Revelation From Between the Lines: A Sudy of Martin Buber's Biblical Hermeneutics and his *Elijah, a Mystery Play.*

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Abstract

Martin Buber was one of the most influential Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century. His works on philosophy and theology have had a profound influence on both Jewish and Christian religious thought. The purpose of this thesis is to examine Buber's biblical scholarship in the context of his philosophical and theological writings in order to assess how his approach to biblical hermeneutics is connected to the rest of his thinking. It is demonstrated that Buber's philosophy of I and Thou has a profound role in his understanding of the Bible and the nature of interpretation itself as a dialogue between reader and text in a way that anticipates certain post-modern notions of literary theory. In particular, Buber's dramatic work, *Elijah, a Mystery Play* is examined in order to evaluate Buber's hermeneutical method as it is displayed in a specific example of artistic exegesis.

Abstract

Martin Buber etait un des penseures juifs les plus influents du vintieme siecle. Ses travaux sur la philosophie et al theologie ont eu une influence profonde sur la pensee religieuse juive et chretienne. Le but de cette these est d'examiner l'erudition biblique de Buber dans le contexte de ses ecrits philosophiques, afin d'evaluer comment son approche aux hermeneutiques biblique est reliee au reste de sa pensee. On demontre que la philosophie de Buber de I et de Thou a un role profond dans sa comprehension de la bible et de la nature de l'interpretation elle-meme, car un dialogue entre le lecteur et le texte est une manier dont prevoit certain elements de theorie litteraire sus-moderne. En particulier, le travail dramatique de Buber, *Elijah, A Mystery Play* est examine specifique d'exegese artistique.

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I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Prof. B. Barry Levy for his tireless assistance, sound advice and erudite teaching. Without his guidance this project would not have been possible.

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Introduction

Martin Buber is best known for his contribution to the field of existential philosophy, specifically his book *I and Thou*, but the majority of his scholarly activity centered around biblical studies. He published four major works on biblical topics: *The Prophetic Faith*, *Kingship of God* and *Moses*, as well as a new German translation of the Bible that he began in collaboration with Franz Rosenzweig and continued after the latter's death. He also published many articles on topics related to the Bible that have had wide ranging influence on modern Bible study in both Jewish and Christian circles. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a general introduction to Buber's approach to the Bible and an analysis of a play he wrote entitled, *Elijah, a Mystery Play*.

Buber originally intended to write a large-three volume work on the Bible, which was to be entitled *The Biblical Faith*, because he believed that all of the topics of the Bible are in one way or another related to issues of faith, or more specifically, the encounter between humanity and God. The first volume was intended to "verify the religious idea of a folk-kingship of God as an actual-historical one for the early period of Israel,"[1] and was published under the title, *Kingship of God*. Its general thesis is that early days of the Israelite nation were typified by an aversion to human kingship, as in the time of the judges; YHWH alone was to be king over Israel, and human leaders

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[1]Martin Buber, *Kingship of God*, third edition, translated by Richard Scheimen, Harper and Row Publishers, New York and Evanston, 1967, p. 14.

were only to have temporary power that was contingent upon divine nomination.

The second and third volumes were never completed. The second was intended to deal with how "the sacral character of the Israelitish king as one 'anointed' of God is related to this [the folk-kingship of God]."[2] The intention of the third volume was to demonstrate how the failure of human kingship in Israel and the resultant historical disillusionment engendered eschatological hopes for the coming of God's holy "anointed" leader or messiah. Since Buber maintains that the Bible essentially deals with issues of faith and the relationship between humanity and God, he argues that the *messianic* faith is nothing more than "the being-oriented-toward the fulfillment of the relation between God and world in a consummated kingly rule of God."[3] None of this third volume dealing with the biblical conception of messianism was ever completed, though Buber touches upon the topic in numerous places throughout his other works and essays; significant parts of the second volume were published in Hebrew.[4]

Though this ambitious venture never fully came to fruition, Buber's other works hold a wealth of unique insights and novel hermeneutic techniques relating to the study of the Bible. My intention in this introduction is to describe these developments in Buber's biblical studies and demonstrate how they relate to his existential philosophy of I and Thou. First, it is helpful to discuss Buber's conception of the historicity of the Bible and his relationship to modern biblical criticism.

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[2]*Ibid.*, p. 14.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 15.

[4]See Martin Buber, *Darko Shel Mikra*, Mosad Bialik, Jerusalem, 1964.

Martin Buber does not offer a simple and conventional answer to the question regarding the historicity of the events related in the Bible. This is a result of his conception of the role that *myth* plays in the formulation of biblical tales. However, to say that a given narrative is a myth does not mean, on Buber's account, that the event described has no historical correlate. It merely means that a particular event has been expressed mythologically, that is to say, it has been expressed as a "tale of a corporeally real event that is perceived and presented as a divine, an absolute, event."[5] The classification of the mythological content of the Bible as "untrue" or "nonhistorical" is a function of the fact that the modern understanding of the world is based on a conception of empirical causality, and any depiction of events in the world that deviates from this framework is considered at best to be a poetic or subjective impression, but not historically true. Buber, however, maintains that the understanding of actual corporeal events as divine events and the depiction of them as such, that is, the representation of them as myths, is part of the very nature of ancient Israelite society. This was the way that events in the world were understood and transmitted to posterity. Therefore, when Buber states that "all story-telling books of the Bible have but one subject matter: the account of YHWH's encounters with His people,"[6] he is not implying that these stories are somehow fallacious. Rather, he is arguing that they are indeed relating historically real events, but they relate them in the only way that the ancient Near Eastern Israelite deems appropriate: as myths, as divine, absolute events. For example, with regard to the miracles associated with Moses and the exodus from Egypt, Buber argues that some real, historical event must have actually occurred, but is was

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[5]Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1967, p. 103.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 105.

"an event that cannot be grasped except as an act of God. Something happens to us, the cause of which we cannot ascribe to our world; the event has taken place just now, we cannot understand it, we can only believe it. It is a holy event."[7] This is not to say that the miracles actually occurred as they are described in the text. But they are mythical descriptions of some *real* historical event which was "actually conveyed form person to person."[8] In this way, Buber ascribes his own unique brand of "historicity" and "truth" to the tales related in the Bible.

As well, Buber takes a unique position with regard to the authorship of the texts themselves. He acknowledges that the Bible is composed of many different books, and that many of them are composed of a number of different sources. However, Buber rejects the idea propounded by Wellhausen and his school that these sources, especially those of the Pentateuch, can be categorized into distinct units and that all of the pieces and fragments of the Pentateuch can be attributed to one of them. In fact, Buber argues that such scholars have succeeded in establishing only one thing, "namely, that we have before us a number of fundamental types of literary working out of tradition, all according to different editorial tendencies."[9] Buber polemicizes further against the program of modern biblical source criticism by arguing that "even if we were allowed to speak of 'sources' and if it were even possible to fix their dates (and also the dates of the additions and redactions), we would thereby only be able to establish layers of the *literary*, and not the *religious* development, and these two need not in any way parallel one another, as it is very possible that a primitive religious

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[7]Martin Buber, *On the Bible*, p. 66.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 137.

[9]Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, p. 4.

element is only found in a late literary from."[10] This argument is of course contingent upon the idea that the text of the Bible as we have it today is based upon *oral* sources. From this argument, we can see that Buber is interested in more than the literary development of the biblical text. His aim is to reach *beyond* the text in order to grasp the religious world-view of the biblical faith. And as will be demonstrated below, Buber takes no mere academic or objective interest in the religious history of the Bible; he is interested in it for the teaching it has to offer modern humanity.

With regard to the actual text of the Bible itself, Buber acknowledges that many hands and memories have worked on the text over the centuries, and it is this constantly altering transmission that has molded the text into the form in which we have it today. Though many scribal interpolations and textual corruptions are apparent, Buber warns against employing the technique of textual emendation too easily; "nothing is easier or cheaper than to consider the text erroneous and to presume we can get behind that text and thereby reach a true one! But we should acknowledge that whoever was responsible for the text as we have it knew as much Hebrew as we do... The 'letter of the text' is, however problematic it may seem, a strict reality, in comparison with which everything else is only appearance."[11]

For this reason, Buber remains faithful to the Masoretic text in most of his biblical studies and his Bible translation. Though this text may contain flaws and uncertainties, it is the most reliable witness we have. In spite of all of the uncertainty surrounding the state of the text of the Bible and its various sources (whatever they may be) which contributed to the present state of the

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[10]*Ibid.*

[11]Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, p. 172-73.

text, Buber still maintains that the Bible should be treated as a unity, even though it is clearly a redaction of an eclectic assortment of texts. Because the Bible is a redaction, Buber argues that the text should be seen as a unity, since in the final analysis, the text in our hands is the single text that a redactor or redactors have transmitted to us. It is reasonable to assume that this redactor or these redactors understood Hebrew and were familiar with the other books that are present in the Masoretic cannon, or at least with the traditions that contributed to the composition of those books (excluding, of course historical books written after the time of a given redactor). For these reasons Buber states that

> biblical texts are to be treated as texts of the *Bible* - that is, of a unity, which though having come into being, having grown from numerous and diverse whole and fragmentary elements, is nonetheless a real organic unity, and can be comprehended only as such. The consciousness that established the Bible, selecting from the abundance of a presumably far greater textual repertory what would fit that unity, and selecting in particular the versions of that material appropriate to that unity, began its work not with the actual assembling of the cannon, but long before - in the gradual bonding of what belonged together. The work of composition was itself 'biblical,' even before the first notion of a biblical structure arose.[12]

This presupposition of the unity of the Bible underlies much of Buber's interpretative techniques which, as will be shown below, are based upon the interconnections of different texts by the echoing of similar sounds, rhythms and word phrasings. Buber is convinced that approaching the Bible as a unity will allow one to make far more connections, discover far more patterns, and discern far more "hidden" messages of divine instruction than the source criticism of modern scholarship. Ultimately, for Buber, meaning in the Bible is far more *intertextual*[13] than textual. This kind of approach to text

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[12]*Ibid.*, p. 174.

[13]Daniel Boyarin addresses the subject of intertextuality and biblical interpretation in his book *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana

and meaning, which may seem like old hat for those of us who have been bombarded in recent years by the writings of post-modern theorists of language, is a testimony to the daring originality of Buber's work in a context that accepted a decidedly empirical-modernist view of linguistic semiology.

Before addressing the hermeneutic techniques Buber employs in his biblical studies, I will first describe his general approach to the Bible and what he regards as the desired outcome of his project of Bible study. In both his philosophical and biblical work, Buber tries to address rather than merely describe the ailments of the existential condition of modern man. One of the problems with the modern world, as he sees it, is that the intellectual person

> holds it important that intellectual values exist, and admits, yes, even himself declares that their reality is bound up with our own power to realize them. But if we were to question him and probe down to truth - and we do not usually probe that far down - he would have to own that this feeling of his about the obligations of the spirit is in itself only intellectual. It is the signature of our time that the spirit holds no obligations.[14]

In every day life, one's intellectual convictions hold no real obligation for the modern person. People no longer feel truly addressed by their ideals, since the modern world tends to compartmentalize the realm of the ideal from the realm of the every day where life actually occurs. The individual of

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University Press, 1990. Boyarin argues that the Midrash, at least with regard to the Mekhilta, reads the Bible intertextually. In his words, intertextuality claims that "every text is constrained by the literary system of which it is a part and that every text is ultimately dialogical in that it cannot but record the traces of its contentions and doubling of earlier discourses" (p. 14). This conception of the meaning of a text as being constrained and defined by other texts within a given group is admittedly a post-modern view of the semiology of language and texts. For Martin Buber, this very idea of intertextuality, which presupposes a kind of post-modern hermeneutic, is the guiding principle of his conception of text and meaning which informs all of his biblical exegesis.

[14]Martin Buber, *On the Bible, Eighteen Studies*, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible," Edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, New York, Schocken Books, 1982, p. 2.

modern society, where technology separates people from one another, where bureaucracy and procedure prevent people from meaningfully encountering one another, is left with a feeling of isolation due to this separation of "spirit" and "world." Even religion is no longer helpful in addressing this problem, because "'religion' itself is part of the detached spirit. It is one of the subdivisions - one in high favor, to be sure - of the structure erected over and above life, one of the rooms on the top floor, with a very special status of its own."[15]

In order to address this crisis in modern society, Buber stressed that his study of the Bible is not intended as a purely intellectual activity, but rather, as an attempt to unite the realm of the spirit and the world of the every day by teaching modern society to stop merely reading the text of the Bible *intellectually*, but rather, to feel addressed by the Bible and to hear its message. In this connection Buber argues that "if we accept the Old Testament as merely religious writing, as a subdivision of the detached spirit, it will fail us and we must needs fail it. If we seize upon it as the expression of a reality that comprises all of life, we really grasp it and it grasps hold of us."[16] An aesthetic, historical or literary reading is by itself inadequate, indeed useless, if it is not intended to bring one to a point where the text is understood for the sake of being seized by it and commanded to translate the message of the Bible into a way of living in the real world. To be sure, Buber was not against the use of formal literary biblical criticism; he employs many of these techniques in his studies. However, he does so in order to lead the student *to* the text rather than past it. In all of his studies, as well as his translation, Buber's final goal is to cause the reader to hear the message and

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[15]*Ibid.*

[16]*Ibid*, p. 4.

the ethical, spiritual demand the Bible holds for him/her in the present, earthly moment.

Chapter One

Buber's work on the Bible can be properly understood only in light of his philosophy of dialogue since, as I will demonstrate below, dialogue plays an essential role in his conception of prophecy. As well, a clear conception of Buber's notion of dialogue is essential to understanding his idea that the Bible itself is "spoken word." Therefore, before I discuss the basic hermeneutic principle of spokenness Buber employs throughout his work on the Bible, I will analyze his dialogical philosophy of I and Thou.

Martin Buber divides the human world into two basic realms that correspond to two basic human attitudes. One of these attitudes is represented by the basic word pair I-Thou; the other, by I-It. In defining and coming to an understanding of these two basic word pairs, one of the most important distinctions to draw is between *relation* and *experience*. First we will outline the role that relation and experience play in each of the basic word pairs. Then, it will be shown how Buber uses this distinction to describe God as the eternal Thou. Finally, we will examine how the principles of Buber's dialogical philosophy come to bear on his conception of the spokenness of the Biblical text.

The first distinction that Buber makes between the I-Thou and I-It relations is that "the basic word pair I-Thou can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word pair I-It can never be

spoken with one's whole being."[17] To speak with one's whole being is to assume a mode of existence that includes all aspects of oneself. When one speaks with one's whole being, one does not simply speak with the heart or the intellect but with something that is more general, that includes the entire person. To speak with one's whole being is to encounter, to enter into a *relation*. To speak with less than one's whole being is to *experience*.

Buber draws a direct correlation between relation and experience and the two basic word pairs near the beginning of his book *I and Thou*, when he says that "the world of experience belongs to the basic word I-It. The basic word of I-Thou belongs to the world of relation."[18] For Buber, a person experiences something when he/she sees it as an aggregate of qualities or as one member in a species. One can stand in front of a statue and perceive all its contours. One can become so familiar with its color, size and other physical attributes that one can recall its appearance at will by merely closing ones eyes and thinking about it. One may even grow fond of the statue and find its form aesthetically pleasing. All of this is experience. This belongs to the basic word pair I-It. In such an experience, one learns what there is to things and compiles objective knowledge about them. No matter how much knowledge one compiles about something, as long as the thing remains an object of experience, as long as the relationship remains devoid of all reciprocity, as long as the self remains removed and detached from the relationship, the thing remains an It. However, Buber is quick to point out that "it is not experiences alone that bring the world to man."[19]

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[17]Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970. p. 163.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 56.

[19]*Ibid.*

Experience is internal. One who experiences "does not participate in the world. For experience is 'in them' and not between them and the world."[20] Relation, however, is external. Relation takes place in the world between an I and a Thou. In order to enter into a relation, one must allow oneself to encounter a Thou. Yet, what qualifies something as a Thou rather than an It? It is not the nature of the thing itself makes it a Thou instead of an It. Rather, it is determined by the way in which one relates to the thing. To illustrate this point, Buber uses the example of a tree. It is possible to contemplate all of the physical characteristics of the tree, to assign it to a given species, to consider its way of life and observe its struggle for survival. All of this is experience. Such experience is removed and objective. However, Buber points out that this very same tree can suddenly become a Thou, if one encounters the tree and enters into a relation with it. In this case, the I encounters the tree and is seized by its uniqueness. The I allows his/her entire being to open up to the tree and "I am drawn into a relation, and the tree ceases to be an It."[21] When the I recognizes the tree as a Thou, a kind of reciprocal relationship is created with the tree. This is not to say that the tree can encounter the I with human-like consciousness, however, there is still a reciprocity of sorts at work in so far as the I presents his/her entire self to the tree and recognizes the uniqueness that the tree presents in return, rather than removing the self from the relation to the tree and merely experiencing the objective facts about it, such as size, species, etc.

Thus, any It can become a Thou when it ceases to be an object of experience and becomes a partner in relation. Buber defines three spheres of relation. The first sphere is with nature. This

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[20]*Ibid.*, p. 56.

[21]*Ibid.*, p. 58.

sphere is "below language" so to speak. When we relate to an animal, as Buber defines his relation with a house cat, the interaction is in movement and gesture, "the Thou we say to them sticks to the threshold of language."[22] As well, in nature there is the simple presenting of uniqueness to each other as we saw in the example of the tree. The second sphere is relation with people. With a person, the reciprocity of the relation can be expressed in language. As Buber puts it, "we can give and receive the Thou."[23] The third sphere is relation with spiritual beings. Such a relation is beyond spoken language, or, as Buber says, "it lacks but creates language."[24] This point will be revisited below in our discussion of Buber's conception of revelation as a dialogue between God and prophet.

Buber outlines these three basic spheres of relation to point out some of the ways in which one can encounter a Thou and enter into a relation and, as well, Buber wants to point out that "in every Thou we address the eternal Thou."[25] We will discuss the relation to the eternal Thou, or God, below. For the time being, suffice it to say that in experience, the self is removed from the relationship and objective knowledge of the object is acquired. When one enters into a relation, the I is included and involved in an encounter with a Thou. Buber makes this point clearly when he says at the bottom of page 61:

> What, then, does one experience of the Thou?
> Nothing at all. For one does not experience it.
> What, then, does one know of the Thou?
> Only everything. For one no longer knows particulars.

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[22]*Ibid.*, p. 57.

[23]*Ibid.*

[24]*Ibid.*

[25]*Ibid.*

Encounter and relation provides us with infinitely more than mere facts. When we enter a relation, we encounter existing things with our entire being. We encounter a Thou rather than experience an It as a conglomeration of facts. Thus, Buber asserts that "all actual life is encounter."[26]

Buber argues that the Modern world distances the individual from a actual "encounter" and forces him/her to live mainly in the realm of I-It and experience. By describing such isolation, Buber is pointing out the conditions of modern society that increase the solitude of the individual and inhibit his or her opportunity to relate to others. This idea of the solitude of the individual caused by the oppressive, objectifying I-It nature of modernity has been addressed by a number of existential authors such as Camus, Kafka and Tolstoy. When Buber says that "if you were to die into it [the world of I-It], then you would be buried into nothingness,"[27] he is reminiscent of Tolstoy's character Ivan Illich, who, in *The Death of Ivan Illich*, seems to realize that he is about to experience this at the moment of his death, and of Kafka's character Joseph K. in *The Trial*. When Buber says that "the ability to experience and use generally involves a decrease in man's ability to relate,"[28] he is pointing out that modern society, with its inordinately strong emphasis on the realm of I-It, the world of calculation, efficiency, use and detachment, often hampers the human capacity to encounter a Thou from any of the three spheres of relation. He points this out more explicitly when he says that "modern developments have expunged almost every trace of a life in which human beings confront each other and have meaningful relationships."[29] Through his distinction between the

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[26]*Ibid.*, p. 62.

[27]*Ibid.*, p. 83.

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 92.

[29]*Ibid.*, p. 97.

experience of I-It and the relation of I-Thou, Buber has been able to point out more succinctly than his predecessors what exactly the ailment of modern society is; namely, the isolation of man from the realm of relation. Many of these authors have been intimating that people are forced to live purely in the I-It world in modern society. Thus, the predicament of modern humanity is how to overcome this objective, distant experience based society and enter into relations with others.

Buber believes that the message of the Bible is the cure for this problem in modern society, or any society in any time. In order to detect this message, one must be able to make the intertextual connections between the different parts of the text. According to Buber, this can be accomplished only when the text is understood as "spoken word," which, like all language, is uttered between an I and Thou. If the text of the Bible is to be understood as a spoken dialogue between God and Prophet, it is necessary to understand the philosophical underpinnings of how, according to Buber, such a dialogue takes place.

Relation to God is not different from relation to other Thou's. That is to say, it is not impossible in this world to relate in a truly reciprocal manner with the eternal Thou. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that Buber thinks that it is impossible *not* to relate to the eternal Thou whenever one relates to anything in this world. Whenever we address a Thou, we also address the eternal Thou, or as Buber says, "extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal Thou... through every single Thou the basic word addresses the eternal Thou."[30] God, for Buber, as the eternal Thou, is of such a nature that it is impossible to turn Him into an It. When one tries to experience God, one no longer addresses God but something else. God can only be encountered.

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[30]*Ibid.*, p. 85.

We cannot know God the way we can know things here in the It world, but we can stand before God and address Him as the Eternal Thou. One cannot speak *of* God without being in error, for God is unknowable. But one can speak *to* God.

What then does Buber say about God or the eternal Thou? Only antimonies such as "in relation to God, unconditional exclusiveness and unconditional inclusiveness are one,"[31] and "one does not find God if one remains in the world; one does not find God if one leaves the world,"[32] and "of course, God is the 'wholly other'; but he is also the wholly same; the wholly present."[33] Buber is trying to express the unknowable, transcendent nature of God as well as His this-worldly presence through such apophatic statements. God is not such that if only we knew enough about Him or if only we knew how to seek Him we would be able to experience Him objectively and "know" Him. Buber, it seems, would reject the rational logic of medieval neo-Aristotelian and Platonic theology, for God cannot be proven with the intellect, He can only be encountered. In fact, for Buber "there is no God-seeking because there is nothing where one could not find Him."[34] Discovering God in this life is "a finding without seeking."[35] For Buber, when it comes to God, subjectivity and the manner of approach are paramount. God must be encountered and related to as the unknowable Thou who is present in every relation and encounter. God is not deduced from the world or the universe as its creator or understood through a logical syllogism of metaphysical premises whose

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

[32] *Ibid.*, p. 127

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 128

conclusion is, "thus, there must be a God." God is simply "what confronts us immediately and first and always, and legitimately it can only be addressed, not asserted."[36]

Some argue that Buber's position is essentially mystical because of his non-rational approach to God. However, Buber differs from the mystic in that the latter wants union with God in order to lose the self and be completely joined with God.[37] For Buber, this is unacceptable because, in order to relate to God, there must be an I, a self to occupy one side of the I-Thou relation in living dialogue. We cannot relate without our self. There is no dialogue without both the I and the Thou. However, one type of mystic unity that Buber does acknowledge as important to a relation with God is the unification of the soul within the individual in order to focus the self. One must concentrate oneself into one's core, for "without this, one is not fit for the work of the spirit."[38] Yet there still remains the duality of the self and the eternal Thou. These two do not become one. It is by this same token that the solipsist cannot encounter God, because if there is no other, if there is nothing but the self, then there can be no relation to anything. At best, a solipsist can step back and analyze the self objectively and say "I am this or that way and there is nothing else," but from such a perspective, one cannot according to Buber, relate to the eternal Thou.

By creating a theology (if indeed one can use the word "theology" without sounding too It oriented) from the perspective of the existing individual who has the ability to encounter and relate

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[36]*Ibid.*

[37]For a discussion of the development of this idea in Buber's thought, see E. R. Wolfson, "The Problem of Unity in the Thought of Martin Buber." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989): 419-439.

[38]*Ibid.*, p.129

by recognizing the divine aspect of every encounter and the intimations of God in every Thou to which we relate, Buber attempts to outline a philosophical system in which one can make God relevant to modern life. Thus, Buber maintains that God's meaning "is not the meaning of 'another life' but that of this our life, not that of a 'beyond' but of this our world, and it wants to be demonstrated by us in this life and this world."[39] This is not to say that Buber is a pantheist. He is adamant that "God embraces but is not the universe."[40] However, everything points to God when we enter into a relationship and encounter a Thou.

It is quite remarkable that in a such a short work as *I and Thou*, Buber has been able to set up such a unique philosophy of life and religion. Through creating his own language and jargon of I-You and I-It, experience and relation, Buber clearly points out the ailment of the modern individual and his/her alienation from others through the It-world of the society in which he/she lives. As well, he constructs a philosophical system which helps us to understand the infinite cosmic significance of relation to others in this life, in this world, as an indication of the relation to the eternal Thou which endows our everyday It-world with meaning. As we shall see below, this conception of dialogue informs Buber's hermeneutic in which the text of the Bible is troped as "spoken word" and the process of interpretation is inherently dialogical.

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[39]*Ibid.*, p.135.

[40]*Ibid.*, p.159.

Chapter Two

Buber's view of language in general and biblical language in particular is intimately connected to his philosophy of I and Thou, because the essence of language for Buber is that it occurs as a spoken dialogue during an encounter between an I and a Thou. In this vein, Buber asserts that "language presents itself to us above all as the manifestation and apprehension of an actual situation between two or more men who are bound together through a particular being-directed-to-each other."[41] Though one can write without speaking to anyone in particular, and though one may speak silently to oneself, this is only possible because language has come into being as a result of one person calling out to another, speaking to another, engaging another in dialogue. Therefore Buber argues that "language never existed before address; it could become monologue only after dialogue broke off or broke down."[42] The lack of dialogue between people and the tendency to view written language as merely literary, anonymous words on a page is another result of the alienation of modernity. Contrary to this view, Buber argues that "the author... receives his creative force in fief from his partner in dialogue. Were there no more genuine dialogue, there

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[41]Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man*, "The Word that is Spoken," translated by Maurice Friedman and Roland Gregor Smith, New York and Evanston, Harper and Row publishers, 1965, p. 117.

[42]*Ibid.*, p. 115.

would also be no more poetry."[43] Thus, language, both written and spoken, must remain in its essence a phenomenon that "is uttered here and heard there, but its spokenness has its place in 'the between'."[44] By emphasizing the spoken nature of language, Buber is emphasizing the ontological dependance of language on the encounter of an I and Thou as partners in dialogue between whom the word is spoken.

As a hermeneutic device for the interpretation of the Bible, linguistic spokenness holds a central position in Buber's thought, since the "full force is present in the biblical word only when is has retained the immediacy of spokenness."[45] The Bible for Buber is the record of a dialogue between people and God and between people before God. When the prophet encounters God as the eternal Thou, that is, as a partner in dialogue, the 'conversation' is translated by the prophet into human language. The word of the Bible is the commanding word of God transformed into human language through the medium of the subjectivity of the human prophet. For this reason, "it also became possible in the domain of this word for the humanized voice of God, resounding in human idiom and captured in human letters, to speak not *before* us, as does a character in the role of a god in the epiphanies of Greek tragedy, but *to* us.... Untransfigured and unsubdued, the biblical word preserves the dialogical character of living reality."[46] The word of the Bible is thus divine according to Buber, but it is also spoken by the human prophet and can therefore be properly understood only

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[43]*Ibid.*, p. 111.

[44]*Ibid.*, p. 112.

[45]Martin Buber, *On the Bible*, "Biblical Humanism," edited by Nahum N. Glatzer, New York, Schocken Books, 1968, p. 214.

[46]*Ibid.*, pp. 214-15.

as a spoken text, which must not be simply read, but also *heard* by the listener/reader as a personal address. To read the text in silence with purely academic interest would miss the point according to Buber. One must hear the text and its subtle nuances in order to perceive the commanding instruction that the text presents not for the mere perusal of the reader but as a direct and personal address to the listener/reader.

One of the ways in which the significance of the spokenness of the biblical text plays out in Buber's biblical hermeneutics is the idea that the language of *Botshaft*[47] is imbedded in the form of the text and can be discovered through the perception of *Leitworte* or key-words which echo throughout the text and can be discerned only by the attentive listener/reader. *Botshaft*, according to Buber, is bonded into the very form of the biblical text to the point that

> stories like the story of Gideon's son Abimelech, which seem to belong altogether to secular history until we see how the story presents an image of one of the great concerns of *Botshaft*, namely of what is called 'primitive theocracy.' We read legal prescriptions of the driest, the most concrete casuistic precision; and suddenly they breathe out a hidden pathos. We read psalms that seem to be nothing but the cry for help lifted upwards by a man in torment; yet we need only listen carefully to see that the speaker is not just any man but as man standing in the presence of revelation, and witnessing revelation even in his cries and shouts. We read what is ordinarily considered the literature of skeptical wisdom, and in the middle of it great declarations of *Botshaft* blaze out at us. However it fared with certain pieces of the Bible before they entered the sacred text, the Bible as we have it is *Botshaft* in every limb of its body.[48]

In this way Buber argues that one cannot detect *Botshaft* in the text by looking for a statement here

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[47]The term *Botshaft* has no true English equivalent. For our purposes it will be understood as "language when it reveals divine instruction." See Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, translated by Lawrence Rosenwald and Everett Fox, Blomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 27, note 1.

[48]*Ibid.*, pp.27-28.

or there that offers divine instruction while the rest of the text remains devoid of such content. Every part of the Bible contains *Botshaft*, which offers divine instruction in the form of spoken, personal address to anyone who takes the time and effort to *listen* to the text carefully.

As mentioned above, *Leitworte*, or key words, play an important role in the detection of *Botshaft* in the Biblical text. In Buber's own words, *Leitworte* is "a word or word root that is meaningfully repeated within a text or sequence of texts or complex of texts; those who attend to these repetitions will find a meaning of the text revealed or clarified, or at any rate made more emphatic."[49] *Leitworte* allows *Botshaft* to be expressed in the text in such a way that it does not interrupt the form of the text, but rather it becomes part of the form itself. In this connection Buber argues that "without encroaching on the configuration of the narrative, it nonetheless significantly *rhythmicizes* it - by *Leitworte*. A connection is established between one passage and another, and thus between one stage of the story and another - a connection that articulates the deep motive of the narrated event more immediately than could a pinned on moral."[50] It is as though the text of the Bible is in a secret dialogue with itself, and those who perceive this secret dialogue through *Leitworte* are offered a special insight into the divine instruction that the text offers to those who listen carefully.

The spokenness of the text and the careful listening of the reader is so important for the purposes of the detection of *Botshaft* within the text because they are revealed through the rhythm and key-words or motif-words that recur throughout the text, drawing connections between one

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[49]*Ibid.*, p. 114.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 115.

narrative and another, or between different parts of one narrative. The spoken, sounding nature of the text must be understood by the listener/reader, if he or she is to catch the divine message or instruction embedded in the form of the text, whether it be epic narrative, law code or poetry.

One example of the detection of *Botshaft* through careful listening to the rhythm and recurrence of key-words of the text occurs in Genesis 15:16, which is, according to Buber, "intended to impose itself on the memory - not only on the reader's memory, but also, in the purely oral context of the original narrative, on the hearer's."[51] The verse reads: *But in the fourth generation they will return here, for the punishment of the Amorite has not been paid-in-full heretofore.* Buber asks, "what transgression of the Amorite is it that is spoken of so fatefully and at so significant a moment?"[52] Buber points out that in the genealogy, Emori appears as the son of Canaan. In the previous story, which concerns Noah's drunkenness, Canaan is punished for seeing his father's nakedness. Buber argues that "the motif-words of the story are 'the nakedness [*'ervah*] of the father' and 'Canaan' - though Canaan has nothing to do with the event the story tells of."[53] The relevant verse, (Gen. 9:22-23) reads: *Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness... [Shem and Yafet] walked backward, to cover their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned backward, their father's nakedness they did not see.* The only other context in which the phrase "the nakedness of the father" occurs in the Pentateuch is in the legal passages of Leviticus, chapters 18 and 20. Buber maintains that "this is not casual repetition, but the characteristic phonetic-rhythmic or

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[51]*Ibid.*, p. 29.

[52]*Ibid.*

[53]*Ibid.*

paranomasiastic method of the Bible for imprinting a specially important word or sequence of words (important either within the particular text or beyond it) upon the hearer or reader."[54] Buber argues with regard to this passage that the special key phrase "the nakedness of the father" is used to connect the emphatic sexual prohibitions in Leviticus with the story of Noah's drunkenness. The key word "Canaan" is used to connect Genesis 9:22-23 to Genesis 15:16, thereby offering a reason for why the Amorite should be punished. The overall message brought out through the paranomasiastic connections between these different sections of the text is to emphasize the prohibition against certain incestuous sexual relations, lest one end up cursed like Emori, the son of Canaan, the son of Ham, who looked upon his father's nakedness. In this kind of exegesis, the interconnection of texts through word repetition is essential. Furthermore, the *meaning* of the text can only be properly understood in light of the *intertext* created and emphasized by the *Leitworte*. According to Buber, such interconnection is possible only if one recognizes the spokenness of the text and listens carefully while reading.

In his joint venture with Franz Rosenzweig in translating the Bible, Buber made a very deliberate attempt to present the text in German in such a way that the German reader would hear the spokenness of the text and would perceive the key word and phrase repetitions which connect the different parts of the text together and indicate *Botshaft* to the reader. Regarding the intention to represent this in the translation, Buber states that

> we find hints of this great expressive method in other, originally oral Semitic texts; but in the Bible it has been developed to an unparalleled degree, because here each author grew up in the auditory environment of the words that are spoken onward to him; and when his mission touched him, he saw himself called to enter into those words with his own heard

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[54]*Ibid.*

> and spoken offering - to make reference to what had been said, to sounds and words, to link himself as speaker with other speakers in a common linguistic service for the sake of the teaching. That is what Rosenzweig called 'the unaesthetic-superaesthetic of the Bible.' And we had now undertaken to act in its service.[55]

It was Buber's desire that this new German Bible translation would bring the general reader closer to the message and divine instruction of the text. He hoped that the Bible would be read not as a book of mere literary or academic significance but as an address to the listener/reader that would once again grab hold of people and cause them to be engaged by the text and to translate the messaged percieved in it into action in the realm of every day existence. Essentially, Buber wanted people to encounter the Bible as a Thou and to enter into a dialogue with it.[56] He wanted them to hear the dialogue between the different parts of the Bible that any given author echoed in his "common linguistic service for the sake of the teaching."

Buber and Rosenzweig were responding with their Bible translation to the venerated Bible translations, such as the Greek Septuagint, the Latin Vulgate and Luther's German translation. The problem with these translations is that they

> do not aim principly at maintaining the original character of the book as manifested in word choice, in syntax, and in rhythmical articulation. They aim rather at transmitting to the translator's actual community - the Jewish diaspora of Hellenism, the early Christian *oikumene*, the faithful adherents of the reformation - a reliable foundational document. They accordingly carry over the 'content' of the text into another language. They do not *a priori* ignore the peculiarities of its constituent elements, of its structure, of its dynamic; but they easily enough sacrifice those peculiarities when stubborn 'form' seems to hinder the rendering of the 'content.' It is for them as if genuine tidings, genuine speech, genuine

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[55]Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Scripture and Translation*, p. 218.

[56]For an extensive study on the topic of Buber's hermeneutics to which my own work is greatly indebted see Stephen Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1992.

> song contained a What easily detached from their How; as if the spirit of the language could be found elsewhere than in its concrete linguistic configuration, and could be delivered to other times and other places in otherwise than by a faithful and unprejudiced imitation of that configuration...[57]

Here the importance of the form of the Biblical text is emphasized. We have seen above the importance of the textual interconnections made by listening to the formal key phrase similarities of "the nakedness of the father" and "Canaan" for perceiving the divine instruction hidden in the form of the text; hidden, that is, in the intertext. Buber and Rosenzweig's translation attempts to bring out these peculiarities of the text, to free the text from the encumberences of cliche-like familiarity that previous translations had created and that prevent him or her from really listening to the text and feeling addressed by it and obligated to obey the message hidden within it.

So far we have seen how Buber's philosophy of I and Thou relates to the essential spokenness of language. As well, we have seen how the unity and spokenness of the Bible allows Buber to employ *Leitworte* as an interpretative tool that connects different texts with each other in order to express a new meaning or to emphasize an old one. This allows the listener/reader to be able to perceive the *Botshaft* that is implanted into the form of the text and offers divine instruction. As well, we have seen how these considerations have influenced Buber to direct his Bible translation in such a way that the spoken nature of the text and the paranomasiastic connections that echo throughout the various parts of it will be felt by the modern German reader. Ultimately, the intention is to cause the German reader to *hear* the message of divine instruction which the text, as spoken word, offers, and to incorporate this message into everyday life. We will now investigate how the

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[57]*Scripture and Translation*, "On Word Choice in Translating the Bible," p. 74.

idea of dialogue plays out in Buber's concept of prophecy. Finally, we will come full circle and see how this conception of prophecy relates to the spokenness of the biblical text.

We have already alluded to Buber's concept of prophecy above. Prophecy, on Buber's account, is the translation into speech of an encounter between an individual and God that takes place as a dialogue between an I and a Thou, in this case, the prophet and God, or, the eternal Thou. It was mentioned above that a dialogical encounter between an I and a Thou, where the Thou is a Spiritual being "lacks but creates language." Prophecy is just this created language, which is, on Buber's account, a translation into human terms of an actual non-linguistic dialogical encounter between an individual and God. The message is divine, but the words are human. For this reason the Bible "tells us how again and again God addresses man and is addressed by him."[58]

Martin Buber is somewhat unique for maintaining a conception of prophecy that not only regards the language of prophecy as a translation into human language of an encounter between God and man, but also regards the very nature of the prophetic event as *dialogical*. Here the significance of the role of the subjectivity of the prophet comes into play in Buber's thought. In contradiction to some traditional views of the prophet as a mere mouthpiece of God, Buber maintains that the individuality of the prophet comes to bear on the substance of the prophecy itself, since it is more than divine address, but rather, a dialogue between God and man. For Buber it is thus part of the very nature of prophecy that "the revelation, the making of the covenant, the giving of the statutes, was performed by the 'translating' utterance of a mortal man; the queries and requests of the people are presented by the internal or external words of this person; the species of man that bears the word

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[58]Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, "The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth," p. 77.

from above downwards and from below upwards is called *nabi*, announcer."[59] Furthermore, Buber argues that the "'god' who speaks into a person is, so to say, dependant on the *nabi* who speaks out."[60] Thus, prophetic language and literature is permeated through and through with the subjective spirit of the individual who fulfills the role of the *nabi* who translates the words of a divine - human dialogue into human language.

One specific example of this is the personality of Jeremiah. Buber points out that when Jeremiah was asked to become the "mouth" of God (and it should be pointed out that it is very common to find reference of one sort or another to the mouth of the prophet during his call to prophecy)

> not only his mouth however, was required, for this, but his whole personality, his whole personal life. With everything that he had and that was in him, even including the most private things of his life, he was to become a speaker; his most personal lot was to be presented before the people and to express God's concern. His marriage with a 'woman of whorishness,' that is to say a woman whose heart inclines to whoredom, represents the marriage between YHVH and this land, his love which his wife has betrayed represents YHVH's love which Israel has betrayed, his separation from the faithless one the divine separation, his mercy on her God's mercy.[61]

Here Buber brings a convincing example of an instance in which the prophet is not merely used as an instrument for disseminating the word of God to the people. Rather, Jeremiah's entire personality is employed to portray the message of God. In response to critics, Buber argues in such cases that even if there never were such an individual, the fact remains that according to the text itself, the

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[59]Martin Buber, *On the Bible*, "Holy Event," p. 77.

[60]*Ibid.*

[61]Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1949, p. 111.

message of God is represented to the people through both the words of the dialogue between the prophet and God which he translates into human language, as well as through the lived reality of the prophet himself.

The dialogical nature of prophecy is carried over onto another level, which is the dialogue between God and the reader/listener which the text, when read and heard with sincerity, is intended to mediate. Buber points out that "the basic teaching that fills the Hebrew Bible is that our life is a dialogue between the above and below."[62] I have mentioned how, in the final analysis, Buber is concerned with the existential crisis of the modern individual. One of the problems of modern life for Buber is that "in the seemingly God-forsaken space of history, man unlearns taking the relationship between God and himself seriously in the dialogic sense."[63] Buber wants people to recognize the fact that the biblical word, as a product of the dialogue between heaven and earth, calls out to its readers/listeners and demands response. To this end Buber argues that "this is what the biblical word does to us: it confronts us with the human address as one that in spite of everything is heard and in spite of everything may expect an answer."[64] To read the Bible with detached interest would be to once again reduce it to the level of the academic and the literary. Rather, for Buber, the Bible must be read as an address, an opening of a dialogue to the reader in his or her present moment. One must feel addressed by the message of *Botshaft* which the text bears, and furthermore, as a true interlocutor in dialogue, the reader must respond to the message of God found hidden

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[62]Martin Buber, *On Judaism*, "The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth," p. 215.

[63]*Ibid.*, p. 222.

[64]*Ibid.*, p. 224.

within the text through action in the real world, through lived reality. Thus, we have come full circle, and we can now see how the mute and silent text can be transformed, according to Buber, into the living address of God by the individual who hears the word spoken to him or her, perceives the message which God extends through the interconnections and dialogues that take place between parts of the text, and responds to this message and command with action in the lived reality of every day life.

Chapter Three

Before commenting upon the details of Buber's, *Elijah, A Mystery Play,*[65] I will first give a general description of the contents of the play and compare it with the biblical text.

Martin Buber wrote *Elijah* in 1956 and published it in German in 1963. Though at first he was hesitant publish the play because he doubted its merit for live production, he always believed that it had something very important to say about the nature of prophecy, biblical literature, and the relationship between humanity and God.[66] *Elijah* is more than a re-rendering of the biblical text into the format of a modern drama. Buber reorganizes, alters and interprets the text in his dramatic presentation of the narratives concerning the prophet Elijah. As well, much in the manner of a Midrash, he adds material into the gaps in the text, supplying explanations to certain difficulties in the text, as well as new dimensions to portions of the story that may have seemed straightforward. Most of all, *Elijah* provides many working examples of Buber's interpretive techniques described above.

The first scene of *Elijah* is a short conversation between Elijah, the lonely goatherd, and The

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[65]All quotations of *Elijah* are taken from the translation in Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber and the Theater*, New York, Funk and Wagnalls, 1969.

[66]See *Ibid.*, pp.109-10.

Voice. The Voice, which is clearly intended to represent God and is described as emanating from Elijah's own breast, summons him and urges him to go to the royal palace of Israel. At first Elijah resists the Voice, but eventually he complies. This scene appears to be based upon the first two verses of I Kings, which read: *Much later, in the third year, the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go, appear before Ahab; then I will send rain upon the earth." Thereupon Elijah set out to appear before Ahab.* It is interesting to note that, according to the biblical ordering of the texts, this event occurs in the middle of the story. However, in his presentation of the biblical narrative in *Elijah*, Buber rearranges the texts, which admittedly present the reader with chronological difficulties, in a way that he considers to be more plausible.

In the second scene, on his way to the palace, Elijah comes to a temple dedicated to Baal, an ancient Canaanite god. This scene, which is an example of one of Buber's "midrashic" interpolations, has no correlate in the biblical text. Elijah, perhaps as a result of his reclusive and provincial life as a goatherd, fails to recognize the Temple and is unfamiliar with the foreign god. When he stops and asks a peddler of phallic amulets what kind of temple it is, he is taunted by all who hear the question for not knowing something that is to them a basic part of life. The people in front of the temple explain to Elijah that the temple is where the phallic amulets are consecrated. Then they are worn on the breast and stomach in order to help the god Baal succeed in his nuptials, which fertilize the earth. Without replying to the people in front of the temple of Baal, Elijah continues on his way to the royal palace.

In the third scene, Elijah appears at the gate of the palace. He declares to the guards that he has been sent by "Him." They point out that his attire and smell indicate that he is a goatherd and not a priest. Elijah simply replies that "He sends no priest... He does not draw his messengers from

the Temple."[67] The guards still refuse to admit him to the palace, so Elijah smashes their heads together and rushes past them. Once inside, Elijah reveals the red sign on his forehead to indicate his identity as a prophet to the Master of Palace Rites. The Master befriends him and takes him to see the king, in spite of the fact that a delegation of priests of Baal from Tyre is present in the palace.

In the fourth scene, the Master of Palace Rites presents Elijah to king Ahab as his cousin Eljada. Elijah, however, refuses to be disguised and presents himself to the king with his real name and declares to him that he has been sent by Him, and that He demands that the house of Baal be demolished. Ahab tries to explain to Elijah that the God of Israel is done no harm by the presence of Baal in Israel. The Israelite God is a leader, a God of war, while Baal is an agricultural God. Elijah then reiterates his demand that the house of Baal be demolished. Ahab then tries to explain that Baal is the god of Tyre and the political ramifications of such an act would be devastating. Again, Elijah repeats God's demand. Ahab offers a third objection, namely, that Baal is his wife's god. In response, Elijah takes on a more prophetic tone and declares, according to the text of I Kings, 17:1, *As the Lord lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding.* At this point Elijah leaves, and the king, who appears disturbed, asks that the Rememberer be brought in to tell him the story of Joseph and the famine in Egypt. Upon hearing the story, Ahab decides to follow Joseph's example and store up food in anticipation of the famine that Elijah had predicted. As well, he orders that a great feast be made to God and that songs be sung before Him.

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[67]*Ibid.*, p. 117.

In the fifth scene, in accordance with I Kings 17:2-7, Elijah goes to a wadi where ravens bring him food. Buber adds a conversation between two ravens, one young and the other old. The old raven is reflecting on the days of the flood, when the young one expresses skepticism as to whether or not there ever was a flood. The young raven admits that there may have been a flood, but he argues that it is highly unlikely that there could ever have been a flood that covered the entire planet. He bases his argument on the premise that "the longer a memory lasts, the more exuberant it becomes."[68] Elijah then arrives upon the scene, but once he hears that there is a famine in the land, he leaves immediately without eating the food that the ravens had brought for him.

The sixth scene, following I Kings 17:9-15, begins with Elijah complaining to God that he is tired of constantly being sent from place to place without any explanation. God, or The Voice, then commands Elijah to go and speak to a woman whom he sees gathering wood, though He does not tell him what to say. Elijah explains to the woman that he is tired from all of his wandering and that he would like some water. The woman, who is a widow, gives him water and an oil cake. Elijah asks the woman why she and her son do not prepare something for themselves. She says that she has no food left and neither do her neighbors. At this point, Elijah becomes incensed, and he complains to God that he has been a good servant and has done His bidding, and he therefore sees no reason to make loving Him so difficult by starving this poor widow and her fatherless child. Then the widow comes running from the house with a full jug of oil and bushel of grain. Her neighbors come running from their houses with the same news. The scene ends with a quotation from I Kings 17:14, ...*The jar of flour shall not give out and the jug of oil shall not fail until the day*

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[68]*Ibid.*, p. 125.

that the lord sends rain upon the ground.

The seventh scene is an interpretative rendition of the story related in I Kings 17:17-24. In this scene the son of the widow, with whom his is now lodging, grows ill. During his feverish delirium, the boy claims to have seen a robber sitting on the royal throne of Israel. In an attempt to help the boy, Elijah goes outside and paints an amulet on the door of the house to prevent the "destroyer" from harming the boy but it is to no avail, and the boy dies. When Elijah comes back inside and hears the news, he takes the boy and stretches himself over the boy and breathes into his nostrils. Buber then has Elijah quote Gen. 2:7, *And the Lord formed man out of the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.* Finally, the boy is revived.

The Eighth scene begins with Elijah wandering in northern Samaria when he meets Obadaiah, the chief of the royal bodyguards. Obadaiah, who is loyal to the God of Israel and who saved one hundred of the prophets of Israel from queen Jezebel, bows before Elijah. Owadja explains that there is still one young prophet left in Israel. Obadaiah also tells Elijah that he was on an excursion with the king and they had parted so that they could search for something for their horses to eat. Elijah tells Obadaiah that he should return to Ahab and tell him that he has found Elijah, whom the entire court had been looking for since Elijah's visit to the king. Obadaiah is reluctant, because he is afraid that if he tells the king that he has found Elijah, by the time he brings the king to the place where Elijah is, God will have swept him off somewhere else. Elijah assures Owadja that there will be no problem, so the meeting is made. When Ahab and Elijah meet, Ahab calls him "confounder of Israel," in keeping with I Kings 18:17. Elijah then points out how ironic this is, since Ahab was present as a child when his father was anointed king and viceroy of God over

Israel by Ahija, and now it is Ahab himself who has confounded Israel through his faithlessness to the Lord. Elijah then tells Ahab that he will challenge the prophets of Baal on the slope of Carmel.

The ninth scene is a very brief conversation between Ahab and Jezebel. Ahab relates to his wife the challenge put forth by the prophet Elijah and points out that it is inevitable that the gods must challenge each other. Jezebel argues that it is degrading that a great god like Baal should be asked to contend with such a "schoolmaster" as the God of Israel. Ahab, however, points out that the famine still continues and the people are beginning to lose patience with Baal.

The tenth scene begins on a plateau on the slope of Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal are gathered on one side and Elijah on the other. Elijah proclaims to the people that they cannot continue to serve two gods. There is no division between the leadership of the God of Israel and the agricultural gifts of Baal. Everything is within the domain of the Lord, and Baal is nothing but a figment of greed. The time for decision has become. In response, the prophets of Baal proclaim the strength of their God, and accept any challenge that will be placed before them. Elijah says that they shall both assemble animal sacrifices upon piles of wood as offerings to their respective gods. The prophets of Baal are to call out to their god to take their sacrifice, and then he will do the same. The prophets of Baal then call out to their god with wild dance, crying out and self mutilation. This spectacle continues for some time, but the offering is not consumed. Then skipping over the section in the biblical text in which Elijah taunts the prophets of Baal, Buber has Elijah, who was sitting with his head between his knees,[69] stand up and erect an alter with twelve stones that represent the

[69]Assuming this position was a common practice among practitioners of mystical ascent according to certain tracts of the *Heikhalot* literature according to Gershom Scholem, a contemporary of Buber's, in his book *Kabbalah*, New York, Penguin Books USA, 1978, p. 15. Perhaps Buber is trying to indicate the unification of the soul that he believes, as I pointed out in

twelve sons of Jacob. He then has the alter, the wood, and the surrounding trench soaked with water. Elijah offers two short prayers and a fire from heaven descends onto the sacrifice and consumes the wood, animals, stones and even the water in the trench. The mass of people present then prostrate themselves upon the ground and declare "He is the God," echoing I Kings 18:39. Elijah then calls to one of the boys, and they climb together to the summit of the mountain. Elijah, again with his head between his knees, asks to boy to look out in the direction of the sea. The boy says that he sees nothing. Elijah tells him to look seven more times. Finally, the boy says that he sees a small mass of vapor rising from the sea. Elijah then calls down to king Ahab and tells him that rain is coming. At this point the tenth scene ends without including the section related in the Bible, I Kings 18:40, in which Elijah has all of the prophets of Baal killed.

The eleventh scene begins with Elijah visiting Owadja at his country house in Tirza. Obadaiah relates to Elijah the story of how Jezebel went on a rampage through the palace demanding that Elijah be brought to her in chains for what he had done to the prophets of Baal. However, all of her servants had to admit that Elijah had disappeared. As well, all of the servants from Tyre fled. Obadaiah also informs Elijah that Ben-Hadad of Damascus has assembled his forces on the borders of Israel, and Ahab, who is ill prepared for such a military conflict, intends to meet him in battle rather than become a vassal. Elijah then asks about the young prophet Obadaiah had mentioned before. Owadja tells him that the young man's name is Michaia, son of Imlah. Here Buber is giving an identity to a prophetic character who remains anonymous in the biblical account. Elijah asks to see him and subsequently asks Michaia to tell him about himself. Michaia say that when he was

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the section on his philosophy of *I and Thou*, to be a necessary prerequisite for the activity of the soul which meets with the eternal Thou in a dialogical encounter.

young he reflected upon the nation of Israel and realized that the people had never really been faithful to the Lord who brought them out of Egypt. There have always been two groups: those who are faithful and those who follow after other gods. Michaia explains that is what is means to be Israel, wrestling for God. However, the purpose is that there should eventually be one community of the faithful. He explains that he had himself consecrated as a Nazarite, that he abstained from all temptation, and that he committed the ancient holy war songs to memory. The prophets of the Lord took him into their circle, but he refused to have the sign of the prophet placed on him, because the voice of God had never visited him. With his other young comrades he would go into the forest and practice the art of war. Elijah tells Michaia that, in the evening, the troops Ben-Hadad of Damascus has amassed on the border will become drunk. He must then creep up on them with his comrades, bind the soldiers, and carry them away.

The twelfth scene simply related that the campaign was a victory and that Michaia, after the battle, fled again into the woods. This news upsets Elijah, and he proclaims, "Michaia, my poor son."[70]

Buber then skips over the rest of I Kings chapter twenty and turns to chapter twenty one. The thirteenth scene begins with Jezebel and Ahab in the Royal palace. Jezebel reflects how pleasant their life has been since the God of Israel has stopped harassing them ever since "that time when he came off the loser because he had nothing to show but his useless fireworks, while the Baal granted the plea of his servants and ended the drought."[71] This conversation does not take place in the

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[70]*Ibid.*, p. 146.

[71]*Ibid.*

biblical account, but it is an interesting spin on the situation. Jezebel tells Ahab that he should enjoy his power, his beautiful palace and his garden. Ahab, while looking out of an upper window of the palace, then notices a vineyard that juts into the land of the palace garden. He asks his wife why a garden has not been planted there. She explains that the land belongs to a townsman of Jezreel named Nabot and that it should simply be seized by royal edict. Ahab is reluctant to take such action for fear that it would cause dissent among the people. Instead, he asks that Nabot be brought before him and offers to buy the land. Nabot refuses and explains to the king that the land is part of his family's inheritance in the tribe of Manashe from the time when the land was divided up when the Israelites first settled in Canaan. Ahab, somewhat perturbed, dismisses Nabot.

The fourteenth scene is a conference between Jezebel and the elders of Jezreel. Jezebel lies to the elders and tells them that she has heard a rumor that Nabot has spoken slander against the king. The elders, afraid to contradict Jezebel, say that he may have made a few comments about the heavy taxes, but they are not certain. Jezebel, however, is convinced that the evidence proves that Nabot is guilty of slander. The punishment for such slander, the elders reluctantly agree, is stoning and the confiscation of property.

The fifteenth scene depicts Ahab gladly walking through his new garden, which his wife Jezebel has deviously acquired for him. Suddenly, Elijah appears and condemns Ahab and his wife as thieves and murderers. Then, as mysteriously as he appears, he vanishes.

In the sixteenth scene Buber returns to chapter 19:9-18 of I Kings. Elijah, alone in a cave on mount Sinai, asks to die. An angel appears and tells Elijah that no creature may die in this holy

place. The angle ascends and there is a great wind and Elijah says "You are not in the storm."[72] Then there is and earthquake, but again Elijah says, "You are not in the earthquake."[73] Then there is a fire and Elijah says, "You are not in the fire."[74] Then there is silence, and in this silence there comes a soft voice which, as in the first scene, speaks from the breast of Elijah. The Voice explains to Elijah that it is not his time to die. He must return to appoint a prophet to take his place.

The seventeenth scene, following the biblical account in 19:19-27, shows a tall peasant named Elisha plowing with some other peasants. Elisha, while talking to his friends, says that soon the Lord will appoint kings who will kill all those who have served Baal in their hearts. At this point, Elijah walks up behind Elisha and throws his hairy mantle over him. Elisha gets up and runs after Elijah and asks for a moment to kiss his parents goodbye. Elijah acts as though he has done nothing that constitutes a call to service, but Elisha understands the situation otherwise. He calls to his friends and tells them to eat the oxen if they want, for he has been called.

The Eighteenth scene is a short conversation between Elijah and Elisha that expands upon the theme of I Kings 19:17. Elijah tells Elisha it will be his job to chastise the people with the sword, while king Hasael in Domascus and king Jehu in Samaria do the same. Then, God will make a covenant with a faithful remnant of the people.

The nineteenth scene relates the second part of chapter twenty two. Ahab, king of Israel, and Jehosophat, king of Judah, are sitting on their thrones on the threshing room floor, and they have

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[72]*Ibid.*, p. 152.

[73]*Ibid.*

[74]*Ibid.*

summoned all of the prophets so that they might question the Lord as to whether or not they will be victorious if they attack Aram in order to win back Gilead. When asked, the prophets, obviously court prophets who are afraid to say anything negative, speak in unison and give a positive answer. Jehosophat asks if there is a free prophet of the Lord whom they might ask. Ahab explains that he and his wife had all of the free prophets killed. Owadja, however, says that he knows of one who lives in the forest and is recording the old war psalms form the time of the Judges. Owadja then brings this prophet, who turns out to be Michaia, and asks him to prophecy before the king. Michaia prophecies that the king will lose the battle. Ahab becomes angry and has Michaia put in prison. As he is being taken out, Michaia tells Ahab that he will not survive the battle.

The twentieth scene takes place in the battle for the fortress of Ramah, which the king decides to attempt in spite of Michaia's warning. King Ahab is on his chariot with his driver and shield bearer. He has dressed himself in common armor, so that he would have an easier time making his way through the crowd to kill Ben-Hadad. But, in the heat of the battle, a stray arrow hits the king in his side. Ahab leans back against his shield bearer, only to find out that he is actually Elijah. Elijah tells the king that neither he (Elijah) nor the Lord is his (the king's) enemy, and that, since he must die, God has had mercy upon him for his sins. The King asks for a song, and Elijah quotes Ps. 23, *The lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing...* Then, the king dies, and the driver calls out, "king Ahab is dead - everyone to his city, everyone to his province, the king is dead!"[75] The army retreats.

In the twentyfirst scene, Elisha and his men are waiting with Elijah near Jericho for news

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[75]*Ibid.*, p. 160.

from the battle in the north. Owadja comes and tells them that, when the news reached the servants of Jezebel that the king was dead, two of them forced their way into the prison and strangled Michaia. Elijah orders that everyone mourn the death of Michaia. Owadja also informs them that the papyrus script on which he had been recording the holy war psalms was destroyed. Michaia's brethren, referred to as Sons of the Prophets, point out that the songs are not lost, since they too know how to recite them.

The twenty-second scene takes place on the edge of the Jordan river. Elijah tells Elisha that it is time for him to depart. Elijah blesses Elisha and tells him that the prophet's task is a difficult and lonely one, but that he will succeed since he has developed obedience to his own spirit. Elisha finally walks away form Elijah, but then he turns around and declares, "a fiery chariot ascends to the firmament. My father, my father, Israel's carriage and its cavalry!"[76]

The twenty-third and final scene takes place with Elijah on the other shore of the Jordan a short time after his parting with Elisha. The Voice calls to him and tells him that he will be taken up into heaven a living body. God assures Elijah that His loving kindness will surround him. Elijah explains that though he will bask in the glory of the Lord, he will never forget the poor souls on earth. Since he has always been a wanderer and a messenger for the Lord, Elijah asks that he be allowed to continue to wander for the lord and help people in need. The Lord grants him his request.

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[76]*Ibid.*, p. 163.

Chapter Four

Martin Buber's *Elijah* contains many examples of how his views on prophecy, the importance of dialogue, the spokenness of the biblical text, and the oral development of the text of the Bible play out in an actual interpretation of a section of text. As well, we can see how his views on the nature of paganism and its conflicts with ancient Israelite religion come to bear on his understanding of this narrative. It is my intention in this section to discuss the parts of *Elijah* that touch upon these issues and to describe how they are connected to Buber's ideas about biblical studies as I have described them in Chapter One and Two.

The first issue in *Elijah* that I would like to discuss is revelation. As mentioned above, Buber's conception of prophecy is that it is a translation into human terms of a non-linguistic dialogue between God and prophet. Thus, it makes sense that in the play the "soft, distinct Voice" of God actually comes out of Elijah himself, since the Voice is really Elijah's voice translating into human language the dialogical encounter between himself and God. In the sixth scene, Elijah describes his call to prophecy in this way: "Into my mouth, opened by sleep, your breath passed. And you spoke into me, not into my ear but into my throat, and out of my throat it shouted. 'Taken into service, into service! Guard yourself, guard yourself well! You stand in the service of the

Lord!'"[77] Here it is clear that Buber's understanding of the text and its reformulation are influenced by this conception of prophecy.

Moreover, throughout the play, Elijah, though he is a "faithful servant," does not always accept the command of God without protest. In the first scene, he is reluctant to follow the command of the Voice. He declares "You cannot compel me," and the Voice replies, "I cannot compel you."[78] Thus, in the true spirit of dialogue, both sides are free to decide if they wish to act or speak. Elijah is a faithful servant, not because he is forced to obey the commanding voice of God that issues from his own breast, but because he chooses to. In our discussion of *I and Thou*, it was emphasized that all true encounter and dialogue between an I and a Thou necessarily involves reciprocity. We can see how the combination of Buber's conception of the reciprocity of dialogue and his idea of the dialogical nature of prophecy come to bear on his understanding of the text, when he depicts Elijah crying out and protesting against God in the sixth scene when the Widow and the Boy run out of food, and in the seventh when the Boy dies.

It is significant that Baal does not speak in human language, even through the mouth of a prophet. In a letter he wrote to Werner Kraft on March 3, 1963,[79] Buber argues that Baal "did not know how to say anything other than to praise his palace and the like. He is quite simply the anti-dialogical god, the enemy of speech, the enemy of all contact that was not possession." There is no reciprocity in the relationship between Baal and his worshippers. In terms of Buber's philosophy

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[77]*Ibid.*, p. 129.

[78]*Ibid.*, p. 115.

[79]See Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*, Vol. 3, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1988, p. 461.

of dialogue, the relationship between humanity and Baal is I-It. This discords strongly with the I-Thou relationship Buber perceives between Israel and God, and especially between prophet and God. In the play, this conflict is articulated by the Spokesman for the prophets of Baal when he says: "Baal the Mighty does not make speeches to his servants, as you report of your God. Through all kinds of contact he communicates to us both his will and his favor. We call to him, of course, just in the manner of men, but he answers us without sound. You prophets of Israel imagine you can speak with gods as if they were men."[80] Here the conflict between the means of relating to Baal and God is underscored. As well, this example shows a clear influence of Buber's ideas concerning the dialogical, spoken nature of language and prophecy on his formulation of *Elijah*.

Elijah engages himself in a dialogical encounter with God, but he also brings the people of Israel into dialogue with Him, from whom they had strayed by worshiping Baal as a fertility god. In his *The Prophetic Faith*,[81] Martin Buber discusses the nature of the conflict between YHWH and Baal. At the time of the covenant, "YHWH's Power and influence to cover all departments of life was solemnly proclaimed,"[82] but the actual acceptance of this idea into the minds and hearts of the Israelite people after settlement in the land took place over a long period. The problem was that there was "*one* sphere which by its very nature was opposed to the nature of the God coming into Canaan. This is the central sphere in the existence of the primitive peasant: the secret of the fertility of the ground, the astonishing phenomenon, from the discovery of which the invention of agriculture

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[80]*Elijah*, p. 139.

[81]Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith*, London, Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1949.

[82]*Ibid.*, p. 71.

springs."[83] Baal was the Canaanite god of fertility whom the Israelite people discovered already in the land when they came to settle it. The fertility of the land was a matter of direct perception that the common belief of the ancient Near East attributed to the success of the copulation of fertility gods, such as Baal, with their paramours, such as Baalath. Ancient Canaanite practice went so far as to institute ceremonial orgies to help bring about the success of the nuptials of the gods and thereby fertilize the land. This idea found its way into the ancient Israelite psyche and existed alongside their faith in God. When the Israelites worshiped foreign pagan deities, it was not because they no longer believed in God, but because they thought that He was not concerned with agricultural matters. That is, they fell into a compartmentalised theology that designated seperate realms for seperate deities. Regarding this Buber states that "in the hour of adversity and hostile attack they turn to Him and devote themselves to His well-tried leadership, but in matters of peasants' secrets and charms they cannot of course turn to the ancient nomad deity."[84] God, when understood as the nomad deity and leadership deity, remained the god of the people as a whole, the god to whom they turned in a time of crisis, and, for this reason, "the community on the whole was able to regard itself as remaining the congregation of YHWH,"[85] but the secret of fertility was believed to be a separate realm which rightly fell under the auspices of Baal. This theme is brought out clearly in the play when Elijah goes to the royal palace to speak to king Ahab in the fourth scene. The king argues that the house of Baal need not be demolished, because "no injury is done to the Lord...He is a great God.

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[83]*Ibid.*, p. 71.

[84]*Ibid.*, p. 73.

[85]*Ibid.*, p. 74.

He has led us here out of Egypt. He is a great leader. He does not occupy himself with agriculture. That is what Baal is here for."[86] Elijah criticizes the king especially for holding this opinion in accordance with Buber's idea of the Israelite king as the holy anointed emissary of God.

Buber is quick to point out that not all of the people in ancient Israel felt this way. The "faithful YHWH worshippers recognize the incompatibility between the nature of YHWH and the nature of the Baal."[87] It was inevitable, historically speaking, that there would come a point when there would be a recognized conflict between YHWH and Baal. The people could not serve both YHWH and Baal without eventually compromising His sovereignty and all encompassing omnipotence which his zealous supporters adamantly maintained. The essence of Buber's anthropological understanding of good and evil[88] is that evil is the affirmation of indecisiveness. During the time of Elijah, this brand of evil had become virulent, and the incompatibility of the natures of Baal and YHWH had come to a head. This conflict is, according to Buber, the essence of the story of Elijah, and for this reason he argues that

> the rallying cry, 'YHWH versus Baal,' is necessarily intended to shake the religious foundation of west-Semitic agriculture: the sexual basis of the fertility mystery, hidden in the meeting of water and earth, must be abolished... This - if translated from the language of *Faith* itself into the language of the *history* of faith - is in essence the core of the testimony of the story about Elijah the Tishbite.[89]

This concept comes out clearly in the play in the dramatic tenth scene during the context on Mount

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[86]*Elijah.*, p. 120.

[87]*The Prophetic Faith*, p. 75.

[88]See Martin Buber, *Good and Evil*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.

[89]*Ibid.*, p. 76.

Carmel. Buber places an impassioned speech in the mouth of Elijah in which, basing himself on I Kings 18:21, he says:

> How much longer will you try to hop along on two twigs at once, like the bird that has hopped beyond the fork in the bough?... You cannot serve God and the idols at the same time. He from whom alone the blessing of the upper and the nether powers comes, He, the Lord, does not share might with nothingness... It is time to choose between God and Baal."[90]

For this reason, Buber portrays Elijah the wonderer and nomad as the representative of the God who lead the wandering, nomadic people of Israel out of Egypt and now demands exclusive fidelity.

The time had come to demonstrate once and for all that every realm, including that of the fertility of the ground, is within the purview of God's power. However, the question remains, "how can this be done without perverting His own nature? The Canaanite soil cultivation is linked with apparently unbreakable bonds of tradition to sexual myths and rites; whereas YHWH by His uncompromising nature is altogether above sex."[91] According to Buber's understanding, the acceptance of the power of God in matters of agriculture necessarily involves the de-sexualization of the mystery of fertilization. In the introduction, we discussed the passage about the drunkenness of Noah and its paranomasiastic connections to the texts which deal with cursedness of the Ammorite and the legal prohibitions against sexual indiscretion through the key-word repetition of the phrase "the nakedness of the father" and "Canaan." Buber's understanding of the text is that these repetitions are intended to warn against prohibited sexual acts. Since it is mainly Canaanite influence that lead the Israelites to the highly sexual worship of Baal, Buber sees this text as "one

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[90]*Elijah*, pp. 137-38.

[91]*The Prophetic Faith*, p. 75.

of the pieces of evidence showing how deeply interwoven into the *composition* of the Hebrew Bible - work on which began not in post-exilic times but in the period of the kings[92] - is the protest against the worship of the Baal."[93] In this way Buber's understanding of these texts through key-word analysis influences his understanding of the conflict of the Elijah story and his presentation of it in the play as one between the omnipotent YHWH and the earthly, sexual Baal.

Buber's conception of myth and the mythical nature of the ancient Israelite psyche also comes to bear on his understanding and presentation of the story. Historically speaking, Buber maintains that there most certainly was a real conflict in the time of Elijah between those who worship YHWH and Baal and those who worship YHWH alone. After great turmoil, the people, "in acknowledging the sole leadership of YHWH thereby acknowledge that the power of sexual magic is broken."[94] The miraculous spectacles, such as the contest on Mount Carmel and the revivification of the boy, are mythical images intended to convey the message that God reigns supreme and holds sway over all of the forces of nature. Interestingly enough, Buber does not de-mythologize these elements of the story in his play. This would seem to be associated with the fact that he believes the myth to be the appropriate form of expression of such history for ancient Israelite society. In fact, in accordance

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[92]Much recent research substantiates this claim, especially the argument that since the Samaritans have a text which is very similar to the Pentateuch, and in fact, seems to be an expanded version of a text very similar if not identical to the Massoretic text, and since we know from the biblical account that the relations between the Samaritans and the Judeans (for lack of a better term) were very bad after the return from the Babylonian exile, it is reasonable to assume that the Pentateuch existed in a form quite similar to the Massoretic version we possess to day long enough before the destruction of the first temple to allow for the text to circulate as an authoritative document among the general population.

[93]*Ibid.*, p. 73.

[94]*Ibid.*, p. 79.

with this conception of the Israelite mode of expression, Buber even adds some mythic elements of his own. For instance, the conversation between the young and old ravens has a mythic flavor to it. The content of the conversation as well, for instance, when the young raven says that the longer a memory lasts, the more embellished it tends to become, is actually an expression of Buber's own theory that myths preserve an historical core, yet assume a more poetic medium of expression. Another example is found in the sixth scene, when Elijah, complaining to God about the difficulty of his lot as His wandering herald, expresses himself by saying: "gigantic beaks seize hold of my girdle, at the right and at the left of my girdle, and carry me away through the high air to this place into this strangest of strange places. Why away? Why hither?"[95] Buber places this mythic expression into the mouth of Elijah not simply for dramatic affect, but because this is the best way to understand the expressiveness of ancient Israel.

Another aspect of Buber's biblical studies that finds unique expression in *Elijah* is his view on the origin of the biblical text. Recall that Buber maintains that the written composition of many parts of the Bible took place only after many years of oral transmission. In the play, Michaia and his comrades all know the ancient war songs from the time of the Judges, and Michaia even tries to commit them to writing while in the king's dungeon. As well, in the fourth scene, after Elijah has been to see the king to tell him that a drought is coming, the king asks that the Rememberer come in and tell him the story of Joseph. The Rememberer recites the story, which is in poetry rather than prose, and is a truncated, less mythical rendition of the account in Genesis, *aloud* and from *memory*. Here again, Buber's conviction that the Bible text had originated orally and was meant to be spoken

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[95]*Elijah*, p. 127.

and *heard* comes to bear on his presentation of the story.

According to Buber, one result of the spoken and heard nature of the text is that it connects itself via word and phrase repetition to other parts of the text, thereby revealing *Botshaft* through a kind of secret dialogue between different parts of the text. In *Elijah,* Buber makes many allusions to other parts of the Bible in a similar way. In the last example, we saw that the story of Joseph was recalled by the king, probably as a result of the recurrence of theme words like "drought" and "famine." Another example of intertextuality established through paranomasia occurs in the fifteenth scene, where Queen Jezebel is questioning the elders about Nabot. One of the elders said that he had heard Nabot's son recite to him something he had heard from his father about the king of Israel:

> He will take your sons
> and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen,
> and to plow his land,
> to make his implements of war and his wagons.
> And he will take your fields, your vineyards, your olive trees,
> the best of them,
> you yourselves shall become his servants.
> **The First (elder)** (severely). You have obviously remembered the saying well. But you probably do not know that is a saying of Samuel the prophet from the time of the united kingdom.
> **The Other** (embarrassed). Well now yes, an old saying, as I already said.[96]

Buber is convinced that messianism results when the Israelite kingship, the anointed leader appointed to rule as an intermediary of God, fails in its mission and causes a sense of despair and historical disillusionment among the people. This failure of the Israelite kings in general, and Ahab in particular, to fulfil its obligations as the office of the holy, anointed leader of God, seems to be the point that Buber is trying to emphasize here by connecting the saying quoted above, which is a

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[96]*Elijah*, p. 150.

condensed version of the warning which Samuel issues to the people in I Sam. 8:11-18. The key-word that is repeated and seems to tie these texts together is "vineyard," that is the "vineyard" of Nabot and the "vineyards" that the king, according to the saying in Samuel, the king is going to take away and give to his servants in a manner unbecoming to God's anointed leader. It is also significant that this intertextual connection is made by an anonymous elder who knew the quote not as a text but as an old, *orally transmitted* saying. Here again Buber seems to be drawing on his claim that the Bible is really spoken literature and that, as a result of this, formal connections through word repetition were commonly made.

Conclusion

This study reveals the organic nature of Buber's work. His biblical studies cannot be separated from his philosophical work. Moreover, I believe that such connections between Buber's own works are necessary in order to understand them fully. Just as Buber claims that the Bible can be properly understood only in an intertextual way, I believe the same principle applies to his own writings. We have seen how Buber's philosophy of dialogue as presented in *I and Thou* plays an essential role in understanding his formulation of the nature of biblical prophecy, namely, that prophecy is a translation into human language of an essentially non-linquistic event, an I-Thou encounter between God and the prophet. This conception of prophecy is as novel as it is radical. On the one hand, Buber's position contrasts strikingly with the traditional model of prophecy whereby revelation itself consists of language or a vision. Accoding to Buber, the language of a given prophecy is the prophet's own words. However, Buber's notion of prophecy also diverges from the perspective and assumptions of many of his contemporaries in that he ultimately attributes the origin of prophecy and the *Botshaft* that can be detected from its echoes to a divine source rather than human invention. As well, we have seen how the resulting spoken nature of the biblical word, when understood as the subjective translation into human terms of a non-linguistic dialogue between

the prophet and the Eternal Thou, lays the foundation for Buber's exegetical device of *Leitworte*. Moreover, we have seen how Buber maintains that the ethical/religious message, the *Botshaft*, is revealed through the detection of intertextual connections created by *Leitworte* and perceived by the reader who *listens* to the text and is sensitive to its spoken nature. That is to say, the meaning of the text lies between the lines; it is intertextual. This novel development alone in Buber's work reveals the originality of his project.

Ultimately, it is this *Botshaft* that provides the divine instruction to the reader in his or her moment. It is this message that addresses the existential plight of spiritual loneliness that Buber describes in *I and Thou*. Through this strikingly post-modern kind of exegesis, Martin Buber attempts to read and to rewrite the Bible in such a way that he reveals the religious message of the intertext to the contemporary world.

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