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FRAMING EVE: CONTEMPORARY RETELLINGS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE

ELIZABETH M. GILLHOUSE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2009

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**FRAMING EVE: CONTEMPORARY RETELLINGS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE**

Elizabeth M. Gillhouse

DISSERTATION APPROVED:

Date **Karen Coats, Chair**

Date **Roberta Seelinger Trites**

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FRAMING EVE: CONTEMPORARY RETELLINGS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Elizabeth M. Gillhouse

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This dissertation examines the ideological implications of re-visioning Bible stories for young readers in order to negotiate changing cultural attitudes regarding gender. I begin by exploring three theories of retelling traditional narratives including John Stephens and Robyn McCallum's discussion of "reversion," Adrienne Rich's concept of "re-vision," and the Jewish tradition of biblical Midrash. Stephens and McCallum's term "reversion" emphasizes the inevitable cultural influence that occurs during the process of retelling an existing narrative. Rich's discussion of "re-vision" advocates an active attempt on the part of feminists to re-see traditional narratives that have historically been used to oppress women. The Jewish tradition of Midrash illustrates a religious approach to filling in the gaps of biblical narrative; feminist midrash, a secularized version of the tradition, employs the practice to negotiate changing ideologies of gender within a historically patriarchal system. The discussion of these three approaches to retelling traditional narratives explicates the complex negotiation of religious and feminist ideologies at work in collections of narratives devoted to women in the Bible. I then categorize five ideological patterns that appear in these collections. Chapter II examines these ideological patterns as they appear in the macrodiscourse, or

packaging and paratext of the collections. In chapter III, I move to an analysis of several trends that appear in the microdiscourse, or the actually retelling of individual narratives. Chapter IV narrows the analysis to narratives about a single biblical figure, Eve, and employs a close, comparative reading of between the account in Genesis and various retellings of the creation and the Fall for young readers. Chapter V explores the pedagogical ramifications of incorporating retellings of Bible stories into the college classroom. Chapter VII summarizes my findings and enumerates further analysis to be done with religious texts for young readers.

APPROVED:

Date	Karen Coats, Chair
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E. M. G.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO RETELLINGS OF WOMEN'S BIBLE STORIES

Within the field of children's literature, approaches to Judeo-Christian religious literature are not giving sufficient attention to the growing number of collections of biblical women's stories for girls.¹ Currently, there are no studies devoted specifically to the examination of women's Bible stories for children. In fact, there is very limited consideration given to any religious literature for children, regardless of the gender of its intended audience. Perry Nodelman addresses this gap in the field in his editor's comments to *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in 1986:

[T]he Bible is not the only book we ignore because it expresses religious values we don't share or, even if we do share them, feel uncomfortable with in the context of children's literature. [...] this journal takes part in a vast conspiracy of silence about children's literature with a spiritual emphasis. The books published by Christian presses are not available anywhere but in religious book stores; they certainly don't get reviewed in

¹ The focus of my research is limited to Judeo-Christian texts primarily because that is the religious tradition in which I was raised. Ann Trousdale similarly situates her research offering the following explanation: "I am neither qualified nor willing to criticize religious traditions other than my own; it is rather like criticism of one's own family. Permissible from the inside; a bit inappropriate and presumptuous when it comes from the outside. It is likely, however, that the issues that are raised can be raised across religious boundaries" ("Parallels" 177).

the usual mainstream reviewing organs, or recommended for public libraries by the usual mainstream bodies who recommend children's books; and they are certainly not considered as possible touchstones or even discussed in articles in journals like this one. We simply act as if this massive body of literature intended for children did not exist at all. (55)

When religious texts do receive critical attention, historical texts predominate and the influence of the Bible on Western narrative traditions serve as the primary reason to take children's Bible stories into consideration. Examining these books in the context of their use as religious instruction is almost never considered. In fact many critics explicitly couch their examinations of Bible stories outside the framework of religious instruction or religious publishing. Hara E. Person and Diane G. Person explicitly articulate their limitation to "books published by commercial, mainstream publishers to the general book trade" purposely excluding "books and publishers whose publishing mission is primarily religious and didactic in nature" in their study of biblical characters in children's literature, *Stories of Heaven and Earth: Bible Heroes in Contemporary Children's Literature* (21). They further justify the inclusion of "notable exceptions" to this rule because "These books all added perspectives not found elsewhere, were of literary merit beyond the religious aims of their publishers, and were meant to appeal to a broad readership rather than a specific religious group" (21). The distinction between Bible stories published by secular publishers and religious publishers is a hazy one at best. While clearly not all retellings of stories from the Judeo-Christian Bible have the primary intent of proselytizing to a young audience, many texts created by secular publishers are

used by parents and church communities for that purpose. The distinction made by Person and Person seems to therefore be rooted more in an anticipated academic bias against religious texts for children than a productive genre distinction. The prevailing attitude appears to be that texts produced by religious publishing companies are of lesser quality than secular texts created for children. This attitude is likely informed by the belief that texts produced for secular purposes are devoid of the explicit ideological influences of religious practice. And yet every text is influenced by some ideological paradigm and thus, ultimately, the evaluation is reduced to the assumption that religious ideologies are not as valid as other secular or humanist ideologies.

The impetus for this assumption can, in part, be attributed to the history of children's literature. Many critical books and articles that discuss religious texts for children begin with a brief history of children's literature in which the shift from didactic and religious to creative or imaginative purposes is emphasized. By acknowledging this shift, these critics imply a need to justify a critical examination of religious texts because they are viewed as didactic in their intent. In order to begin a critical examination of religious texts then, one must apparently apologize for their inherent lack of imagination and creativity. Because in the history of children's literature religious texts predominated before authors like J.M. Barrie and Lewis Carroll initiated the trend toward imaginative texts for children, the assumption appears to be that any religious text for children lacks imagination.

Because of the historical context in which religious children's literature is frequently discussed, many critics focus their study on the historical texts of the genre.

Ruth B. Bottigheimer is one of the most prolific critics in the area of religious children's literature. Her study of religious texts for children, *The Bible for Children: From the Age of Gutenberg to the Present*, has become a touchstone in the field and is frequently cited by other critics. While her study does include contemporary texts, its nature as an historical overview limits the attention paid to texts created in the latter half of the twentieth century. Kate Montagnon's section on "Moral and Religious Writing" in *The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature* is similarly limited in its consideration of contemporary religious texts for children by its nature as an encyclopedic overview of the genre. *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* includes a tenuous section devoted to Judeo-Christian religious stories emphasizing the historical context of religious literature for children: of the six authors featured in this section only two, Isaac Bahevis Singer and Tim Rice, are twentieth century authors.

Another common approach to religious texts for children is to emphasize their importance in influencing Western narrative traditions. Much like other traditional narratives such as mythology and folktales, Bible stories are frequently introduced as important texts for children to be exposed to as part of their development as culturally aware readers. In fact when Bible stories are included in children's literature textbooks, they are almost always grouped with myths, legends and folktales, or traditional literatures. Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson devote only 250 words to the genre of Bible stories in the fifth edition of their textbook *Essentials of Children's Literature*, but they espouse that the "characters, sayings, and situations [are] essential to the culturally literate person" (106). Both Cullinan and Galda's *Literature and the Child*

and *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* (Kiefer) briefly reference the work of Northrop Frye to lend credence to the use of Bible stories as necessary reading for children. "Children cannot fully understand other literature unless they are familiar with the outstanding characters, incidents, poems, proverbs, and parables of this literature of the Western world of thought" (Kiefer 334). While these textbooks are clearly intended for use in college classes dominated by education majors, the treatment of religious literature in these textbooks speaks to the general trajectory of how religious texts are being approached in the field.

Framing religious children's literature as texts to promote cultural literacy is not limited to education-focused textbooks, however. John Stephens and Robyn McCallum identify Bible stories as intrinsic in developing our approach to other traditional narratives in *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*. "We are arguing, therefore, that the relationship between Bible story and stories from other sources is substantially closer than is often thought, because Bible story is the bearer of an interpretive tradition which informs all acts of interpretation involving traditional stories" (Stephens and McCallum 25). While their study of biblical texts for children goes on to examine the cultural influence of metanarratives, they have begun by framing Bible stories as a foundation for understanding how we interpret other traditional narratives. Similarly, Joyce Elizabeth Potter identifies a background in biblical study as important in developing culturally aware readers in her essay "Beautiful for Situation: Bible Literature and Art in Modern Books for Children":

Certainly modern scholars have acknowledged the valuable role of the Bible, not merely in the education of an adult but also in that of the child, as a foundational element. The basic allusiveness of much art and literature presupposes in its audience a common and fore-established knowledge of the Bible and the longer and more deeply enfolded in a life's experiences that knowledge is, the more fully the art and literature can involve the entire personality in its created vision." (187)

Potter makes extensive reference to the work of Northrop Frye to further her case for the importance of training young readers "to take their unavoidable place as inheritors of a cultural tradition" (187). Frye is cited by other scholars in their examination of religious children's texts, always in the context of training children to become culturally literate readers. Nodelman makes reference to Frye in order to illuminate his point that "one of the central purposes [of children's literature] is to introduce and acclimatize newcomers to [the structure of humanist learning]" (55). Frye's examination of the Bible as forming the foundation for various narrative traditions in Western literature is certainly important and useful to the study of the Bible as literature. Frye notes that "In European literature, down to the last couple of centuries, the myths of the Bible have formed a special category, as a body of stories with a distinctive authority. Poets who attach themselves to this central mythical area, like Dante or Milton, have been thought of as possessing a special kind of seriousness conferred on them by their subject matter" (7). In utilizing Frye and his literary approach to the Bible, scholars discussing religious children's texts are attempting to inherit the same kind of "seriousness" Frye articulates here. While

there is certainly validity to approaching these texts as foundational for literary study, it is reductive to limit our understanding of these texts only in their literary context. Their influence is not the same as secular children's texts for those who read these stories not as part of a literary tradition, but as part of a sacred religious tradition.

Craig Werner and Frank P. Riga begin to address the particular relevance of religious texts for those who approach them as practitioners or developing practitioners of the faith. They also employ an historical approach, but ultimately seem to place more emphasis on contemporary texts. They begin to compare the questions asked by religious texts for young people in the nineteenth-century and questions being asked today:

Once we thought we knew the answers; now we are not so sure.

Complacency has given way to disquiet, and many of today's writers share not only the anxieties of their heroes and heroines, but they also admit fears which authors of an earlier time would never have dreamed of imparting to young minds in need of secure instruction. [...] Today's inquiring writers, by admitting they do not know the answers, are perhaps closer to the problems they write about than were their ancestors who thought all was clear and sound. In fact, today's writers, because of their relentless pursuit of perplexing problems, may be even closer to their young readers than were their nineteenth-century counterparts. (Werner and Riga 2)

What is implied by this passage and evident in the primary texts referenced in their editorial comments is that they are more focused on mainstream literary texts than texts

produced by religious publishing houses. While there is certainly a growing trend of explicitly religious texts that do reflect the “disquiet” and “perplexing problems” Werner and Riga refer to, many more religious texts continue to provide the “secure instruction” that they only associate with the nineteenth century. Religious or, more broadly, spiritual themes are frequently identified and discussed in mainstream literary texts, C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* receiving perhaps the most attention. Mainstream, predominantly secular texts which address religious themes and issues appear to be our comfort zone in the field.

Ann M. Trousdale employs a similar focus on mainstream literary texts in her essay “Intersections of Spirituality, Religion and Gender in Children’s Literature.” She identifies the silence toward religion more as an absence in children’s books than an absence in critical study. “Most children’s books today altogether avoid the question of religion; yet there are books by outstanding contemporary authors which do approach the topic” (63). Her assertion illustrates Nodelman’s accusation that in the field of children’s literature we act as if the massive body of religious literature for children does not exist; Trousdale’s statement implicitly excludes any literature published with the intent to catechize. However, her study begins to move toward examining the influence of religion on social constructions of gender. Trousdale argues that “[Books about spirituality] do not tend to provide answers to spiritual questions but to raise issues for young readers to consider. In some of these books an egalitarian perspective on gender is taken; in others, spirituality may be treated in an open, liberating way, but gender roles still reveal underlying patriarchal assumptions” (64). Where her approach falls short is

its focus on mainstream literary texts; there is no critical examination of the perspective on gender in overtly religious texts or the dynamic between traditional religious ideologies and modern feminist ideologies.

The complex social dynamic of stories from sacred texts cannot be explored by focusing only on fiction with religious themes. Perhaps there is an assumption being made that because Judeo-Christian religions operate under patriarchal traditions that a feminist reading of religious texts for children is too obvious to warrant serious scholarly attention. This assumption fails to consider how these texts operate in relation to the work being done in the field of feminist theology. Many feminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Judith Plaskow, have undertaken the difficult task of aligning feminist ideology and religious theology in an effort to establish religious approaches that allow both ideologies to coexist in religious practice. Not all feminist theologians believe that this is possible; Mary Daly, for instance, argues that it is futile to attempt to reform organized religion as it is fundamentally corrupt and instead advocates an entirely new spirituality rooted in sisterhood that rejects the patriarchal constraints imposed by organized religion. The production of women's Bible story collections in literature for young people is clearly influenced by the work of feminist theologians who, unlike Daly, choose to work within established religious traditions, and yet even in the field of feminist theology, little to no critical attention is being paid to these texts for young readers.

The most productive approach to understanding the cultural implications of Bible stories for children is found in Stephens and McCallum's chapter "Authority, Wisdom,

and Cultural Heritage: Biblical Literature as Pre-Text” in *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture*. While only one chapter is devoted specifically to Bible narratives and it is used in a larger context to establish a foundation for their examination of metanarrative in Western culture, their approach is one of the only extensive studies of the influence these stories have on cultural constructions such as gender. They note how retellings of biblical narratives that attempt to subvert proscriptions of gender construction in which women are placed in an inferior and subversive role are “fraught with difficulties” because of the tradition of cultural interpretation they carry with them. “In replicating the content of the story, there is always a risk of replicating the metanarratives that the microdiscoursal patterning of the story conventionally implies” (Stephens and McCallum 44). They examine several versions of the biblical narrative of the Fall, identifying the clash of ideologies between traditional, masculinist interpretations and humanist or feminist interpretations. Their examination of collections of women’s stories from the Bible is limited to Alice Bach and Cheryl Exum’s *Miriam’s Well*. Their intent is to illustrate how a feminist metanarrative can be constructed through collections that focus on women’s stories and be used to “implicitly critique patriarchal social structures by focusing on the implications that these social structures have had for women” (50). However, by focusing only on one successful collection, they implicitly suggest that this success is true of any collection of women’s Bible stories, which is not the case.

Ideology and Theories of Retelling

The question of why traditional stories, including Bible stories, are retold is an important point to consider in any examination of how traditional narratives are disseminated to a contemporary audience. As my review of scholarly approaches to discussing children's Bible stories illustrates, the belief that traditional narratives should be passed on to children is frequently rooted in abstractions of cultural literacy. Stephens and McCallum argue that traditional narratives offer a cultural inheritance of "social conditioning": "Under the guise of offering children access to strange and exciting worlds removed from everyday experiences, they [traditional narratives] serve to initiate children into aspects of a social heritage, transmitting many of a culture's central values and assumptions and a body of shared allusions and experiences" (3). Unlike scholarly research on their literary cousins, fairy tales and folktales, this link between cultural literacy and social conditioning is seldom acknowledged in analyses of children's Bible stories. Because Bible stories for children are frequently employed for religious instruction and indoctrination, the social or religious conditioning may appear more transparent than the ideologies embedded in tales told primarily for entertainment. However, in spite of what may be the best efforts of the authors of Bible stories for children to "remain true" to the original text, retellings of religious narratives are subject to the same cultural influences of contemporary society as retellings of fairy tales, folk tales and other traditional narratives.

Arguably, even translations of the Biblical texts themselves can be thought of as retellings, making the choice of which translation to use when working with child readers or children's texts a pertinent one. The choice of which translation to quote is a difficult

one. Because I am discussing religious children's texts, my choice of translation implies a stance on what I believe is appropriate for children to read. This is actually an issue of some debate. Ruth Sawyer argues that children should initially be exposed to the *King James Version* of the Bible. Many would disagree, arguing that children should be given a translation that is easier for them to read. At the same time, the *KJV* has traditionally been identified as the most influential for Western literature and therefore used most consistently in literary studies. Furthermore, the Jewish tradition has historically maintained use of the original Hebrew and only since the Holocaust has begun to experience an increase in the use of English translations of the Bible. Children's Bibles and collections of Bible stories include a wide variety of translations, some of which are based more on what the publisher owns than on any thoughtful reflection of what is accessible to children. I am of two minds with regard to the choice of translation. Highly readable translations are more conducive to individual exploration of biblical text without the imposition of authoritative mediation. On the other hand, highly readable translations can minimize the reader's awareness that every translation involves interpretation through word choice and/or omission. Highly readable translations also allow for quick or "light" readings of biblical text; more difficult translations, such as the *KJV*, require slower and more thoughtful reading. Because the choice of translation varies so greatly among practitioners and likewise influences perceptions of the text, I have chosen to use the translation that I have been exposed to the most, particularly during the formative years of my religious training: the *New International Version (NIV)*. Because I cannot adequately acknowledge the many different religious traditions that utilize these texts, I

have used my choice of English Bible translation throughout this study to situate my own perspective on the interpretation of the texts.

Just as the decision of which translation to use is based on ideologies and social constructs with regard to children and their use and understanding of language as well as the ideologies a culture or tradition would wish to impose on them, so retellings of traditional narratives, whether those narratives originate in folk tale, mythology, or religious tradition, have been influenced by the ideologies and social constructs of the contemporary culture in which they are written. Stephens and McCallum argue that it is impossible for a retelling to replicate the original source. “[B]ecause retellings do not, and cannot, also reproduce the discursual mode of the source, they cannot replicate its significances, and always impose their own cultural presuppositions in the process of retelling” (4). Ruth B. Bottigheimer identifies a similar trend in her diachronic study of children’s Bibles, *The Bible for Children*:

Children’s Bibles express values and standards that are not universal and eternal but particular and ephemeral. Bound by place and time, they adapt an ancient and inspired text to changing manners, morals, ideas and concerns. For authors, buyers, and readers in nearly every age children’s Bibles have seemed to be texts faithful to the Bible itself. But their authors’ common effort to use the Bible to shape a meaningful present has produced Bible stories that mingle sacred text with secular values. (218)

While many practitioners of Judeo-Christian religious traditions advocate fidelity to sacred texts, the retellings of these tales, whether for children or adults, are not exempt

from the influences of the contemporary cultures in which they have been written.

Feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether approaches the issue of ideology not according to how it influences the retelling, but rather how it is interpreted by the reader. “[N]o new prophetic tradition is ever interpreted in a cultural vacuum. However startling and original the vision, it must always be communicated and made meaningful through some transformation of ideas and symbols already current. The hand of the divine does not write on a cultural tabula rasa” (14). Ruether argues that the very significance of these stories and the symbols they provide for practitioners is subject to their ability to evolve and remain applicable to contemporary society. “The uniqueness of the vision is expressed by its ability to combine and transform earlier symbolic patterns to illuminate and disclose meaning in new, unexpected ways that speak to new experiential needs as the old patterns ceased to do” (Ruether 14). The idea that retellings should work together with the “original” narratives, while not unique to Bible stories, is certainly a more invested concept in the corroboration of the various versions of sacred texts.²

Practitioners of religious faiths generally associate a universal quality with the sacred texts of their religion. This perception of universality is uncomfortable in an academic context in which we consistently question assumptions of universality.

However, even in scholarly work on traditional narratives, there have been critics such as Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* who have argued that it is the universal

² Nodelman and Reimer raise the question of whether feminist retellings of fairy tales can be understood and appreciated without prior knowledge of the “original” version. This type of reliance between the two texts, the “original” and the retelling, is different from the investment practitioners of a religious faith have in the connectedness of the various versions of sacred texts.

quality in secular traditional narratives that ensure their continued presence in a changing culture. Because these approaches are passé in current academic work, there is an intellectual “thumbing of the nose” at faith systems that still seek universal and timeless themes in their sacred texts. The active engagement between old symbols and new cultural experiences is not masked in retellings of religious texts as they might be in retellings of secular narratives and are therefore particularly useful in examining how cultural ideologies evolve and are disseminated. Ann M. Trousdale employs the metaphor of black and white fire pulled from old Jewish commentary in the Hebrew *Book of Legends* to illustrate the potential for “personal engagement” and “imaginative leaps of understanding” in narratives for young readers. This old Jewish commentary describes Bible stories as:

having been composed in black and white fire. The black fire is seen in the form of the printed or handwritten words on the page or scroll; the white fire is found in the spaces between and around the black. The black fire is fixed for all time; the white fire is forever kindled by fresh encounters between changing times and the unchanging words. The black fire establishes the canonized object we can all see before us; the white spaces represent the endless potential for the fresh interpretation of that object.
(qtd. in Trousdale, “Black” 180)

Many religious faiths are invested in the universality of their sacred texts; if these texts are limited to the classification of historical documents, they lose their spiritual significance. Therefore, religious texts are more forthright than other traditional texts in

acknowledging the ideologies that inform the perpetuation of the traditional narratives of a faith system. The story of Noah and the Ark is not immune to contemporary cultural influences any more than Cinderella. What is different, and will be explored in more detail later, is the fidelity to the original text that is expected in retellings and the consequences of reader response if that fidelity is not maintained.

In order to examine the influence of contemporary ideologies on the retellings of traditional narratives, specifically Judeo-Christian Bible stories, I have drawn from three correlative terms: re-version, re-vision, and feminist midrash. The term “re-version” is drawn from John Stephens and Robyn McCallum’s *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children’s Literature*. Stephens and McCallum examine a wide range of traditional narratives in this text including a chapter devoted entirely to retellings of biblical narratives. Their argument throughout the book is that retellings of traditional stories for young audiences take place within the frame of metanarratives; they define metanarrative as “a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (6-7). They use the term “re-version” to emphasize the cultural presuppositions that contribute to the metanarratives embodied in the text. Stephens and McCallum explain that “few retellings are simple replications, even when they appear to reproduce the story and point of view of the source” (4). Just as the narratives told in the Bible are influenced and limited by the historical period in which they are written, contemporary retellings of these same stories are infused with the cultural perspectives of their historical period:

[F]ew retellings are simple replications, even when they appear to reproduce the story and point of view of the source. [...] The resulting version is then not so much a retelling as a *re-version*, a narrative which has taken apart its pre-texts and reassembled them as a version which is a new textual and ideological configuration. (Stephens and McCallum 4)³

The term “re-version,” then, emphasizes the social and cultural context of any retelling and the imposition of cultural presuppositions. According to Stephens and McCallum’s description, the influence of these cultural ideologies is largely unconscious or unintentional; a “re-version” is not *necessarily* a conscious application of contemporary cultural ideologies onto the narrative pattern of a traditional story. Stephens and McCallum’s “re-version” accentuates some important concepts in the retelling of traditional narratives. In particular with the genre of biblical stories, there is the assumption that retellings replicate only the ideologies of the pre-text as Bottigheimer also notes (217). This assumption that retellings of Bible stories are free from “contamination” by contemporary culture is perhaps because these texts are used as part of children’s training and induction into a religious faith. Stephens and McCallum’s assertion that retellings “always impose their own cultural presupposition in the process of retelling” is the foundation on which I have built my own critical approach to religious

³ “Pre-text” is another term offered by Stephens and McCallum which indicates the “original” source from which the narrative was drawn. In the case of religious stories, the pre-text is the Judeo-Christian Bible, however, Stephens and McCallum note that “it is perhaps only a minority of cases in which this source is fixable as a single work by an identifiable author” (4). This is arguably true of the pre-text of religious children’s stories as well in that there are many different translations of the Bible and the “original authors” of the text remain a debate among biblical scholars.

children's texts. It is immediately evident in any extended examination of different retellings of a particular narrative, for examples the story of the Creation and the Fall, that differing cultural presuppositions and ideologies inform how authors frame the narrative. In examining collections of biblical women's stories for young readers, the extent to which contemporary feminist ideology and feminist theology informs the retellings is the primary focus of my analysis.

The term "re-vision" is drawn from Adrienne Rich's essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision":

Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity: It is part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (512)

Rich's definition of "re-vision" indicates an active and conscious application of feminist ideology that is represented in feminist retellings of traditional narratives. Her assertion that we must "understand the assumptions in which we are drenched" acknowledges the cultural presuppositions indicated by Stephens and McCallum's "re-version" and extends it by demanding an active recognition of these limited ideologies. Where Stephens and McCallum's term indicates implicit or underlying cultural presuppositions, Rich's term

suggests overt and active engagement with cultural ideologies, specifically feminist ideologies, that inform the text;

A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us, how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name – and therefore live – afresh. (Rich 512-3)

Rich's term is deployed in her essay as a description, primarily, of an approach to literary criticism; applied in the context of retellings of traditional narratives, the concept can be extended to describe texts which engage in "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (512). Unlike Stephens and McCallum, Rich is not specifically working with texts written for a child audience. However, her insistence that "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" does speak to concerns in the production of literature for children (513). Many feminist retellings of religious literature for children enact this desire to not "pass on a tradition" of patriarchal ideology that has been ingrained in the Judeo-Christian religious traditions. Nodelman and Reimer raise an important point regarding the assumptions on which feminist retellings of traditional narratives operate in their discussion of feminist fairy tales in *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*:

Such stories often strike adults as both enjoyable and useful. [...] What adults often forget to consider is the degree to which their pleasure in these stories depends on their knowledge of all those other [traditional] stories [...] Without the outmoded, sexist schema of those stories to compare it with [a feminist retelling] loses much of its humor and almost all of its point (320-1).

Nodelman and Reimer contend that if adults in fact believe feminist retellings are good for children, they must also believe that either children should be taught outmoded, traditional role models so they can be untaught them or that children already know these gendered role models. In the context of re-visioned religious narratives, the retellings of Bible stories are not intended to replace the Bible, but rather to supplement it. Children will inevitably be exposed to more traditional retellings as well as the pretext, the Bible, in the process of their religious education and the practice of their particular faith. Texts that engage in Rich's concept of re-vision then, provide the opportunity for young readers to actively engage in a more complex understanding of how Jewish and Christian women have been led to imagine themselves through the sacred texts of their faith as well as how they have begun to re-vision their roles within the Judeo-Christian religious tradition.

Midrash is a Jewish tradition in which the gaps and inconsistencies in the sacred texts are imaginatively explored and explained. Traditionally, the practice of midrash was performed only by rabbis and holy men, but it has been appropriated by contemporary women writers to fill out the exiguous stories of the lives of biblical

women. Norma Rosen offers a working definition of Midrash and the work of midrashists:

The midrashists – the word Midrash comes from the Hebrew *lidrosh*, to search, to ask, to explain, to draw out, to enlarge upon – seized upon improbabilities, gaps. These spaces lying open in the text set the scholars to dreaming, to imagining answers to their own questions. Often the ancient commentators invented whole new tales that not only explained but extended biblical narratives. (4)

The concept of midrash clearly speaks to the work being done by feminist scholars, particularly in the field of religious studies. Midrash performed by women with specific feminist intentions is generally referred to as feminist midrash. Naomi Graetz offers a description of feminist midrash in *Unlocking the Garden: A Feminist Jewish Look at the Bible, Midrash and God*:

Modern feminist midrash attempts to redress the misogynist tendencies of traditional mainstream midrash. The mainstream of rabbinic tradition depicts biblical women positively only if they are willing to assume the enabling roles of wife and/or mother. Since most mainstream midrashim present biblical women as being of marginal importance or in a negative light there is a need for contemporary feminist midrash to change this image, to create role models for the next generation of women. (101)

Categorizing midrash that presents biblical women positively as feminist midrash segregates it from the formal religious tradition of Midrash.⁴ The distinction clearly separates the creative midrash done by laypersons from the formal and official Midrash that has been canonized in the Jewish tradition. Acknowledging this distinction is important as it helps to establish how these texts, both those intended for women and children, remain on the outskirts of religious tradition.

The previously mentioned metaphor of black and white fire is an eloquent description of and metaphor for the Jewish tradition of Midrash. The black fire, the printed words on the page which are fixed for all time, represents the commitment to the sacred text and the belief that it holds universal qualities that contribute to the basis of the religious tradition. The white fire, the spaces in between the text that is continuously rekindled through changing times, represents the process of midrash itself in which practitioners can address issues raised by contemporary ideologies by exploring the gaps in the text. This metaphor suggests the unique relationship with the pre-text that midrash has: the pre-text is sacred for practitioners of both the Jewish and Christian faiths. There is a belief common among practitioners of both faiths that, while the text is in part an historical document, it is also a text that transcends time and place – it is universal, a term at which academics cringe. This relationship practitioners have with sacred texts is perhaps one of the underlying reasons religious texts for children have not received adequate discussion within the field of Children's Literature. Because scholars

⁴ In order to distinguish traditional and canonized Midrash from the creative midrash produced for children, I refer to the tradition of Midrash and canonized texts of Midrash as a capitalized noun and the concept of midrash and the texts created by laypersons as a lowercase noun.

understand any literary text as being situated within a particular historical period and from a limited, individual perspective, the implication that a text can or should be seen as universal prompts an academic bias against the text itself and the rhetorical context in which it is composed and disseminated. Midrash, understood through the metaphor of black and white fire is an approach to the pre-text of the Judeo-Christian Bible that allows for a negotiation of the enduring and sacred status of the narratives with sometimes conflicting contemporary ideologies, specifically feminist ideology. The concept of midrash, therefore, serves two purposes in my theoretical framework of analyzing religious children's texts: 1) it actively acknowledges the application of these texts as part of the practice and training of children in a religious tradition, and 2) it articulates the complex relationship between the sacred pre-text, the black fire that is fixed, and the retellings which negotiate contemporary feminist ideology, the white fire rekindled by fresh encounters.

The concepts of re-version, re-vision and midrash inform the theoretical framework through which I approach religious texts for children and young adults. The primary concepts I draw from them establish how I engage in a critical reading of these texts. There are several key elements that connect these concepts and inform my overall approach. That any retelling is influenced by the cultural presupposition and ideologies of the context in which it was written is established by the connotations Stephens and McCallum bring to re-version; Rich's re-vision and the Jewish tradition of Midrash serve as specifications for the nature of the cultural ideologies imposed on a retelling. In examining a collection of biblical women's stories for an audience of young readers, the

dynamic between feminist ideology and religious tradition is frequently complex. Stephens and McCallum note that collections of women's stories from the Bible that attempt to "undermine or subvert" patriarchal assumptions are "fraught with difficulties [...] because the basic story components carry with them a tradition of cultural interpretation. In replicating the content of the story, there is always a risk of replicating the metanarratives that the micro-discoursal patterning of the story conventionally implies" (43-4). In other words, because within the religious community these stories have traditionally been interpreted through the lens of patriarchal assumptions, it is difficult to re-vision the story through feminist ideology while "remaining true" to the sacred text without carrying over the traditional patriarchal connotations. Because previous approaches to religious children's texts frequently overlook and sometimes explicitly avoid the context in which the texts are used by practitioners of the faith, they do not examine this complex relationship between the sacred pre-text and the contemporary retelling.

Authority and Rhetorical Context

There are many genres of traditional literatures that undergo re-visioning by feminist authors because of ideological shifts in the constructions of gender. The largest body of re-visioned narratives in both children's and adult literature is the feminist fairy tale. The well-established feminist critiques of traditional fairy tales have clearly influenced this booming genre. Biblical narratives, in particular retellings of Bible stories for young readers, have not garnered the same degree of attention as fairy tales. The

rhetorical context in which Bible stories are re-visioned through a feminist lens is considerably more complex than that of feminist fairy tales. The web of authority impacts all stages of the process of transmission from the authors who attempt to revision the “original” narrative to the child readers attempting to contextualize the story among a myriad of different ideologies.

Since Roland Barthes asserted the “death of the author,” accounts of authorial intention are generally dismissed within literary theory. However, examining the rhetorical contexts in which religious texts for young people are written provides more insight into the complex negotiation of ideologies which are unique to these texts. The intent is not to justify a specific interpretation based on the author’s intent; the purpose here is to take into consideration the unique situation of women writers retelling stories from a religious tradition that has historically disallowed the authority of female voices. In their monumental study of nineteenth-century women writers, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the anxiety women writers face against a predominantly male tradition. Gilbert and Gubar acknowledge the “tensions and anxieties, hostilities and inadequacies writers feel when they confront not only the achievements of the predecessors but the traditions of genre, style, and metaphor that they inherit from such ‘forefathers’” (46). They argue that the “male-oriented” theory of Harold Bloom’s “anxiety of influence” is inadequate in accounting for the situation of the woman writer:

[W]e can be sure that the female poet does not experience the “anxiety of influence” in the same way that her male counterpart would, for the simple

reason that she must confront precursors who are almost exclusively male [...] Not only do these precursors incarnate patriarchal authority [...] they attempt to enclose her in definitions of her person and her potential which, by reducing her to extreme stereotypes (angel, monster) drastically conflict with her own sense of her self. [...] On the one hand, therefore, the woman writer's male precursors symbolize authority; on the other hand, despite their authority, they fail to define the ways in which she experiences her own identity as a writer. (48)

While Gilbert and Gubar are addressing the nineteenth-century women writers in their study, it is relevant to contemporary women writers working within a religious tradition. The "precursors" of collections of Bible stories are the male writers of the Bible, a text which has sacred authority for those practicing its religious traditions far beyond the literary authority of the "forefathers" Gilbert and Gubar reference. The biblical text that these collections draw from is the source of the "extreme stereotypes" Gilbert and Gubar identify as "conflicting" with the woman writer's sense of her self and therefore frequently provide the motivation behind the way in which the stories are retold.

Given their contested authority within the religious tradition, perhaps the most important aspect of the rhetorical situation in which women write these texts is how they establish their ethos. Gina E. Kirsch's *Women Writing the Academy: Audience, Authority, and Transformation* examines the writing of female professionals and students in an academic context. Again, while Kirsch is not specifically discussing the relationship between women writers and religious tradition, a useful parallel can be made

with academia and religion: within academia, as in Judeo-Christian religions, authority has historically resided predominantly with men. Kirsch's discussion of authority echoes that of Gilbert and Gubar:

Scholars in women's studies have argued that establishing authority is further complicated for women – as well as for other groups historically marginalized in institutions like the university – because part of *having* authority entails being *perceived* as an authority. Since authority is usually attributed to, and exercised by, people who hold power in cultural, social, and political settings, and those people have been, at least historically and in Western culture, predominantly men of one class and race, it can be said that male voices have become closely - associated – if not identified – with definitions of authority. (49)

Kirsch considers the influence of academic rank and the politics of publication in her analysis of the development of authority in academic women's writing.

Connections between women writing in the academy, as discussed by Kirsch, and women writing within a religious tradition are most clearly illustrated by Kirsch's accounts of female graduate students and the narrative strategy of distancing oneself from one's writing. Kirsch notes that "Both graduate and undergraduate students placed the main source of their authority in the research materials they quoted, not in themselves or in their writing" (49). Additionally, Kirsch describes a narrative strategy common to women's writing, both students and professionals, to establish distance from their writing. "This strategy involved detachment from or even denial of textual ownership, a

strategy that may be a direct consequence of the frequent challenges women encounter to their authority” (64). An examination of the “Author’s Notes” and “Introductions” of collections of Bible stories indicates similarities to the patterns Kirsch notes in *Women Writing the Academy*.

Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum have published two collections of Bible stories for young people, *Moses’ Ark* and *Miriam’s Well*. While *Miriam’s Well* is the only collection devoted entirely to women’s stories, *Moses’ Ark* includes “a number of stories that portray women as strong figures, among them the defiant women who save the chosen people” (*Moses* 1-2). Both collections include lengthy introductions in which the authors articulate the historical context of the stories as well as establish their authority as biblical scholars. In *Moses’ Ark*, the first of the two collections to be published, Bach and Exum distinguish their collection as unique, “As far as we know, *Moses’ Ark* is the only collection of Bible stories based on the original language, informed by the fruits of contemporary biblical scholarship, and written especially for children” (2). Because both authors are college professors at distinguished universities, it is not surprising that their introduction to both texts follow many of the conventions of academic writing, in particular situating the text within scholarly research.⁵ However, the perceived need to identify their text as being informed by the original Hebrew as well as biblical scholarship, especially given the age of the audience, indicates anxiety with regard to how their collection and the filling out of women’s stories in particular will be received. It is not unlikely that Bach and Exum anticipated that the audience of their introduction

⁵ At the time of publication for *Miriam’s Well*, Alice Bach was an assistant professor of religious studies at Stanford University and J. Cheryl Exum taught Hebrew Bible at Boston College

was not so much the child audience, but the children's parents. In particular in *Miriam's Well*, they repeatedly refer to the archaeological studies that inform the additions made to the minimal sketches of women's stories in the sacred text. "Even though there is much we do not know about women in biblical times, archaeological studies can supplement the literary evidence to give us a fuller picture" (*Miriam's Well* xvi). By identifying archaeological research as a primary influence on the additions to women's stories rather than their own creativity and imagination, Bach and Exum illustrate the distancing of textual ownership that Kirsch identifies as typical of women's writing.

The introduction to Fran Manushkin's collection *Daughters of Fire* performs a similar distancing, but ultimately embraces the responsibility of her interpretation:

The narratives of these tales first appeared in the Torah [...] These stories were expanded and reinterpreted by sages and rabbis in the oral tradition, and then written down as folklore and in collections such as the Talmud and Midrash. I have learned much about Biblical men and women from these sources, but the stories collected here also contain interpretations of my own. (x)

Manushkin first establishes the tradition from which her collection is drawn as well as the tradition of "reinterpretation" of the texts in much the same way the graduate students in Kirsch's study utilize research to develop their authority. However, unlike Bach and Exum, Manushkin does not distance herself from the text, but rather openly claims them as her own. This might be accounted for in several different ways. On one hand, the freedom to claim her interpretations without heavily couching them in research might be

explained by Manushkin's lack of professional academic affiliation. Or, identifying them as her interpretations might also be read as an attempt to shift responsibility for negative reactions away from the "original" text or any specific religious tradition to her own personal creative and spiritual exploration, thereby diminishing their status as authoritative religious texts. Finally, Manushkin's willingness to embrace her interpretations of these stories may be attributed to the ten year difference between the publishing of *Miriam's Well* in 1991 and that of *Daughters of Fire* in 2001, a difference that reflects a shift in the *Zeitgeist* of children's religious literature. This new *Zeitgeist* may alleviate the pressure on women writing within religious tradition that may have been felt by Bach and Exum; Manushkin's willingness to claim her interpretation suggests a shift in the rhetorical environment specifically with regard to women writing about women in the Bible. Similar comparisons of the rhetorical positions of other authors of religious children's texts will continue to provide more in depth understanding of the complex process of creating texts that are utilized by practitioners of a faith system. Unlike revisions of fairy tales and folk tales, there is a stronger sense of responsibility to "remain true" to the original, to not "stray too far" from the intent of the original text. There are many important avenues to explore in comparing author's notes or even the absence of an author's note. Examining what distinguishes the rhetorical context between texts that are more traditional or more radical in their retelling or texts written by male versus female authors will lead to a better overall understanding of the complexity of this unique writing situation and how precarious it might be for women writers in particular.

Unlike feminist re-visions of fairy tales, authors of religious retellings of biblical narratives are negotiating a loyalty to the pre-text that potentially encroaches on their creativity. Alterations and additions they make to a narrative from the Bible must find a balance between “remaining true” to the ideology of the pre-text while integrating feminist ideologies that have historically been in conflict with patriarchal religious traditions. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton noted in the late nineteenth century, the Bible has long been used as a weapon to justify the submissive position of traditional women’s roles both within the home and within religious practice: “When, in the early part of the Nineteenth Century, women began to protest against their civil and political degradation, they were referred to the Bible for an answer. When they protested against their unequal position in the church, they were referred to the Bible for an answer” (8). Given the history of women’s relationships with the religious tradition and the ways in which the divine authority of the pretext was used as a means of preventing women from exerting change, the relationship between pre-text and re-vision are considerably more complex than re-visions of secular texts. Collections of women’s Bible stories exist as a response to the limited presence of female voices within the tradition. Many of these collections are situated, not against the religious tradition, but within it and actively participating in its evolution. This informs the rhetorical positioning women writers construct within the text with regard to the anticipated reception of the text by the religious community. The goal is not simply to critique the tradition through the text, but to reinvent it, to re-vision the narratives that serve as the corpus for the religion. To accomplish this, the text must

negotiate a precarious balance in order to introduce a new mode of understanding to a traditionally resistant audience.

The complex issues of authority and the rhetorical context of biblical retellings of women's stories does not end with the production of the text. The selection of texts is typically controlled by the adults in young children's lives. If the purpose of a religious text is interpreted as part of religious training, the primary evaluation will likely be the perceived accuracy in replicating the "original" story. This expectation will generally be increased if the reader is particularly young or in the early stages of religious indoctrination as the purpose of the text will be to introduce the young reader to the religious tradition. This brings us back to the issue of familiarity with the "original" version of the story that Nodelman and Reimer raise. To fully appreciate the changes made by a feminist retelling of a text, some familiarity with the traditional version of the story is necessary. Moreover, I have yet to encounter a liberal retelling of a Bible story that explicitly or implicitly claims a purpose of replacing the sacred text. Many retellings advocate an active engagement with the Bible and offer their interpretations as thought provoking material to that end; therefore, these texts are intended to be supplemental in nature. At what age this kind of engagement is encouraged in young practitioners varies greatly according to the assumptions of the adults, both the parents of individual children and the theology of the specific denomination, regarding the child's readiness to assume religious agency.

The last aspect of the rhetorical context that is particularly affected in retellings of Bible stories for young readers is how the text's authority is perceived by the child. In a

child's world, parents are typically the most immediate authority in that they assert control over the child's behavior as well as their environment. In a religious household, God is understood as the ultimate authority: if the parents are the boss, God is the boss's boss. In many Christian denominations, the Bible is described as "the Word of God," therefore any story derived from the Bible is from God, the boss's boss, the ultimate authority figure. These stories therefore carry immense weight in constructing the religious child's view of the world. For both the parents who select the texts and the child who reads it, the socially constructed view of the world that any retelling embodies is subverted by the authority of the inviolable word of God. Stephens and McCallum also note this influence of authority in biblical retellings:

In modern narratives for children, the equivalent of irrefutable premises is divine authority as represented in Bible stories and mediated by authoritative adults. Thus authority and decision-making are concentrated in one source, "God," and thence in whatever institutions or people that can claim to have divine authority invested in them. At its most basic level, this representation of authority conceals that its basis and the tenets which uphold it and which it upholds are socially conditioned and culturally inherited. (27)

The influence religious texts have on children's constructions of the world is inherently more pervasive and potentially more resolute than other traditional narratives such as fairy tales. Mary Daly articulates the influence this has on constructions of gender in particular:

The symbol of the Father God, spawned in the human imagination and sustained as plausible by patriarchy, has in turn rendered service to this type of society by making its mechanism for the oppression of women appear right and fitting. If God in “his” heaven is a father ruling “his” people, then it is in the “nature” of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated. (13)

Because the authority of these texts is understood by many readers as ultimate and universal, how gender roles are represented and who plays active or passive roles in the foundations of the religious tradition is critical. Certain behaviors that may be socially prescribed for a specific gender can potentially be construed as divine mandate. Stephens and McCallum describe this in terms of boundaries:

Authority is constituted by establishing boundaries, so that rules, prohibitions, and so on, presuming that those boundaries are natural and universal, teach that moral and social normality is defined by refusal to transgress them. The existence of the boundaries themselves is placed beyond question, with the consequence that processes of judgment are already foreclosed; boundaries may thus structure the relationships of selves to world, but they militate against any questioning of whether those boundaries themselves are desirable or undesirable. (27)

Constructions of gender depicted in the Bible and in retellings of stories from the Bible constitute boundaries that are potentially beyond questioning. How retellings of biblical women’s stories negotiate that is worthy of closer analysis.

Fairy Tales and Bible Stories

Throughout this study, fairy tales are used as a point of comparison for Bible stories. This is done both because they share several features and because they differ in profound respects. One commonality between fairy tales and Bible stories is their appropriation as literature for children. Neither was initially conceived of as stories for children. Both genres originate from an oral tradition, include stock characters, follow formulaic narrative patterns, incorporate repeated images and motifs, and advocate justice as a primary value. Fairy tales as well as Bible stories are populated with archetypal characters that can easily be reduced to generic stereotypes. Bettelheim notes the influence of religion on fairy tales and the shared qualities of these two types of traditional narrative: “Fairy tales also abound in religious motifs; many Biblical stories are of the same nature as fairy tales. The conscious and unconscious associations which fairy tales evoke in the mind of the listener depend on his [*sic*] general frame of reference and his [*sic*] personal preoccupations” (13). Both fairy tales and Bible stories are also used as tools for moral instruction. “[Children need] a moral education which subtly, and by implication only, conveys to him [or her] the advantages of moral behavior, not through abstract ethical concepts but through that which seems tangibly right and therefore meaning to him [or her]. The child finds this kind of meaning through fairy tales” (Bettelheim 5). It is not uncommon in retellings of either genre to find explicitly stated morals or lessons to be learned from the narrative added on at the end. Both fairy tales and Bible stories are narratives from vastly different time periods and cultures than

our own. And yet, both genres continue to be presented to contemporary readers because they are believed to carry some timeless value.

Fairy tales are unlike Bible stories in that they can be re-visioned without inscribed limitations. Because Bible stories are drawn from a text that practitioners believe to be sacred, there is only so far the story can be stretched before it is at risk of being rejected by faithful readers. Fairy tales, on the other hand, have virtually limitless opportunities for change: the gender of characters can be switched, evil characters can become good, good characters can become evil, and even the ending can be changed all without serious repercussions from the audience. Some readers may prefer the “original” version, but many readers take considerable pleasure in recognizing the changes made in “fractured” fairy tales. Of particular interest to this study are fairy tale retellings that re-vision constructions of gender, or feminist fairy tales as they are frequently described. Feminist fairy tales specifically engage problematic constructions of gender and re-vision those constructions in various ways to represent changing ideologies of gender. The most common fairy tales to be re-visioned through a feminist lens are those which focus on romantic themes, popularly known as “princess tales,” including Cinderella, Snow White, Beauty and the Beast, Rapunzel, and Sleeping Beauty. Disney has been a major abettor of the traditional “princess tales,” particularly in American culture, and even currently peddles a line of princess products to young girls. For the purposes of this study, any reference to fairy tales refers specifically to the princess tales, not because other folk fairy tales are unimportant, but because in having a female protagonist they share the most in common with retellings of biblical women’s stories.

Narratology and Ideological Categories

There are two main types of texts that this study is limited to: short story collections of Bible narratives and novel-length retellings of individual Bible narratives. Many of the short story collections of particular interest to this project are collections of specifically women's stories. Typically these include the canonized narratives of children's Bibles, the Creation story, Abraham and Sarah, Baby Moses in the bulrushes, to name a few; however, when these narratives are included in collections of women's stories they are usually identified by the most prominent woman in the story rather than the man. Both short story collections of women's narratives and novel-length explorations of an individual woman's life participate in the feminist agenda of reclaiming the lost stories of women. Sometimes this operates as a feminist approach only on the surface, for example Nancy Simpson's *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible* is more representative of conservative backlash to the feminist movement. However, even when the narratives in the collection clearly do not espouse a feminist ideology in the process of retelling, the very nature of a collection devoted entirely to women's stories suggests an awareness of the shift in larger cultural ideologies toward gender equality. As Stephens and McCallum would characterize it, the unifying metanarrative of the texts examined in this study is that of shifting cultural norms in gender construction.

In analyzing the ideologies of gender that are negotiated in retellings of Bible stories for young readers, I have taken cues from the field of narratology, specifically the

work of Mieke Bal and Susan S. Lanser. Both advocate the systematic approach of narratology for a feminist analysis of texts. Lanser contends that the author's relationship to the subject, his/her gender, the time in which the text is written and the perceived audience all factor into the narratological approach and the form of the text in ways which traditional narratology has not addressed. These influences on the rhetorical orientation of the texts inform the distinctions between reversion, re-vision and Midrash that I will be examining in this project. Bal employs a feminist narratological approach in her analyses of Bible stories and biblical figures. This approach asks questions such as "Who does what?", "Who speaks?", "Who sees?", "Whose view is expressed?", and "Who acts?" (Bal, "Reading as Empowerment" 92). For the purposes of my study, these questions, and more like them, form the foundation for comparison between the pretext and retellings. I have identified two basic categories of the techniques most prominently used to retell stories from the women's perspectives: untold stories and alternative perspectives.

The technique of untold stories retells a traditional narrative through the eyes of a character that was not a significant part of the biblical narrative. In some cases, these characters were not alluded to and did not exist as part of the biblical narrative, as in the case of Re Jana, the stowaway on the Ark in Provoost's *In the Shadow of the Ark*. In other cases, the characters may exist, but they have little to no background in the pretext. Sasso's *Namaah, Noah's Wife* is a prime example of a character that is only mentioned, and not even by name, in the pretext, but who gets a much more developed story in Sasso's picture book. This approach shares much in common with historical fiction,

particularly in how it would be interpreted by practitioners. Because it adds to the story, rather than alters it, this approach is less invasive and may not be perceived as encroaching on the sanctity of the biblical text.

The second most common technique, alternative perspectives, retells familiar stories from new, but existing, perspectives, typically the woman's perspective. This differs slightly from the untold stories in that the basic plot of the narrative remains the same only it is told from a different perspective that suggests there are other interpretations and morals to be drawn from the story. When Rachel and Leah tell their version of the marriage debacle in *Lilith's Ark*, the focus is shifted from themes of romance, perpetuating the Jewish race and working hard for your reward, which are accentuated in traditional retellings, to themes that emphasize the importance of women's community, the dangers of competition among women, the physical and emotional insecurities of young women, and influence of culturally defined gender roles.

In analyzing what has been altered from the pretext, the goal is to extricate the ideological thrust of the changes. Not all retellings of biblical women's stories are feminist in nature and not all feminist approaches to these narratives are religious in nature. Articulating a theoretical approach to religious literature for children that acknowledges the various uses to which the texts may be put necessitates an understanding of the ideologies that drive the retelling. I have identified several particular ideologies that influence the retellings of biblical women's stories:

- “Good Christian Woman” Ideology: The “Good Christian Woman” Ideology is not limited to Christianity, but rather refers to the cultural construction commonly

described as the “good Christian woman. The “Good Christian Woman” Ideology includes texts that perpetuate traditional constructions of gender as articulated in various biblical texts. In particular the description of “The Wife of Noble Character” found in Proverbs 31 or the celebration of the submissive wife in 1 Peter 3 are used to provide biblical justification for traditional gender roles that have oppressed women. Not all religious practitioners, Christian or Jewish, interpret these passages as justification for the oppression of women, however, texts which do imply that traditional gender roles are divinely prescribed are influenced by this ideology.

- The Gendered Body Ideology: The Gendered Body Ideology maps issues raised by feminist theory and gender studies onto the narratives of biblical women. The Gendered Body Ideology engages with social constructions of gender and sexuality which have colonized the female body and functioned as a means of patriarchal control. Narratives that are influenced by this ideology may address issues such as gendered beauty standards, proscriptions of domesticity, and sexuality and romantic relationships. Issues incorporated in these narratives are not exclusive to religious practice and may be relevant to secular audiences. These issues are of particular importance for contemporary women and girls, but are not necessarily in keeping with the culture of the biblical time period. Narratives that are influenced by this ideology may include anachronisms in the process of addressing these contemporary issues of gender construction.

- Ideology of Women's Religious Agency: Approaches focused on the agency of a character develop aspects of the character's life, either from the pretext or added to the narrative, with particular focus on her role in the history of the faith. This approach attempts to establish the importance of women in the history of the religious tradition. Miriam is a prime example for the Jewish faith in that some narratives of her life emphasize her role as a spiritual leader alongside her brothers Moses and Aaron. Mary Magdalene is a strong example for the Christian faith in that her importance as a devoted disciple or follower of Jesus establishes a tradition of women actively serving in a leadership role.
- Ideology of Audience Engagement: The moral or philosophical tension in these retellings engages readers in questions about faith or tells stories in such a way that attention is drawn to the human fallibility of religious figures thereby encouraging the audience to become actively engaged in the exploration of their individual religious beliefs. Sandy Eisenberg Sasso describes Midrash in her introduction to *But God Remembered* and encourages her audience to ask questions about the lives of other women in the Bible, which illustrates one approach to creating tension. For Sasso's texts, this tension is created to engage the audience with issues specific to gender which ultimately can lead to feminist theological questions. Matt Biers-Ariel's collection, *The Triumph of Eve*, also tells stories in such a way that the questionable choices made by many biblical heroes become unsettlingly mottled. Samson's lusty penchant for beautiful and exotic women is generally glossed over in most accounts of his narrative, but

Biers-Ariel's short story draws our attention to this flaw along with the "tragic flaws" of many other characters in the Old Testament. *The Triumph of Eve* is not focused entirely on issues pertaining to gender, but does include important questions about cultural norms for both gender and sexuality; so, while this type of retelling is not exclusive to gender issues, it can and is used for that purpose.

- Re-"framed" Ideology: Re-"framed" ideologies include stories of characters that are traditionally interpreted negatively, as the antagonist or as a model for how not to behave, which are retold to tell their side of the story. These stories play with the idea that these characters have been unjustly "framed" for their behavior. Prime example of this is Eve, especially in *The Garden*. Eve has been the poster girl for why women are subservient and a model for how women are dangerously sexual/sensual. She's "framed" for the downfall of all humankind. Aidinoff's novel put her decision to eat the fruit in a context that not only makes her action admirable, but distributes the responsibility for this choice between both her and Adam. Mieke Bal describes these negatively interpreted narratives as "ideostories."

These ideological categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive or all inclusive; however, they represent the most prevalent approaches to retelling Bible stories to a contemporary audience of children and adolescents.

No consistent patterns have yet emerged with regard to which stories are more likely to be retold from a particular ideological perspective. These ideological categories are manifested in multiple levels of the text. How a text conveys its ideological

framework is not limited to the actual words which tell the individual narratives. The ideologies of a text are expressed through the macrodiscoursal framing and paratext (the “packaging” of the text) and the microdiscoursal patternings of the individual stories (the manner in which narratives are retold). Therefore, the subsequent chapters will examine the differences levels on which ideology is conveyed in collections of Bible stories. Chapter two will examine the macrodiscourse and paratext of notable collections, chapter three will explore the microdiscoursal patterns that emerge in how specific women’s narratives are retold, chapter four will employ close readings of the pre-text and contemporary retellings of stories of the Garden of Eden, and chapter five will consider the pedagogical implications of narratives of biblical women.

Chapter two examines the ways in which ideologies are indicated to readers before the narratives are even read. This chapter defines and examines the macrodiscourse and paratext of collections of Bible stories. Titles, covers, selection of narratives, organization, and prefaces are the primary focus of the chapter, essentially, how the text is packaged. The “Good Christian Woman” Ideology, the Ideology of Women’s Religious Agency, and the Ideology of Audience Engagement are all ideological categories that are most clearly illustrated with the macrodiscourse, or packaging, of a collection and therefore are examined in this chapter. In this chapter, collections are analyzed individually and categorized according to the most dominant ideological category that influences the macrodiscourse of each text.

Chapter three explores the ideological patterns that arise within the retellings of individual narratives, or the microdiscourse of the texts. Three particular trends specific

to feminist ideology are identified and examined in this chapter: rejection of gendered standards of beauty, resistance to the gendered cultural paradigm of marriage, and reclamation of exception(al) women. The trends of rejecting gendered standards of beauty and resisting the gendered cultural paradigm of marriage exemplify the influence of the Gendered Body Ideology. The reclaiming of exception(al) women within religious traditions, on the other hand, is further evidence of the Ideology of Women's Religious Agency. In this chapter, individual narratives from various collections are discussed together to illustrate the trends in retelling biblical women's stories.

Chapter four is the only chapter devoted entirely to a single narrative for several reasons. First, the retellings of the Creation and the Fall illustrate the widest range from liberal, secular retellings to conservative religious retellings. Second, the narrative of the Creation and the Fall engages directly with many of the fundamental concerns raised by feminist theology with regard to the construction of gender within the religious traditions that include the narrative as part of their sacred texts. The figures of both Eve and Lilith will be examined and texts which focus on these characters, either by narration and focalization or by their inclusion within a collection of women's stories, will serve as the primary texts for this chapter. Primary texts of particular importance for this chapter include Elsie Aidinoff's novel *The Garden*, Deborah Bodin Cohen's collection *Lilith's Ark: Teenage Tale of Biblical Women*, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's picture book collection *But God Remembered: Stories of the Creation to the Promised Land* and Matt Biers-Ariel's short story "The Triumph of Eve" from the collection of the same name.

In chapter five, I will explore some of the issues raised in the pedagogy of the Bible as literature, specifically negotiating the attitudes and personal beliefs toward the Bible students bring to the classroom. I plan to explore the similarities between the emotional attachments students frequently have to favorite texts from their childhood and the emotional and spiritual loyalties to texts from their own religious traditions. I will also discuss how I have used the correlations between fairy tales and biblical narratives in the context of a children's literature class as well as a course focused on gender and culture.

CHAPTER II

GATHERING THE WOMEN: MACRODISCOURSAL FRAMING OF IDEOLOGY IN COLLECTIONS OF BIBLICAL WOMEN

There are many collections of Bible stories for children whose packaging indicates to readers what the ideological agenda of the text will be. The collection *Daughters of the Desert* draws stories from the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions in an effort to explore not only issues pertaining to gender, but also inter-religious acceptance. Carole Armstrong's collection *Women of the Bible with Paintings from the Great Art Museums of the World* advocates the important influence the Bible has had on Western art more so than a feminist approach to the pretext despite the focus on women. The title of Mike Thaler's collection *Heroines of the Bible: God's Fair Ladies* suggests the text's efforts to draw on familiar references from popular culture to entertain readers. As these examples illustrate, how a collection of stories is packaged and presented to readers provides the audience with guidance about what to expect and how to read the stories within. The very existence of collections organized around women's narratives indicates a cultural presupposition that there is a need for closer examination of the stories of women in the Bible. A collection devoted only to the stories of women reflects the cultural ideology of a society that has begun to benefit from the first waves of the feminist movement. In this respect, the very bases of these collections are re-versions of the pretext.

John Stephens and Robyn McCallum articulate the influence that the framing of a collection can have in establishing a context for the interpretive strategies of the individual stories within a collection:

The processes of selection, organization, and framing of stories and packaging of texts, especially collections, is important in shaping and reshaping the ideologies of the stories, and hence in the (re)construction of interpretive metanarratives. The extent to which selection and organization affect the way individual stories are read and interpreted becomes more obvious when a collection deviates from conventional selection criteria. (34)

Collections of biblical women's stories deviate from conventional selections for children's texts; their focus on gender implies that some degree of feminist ideology will be applied to the narratives presented in each collection. This is not however, a guarantee that a collection can, in fact, be described as feminist as Stephens and McCallum note. "[T]he ideological implications of texts are determined by the interaction between the macrodiscoursal framing of the story and the microdiscoursal patterning of individual stories" (35). Though Stephens and McCallum do not define micro- and macrodiscourse per se, the sense of what they mean by those terms provides a useful framework for parsing and analyzing how the various aspects of texts work together to manage ideological effects.

In fleshing out the definitions of macrodiscourse and microdiscourse, then, I draw on two meanings of the root word "discourse": first, the more common definition of

discourse as communication of thought through language; second, the idea of a “discourse community” drawn from the field of Composition. A “discourse community” is a group of people united by common values, beliefs, and experiences, in short, a shared ideology. The collections examined in this chapter are negotiating the ideologies of at least two discourse communities: religious discourse and feminist discourse. “Macro” and “micro,” in my definition, refer to the level of the text: “macro” includes the packaging of the text, whereas “micro” refers to the aspects of the text which tell the story. The more common definition of discourse as communication through language must be expanded to include other semiotic signs that convey meaning, particularly when dealing with children’s texts that employ illustrations, not only as part of the packaging, but also in the telling of the story. Both macro- and microdiscourse work implicitly and explicitly to convey the ideological messages of the discourse communities to which their authors are committed, but at different levels. The macrodiscourse, then, is the frame created by the packaging, organization, and selection of narratives. This frame indicates to readers what ideological discourse(s) the text participates in and has(have) influenced the text.

Gérard Genette employs the term “paratext” to describe the various outward trappings that contribute to a reader’s interpretation of a text. “[T]he paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1). Genette’s analysis of paratext includes a wide range of influences, including the packaging of the text itself, such as the title, cover, introduction, author’s notes and preface. The paratext functions as a threshold for the text “that offers

the world at large the possibility either of stepping inside or turning back” (Genette 2).

Beyond the choice of entering the text, the paratext also provides readers with an ideological framework, or macrodiscourse, that potentially informs the audience’s decision to cross the threshold, or not.

As this analysis will show, some collections camouflage more traditional retellings in the macrodiscoursal packaging of a feminist collection, while others follow through with microdiscoursal patternings of the individual stories by incorporating feminist ideologies in the process of retelling. This chapter will examine more closely several macrodiscoursal features of collections of women’s stories and the ideological implications of how the text is organized and packaged for readers. The next chapter will then examine the microdiscoursal patterns or trends in how the individual stories are retold in collections devoted to biblical women’s stories.

The selection of stories presented in a collection is one macrodiscoursal feature that establishes the ideological implications of the text. Stephens and McCallum note that “The particular stories selected for retelling indicate assumptions about the audience and about the importance of the material itself” (34). The most common biblical narrative retold for children, either as part of a collection or as a single narrative text, is almost certainly the story of Noah and the Flood. The assumption regarding the audience appears to be that children will be fascinated by the colorful images of animals and rainbows and comforted by the promise that God will never flood the earth again. I mention this for two reasons: 1) it broadly represents the attitude toward children that is prominent in the genre of religious children’s literature, specifically that stories are

presented in fixed and comforting interpretations, and 2) none of the gendered collections examined here include a retelling of the Flood, nor do they include other narratives common to collections of Bible stories for children such as David and Goliath, Joseph's coat of many colors, or Daniel and the lion's den. The selections of stories in many of these collections clearly establish a new framework for approaching the pre-text of the Bible, one which challenges the secondary status and omission of the stories of women.

The introductions, prefaces, or author's notes, particularly those presented at the opening of the collection, are another type of macrodiscoursal element which influences the ideological thrust of the text. In many of these paratexts, authors or compilers of a collection indicate their motivation behind the creation of a text devoted entirely to the stories of women in the Bible. Unlike other macrodiscoursal aspects of a text, these passages are frequently overt in explicating the ideological implications of the texts as understood by the author. In the author's note of *Daughters of Eve*, Lillian Hammer Ross clearly states that the text is motivated by the traditional focus on men in the Bible: "Because much of the Bible is written about men, I felt a need to discover the women who also made a mark on our way of life" (5). Some authors will even incorporate very personal motivations for the focus on women's stories as illustrated by the introduction to Fran Manushkin's *Daughters of Fire*:

The Hebrew Bible is filled with stories of heroic girls and women. When I was a girl, I knew only about one of them: Queen Esther. My three brothers were all sent to religious school, but girls were not, which is why

it wasn't until early adulthood that I learned about the many biblical women whose actions changed the course of history" (ix).

Other introductory elements may also provide guidance to the readers as to how to approach the collection and even the Bible, the pretext from which the collection is drawn. Deborah Bodin Cohen encourages readers to seek out alternative sources of biblical narrative and even explore their own ideas. "I hope that *Lilith's Ark* will inspire you to seek out other midrashim and, perhaps, to create such stories of your own" (x). Whereas Ross's direct observation of the lack of women's stories and Manushkin's account of her personal lack of religious education suggest the texts are influenced by the ideology of Women's Religious Agency, Cohen's encouragement to seek out other retellings or write your own represents the ideology of Audience Engagement. Genette identifies a two-pronged purpose in the chief function of all prefatorial materials: "*to get a book read and to get the book read properly*" (197). Several techniques used to accomplish this identified by Genette include establishing the importance of the work, indicating the novel approach to (or loyalty to) the tradition from which the work is drawn, identifying a specific audience, or explicating authorial motivations and intent in writing the text. These techniques can all help to situate collections according to dominant ideological influences.

Finally, a wide variety of paratextual elements, including cover art, collection titles, story titles, and illustrations, all contribute to the macrodiscourse of a collection. The ways in which a collection of narratives is presented also operates as a macrodiscoursal indicator of the influence of various ideologies on a text. Collection

titles set a tone for what we expect, especially with regard to constructions of gender. Thaler's *God's Fair Ladies* suggests very effeminate constructions of women whereas Manushkin's *Daughters of Fire* alludes to potentially dangerous and likely non-traditional constructions of the female gender. Visual elements signal the seriousness (or lightness) with which we should interpret a text, with whom we should align ourselves as readers, and how closely these stories reflect our own experiences, all of which have implications for the ideological structure of the collection.

In looking at the various elements that establish the macrodiscourse of a text, this chapter examines three of the ideological trends in religious literature for young readers: the "Good Christian Woman" Ideology, Ideology of Women's Religious Agency, and the Ideology of Audience Engagement. While these ideological categories are not mutually exclusive, typically one ideological slant dominates the macrodiscourse of each collection. I will be exploring the way the packaging – the selection of texts, the introductory material, and various other paratextual features – are influenced by ideological trends.

"Good Christian Woman" Ideology

The "Good Christian Woman" ideology advocates what many would consider the "traditional" qualities of a model woman. While not inherently exclusive to Christianity, this ideology is dominant in Christian texts. As demonstrated by Elizabeth George's picture book *God's Wisdom for Little Girls*, the qualities of a Godly woman are generally drawn from Proverbs 31: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more

than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life. ” (Prov. 31: 10-12). This chapter expounds on the desirable qualities a man should seek in a wife. Qualities similar to the “good Christian woman” have surfaced over the centuries in secular culture as well and are not the exclusive domain of religion. The nineteenth century Angel in the House with her subservience and ethereal goodness is one example of these “traditional” feminine qualities. The June Cleaver, 1950s housewife stereotype is another secular embodiment of these supposedly desirable qualities in a woman. She is inevitably a wife and mother, patient, virtuous, obedient, and devoted to her family and husband, even at the expense of her selfhood. The “good Christian woman” is all of these things as well as devoted to God. These qualities are not inherently at odds with modern feminist ideologies; however, the focus on marriage and motherhood and the lack of non-domestic empowerment are problematic.

Simpson’s *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible*

Nancy Simpson’s *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible* is an extensive collection of character studies of biblical women targeted specifically to a young female audience. The length of the text suggests a chapter book for children, while the length of each story, 68 character studies in all, would not generally suffice as a full-length “chapter” in a typical chapter book. One of the distinguishing features of this text, then, is its seemingly comprehensive collection of women’s stories from the Old and New

Testament.¹ Of the collections I will be examining for the purposes of this study, it is the most inclusive, a feature which does not necessarily warrant commendation as a feminist text.

The macrodiscourse suggested by a collection of women's stories is that the text has feminist underpinnings simply because it focuses on female characters, which is misleading. Attempting to gather together the experiences of women in history is certainly one of the projects feminist scholars in various fields have taken up. What this text illustrates is that constructing a women's religious tradition according to their contributions to significant events as men have defined them can result in a perpetuation of the same problematic ideologies while masquerading as progress. There is nothing in the author's introduction to suggest that Simpson is attempting to combat the complex issues taken up by feminist theologians, and yet the nature of a collection of Bible stories that examine only women's experiences implies some feminist influence. Because of the political and ideological ambiguity of how this collection is constructed, it generates disturbingly conflicted messages that enable the patriarchal control of the religion it explores.

One macrodiscoursal message that influences the ideology of this collection appears to be an effort to help young girls in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries relate to the women and girls in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles in ways that speak to their modern experiences. The cover of the book depicts a modern girl in jeans and

¹ I use the terms Old and New Testament here, rather than Hebrew Bible and New Testament, because these are the categories used in this text. It is a markedly Christian interpretation of these characters which I will examine in more detail later.

tennis shoes (as well as a pink shirt and hair bow) looking into a mirror in which the reflection is a young girl in “biblical” clothing. It is clear that the message this cover art and title convey is that young girls can and should be able to make relevant and meaningful connections to the experiences of women found in the Bible. The cover art also clearly establishes a female audience for the text because it is a modern girl, not a boy that is peering into the mirror. While it is not as overt as some texts in excluding a male audience, for example the devotional text *No Boys Allowed* by Kristi Holl, the text as a whole, particularly the lessons conveyed within, is intended for a female audience.

The focus on a female audience as well as the assertion that contemporary women can make meaningful connections is also evident in the introduction. Simpson repeatedly draws parallels between biblical women and the audience of text:

The women in this book are not just good women or bad women. But, like you, they were once young, and made both good and bad decisions as they grew up. They had to decide to choose God’s way or their own way. They didn’t always make the right choices, just as you won’t always make the right choices. But the difference in whether they became women of God or not is what they did about their failures and successes. (vii)

Identifying the positive role models as “women of God” rather than a more gender neutral phrase further clarifies the intended audience as female.

The purpose of revealing relevant connections to a contemporary audience is further applied through the use of summarizing morals at the end of each narrative. These morals are intended to help young girls identify and apply the “message” of each

woman's story to their modern lives. While these morals appear within the boundaries of what is traditionally considered the text of the collection, it functions as paratext because it directly informs the reader how the text should be interpreted. As paratext, these morals are "informing, persuading, advising, or indeed exhorting and commanding the reader" how to interpret each narrative (Maclean 274). Messages in Simpson's collection such as "Believe in God's promises and He [*sic*²] will count you as righteous" (18) and "God will help you out of every situation if you choose to follow His [*sic*] ways" (94) offer guidance and instruction as to how each story should be interpreted and applied to the audience's lives. The macrodiscourse of the presentation of these "morals" lend further weight because they appear as if written on aged parchment scrolls that echo the image of the sacred Hebrew scrolls read in Jewish temples. The aged appearance and sacred connotation suggest that these morals come from a higher power than simply the author. While there is no direct suggestion, the implication might be interpreted that these morals are divinely inspired, especially as this imagery is perceived by an impressionable, young audience. To further the suggested message and the implied divine seal of approval behind each moral, a quotation from a different portion of the Bible concludes each story following the image of the scroll. These quotations are not from the book in which the woman's story can be found, but rather are predominantly

² Because I am utilizing a feminist approach to these texts and the religion(s) they represent, I want to call attention to the patriarchal bias of both this text as well as the sacred text from which it is derived. I acknowledge that the "correctness" of the use of a masculine pronoun in reference to God is open to interpretation and contention. However, feminist theology generally agrees that, while the solution to the issue of a gendered deity is still unclear, it is a bias which needs to be acknowledged and grappled with rather than ignored.

drawn from Psalms, Proverbs or various books in the New Testament. The collection is without question a Christian interpretation of the lives of these women and does not pretend to be otherwise. As such, the interpretations, particularly of the Old Testament characters, are colored with the bias of Christian ideologies.

When we understand the historical context of the stories of women in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles the limitations of the roles allotted to them become much less problematic in our understanding of women's agency in modern religious settings. For example, Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum's collection, *Miriam's Well*, provides a clear focus on the cultural and historical differences in the introduction as well as the notes following each story. However, the thrust of Simpson's collection seems to insist that these same roles and by extension their inherent limitations can be directly applied to the lives of modern women and girls. While there are notable exceptions, the majority of the women found in these sacred texts are mothers, wives, sisters or daughters to prominent male figures. As such, their roles are frequently depicted as primarily that of enablers, offering some form of assistance to the powerful men in their lives. There is no attempt to subvert or re-vision the enabling roles in Simpson's text. The moral at the conclusion of Elizabeth's story, "Even the greatest of men begin with the nurture and care of a mother," (145) suggests that the only valuable lesson to be taken away from this woman's experience is that through their sons, women can achieve great things. If the intended audience of the text was anything other than the specifically female audience identified by the cover art and author's note, the message of this moral might suggest a more optimistic feminist nuance; however, the audience is female and as a representative

of what it means to become a “woman of God” the message of Elizabeth’s story is diminutive to young women (Simpson *vii*).

There is an unarticulated limitation inherent in this lesson: women cannot be great or do great things on their own. Elizabeth is not the only woman in this collection or in the Bible whose identity is defined by her ability to bear, or inability to bear, a son. In fact the vast majority of women in this collection have some connection to this plot motif, including Mary the mother of Jesus who is considered by the Christian tradition the most important woman in the Bible. What is so problematic is that, through these limited and traditional biographies, *Face-to-Face* suggests to young girls that bearing children will be their primary mode of service to God.

Another deeply disturbing motif that is given prominence in this collection is the marriage plot. From a historical context, we can understand that women had no other option but to marry; however, to suggest to modern girls that this should be their life’s dream is at odds with changing constructions of gender. From a feminist perspective, the most disturbing moral suggested in this collection is presented in Zipporah’s story. Zipporah is the wife of one of the Hebrew Bible’s greatest patriarchs, Moses. Despite the potential importance of her position, the concluding moral of Zipporah’s story is “Waiting for the right person to love makes your dreams come true” (52). This moral in its focus on “dreams” echoes Disney versions of fairy tales (“...once upon a dream,” “when you wish upon a star...your dreams come true,” “a dream is a wish your heart makes”) and ultimately seems more fitting to a collection of traditional fairy tales than Bible stories. While fairy tales and Bible stories share many of the same elements of the

oral tradition, stories from the Bible are imbued with the authority of the Divine for practitioners. The inclusion of such a lesson sends a very clear message to modern girls: God wants you to get married. The pressure for women to marry and have children is pervasive in our society; this collection compounds the cultural pressure with a divine mandate to comply to these expectations. While this collection is clearly not attempting to approach some of the complex issues brought up by feminist theologians, the perpetuation of these “traditional” notions of women’s roles as the markers of a “woman of God” (Simpson *vii*) indicates a complete disregard for a modern understanding of gender and gender roles.

Ideology of Women’s Religious Agency

At its core, the ideology of Women’s Religious Agency works to establish a tradition that acknowledges the active contributions of women to the religious tradition. The wives of the major patriarchs are given the same prominence as their husbands, but the female figures who have inhabited leadership positions are of particular importance to this ideological framework. Drawing attention to those exceptional women in the Bible whose leadership roles have been largely ignored or eclipsed by male figures is one feature of texts that engage this ideology. Similarly, hypothesizing and exploring through midrash the more subtle influence women may have had on the religious traditions is another approach to emphasizing this ideology of women’s agency.

Manushkin's *Daughters of Fire*

The title of Manushkin's collection, *Daughters of Fire*, establishes a context of interpretation that suggests powerful women. According to Marie MacLean in the article "Pretexts and Paratexts: the Art of the Peripheral," titles are one of the most obvious thresholds that guide readers into the text whether thematically or rhematically (concerned only with content). "Titles may work on the principle of inclusion, appealing to as wide a cultural code as possible [...] They may, on the other hand, deliberately exclude [...] They can indicate both sameness and identification with the wider community or a deliberate marking of difference" (275). Manushkin's title functions primarily as identification with a specific community, religious women, but also connotes a deliberate difference from traditional associations with this community. The image of fire elicits connotations of passion, danger, and power that are unlike the traditional depictions of women in the Bible as submissive, obedient and beautiful. Manushkin indicates in the introduction that the image of "daughters of fire" refers to the "sparks of the divine spirit" embodied in each of the women in her collection. *Daughters of Fire* also echoes the metaphor of black and white fire from the Hebrew *Book of Legends* that has been used to describe the practice of midrash. The image of fire is frequently associated with God in the Old Testament: God appears to Abraham as a burning bush, God leads the Israelites through the desert by a pillar of smoke and fire, and offerings were made to God in fire. The associations of God with fire generally inspire awe or fear; fire is incredibly powerful and useful, especially for nomadic cultures, but it is also very dangerous. The title associating female figures from the Bible with fire provides

one of the first paratextual clues to the reader regarding the macrodiscourse of the collection.

Most collections of children's Bible stories are arranged in chronological order, imitating the narrative structure of the Bible. Gendered collections employ a similar pattern, but because each story is named after female characters, they replace the patrilineal narrative structure with a matrilineal narrative. Among the women's stories that are told in *Daughters of Fire* we see the story of Eve; Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel – the matriarchs of the religion; the stories of women of the Exodus and the women in the wilderness; Deborah and Yael;³ Hanna; Ruth and Naomi; and finally Queen Esther. Manushkin's selection of women's stories can be read as an enactment of the approach Rich describes as a "radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse" (512). By restructuring familiar narratives from the perspective of the female characters and by drawing attention to women's stories that are frequently overlooked in the canon of religious stories, both those intended for children and adults, the collection examines "how we have been living, how we have been lead to imagine ourselves, [...] how the very act of naming has been till now a male prerogative, and how we can begin to see and name – and therefore live – afresh" (Rich 512-13). By shifting our perspectives from the patriarchs to the matriarchs in the stories of Sarah and Rebecca the text implicitly critiques the patriarchal bias of the religious traditions. The story of Leah and Rachel, two sisters forced to share a husband that prefers one over the other, is reconceptualized as a narrative of the enduring power of sisterhood in the face of jealousy and the cultural

³ The more common spelling that I have encountered for this character is Jael.

pressure for women to bear children. These re-visions do not simply tell the same story from a different perspective, but rather draw out the specific concerns and preoccupations of women of the time period as well as mapping onto the narrative some of the concerns important to women today.

The selection of stories in *Daughters of Fire* establishes not only a matrilineal narrative, but also a macrodiscourse that focuses on the leadership roles women have enacted within the religious tradition. The stories of “The Women of the Exodus” and “The Women in the Wilderness” address the events in Jewish history that are traditionally narrated as the story of Moses. In *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*, Judith Plaskow identifies the covenant at Sinai, which is included as part of the narrative in Manushkin’s “The Women in the Wilderness,” as a central event for the Jewish people, and yet it is an event that denies the existence of the women of the community:

Entry into the covenant at Sinai is the root experience of Judaism, the central event that established the Jewish people. Given the importance of this event, there can be no verse in the Torah more disturbing to the feminist than Moses’ warning to his people in Exodus 19:15, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.” For here, at the very moment that the Jewish people stands at Sinai ready to receive the covenant [...] at the very moment when Israel stands trembling waiting for God’s presence to descend upon the mountain, Moses addresses the community only as men. [...] Moses does not say, “Men and women do not go near each

other.” At the central moment of Jewish history, women are invisible.

(25)

It is fitting that Manushkin’s retelling of the events at Sinai reframe the narrative from one man’s special communion with God to the story of all of the women whose presence is denied by the sacred pre-text at this pivotal moment in Jewish history. Further, Manushkin draws from traditional Midrash a description of the women’s refusal to contribute their jewelry for the creation of a golden idol. Because they had refused to worship the golden calf, women receive special treatment during the celebration of the new moon, Rosh Hodesh.

The narratives of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, as well as the women of the Exodus and Wilderness are all stories that are frequently told in traditional collections of Bible stories, albeit from the male perspective. However, some women’s stories, while they depict women in central roles, are less commonly anthologized in collections for children. Manushkin includes the narratives of Deborah and Yael in her collection, two very aberrant depictions of women in the Bible as active and influential in the course of Jewish history. Deborah maintained an unusually powerful position for women as a judge, an influential moral counselor for the Jewish people. Manushkin’s retelling of Deborah’s story emphasizes her unique power, describing her as possessing great wealth and wisdom. However, it is not Deborah’s story that is so frequently omitted in contemporary collections of Bible stories for children. Deborah prophesies that victory over the enemy Sisera will come at the hands of a woman, that woman being Yael. Yael, a single woman, invites Sisera into her tent where he falls asleep; while he is sleeping,

Yael drives a tent stake through his head, thereby defeating the enemy of her people. Including the linked stories of Deborah and Yael asserts a macrodiscourse of unflinching re-visioning of the traditional and canonized representations of women in the Bible.

Manushkin concludes her collection with one of the most canonized stories in which a woman plays the central role, the story of Queen Esther. Interestingly, Manushkin notes in her introduction that Queen Esther was the only heroic female character she was familiar with as a young girl (*ix*). It is this personal experience of not being taught about the women in the Hebrew Bible, in fact, of not being taught religion at all because she was a girl, that motivates the creation of the collection as a whole. This motivation being derived from personal experience further embodies the desire to not pass on a limiting tradition such as Rich describes in her definition of re-vision.

Ross's *Daughters of Eve*

The majority of the collections examined in this chapter share the macrodiscoursal ideology that purports the value of women's stories in the Bible simply by virtue of selecting the narratives of women or utilizing the perspective of a female character. These collections are dominated by an attempt to establish a matriarchal line that provides a mirror-like image of the patriarchal canon with which readers are generally familiar. This focus, however, to varying degrees emphasizes the roles of wife and mother to which many women in the Bible are limited. Lillian Hammer Ross's collection *Daughters of Eve: Strong Women of the Bible* offers a slightly different approach to gathering together the stories of women in the Bible. In this collection, each

narrative is first categorized by a theme and then by the woman whose narrative explores that theme. Topics such as “The Jews in Egypt” and “Passover and Exodus” cover important time periods in Jewish history which are explored through female characters. But the collection’s themes are not limited to key narratives of the traditional canon. Themes which specifically explore issues of importance for women, especially from a feminist historical perspective, are also included such as “Women and the Law” and “Women and Marriage.” By framing the focus of women’s stories according to these themes, Ross extricates the narratives from the familiar framework of the patriarchs and not only encourages readers to see from a new perspective, but also presents her audience with stories that are frequently left out, even in collections devoted to the stories of women.

Some of the most notably absent figures in Ross’s collection are Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel. The absence of these stories results in a noticeable shift in focus away from the importance of romantic and familial relationships. The stories of these particular women frequently focus on the love and devotion of their marriages or their struggle to procreate. Marriage is not a major focus of the collection. In fact, the one narrative whose theme is devoted to “Women and Marriage” does not expound upon the wonders of a happy marriage, but rather explores the historical aspects of arranged marriage and the limitations of women’s agency. The little known figure of Abigail is the focus of the narrative on marriage. Abigail is married off to a boorish drunk whose selfish ways are a cause of serious unhappiness for his young wife. Abigail’s power rests in her control over the domestic affairs of the household. When her husband refuses to

share lunch with the outcast David and his followers, Abigail rescues the household from David's retaliation by going against her husband's wishes and delivering food to the wanderers. After her husband's timely death, Abigail becomes the wife of David after he succeeds to the throne. The role of wife in Abigail's story is not a romanticized notion, but a clearly historically situated perspective that implicitly critiques the often romanticized narratives of Sarah, Rebekah, Leah and Rachel, whose stories are absent from the collection.

Ideology of Audience Engagement

The history of children's literature spans a variety of changes in the assumptions about its audience and the purpose it serves for that audience. Early assumptions dictated that children's literature was inherently didactic, serving a primarily moral purpose; later trends reversed these notions indicating the purpose of literature for children was to imaginatively entertain. Even as the genre began to be examined for its white, androcentric biases, a common assumption remained that the intended audience, children, were passive receptacles who could not think critically about a text. "[C]hildren's books construct children, both as characters and as readers, as without sexuality, innocent, and denied politics, either a politics between themselves or within wider society. As such they are seen as beings with a privileged perception, untainted by culture" (Sarland 48). While critical theory in children's literature has begun to call into question our constructions of childhood and how they are represented in literature, it is a relatively rare children's text that does not pander to children when attempting to address political

issues and instead actively engages children in exploring complex social debates. It is these texts which are participating in the Ideology of Audience Engagement.

In a sense, any collection that employs midrash to creatively re-vision biblical narratives is on some level participating in the ideology of audience engagement. By introducing audiences to alternative versions of familiar narratives, the text encourages a higher level of engagement with the religious tradition and implicitly endorses further examination of the Bible from alternate perspectives. However, paratexts that actively and explicitly encourage their audiences to probe the Bible and scrutinize the traditional interpretations of biblical text beyond the stories presented in the collection are truly exhibiting the ideology of audience engagement.

Sasso's *But God Remembered*

One of the fundamental obstacles to creating a text that successfully incorporates some of the issues of feminist theology is the assumption that it must be sugar-coated for children to understand it. When issues about patriarchy, historical context, or gender roles are brought up, they are relegated to an author's note at the end of the text which is directed more toward parents even when it uses vocabulary accessible to a younger audience. In *But God Remembered: Stories of Women from Creation to the Promised Land*, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso attempts to incorporate feminist theological concerns, allowing her audience to become more consciously engaged in the issues at hand.

The collection of four women's stories begins with what might be considered a prose poem addressing the issue of memory. The poem begins with God considering

whether or not to create Memory and Forgetfulness, an idea that receives much complaint from the angels who fear that people will forget the songs of their ancestors, many good stories, and even each other's names. When God asks the angels what sort of things they remember, nostalgic memories quickly give way to old and bitter disagreements that escalate into thunderous bickering. "God said, 'FORGET IT!' / And there was Forgetfulness" (5). The final lines of the poem wrap up the story as well as directly address the issue that the Bible does not include all of the stories or all of the people who played a role in the religious tradition:

God said, "There are some things people will need to forget."

The angels objected. "People will forget what they should
remember."

God said, "I will remember all the important things. I will plant the
seeds of remembrance in the soul of My people.

And so it was that over time people forgot many of the songs, stories
and names of their ancestors.

But God remembered. (5)

This opening sets the stage for the rest of the text and engages the children directly by using a creative narrative style that is accessible as well as entertaining.

The following page of the text offers an explanation and introduction to midrash. Again it engages the child audience because it appears in the opening rather than as a concluding author's note. The very concept of midrash is made an important and integral part of the text rather than an afterthought or interesting footnote. The notion of midrash

is made accessible through references to familiar stories and characters. A short midrashic examination of Lot's wife serves as a clear example of how midrash can work and why:

Suppose you are reading the biblical story about Lot's wife turning back to see the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and about her becoming a pillar of salt. You wonder why she turned around, and why she became a pillar of salt. Suppose you say she turned around out of compassion for those left behind, and the pillar of salt was from her tears. In adding this explanation, you would be creating a type of story which in Hebrew is called *midrash*. (6)

The quality of the language is engaging and conversational which prevents the information from becoming too dry or intimidating. The choice of examples subtly sets a tone for the feminist slant in the midrash to follow. Most importantly, this introduction establishes a challenge to children to read this text, as well as the rest of the Bible, actively rather than passively accepting it as "the whole story." As such, this text reaches beyond its own boundaries to encourage its audience to engage in a similar exploration of the issues within religion that it brings to the table.

Sasso's selection of narratives for the collection further encourages audience engagement with feminist ideology and the Bible in that the stories retold are atypical of more traditional collections and likely unfamiliar to the audience. Many feminists have come to embrace the midrashic character of Lilith, but with certain important revisions.

Scholars like Plaskow take up the strands they find which relate to their modern experience and reject the demonization of Lilith:

I retain the rabbinic idea that Lilith was banished for demanding equality with Adam but refuse to judge her an evil demon, perceiving in that label the whole history of male naming of women who refuse to yield to male authority. My story seeks to expose the patriarchal perspective of the midrash, at the same time exploring the question it leaves open: What would happen, what is happening, as women's power begins to be freed and defined by women. (Plaskow 54-55)

For some, Lilith has become an icon for feminist theology, the first woman to rebel against the domination of her male counterpart and be labeled “demon,” “witch” and “whore” for resisting the pressure to be ruled or subdued. “The Lilith story may be a clue to our own history, reflecting some assertive, rebellious behavior of women in the past [...] With so few materials about women, particularly of this nature, it would be unthinkable for us to let Lilith be forgotten simply because of the male biases grafted onto the story or her revolt” (Cantor 43).

Sasso's retelling of the Lilith tale is a midrash of a midrash. It seeks to fill in the gaps that the midrash which first “created” the character of Lilith left in our understanding of who she was and what she stood for. Perhaps because Lilith is less well known than Eve, Sasso does not incorporate the problematic elements of the traditional depiction of Lilith. Instead she paints a picture of a feminist figure that is empowering for young girls and grown women alike. It is made clear that the beginning of the

conflict that leads Lilith away from the garden is rooted in Adam's desire to take control and reserve their favorite activities to himself. He refuses to allow Lilith to climb on his shoulders to look out over the garden or split open the pomegranates or name the animals – activities which they had both participated in up to this point. Their escalating argument becomes quite childish, resorting to “are nots” and “are sos.” Although the source of the argument is clearly placed on Adam's shoulders, the inability to resolve it is equally distributed as God refuses to take sides or resolve the issue for them. In the end, Lilith is not demonized in any way and while her association with the night is retained there is no suggestion that she is stealing anyone's ability to bear children. The more familiar character of Eve is acknowledged and an explanation is offered as to why Lilith is not found in the Bible. “After a while, Adam found comfort with a new companion named Eve. Adam called his new companion the *first* woman, because he wanted to forget Lilith. In the course of time, people forgot Lilith's story and how man and woman were once equal” (11). The moral of the story is clear: God did not ordain the inequality of the sexes; that is a construction and flaw of humanity.

Using midrash to create a children's text that incorporates feminist theological issues allows for much more room to speak to a modern audience about the issues that are relevant to their society, rather than being limited by the historical context of the traditional Bible stories. Sasso's tale “The Daughters of Z” is an excellent example of opening an obscure reference that focuses primarily on ancient Hebrew law to explore issues that reflect modern concerns. The daughters of Zelophehad stand up for their right to inherit land in their father's name. Their father died in the desert and did not leave a

male heir so the daughters take up their claim with Moses who passes it on to God. God agrees that their claim to inheritance is just and it is decreed that daughters should be allowed to inherit property in the absence of a son. While this is certainly not a flawless feminist narrative, since we are exploring the possibilities, why not have God say women should be allowed to inherit regardless of whether or not there is a son? The inclusion of this narrative does establish a tradition in which young women can stand up against laws, even church laws, that feel unjust. Sasso's narrative continues by attributing the more restrictive laws regarding marriage and inheritance to displeasure among the people and a desire to control the women who inherit land from their fathers. The "daughters of Z" fought this new law but lost and in time the people forgot that God thought the women's complaint was just. This accounts for the lack of familiarity many practitioners have with this story; even though it appears in the Bible, it is a story that, until recently, has seldom been retold for young audiences. The conclusion of this story is not necessarily a "happy ending," but it does introduce young girls to a realistic outlook on the resistance to change they will certainly find. But the message is also that God and humans do not always have the same ideas, even humans who have authority within the church.

Biers-Ariel's *Triumph of Eve*

Matt Biers-Ariel's collection *The Triumph of Eve and Other Subversive Bible Tales* is the only collection included in this study written by a male author and not devoted exclusively to women's narratives. Biers-Ariel's collection is included because both the macrodiscourse and microdiscourse are unique in how they engage young

readers and foster individual exploration of biblical texts regardless of the gender of the central figures. The macrodiscourse of the paratext in this collection overtly establishes an ideology of audience engagement while simultaneously introducing a very entertaining tone.

The cover of *The Triumph of Eve* metaphorically presents the purpose of the collection which is more overtly stated in the author's preface. In homage to the narrative whose individual title has been ascribed to the whole collection, the cover art presents an iconic image of a piece of fruit dropping into an outstretched hand. Because the narrative has been titled the "triumph" rather than the "fall" of Eve, readers are given the first indication that the stories in this collection are not traditional interpretations. The moment that Eve eats the fruit is one in which her eyes are opened to other possibilities and knowledge; this privileging of multiple interpretations and seeing with new eyes is the foundation on which the collection operates. The golden fruit illustrated as dropping from the top of the frame has only partially appeared; its exact nature is not fully disclosed and resists definitive identification. It most resembles a pear as it does not have a spherical shape, but rather a rounded bottom that tapers to a smaller circumference on top. Because the fruit pictured is clearly not an apple, the icon most commonly associated with the fruit eaten by Eve, this unidentifiable fruit is a metaphor for the retellings within the collection which ask us to reconsider our assumptions about what each text means.

The foreword of *The Triumph of Eve* employs a similar strategy of heavenly commission as the prose poem introducing *But God Remembered*; both paratextual

elements suggest that God would approve of, if not specifically commission, the contents of the collection. The collection includes both a foreword, written by someone other than the author, and a preface, written by the author. In *The Triumph of Eve* the Foreword is “written by” Gabriella, “Chief Angel” (xi). Gabriella describes in her foreword the conversation with God in which she is assigned the task of visiting Earth to “find a guy named Matt” and help him write a book about the Bible (x). Gabriella, along with God, are recurring characters whose commentary punctuates the retellings of each story and provides a connecting thread for the collection. Utilizing the voice of a character in the foreword blurs the line between text and paratext. Maclean uses speech act theory to distinguish the difference between the two illocutionary acts:

The paratext involves a series of first order illocutionary acts in which the author, the editor, or the prefacer are frequently using direct performatives. They are informing, persuading, advising, or indeed exhorting and commanding the reader. On the other hand the world of the fictional text is one of second order speech acts where even the most personal of narrators belongs not to the real world but to the represented world. (274)

Biers-Ariel’s first textual communication with the audience is through a second order speech act using a character from the fictional world of the collection. This both imbues the ideas expressed in the paratext with authority, particularly those said to be voiced by God, as well as depreciates that authority because it is clearly part of the fictional world.

Several vital ideas are conveyed in the paratext that establishes the macrodiscoursal ideology of the collection. In the foreword, Gabriella recounts a conversation with God in which they discuss the reception of the Bible. The ideology of audience engagement is clearly established when God expresses disheartenment at the simplistic interpretations of the most popular narratives: “My point is that when most humans read about the Flood, they see a happy children’s story that ends with a dove flying over a rainbow. They miss the deeper meanings. [...] They need help getting to the essence of the Bible. They need help seeing the essential questions that the Bible poses, questions that I want them to wrestle with” (x). God sends Gabriella to Earth to help “Matt,” the author of the collection, write a book that will help humans begin to wrestle with these questions as opposed to passively accepting closed interpretations. The preface further articulates the collection’s purpose, but because it is openly the voice of the author, the ideology of audience engagement is more didactic. “Paradoxically, the Bible’s very ambiguity imbues it with more power, rather than less. Since there can be no single interpretation of the Bible, its multiple meanings allow each story to speak to each individual reader” (xiv). While Biers-Ariel dons a more academic vocabulary in much of the preface, it is clear that he is encouraging an audience of young readers to actively engage with the Bible:

My hope is that *The Triumph of Eve* gives you food for thought, ideas to ruminate over. If you can digest particular ideas without suffering indigestion, terrific. If you spit them out in favor of others, great. The important thing is for you to become engaged with the Bible as

generations have done for over 2,500 years. If *The Triumph of Eve* helps you do this, that will be enough. (xv)

Biers-Ariel's collection engages readers in religious exploration of complex moral issues as well as a variety of social issues including gender construction and sexual orientation. While the collection is not devoted entirely to women's stories or feminist re-visions of biblical narratives, the macrodiscourse establishes a clear forum for active exploration of the Bible and abjures passive acceptance of the status quo interpretation.

Conclusion

While thus far the paratexts of each collection have been "neatly" categorized into specific ideological categories that represent the macrodiscourse of the collections, few collections, including those already discussed, can or should be limited to only one ideological influence. Before concluding this chapter, I want to illustrate how complex and multi-discoursal the macrodiscourse of any given collection can be by examining the various influences in Deborah Bodin Cohen's collection *Lilith's Ark*.

Lilith's Ark: Teenage Tales of Biblical Women is unique from the other collections of biblical women's narratives in several respects. First, it identifies itself in the title as well as the introduction as a collection for and about teenage girls. While many of the collections examined here are clearly advanced enough in both content and style for an adolescent audience, Cohen's collection is the only example which explicitly identifies a teenaged audience. Unlike the paratext of Sasso's *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible*, Cohen clearly acknowledges the differences between the cultures in which

these stories are based and that of contemporary Western audiences. “The women of Torah grew up at a time very different from ours, a time when women’s and men’s roles were rigidly defined [...] The concept of being a ‘teenager’ did not exist during the biblical era. Childhood led directly into adulthood with little time for the exploration that marks the ‘teenage’ years today” (Cohen *ix*). However, Cohen also asserts a connection between the experiences of herself and her readers and the women in the Old Testament: “Although their world was dramatically different, these young biblical women faced challenges essentially the same as the ones teenagers face today. We find hints of these women’s first loves, blossoming spirituality, and developing bodies and identities in the Torah” (*ix*). This portion of the introduction illustrates the author’s assumptions about the interests of a teenage audience as well as establishes a macrodiscoursal framework for interpreting the collection. By focusing on themes of first love, spirituality, body image, and the development of individual identities, Cohen provides points of comparison which suggest a universality of women’s experiences that theoretically transcends time. Both the title of the collection and the author’s introduction provide macrodiscoursal evidence for how this text should be approached by its readers. The focus on romantic relationships and the assumption that adolescent girls should be interested in them suggests the influence of the “Good Christian Woman” ideology. However, because the collection does not only focus on romantic relationships and marriage, but also women’s relationships with each other and the development of individual identity, this collection is also influenced by the ideology of Women’s Agency.

Another unique feature of Cohen's collection is the narrative device used to connect the stories of the biblical women. In the prologue, Cohen introduces the readers to the figure of Lilith with rhyming poetry and plucky prose. Lilith is identified as a confident and empowered woman whose primary desire is to tell the stories of the women she prophesies after eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Lilith's purpose in the collection is established near the end of her story: foreseeing the Holy Ark which would be built to house the Ten Commandments, Lilith creates her own ark which is left behind when she leaves Eden later to be found by Eve. Each woman in the collection contributes something to this ark that represents her story, her part in a matrilineal heritage that has not been adequately documented in the Bible. It is important to note that each woman's contribution is a material object, not a written account of her story; readers are encouraged to "listen" to the stories whispered by the objects in Lilith's ark. In spite of the fact that the text is a written collection of stories, it introduces readers to the concept of an oral tradition and other nontextual traditions through which women have historically passed their heritage. Moreover, the adolescent audience is urged to consider what they would add as their gift to the ark and what their story would be. This feature of the paratext is clearly influenced by the ideology of Audience Engagement by emphasizing the role the audience can play in the religious tradition.

The negative legends surrounding the figure of Lilith are also acknowledged in the prologue as well as contemporary reinterpretations of what she represents. "Some say I'm a temptress of teenage boys, visiting their steamy dreams. / Others call me the first feminist, whatever that means" (2). Though the character of Lilith may not be aware of

the ideology of feminism(s), any more than the majority of her audience of adolescent girls, the author is clearly situating both the figure of Lilith and the collection as representative of contemporary constructions of gender. The inclusion of Lilith as an empowered female figure from the religious tradition further promotes the ideology of women's agency and a celebration of changing constructions of gender.

As the example of *Lilith's Ark* illustrates, while the paratext of a collection may be predominantly influenced by a particular ideological pattern, a close reading of the macrodiscourse of a text will likely reveal a multilayered influence of a variety of ideological categories. To complicate matters further, the macrodiscourse of a collection including the selection of stories, introductory features, and various other paratextual elements do not necessarily guarantee that the retellings of stories within the pages of the text will actually fulfill the ideological ambitions of macrodiscourse. The ideological influences on the individual retellings of each narrative constitute the microdiscourse of a collection, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

THE THREE R'S OF FEMINISM: REJECTION, RESISTANCE, AND
RECLAMATION AS PATTERNS OF THE INFLUENCE OF
FEMINIST IDEOLOGY ON THE NARRATIVES OF
BIBLICAL WOMEN

To modify an old adage, you can't judge the ideology of a book by its paratext. While the cover art, title, author's note and other paratextual features prompt readers to expect certain ideological influences, it is ultimately the stories themselves that establish the ideological tenor of the text. A reader is liable to feel duped or misled by the cover if the narrative(s) within do not "match," not the other way around. How the text is framed is important, but, as Girard Genette acknowledges, the paratext is subordinate to the text:

Whatever aesthetic or ideological investment the author makes in a paratextual element ("fine title," preface-manifesto), whatever coquettishness or paradoxical reversal he [*sic*] puts into it, a paratextual element is always subordinate to "its" text, and this functionality determines the essence of its appeal and its existence. (12)

In this chapter, the analysis of collections of women's Bible stories turns from macrodiscoursal and paratextual elements to the microdiscoursal patternings of the stories within the text.

According to my expanded definition of John Stevens and Robyn McCallum's terms "macrodiscourse" and "microdiscourse" described in the previous chapter, the microdiscourse of a text is located within the actual narratives. Analysis of the microdiscourse considers the ideologies of the discourse communities that influence the ways in which the stories of women in the Bible are retold. Where the analysis of the macrodiscourse included the framing of the text, an analysis of the microdiscourse examines the patterns or trends that appear in retellings of individual stories. The specific concerns raised by the values of a discourse community impact the direction the narrative takes in being retold. This chapter examines several patterns that emerge from the ideological influence of feminist discourse in the text of the narratives.¹ The patterns examined in this chapter illustrate the application of several of the larger ideological categories to the individual retellings, as opposed to the packaging of the collection as a whole.

Contemporary retellings of the narratives of biblical women negotiate the ideologies of at least two, sometimes competing, discourse communities: religious discourse and feminist discourse. Both of these discourse communities include a multiplicity of factions and no universal ideology for either can be said to represent the beliefs of all members. There are many different types of feminism, just as there are many different factions and denominations within the Jewish and Christian religions.

¹ In children's literature, illustrations are frequently an integral part of the communication of the story. Because in many collections of Bible stories, individual narratives frequently include only one illustration, or sometimes no illustration, this chapter examines only the language that tells the story. The next chapter includes analysis of how illustrations convey different ideological influences on the text.

Some collections in this analysis can be clearly defined as Christian because they include narratives of women from the New Testament. Collections that only include “Old Testament” women are more difficult to align since both Judaism and Christianity draw from the same religious heritage.² While feminist ideology is as potentially diverse as the religious ideologies that influence the texts, the retelling of biblical narratives from the perspectives of women is a feature of all the collections examined here. Certainly not all of the collections can be identified as feminist; however, all of the texts examined here have been written in the last 20 years and have arguably been influenced by feminism on some level because feminism and gender equality is part of the cultural zeitgeist. In *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards claim that “for anyone born after the early 1960s, the presence of feminism in our lives is taken for granted. For our generation, feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice that we have it – it’s simply in the water” (17). However, because so many young people take feminism for granted, many young women are unaware of the rights and privileges they would not have without the progress of the feminist movement. Even more troubling, some young people have embraced a disdain for all things feminist precisely because they take the gains of the feminist movement for granted or because they believe feminism has fulfilled its purpose and is no longer needed. One possible explanation for the recent publications of collections of women’s stories in the Bible is that Western culture has been so impacted by the feminist movement. This explanation

² The term “Old Testament” is a Christian distinction. I have placed the term in quotation marks to acknowledge that this label is only used by some of the members of the religious discourse community as it is broadly defined here.

accounts for both texts that espouse feminist ideology and those that attempt to reclaim traditional constructions of femininity; it simply depends on the nature of the reaction to the impact of the feminist movement. The backlash against the feminist movement perpetuates stereotypes about feminists and advocates the idea that feminism robs women of the satisfaction of traditional gender roles; one result of this backlash is texts targeted to young women and girls that advocate traditional gender roles. The focus on gender is what unites texts from different religious traditions and different stances on feminism. This chapter examines the ideological influence of feminist discourse on the retellings of these narratives, including how they engage with issues raised by feminist backlash. The influence of feminism on the retellings of Bible stories is manifested in a variety of different ways; this chapter examines three of the most prominent trends: the rejection of gendered beauty standards, resistance to the gendered cultural paradigm of marriage, and the reclamation of exception(al) women.

Rejecting Gendered Beauty Standards

Many of the prominent women in the Old Testament are noted for their beauty. Rachel is singled out for her beauty, while her sister Leah by contrast is only identified by her disability.³ Abigail, Bathsheba, and Esther all attract the attention of a king

³ “Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.” (Gen. 29.17)

because of their beauty.⁴ The beauty of Sarah and Rebekah is even described as posing a threat to their husbands' lives.⁵ There are few women noteworthy enough to be singled out in retellings of the Old Testament whose beauty is not referred to as a distinguishing feature. Proverbs 31, which expounds on the virtues of and establishes the standard for a model wife, focuses primarily on her work ethic and generosity to others. The only reference to beauty is negative: "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31.30). Beauty and deception are conflated, which is problematic for retellings that embrace beauty as a form of power, a point that will be expanded upon later. There is an inherently conflicted message about beauty: it is a suspicious quality in descriptions of a "woman of God" and yet so many of the female role models provided are celebrated for their beauty.

⁴ Abigail: "A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings" (1 Sam. 25.2-4).

Bathsheba: One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" (2 Sam. 11.2).

Esther: "This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features" (Esth. 2.7).

⁵ Sarai: "As he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they will say, 'This is his wife.' Then they will kill me but will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that I will be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you'" (Gen. 12. 12-13).

Rebekah: "When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, 'She is my sister,' because he was afraid to say, 'She is my wife.' He thought, 'The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful'" (Gen. 26.7).

Contemporary women and girls are constantly subjected to an onslaught of images and media that focus on women's beauty. The pressure to conform to beauty mandates is a form of social control that some feminists argue has escalated as part of the backlash against feminism since the second phase of the women's movement gained ground for women's rights. Susan Bordo articulates the incapacitating influence the pressures regarding feminine appearance have on women and girls:

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity – a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, “improvement.” Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress – central organizing principles of time and space in the day of many women – we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. (166)

Beauty ideals are the mechanism of social control that reel many women back in from the potential freedoms gained over the last century. “The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us” (Wolf 10). Using Foucault's distinction between power that comes “from above” and “from below,” Bordo defines the pervasive nature of beauty standards that might otherwise be dismissed as self-imposed trivialities. “Where power works ‘from below,’ prevailing forms of selfhood and subjectivity [...] are

maintained, not chiefly through physical restraint and coercion [...] but through individual self-surveillance and self-correction to norms" (27). Women and girls may feel guilt or be resistant to the importance of this mechanism of social control because of their assumed complicity in their subjugation; furthermore, this apparatus of ideological control may be dismissed as such because of women's participation in its perpetuation. In *The Beauty Myth*, Naomi Wolf indicates that the ideology of beauty has become so pervasive because formerly repressive norms for women's experience have become outdated and have lost their influence on contemporary women:

[T]he ideology of beauty is the last remaining of the old feminine ideologies that still has the power to control those women whom second wave feminism would have otherwise made relatively uncontrollable: It has grown stronger to take over the work of social coercion that myths about motherhood, domesticity, chastity, and passivity no longer can manage. (10-11)

Wolf takes this argument even further by equating the "beauty myth" with religion. For an increasingly secular culture, the "Rites of Beauty" have supplanted religious doctrine in exerting patriarchal domination over women, and Wolf illustrates how the language of religious practice has been mapped onto the "Rites of Beauty."⁶ Wolf contends that the

⁶ Wolf argues that as the sexual revolution and the feminist movement decreased the control over women's bodies that Judeo-Christian religions supported, the Rites of Beauty relocated sexual guilt to oral guilt. "Women were genitally chaste for God; now they are orally chaste for the God of Beauty. Sex within marriage, for procreation, was acceptable, while sex for pleasure was a sin; women make the same distinction today between eating to sustain life and eating for pleasure. [...] A sexually unchaste girl was 'fallen'; women 'fall off' their regimens. Women 'cheated' on their husbands; now they

“Rites” are “a new fundamentalism” that isolate women because they are not publicly recognized as a repressive doctrine in which devotees are trapped (89).

Given the pervasive influence of idealized standards of beauty in contemporary culture, references to beautiful women in the Bible are both commonplace and doubly enforced for young women. For Christian girls and women, the Bible presents potentially conflicting messages about beauty. While all of the female role models provided in the Old Testament are predominantly noted for their beautiful appearance, beauty is almost never a distinguishing feature of the women in the New Testament. Furthermore, the New Testament advocates a focus on inner beauty and shuns outward beauty: “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight” (1 Pet. 3.3-4). Lest we confuse this as an emancipation from the tyranny of idealized standards of beauty, it should be noted that the passage continues by explaining the nature of Old Testament women's beauty thereby justifying the repeated references to that beauty: “For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master” (1 Pet. 3.5-6). Certainly not all Christian marriages abide by the gender hierarchy referenced in this passage; most

‘cheat’ on their diets. [...] The rosary has become a calorie counter; women say, ‘I have the stretch marks to show for my sins.’ Where once she was allowed to take communion if she made a full and sincere penance, now a woman is granted a given procedure ‘if she has sincerely tried diet and exercise.’ The state of her fat, like the state of her hymen in the past, is a community concern: ‘Let us pray for our sister’ has become ‘We’ll all encourage you to lose it’” (Wolf 97-8)

couples now revise the section of the marriage vows that indicate the woman should “love, honor, and *obey*,” opting for the more egalitarian “love, honor, and *cherish*” for both partners. What is illustrated by this biblical passage is that beauty as a mechanism of social control is not limited to contemporary pop culture. According to a strictly literal biblical interpretation, Christian women can be “beautiful” through submission to male domination in much the same way that contemporary women, both religious and secular, strive for beauty by submitting to idealized standards of beauty.

For contemporary Jewish and Christian girls the sacred texts do not provide unequivocal respite from secular culture’s obsession with beauty. While neither faith system advocates a focus on outer beauty, there are few reciprocal references to the physical appearance of male biblical figures. David is noted for his “fine appearance and handsome features” (1 Sam. 16.12), but only five verses prior to this description it is made clear that “The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16.7). The very need to make a distinction between “inner” and “outer” beauty, as evidenced by the passage in 1 Peter as well as elsewhere throughout the Bible, indicates a tension within the sacred text. That this tension is an issue for female practitioners more so than male practitioners is illustrated by the recent appearance of “Biblezines.” In 2003, Thomas Nelson Publishing released the first Biblezine whose target market was adolescent and preadolescent girls. *Revolve*, the Biblezine for girls, is a complete edition of the New Testament in the format of a beauty magazine including beauty tips, dating advice, and other features typical of a fashion magazine; *Refuel*, the male equivalent released the following year, includes

special interest features and some dating advice, but the only references to physical appearance are related to hygiene. What is made evident by the different approaches to marketing the Bible to a teenage audience is that how the conflicted issue of beauty is presented is of particular importance for a young female audience.

Of all the narratives of biblical women, particularly those retold for young readers, the story of Esther most frequently highlights the motif of beauty. Little is revealed about Esther in the Bible other than that she is beautiful, a feature that singles her out and provides her the opportunity to take a stand for the Jewish people. The pretext for the narrative depicts Esther as a beautiful and obedient young woman, a correlation of characteristics that is very familiar to readers of both Bible stories and fairy tales. The book of Esther is only one of two books in the Bible which is named after and devoted to the narrative of a woman, and yet it is the story of Esther, not Ruth, which is most frequently retold in children's literature.⁷ The similarities the narrative of Esther shares with fairy tales is one likely reason for its popularity. Like many familiar fairy tales heroines Esther is an orphan, she is kind and beautiful, she is drawn out of a lower social class to become queen, and her former social status is a secret throughout most of the story.⁸ Esther's similarities to Cinderella alone could account for the frequency with

⁷ The frequency of the retelling of Esther's story is not quite as evident in the primary texts examined in this chapter which are limited to collections of Bible stories. However, when single-story picture books, novels, and films are taken into account, the narrative of Esther is clearly more frequently retold than that of Ruth.

⁸ Jews were not specifically described as being enslaved during the narrative of Esther (the time period and historical accuracy of the text being a topic of some debate among biblical scholars) and Esther's cousin Mordechai holds a respectable and perhaps relatively prominent position in the king's court; however, the fact that Haman is able to

which the story is retold given the rampant popularity of Cinderella in contemporary Western culture. Fairy tales have received considerable attention from feminist scholars and many authors have re-visioned these narratives to explore the shifting ideologies regarding gender in Western culture. The feminist critiques of traditional fairy tales exemplify many of the same issues of gender ideologies and therefore provide a foundation from which to begin exploring the issues raised by collections of biblical women's stories. The limitations of feminist analyses of fairy tales is that, while fairy tales arguably exert considerable influence on social constructions of gender, the texts themselves are not deemed sacred by any organized group, nor are they ever infused with the immutable distinction of being "the Word of God." Feminist analyses of fairy tales do, however, provide a framework for building an approach to analyzing the ways in which collections of women's Bible stories negotiate gender construction.

The vacancy Esther fills as Queen of Persia is created because the former queen, Vashti, refuses to appear before the king when summoned. The book of Esther clearly establishes this defiance as an issue of gender domination:

Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, "King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti

persuade the king to pass an edict to exterminate the Jews is indicative of a disempowered group if not literally a lower social class. For that matter, Cinderella's is not always described as coming from a lower social class but she is treated as a servant. The correlation is approximate and suggests a similarity in form that young readers recognize.

to be brought before him, but she would not come.” This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way.

There will be no end of disrespect and discord. (Esth. 1.16-8)

For contemporary audiences, Vashti has been appropriated as a feminist figure, a woman who refuses to be objectified by her husband. If Vashti is defiant and disobedient, then for Esther to be her more “desirable” replacement, she must be submissive and obedient. This dichotomy is problematic for contemporary retellings which attempt to maintain Esther as the heroine of the narrative while also imbuing her with qualities of an empowered woman.

Because of this dichotomy, few narratives linger on the decision made by Vashti and some skip over it entirely. When it is addressed, it is generally used to establish the negative qualities of the king's character, in particular that he is easily swayed by others and susceptible to popular opinion. The tension created for a feminist re-vision of the story of Esther is most clearly demonstrated in Nancy Simpson's *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible*. Simpson's collection is one of the only examples in which Vashti is given her own story separate from Esther's. Vashti's refusal is celebrated as an example of self-respect: “Vashti held her head high as she left the royal palace. Although the king had won the battle, Vashti had won the war. She had refused to undergo humiliation. She had demonstrated for all to see that self-respect is far more valuable than riches; inner worth far greater than earthly kingships” (132). The illustration accompanying the narrative shows Vashti in the foreground, head held high with dignity, while Esther is

crowned in the background, seductively approaching the king with her hand demurely at her throat and her eyes cast downward. The following story in the collection, Esther's narrative, does not include an illustration, an omission that stands out in a collection in which the majority of stories include vibrantly colored, full-page illustrations. If as readers we are led to celebrate the defiance of Vashti, we are then predisposed to be suspicious of Esther who is deemed more desirable by the king because of her obedience. Both women are described as great beauties, the only difference between them being their compliance to the king's whims. Because both women are renowned for their beauty, Esther's obedience, in contrast to Vashti's rebellion, is conflated with idealized standards of beauty: to be unquestioningly beautiful, a young woman must also be submissive.

Vashti further complicates the process of establishing Esther as an empowered female character because her treatment in the narrative reinforces the prejudice against older women. "Youth and (until recently) virginity have been 'beautiful' in women since they stand for experiential and sexual ignorance. Aging in women is 'unbeautiful' since women grow more powerful with time" (Wolf 14). As an "older" woman, Vashti has gained the confidence to stand up for herself and to refuse the king's command; therefore her "beauty" has begun to wane and must be replaced with a more compliant, younger model.⁹ Unlike the evil stepmothers of fairy tales, the prejudice against older, more empowered women is not masked behind evil jealousy; in the story of Esther, we are presented with a beautiful and admirably empowered woman before the young heroine is

⁹ Vashti's age is never identified. That she is older than Esther is in part assumed because she is a married woman, but more importantly she is more mature because of her sexual experience, her social status as a married woman, and her exposure to life in the royal palace.

even introduced and then expected to align ourselves with her more passive and obedient replacement.

The corralling of young women to select a queen is one feature of the narrative which most closely ties the story of Esther to fairy tales. Many retellings for young readers describe this process as a beauty pageant. The Veggie Tales film of Esther includes a talent competition scene, complete with judges and score cards. Mike Thaler's retelling includes an illustration of Esther walking down a runway wearing a sash in a clear allusion to the Miss America pageants (*Heroines*). Matt Biers-Ariel's retelling of Esther, "Uncorked Perfume," establishes the strongest connection between the beauty pageant and fairy tales with a handbill that announces the contest:

Hear ye! Hear ye!

A Proclamation from our

Noble, Wise, Rich, Powerful, and Handsome

King Ahasuerus.

He Desireth a Bride.

All young maidens of Enchanting Beauty are invited

to enter the

King's Beauty Pageant

from which the New Queen shall be chosen. (104-05)

This emphasis on beauty and allusion to modern beauty pageants is in part a means of downplaying the sexual nature of the king's process of selection. Each young woman undergoes months of beauty treatments in preparation for her one night with the king: "In

the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name" (Esth. 2.14). Hara E. Person and Diane G. Person note that "The authors who re-create the Esther story for children must [...] find a way to downplay the inherent sexual undertones. Just as in contemporary versions of fairy tales, the importance of beauty in the story tends to be emphasized in compensation for omitting references to sexuality" (240). Marcia Lieberman acknowledges the importance of the beauty pageant trope in fairy tales in her essay "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation Through the Fairy Tale":

The beauty contest is a constant and primary device in many of the stories. Where there are several daughters in a family, or several unrelated girls in a story, the prettiest is invariably singled out and designated for reward, or for punishment and later for reward. Beautiful girls are never ignored; they may be oppressed at first by wicked figures [...] but ultimately they are chosen for reward. (187-88)

The beauty pageant is an apt metaphor from contemporary Western culture in that it emphasizes the objectification of women's bodies for the sexual stimulation of men.¹⁰

¹⁰ The metaphor of the beauty pageant also presents contemporary readers with a very limited understanding of the social conditions of biblical women. As A.R. Riverol establishes in *Live from Atlantic City: A History of the Miss America Pageant*, "pageants as we know them today could not have existed anytime in our history outside the last hundred or so years. Before then, social conditions made the respectable, institutional, flagrant, and profitable exposition of scantily clad girls before a paying audience inconceivable" (1). In the narrative of Esther, there was not a choice to "participate" in

Furthermore, the experience of beauty as a competition is familiar for adolescent girls as Rosalind Wiseman illustrates in her exploration of contemporary girl culture in *Queen Bees and Wannabees*. “Adolescence is a beauty pageant. Even if [a young woman] doesn’t want to be a contestant, others will look at her as if she is. In Girl World, everyone is automatically entered” (77). Early feminist critique of beauty contests rebuked the focus on women’s bodies and appearance.¹¹ This focus on beauty does not provide young women with role models who have done anything to warrant admiration. “The immediate and predictable result of being beautiful is being chosen, this word having profound importance to a girl. The beautiful girl does not have to do anything to merit being chosen; she does not have to show pluck, resourcefulness, or wit; she is chosen because she is beautiful” (Lieberman 188). Esther is not chosen because of her admirable qualities, but for her appearance alone; while she does use the position she attains to do good, it is only because of her beauty that she is given the opportunity and responsibility. Contemporary authors use several different strategies to draw our

the “beauty contest;” it was commanded by the king. Not all retellings of the story of Esther employ the metaphor of the beauty pageant, instead choosing to emphasize the threat Esther’s beauty posed to her life and her unwillingness to acquiesce to the king’s command.

¹¹ The 1968 protest at the annual Miss America Pageant ushered the Second Wave of the feminist movement onto a public platform (and originated the inaccurate association of bra burning with feminists). The focus of the protests was targeted at the oppression of idealized standards of beauty and the reducing of women’s worth to appearance. More recent critiques of the pageants examine the racial bias definitions of beauty, as explored in Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin’s collection “*There She Is, Miss America*”: *The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America’s Most Famous Pageant*, and the different cultural definitions of beauty, one example of which is Rebecca Chiyoko King-O’Riain’s *Pure Beauty : Judging Race in Japanese American Beauty Pageants*.

attention to her moral character and deemphasize her physical attributes in retellings of Esther's narrative.

The first strategy involves the rejection of beauty rituals, what Bordo describes as "the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress" (166) or what Wolf more tersely refers to as the "Rites of Beauty." While potentially less potent following Vashti's open defiance, these retellings incorporate varying degrees of resistance on the part of Esther to being objectified because of her appearance. In the biblical account, all of the young women are subjected to 12 months of beauty rituals before being presented to the king (Esth. 2.12). Esther is even singled out for special treatment because she is favored by Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. Many of the contemporary retellings re-vision this portion of the narrative by emphasizing Esther's natural beauty. In Fran Manushkin's retelling in *Daughters of Fire*, the 127 most beautiful women in Persia are described as "vain and proud," "attired in glorious silken gowns," and bedecked in "pearls and diamonds" (62). Esther stands out because of her simplicity. "One alone wore a plain, modest dress, befitting her guileless spirit. Ah, but Esther's beauty could not be denied" (62). However, this "natural beauty" ultimately emphasizes the unrealistic standards of beauty because for many women and girls the ability to stand out among such carefully groomed competition is unattainable. In Lillian Hammer Ross's *Daughters of Eve*, Esther is exposed to the same beauty treatments as the other women, however when her turn to meet the king comes, she makes the active choice to present herself in her natural state:

They were taught how to look after themselves and instructed in the use of myrrh oil, perfumes and cosmetics. [...] When it was Esther's turn to go before King Ahashverosh, she refused the glittering gowns, costly cosmetics and perfumes offered to her by Hagai. "I will be myself," she said. When Esther approached, simply dressed in the clothes of an ordinary Persian woman, her face scrubbed clean and her long hair hanging straight down her back, he gasped. He had never seen unadorned, natural beauty before. She was splendid in her purity. (85-6)

This more effectual decision gives Esther more agency; she actively rejects the "Rites of Beauty" as opposed to simply not needing them in the first place. This also serves to demystify the unattainable "natural beauty" that distances the protagonist from her more average-looking audience.

Another strategy employed by contemporary authors is to emphasize Esther's personality and intellect. The kindness, generosity, and other admirable qualities of Esther are frequently described as enhancing her outer beauty. Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum's retelling in *Miriam's Well* establishes that Esther's generous personality won her many female companions. "When she had been brought to the seraglio, she was so cheerful and full of fun that she quickly became the favorite of the attendants. [...] Because Esther freely shared her lotions and oil of myrrh with all the other women, they vied for the privilege of being her companion on walks" (110). In beauty pageant terminology, Esther is "Miss Congeniality." While Esther's personable nature wins her many female friends in this retelling, it is still her beauty and delicate nature that win the

heart of the king. “[His appearance] made him seem frightening, and Esther’s knees trembled. She swayed, and the king rushed from his throne to catch her. ‘You are the loveliest of all the young women who have tried to amuse me,’ he said tenderly to her. ‘Now that you are here, my little anemone, my life will be full of sunlight’” (Bach and Exum, *Miriam’s Well* 111). In *Daughters of Eve*, after choosing to present herself unadorned before the king, it is her natural beauty as well as her generous nature that earns his admiration:

“My noble king,” said Esther. “There are many poor people in Shushan.” She paused, waiting for his reaction. When he said nothing, she continued, “If you wish to declare a true holiday in my honor, you should send baskets of food to every home. That way, all of Shushan would be able to celebrate our wedding.”

The king was as impressed by her wisdom as by her beauty. (Ross 86)

Esther’s hesitation in making this suggestion illustrates the social boundary that is traversed by daring to correct the king or show more generosity than him. Because Esther’s generosity is not limited to the company of women, the narrative can be re-visioned to suggest that the king was attracted to more than just her beauty.

The emphasis on Esther’s personality in order to detract focus from her appearance is taken another step further in “Return to Hadassah” from the collection *Daughters of the Desert*. In this retelling, told through first person narration, Esther consciously wants to be recognized as more than just a pretty face and is disillusioned

with the beauty rituals to which she is constantly exposed. Esther is aware that people believe her to be a kind and generous person, but does not agree with their assessment:

She knew the young women were fond of her, as were the other palace workers. She heard them whispering in the corridors. “Good Queen Esther, she is as kind as she is beautiful.”

I am not kind, she thought, as she lay awake that night. *I do nothing for others. My days are filled with empty beauty rituals.* (Murphy *et al.* 55)

Through the first person narration we are able to glimpse her motivations which depict a young woman who strains against the cultural limitations of her gender. Her decision to risk her life by appearing unbidden before the king is not motivated by obedience to her cousin Mordechai, guilt at the thought of watching her people perish, or even just humble self-sacrifice; her decision is also fueled by an individualistic desire to be recognized for more than just her beauty. “*This is my time, my chance to prove that I am more than beauty*” (Murphy *et al.* 59). For contemporary women and girls, this is a role model worthy of admiration for more than just a flawless complexion.

The last strategy for re-visioning the beauty motif is to acknowledge the power that beauty grants women, particularly in a cultural context where other forms of power are severely limited. This leads us to the same question posed by Esther in “Return to Hadassah”: “Why does everyone think I have power because of my beauty?” (Murphy *et al.* 57). Identifying beauty as a valid or desirable form of power for women is problematic. “Beauty enhances the power of women even while diminishing it. [...] As women learn to channel energy into being seen rather than into being strong, attracting

becomes a substitute for acting” (Freedman 72). In *Beauty Bound*, Rita Freedman explores the dual system of power which characterizes the forms of power historically associated with gender. The agonistic mode, typically allocated to masculinity, involves aggressive behavior including direct threat and the use of force; the hedonic mode, associated with femininity, utilizes indirect or covert influence through display and exhibition to command attention (Freedman 73). Freedman argues that it is the association of each mode of power with a specific gender that is problematic:

Both agonistic and hedonic forms of power are useful. There is a time and a place for each. When we assign them separately to the masculine or the feminine role, gender inequality is perpetuated. As long as attraction belongs primarily to women and action to men, strong women will be viewed with suspicion, and homely women (along with weak men) will be judged with contempt. As long as women remain the fair sex, they also remain the weaker sex. (94-95)

The potential problem of embracing the power of beauty in the narratives of biblical women is that it can lull readers into a false sense of empowerment: that this is and always has been the nature of women’s power; that this power is sufficient, and therefore other forms of power are not necessary. As Bordo argues, this draws women’s focus inward to self-modification and maintenance and away from social action, making women complicit in the subordination of their power. Retellings which acknowledge the power of beauty must walk a fine line between wielding that power and presenting its limitations. In *Daughters of Eve*, as Esther stands among the women who are vying for

the opportunity to present themselves to the king, she notes how the women allow the power of their beauty to reduce them to commodities: “‘These innocent women are offering themselves as if they were items for sale.’ She shivered, and bent her head even lower. ‘A woman is not a water-jug, to be bought at the market’” (Ross 84). While in this retelling Esther chooses to “be herself” when she is first presented to the king, later when she approaches him unbidden to plead for the lives of the Jewish community she utilizes the power of her beauty. She adorns herself in the finest silk and jewels before presenting herself to the king, a strategy which works because “The king, sitting on his throne, thought only of how beautiful she was” and her life is spared (Ross 89-90). A subtle, but present, balance is created in Ross’s retelling that acknowledges the positive and negative aspects of hedonic power.

Wielding the power of beauty is not without consequences to an individual’s sense of authority and self-esteem. “The modes of power a person uses affect how powerful he or she feels. Since hedonic power often goes unacknowledged or is deemed manipulative and so is mistrusted, it does little to enhance the user’s status or confidence. Heavy reliance on beauty and charm can leave a person feeling insecure even after success” (Freedman 74). Biers-Ariel’s retelling of Esther, “Uncorked Perfume,” is one of the most unique retellings because of its blatant focus on the motif of beauty. Esther is acutely aware of the power of her beauty and consciously wields it to gain the position of Queen of Persia. The dark side of the power of beauty is alluded to later in the narrative as well as a sense of responsibility to a larger community:

Esther felt the urge to look at herself and clawed through her purse for her hand mirror. She lifted the mirror and looked deeply into her perfect face. Was her beauty fair? Did she do anything to deserve her beauty? If she were to be truthful with herself, Esther knew the answer was no. Her beauty was a gift bestowed upon her at birth. A gift she must now use to serve others. (Biers-Ariel 110)

Esther appears to be addicted to the power her beauty provides in that she feels a compulsion to view herself in the mirror and “claws” through her belongings to get her fix. Despite her claims to empowerment earlier in the narrative, it is clear that her confidence and self-esteem are shaky, perhaps because she is aware that beauty is fleeting. The maintenance of beauty ultimately serves to remind women, even beautiful women, that they are not enough. “Through these disciplines [of maintaining beauty], we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough” (Bordo 166). This passage from “Uncorked Perfume” also suggests the importance of not allowing appearance to create a centripetal focus. Maintaining appearance through beauty rituals makes one susceptible to narcissism and in this narrative Esther realizes that she has a responsibility to others as well as herself. Narratives, such as Esther’s, where appearance is a defining feature of the female figure, exemplify the problematic association of beauty with female role models in the Bible.

Resisting the Gendered Cultural Paradigm of Marriage

In her ground-breaking feminist text, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir articulates the fundamental idea that gender is a social construction. “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an Other” (267). As the works of several central second wave feminists, including de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, and Adrienne Rich, attest, the social constructions of the roles of wife and mother have a sordid history of oppression and continue to exert considerable influence on women’s identities. While the institutions of marriage and motherhood have undergone much change since de Beauvoir, Rich and Freidan first analyzed their influence on women’s lives, the psychological hold of these institutions has not been eliminated. The prospects of young women today are no longer limited to marriage and motherhood; however, a woman’s identity is still heavily influenced by the decision to marry, or not, and have children, or not. Some of the arguments made by these scholars warrant historical contextualization as they apply to current mores of marriage and motherhood; however, centuries of oppression through these institutions cannot be erased by a scant few decades of changing ideologies.

Despite the multiplicity of options available, many young women, particularly in American culture, are still plagued by the heteronormative message that marriage is a defining marker of their success. Not all women succumb to this message as attested by

the slow increase in the average age of marriage and general decrease of married adults in the United States. While marriage is seldom the only item on the agenda for success, it still functions as an important category in women's identity. Television, movies, magazines, and popular literature reinforce the cultural imperative of marriage for young women; one defining feature of a "chick flick" is that a film focuses on romantic relationships. The nature of a desirable marriage as presented in our cultural texts has changed – equality, mutual respect, and a woman's independence are prominent features of this change – but the focus on marriage as a culminating moment in women's lives still remains.

In 1952, de Beauvoir argues that "There is unanimous agreement that getting a husband – or in some cases a 'protector' – is for [the young girl] the most important of undertakings. In her eyes man incarnates the Other, as she does for man; but this *Other* seems to her to be on the plane of the essential, and with reference to him she sees herself as the inessential" (329). Contemporary women may cringe at the suggestion that they seek a "protector" or that a husband is "essential," but the focus on marriage in women's texts indicates that "getting a husband" is still of considerable importance in Western culture. In "Feminism and Fairy Tales" Karen E. Rowe argues that, in fairy tales as well as other narratives that focus on romantic relationships, women identify with the heroine who wins the "prince" and dissociate from the "evil," and frequently more empowered, female nemesis:

Romantic tales [...] transmit clear warnings to rebellious females:

resistance to the cultural imperative to wed constitutes so severe a threat to

the social fabric that they will be compelled to submit. [...] By punishing exhibitions of feminine force, tales admonish, moreover, that any disruptive non-conformity will result in annihilation or social ostracism. While readers dissociate from these portraitures of feminine power, defiance, and/or self-expression, they readily identify with the prettily passive heroine whose submission to commendable roles insures her triumphant happiness. (217-18)

The “evil stepmother” or “wicked queen,” to use the archetypes of the fairy tale genre, have changed as much as the heroine: they are no longer simply the aggressive woman to the heroine’s passive submission. Regardless of the nature of her qualities, the heroine remains the young woman who ends the narrative in the arms of the man she desires.

Wiseman asserts that “although we have told girls that they’re as smart and as competent as boys, they still get conscious and unconscious messages that they need a man to validate their self-worth and that, to get the man in the first place, they have to present themselves in a nonthreatening (read feminine) manner” (78-9). Friedan examines the defining images of “femininity” transmitted to women through popular culture, specifically women’s magazines in the 1960’s, in *The Feminine Mystique*. According to Friedan, the definitions of femininity as presented in popular culture are drawn from models of women who did not have the options available to the contemporary audience:

The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. [...]

The new mystique makes the housewife-mothers, who never had a chance to be anything else, the model for all women [...] Beneath the sophisticated trappings, it simply makes certain concrete, finite, domestic aspects of feminine existence – as it was lived by women whose lives were confined, by necessity, to cooking, cleaning, washing, bearing children – into a religion, a pattern by which all women must now live or deny their femininity. (43)

Definitions of femininity are no longer dominated by domestic activities, but the feminine hero is still rewarded with marriage and, at least, the prospect of motherhood. The connections between femininity and the institutions of marriage and motherhood continue to remain inextricably linked.

Feminist ideology does not preclude marriage as a desirable choice for empowered women. As Rowe argues in her analysis of fairy tales, it is the prominent focus on marriage in traditional narratives that is cause for concern:

Certainly marriage need not be a totally unacceptable or self-abnegating goal. Nonetheless, [...] portrayals of matrimony as a woman's only option limit female visions to the arena of hearth and cradle, thereby perpetuating a patriarchal status quo. Whatever the daily reality of women's wedded or professional life, fairy tales require her imaginative assent to the proposition that marriage is the best of all possible worlds. (221)

Instead of “imaginative” assent, biblical stories suggest a “spiritual” assent; this is the role women have played in the religious tradition, and marriage and motherhood is, according to some sects, the highest spiritual calling for a woman. “To be a wife may no longer be a badge of honor, but it is far from a badge of woe” (Yalom *xvii*).

Contemporary marriages are marked by the choices of those entering into the commitment; they may consist of equal partners or a dominant and submissive partner. The history of the institution of marriage has an impact on our expectations as do the narratives about marriage we tell, or re-vision.

Contemporary ideologies about the nature of marriage are very recent. The notion that marriage should be a commitment based primarily on love is a relatively new phenomenon. Marilyn Yalom explores the legacy of the social construction of the role of the wife from biblical and ancient times to the second half of the twentieth century in *A History of the Wife*:

In the past, most marriages were affairs of the pocketbook rather than affairs of the heart. Men wed women who had dowries; women wed men who could support them. From biblical days to the 1950s, it was a husband’s duty to provide for his wife. She, in turn, was expected to provide sex, children, and housekeeping. It was a quid pro quo that was not just tacitly understood by the two parties but written into religious and civil law. (*xiv*)

There is some debate among scholars as to the exact point in history that marriage became synonymous with love; theories range from the troubadour poetry of the early

Middle Ages to the sixteenth century in England (Yalom xv). Marriage for biblical wives was not based initially on love and “since arranged marriages, rather than love marriages, were the norm in premodern times, brides and grooms did not enter marriage with the expectation of ‘loving’ each other as we understand the term” (Yalom xvi). Many retellings of Bible stories which include a marriage are reversions that incorporate the contemporary ideology that love precedes marriage. For example, in *Daughters of Fire* the early relationship between Abram and Sarai, later known as Abraham and Sarah, is highly romanticized in a style evocative of fairy tales. “So close in spirit were she and Abram, they felt as if they shared one soul. Soon they married – a marriage that was made in heaven, for God had planned it before they were born” (Manushkin 9). There are several implications of incorporating this ideology into retellings of Bible stories. First, marriage based on love rejects the situation of arranged marriage in which women are treated as property passed from one dominant male to the next. Second, removing the historical context in which women were treated as property glosses over this problematic aspect of the culture that these religious traditions grew out of and which has influenced the patriarchal aspects of religious practice. Third, incorporating romance into these stories reinforces the current cultural mandate that women identify marriage as an important guideline for personal success.

Scholars of historical fiction critique the flagrant revisioning of cultural realities that inhibited women’s experiences. Anne Scott MacLeod articulates her “difficulty” with contemporary historical fiction in “Writing Backward: Modern Models in Historical Fiction”:

They evade the common realities of the societies they write about. In the case of novels about girls or women, authors want to give their heroines freer choices than their cultures would in fact have offered. To do that, they set aside the social mores of the past as though they were minor afflictions, small obstacles, easy — and painless — for an independent mind to overcome. (MacLeod 31)

In examining how contemporary authors re-vision the stories of biblical women, the historical reality of arranged marriage is susceptible to similar critique and should be held accountable in a similar fashion. Margaret Chang acknowledges the potentially detrimental impact feminist re-visioning of historical contexts can have for contemporary readers in “Are Authors Rewriting Folklore in Today’s Image?”: “If girls and young women are presented a version of the past that conforms to modern ideals, they could easily undervalue, or take for granted, the variety of choices open to them at the end of the twentieth century” (86). Integrating the contemporary ideology that love precedes marriage ignores the historical reality of arranged marriage. Not all retellings gloss over the problematic aspects of arranged marriage. In *Lilith’s Ark* the stories of Rachel and Leah are re-visioned to emphasize several issues of arranged marriage. Most accounts of this narrative romanticize the relationship between Rachel and Jacob, particularly their love-at-first-sight and Jacob’s devotion in serving an additional seven years to marry Rachel after he is tricked into marrying Leah first. In Cohen’s version, Rachel is not attracted to Jacob; she prefers being outdoors shepherding while he would rather discuss his belief in the “true God” (56). It is Leah who is first attracted to Jacob and enjoys his

company and spiritual debate. It is clear that the cultural context of marriage leaves Rachel with little choice in the matter: “I resigned myself to marrying a man for whom I felt little affection” (Cohen 57). The account in Genesis places all the blame, and all the power, in the hands of Leah and Rachel’s father, Laban; it is Laban who schemes to switch the daughters and marry off the elder sister first. The accounts in *Lilith’s Ark* revision the inception of the plan as the sisters’ solution to the disparity of their affections for Jacob, thereby granting them more agency in the marriage in spite of the historical lack of choice for women. Of course, the plan backfires and the sisters become rivals instead of co-conspirators, a theme that will be addressed in more detail later. Another text that openly engages with the issues of arranged marriage for a contemporary audience is found in the story of Abigail in the collection *Daughters of Eve*. Abigail is the future wife of King David; however, this retelling focuses on her first marriage to a brutish man named Nabal. The narrative begins with Abigail being introduced to the man with whom she has essentially been sold into marriage. “To Abigail he looked like a wild animal that wanted to eat her, and a shiver ran down her spine. She clenched her fists to keep herself from trembling. She felt so small. This man seemed like a giant. She swallowed her tears and looked down at the floor” (Ross 54). The retelling depicts Nabal as a drunkard and abusive husband in addition to his poor manners and “wild” appearance. This retelling makes it quite clear that marriage was not always a desirable situation for women. At the same time, it provides the “happily ever after” ending that contemporary readers expect when David, now king, offers Abigail the opportunity to marry a civilized and considerate husband.

Not all ideological re-visions of marriage in Bible stories are limited to historical issues such as the selling off of young women in marriage. One issue raised by the marriage paradigm, as well as the beauty myth, is the jealousy and competition that is fostered among women:

For most grown-up girls, whether they work hard or lead a frivolous existence, whether they are confined at home or enjoy some liberty, to get a husband – or, at least, a steady sweetheart – becomes a more and more urgent business. This concern is often destructive of feminine friendships. The ‘best friend’ loses her place of honor. The young girl sees rivals rather than allies in her companions. (de Beauvoir 368)

Lieberman argues that the goal of marriage as well as the pattern in which the most beautiful girl is rewarded with marriage promotes jealousy among young women. “This pattern, and the concomitant one of reward distribution probably acts to promote jealousy and divisiveness among girls. The stories reflect an intensely competitive spirit: they are frequently about contests, for which there can be only one winner because there is only one prize” (188). Competition is not inherently negative; however, as a function of patriarchy, competition among women has been used to dissuade insurrection. This is true of marriage as well as standards of beauty which have been ingrained in the cultural psyche as a prerequisite for attaining a husband. “The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance. Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another” (Wolf 14). In religious

texts, this theme of competition and jealousy is most frequently and poignantly addressed in retellings of the story of Rachel and Leah.

The narrative of Leah and Rachel requires little re-visioning to draw our attention to the competition and jealousy among women: two sisters married to the same man; one favored in love, the other favored with fertility. When the narrative is included in collections of women's stories that challenge the patriarchal status quo, the story transforms into a cautionary tale for women rather than the more traditional focus on Jacob fathering the twelve tribes of Israel. The transformation into a cautionary tale occurs by drawing attention to what is lost by the sisters. In *Daughters of Fire* the narrative begins with a touching portrayal of two loving and devoted sisters. Leah is very devoted to her infant sister who is afflicted with what we would now identify as colic. Manushkin envisions the older sister going to great lengths to soothe the child, a development of their relationship that is not alluded to in the pretext:

Leah searched the darkest caves, where the bees hid their sweetest honey. Defying their stings, she scooped up the dripping honeycomb and brought it to Rachel. "Taste of this," Leah whispered, placing the nectar on Rachel's lips. The child tasted the honey, and her crying ceased; and for the very first time, she smiled.

"See?" said Leah softly. "Life is sweet." (23)

Leah's statement is ironic foreshadowing as both sisters suffer bitter disappointment in their adult lives. The intimate and loving relationship between the "inseparable" sisters emphasizes what is lost by the competition and jealousy that destroy their adult

relationship. The rivalry is explicitly identified in the text and serves as the primary conflict driving the narrative. The story concludes with the sisters finally making amends and acknowledging what they lost by allowing their rivalry to divide them. Tragically, the sisters' reconciliation comes too late as Rachel dies in childbirth shortly thereafter. The caution to readers of what can be lost when competition and jealousy interfere with relationships is only possible when this narrative focuses on the women.

In *Lilith's Ark*, the stories of Rachel and Leah are told separately, each in a first person narrative that allows readers a glimpse into the thoughts and emotions of each young woman. This narrative strategy is unique in that it emphasizes the psychological struggle of young women as they enter puberty and begin to desire a romantic relationship. The destructive nature of jealousy and competition is drawn to the forefront of the narrative as each girl's insecurities are revealed. Rachel, the younger and more beautiful sister, is envious that her sister is always identified as the smart sister and longs to be recognized for more than her appearance. Leah struggles with her jealousy of Rachel because she recognizes the important role her sister plays in her life:

I tried not to resent Rachel, for I needed her. She was my only link beyond the courtyard. Nobody else my age talked to me. [...] It was difficult not to be envious. Rachel was bronze-skinned and muscular from herding sheep. My skin remained pale, and my body jiggled like my elderly aunties' arms. Rachel smiled and giggled, eternally cheerful. Her good fortune irked me. (Cohen 65)

The issues of rivalry and envy are addressed quite explicitly as each girl recognizes the influence they have on their relationship. Some of their quarrels are typical of sisterly squabbles, but the hierarchy created by beauty standards is not exclusive to sibling rivalries:

“Leah,” I said, to lift her spirits, “just remember how beautiful your eyes look in the morning.”

“You are a little girl who does not understand adult beauty,” Leah snapped.

I looked at the ground in shame.

Leah laughed at me. For the first time, her laugh was full of envy. She said, “Don’t worry, Rachel. You are the beautiful one.”

Envy has an ugly sound. (Cohen 53)

After Jacob is tricked into marrying Leah and then agrees to work another seven years for Rachel, both young women recognize the gravity of the divide between them. Leah’s heartbreak is twofold in that the man she loves and who is her husband will marry another woman and that her relationship with her sister has been forever changed. “She would marry my husband, the man I loved. I felt a gulf open between us. She could no longer be my friend or confidante” (Cohen 75). Rachel also suffers from the loss of her sister’s confidence; she longs to comfort her as she used to, but is no longer able because of the unsought rivalry. It is in Rachel’s narrative that the nature of their competition is blamed on the patriarchal traditions of marriage in their culture:

Leah untangled herself from my arms and stood up. We looked at one another. I wanted to reassure Leah, but I could not find the words. I opened my mouth in silence.

Leah cried, "You are now my rival." She began climbing down the ladder.

"Leah," I called out. "Do not let our father and Jacob make enemies out of us. We have both been tricked." (Cohen 59)

Envy is an emotion that is not condoned by any religious tradition regardless of gender. In the context of the story of two sisters married to the same man, the implications of envy and competition allude to a problem for women even today. The competition for men's affections that continue to divide women is not specific to a long ago and far away culture; it is distinctly familiar to young women growing up in a culture that prizes beauty and continues to reinforce the notion that women are not truly successful in life if they do not marry.

Reclaiming Exception(al) Women

Thus far, this analysis has focused on women whose inclusion in the Bible has primarily been due to their marriage to and mothering of important male figures in the religious tradition. There are, however, several female figures whose role is an exception to the rule of women being relegated to the domestic sphere; these women stand out as extraordinary examples of female empowerment and leadership. In *Standing Again at*

Sinai, Judith Plaskow comments on the progress of feminist historians in the Jewish community:

Historiography as one aspect of the feminist reconstruction of Jewish memory challenges the traditional androcentric view of Jewish history and opens up our understanding of the Jewish past. In the last two decades, feminist historians have demanded and effected a far-reaching reorientation of the presuppositions and methods of historical writing. Questioning the assumption that men have made history while women have stayed home and had babies, they have insisted that women and men have lived and shaped history together. (Plaskow 36)¹²

The women whose stories we are most familiar with and that generally dominate collections devoted to the women of the Bible support the assumption that “men have made history while women have stayed home and had babies.” However, most collections of women’s stories include at least one narrative of these exception(al) women, and many collections not devoted to women’s stories include a nod to one of these female figures. The most frequently included exception(al) women are Miriam, Deborah, Jael, and Huldah. Judith also appears frequently in collections of women, though the Book of Judith is deuterocanonical and therefore is not included in the Jewish or Protestant Bibles.

¹² Plaskow’s text was published in 1990, so the “last two decades” refers to work accomplished in the 1970s and 1980s.

The most frequently retold narrative of an exception(al) woman is the figure of Miriam.¹³ What is particularly interesting about this is that the Bible includes very little about Miriam, although what is revealed suggests she was a very important religious leader as Plaskow notes. “The same passages that hint at Miriam’s importance, however, at the same time undercut it. [...] The Torah leaves us, then, with tantalizing hints concerning Miriam’s importance and influence and the nature of her religious role, but she is by no means accorded the narrative attention the few texts concerning her suggest she deserves” (38-39). Bible story collections that include the story of Miriam generally have to employ a fair amount of Midrash to flesh out the minimal information the Bible provides about the sister of Moses. “In seeking to recover women’s history, feminist historians have mined androcentric sources for clues to women’s lives and leadership, and interpreted and filled in the gaps and silences that erase women’s activity” (Plaskow 37).

The most common fragment of Miriam’s story told in children’s texts, particularly single-narrative picture books, is the account of baby Moses being protected by his sister in the Nile River. The popularity of this portion of Miriam’s life is noteworthy because a child, more importantly a female child, is an agent of change. There are few biblical narratives that focus on a youthful protagonist, and, therefore, those tend to be popular material for children’s texts. Ruth Sanderson’s collection, *Tapestries: Stories of Women*

¹³ Of the collections of women’s stories discussed in this chapter, some variation of the story of Miriam is told in five out of the seven collections. The two collections that do not include a retelling of Miriam also do not include the narratives of any exception(al) women because they either focus on rarely told narratives (*But God Remembered*) or establish a matrilineal tradition (*Lilith’s Ark*). Miriam is also the focus of several single-narrative picture books including *Miriam’s Cup: A Passover Story* by Fran Manushkin, *Miriam and Her Brother Moses* by Jean Marzollo, *Hide the Baby (The Birth of Moses)* by Mary Manz Simon, *A Little Girl Named Miriam* by Dina Rosenfeld, *Edge of the River* by Bob Hartman, and the novel *Miriam* by Beatrice Gormley

in the Bible, includes a very short and typical retelling of Miriam standing guard over her brother and approaching the Pharaoh's daughter to suggest a Hebrew woman, the children's mother, to nurse him. This standard account certainly portrays Miriam as brave and resourceful; however, it requires little embellishment of the pretext to establish these characteristics. Manushkin's *Daughters of Fire* also includes this account of Miriam protecting her brother, but draws on traditional biblical Midrash to further develop her importance as a leader of the Jewish people. In response to the Pharaoh's decree that all Israelite boys be drowned after birth, Miriam's father divorces his wife so there will be no sons to kill. Young Miriam chastises her father and prophesies the important birth of her brother Moses:

But their six-year-old daughter, Miriam, protested, "Father, your decree is worse than Pharaoh's. *He* wants to kill boys, but *you* are not allowing girls to be born either."

"That is true," Amram said sadly.

"You must remarry Mother," Miriam insisted. "She is destined to have a child who will set our people free!" So powerful were Miriam's words that Amram knew they had come from God. Amram did remarry Jochebed, and Miriam danced joyfully at the wedding, singing and playing her timbrel. (Manushkin 34)

Miriam is established as a prophet in her own right even before her famous brother, Moses, is born. The passage also foreshadows Miriam's role in leading the women in dance and celebration after the defeat of the Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea. Developing

the story of young Miriam into more than just a story of a mother/protector-in-training necessitates allusions to her future importance as a religious leader.

Retelling the foundational narratives of the religious tradition through the eyes of women can sometimes lead to characterizations of women that are not empowering. In Ross's *Daughters of Eve*, two stories are devoted to Miriam. The first narrative is an effective feminist Midrash of Miriam's role in protecting her brother and becoming a leader for the Israelites. Miriam has a prophetic dream in this retelling as well:

Then one night, Miriam had a dream. When she awoke, she ran to her parents to tell them. "A very old man, dressed in white robes, approached me. He told me that the baby would be a boy and we need not fear for him," she said. "We must make him a basket like an ark out of bulrushes and let him float on the Nile. He will be safe in it." (Ross 8)

The "very old man, dressed in white robes" is clearly meant to represent God; the passage implies that God spoke to Miriam through her dreams and establishes a tradition of Miriam as a prophet as well. Miriam is very active throughout her first story in the collection: she serves as her mother's midwife, she approaches the Pharaoh's daughter, and she retells the story of how Moses was saved to her friends. Her active role in the first narrative is in stark contrast to her observational role in the second narrative devoted to Miriam and her brother Moses. The second narrative in this collection is centered on Moses' return and the plagues that lead up to Passover and the Exodus. Miriam secretly follows her brothers when they repeatedly go to confront the Pharaoh. Miriam always follows at a distance as though she was spying on an adult conversation and she is

frequently frightened by the miracles Moses performs and runs home in fear. When the Pharaoh does not relent to Moses' command to free the Israelites, Miriam shuts herself up in her room and cries, much like a child throwing a temper tantrum because she did not get her way. Miriam is infantilized in this narrative, diminishing the strength of character established in the first narrative. This change in Miriam's personality as she ages suggests that part of maturing for women is surrendering strength, an implication that works against the ideological thrust of Ross's collection. As this example illustrates, mapping a female protagonist onto events dominated by male figures does not necessarily create an empowered or exception(al) female role model.

Miriam's adult life is enshrouded in mystery. She is identified as both a prophetess (Exod. 15.20) and a leader along with her brothers Moses and Aaron (Mic. 6.4). However, little is said about her after she leads the women in the victory dance following their escape from the Pharaoh's army. Aside from her death (mentioned very briefly in Num. 20.1), the only other mention of Miriam is when she and Aaron oppose Moses (Num. 12). It is this account that has been explored in several young adult collections of women's stories. After Miriam and Aaron express their dissatisfaction with Moses and assert their authority as prophets as well, God calls them together to defend Moses and express anger with his siblings. It is only Miriam, however, who is punished with leprosy and forced to leave camp for seven days. Why only Miriam is punished is one of several questions raised by this passage and the subject of the Midrash in *Daughters of the Desert* and *Miriam's Well*.

Both retellings use Miriam's seclusion to illustrate the degree of importance she had as a leader of the Israelites. In *Miriam's Well* the community speaks highly of her and recognizes her contributions during her expulsion: "For seven days the people spoke in praise of Miriam. Her trouble made them realize how much they depended on her. 'We shall not break camp until Miriam has been healed'" (Bach and Exum 53). In *Daughters of the Desert* it is Moses and Aaron who need to be reminded of her importance within the community:

"I'm famous for my healing, Lord. People gather to hear my wisdom. I've never been cast out."

In the western sky a single star fell, its path a streak of light. Miriam lifted her hands. "Am I not a prophetess?" she said to the stillness. "Do I not lead Your people in celebration and praise of Your greatness?"

"Miriam."

The voice brushed her ears, tender as a mother's touch. "I love you just as much as I love your brothers."

[...]

"Did you not hear your brothers crying out in your defense, and yet I ignored their prayers? They will see how all the people mourn your absence. Not a man or woman will move a step forward without you."

(Murphy *et al.* 25-26)

Miriam rails against the injustice of being punished alone in this passage, in part, because she has struggled with her brothers treating her more as a subordinate than as an equal.

When Moses visits her tent earlier in the narrative she is irritated by his unspoken desire to be fed: “she caught Moses eyeing the dead fire under her cooking pot. The heat, her weariness, past hurts – all mingled and prickled the back of her neck. She was more than just a cook and tent sweeper” (Murphy *et al.* 22). Miriam’s struggle for recognition and respect is representative of countless unmentioned women in the Bible. What makes Miriam exception(al) is her ability to resist the pressure to be relegated to the domestic sphere. The very fact that so little is included of Miriam’s contributions attests to her unique ability to defy social norms and slip in under the radar. In *Daughters of the Desert*, as Miriam learns that God endorses her leadership, so too are readers encouraged to question the gender imbalance among the prominent figures of the religious tradition.

While exception(al) women, such as Miriam, are central to establishing the important roles women have played in the history of the religious tradition, they can eclipse the influence ordinary women have had as well. “Stories of outstanding women are important to our understanding and appreciation of women’s religious agency, but they can also distract attention from the fate of ordinary women and from seemingly undramatic but far-reaching changes in gender relations” (Plaskow 40). Many collections incorporate small, but significant actions in the “ordinary” women whose contributions are not as celebrated as those of exception(al) women. The daughters of Zelophehad, who petition and win the right to inherit their father’s property, are included in *Daughters of Eve* (Ross), *But God Remembered* (Sasso), and *God’s Fair Ladies* (Thaler). Several women are attributed with the role of teacher: in *Daughters of Fire*, Sarah preaches to the women while Abraham preaches to the men; in *Daughters of Eve*, Huldah secretly

teaches the young king Josiah Jewish law. Even the act of bearing children is envisioned as a form of empowered leadership in *Daughters of Fire*:

Pharaoh issued another command: “All Israelite men must sleep in the field, away from their wives. Thus no children will be born to them and this people will cease to exist.”

Ah, but Pharaoh was no match for the Israelite women! They refused to let their people die. Each day they did Pharaoh’s bidding, toiling in his brickworks, but at sundown they defied him! They bathed themselves in the river, washing away the dust of the day. Then gazing into copper mirrors, they adorned their hair with fragrant night flowers.

They waited for the moon to hide behind the clouds, and then under cover of night, the women hastened to the fields. As the moon emerged, they awakened their sleeping husbands, and the men, beholding their lovely wives, joyfully embraced them.

[...] Thus the brave Israelite women continued having children.

(Manushkin 33)

Judith and Jael are included in several collections as examples of women who utilize the cultural assumption of women’s weakness to lure the enemy in only to strike him down and achieve victory for the Israelites at the hands of a woman. Many stories are told in such a way as to emphasize the power women can exert even within cultures that limit their agency. “The great silence that has shrouded women’s history testifies not to

women's lack of historical agency but to the androcentric bias that has shaped historical writing" (Plaskow 37).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored three trends in how feminist ideologies can manifest themselves in retellings of Bible stories: by rejecting gendered standards of beauty, by resisting the gendered cultural paradigm of marriage, and by reclaiming exception(al) women within the religious tradition. Not all religious texts that focus on gender advance the ideology of feminism through these particular trends. Nor do the patterns of rejection, resistance, and reclamation account for all the ways in which retellings engage with contemporary gender ideologies.

One commonality of the trends that have manifested is that the defiance is directed at institutions and not men in particular. As a means of deconstructing the influence of these institutions and establishing new frameworks for gender construction, the distinction between individuals and institutions is important. "Following Foucault, we must first abandon the idea of power as something possessed by one group and leveled against another; we must instead think of the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain" (Bordo 167). Identifying the issue with institutions and not individuals can also be linked to the influence of the ideologies of religious discourse. Discord among practitioners and pitting women against men is not in keeping with the values of either Judaism or Christianity. Furthermore, the Bible stories that are retold for children are

part of the “network of practices, institutions, and technologies” that perpetuates gender norms.

The first two trends, rejecting gendered beauty standards and resisting the cultural paradigm of marriage, both fit into the category of The Gendered Body Ideology. The issues addressed are not exclusive to the Jewish or Christian religions, and, in fact, are relevant for contemporary practitioners primarily because of changing gender norms in Western culture. The trend of reclaiming exception(al) women is more closely aligned with the Ideology of Women’s Religious Agency. The reclamation and filling out of the stories of biblical women in leadership roles within the religious traditions is at the foundation of this ideology. Re-visioning definitions of religious leadership and emphasizing the influence of “ordinary” women also contributes to the agenda of this ideological category.

Whereas rejection, resistance, reclamation represent some of the patterns that emerge as part of the microdiscourse of feminist ideology in the retelling of the narratives of biblical women, they do not take into account the ways in which texts negotiate the sometimes competing ideology of religious discourse. The next chapter employs close readings of the biblical text and contemporary retellings of a particular narrative to more fully explicate the complex tensions and negotiations of feminist ideology and religious practice.

CHAPTER IV

“EVE WAS FRAMED”: IDEOSTORY AND THE (MIS)REPRESENTATION OF CHARACTERS IN CREATION STORIES

“Adam’s last will and testament read, ‘Don’t believe Eve’s version’” Jewish Folk Saying

Few women in the Bible have received as notorious a reputation as Eve. While Delilah, Mary Magdalene, Salome, Vashti and Lot’s wife all have reputations as promiscuous seductresses and disobedient wives, none has the inauspicious distinction of causing the downfall of all humankind. As the first representative of the female sex in the Old Testament, Eve arguably provides an interpretive schema for all the women in the Bible. For that reason, I have devoted an entire chapter to examining the children’s and young adult texts that retell or re-vision the story of the creation and the Fall from Genesis.

The primary source for the religious justification of women’s subjugation is the account of the creation and temptation of Eve. In Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s summary of the representation of women in the Bible, it is clear that she credits traditional interpretations of Eve’s story as the foundation for the interpretation of all women in the Bible:

The Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the

judgment of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants, and for all the information she might desire on the vital question of the hour, she was commanded to ask her husband at home. (Stanton 7)

Not all women represented in the Bible are intended as negative role models. In fact the majority are set up as models of domestic propriety, the primary function of women being limited to marriage and motherhood. However, when women in the Bible function as negative models, it is because they fail to adequately adhere to the domestic proscriptions for women and display characteristics of insubordination and sexual autonomy.

Given the change in ideologies of gender, contemporary readers may not be comfortable with interpreting some of the women in the Bible as negative role models. In some cases, the stories we know about the "bad women" in the Bible are based more in a history of patriarchal interpretation than in evidence from the biblical text. Mieke Bal coined the term "ideostory" to describe figures whose stories have been misrepresented and reduced to negative stereotypes:

Stories that seem to trigger [...] distortion, and subsequently distorted comparisons, can be labeled *ideostories*. The term indicates narrative texts that seem to attract ideological abuse. Their structure lends itself to investment with ideological values sometimes reversed and mostly

twisted, while the story appears unchanged. These stories have clearly opposed characters, easily seen as goodies and baddies, and they are easy to remember. Fixed as images (Greek: *eidon*, the root of ideology), they can be used against women without reference to the stories' precise content. The comparisons and distortions are based on the form of the text rather than on a detailed analysis of its substance. (Bal 88-9)

Eve is an excellent example of Bal's definition of ideostory; a close analysis of the pretext compared to traditional interpretations and contemporary reversions illustrates the rhetorical context in which collections of biblical women's stories are being created.

Before delving into an extended analysis of gender ideologies in the story of the Garden of Eden, I want to briefly acknowledge some of the other theoretical approaches to children's texts of this narrative. Hara E. Person and Diane G. Person examine the story of the creation as a metaphor for psychological development in *Stories of Heaven and Earth: Bible Heroes in Contemporary Children's Literature*. In their analysis of various contemporary texts for children, they argue that Adam and Eve function as models for childhood development:

They [the first people] are the ultimate Everypeople, the earliest archetypes of human behavior, stand-ins for all of us as we grow from utter dependency to confident independence, experiencing the struggle of separations, growth, and suffering along the way. The biblical story of creation matters to children as it matters to us all, for their origins and their story are the blueprint for ours. (27)

Drawing on Erik Erikson's theories of development, they explore themes of setting limits and breaking rules, loss of innocence and sexual awakening, and transitions into adulthood. This approach is useful for many retellings for children, but for an examination of the stories of women in the Bible and Eve in the narrative of creation it has obvious limitations.

Moreover, Stephens and McCallum argue that there are two dominant ideologies that present themselves in retellings of the Garden of Eden: the authority paradigm, "a paradigm for a hierarchical relation between individuals and God" and the gender paradigm, "a paradigm which structures the social roles and relationships between men and women and the physical relations of men and women to the world" (37). In many ways similar to the theoretical approach taken by Person and Person, the authority paradigm is interpreted as a "structure for teaching filial obedience, as the relationship of Adam and Eve to God is analogous with the relationship of a child to its parents and other adults" (Stephens and McCallum 37). According to Stephens and McCallum, both paradigms are generally present within any retelling; however, the authority paradigm is accentuated in religious retellings, while the gender paradigm is more prevalent in literary retellings. It is unclear, however, what distinguishes literary retellings from religious retellings. Arguably, any attempt to recreate stories from the Bible has some spiritual motivation. However, in this case it seems that a text's conscious negotiation of gender ideologies is associated with literary retellings because of an assumption that religion is more concerned with authority and obedience than rectifying the gender iniquities of its past. Because I am approaching these texts with the additional lens of

feminist theology, I do not assume that negotiations of gender are exclusive to literary retellings. Furthermore, my interest in issues of authority is focused specifically on the role of divine authority in the text and how that authority impacts readings of the constructions of gender. Stephens and McCallum identify key stages of the narrative in order to explicate the prominent ideological slant of a retelling: Interdiction, Temptation, Transgression, Consequence of Transgression, and Punishment (38). Given my focus on the gender paradigm, I am equally interested in the narrative component of the creation of the first humans, particularly whether the first woman was created simultaneously with the man (as in Genesis 1) or created later from the man's side (as in Genesis 2). The characterization of Eve, Adam, the serpent, and God are also of particular importance for my analysis and warrant an examination separate from the chronological events.

Drawing from the outline provided by Stephens and McCallum, I will begin by examining the events of the story presented in the various texts followed by an extended analysis of the primary characters. I have limited my analysis to the events I believe to be most revealing of the ideology of gender in a given text and grouped events separated by Stephens and McCallum that have important connections to each other: 1) creation of the first humans, 2) temptation and moment of choice, and 3) outcome of choice and dispensation of punishment. In examining the creation of the first humans I am primarily interested in whether the text depicts the simultaneous creation depicted in Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them," or the asynchronous creation described in Genesis 2:22, "Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought

her to the man.” With regard to the temptation and moment of choice my analysis is concerned with the manner in which Eve is tempted and the implied impetus for her decision. Finally, in my examination of the outcome of choice, I am concentrating on whether the immediate outcomes indicate distinctly negative ramifications or allow for positive conclusions; with regard to the dispensation of punishment, I am similarly concerned with the positive or negative connotations, but also with how the distinctly gendered punishments are negotiated.

“Dualing” Versions of Creation

In choosing which version of events to portray, every text that recounts the story of the Garden of Eden establishes an ideological stance on the conflicting accounts of the creation of woman. Genesis 1 describes what many scholars interpret as a simultaneous creation of man and woman, either as a hermaphroditic creature or two separate beings, while Genesis 2 describes the first woman being created from the side, typically the rib, of the first man. Which version a text embraces sets an initial standard for the ideological framework of gender in the narrative. Even those texts which begin after the dramatic scenes of creation indicate a conflicted view on the creation of woman by the very omission of that aspect of the narrative. In 1895, Stanton eloquently described the insult engendered by the “rib version” of creation compared to the seven-day account: “There is something sublime in bringing order out of chaos; light out of darkness; giving each planet its place in the solar system; oceans and lands their limits; wholly inconsistent with a petty surgical operation, to find material for the mother of the race. It is on this allegory

that all the enemies of women rest their battering rams, to prove her inferiority” (20). Scholars such as Phyllis Tribble and Pamela Norris have attempted to reframe the second account in which Eve is molded from Adam’s rib in a positive context.¹ “[T]here is an argument for Eve to be seen, in the words of Milton’s Adam, as ‘Heaven’s last best gift’: she is God’s final creation and is formed not of dust but of the raw material of humanity, [...] the rib story confirms that Eve is part of Adam and therefore cannot be inferior to him” (Norris 19-20). However, as John A. Phillips illustrates, not all scholars are satisfied with this inversion of traditional interpretations: “The suggestion that Eve’s creation is deliberately placed as the last of God’s acts because she is the crown of creation is wishful thinking. Given the other features of the story and the purpose of her creation, that notion is utterly impossible” (33). Re-visions of the myth of creation provide the opportunity to explore how deeply embedded the patriarchal interpretations of the rib-version are in our cultural conscious. Ultimately, retellings of the Garden of Eden for young readers establish a position, whether discernable or ambiguous, on the constructions of gender in the Bible.

Accounts of creation in children’s books provide a range of interpretations that in many cases only become evident upon close reading. The dominant version appears to be the asynchronous creation of humans, or the rib-version of the story. This version, while lacking the epic qualities of the seven-day account to which Stanton refers, provides a stronger narrative plot and characters with which children can relate. However, some retellings, such as Gwendolyn Reed’s *Adam and Eve*, merge the two

¹ Tribble makes a similar argument in “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation”

accounts of creation into one unified narrative which begins with the seven-day account and concludes with the creation of woman after the monumental first week. This approach, along with subtle changes in modern translations of the Bible, may account for the general lack of awareness among many readers that there are in fact two accounts of the creation in Genesis.² The preference for the second account may suggest sexist ideologies regarding gender as Phillips illustrates:

If the woman is created simultaneous with the man, she is “perfect” also, and shares equally in the work of lordship. If she is created after him, she is somewhat less than perfect and belongs to the realm over which he exercises lordship. In preferring the second account, then, interpreters prefer an Eve who is religiously, socially, politically, and sexually under the control of her husband. (30)

A number of the children’s texts that privilege the second account of creation attempt to carefully negotiate the patriarchal history of this version of creation with contemporary ideologies about gender.

Many accounts that include the rib-version of creation accomplish this negotiation by modifying traditional interpretations or diminishing the importance of that aspect of the story. Deborah Bodin Cohen’s *Lilith’s Ark* is told in first person narration from the

² Changes in verb form appear to blur the distinctions between the two accounts of creation in modern translations such as the New International Version (NIV). For example, the King James translation of Genesis 2:19 begins: “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air;” whereas the NIV translation of the same verse begins: “Now the LORD God *had* formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air” (emphasis mine). In shifting the verb tense to past perfect, it moves the events of creating the animals to a previous time allowing the two versions to coincide.

perspective of Eve. The narration begins with Eve opening her eyes for the first time and viewing a boy with a “thin, bloody wound cut from his chest to his back,” which begins to heal before her eyes. The narrative assumes familiarity with the account in Genesis and immediately establishes a contemporary ideology toward gender through the first dialog exchanged:

“Are you my helper?” said the boy. “I call myself Adam.”

“Are you my friend?” I replied. (6)

The non-confrontational adjustment to how relations between the genders should be approached sets a clear tone that undermines the patriarchal ideology of the rib-version of creation.

Matt Biers-Ariel demonstrates another subtle shift in retelling the rib-version that reveals a more contemporary understanding toward gender in his collection *The Triumph of Eve*. The first human is never referred to as male prior to the creation of the second human. “So while Human lay on the ground sleeping, God removed a rib, divided the soul, took a bit more clay, and transformed Human into two creatures, one male and one female” (Biers-Ariel 2-3). While this adjustment retains the familiar reference to a rib being removed, it also indicates that the soul, the essence of what many believe is humanity, has been divided and therefore neither male nor female should be seen as superior to the other. Furthermore, Biers-Ariel’s account makes it clear that gender did not exist prior to the creation of the second human; in fact it is conceivable in this retelling that the “Human” from which the rib was taken could have been the female. This conscious shift in language choice illustrates the importance of a single word in the

text. Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum further illustrate the importance of language choice by drawing their retelling from the original Hebrew. They also consciously do not gender the first human until after the creation of the second human. In the notes following the story of the Garden of Eden, Bach and Exum explain that the word that is traditionally translated as “rib” can also be interpreted as “side,” and in fact is not translated as “rib” anywhere else in the Bible (*Moses 16*). According to Bach and Exum, the tradition of referring to the second human being created from a rib is as textually unjustified as the tradition of associating an apple with the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Both of these accounts incorporate the problematic rib-version while also negotiating contemporary ideologies of gender that conflict with the traditional interpretations.

Many of the texts that utilize the simultaneous creation of man and woman either tell only the story of creation or recount the stories of the creation and the Fall as two separate narratives. Gerald McDermott’s *Creation* and Lisl Weil’s *The Very First Story Ever Told* both indicate visually and textually that the first male and female were created at the same time. Weil’s retelling implies an order to creation in the two page spread that introduces Adam and Eve. Reading the text and images left to right shows that the boy, Adam, is depicted first and the girl, Eve, second. McDermott, on the other hand, refers to the creation of “man and woman” textually, but visually the female figure is placed on the left side of the illustration and therefore “read” first in the illustration. More radical interpretations of the simultaneous creation can also be found in children’s books. Fran Manushkin’s collection *Daughters of Fire* explicitly describes the creation of the first

human as something resembling a Siamese twin, echoing the Platonic account of the creation of man in the *Symposium*. “Gathering forth dust of red and brown and white and yellow, from all corners of the earth, God shaped one human with two faces, female on one side, and male on the other” (1). Not only does Manushkin’s retelling draw attention to the gender bias of traditional interpretations, it also attempts to represent various races in the first human.

Yet another approach in retelling the story of creation in children’s texts is to suggest the creation of many humans at once. In *God and His Creations*, the account of the creation, which is told separately from the story of the Garden of Eden, depicts four different comical variations of humans in all shapes and sizes with indistinct gender and literally rainbow-colored, one such human having red, yellow, green, and blue stripes. Marc Gellman offers another multicultural message in the short story “Painting People Purple.” In this comical midrash, God sends the first human to the “painting room” where the angels are instructed to “Paint this one your best color, and no fighting! Love, God” (27). Unsurprisingly the angels do fight, and their attempts at coloring the first human are disastrous: “The first person came out with one black arm and one tan foot and one yellow toe, along with pink toenails and turquoise hair and violet eyes – a mess!” (27). After God takes over the job, the angels are surprised by the introduction of many different humans in all varieties of shapes and colors “but each one looked just right” (28). Similar themes of multiculturalism are found in Cynthia Rylant’s *The Dreamer* and Phyllis Root’s *Big Momma Makes the World*. The simultaneous creation of multiple humans is typically used to promote an appreciation for the diversity found in all human

beings, but it coincides with the changing ideologies regarding gender equality because it does not imply a gender hierarchy.

Temptation and Choice

The narrative of the Fall has an ominous history of being used to malign the female sex. “The myth [of the Fall] was both symptom and instrument of further contagion. Its great achievement was to reinforce the problem of sexual oppression in society, so that woman’s inferior place in the universe became doubly justified. Not only did she have her origin in the man; she was also the cause of his downfall and all his miseries” (Daly 46). Tertullian refers to woman as the “Devil’s Gateway,” explicitly placing blame, not only on Eve herself, but on all women as the descendants of Eve: “You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack” (Deferrari 130). According to Tertullian’s interpretation, Adam had too much moral strength for the serpent to even consider tempting. The serpent’s temptation of Eve and her subsequent disobedience has been used to verify the “inferiority” of women initially established by her secondary place in the sequence of human creation. The importance of how this narrative is re-visioned for young readers is made evident by Ruether:

Stories like the myth of Eve also enforce the continued repression and subjugation of woman, as “punishment” for her primordial “sin” in causing the fall of “man” and the loss of paradise. Because women are in

fact not inferior, but full human persons [...] the task of suppressing women into dependence on males is a never-ending struggle. It is not a “coup” accomplished once upon a time in some mysterious victory of patriarchy at the dawn of history. It must be reiterated generation after generation, by repeating the myths of woman’s original sin to the young, both male and female. (169)

Given the notoriety of the narrative of the Fall, it is not surprising that feminist scholars and authors of children’s literature have returned to this story to re-vision its treatment of Eve as the “Devil’s Gateway.”

Traditionally, the serpent’s choice to tempt Eve rather than Adam has been attributed to her inferiority as a woman. However, Eve is not tempted with riches or flattery, but rather with the promise of wisdom, suggesting not an inferior mind, but rather a superior intellect. In fact the scripture provides an unusual glimpse into the machinations of Eve’s choice. “Scriptural style is known for its terseness and economy of language, it also rarely delves into the protagonists’ inner deliberations. Therefore, the brief but condensed sentence that divulges Eve’s reasons for picking the fruit and eating it is extremely meaningful” (Aschkenasy 41). Eve chooses to eat the forbidden fruit because she “saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom” (Gen. 3:6). Because she is aware of the possible consequences, her choice could be interpreted as brave and admirable:

In one brief second, Eve has a vision of the total range of the human experience, and by eating from the Tree she expresses a lust for life in all

its manifestations. The act of violating God's order is not described by the biblical author as the surrender to temptation of a silly, empty-headed person, but as the daring attempt of a curious person with an appetite for life to encompass the whole spectrum of life's possibilities. (Aschkenasy 41)

Given the possibility of an alternate interpretation of the temptation of Eve and her conscious choice to eat the fruit, I begin my analysis of retellings of the Fall for young readers with an examination of the manner in which this moment of temptation and choice is presented.

There do not appear to be any contemporary retellings of the Fall which condemn Eve's actions because of her gender. Some approaches do retain much of the biblical language and imagery and in doing so depict the serpent tempting Eve with the promise of becoming "god-like."³ The various retellings of the temptation scene utilize one or more of the following motivations for Eve's decision to eat the fruit: motivated by desire to be God-like, motivated by desire for knowledge, tricked or manipulated by the serpent, and motivated by desire for freedom and equality. In addition to being motivated by the desire to be God-like, representing Eve as motivated by a desire for knowledge is also influenced by the biblical text. While in the account in Genesis the serpent never tempts Eve specifically with general knowledge, Eve does see that that fruit will give her wisdom. Many texts re-vision the serpent's temptation as a promise of wisdom and knowledge in the general sense and not simply knowing good and evil. In Manushkin's

³ See Genesis 3:5

retelling the serpent promises “every kind of knowledge” and “Eve so yearned for knowledge and every source of wisdom that she ate of the fruit” (4). This idea of a thirst for knowledge is not inherently evil, nor is it ever described as such, and, in fact, is generally considered a desirable quality that we want to instill in young readers. Framing her decision as being motivated by a thirst for knowledge deconstructs the patriarchal interpretations of Eve’s choice.

Some retellings enhance the serpent’s role and characterize it as much more deceptive, which alters our perception of Eve’s situation. In Genesis, the serpent has only one line of dialog in which to tempt Eve; because of this terse narrative, it appears that Eve is easily persuaded. Most retellings for young readers extend the scene by incorporating extended dialog between the characters; this alone alters our perception of Eve in that she requires a bit more convincing and gives more thought to this momentous decision. Some retellings take this even further by enhancing the serpent’s trickery. In Manushkin’s retelling the serpent takes advantage of Eve’s overzealous description of God’s interdiction adding that they could not even touch the tree. “Upon hearing this the serpent smiled wickedly, for God had *not* forbidden Adam to *touch* the tree, only to eat from it” (4). After Eve refuses to touch the tree, the serpent pushes her against it proving that she will not die and suggesting that eating the fruit would have the same result. The serpent takes pleasure in its trickery and is even more clearly painted as the villain. Biers-Ariel employs a similar plot device in his retelling. After Eve proclaims that she will never even touch the fruit, the serpent tosses it to her and she reflexively catches the fruit to which the serpent taunts “ ‘Three seconds, [...] your eternal vow regarding this

exquisite food lasted three seconds” (10). Biers-Ariel’s Eve is not simply characterized as a naïve girl tricked by a snake, however. Her moral fabric is demonstrated after the serpent tosses her the fruit. “Eve held the gold fruit between her palms. Its softness, texture, and fragrance threatened to overcome her. But instead of giving in to temptation, Eve threw it back to the Snake” (10). Holding the fruit in her hands, feeling it and smelling it enhances the temptation beyond any abstract concept of something that is forbidden, and yet she remains resolute for the time being. It is not until the serpent appeals to her desire for a better existence that Eve succumbs to his manipulation.

Several texts actually allude to a feeling of discontent while living in the Garden. This sense that there could be something more, that the Garden is perhaps not the perfect paradise, provides additional context that complicates our interpretation of Eve’s choice. Reed’s retelling only briefly alludes to the possibility that something is not quite perfect in the Garden. “Adam and Eve lived joyously. But they did not know it, for they did not know what sorrow or suffering were. They did not know what evil was” (n.p.). On the surface this might be read as an account of their uninterrupted joy and the complete lack of suffering Adam and Eve experienced. But it also suggests that the joy they experienced was not as fulfilling as it should be because of the inability to appreciate it. In *The Triumph of Eve*, Eve is actually conscious that something is amiss:

“Adam, I don’t feel right.”

“You shouldn’t have eaten so many mushrooms.”

“That’s not it.”

“Well, what is it?”

“I don’t know. It’s just that I feel sort of ... you know ... empty.” (Biers-Ariel 8)

Eve cannot correctly name the source of her dissatisfaction, but is acutely aware of it and tries to compensate. “Eve tried to get rid of her emptiness by stuffing her stomach with as much food as she could cram into it. She then had a stomachache to accompany her emptiness” (Biers-Ariel 8). Traditional interpretations of the Garden of Eden imagine it as a perfect paradise where every need is fulfilled and there is no suffering. This interpretation prejudices us against Eve’s choice, leads us to perceive her as an enemy that took this perfection away from us. By suggesting that the Garden is not quite perfect, readers are encouraged to sympathize with Eve’s decision and consider that they might have made the same choice.

In Elsie V. Aidinoff’s novelization of Eve’s story entitled *The Garden*, Adam and Eve make the decision to eat the fruit together. They are fully conscious of the repercussions of this decision and it is the serpent, Eve’s friend and teacher, who makes these consequences clear to them:

“If you eat the apple, in certain respects you’ll resemble God. You will no longer be innocent: you’ll know good and you’ll know evil, and be able to choose between them. You’ll be responsible for your actions. And you’ll be free to choose the course of your lives. [...] [Y]our freedom comes at a price. You’ll have to work for your survival, and bear the result of your actions, good and bad. You’ll have to deal not only with evil committed by others, but with your own – the evil you do – and the

evil that may be within yourselves. With guilt and conscience. With the suffering of all people, including those you love.” (Aidinoff 366-7)

Aidinoff’s novel is marketed to a young adult audience, and therefore the consequences of this choice are presented in a much more complex manner; however, it is clear that both Adam and Eve are very aware of the possible repercussions of their decision before they make it. The serpent’s actions are not presented as temptation, even though it is evident that it believes their lives will be more fulfilling outside the Garden. The benefits described by Aidinoff’s serpent seem to respond to the discontent described in the retellings by both Reed and Biers-Ariel: “In the outside world, the abilities and talents God gave you will be free to flourish and, like the wind, take on lives of their own. You’ll feel emotions more deeply, you’ll experience love beyond what is possible here. Because you suffer, your happiness will be more intense; sorrow will give deeper meaning to joy” (368). In this re-visioning of the story, there is no temptation, only a very well-informed decision by two individuals who are brave enough to face the unknown.

Some re-visions of the story of the Garden of Eden are clearly influenced by contemporary feminist ideology in their depiction of Eve’s temptation and her choice to eat the fruit. In *Lilith’s Ark*, Eve is initially motivated to seek out the Tree of Knowledge by a desire for equality. She discovers that Adam has been conversing with God alone:

“God wishes to record our story in a scroll called the Torah.”

“Should I not also speak to God?” I asked. “Surely God wishes to hear from me as well.”

“God created me first,” Adam said. “You were created to be my helper.

Can I not speak for both of us?”

“I wish to tell my own story,” I said. (Cohen 9)

Following this exchange, Eve experiences anger for the first time. As her emotions cool down and she is able to think, she realizes what she needs to do. It is at this point in the narrative that Eve actively seeks out the Tree of Knowledge and the serpent. Because of Adam’s suggestion that her role is less important than his and her perspective insignificant enough that he can speak for her, the decision to eat the fruit and gain the knowledge it promises has been made before she even speaks with the serpent. Her exchange with the serpent, the content of which is modeled very closely after the account in Genesis, is thereby less of a temptation and more a reminder or clarification: “As soon as you eat its fruit you will understand both good and bad” (Cohen 10).

Outcomes of Choice and the (Un)Gendering of Punishment

Perhaps the most blatant evidence of patriarchy in the Genesis account of the Fall is the gendered punishments dispensed on the first man and woman. According to God’s sanction in this narrative, women will be subordinate to their husbands while men will toil in their labors:

To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you,

'You must not eat of it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Gen. 3:16-19)

This passage has historically been used as a justification for the patriarchal order of society and has raised the hackles of feminists for centuries. Stanton asserts that "The curse pronounced on woman is inserted in an unfriendly spirit to justify her degradation and subjection to man" (25). Others have tried to find an alternate interpretation, such as Lillie Devereux Blake who suggests that it might be interpreted as a prediction and not a permanent state of affairs: "With the evolution of humanity an ever increasing number of men have ceased to toil for their bread with their hands, and with the introduction of improved machinery, and the uplifting of the race there will come a time when there shall be no severities of labor, and when women shall be freed from all oppressions" (Stanton *et al.* 27). Alternative interpretations seem like wishful thinking in the face of such a long history of subjugation. There are several strategies employed by texts for young readers that negotiate the clearly gendered nature of God's punishments with contemporary gender ideologies.

Very few contemporary retellings actually include the specific reference to woman being subordinate to her husband. Bach and Exum's retelling in *Moses' Ark* does include this proclamation, but in the concluding note on the story, the authors discuss

their interpretation and clearly renounce patriarchal interpretations of this particular punishment:

The story does not function as a justification for the subordination of woman to man (a situation that needed no justification in the ancient world). Rather it describes life's universal hardships as women and men experienced them, sweating out a living from the uncooperative Palestinian soil. In addition women were given the extra burden of bearing many children. Men lived to about the age of forty. Women had a shorter life span because of the risks associated with childbearing. (16)

Bach and Exum attempt to alter the reader's perception of the gendered punishments by contextualizing the story within its historical origins. Other contemporary texts modify or omit the offending castigation. Many texts include some variation of the first half of Eve's punishment. Hutton's *Adam and Eve* declares that "In sorrow you shall bring forth children" (n. p.), while Reed's picture book of the same title pronounces that "You shall know sorrow" (n. p.). Simpson's *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible* brings a distinctly Christian interpretation to the story that also serves to soften the gendered punishment of the narrative. "Even though you, a woman, will be blamed for eating the fruit first, [...] one day, through a woman, a Savior will be born who will save all people from evil" (15). Another approach to negotiating the gendered punishment is to present them simultaneously directed at both. "'You have made your choice,' He told them. 'You have chosen the sweat of ploughing and the ache of reaping, the pain of childbirth and the grief of children. The knowledge you have eaten is the knowledge of death. So

you have no longer any place in this garden” (Dickinson 16). Alternately, the simultaneous meting out of punishment is sometimes presented as devoid of any gender-specific sanctions. “To Adam and Eve God said: *Here in my garden you would have lived forever and been happy. But now you must go out into the world to work and suffer, and at the end of your lives – for now your lives will end – you will go back into the dust of the earth, for from the dust of the earth I created you*” (Mark 24-5). Still other texts omit the punishment entirely, such as Biers-Ariel’s *The Triumph of Eve*. There are many strategies employed, but virtually all retellings in recent years make some effort to comfortably negotiate the reference to female submission because it is so at odds with our cultural ideologies.

In examining how children’s and young adult texts negotiate the conclusion of the narrative, it is necessary to consider not only who gets what punishment, but also how the ramifications of the choice to eat the fruit are depicted. Because many retellings for children and young adults elaborate on and even modify the nature of Eve’s temptation, more attention is drawn to the immediate results of the choice. What exactly happens after they eat the fruit? These texts explore the question of what exactly the “knowledge of good and evil” means. The account in Genesis indicates that this knowledge is manifested by an awareness of their nudity. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” (Gen. 3:7). This has been interpreted by many theologians over the centuries as the development or awareness of their sexuality. It may even have influenced some of the associations of sex with sin, i.e. that the knowledge of evil is a

knowledge of carnal desire. Few interpretations for children include this sexual connotation in their retelling, and those adolescent texts that do include it typically revision the nature of the interpretation which will be discussed later. The awareness of their uncovered bodies is frequently included as part of the change that occurs post-consumption; more traditional retellings include only this change as part of their attempts at fidelity to the pre-text.

Because Eve and Adam immediately cover their bodies upon the realization that they are naked, the message is clear that they are ashamed and embarrassed of their bodies. This is potentially problematic for contemporary retellings, as noted by Person and Person: “The question of how to deal with themes of nakedness, shame, embarrassment, and sexuality is an important consideration for contemporary authors and illustrators attempting to retell this story for children. Shame about nudity or sexuality is today considered retrogressive and not in keeping with the current mores of child-rearing” (47). Retellings, particularly those for young children, have to negotiate the contemporary philosophies about body image with the actions of Adam and Eve. Hutton’s picture book adaptation refers to their realization that they are naked without any mention that they were embarrassed, much like the account in Genesis. In *God and His Creations*, the realization that they are naked is given a comic effect in the illustrations as motion lines and picture placement suggest they both jump to cover their genitalia; however, the text states that “they became ashamed of their nakedness” (Williams 9). Thaler is perhaps more effective in using humor to address the potential tension over nudity. After consuming the fruit, an apple pandowdy served for dessert,

Eve asks “Why didn’t you dress for dinner?” (*Adam* 12). Adam responds by looking down only to realize he is naked and runs to put on a tie; the humor of the situation is reinforced by the illustrations that depict Adam wearing a tie and only a tie.

Other texts incorporate additional changes following the consumption of the fruit and thereby distract from the issue of embarrassment. Manushkin’s description of the immediate effects of the knowledge of good and evil includes an awareness of their nudity as well as another change in the first humans. “The moment Adam tastes of the fruit, the Cloud of Glory departed from the couple” (4). The “Cloud of Glory” is an allusion to the presence of God which is consistently described as a cloud throughout the Old Testament. This metaphor for the immediate presence of the divine is particularly apt in this context as the disappearance of a cloud or fog would make nakedness apparent. However not all texts appear to be negotiating the issue of attitudes toward nudity; many additions to the changes that occur after eating the fruit have an impact on the ideological issues of gender.

Many traditional retellings emphasize the disobedience of the first humans and foreshadow the negativity of the punishments to follow. In Reed’s retelling, she indicates that nothing beyond initial sensory pleasures were gained by eating from the Tree of Knowledge:

At first the fruit was sweet on their lips. Soon its sweetness turned to the bitter taste of dust and death. Their eyes were opened. They knew they had done evil in disobeying God. They knew shame. The man and the woman looked at each other and saw that like the beasts they were naked.

This filled them with shame too. They sewed together the leaves of a fig tree and covered themselves. (n. p.)

Not only does the sweet taste not last, but they see their actions as evil, a strong condemnation for an act of disobedience, and they are ashamed of their nudity as well. Clearly, the reader is directed to interpret the outcome as negative and having no positive aspects whatsoever. The absence of any positive outcome is also represented in Jan Mark's *God's Story*: "They were not like God. They did not know everything. But they knew that they were naked and ashamed and cold and afraid" (23). Peter Dickinson's *City of Gold* does not limit the negative impact of the decision to the first humans. Initial descriptions of the Garden of Eden depict a peaceful, symbiotic environment where no living thing harms another. "All grew in one delighting harmony. Moreover, all beasts, wild and tame, roamed through the garden at peace with each other. The lion laid with the lamb and the lamb was not afraid" (14). After Adam consumes the fruit however, the consequences are not limited to himself and Eve, but rather extend to the whole garden as well. "Now Adam looked about him and saw the garden with the eyes of knowledge. He saw the lion stalking between the tree-trunks and knew that its talons were fashioned for striking at its prey and its mouth for the rending of flesh. He saw the lamb grazing in the glade, and he knew that its meat was juicy and tender. He saw the lion leap on the lamb and slay it" (Dickinson 15). Retellings that emphasize the negative consequences of eating from the Tree of Knowledge squelch possible interpretations of Eve's choice as heroic or admirable and reinforce the negative reading of the feminine gender.

There are a limited number of retellings of the Garden of Eden that explore the more radical possibility that Eve's choice of eating the fruit was heroic. However, the idea that Eve can be interpreted as a uniquely brave figure and even a hero has been explored by many feminist scholars and theologians. Norris concludes her study of the historical and literary interpretations of the figure of Eve with the argument that the "original sin" or "fall from grace" is not necessarily her only contribution to the human race:

Eve had excellent reasons for eating the forbidden fruit: it looked good and was nourishing, and it promised her the priceless gift of wisdom. She took and ate, and was rewarded with the opportunity to pass on her knowledge to future generations. The modern Eve may interpret that destiny in any number of ways; children are not the only gift that a woman can offer the future. Perhaps what is most important is Eve's recognition of the need to challenge boundaries, to make the imaginative leap, however difficult, unpredictable and even dangerous, into a new phase of existence. (403-04)

Both Biers-Ariel's *The Triumph of Eve* and Aidinoff's *The Garden* explore the positive aspects of Eve's legacy. Biers-Ariel's depiction of the changes that occur immediately after Eve eats the fruit implies that this choice was part of God's plan all along:

Adam rushed to grab Eve and force the fruit out of her. He got within arm's reach and stopped. He was too late. Eve was no longer Eve, or rather, Eve was not truly Eve. Her eyes sparkled. That was new. Adam

looked into her eyes and saw her soul. It had opened up, and Adam saw the whole universe inside. There was God smiling. (12-13)

Earlier events in the narrative allude to a more positive interpretation of what is gained by eating the fruit. In the process of creating the first human, God withholds wisdom, a decision his right-hand angel, Gabriella, questions:

“Wisdom’s not something you give. It’s something Human earns through experience, pain, reflection and sacrifice. Give it for free, and Human will despise it.”

“But then Human will possess all that power without anything to counterbalance it. Trust me. You’re playing with fire.” (Biers-Ariel 2)

While it is knowledge, not wisdom, that is bestowed upon the humans after eating the fruit, it is only outside of the garden where Adam and Eve have the free will to make mistakes and learn from them that they will be able to gain wisdom.

In Aidinoff’s novel, there are no magical or mystical transformations that occur immediately following the eating of the fruit. Neither Eve nor Adam can recognize a difference in how they feel, but the Serpent assures them that they have changed. “‘Of course you’re different,’ said the Serpent. ‘You don’t notice it yet, but you will soon. You’ve made a choice: you’re free’” (Aidinoff 378). The legacy that is established by this choice is more clearly articulated as they contemplate the decision, in particular the passage where Eve describes their need for free will:

If we stay in the Garden [...] We’ll be like the animals, obeying God, turning to the right and the left as he moves his hands. [...] Comfortable,

but not free. Always we'll be under God's control. [...] I'd rather be like the eagle. He refused to join the parade. He's not afraid to go beyond the Garden [...] He defied God, to do what was right [...] I want to be one of the things that gets away from God and take on its own spirit. A force.

Like the eagle. (Aidinoff 373)

The expulsion from the Garden is not simply a punishment in Aidinoff's novel, but it is also a gift to future generations. The complexities and hardships of life are not ignored, but the humanist celebration of free will and equality is the dominant theme of the novel.

A Cast(e) of Characters

The Bible is well-known for its terse and economic use of language. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, very few figures are truly presented as well-developed characters, particularly by the standards of contemporary literature. We are told that Noah is a "righteous" man, but we are never presented with evidence of this or even clarification as to what has made him righteous (Gen. 6:9). Every reader of the biblical text has a different schema for "righteousness" and therefore brings to the text different interpretations of the character of Noah. This was as true for biblical scholars hundreds of years ago as it is for readers today, and yet the influence of historical interpretations is evident by the ideostories that persist. Few contemporary readers are first introduced to the stories of the Bible by actually reading them from the pretext. Children's books, Sunday school or Synagogue, classic literature, and even Hollywood films have a major influence on how our imaginations develop rounded characters for biblical figures that

are seldom more than a caricature. The four main figures in the story of the Garden of Eden – Adam, Eve, the Serpent, and God – have been so rigidly defined for many readers that they are unaware that the sources of these characterizations are not always rooted in the text itself. Much like the iconic association of an apple with the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, these depictions of the different figures of the story often cannot be traced to textual evidence in Genesis and occasionally are contrary to the limited details presented by the text. Retellings that explore alternate characterizations are frequently met with resistance and even hostility to varying degrees; the idea that there can or should be one correct interpretation is a major factor in this reaction for many practitioners. Here I will examine some of the alternate characterizations of the four main figures in the story of the creation and Fall in context with some of the traditional interpretations.

Adam

Adam has generally been presented as a “good guy.” This characterization is likely drawn from several aspects of the narrative. Depending on the version of creation, he is the culmination, the high point, of the majestic creation of the world. According to traditional interpretations, he is created literally in the image of God, made evident by masculine representations of the Divine throughout the Bible. Because he has not initiated the decision to eat the fruit, he is all but exonerated from his role in the Fall, particularly when compared to Eve’s reputation as the “Gateway to Hell.” Virtually all of the important figures in the Bible, the patriarchs, are male, and as the first male he is frequently interpreted as a hero. And yet there is very little about Adam that is actually

heroic. Nehama Aschkenasy also recognizes Adam's lack of heroic qualities, instead seeing his role as a very passive one compared to his partner, Eve:

The Genesis narrator is surprisingly silent about Adam's motives for eating the fruit. However, this narrative vacuum is consistent with the characterization of Adam throughout the story as a passive, acted-upon character. He has no part in choosing his mate, and Eve comes to life when he is asleep. The polarity created in this story between Adam and Eve is not between good and evil, morality and sinfulness, but rather between a passive, lackluster personality on the one hand, and an intellectually curious, aggressive individual, on the other. (41)

Some feminist scholars, such as Blake, even suggest that Adam's moral character is lacking because he is the first to shift blame away from himself when confronted by God: "The subsequent conduct of Adam was to the last degree dastardly. When the awful time of reckoning comes, and the Jehovah God appears to demand why his command has been disobeyed, Adam endeavors to shield himself behind the gentle being he has declared to be so dear" (Stanton 27). In retellings for children and young adults, the apparent lack of textual clues to support heroic or even admirable qualities contributes to a problematic representation of the first man.

There is an unfortunate trend in the depiction of male characters in some contemporary retellings of Bible stories, particularly in those texts which are clearly motivated by feminist ideology. It appears that in order to develop stronger, more empowered female characters, authors resort to belittling and even vilifying the male

characters in the narrative. Certainly, not all re-visions depict male characters in a negative light; however a feminist re-visioning that does perpetuates the myth that feminists are man-haters and simply wish to invert the gender hierarchy. True gender equity is not achieved by replacing one Other for a new Other.

This strategy does however draw attention to the disparity of the genders in biblical narrative. Given the tenuous textual evidence for an admirable characterization of Adam, this approach does demonstrate the role that historical and patriarchal interpretation has played in how we envision these characters. Cohen's Adam in *Lilith's Ark* is condescending to Eve, frequently treating her like an uneducated child he must guide. He assumes that Eve is frightened that the sun will not return when she is in fact exhilarated by the brilliance of the sunset (Cohen 7). When Eve wakes early and leaves to explore the Garden on her own, Adam chastises her like a parent, indicating that she worried him because "You are young and have only begun to learn your way" (Cohen 7). Cohen's Adam is incurious, easily frightened, and eager to assert his dominance over his mate; he displays no qualities that might endear him to the audience. Aidinoff's Adam in *The Garden* also suffers from a lackluster personality in comparison with the brilliance of Eve. Adam has trouble sitting still and concentrating, he is forgetful and irresponsible, and is very physically active; in many ways he embodies the stereotype of the half-witted athlete familiar to contemporary audiences. He also lacks the more complex moral development that can help him distinguish that the right choice may be to defy rules or authority figures. In one of the most disturbing scenes in this YA novel, Adam is encouraged by God to have sexual intercourse with Eve; Eve is hesitant, but initially

willing; however, the consensual act becomes rape when she pleads for him to stop. Adam is psychologically damaged by the experience in his own way and is never simply presented as a loathsome rapist; however, there is no denying the very negative impact this has on audience response to his character and the representation of the male gender in general. While problematic, the negative characterizations of Adam are clearly influenced by ideologies of gender and further enhance, by contrast, the positive representations of Eve.

The Serpent

Traditionally the Serpent is interpreted as the antagonist, the “bad guy,” of the narrative of the Fall. However, it is not your run-of-the-mill bad guy; the serpent is frequently associated with Satan himself. There is no textual evidence in Genesis that links the serpent with Satan; in fact Genesis clearly describes the Serpent as one of the animals created by God. “Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made” (Gen. 3:1). While it is clear that the serpent is not a trustworthy figure, there is no indication that it is anything other than an animal. It is often identified as the tool or representative for Satan, an interpretation in keeping with the animal nature of the creature as described in Genesis. For Christians, the book of Revelation offers a textual basis for the interpretation of the Serpent as Satan: “⁹The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev. 12:9). John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is another influential text in establishing the association of the Serpent with Satan.

Narratives of the Fall for young readers seldom actually identify the Serpent as Satan or the Devil or even make reference to a connection between the two. It is identified as a creature that should be approached with caution. Many descriptors are used for the serpent in children's picture books to engender wariness toward it: "cunning" (Reed n.p.); "subtle" (Hutton n.p.); "clever," "curious," and "envious" (Mark 21); "crafty" (Williams 9); and the "shrewdest" (Manushkin 4) or "wisest" (Bach and Exum, *Moses* 12) of all the creatures. In *God and His Creatures*, the serpent haunts the borders of the comic-style, paneled pages along with the host of angels that provide commentary to all the stories presented in the collection. The serpent's continuing presence in the text and inclusion with the heavenly host implies that it is a figure of importance beyond the story of the Fall. The majority of children's texts clearly frame the Serpent as an undesirable or abject character.

Texts that in a variety of ways display the influence of feminist ideology typically depict the serpent either ambiguously or even favorably. In *City of Gold* readers are informed that the Serpent was Adam's close friend and constant companion before the first woman was created (Dickinson 15). The jealousy the Serpent feels at being replaced serves as the motivation for its actions. In *The Triumph of Eve*, the Serpent is depicted as a frustrated tenant; Adam and Eve, the caretakers of the Garden are lax in their responsibilities of maintenance. The Serpent encourages Eve to eat the fruit so that she and Adam will be able to discern good from evil and live responsibly, i.e. do their job in taking care of the Garden (Biers-Ariel 10). Because *Lilith's Ark* is told in first person narration, we do not get a clear sense of the Serpent's true nature; we do, however, see

through Eve's eyes and develop a better understanding of how she might have been seduced and manipulated by this creature. This appears to be the purpose of altering the characterization of a figure that is neither male nor female in a retelling that addresses changing gender ideologies. In much the same way that extending the scene of Eve's temptation indicates that she is not as easily swayed as the account in Genesis implies, characterizing the Serpent as an ambiguous figure, one that perhaps we shouldn't trust but whom we have no clear reason not to trust, provides even more context for understanding how Eve might have been tricked or manipulated. *The Garden* goes even further by characterizing the Serpent as a positive figure, more clearly benevolent and good, in fact, than God. The Serpent is Eve's guardian; it is charged with her education, while God assumes responsibility for Adam's. The Serpent is a loving parent-figure for Eve and encourages her curiosity and creativity, frequently marveling at her intellect. These qualities embodied by the Serpent further establish the interpretation that curiosity and a desire for knowledge are not evil or undesirable qualities, which runs counter to traditional interpretations of Eve's actions.

God

In children's picture books, the most common story in which God makes a physical appearance is the story of the Creation and the Fall. Not all picture books choose to represent God visually, instead depicting the formation of light and dark, the heavens and the earth, plants and animals, and culminating in the creation of human beings. Gerald McDermott's *Creation* actually uses God as the narrative voice, yet does

not picture the Divine. In many texts, Adam, Eve, and scenes in the Garden of Eden are lavishly illustrated, but God remains a disembodied voice. These texts are more in keeping with the Jewish and Islamic faiths, both of which prohibit any visual depictions of the Divine. It is only in the Christian faith that visualizing God is permissible. While the picture books that illustrate God should therefore be categorized as Christian texts, the anthropomorphizing of the Divine is a practice common to all three traditions. In *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion*, Stewart Elliott Guthrie acknowledges the semiotic tension between Signifier and Signified at the core of anthropomorphizing God. He articulates why we cannot eliminate the language of anthropomorphism in describing God: “[W]e can say neither that God is like us nor that He is unlike us. If we say He is like us, His stature as absolute and as the ground of being is diminished and there is no clear point at which we can draw any distinction between Him and us. If we say He is totally unlike us, He becomes incomprehensible and hence meaningless” (Guthrie 183). In other words, in describing God as too human, then “He” loses “his” divinity; but if we cannot describe the Divine in language and symbols we understand, then God becomes a concept with no tangible meaning. Guthrie allows us a glimpse of the linguistic and semiotic impasse that necessitates anthropomorphism in human conceptions of the Divine.

There are three common trends in visually depicting God in children’s picture books. Children’s picture books tend to draw from the familiar images of God in Western canonical art, for example Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel. The primary signifier for the Divine in both canonical art and children’s picture books is masculinity.

Illustrations that represent God in a physical form employ various means to convey the mystery and power of the Divine. Hutton's picture book *Adam and Eve* depicts God as a radiant, "glowing" figure. While the shape of this figure is vaguely human and therefore familiar, the ability to radiate light is a magical quality in the semiotic lexicon of a child's experiences. Robert Coles, a child psychiatrist whose work has included extensive research into children's understanding of God, suggests the contexts and associations children may employ in interpreting this approach to representing the Divine. "Into the lives of children God joins company with kings, superheroes, witches, monsters, friends, brothers and sisters, parents, teachers, police, firefighters and on and on." (5). Children may interpret the glowing figure as one with magical or superhero-like powers, but the sense that this figure is more than human maintains the inscrutable nature of the Divine. Coles also notes in his observations of children's drawings of God that individuals tend to incorporate their own features into their description of God. Skin color, eye color and hair color were all modified by different children, but more remarkable was that many were able to articulate an understanding that other people would imagine God as looking like them – light skin, dark skin, brown eyes or blond hair. Because Hutton's illustrations are in essence a blank slate, they also allow children to imagine a God that looks like them. Interestingly (and disturbingly from a feminist perspective), none of the children described in Cole's research imagined God as anything other than male. Similarly, Hutton's illustrations, while superficially androgynous, suggest masculinity, particularly in the shape and breadth of the shoulders. Representations of God as male are extremely

pervasive in our culture and texts that introduce questions regarding the gendering of God are rare.

Another trend is representing “Him” as a kindly, old man. These illustrations draw most heavily from the pervasive metaphors of God as male, but also from the traditional representations of God in Western art as an old, white man with a white beard. These depictions emphasize the concept of the personal God of contemporary Christian theology. This God is approachable and loving; one you can imagine like a kindly grandfather or perhaps even Santa Claus. What appears to be lost in these friendly representations of God is the impenetrable mystery of God. Helme Heine’s illustrations of God in *One Day in Paradise* might remind children of Geppetto carving a “real boy,” but the sense of the awesome power of the Divine is lacking. Williams’s illustrations in *God and His Creations* are extremely playful and sentimental. God appears as a character that haunts the outer frames of each story along with a flock of angels. What seems to distinguish God from the rest of the heavenly host is his halo and cloud Barcalounger. He is frequently surrounded by friendly, little animals, many of whom appear to have taken up residence in the pockets of His bright fuchsia robes. This God also apparently suffers from male-pattern baldness. Again, what is lost in the efforts to emphasize an approachable, personal God, is that sense of awe. Even when God is angry, it’s not very intimidating. This particular trend in visually representing God illustrates the problem that many critics of anthropomorphizing God anticipate: the possibility that representing God as having human qualities could be demeaning to the Divine.

While it is not a dominant trend, the depiction of the Divine as being married also humanizes the deity. This particular approach has the potential to either challenge or reinforce gender norms. In Julius Lester's *What a Truly Cool World*, God's marital state is first indicated through an illustration in which he and what is later identified as his wife are awakened from a sound sleep. Stereotypes of gender norms are reinforced as we learn that God's wife's forename is known, Irene God, but that even his personal secretary has always wondered what God's first name actually is. God is known only by his surname, while his wife's association with him is indicated by the presence of both a forename and his surname. Not only is Irene God a secondary character who has little agency in the narrative, her forename is used to reestablish the inscrutability of God which is initially diminished by the humanization of the Divine as a married man. Depicting the Divine as married can, however, be used as a tool for deconstructing gendered anthropomorphisms. In Nancy Wood's *Mr. and Mrs. God in the Creation Kitchen*, the narrative of creation is described as a joint effort by a married couple. Both Mr. and Mrs. God, neither of which is identified with a first name or as the primary deity, take turns creating different aspects of the world. The action takes place in the "creation kitchen" a distinctly domestic sphere traditionally associated with the female gender. Furthermore, the monochromatic illustrations by Timothy Basil Ering are reminiscent of a witch's cottage, yet another setting typically associated with women's power, with jars of eyeballs and boxes of wings and hooves setting a macabre, yet playful tone. While both Mr. and Mrs. God go through a process of trial and error in creating the world, Mr. God is more prone to major mistakes such as the dinosaurs. Mrs. God makes the first

beautiful contribution when she creates fish in all the colors she loved. Mr. God then creates a creature we recognize as a pelican which proceeds to eat up all Mrs. God's pretty swimming creatures. "Mrs. God did not speak to Mr. God for a thousand years" (Wood n. p.). Even though both contribute equally to the creation of the world, the traditional expectations of a male god who creates with a flawless design is subtly deconstructed through associations with the domestic feminine sphere in which the female deity clearly has more finesse for the process of creation.

Another trend in visualizing God in children's texts is familiar both visually and linguistically. The "hand of God" is a metaphor used throughout the Old Testament that takes on a more literal form in several children's books. In Cynthia Rylant's *The Dreamer*, the illustrations by Barry Moser depict the hands of an artist cutting out stars and sketching a human form. This artist is only specifically identified as God on the closing page; however, any reader even vaguely familiar with the accounts of the Creation in Genesis will have recognized the true nature of "the Artist" long before the conclusion. What is most significant about this physical representation of God is the size of the hands. Initially, we are presented with the image of a hand cutting out star shapes out of what appears to be yellow construction paper. This image is clearly drawn from the experiences of childhood and virtually every elementary school student will be able to associate this action with some of their own experiences. However, we are first introduced to the inordinate size of these hands when one appears holding the Earth in its fingers. As many of us will remember, the metaphor of God's hands is also a part of the familiar Sunday school song "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands."

The magnitude of these illustrations of the hands of God demonstrates one approach to balancing a conceptual metaphor that provides a source we can understand while describing a target that is unfathomable. If God's hands can hold the whole world in them, it becomes hard to imagine just how big God really is. Mark Johnson argues that the source of all cognitive metaphors is rooted in bodily experience. For a child audience in particular, the concept of size conveys not only a sense of bewilderment, but also of power and authority. For children, the adults who are "bigger" than them are the defining source of power and authority in their lives. Therefore, if God is so much bigger than Mommy and Daddy as well as everything else in their world, then God must have even more power and authority than anyone or anything.

The use of hands as a visual representation for God, rather than a fully-embodied being, may initially seem like an effort to de-gender our understanding of God. Linguistically, this theory is supported by the lack of gendered pronouns in reference to God in the majority of these texts. However, the hands depicted are consistently masculine in nature, having larger bone structure, wider nail beds and more square fingertips. Feminine hands do not appear to clearly signify God any more than a female face or torso. Furthermore, God is consistently depicted with Caucasian skin. In popular culture, films such as *Bruce Almighty* and *Evan Almighty* cast God as a Black man, and in *Dogma* God was cast as a woman. However, in children's picture books the exceptions to the white male representations of God are limited to a few notable texts including Phyllis Root's *Big Momma Makes the World* as well as Lester's *What a Truly Cool World*.

Lester's picture book depicts God as well as all the inhabitants of heaven as having deep brown skin. The action in *What a Truly Cool World* takes place entirely in heaven immediately following what most readers would recognize as the traditional conclusion of the seven-day creation. Pleased with himself and his creation, God is brusquely interrupted by Shaniqua, "the angel in charge of everyone's business" who is forthright in her criticism that this creation "looks kind of boring" (Lester n. p.). The narrative proceeds with a midrashic exploration of how God with the help of Shaniqua make the world "truly cool." Lester challenges traditional notions of God as an old white man both visually as well as linguistically; the dialog in the text displays features commonly associated with AAVE, African-American Vernacular English. Being verbs are dropped by many of the characters including God:

"God? What you call that down there?" [...] "Don't look like much to me. I don't want to hurt your feelings or nothing like that, but what you made looks kind of boring."

God narrowed his eyes and stared at the world again. "You right, Shaniqua," he admitted reluctantly. (Lester n. p.)

Other colloquialisms not necessarily limited to AAVE also signify a deconstruction of traditional, Western notions of an unapproachable Caucasian male deity: "Yo! What's up, Deity?" (Lester n. p.). God in Lester's narrative is avowedly male as augmented by the Hallelujah Angelic Choir of sixtillion voices which chants "'God! God! He's our man! If he can't do it, nobody can!" (n. p.). However, it should be noted that Shaniqua's singing, the process by which God creates, is almost as good as God's. When God first sings,

flowers of all shapes and colors are created; when Shaniqua sings, butterflies populate the Earth. The text concludes with God acknowledging Shaniqua's contribution: "I couldn't have made the world without you, Shaniqua" (n. p.). While God is distinctly depicted as male, the text includes a female contribution to the process of creation.

Big Momma Makes the World depicts a creator that challenges gender as well as racial norms. In Root's playful re-visioning of the story of creation, the world and its inhabitants are created by Big Momma and her ever present baby. While Big Momma is never explicitly identified as God, she enacts all the stages of creation according to the first chapter of Genesis. Big Momma is a large mother figure, physically embodying the fertile female form. She is not clearly of any racial background as her skin color changes to reflect her surroundings. In the illustration where she creates the sun, she and her baby have yellow tinting, whereas in the illustration for creating the plants they both appear distinctly green. Most often, she is illustrated in a range of grays. This might be read as embodying the Caucasian God in most picture books; however, when Big Momma creates humans, we see the variety of different skin tones, none of which resemble her gray coloring. With regard to questioning assumptions about the gender and race of God, *Big Momma Makes the World* offers the most successfully thought-provoking and entertaining approach in a text for young readers.

Eve

In narratives of the Fall, Eve is most often the focalizer of the action and narration. The story is almost never told from Adam's perspective and only rarely from

the viewpoint of the Serpent. As we have seen throughout this chapter, Eve's character is most often maligned in traditional interpretations and as such is one of the most suitable examples of Bal's concept of ideostory of all the women in the Bible. The interpretation that Eve, and by extension all women, serve as the "Gateway to Hell" is rooted in the belief that women are first and foremost sexual beings with weaker moral character than their male counterparts:

Woman is seen as primarily a sexual being whose moral weakness is coupled with sexual power which she puts to evil use. Woman's sexuality is for her the weapon with which she gains mastery over man and eventually destroys him. From the object of male lust woman has become the cause of it, and the story of Eve is seen as the introduction of sinful sex into the realm of human life. In her struggle for dominion, woman uses erotic appeal to bring man down to her bestial level. The female has thus come to represent that part of the human composite that is more physical than spiritual and is more defenseless against the weaknesses of the flesh. (Aschkenasy 40)

A dichotomy between female sexuality and male intellect is established in traditional interpretations of the story of the Fall. As Stephens and McCallum note, overt sexuality is commonly replaced by sensuality and physical appetite. "[T]exts displace the sexual dimension of Eve's desire, encoding her temptation instead as motivated by physical appetite. It is, of course, not unusual in children's texts for concupiscence to be expressed as greed for food rather than as sexual appetite" (42). Whether Eve's desire

and persuasion is described as sexual or a hunger for food, the location of the desire is rooted in the body as opposed to the mind. Susan Bordo points out that while men have historically been associated with the intellect, women have been aligned with the subordinate body, especially its sexuality. This mind-body split between the genders is frequently represented in traditional interpretations, however in many contemporary retellings which re-vision gender ideology the Cartesian mind-body split is disassociated from the genders. "It is conventional for retellings to distinguish between the motivation of Eve and Adam through an opposition between the sensual and the intellectual. [...] By contrast, [in several feminist retellings] the temptation constitutes an appeal primarily to Eve's intellect rather than to her physical appetite, sexual, or sensual nature" (Stephens and McCallum 46). The Serpent's appeals to Eve's intellect have been explored in the earlier section on the scenes of temptation and choice, so here I will focus on the issue of her sexuality.

The account in Genesis does not indicate that Eve used her sexuality to persuade Adam to eat the fruit. "[S]he took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." (Gen. 3:6). There does not appear to be any coercion involved, sexual or otherwise; in fact, some interpretations suggest that Adam was actually present for the entire exchange between Eve and the Serpent. The accusation that Eve has used her feminine wiles to sway Adam is thus a clear example of ideostory. Very few children's texts make any reference to Eve using her sexuality to persuade Adam to eat the fruit. Dickinson's account in *City of Gold* does include a rare description of Eve manipulating Adam; however, it is not sexual in nature. "Then Eve repeated the

serpent's arguments, cunningly hiding the lies beneath the truths because of the knowledge that was in her. So Adam believed her and ate the other half of the fruit" (15). In Cohen's *Lilith's Ark*, Eve is depicted as taunting Adam with her sexual maturity. "'I am now a woman,' I said to him. 'And you are just a boy. Eat the fruit and we will become equals. If you refuse, I will call out to God and tell my story without you'" (10). Eve's manipulation is based in the text's theme of equality and is not sexually seductive. The passage is more reminiscent of Wendy encouraging Peter Pan to grow up than it is of a scene of concupiscent seduction. Even when Eve is characterized as manipulating Adam to eat the fruit, the mode is based in intellectual appeals rather than physical or sensual appeals; thus woman's intellect is described as either equal or superior to man's.

In Aidinoff's *The Garden*, the issue of Eve's sexuality is explored in more detail. The slanderous descriptions of Eve's sexuality is represented metaphorically in the chapter entitled "The Betrayal." God is eager to see his design for sexual intercourse in action, to "see how it would work" (100). Despite the Serpent's warnings that Adam and Eve are too young and that they should allow it to happen naturally, God encourages the two to engage in sexual intercourse. The two are coerced by God's authoritative position in much the same way that pedophiles abuse their adult authority when sexually abusing children; neither Adam nor Eve feel able to refuse God's request. Following the betrayal of Eve, she is unable and unwilling to even consider a sexual relationship with Adam; she is distressed by her responsibility as the mother of all living to perpetuate the human race because it would necessitate having sex. Her response is typical of rape victims, shunning sexual relationships. It takes a great deal of healing and "therapy" with the

Serpent before she is able to be in Adam's or God's presence. Even by the end of the novel when she and Adam have begun to develop a friendship, Eve is still averse to the idea of engaging in a sexual relationship with Adam. The events of the novel refute the accusation that Eve would use her sexuality to manipulate, instead exploring the ancient history of sexual violence toward women. Read in the context of the ideostory of Eve's sexuality, the rape of Eve renounces the binary of sexuality and intellect between the genders.

Conclusion

As this close analysis of the narrative structure and characterization of biblical figures indicates, our perceived understanding of familiar stories from the Bible is highly influenced by long traditions of interpretation. In retelling biblical narratives, the negotiations of traditional interpretations with changing cultural ideologies are manifested in complex ways. While not all biblical women have been subjected to the misrepresentation of ideostories, the exceptional cases, such as Eve, in which women's stories have been unfairly framed in support of patriarchal ideologies justify the closer examination of ideologies that influence reversions and re-visions of women's stories.

CHAPTER V

NOT JUST ANY BOOK: HARNESSING STUDENT RESISTANCE TO RETELLINGS OF BIBLE STORIES

My primary goal as a teacher is to open my students' eyes to the ways in which we construct and are constructed by our culture, the power structures that influence our perceptions and the impact that critical engagement with these constructions can have over our experience of the world. Expanding on Adrienne Rich's definition of re-vision as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction," I attempt to establish a learning environment where students are encouraged to see with "fresh eyes" by examining an "old text," whether that text be a traditional folk tale, a cherished picture book from their childhood, or a popular television series, from a new, critical perspective (512). This philosophy is at the core of every class I teach whether in composition, children's and adolescent literature, or gender studies. I strive to provide my students with the tools to examine the ways in which they have been constructed as individuals and as members of various subcultures. I encourage them to engage with their environments outside of the classroom by considering the world as a text to be deconstructed.

In a children's or adolescent literature course it can be particularly difficult to examine texts to which we have very personal, emotional attachments. I find that many

students resist the idea of thinking critically about texts, especially those near and dear to their hearts, because they believe that analysis automatically implies a negative critique.

Many of us have a favorite book inextricably linked with emotional memories of a parent or guardian reading to us. Embarking on the process of learning to analyze texts for children frequently results in emotional road blocks for students. This resistance is similar to the resistance some students may have when approaching texts that re-vision stories from the Bible. Reading Bible stories through an academic, analytical lens is, however, a stronger site of resistance for many students; secular children's books, though students may have strong personal affinities to them, are not charged with the authority of the Divine. If you have been raised to believe that the Bible is the "Word of God," then changes made to it might be interpreted as sacrilegious. Similarly, if you have been raised to believe that the Bible is the sacred, it can be difficult to recognize how you have been socially constructed by your religious faith. Additionally, students are faced with the recognition that other sects within their religious tradition construct elements of the faith differently, that there is a spectrum of beliefs within any religion. These are some of the issues that I face when teaching retellings of women's Bible stories in a children's and young adult literature course.

Prejudice Against Religious Texts and Current Trends in Textbook Inclusion

Religious texts, specifically Bible stories, are rarely included in courses on children's or adolescent literature. This does not come as a great surprise given the

limited critical analysis of these texts in the field. The reason religious texts seem to be excluded from both critical study and the children's literature classroom appears to be rooted in two assumptions. Perry Nodelman posits the explanation that these texts are excluded because of academic resistance to censorship:

[F]or many humane, sensitive North Americans nowadays, and perhaps especially including many of us who teach children's literature, the Bible has developed a sinister reputation; it has come to be the tool of The Enemy. Many of those obnoxious people who want to keep good books out of the hands of children because they think children are weakminded enough to adopt every dangerous idea and attitude they read about often use the Bible as the authority for their narrow-minded bigotry; so those of us who oppose such censorship tend to think of the Bible as Evil, and certainly not to be recommended for children, lest they learn from it the anti-humane prejudices shared by so many of its most ardent readers. (55)

While Nodelman's colorful description is clearly unsympathetic and unfair to the religious communities to which he refers, his hypothesis identifies one assumption that leads to the omission of religious texts from the children's literature classroom. His larger argument is almost equally condemning for the academic community that tends to ignore religious texts. He suggests that the assumptions motivating the absence of these texts:

reveal a common form of intolerance by theoretically tolerant people, an intolerance that amounts to censorship. It seems to be based on the

peculiar assumption that, in order to have true religious freedom, we must never express a religious idea – we must, indeed, be free of religion, for to allow the expression of any one particular religious idea would be an insult to those who believe otherwise, and perhaps in particular, to those who believe nothing. Consequently, we tell ourselves, our literature for children must be free of religious bias. (55)

Another assumption that appears to motivate the exclusion of Judeo-Christian Bible stories from the children's literature classroom is made apparent in some children's literature textbooks. Many of the textbooks devoted to the study of literature for young people are designed with future primary and secondary education majors in mind. Given this rhetorical context, it is not surprising that many textbooks, when they include religious literature, identify the restrictions that will likely be faced in elementary or high school curriculums. Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson address this concern in their text *Essentials of Children's Literature*:

Regardless of whether one considers the religious stories to be fact or fiction, the important point is that these wonderful stories should be shared with children. Because religion in the classroom is potentially controversial, however, many teachers and librarians do not feel comfortable sharing stories with any religious connection. This is unfortunate, since many wonderful stories and some superlative literature, as well as characters, sayings, and situations essential to the culturally literate person, are therefore missed. (105-06)

Despite the fact that many children's literature classes are populated with education majors, the study of children's literature is not and should not be isolated to its use in elementary school classrooms. However, it would be pedagogically irresponsible to ignore the concerns students may have regarding the application of any text presented in the college classroom for their future elementary or secondary classrooms. Given that, I am not suggesting that these issues be ignored. The potential controversy of utilizing religious texts does appear to have influenced whether religious literature is included as an important genre in children's literature textbooks as well as informing how these narratives are presented in the textbooks that do acknowledge them.

A brief examination of how religious texts are critically examined within the field as well as how they are presented in children's literature textbooks will illuminate some of the gaps in current pedagogical approaches to the genre. There are three trends in addressing Judeo-Christian religious texts for children: 1) focusing primarily on the historical context of religious children's literature, 2) emphasizing the Bible's influence on Western literary traditions and the role of children's Bible stories in developing culturally literate children, and 3) grouping biblical narratives with fairy tales, legends and mythology.

A dominant portion of the limited critical study of religious texts for children focuses on the history of the genre. Ruth B. Bottigheimer is perhaps the most prolific scholar of children's Bibles. Her book *The Bible for Children* provides an historical overview of children's Bibles; the limitation of the text, however, is the same as other scholars who employ a diachronic study of the genre: minimal attention is paid to

contemporary religious texts. *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* echoes this tendency to focus on older texts. It includes a tenuous section devoted to religious literature; of the six authors featured in this section only two are twentieth-century authors. The obvious problem with approaching religious literature predominantly from an historical perspective is that it implicitly denies the current and active production and application of these texts in our culture.

Another dominant trend in addressing religious texts for children is to examine the influence of the Bible on Western literary traditions and to emphasize the importance of teaching Bible stories to children in order to develop cultural literacy. Northrop Frye is regularly cited to establish the influence of the Bible on canonical literary texts. Joyce Elizabeth Potter touches on the importance of having a familiarity with the Bible:

Certainly modern scholars have acknowledged the valuable role of the Bible, not merely in the education of an adult but also in that of the child, as a foundational element. The basic allusiveness of much art and literature presupposes in its audience a common and fore-established knowledge of the Bible; and the longer and more deeply enfolded in a life's experiences that knowledge is, the more fully the art and literature can involve the entire personality in its created vision. (187)

This philosophy is also common to the presentation of religious narratives in *Children's Literature* textbooks. Barbara Kiefer claims in the ninth edition of *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* that "Children cannot fully understand other literature unless they are familiar with the outstanding characters, incidents, poems, proverbs, and parables of

this literature of the Western world of thought” (Kiefer 334). There are several limitations of addressing religious texts from this vantage point. First, it reinforces the concept of a canon of classical literature, a concept that is regularly called into question in the larger field of literary studies. This approach also tends to focus on “traditional” retellings of biblical texts, while potentially ignoring the growing trend of more subversive retellings of Bible stories. Finally, this focus does not necessarily question the influence of these texts on social constructions such as gender.

The third prominent trend in addressing religious texts for children is to categorize them with fairy tales, folktales, myths and legends. In every children’s literature textbook that devotes any space to the genre of religious literature, it is cataloged with these other forms of “traditional literature.” Lynch-Brown and Tomlinson explain the inclusion of religious literature in their chapter on “Traditional Literature” by arguing that “Scholars of religion, language, and mythology have found a definite thread of continuity from myth and folk narrative to early religious thinking and writing” (105). The problem that arises from categorizing religious literature with fairy tales, folktales, myths and legends is that its inclusion with these genres does not take into account that a large portion of the population believe these stories are true and even sacred. While Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer do not include a section devoted specifically to religious literature in their textbook *The Pleasures of Children’s Literature*, their discussion of mythology offers an important insight into the problem of associating religious literature with other folk literatures:

Even if they are good stories, what are the moral implications of reading what is or once was true and sacred to someone else as just a fiction, as a source not of spiritual truth but of imaginative pleasure? To consider these implications, readers might think about what their response would be to having their religious stories treated as fiction. For those of European background to treat stories of Glooscap or Nanabozho as entertaining literature is something like a publisher in Iran producing a book about the magical exploits of the fictional hero Christ for the entertainment of an audience of Muslim children. (325)

As with all of the current trends in addressing religious texts for children, the problem is not that these approaches are irrelevant or unproductive, but that they tend to ignore the sticky terrain of acknowledging that these texts are sacred for a substantial portion of contemporary society. Beyond the limitations this brings to any critical reading of the texts, this oversight ignores the personal beliefs and attitudes students in a children's literature class bring to religious literature.

Perspectives on Teaching the Bible as Literature

In beginning to articulate a pedagogical approach to addressing religious texts for children and adolescents, I have turned to work that has been done by scholars dealing with the Bible as literature. While these scholars are dealing with the Bible as a primary text and not retellings of the Bible intended specifically for children, many of the issues that arise in the Bible as literature classroom are similar to those raised during discussions

of Bible stories in the children's literature classroom. Many scholars address the attitudes toward the Bible that students bring to the classroom either directly or cursorily. Most scholars in varying degrees perceive these attitudes as obstacles that need to be overcome in order to proceed with "appropriate" academic approaches to the texts. Herbert J. Levine suggests that "Many students come to the study of the Bible as literature with preconceptions that *adversely* affect their reading" (emphasis added 110). While his description of students' attitudes clearly indicates his belief that this is a problematic obstacle, many other scholars employ similar approaches to their students' preconceptions regarding the Bible as a text. Herbert N. Schneidau articulates his rationale for not beginning a study of the Bible as literature with Genesis by identifying what he believes are problematic preconceptions of the Bible:

Beginning a study of the Bible with Genesis is likely to stir up all the stereotyped assumptions, religious (and antireligious) prejudices, and stock ideas that can impede or even paralyze students' attempts to read the Bible critically and heuristically. Who comes to the Bible free of presuppositions? I prefer to sidestep these as much as possible at first.
(Schneidau 98)

Ruth apRoberts describes her students' attitudes more democratically as "an assortment of strained attitudes, ranging from that of the 'believer' who may be fearful or suspicious to that of the atheist who comes in as a reductionist or scoffer" (65). However, her approach to addressing this range of attitudes by focusing on metaphor, implies that it is still an obstacle to be overcome. "I believe it gently leads into a kind of defusing of the

charged attitudes of the students and ultimately to an intellectual enlargement and to a reading of the Bible that is richer and more rewarding – literarily, artistically, and if one may say so, spiritually” (apRoberts 65). At the end of her description, apRoberts indicates a more personal approach to the texts of religious literature that is more fully explored by Margaret Christian in her essay “Academic and Personal Connections to the Text: The Bible as Literature.”

Christian discusses the personal “affinities or grievances” teachers of literature feel toward any text they introduce in their classrooms (83). “We don’t talk much about these feelings, and I am not proposing that we should – but they do provide us with at least some of the impetus to do the work that advances our mutual understanding of the literature we study and teach” (Christian 83). Christian argues that it is these same personal connections that students seek out when they ask the question “‘Is it about me?’” and this connection similarly energizes students to engage with the text at hand. “[M]any of us invest considerable time and energy in convincing them either that the text is in fact about them (as we do when we help them imaginatively enter its world and identify with its characters) or that they have (or should have) an interest in extending themselves toward an alien text” (83-84). Unlike many of the other scholars’ descriptions of their students’ initial attitudes, Christian approaches her students’ attitudes positively:

In my experience, students who enroll in *The Bible as Literature* often begin with such a sense of engagement, whether they define it positively (as practicing Christians and Jews), negatively (as self-described atheists),

or as an open-ended exploration of spirituality. [...] [W]e might expect to regard any connection students already have to the Bible – any sense that it speaks to them or is about them – as a source of energy and motivation that can be channeled into the intellectual work of the course. (84)

Christian also addresses the question of how to utilize these attitudes, particularly within the context of a secular university which distinguishes between academic literary approaches to the text and approaches of a more personal, spiritual nature:

[W]hat are teacher and students to do with the nonacademic investments they already have in the Bible? Should we ignore them and read the Bible as if we are strictly academic, literary analysts? To do so seems impractical, indeed counterproductive. [...] [I]t seems unrealistic, disrespectful, and pedagogically unfruitful to ask students to renounce their primary interest in the Bible or to split off reasons they might have for caring about the Bible from the academic self that would be doing the work of the class. (I wouldn't ask them to stop loving Jane Austen.) (87-88)

Christian's approach does not deny students' personal engagements with the text prior to the work done in the course. I believe this pedagogical approach is necessary in exploring how religious texts intended for children are created and used in our culture. Many students in a children's literature course are regularly asked to confront well-loved texts from their childhood from a new critical angle. This process is often uncomfortable and difficult because of the personal attachments students have. When examining any

text in a children's literature course, I do not discourage initial discussion of these personal attachments but rather use them as a starting point for further exploration of how these texts engage child readers and what purpose they seem to serve in childhood development. This same kind of approach is useful with regard to religious texts although the reluctance to approach stories considered to be sacred by many of the students is generally heightened. In dealing with religious texts for children in the classroom then, instructors are frequently faced with multiple layers of personal attachment that can cause resistance to a critical approach: the personal attachments of familiar childhood stories and the spiritual connections of those reared within the Jewish or Christian religious traditions. I do not believe it is possible or desirable to pretend this resistance does not exist or to prohibit discussion of these personal and spiritual connections to the text.

Facts, Fictions, Fairytales, Feminism: My Internship Teaching a Course on Gender and Culture

In developing my own pedagogical approach to presenting religious texts for children and adolescents I have embraced the correlation frequently made between fairy tales and religious texts. We begin by first examining fairy tales and how these narratives appear in a variety of different forms. Rather than reading a wide selection of different tales, students are presented with several different versions of the same tale. This approach is modeled after the "Texts and Contexts: Little Red Riding Hood" portion of the fairy tale chapter in the *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* and the structure

of the Norton Critical Edition of *The Classic Fairy Tales* edited by Maria Tatar. Both collections include the “traditional” versions of fairy tales from authors such as Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Charles Perrault, and Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont. Many students are not familiar with these versions, having acquired their familiarity with the narratives primarily through the films produced by Disney. Students are also presented with a variety of different contemporary retellings many of which alter the familiar narrative in order to draw our attention to the influence these narratives have on cultural norms such as gender construction and sexuality. Texts such as Ellen Jackson’s picture book *Cinder Edna* work well in initiating discussions regarding how cultural attitudes toward gender have changed and how the traditional versions of fairy tales frequently promote outdated ideologies. In *Cinder Edna*, Jackson parallels the story of Cinderella with her more homely neighbor Cinder Edna; both characters suffer from similar circumstances, but where Cinderella responds to her circumstances with melancholy resignation, Cinder Edna embraces her work with a positive attitude. Cinder Edna’s story deviates from Cinderella’s in that she saves her money to buy a dress and takes the bus to the ball; her prince, while not as handsome as his older brother, is more thoughtful and logical – he learned his date’s name and was able to track her down by looking her up in the phone book. By beginning with fairy tales rather than religious stories, students are able to engage with the questions regarding how these texts influence cultural constructions without the initial complication of religious belief and the perception of stories as being sacred.

The portion of the class devoted to religious texts immediately follows or rather extends from the discussion of fairy tales. The same model is followed where students are presented with a wide variety of different retellings of a single story such as the Flood narrative, the Creation and the Fall, or the story of Esther.¹ There is a growing trend of collections of biblical women's stories in religious literature for young people. Within this trend there is a range of texts that approach the retelling of these stories from traditional and conservative approaches to more radical and subversive approaches. Because these are predominantly collections of short stories, selections from these collections work well to provide students with a wide range of short readings. Nancy Simpson's collection *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible* is a very conservative text whose title and front cover indicate to contemporary readers that young girls can and should be able to relate the lives of biblical women and girls directly to their own. Unlike Simpson's text which includes 68 stories from the Old and New Testament, Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum's collection *Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible* provides 13 longer stories based on women in the Bible. Bach and Exum's collection includes additional information and details about each woman's story that are gleaned from other sources:

In telling the stories of biblical women we have tried to give the women a voice where the Bible often relegates them to silence, to tell the stories

¹ A wider range of different versions of stories from the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament are available in picture books and collections of Bible stories for children and adolescents. Because of this availability I have yet to utilize children's texts from the New Testament. I anticipate that I would encounter a different range of responses if using stories based on the life of Jesus or his contemporaries.

from their point of view. Since the Bible gives us so little information about many of these women, we have added details to their stories from what we know about customs and society in ancient times. Sometimes we supplement one biblical story with information gleaned from other parts of the Bible; [...] Gaps in the text are not unique to the stories of women; they are typical of biblical narrative in particular and of storytelling in general. (xiv)

Given their attention to detail and scholarly approach to filling in the gaps, I tend to situate this collection toward the traditional end of the spectrum, however their open acknowledgment of the Bible's tendency to focus on men's stories and leave women's stories in the background differentiates their collection from Simpson's collection. The most radical stories presented, according to my students, come from Matt Biers-Ariel's collection *The Triumph of Eve & Other Subversive Bible Tales*. In this collection, God appears as a character along with the sassy angel Gabriella as a framing technique for the stories included. Students frequently express discomfort with Gabriella's irreverent interactions with God as well as God's colloquial demeanor. In convincing Jacob to meet with his brother Esau God exclaims "I'm God, for God's sake. I'm not exactly powerless" (Bier-Ariel 58). These three collections as well as collections by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, Jan Mark, Fran Manushkin, and Lillian Hammer Ross provide a wide variety of approaches to the stories of women in the Bible that allow for discussion of the different approaches to adapting religious stories for a young audience.

Before examining selections from these collections students may be asked to summarize the story from memory, identifying as many details as possible prior to the reading, a technique also used by Mieke Bal (89). A careful reading of the version of the story from the Bible, the “pre-text” to use Stephens and McCallum’s term, provides a foundation for comparison of the retellings. Initial discussion may focus on the similarities and differences among the various versions and the pre-text. This approach resembles the narratological approach Bal advocates in “Reading as Empowerment: The Bible from a Feminist Perspective.” “Using simple tools from narratology [...] they may analyze the story and answer the question Who does what? systematically, on the basis of the text, not of their own interpretations” (Bal 89). Similarly, Ruth Adler encourages students to ground their analysis in examples from the text(s) in order to confront the problem of “preconceived” and “erroneous ideas”: “I insisted that students be familiar with specific texts and not speak in vague generalities, and I constantly endeavored to engage students intellectually and emotionally in the learning process, inviting them to make discoveries on their own and welcoming personal responses” (93-94). In my course, students are asked to identify what features of the story from the pre-text are left out, what elements are added or embellished, who is named and who takes action. Having generated a list of the similarities and differences, we embark on a discussion of the possible motivations behind the changes. Specifically, we explore whether the motivations represent assumptions about what is appropriate for children or what will appeal to children or whether the changes made indicate evolving cultural ideologies.

Having identified the differences and similarities among the different versions of the Bible stories read by the class, students are then asked to explore how retellings of fairy tales differ from retellings of Bible stories. This is the point at which personal beliefs and attitudes toward the texts generally interact with our critical reading of the narratives as literary texts. Jane Hedley addresses the potential tension of sharing personal responses to sensitive texts:

When course material is politically sensitive or when it is more painful for some students to read than for others, there needs to be a way for everyone to acknowledge and work with these differences; but in the present atmosphere of political correctness it is far from easy for us to do so. And rather than predict my students' experience for them, I want them to feel that whatever their experience may be, it is potentially interesting and discussable. (34)

In my own classroom, I attempt to create an environment where a variety of different experiences of the texts can be brought to the discussion and then examined through a more critical lens. Students are asked to speculate on the different kinds of authority these texts are endowed with depending on the personal beliefs of the reader. Discussion of how practitioners of the faith approach the texts differently than non-believing readers allows students the opportunity to share and explore how their own approach informs their reading of the text. Students are also asked to consider how their responses to retellings of Bible stories, in particular the more radical re-visions, differ from retellings of fairy tales and speculate on the reasons for those differences. Finally, students are

asked to consider the concerns raised, specifically with regard to gender, by the traditional versions of these Bible stories and the different responses we have to the authority of the pre-text and the re-visioned narratives.

I introduce students to several different categories of retelling drawn from various literary scholars: John Stephens and Robyn McCallum's "reversion," Adrienne Rich's "re-vision," Mieke Bal's "ideostory," and the Jewish tradition of Midrash. Provided with these four different classifications for retold traditional narratives, students may be asked to debate which category they would place each retelling of the traditional narrative. This debate may instigate more in depth discussion of how the texts are received by those adults hoping to foster religious belief and how the texts might currently be used within that context. I have not introduced the ideological categories discussed in the previous chapters because I do not want to impose my interpretations and observations onto the students. My intent is to encourage students to become critical readers and recognize patterns in how ideology influences retellings of traditional narratives in their own way. As the instructor, my interpretations are easily misunderstood as the only "correct" interpretation and the patterns I recognize the only possible manifestations of contemporary ideology.

The culminating project of the study of traditional literature is a picture book project in which the students choose a traditional narrative to retell. Students are required to complete both a creative retelling in picture book form as well as a formal rhetorical analysis of their creative project. The rhetorical analysis requires students to identify some of the ideologies found in the pre-text of the traditional narrative as well as describe

the cultural ideologies that influence their retelling. Students are encouraged to identify an ideology in the pre-text that they feel is outdated, problematic or inappropriate for contemporary children and use that as a motivation for the changes they make in their retelling. The project requires students to examine several retellings of their chosen narrative or related retellings if their narrative is not commonly included in publications for children or adolescents. Students are not evaluated on their creative ability, but rather their ability to identify and reflect on the pervasiveness of cultural ideologies.

In constructing a pedagogical approach to presenting religious literature for children and adolescents I have attempted to address the gaps in the critical research within the field as well as how these texts are presented in children's literature textbooks. The primary focus of my approach is to emphasize contemporary texts and foster an examination of how these texts are situated within the religious and secular communities. By presenting students with both traditional and progressive retellings of traditional Bible narratives, they are encouraged to explore both the ways these texts are perceived by practitioners of the faith and how these texts influence the larger tradition of Western literature. I utilize the correlation frequently made between fairy tales and religious literature to negotiate the discomfort some students may feel in approaching religious texts through a critical lens, but also ask students to explore the differences in how these texts influence cultural norms in different ways. While a feminist perspective clearly motivates my own approach to these texts and how I present these texts to students, it serves primarily as a starting point of our analysis and other considerations such as

assumptions about children and childhood, social class, and race are also encouraged in class discussion and the students' picture book projects.

***“Bra-burning, man-hating lesbians”:* Students’ Attitudes Toward Feminism & Feminists**

For the first written response of the semester in which I completed my teaching internship, I asked the students to describe their attitudes and assumptions about feminism, feminists and gender. My intentions with this prompt was to gain insight into their attitudes going into the class before any of the readings or class discussions began to influence their perceptions. I did my best to encourage them to be honest, reassuring them that they would not be “punished” or pre-judged for expressing their opinions. Because the population of the class included a range of students from freshman to graduating seniors, I was uncertain what to expect. Generally speaking, I expected a fairly wide range; surprisingly that is not what I received.

A large number of the students began this first response with dictionary definitions of feminism. This suggests two possibilities: 1) these students were unfamiliar with feminism/feminists, and 2) these students fell back on familiar, academic approaches (clearly a technique predominantly used in high school) to a prompt in an effort to “impress” the instructor. Either explanation indicates to me that many of these students were not particularly comfortable discussing the topic. An optimistic approach to the academic prowess of undergraduate students would suggest that these students were reverting to old academic habits, having (hopefully) learned more advanced

approaches to responding to writing prompts in college. Admittedly, this may be over-analyzing their approaches; this dictionary definition approach could be attributed to the fact that it was the first response of the semester and students were “feeling me out” to gauge how I graded and what I expected. I do, however, think it is significant that so many students chose to begin their responses in this fashion.

Similarly, the vast majority of students identified feminism with issues primarily associated with first wave and second wave feminism. Most students equated feminism with the pursuit of equal rights, specifically the issue of equal salaries. I think because of this association, most students expressed some degree of pessimism regarding feminism. Many indicated that it was a slow process; some even suggested that our society may never treat the sexes equally. While I’m intrigued by the nature of these responses and what it indicates for the next generation of feminism, I do not believe that I can begin to draw any conclusions from this one class. It is a question I will continue to explore with my students over many years of teaching.

While two-three students identified themselves openly as feminists and described backgrounds that included courses that focused on or introduced feminist concepts (one student even identified herself as an activist on campus), the vast majority indicated varying degrees of hesitancy to label themselves a feminist:

“I would not say that I am a feminist, but I do have strong opinions about the way men and women are portrayed.”

“Now I am no hard core feminist, but I do feel very strongly that women should not be looked at as inferior to men.”

"I believe that men and women should be treated equally. I would not call myself a feminist though."

Even those students who willingly labeled themselves as feminists indicated that they had initial resistance.

"I consider myself a feminist. It took me a long time to claim this title for myself. I have always had feminist beliefs, but like many women I was wary of the actual title of being a feminist."

What was particularly interesting to me was how many of these hesitant students described personal beliefs regarding gender that would typically fall under the wide umbrella of feminist thought. In describing their assumptions about feminists in particular, many students identified the stereotype of the "hard core" or radical feminist:

"All too often when people hear the word feminist they think of man-hating, bra-burning lesbians or some similar stereotype."

"The only negative attribute to feminists is their stereotypical overzealous personalities and exaggerated opinions on feminism and gender in general."

"Personally I believe that the views of the radical feminists are too extreme and untraditional. For instance their positions to reject marriage, family and heterosexual relationships are too far-reaching for me."

"I do not agree with the feminists' views that men are bad or evil, because that is just so unrealistic."

“When thinking of feminists, I guess I have that stereotype about feminists being outwardly rude, stubborn, and obnoxious making big deals out of things that shouldn’t be.”

These responses facilitated a class discussion about feminism and feminists in which I introduced the concept of a spectrum. This concept became an important one for our discussion of feminists/feminisms as well as later discussions of religious thought, feminist theology and attitudes toward children and adolescents.

One student in particular expressed a desire for middle ground with feminist thought. She was more comfortable with less radical approaches:

“I think that feminism is a wonderful thing if it is done in the right way. [...] I do think that there need to be changes but it needs to be done in a constructive way. [...] Feminism is a wonderful thing as long as it is done in a constructive, calm way.”

While this student most clearly articulates this opinion in her response, it was clear to me through class discussion that many of the students held similar beliefs with regard to feminism.

***“Letting a child listen to a story will not make them anti-feminist”:* Students’**

Responses to Re-visioned Narratives

I anticipated some resistance to the re-visions of biblical narratives prior to the start of the semester. My assumption was that the students would find it easier to deconstruct the secular fairy tales and come to recognize the influence of these cultural

myths on our constructions of gender more easily than they would with the religious narratives. What I did not anticipate was the emotional ties many of them would have to these stories from their childhood. In retrospect, my personal and professional experiences with critiquing and analyzing children's literature should have forewarned me of this obstacle. Many students expressed emotional attachment to these stories:

"To tell you the truth, I never put the two words feminism and fairytales together. To me Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast [were] just [stories] and I, being a hopeless romantic, always indulged in the love story. It always put a smile on my face to see the princess end up with her prince. I never thought about fairytales any other way until class on Friday. I was just taught that they were fairytales and nothing else, that there were no hidden meanings in them or gender construction."

Throughout the course of the semester I noticed several students using the phrase "hopeless romantic" to qualify their attachments and unwillingness to be critical of the narratives. The concept of romance and the "happily ever after" ending in particular seem to be the point on which there was the most resistance. This is likely connected to their initial resistance to radical feminists as many students cited their inaccurate notions of the rejection of heterosexual relationships and family as the primary factor for disassociation. Clearly many of them are unaware of the degree to which they have been inculcated into the societal paradigm of gender performance. The connection I am making to their similar attitudes toward feminism is further indicated by this student's response:

"I love the fairytales, maybe a 'feminist' would think I am submitting to the ideals I am supposed to but I always loved the aspect of true love and the fact that the underdog can overcome all odds and come out on top."

The sarcastic and confrontational tone indicated by placing the word feminist in quotation marks suggests that the student is on the defensive. She appears to recognize the validity of the feminist critique of fairy tales, but she is unwilling to budge. She attempts to strip a feminist critique of any authority by questioning its validity. More vague concepts like "true love" do not appear in quotation marks even though this might be expected in academic writing.

Several students utilized valid lines of critical inquiry as a means of avoiding a feminist analysis of gender construction. One student utilized the classic "nature versus nurture" line of debate to justify a very staunch opinion that fairy tales are not the culprit:

"I think a young girl's parents and home environment teaches her self-confidence and tells her that she can be what she wants to be and women can be powerful and just as successful as men. Fairy tales are not degrading and they do not teach girls that they need to be saved by their prince."

While the line of argument from which she, perhaps unconsciously, draws is a relevant one, she is clearly not using it as a means to recognize the multiplicity of influences with regard to gender construction, but rather to exonerate fairy tales from the critical implications of a feminist critique. Similarly, several students referred to the historical

context of fairy tales as justification to resist a feminist critique of the constructions of gender.

"Besides the focus on a beautiful princess and [her] prince charming, I really never saw anything offending about Cinderella. I have always felt it reflected the time period in which it was set."

"Re-writing a fairytale can make the story relate more to the current thoughts of society. But, if a child is presented with only the new version, then the rich history of the original is lost. I believe that children need to hear and learn the old story and then see how it differs from current thought."

While this is certainly a valid point, many of these students used this approach more as a means to avoid deconstructing the narratives to which they were so clearly attached than as a critical line of inquiry. For some students this eventually led to more complex questions of the nature and usefulness of re-visions of traditional narratives:

"I also think that starting with another version wouldn't be as pleasurable to a child nor did I once even look deep enough to think that the 'princess' or female in the story was weak, so I doubt many kids look that deeply into it as well."

A very small minority of students were conscious of and receptive to feminist critiques of the constructions of gender in fairy tales:

"I think fairy tales will always make me feel very conflicted. I like fairy tales because they remind me of my youth. I also hate them because I see where some of my own insecurities stem from."

"I have grown up with and loved traditional American fairy tales just like most young women in our culture.² Now that I am older, I still enjoy these stories. I also take them with a grain of salt and recognize that every woman is not just waiting for her prince charming to come to her rescue."

Even within this small minority, we can detect an attachment to fairy tales that is not easily overcome. While I was cognitively aware of the influence fairy tales have on our society, specifically young women, I was not fully prepared for the degree to which they have influenced the students in my class. Perhaps I was too focused on the anticipated resistance to re-visioned biblical narratives, but in many ways I was blind-sided by the resistance I experienced to re-visioned fairy tales.

As I anticipated, there was a small section of students who were considerably resistant to the re-visioning of biblical narratives. I began this portion of the course by utilizing the notion of a spectrum with regard to religious beliefs and sacred texts. I believe that for some students, particularly those who fell in the middle ground of radical versus conservative in their personal beliefs, this concept allowed at least temporary permission to explore the texts critically and with relatively open minds. Many students in their various responses made reference to how various groups might react to the texts we read. Such an approach allowed anonymity in expressing their personal beliefs, but

² At this point in the semester, we had not discussed the complex origins of the fairy tales that are most popular in American culture.

also in acknowledging alternative perspectives. In addition to referencing the beliefs of others in their discussion of the texts, I also noted several students, many of them female students, using linguistic hedges to qualify their comments:

“In my personal opinion, most children are not mentally prepared to fully understand the concept of religion.”

“To supplements biblical stories with midrash can also teach other important lessons in my opinion”

While sociolinguists frequently associate linguistic hedges with women’s language in many contexts, I think that the surfacing of this unconscious technique is telling in the discussion of biblical narratives. I did not note similar qualifying language in this student’s discussion of fairy tale revisions. These linguistic “tells” indicate to me a general discomfort and hesitation in discussing the texts.

The spectrum of religious thought with regard to the sacred nature of the Bible was reflected in the diverse population of our class. Several students were very open to the idea of re-visioning the stories from the Bible:

“I do not think that the Bible needs to be interpreted literally word for word. The same message can be expressed and understood in many ways.”

Other students, however, identified themselves as resistant to any alteration of the narratives found in the Bible:

“This particular story brought out a lot of thoughts from me because I do believe that the word of God is divinely inspired and I do believe that is

should not be changed at all. [...] I feel like we should never try to revise or change the word of God just to please people or make them feel better or important."

This student offered additional explanation to how she personally interprets the lack of active female presence in most biblical narratives:

"I believe that everything in it [the Bible] is true and at the same time I understand that women are not the main characters most of the time but that really does not bother me because I just know that whenever a married man in the Bible successfully completed a God given task then that means his wife was there to help push the vision through prayer, love and support of her husband."

As an instructor I found references to the biblical texts as the "Word of God" a major obstacle. I made it very clear throughout the semester that it was not my primary goal to infiltrate their personal belief systems and convert them to feminist theological thought. At the same time, this type of language was more than just an obstacle to further discussion, it was a virtually impassable road block.

A small but vocal minority of students were not hesitant to express their distaste for the more radical texts we read in class. One student in particular struggled throughout the semester. Her initial views on feminism were clearly influenced by her conservative religious beliefs:

"I think women just want to be side by side with men and not behind them, but what they don't realize is, they already are there. Men need women

just as much as women need men. We must understand that God created man (Adam) first and then he created women (Eve) so that the man could be a protecting covering for the woman and the woman could help the man be strong and wise.”

“[W]omen have to be careful with their bodies since they are the only ones that can produce a child. If women were not able to do the one major thing they were made for which is help increase the population then there would not be many different generations to look forward to.”

While the first quote clearly references traditional and conservative religious justifications for the suppression of women, it was only after some reflection that I recognized the second quote as having similar origins. Clearly this student has been influenced by the dominant theme of childbearing associated with female biblical figures. She appears unaware of the historical context of the stories in the Old Testament that made childbearing of such primary importance within the culture. Even though the cultural atmosphere has greatly changed (I doubt that even large numbers of women abstaining from giving birth would greatly threaten the human race at this point) this student has internalized the gender constructions dictated by the Bible in the face of what most would consider scientific or logical rationale. The responses of this student, while challenging and even frustrating when viewed as an instructor, served as concrete justification of my belief that these texts which attempt to re-vision the narratives of biblical women are necessary and important work.

Student Approaches to Re-visioning Cultural Narratives

In creating their own re-visions of cultural narratives, I believe that many of the students came to understand the complexities of gender construction on a whole new level. The majority of students wrote re-visions of fairy tales for their final project. The single biblical re-vision was one of the weaker projects; it did little more than extend the re-visioned narrative of *Naamah: Noah's Wife* by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso which we read in class. Perhaps the student felt uncomfortable re-visioning a biblical narrative; more likely, the student put off working on the project until the last minute and the results were self-incriminating. Even so, the student's procrastination may have been at least in part motivated by discomfort or intimidation.

On the final exam I offered the students the opportunity to indicate why they chose one form of cultural narrative over the other, knowing in advance that the majority of their final projects were drawing on fairy tale re-visions. The majority identified a strong background and familiarity with fairy tales as the primary motivation behind their choice. Several students, however, indicated that they were also intimidated by or uncomfortable with the prospect of revising a bible story:

"I did not feel comfortable revising a biblical text. I don't think I know enough about a lot of the stories to be able to revise it. Also I was afraid to mess with the story because I didn't want to change it so it offended anyone or was [blasphemous]."

"I did not have a strong enough background in the Bible stories to write a revision. I see the Bible as sacred and some of the stories we read made

the Bible seem unimportant. It was as if the authors thought the Bible should be ripped apart and don't see the importance. I do not really feel comfortable taking a traditional and sacred Bible story and changing it up."

Both of these students were part of the "middle ground" in terms of their previous responses to biblical texts. Neither one was particularly vocal in expressing disagreement with the re-visions we read as a class. However, when asked to attempt their own re-visions they were unable to approach the religious texts with as much intellectual freedom as the fairy tales. These attitudes indicate to me the depth of influence religious texts have on our perceptions of gender. The authority with which Bible stories are endowed make them untouchable for many readers.

One student's final project indicates an issue in my construction of the course. In assembling the text list for the semester, I became aware of the limited number of texts which focus on the construction of masculinity. This is an issue I attempted to address in class through discussion and in class debate. Several interesting observations came out of these discussions, in particular the ways in which male characters are portrayed in traditional versions of the narratives and the new characteristics with which they are frequently endowed in feminist re-visions. Several of the students in class, the handful of male students being the most vocal, noted that in empowering the female character, many of the authors "dumbed down" the male counterparts. As a class we determined we were unsatisfied with the collateral damage of the male characters. Simply reversing the binary was not a satisfactory solution. Initially I was quite satisfied with their

observations and conclusions about how masculinity was being constructed in the texts we read.

For their final projects, many students approached their re-visions by “flip flopping” the genders of the major characters. While this was a relevant and sometimes even creative approach to the project, it made me very aware of how inadequate our discussion of the construction of masculinity really was this semester. Most students in their re-visions and analyses of their revisions seemed unaware of how they were re-inscribing masculine gender constructions in their stories. One project in particular represents this problem even though the narrative technique was not role reversal. This student’s revision of the ugly duckling, a picture book entitled *The Different Duckling*, features an effeminate boy duckling named Duncan who did not like to play sports but instead prefers “taking walks in the forest, watching butterflies in the garden,” but “Most of all, Duncan loved baking cookies.” Duncan is Othered by his classmates for his inadequate performance of gender norms. The climactic scene features Duncan rescuing his mother after she has been shot by a hunter.³ It is after Duncan demonstrates at least one characteristic of proper masculinity that he is ultimately accepted by the flock in spite of his idiosyncrasies.

In reviewing the student’s analysis of the project, I was disturbed to find that not only was she unaware that she had unwittingly re-inscribed constructions of masculinity, she had envisioned Duncan’s improper performance of masculinity as a subtle indication

³ The description of the accident is certainly questionable in its appropriateness for a young audience. Duncan’s mother is describes as “laying on the ground bleeding”. This is however the only issue the author had with addressing the intended audience.

of latent homosexuality. While we did address issues concerning sexuality in traditional narratives when we read Emma Donoghue's *Kissing the Witch*, all of those adaptations focused on lesbian relationships and relationships among women. This project, as well as other similar though less prominent trends in other students' projects, made it very clear to me that this was a problematic gap in the compilation of the texts for this course. Initially I justified this gap because of our focus on re-visioned narratives. I have not found many re-visions of fairy tales or biblical narratives that focus on redefining masculinity, an issue I have attributed to two basic reasons. The first was that fairy tales do not have much draw for a male audience, who would be the most obvious target audience for a re-vision of male gender constructions. Secondly biblical narratives do not appear, at least on the surface, to need re-visioning in order to focus on questions of masculinity. The primary focus of re-visioned biblical midrash tends to be (re)creating the untold stories of women in the Bible, a non-issue for male biblical figures. Ultimately it was not my intent to avoid or devalue the importance of the ways in which masculinity is a social construction. At this point I do not know what I would have done differently to resolve this oversight, as the availability of appropriate texts is inadequate. However it has opened up a series of questions with regard to the ways in which masculinity is constructed in traditional biblical narratives and whether or not it appears to be as unconstructive as the ways in which femininity is depicted.

Conclusion

Incorporating children's Bible stories into the curriculum need not be limited to courses on the Bible as literature or specialized sections of interdisciplinary studies such as the course in which I conducted my internship. Integrating children's Bible stories into survey courses in children's or young adult literature helps introduce students to the deeply-rooted influence of various ideologies in our culture. Because religious texts are generally less comfortable to explore, students as critical readers recognize how much influence ideologies they have been exposed to since childhood have on their lives. Including Bible stories in a children's or young adult literature course also helps engender a more nuanced sensitivity to reading multicultural texts. When faced with their reactions to re-visions of stories they had been taught were sacred, students are typically more sensitive to the traditional narratives of other cultures. While many instructors shy away from the sensitive topic of religious texts, I have found the investment students bring to reading Bible stories, whether that investment is because they adhere to a religious belief or they reject it, to be incredibly productive in the children's literature classroom.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: HAPPILY EVER AFTER...AMEN

The religious texts available today for children and young adults are much more varied than those addressed in this dissertation. In order to develop a theoretical approach to examining the function of gender ideologies in religious texts, this analysis has been limited primarily to collections of women's stories. Chapter four includes a slightly more diverse selection of religious texts for the analysis of retellings of Eve, including a novelization as well as single-narrative picture books in order to illustrate a wider variety of approaches to the narrative. A wealth of different religious texts are available which have gone unexamined by scholars of children's literature. Graphic novels, devotionals, "Biblezines," novelizations of individual narratives, and even choose-your-own-adventure books for young readers have been created in an attempt to assimilate religion with contemporary youth culture.¹ Critical studies of how traditional and contemporary ideologies are negotiated within these texts need not be limited to the constructions of gender.

¹A brief sampling of some of the more non-traditional and gendered religious texts for young readers includes *At the Side of Esther: A Multiple-Ending Bible Adventure* by Eric Pakulak, *Manga Messiah* a graphic novel published by Tyndale, *No Boys Allowed: Devotions for Girls* by Kristi Holl, *Bible B.A.B.E.S.: The Inside Dish on Divine Divas* by Andrea Stephens, and *Testament* a graphic novel by Tim Krueger and Mario Ruiz.

There are two avenues of inquiry this dissertation has not addressed that are of particular interest to the study of religious literature for young readers. First, in reviewing the religious texts devoted to the stories of women in the Bible, it became apparent that there was a dearth of texts that re-vision the narratives of women from the New Testament compared to women from the Old Testament. Only three of the collections examined in this study – *Face-to-Face with Women of the Bible*, *Tapestries: Stories of Women in the Bible*, and *Daughters of the Desert: Stories of Remarkable Women from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Traditions* – include narratives from the Christian tradition. There are two recent, noteworthy novelizations of women's stories for young adults: *Salome* by Beatrice Gormley and *Song of the Magdalene* by Donna Jo Napoli. Other retellings of New Testament women are adult texts which are not likely to be crossover texts for young adult readers. One explanation for the comparative wealth of retellings of "Old Testament" women might be that practice of Midrash comes from the Jewish tradition. Given that Midrash is an accepted part of the Jewish tradition, a comparative analysis of Christian and Jewish feminist midrash could illuminate distinctions between the religious traditions and their constructions of gender.² Furthermore, Islamic children's literature should be considered in a comparative study of the religions that draw from the same core of narratives. The Western stigma of Islam as

² One potential issue with this type of study is determining with which religious tradition individual texts are aligned. Texts that include women from the New Testament are clearly Christian texts; however, texts that include only "Old Testament" women are not necessarily Jewish texts because both religions draw from the same canon.

a misogynistic religion needs careful exploration when considering constructions of gender in children's texts.³

The second avenue for further study is to consider the differences between Bible stories written for children and those written for young adults. Theories of cognitive and moral development, such as those espoused by Erik Erikson and John Kohlberg, are useful for situating the texts along a developmental spectrum. Many aspects of religion are cognitively and morally advanced for young readers, for example the enigmatic nature of the Divine. Moreover, Erikson and Kohlberg can help to identify to what degree texts encourage active participation and exploration of faith when they are designed for children versus those marketed to young adults. Some texts, such as the popular Biblezines, claim to be for a teenaged audience and yet provide answers to moral questions that function on a developmental level much lower than the average adolescent. Other texts, while taking the form of a picture book, such as Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's *But God Remembered*, ask young readers to consider concepts which are quite abstract for the cognitive and moral development of young children. Initial observations indicate, however, that YA texts actively assert feminist ideology to a higher degree while texts for children are more likely to subtly map contemporary gender constructions onto the narratives of biblical women.

³ A further issue with Islamic religious literature is the scarcity of the genre. Many children's texts can be found in university and public libraries that are nonfiction, informational texts for young readers who are not Muslim. Texts designed for religious training are more difficult to come by. Currently I have only encountered one text which focuses on female figures within the Islamic religious tradition; *Daughters of the Desert* is a collection that I have examined in this dissertation because it includes retellings of women from the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions.

Re-visions of traditional narratives are a burgeoning genre in literature for children and adolescents. Feminist re-visions of fairy tales have experienced much positive reception as the plethora of films, novels, poems, and short stories indicate. In 2004 alone, three major films for young adults featured re-visions of the Cinderella narrative influenced by feminist ideology.⁴ Whether this is a matter of art influencing life or life influencing art, it is clear that Western culture, particularly American culture, is no longer as befuddled by the trope of “happily ever after.” Young women are less able to relate to the passive heroine that frolics through the forest waiting for the day her prince will come. It is not that women no longer hope to find a partner just that the influence of the myth of the ideal woman espoused in so many fairy tales has waned:

Although lingeringly attracted to fantasies (like Eve to the garden after the Fall), many modern women can no longer blindly accept the promise of connubial bliss with the prince. Indeed, fairy tale fantasies come to seem more deluding than problem-solving. ‘Romance’ glosses over the heroine’s impotence: she is unable to act independently or self-assertively; she relies on external agents for rescue; she binds herself first to the father and then the prince; she restricts her ambitions to hearth and nursery. Fairy tales, therefore, no longer provide mythic validations of desirable female behavior; instead, they seem more purely escapist or nostalgic,

⁴ *Ella Enchanted* (based on the novel by Gail Carson Levine, directed by Tommy O’Haver) and *A Cinderella Story* (directed by Leigh Dunlap) both are clearly re-visions of the Cinderella narrative. *The Prince and Me* (directed by Martha Coolidge) is a more general fairy tale re-vision, but it includes features most viewers would identify with the Cinderella narrative (disparity of social class, hidden identity, and search for a wife/queen).

having lost their potency because of the widening gap between social practice and romantic idealization. (Rowe 211)

This is not to say that we are free from the influence of fairy tales and other “romance” narratives. Only time will tell what impact reading *Cinder Edna* alongside Cinderella may have on the generations of girls who will have always been exposed to alternate versions of fairy tales.

Re-visions of the stories of women from the Bible are a much more recent trend in Western culture. These stories differ from fairy tales on many levels as I have explored in the previous chapters. One fundamental difference is that many of these re-visions involve additions to the biblical canon, filling out the silence of women’s voices within religious traditions. One marker of “success” for feminist theology will be children who are as familiar with the stories of Miriam, Rachel, and Leah as they are with Noah, Moses, David and Goliath. “Information about women’s past may be instructive and even stirring, but it is not transformative until it becomes part of the community’s collective memory, part of what Jews call to mind in remembering Jewish history” (Plaskow 36). Acceptance of women’s stories as an integral part of either Jewish or Christian tradition is not as simple as publishing a few novels or filming a few blockbuster movies. Because the canon of religious tradition is more or less a fixed monolith, official acceptance of women’s stories is unlikely. But re-visions, reversions and creative Midrash for young practitioners encourage them to wonder about the stories that are not told in the Bible; they encourage young readers to question and seek their own answers. For some religious sects as well as some individual practitioners, this type

of creative exploration is not possible because for them the Bible is immutable.

Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that “Codified tradition both reaches back to roots in experience and is constantly renewed or discarded through the test of experience” (12). For young practitioners living in a world that advocates gender equality, their experience will not correspond with the canon of their faith. “If a symbol does not speak authentically to experience, it becomes dead or must be altered to provide a new meaning” (Ruether 12-13). This is a difficult obstacle to overcome for many religious groups and could result in the loss of young members.

Analyzing religious texts in an academic context is potentially problematic for a variety of different reasons. This may account for the silence toward religious children’s texts that Perry Nodelman admonished. Religion is one of the more concrete examples of Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs); organized religion is one of the institutions asserting control over the development of individual identity that can be clearly identified. In the field of children’s literature there is continual analysis of various ideologies that operate within children’s texts. It is not clear why a genre of texts for young readers that is clearly a tool of ideological interpolation would go unexamined. Ignoring these texts results in a diminutive assessment of the patriarchal practices of religious tradition with no opportunity to observe how they evolve. Academia need not be at odds with religion. It is important to remember that it is institutions that corner us, that pit one group against another. “Following Foucault, we must first abandon the idea of power as something possessed by one group and leveled against another; we must instead think of the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain

positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain” (Bordo 167). Until we can recognize the ideologies of the institutions that influence our lives, we will never fully exert change.

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