beguines suggested, in what God is.

ENACTMENT

Enactment pays attention to the process more than the product. The search is for the presence of God and self, and self within God/spirit/meaning. The work of Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh has been enormously helpful in helping students experience the "the present moment." Beginning with breathing, following the simple flow of breath, the mind becomes calm and the body available. "Gathas" written by Thich Nhat Hanh and memorized by students are small poems that when repeated with everyday actions catapult and demand an awareness of the present moment and our connectedness to other human beings. "Gathas" are another route to being in the present moment.

Serving Food:

> In this food,
> I see clearly the presence
> of the entire universe
> supporting my existence. (Thich Nhat Hanh: 48)

Brushing Your Teeth:

> Brushing my teeth and rinsing my mouth,
> I vow to speak purely and lovingly.
> When my mouth is fragrant with right speech,
> a flower blooms in the garden of my heart. (Thich Nhat Hanh: 11)

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[4] I am grateful to Jude Bell for providing this personal account.

I shall never forget a woman who had chosen the gatha for washing feet and offered to share it with us in class. "Peace and joy in each toe— my own peace and joy." She sat on the floor, took her shoes off, and began to rub heartily the toes of her feet. Breathing steadily, fully engaged with the sight of her toes, she repeated over and over again her gatha. She began to cry, still focusing on her toes. And slowly she began to laugh. All the while the words of the gatha floated like lilies over her sea of emotions. Afterwards she told us that her feet, particularly her toes, had been broken, sprained, cut many times in her life. She said she felt during the gatha the whole history of her toes and as she looked at them. Both specificity and universality are held in the present moment.

When you are inhabiting the present moment, it can also be uncomfortable. I am reminded of a student who had prepared/memorized a sacred text from the mystic Audre Lorde. She carefully laid out a blanket, several scarves, and a bowl. She sat down, looked out the window, and said, "I'm sorry, I can't do this right now." Later she told me that some years ago she had frozen in front of a speech class and the teacher had ridiculed her for it. Those memories were still present. She didn't realize this until she was in front of our class about to begin. Then the memories overwhelmed her. They blocked her ability to be present. Enactment is about integrating, in the present moment, the body/spirit/mind. It is a process of awareness—awareness of connection with your body and losing connections with your body. The student could not inhabit or be inhabited by the words of Audre Lorde. If it had been an acting class, as the teacher I might have insisted that she push at her fear, risking a leap through that shut door. Enactment in this situation meant that perhaps something else was afoot, some lack of alignment, lack of centering that made it impossible for her to feel wholly present. Thus it was more powerful for her to experience the lack of centering/alignment, aware of where she was and was not.

The present moment is a goal for work. It is not an attained continuous state. Breathing as a tool for experiencing awareness is one route to the present moment. There is also action. In a recent class, a student, who had memorized a text by Mechthild of Magdeburg, was having trouble finding her way into being present. I asked her to polish her shoes and to let the action affect the words. This action, possibly something that Mechthild might have done, this engagement of the body demanded that the student be in the present moment with her shoes and with Mechthild's words.

Another student had chosen a text from Thich Nhat Hanh about looking at one's hand but forgot to concentrate upon her hand when she

recited the words. Yet when she engaged her sight, her hand, and the text, she began to participate in Thich Nhat Hanh's experience. The body—sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing, movement—when it is allowed to be truly alive and engaged, plants one in the here and now. The text is allowed to flow through the person without obstructions/obstacles conjured by the ego. The body becomes the "crystal tube" through which the energies of the universe (and the text) can flow.

The journey of "putting flesh on the bones of God," of enacting sacred texts, is continually an encounter with revelation. My work so far has brought to the surface the stories and images that I have tried to relate here. Next year, next month, those bones may become the dry bones of Ezekiel's valley, dead things encumbered with old ideas that need new visions to enliven them. Enfleshing sacred texts with contexts, enacting the words through our bodies breathes life into the bones of God. Perhaps most of all, through this work, I have come to see that the experience of "the sacred" is not cordoned off or assigned to a spiritual elite. The sacred breathes anew each time I do, You do, We do.

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Film Title	Director	Release: Place	Date	Cast Members
Adam and Eve	(Vitagraph)	USA	1912	Harry T. Morey, Leah Baird
Adam's Rib	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1923	Milton Sills, Pauline Garon
Agnostino d'Ippona	Roberto Rossellini	Italy	1972	Dary Berkani, Virgilio Gazzolo
Androcles and the Lion	Chester Erskine	UK	1952	Alan Young, Jean Simmons
Antigone	Giorgos Tsavellas	Greece	1961	Irene Papas, Manos Katrakis
Antony and Cleopatra	Charles Kent	USA	1908	Paul Panzer, Maurice Costello
Antony and Cleopatra	Charlton Heston Sp/Swz	UK	1972	Charlton Heston, Hildegard Neil
L'apocalisse	G.M. Scotese	Italy	1950	T. Carminati, Massimo Serato
The Arena	Steve Carver	USA	1973	Pam Grier, Margaret Markov
L'Asino d'oro: processo per fatti strani contro	Sergio Spina	It/Alg	1970	Barbara Bouchet, Sami Pavel
Lucius Apuleius cittadino romano				
Aux lions les Chretiens	Louis Feuillade	France	1911	Renée Navarre, Renée Carl
Barabbas	Alf Sjoberg	Sweden	1953	Ulf Palme, Inge Waern
Barrabas	Richard Fleischer	USA	USA	Anthony Quinn, Silvana Mangano, Arthur Kennedy
Ben-Hur	William Wyler (+ Andrew Marton, Richard Thorpe)	USA	1959	Charlton Heston, Stephen Boyd
Ben-Hur: A Tale of the Christ	Fred Niblo (+Christy Cabanne, Ferdinand P. Earle, Reaves Eason)	USA	1925	Ramon Novarro, Francis X. Bushman
Bible	Wakefield Poole	USA	1974	Bo White, Caprice Couselle
The Big Fisherman	Frank Borzage	USA	1959	Howard Keel, Susan Kohner
Blood of Jesus	Spencer Williams	USA	1941	Spencer Williams, Cathryn Caviness

Film Title	Director	Release: Place	Date	Cast Members
Cabiria	Giovanni Pastrone	Italy	1914	Lidia Quaranta, Bartolomeo Pagano
Caesar and Cleopatra	Gabriel Pascal	UK	1945	Vivien Leigh, Claude Rains
Cain and Abel	(Vitagraph)	USA	1911	?
Le calde notti di Caligula	Roberto Bianchi Montero	Italy	1977	Carlo Colombo, Gastone Pescucci
Caligula	Tinto Brass	Ita/USA	1979	Malcolm McDowell, Teresa Ann Savoy
Le Christ en croix	Louis Feuillade	France	1910	Mme. Gerard Bourgeois
The Christian Martyrs	Otis Turner	USA	1909	Hobart Bosworth, Betty Harte
Il Cid	Mario Caserini	Italy	1910	?
Clash of the Titans	Desmond Davis	UK	1981	Harry Hamlin, Laurence Olivier
Claudius (unfinished)	Josef von Sternberg	UK	1937	Charles Laughton, Flora Robson
Cleopatra	Charles L. Gaskill	USA	1913	Helen Gardner, Robert Gaillord
Cleopatra	J. Gordon Edwards	USA	1917	Theda Bara, Fritz Lieber
Cleopatra	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1934	Claudette Colbert, Henry Wilcoxon
Cleopatra	Joseph L. Mankeiwicz	USA	1963	Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton
Damon and Pythias	Otis Turner	USA	1908	Hobart Bosworth, Betty Harte
Daniel	Fred Thomson	USA	1913	Courtenay Foote, Charles Kent
David and Goliath	Sidney Olcott	USA	1908	?
David e Golia	(Pathé)	France	1910	?
David e Golia	Richard Pottier, Ferdinando Baldi	Italy	1960	Orson Welles, Ivo Payer
The Deluge	(Vitagraph)	USA	1911	?
Demetrius and the Gladiators	Delmer Daves	USA	1954	Victor Mature, Susan Hayward, Michael Rennie, Debra Paget, Anne Bancroft
I dieci gladiatori	Gianfranco Parolini	Italy	1964	Roger Browne, Susan Paget
Devil's Daughter	Arthur Leonard	USA	1939	Nina Mae McKinney, Ida James, Hamtree Harrington

The Dybbuk	Michal Waszynski	USA	1937	Abraham Morewski, Isaac Samberg, Moshe Lipman, Lili Liliana, Dina Halper (Yiddish)
Ercole contro il gigante Golia	Guido Malatesta	Italy	1965	Kirk Morris, Luciana Paoli
Ercole, Sansone, Maciste e Ursus: gli invincibili	Giorgio Capitani	Italy Sp/Fr	1965	Alan Steel, Nadir Baltimor
Ester e il re	Raoul Walsh	Italy	1961	Joan Collins, Richard Egan
Esther	Louis Feuillade	France	1910	Renee Carl
L'Exode	Louis Feuillade	France	1910	Renee Carl
The Fall of Pompeii	(Motograph)	UK	1913	?
The Fall of the Roman Empire	Anthony Mann (+Andrew Marton)	Spain Italy	1964	Alec Guinness, Stephen Boyd
Fioretti di Santo Francesco	Roberto Rossellini	Italy	1955	Aldo Fabrizi, Monks of Nocere Inferiore Monastery.
Francesco	Liliana Cavani.	USA	1989	Mickey Rourke, Helen Bonham-Carter, Andrea Ferreol
From the Manger to the Cross	Sidney Olcott	USA	1913	Robert Henderson-Bland, Gene Gauntie
The Golden Fleece	?	USA	1918	?
Golgotha	Julien Duvivier	France	1935	Robert le Vigan, Jean Gabin
Go down, death	Spencer Williams	USA	1944	Spencer Williams, Alfreed Sack, Sam Ellijay
The Greatest Story Ever Told	George Stevens (+Jean Negulesco, David Lean, Charlton Heston)	USA	1965	Max von Sydow, Charlton Heston
The Green Fields	Edgar G. Ulmer Jacob Ben-Ami	USA	1937	Anna Appel, Herschel Bernardi Michael Goldstein, Helen Beverly, Isidore Cashier, (Yiddish)
The Green Pastures	Marc Connelly, William Keighley	USA	1936	Rex Ingram, Oscar Polk, Eddie Anderson.Oscar Polk
Hallelujah	King Vidor	USA	1929	Nina Mae McKinney, Daniel Haynes
Ifigenia	Michael Cacoyannis	Greece	1977	Tatiana Papamoskou, Irene Papas

Film Title	Director	Release: Place	Date	Cast Members
The Illumination	(Vitagraph)	USA	1912	Helen Gardner, Tom Powers
I love you, Rosa	Moshe Mizrahi.	USA	1912 (dubbed)	Michal Bat-Adam, Gabi Otterman, Yosef Shiloah, Levana Finkelstein
In a Roman Garden	Mr. McDonald	USA	1913	Edwin August, Jeanie Macpherson
INRI	Robert Weine	Ger.	1923	Gregor Chmara, Asta Neilsen
Jepthah's Daughter	(Vitagraph)	USA	1909	Annette Kellerman
Jepthah's Daughter	(Warner's Features)	USA	1913	Arthur Maude, Constance Crawley
Jerusalem in the Time of Christ	(Kalem)	USA	1908	?
Jesus de Nazareth	Andre Calmettes	France	1911	?
Jesus of Nazareth	Sidney Olcott	USA	1912	?
Jesus of Nazareth	Franco Zeffirelli	USA	1977	Anne Bancroft, Ernest Borgnine, Lawrence Olivier, Peter Ustinov
Joseph	TNT-Turner Pictures	USA	1993	
Joseph in the Land of Egypt	Eugene Moore	USA	1914	James Cruze, Marguerite Snow
Joseph vendu par ses freres	Lucien Nonguet	France	1904	?
The Judgement of Solomon	(Vitagraph)	USA	1909	William Humphries, Florence Lawrence
Judith et Holopherne	Louis Feuillade	France	1909	Renee Carl
Judith of Bethulia	D.W. Griffith	USA	1914	Blanche Sweet, Henry B. Walthall
Julius Caesar	David Bradley	USA	1949	Charlton Heston, Harold Tasker
Julius Caesar	Joseph L. Mankiewicz	USA	1953	Marlon Brando, James Mason
King of Kings	Nicholas Ray	USA	1961	Jeffrey Hunter, Ron Randell
The King of Kings	Cecil B. DeMille (+D.W. Griffith)	USA	1927	H.B. Warner, Dorothy Cummings
The Last Temptation of Christ	Martin Scorsese	USA	1988	Willem Dafoe, Harvey Keitel, Barbara Hershey
The Life of Moses	J. Stuart Blackton	USA	1909-10	William Humphrey, Charles Kent

I Maccabei	Enrico Guazzoni	Italy	1911	Gianna Terribili Gonzales, Pina Menichelli
Male and Female	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1919	Gloria Swanson, Thomas Meighan
Man's Genesis	D.W. Griffith	USA	1912	Mae Marsh, Wilfred Lucas
Manslaughter	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1922	Leatrice Joy, Thomas Meighan
Medea	Pier Paolo Pasolini	It/Fr W.Ger.	1970	Maria Callas, Guiseppe Gentile
Messalina	Enrico Guazzoni	Italy	1924	Rina De Liguoro, Giana Terribili Gonzales
Messalina	Carmine Gallone	Italy	1951	Maria Felix, Georges Marchal
Messalina, Messalina	Bruno Corbucci	Italy	1977	Anneka Di Lorenzo, Vittorio Caprioli
Mio Figlio Nerone	Stefano Vanzina	It/Fr	1956	Alberto Sordi, Gloria Swanson
I misteri delle catacombe	Eugenio Perego	Italy	1913	?
Monty Python and the Holy Grail	Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones	UK	1975	Graham Chapman, John Cleese
Monty Python's Life of Brian	Terry Jones	UK	1979	Terry Jones, Graham Chapman
Moses	Gianfranco De Bosio	It/UK	1976	Burt Lancaster, Anthony Quayle
Moses et l'Exode de l'Egypte	(Pathé)	France	1907	?
Moses und Aron	Jean-Marie Straub, Daniele Huillet	W.Ger. Fr/It	1975	Gunter Reich, Louis Devos
La Nativite	Louis Feuillade	France	1910	Renee Carl
Nefertite, regina de Nilo	Fernando Cerchio	Italy	1961	Jeanne Crain, Edmund Purdom
One Million, B.C.	Hal Roach, Hal Roach, Jr. (+D.W.Griffith)	USA	1940	Victor Mature, Carole Landis
La Passion	? Hollaman	France	1897	?
La Passion	Ferdinand Zecca	France	1902-07	?
La Passion	? Jasset	France	1905	?
La Pastorela	Luis Valdez	Spain	1991	Linda Ronstandt, Paul Rodriguez
A Passover Miracle	Sidney Olcott	USA	1914	Henri Leone, Samuel Lowett
The Passover Plot	Michael Campus	USA W.Ger.	1976	Zalman King, Donald Pleasence

Film Title	Director	Release: Place	Date	Cast Members
I patriarchi della Bibbia	Marcello Baldi	Italy	1962	John Douglas, Judy Parker
El pecado de Adan y Eva	Miguel Zacarias	Mexico	1969	Candy Cave, Jorge Rivero
Pope Joan	Michael Anderson	UK	1972	Liv Ullmann, Keir Dullea
The Prodigal	Richard Thorpe	USA	1955	Lana Turner, Edmund Purdom
Quando gli uomini armarono la clava e con le donne fecero din don	Bruno Corbucci	Italy	1971	Antonio Sabato, Aldo Giuffre
Quando le donne avevano la coda	Pasquale Festa Campanile	Italy	1970	Senta Berger, Frank Wolff
Quando le donne persero la coda	Pasquale Festa Campanile	Italy	1973	Senta Berger, Lando Buzzanca
The Queen of Sheba	J. Gordon Edwards	USA	1922	Betty Blythe, Fritz Leiber
Quo vadis	Enrico Guazzoni	Italy	1912	Amleto Novelli, Gustavo Serena
Quo vadis	(Quo Vadis Film)	?	1913	?
Quo vadis	George Jacoby, Gabriele D'Annunzio	It/Ger	1924	Emil Jannings, Lilian Hall Davies
Rape of the Sabines	? (Pathé)	France	1910	?
The Robe	Henry Koster	USA	1953	Richard Burton, Jean Simmons
Salammbo	Pierre Marodon	France	1924	Jean de Balzac, Rolla Normann
Salammbo	Sergio Grieco	Italy	1961	Jeanne Valerie, Jacques Sernas
Salomé	Oskar Messter	Ger	1902	?
Salomé	J. Stuart Blackton	USA	1908	Florence Lawrence, Maurice Costello
Salomé	(Pathé)	France	1910	?
Salomé	(Brockliss)	UK	1910	?
Salomé	(Itala)	Italy	c.1913	?
Salomé	(Savoia)	Italy	1913	Siga. Costamegno, Suzanne de Labroy
Salomé	J. Gordon Edwards	USA	1918	Theda Bara, Albert Roscoe
Salomé	Charles Bryant	USA	1922	Alla Nazimova, Nigel de Brulier
Salomé	Malcolm Strauss	USA	1922	Diana Allen, Vincent Coleman

Salomé	Robert Wiene, Ludwig Kozma, Erno Metzner	Ger	1922	?
Salomé	William Dieterle	USA	1953	Rita Hayworth, Stewart Granger
Samson	(Pathé)	France	1907	?
Samson	Lorimer Johnston, Hamilton	USA	1914	J. Warren Kerrigan, Mayme Kelso
Samson	Edgar Lewis	USA	1915	William Farnum, Maud Gilbert
Samson and Delilah	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1949	Victor Mature, Hedy Lamarr
Samson et Dalila	Ferdinand Zecca	France	1902	?
Samson und Delila	Alexander Korda (+Michael Curtiz)	Aus	1923	Maria Corda, Alfredo Galoar
The Shepherd King	J. Gordon Edwards	USA	1925	Violet Mersereau, Nerio Bernardi
The Sign of the Cross	W. Haggar	UK	1897	?
The Sign of the Cross	Adolph Zukor	USA	1914	Dustin Farnum, William Farnum
The Sign of the Cross	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1933	Fredric March, Elissa Landi
Sign of the Pagan	Douglas Sirk	USA	1954	Jeff Chandler, Jack Palance
The Silver Chalice	Victor Saville	USA	1954	Virginia Mayo, Paul Newman
Sins of Jesus	Robert Frank	?	?	?
Sins of Jezebel	Reginald Le Borg	USA	1953	Paulette Goddard
Sodom and Gomorrah	Robert Aldrich	France Italy	1962	Stewart Granger, Pier Angeli
Sodom and Gomorrah	James Mitchell, Artie Mitchell	USA	1976	Sean Brancato, Gina Fornelli
Sodom und Gomorrah (I and II)	Michael Curtiz	Aus	1922-23	Lucy Doraine, Erica Wagner
Solomon and Sheba	King Vidor	USA	1959	Yul Brynner, Gina Lollobrigida
A Story of David	Robert McNaught	UK	1962	Jeff Chandler, Basil Sydney
The Story of Ruth	Henry Koster	USA	1960	Stuart Whitman, Tom Tryon, Peggy Wood, Viveca Lindfors
Sunday sinners	Arthur Dreifuss	USA	1940	Mamie Smith, Edna Mae Harris, Frank Wilson

Film Title	Director	Release: Place	Date	Cast Members
The Ten Commandments	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1923	Theodore Roberts, Charles De Roche
The Ten Commandments	Cecil B. DeMille	USA	1956	Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner
Though Your Sins Be As Scarlet	(Vitagraph)	USA	1911	Charles Kent, Julia Swayne Gordon
The Three Ages	Buster Keaton, Edward Kline	USA	1923	Buster Keaton, Wallace Beery
The 300 Spartans	Rudolph Mate	USA	1962	Richard Egan, Ralph Richardson
'Uomo della croce	Roberto Rossellini	Italy		Alberto Tavazzi, Roswita Schmidt, Zoia Weneda, Doris Hild
Vangelo secondo Matteo.	Pier Paolo Pasolini	Italy	1964	Enrique Irazoqui, Margherita Caruso, Susanna Pasolini, Marcello Morante.
Il Veccio Testamento	Gianfranco Parolini	Italy	1964	Brad Harris, Margaret Taylor
La vendetta di Spartacus	Michele Lupo	Italy	1965	Roger Browne, Scilla Gabel
La Vie de Jesus		France	1916	
The Wanderer	Raoul Walsh	USA	1925	William Collier, Jr., Greta Nissen
The Way of the Cross	J. Stuart Blackton	USA	1909	Rose Tapley, Maurice Costello
Das Weib des Pharao	Ernst Lubitsch	Ger	1922	Emil Jannings, Dagny Servaes
The Wife of Cain	Charles L. Gaskill	USA	1913	Helen Gardner
Wise Blood	John Huston	USA	1979	Ned Beatty, Harry Dean Stanton, Brad Dourif

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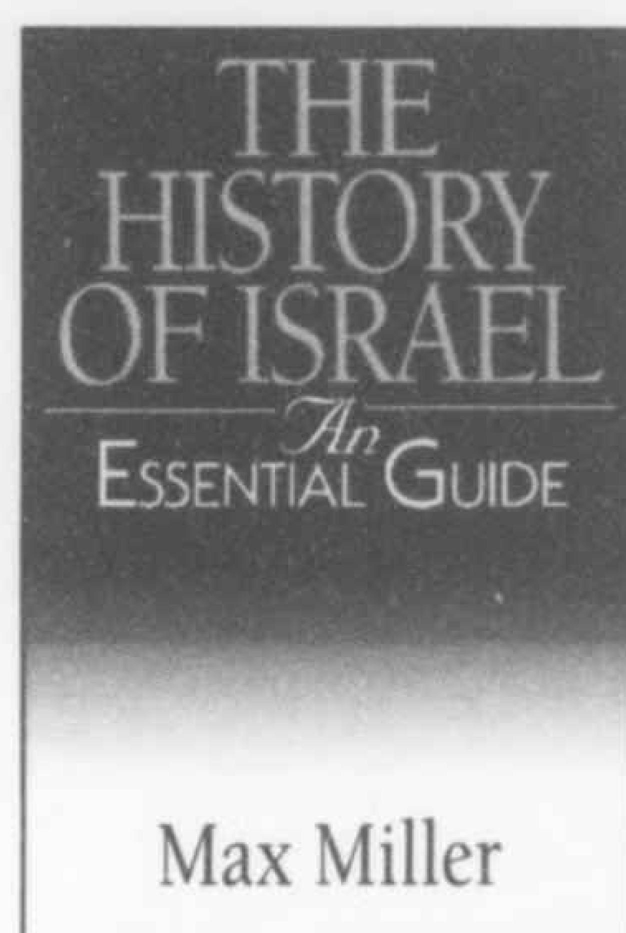

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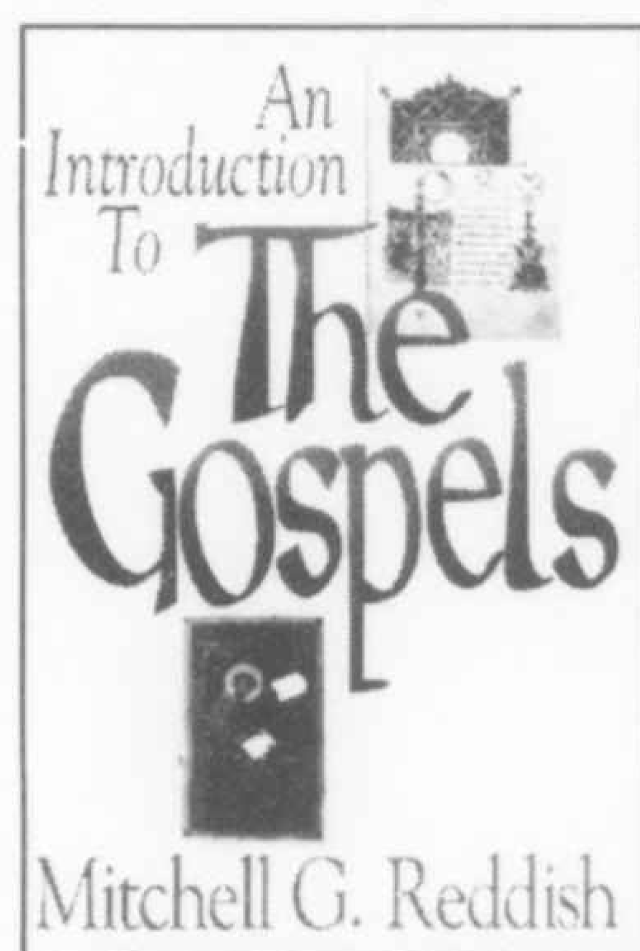

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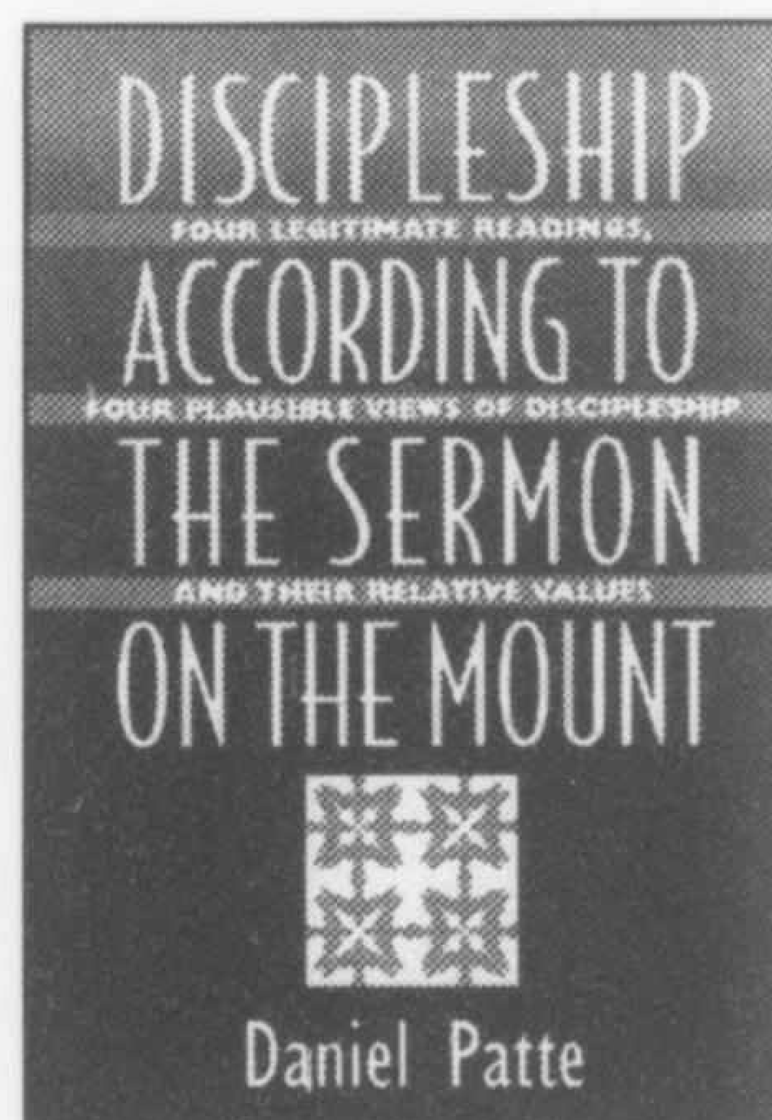

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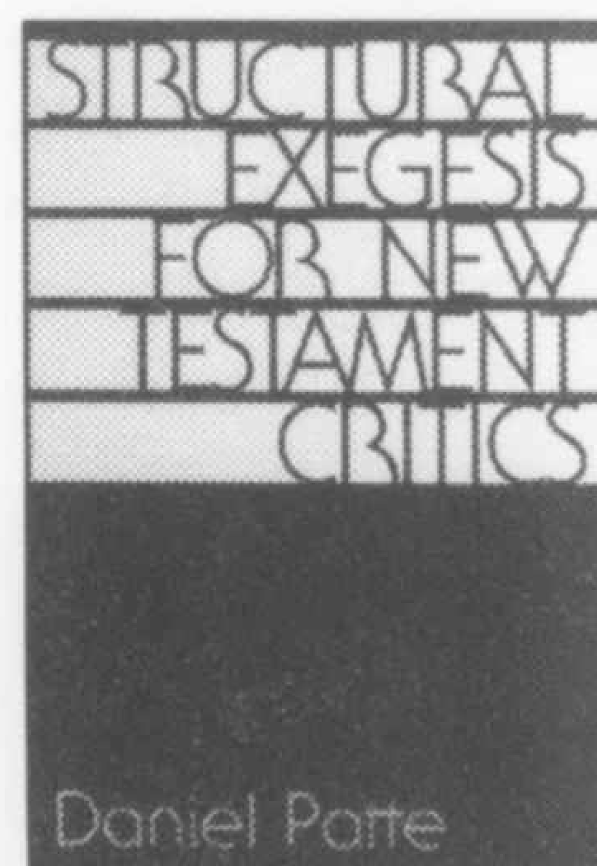

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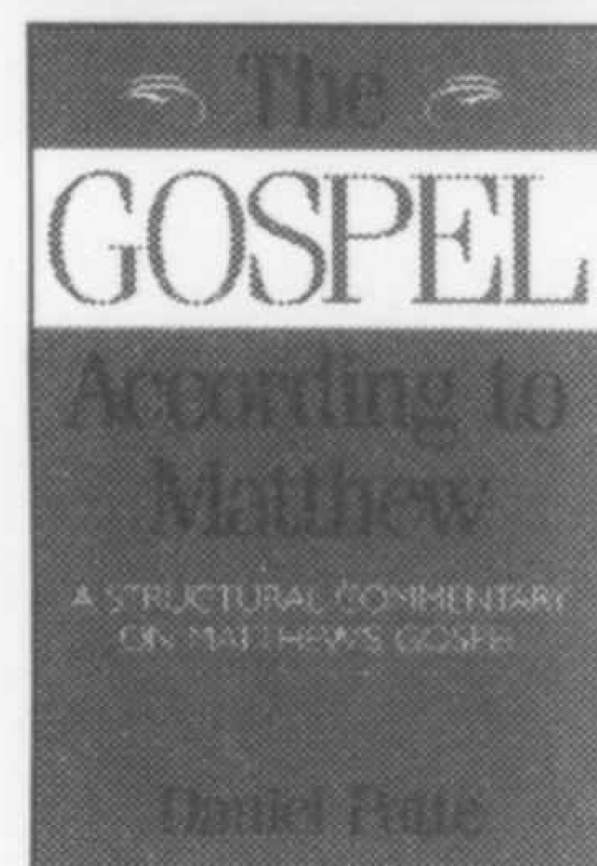

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