Shibboleth into Silence:
A Commentary on Presence in the Hebrew Bible

by Eddie Paul
Student # 8117937

Thesis submittted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree Master of Arts in English, McGill University.

August 1991

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Amelia Kalant, for letting me sleep full nights once again, without telephone queries about margins and texts. (cf. acknowledgements: The Politics of Dissonance,)

Thanks to Louise Fabiani for constant reminders that silence has blessings outside the anthropocentic world.

In 1979, Reb Reuben Hineni invited the possibility that a dialogue with the Book might be a good way to spend a life. Thanks to him for enspiriting this textual encounter, and thanks to Fran Gorbet who has looked into the face of suffering and taught me that it can be healed.

My thanks to Esther Harduby of Weston, Vermont for Sabbaths bathed in warmth, whose home became a cathedral for awhile. And to Rabbi P. Cohen wherever he might be, for renewing ancient dialogues in Montreal, Swanton, and Weston.

And to my parents, Florence and Rubin Paul, who have sustained me through some of the hardest times.

This work is dedicated to Elie Wiesel, his tikkun olam and his search in reclaiming the Sabbaths of his childhood.

10 Av 5750
Lake Danaiva, P.Q.

Abstract

In the Hebrew Bible, literary patterns of revelation and concealment are based on humanity's initial encounter with God in the Garden of Eden. God asks the question "Where are you?" Adam and Eve reveal themselves by articulating their concealment behind the fig leaf. This paradox effects their exile from Eden, and their progeny must henceforth mediate this paradox in their future verbal intercourse with God.

It is the intention of this work to suggest how in certain textual passages, this paradox is defined and structured according to a literary dichotomy of language and silence. After the exile, biblical characters proclaim their presence before God by uttering a password ("Here I am") which is, in effect, an existential utterance of dialogic reconstruction. Through various literary devices, I hope to show how this "vertical" dialogue is re-established by Adam and Eve's progeny, and how the biblical narrator(s) uses language to show silence as a "phenomenon" of the word.

Abstracte

La Bible Hébreu amène une paradigme litteraire de la révélation et dissumulation dans le premier dialogue entre Adam at Dieu en Genèse 3. Dieu demande "Où est tu?" et une paradoxe se présente: Adam et Eve sont devoilé en articulant leurs dissimulation. (J'ai entendu ta voix dans le jardin, et j'ai eu peur car j'étais nu, et je me suis caché.") Ils sont déplacés du jardin, donc, leurs progéniture héritent la paradoxe quand ils parlent avec Dieu.

C'est l'intention de ce travail de suggerer comment cette paradoxe fonctionne d'après un motif littéraire: la juxtaposition entre la parole et le silence. Après l'exil, les sujets bibliques proclament leurs présence en disant: "Voilà, me voici", en effet, un shibboleth ou "mot de passe". En utilisant une méthodologie littéraire, je voudrais démontrer comment la dialogue "verticale" est reconstruit, et comment le narrateur biblique présente la dialogue comme un "phénomène" de la parole.

they dragged me out into
the middle of the market,
that place
where the flag unfurls to which
I swore no kind of allegiance...

Heart.
here too reveal what you are,
here, in the market.
Call the shibboleth, call it out
into your alien homeland:
February. No pasaran

"Shibboleth"
- Paul Celan

I. INTRODUCTION

Silence: Boundaries and (Definition?)

To determine a definition of silence, particularly as it impinges on an understanding of the Bible as a literary text, is much like trying to ascertain whether the water contained inside the glass renders the glass half-empty or half-full: the act of literary interpretation must first demonstrate that the impossible can be done, before parsing the shape and status of the vessel which holds the impossibility within it.

In a broad sense, silence can be said to represent what is implicit in the text, what is not explicitly stated by a character but what might be deduced through a close reading of the words the character does speak, ie, what is implicit. Occasionally, a character will choose to act instead of speak, and the deed becomes a surrogate word, something articulated but not necessarily spoken. In fact, silence happens even when characters speak to one another; this happens repeatedly in the Bible, and finds excellent expression in the book of Jonah. As God calls for Jonah to prophesy to Nineveh, Jonah's low self-esteem does not measure up to God's perception of him, and the entire book recounts Jonah's retreat into the extended belly of his own lonely silence. God causes the belly to distend itself, and Jonah is vomited forth from this silence with an understanding of dialogic retreat. What the antagonist

understanding of dialogic retreat. What the antagonist usually understands as his own weakness or lack of understanding becomes the narrator's way of articulating a breach in the communicable word, a word which always begins with God's own involvement with language.

When I speak of silence as a subject for literary discourse, I do not refer exclusively to that point at which language or words come to a stop. Rather, I would argue that language is an ironic event of concealment, and silence becomes an equally ironic mode of revelation. The Bible is an elaborately-constructed manual for the game of hide-and-seek, and it is through a dichotomy of language and silence that this drama unfolds as a document of ironic literary magnitude.

Words in the Biblical text are shaped by the imagination of the narrator (or those narrators) who transcribed the narrative to the written text; as I repeatedly point out in this work, scholars concur that the ancient Hebrew understanding of language was quite different from our own. As Abraham Heschel points out,

> There is no equivalent for the word "thing" in Biblical Hebrew. The word dabar, which in later Hebrew came to denote thing, means in Biblical Hebrew speech, word, message, report, tidings, advice, request, promise, decision, sentence, theme, story, saying, utterance, business, occupation, act, good deed, event, way, manner, reason, cause -- but never "thing". Is this a sign of linguistic poverty, or rather an indication of an unwarped view of the world, of refusing to equate reality (derived from the Latin word res, thing) with thinghood?[1]

If language were understood as an event, not something exclusively existing as a symbolic representation of reality, then could it not be argued that silence is an eventuality, an ultimate result that identifies that which language is capable of? As a subject for literary discourse, I understand silence as the anagogic referent of language. If by anagogic we refer to the allegorical, spiritual or mystical aspect of a text, then silence assumes a category of meaning in which the entirety of Biblical language directs itself. I would suggest that language is a bridge hanging over silence, its existence contingent on the fissure that necessitates its initial construction.

This work does not claim to be an inventory of moments in which silence has thematic or metaphorical importance, but rather attempts to illuminate how silence functions as an ironic phenomenon in certain designated Biblical passages. My criteria for these selected passages will be established later in this chapter.

Heschel demarcates silence in the following way:

> One, the abstinence from speech, the absence of sound. Two, inner silence, the absence of self-concern, stillness. One may articulate words in (his) voice and yet be inwardly silent. One may abstain from uttering any sound and yet be overbearing.[7]

It will become evident over the course of this work, that I am more interested in Heschel's second remark (absence of self-concern), since this provides silence with its irony, in relation to the passages I have selected for

commentary. It is to be the antagonist's existential statement of presence before God: "Here I am" which will prove the antagonist's selfless subjection to God's word.

Translation and Methodology

In The Great Code, Northrop Frye justifies his use of the Authorized Version on the grounds that it has provided the greatest mythological landscape upon which English literature has been based. He also implies that the AV is comfortable for him, since the critic and Christian humanist (in his case) can make no claim to be mutually exclusive. Fair enough. [3] But my quarrel with his argument is that he does not take it far enough. Frye does not present translation as an issue at all; for him, translation does not have a life outside the act of reading. Any translation that calls itself Authorized indicates a political point of view, implicitly suggesting that unauthorized versions (those not authorized to be read as part of the liturgy) are dominated by principles of exclusion. Frye implies through his choice of translations, that consensus is the determining factor in selecting an appropriate version of the Bible. Whether it ought to be or not, is a question Frye chooses to ignore entirely.

The original text, as it was finally written down after centuries of oral transmission, holds no authority over its ensuing reception and translation, but rather extends itself

to all who wish to participate in an encounter with it. An ancient rabbinic gloss on Joshua 8:32, suggests that Joshua inscribed a copy of the Torah in seventy different languages according to the number of nations to have existed in the world. The text was universally transcribed so as not to exclude anyone: translation therefore becomes an act of scribal hospitality in which the rabbis attempt to soften Joshua's conquest of Canaan along with the forced displacement of its inhabitants.

Implications of Historicgraphy

> Rabbi Nachman had a special dish which he used for the Sabbath loaves. It had belonged to his own master Rabbi Lev of Grenoble and it occupied a prominent place in his home. Once a student of Rabbi Nachman's who was admiring the dish let it drop to the floor where it broke into pieces. The student was so upset he could barely apologize." It was so beautiful," he said, "it was so beautiful."
>
> Rabbi Nachman replied, "It's still beautiful, only now it's in pieces." [4]

It is possible that reading a canonized text does not let anyone escape from the feeling of being accused by its closure. But the text can never know how it will be translated, and cannot know the extent of responsibility that accompanies its reception and interpretation.

I do not wish to devote much space on the Bible's historiography, but two points should be made: the words in the original Hebrew were never initially written separate from one another, and its diacritical marks, vowels, and punctuation were only added during the time of the Masoretes

(8th-9th century CE) It was also about this time, that the Bible was transferred from a scroll to a codex, and this obviously determined the way the text could be read. The Masoretes emended the fragments that were handed down, ordered them, and the Hebrew Bible as we have it today is based on the Masoretic text. The difference in Judaism manifests when the Torah is read in synagogue; the scroll is still written without any vowels. The resonance of pre-exile Bible reading has been kept, but exile is subconsciously enacted because the words are divided. Recollection takes place because without the vowels, there is a reading done quite literally with the body, memorizing where each breath must occur in any given word. Already this motion gives activity to a reading, a deliberate and conscious presence of body and voice -- and because we are reading from a scroll there can be no tangible cross-referencing with other passages. Turning the page is an impossibility; for the ancient reader, the drama of reading is underscored by the particularity of the season or liturgical cycle. Like time, the narrative unrolls, it does not get bracketed and indexed.

Commentary and Interpretation:

Translation as Methodology

George Steiner locates the nexus of translation and interpretation. The identification of the two already makes

translation as a problem suspect, because in attempting to interpret silence in the Bible, I have already translated it into language. Like language, interpretation becomes a reflection of what it is referring to. According to Steiner, interpretation is "that which gives language life beyond the moment and place of immediate utterance and transcription."[5] If I am trying to give life to silence, a life that already exists beyond moment and place, then is not interpretation a redundancy? Can I call my reading of the Bible something other than interpretation, without risking the legitimacy of reading this text for a department of English literature?

As the title of this work suggests, I am compelled to do away with the word altogether and use a French substitution that approaches my methodology in a form consonant with content. Commentary is a word whose resonance allows the reader to participate in the text as a character taking part in the dramatic action. Steiner contends that the interpreter stands at a distance, "The critics lives at second hand. He writes about." [6] As a commentary to the Bible, a prepositional difference marks itself from an interpretation of the text. If I were to give my methodology a name, it might approach something called rabbinic.

> As creation is considered to be a continuous and unified process, so is the Torah and so its interpretation. The world of time and space is connected to realms beyond time and space through Torah, and every verse, letter, and so on contains, therefore, a plurality of meanings and references.

> Applicable not only to Biblical time and place, but to all time and places. Through proper interpretation, then, the application and meaning for any contingency is revealed. Thus interpretation is not essentially separate from the text itself-- an external act intruded upon it -- but rather the extension of the text, the uncovering of the connective network of relations, a part of the continuous revelation of the text itself: at bottom, another aspect of the text.[7]

Since the Bible was orally transmitted, translation becomes an issue once language ceases to be an event and assumes an existence on the written page. In the context of a rabbinical dialogue that spans generations and locations, there can be no such thing as commentary outside the text. Contemporary critics of deconstruction take this for granted in all texts, but its implication addresses the threshold we enter when translation is considered an issue for discourse. If translation can itself be considered a commentary, then it too becomes an extension of the text. When the Masoretes ordered and emended the text, already a fragmentation of the text was taking place. God creatively unites through division, man creatively divides through fusion. There is always the risk of turning a Biblical commentary into something other than itself by using multiple translations; if the fragments are to remain "beautiful," I run the danger of climbing onto a rung where the fragments can only be reduced to dust; the text has to remain decipherable, even if my commentary becomes incoherent.

It was Walter Benjamin, influenced by the Kabbalistic work of Scholem, who claimed that fragments can only be

reduced to a size where they can no longer be broken anymore. In "The Task of the Translator," translating a sacred text is an issue which puts linguistic translation at the forefront of the problem.

> Just as, in the original, language and revelation are one without any tension, so the translation must be one with the original in the form of the interlinear version, in which literalness and freedom are united. For to some degree all great texts contain their potential translation between the lines; this is true to the highest degree of sacred writings. The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translations. [8]

Undoubtedly Benjamin was familiar with the kabbalistic notion of concealed language: the white spaces in between the black letters represent an as yet undecipherable code, where messianic time will raise us to a higher understanding. Literary ambiguity is traced metaphorically, where reading between the lines is the only sure way to cross over the barriers of trans-linguistic comprehension. In any event, the interlinear translation subjects syntax to grammatical attrition, and we are compelled to read a fragmentary language because the text loses all linguistic sense.

This returns me to familiar land: the Bible becomes an anagogic shibboleth, not without meaning but certainly concealed without an appropriate bodily pronunciation. In other words, reading a translation ingathers my capacity to be in silence before I can begin to act upon my reading. Reading a refractured text carries with it an ambiguous

exile. In his commentary on Benjamin's essay, Paul de Man suggests the extent to which Benjamin's ideas were shaped by his Judaism:

> The movement of the original is a wandering, an errance, a kind of permanent exile if you wish, but it is not really an exile, for there is no homeland, nothing from which one has been exiled...That there is a nonhuman aspect of language is a perennial awareness from which we cannot escape, because language does things which are so radically out of our control that they cannot be assimilated to the human at all, against which one fights constantly. [9]

Translation becomes an Abrahamic sojourning, in which I believe, de Man has properly situated Benjamin's stance. If air is a conscious commodity for the asthmatic in a moment of seizure, then the white spaces between the lines become a source of sustenance for the Biblical commentator. De Man perceives a tension in Benjamin, in how the translatability of a text can only be determined if one knows its origin and can name it. For the Bible, origin is the silence of a Name that can no longer be pronounced.

Consequently, reading an English translation of a disfigured Hebrew invites the reader to participate in the act of translation. But this does not necessarily mean that the reader is exempted from misreading the text. In a recent collection of discussions on the issue of translation, Derrida looks at the Tower of Babel story.

> We think we know the story, but it is always in our interest, I believe, to reread it closely. Also, one should read it if possible in the language in which it was written, because the singularity of the story is that a performative takes place as a récit in a tongue

> that defies translation...I don't know the original language thoroughly, but I know enough of it (a few words) to try to define with you this challenge to translation.[10]

According to Derrida, God declares war on the tribe of the Shems (Hebrew for "name"), and in trying to build a tower to make a "name" for themselves, God interrupts this "sublime edification" (101) by imposing his name on their tower. Derrida translates Genesis 11:9 as, "God proclaimed his name loudly, the name which he himself has chosen and which is thus his." Elsewhere in the discussion, he mentions a recent translation of the Bible by André Chouraqui, a version which, incidentally, renders 11:9 in more or less the same terms. But the Hebrew does not say this at all! In the Jewish Publication Society translation, the verse reads, "Therefore was the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth..." It would appear to be an interpolation on Derrida's part, but his exegesis is nonetheless quite sound. God does not proclaim his name, but in calling the tower "Babel," "confusion" is transformed into a proper name, a name which reflects its meaning. Translation then, is made necessary because language itself is divisive. In attempting to defy the duplicity of language, the Shems fracture language even more. Derrida's error makes Babel God's name, but the error gives way to another possibility: God names himself by naming humanity, since humanity is created in God's self-image. If nothing else, it is good theology (ie.

translation) to err on behalf of "errance".

Heschel said, "In early times when the hearts of men burned with the love for the Creator... it was not necessary to verbalize the act of prayer; they did not have to bring it from the heart to the lips."[11] In order to attempt to see how some of this works in the Bible, I am going to focus on four sets of events and characters: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Isaac, Samuel, and Elijah. Each will show in a particular way how an ancient dialogue is renewed without that renewal being subjected to the test of language. The hospitality of the world is made real only when we can draw out its kernel, a wordletting, where interruption is not an act of muting out the Other, but letting the Other become present as we proclaim our presence in its breath or spirit.

Critical Agenda

In order to begin to place these events we should consider briefly the critical agenda which flows from the assertion I have just made.

What is it that grants passage across a boundary in which language cannot be spoken, written, or otherwise communicated? Literary analysis must abide by certain prohibitions, namely, is there a border past which the reader must reinvent the rules of reading, such that the text in question is not altered by the reader's presence? Current literary criticism resorts to the analogy found in anthropology, where the observer of the native culture cannot stand far enough back to avoid interfering in the culture he or she is studying. But is it possible to let the text speak without initiating the first word, without clamouring to displace the event or character it attempts to communicate?

This thesis focuses on a text where analysis has spawned border skirmishes spanning generations, not only in the topographical world, but in the fragility of the human spirit. The Bible forces an encounter with that which grants us passage across language, with a Voice whose pulsating silence has sustained all subsequent encounters. But even when the Voice has spoken, it has never named the boundary, instead urging, chiding, and often forcibly twisting its partner in dialogue into naming that border together, each

time giving it a new name but retaining a common reference point. It is my contention, that whenever this fragile portage of the word is enacted, the reader bears witness to something wondrous: a simultaneous apotheosis of the Voice called revelation, and humanity being recreated into the truly human through a return to the boundary.

In the conclusion of Northrop Frye's The Great Code, the author asks the question "What speaks to us across our own death?" [12] Although he was not referring to an historical particularity, it brought to mind an historical event that has altered the human spirit for the past fifty years. Ten years ago, I was involved in educational sessions of Holocaust survivors recounting their experiences to schoolchildren. After several days, the strain of recollection became too much for one survivor, because each story brought her back behind the electrified fence. The pain of memory became indistinguishable from the pain of experience, and the only possible response at this point was silence. Verbal testimony stops at a point in which language is no longer commensurable with its reference points, and it was this silence that I felt must somehow be made into an affirming phenomena.

Elie Wiesel said in an interview some years ago, that just after the Event,[13] the word "Holocaust" could not be uttered without trembling. Its slipping into popular usage not only manifests a linguistic inaccuracy, but has also

become even more dangerously a catchword for other events, burying its incommensurability within the limitations of the word. The literature of testimony has certainly attempted to affirm by the act of recollection, but the silence beneath the event cannot be touched. There is a prohibition past which no survivor, historian, or writer can speak anymore. It is this muteness with which I would enjoin the tone of my commentary, a tone which recognizes the paradox of speaking about silence juxtaposed to the speaking of silence.

Jacques Ellul has written a book called The Humiliation of the Word,[14] in which he claims the prohibition of idolatry **for** language. There is a Midrashic tradition which maintains that Moses shattered the Tablets for fear that the Israelites would begin to worship them just as they did the golden calf. We already know that words are resemblances, that a system of mediation takes place in talking about something. Contemporary literary criticism has taken it upon itself to unfold the instabilities of language to reveal the vulnerable underbellies of polysemous textual readings. It has not been surprising that many critics of deconstruction have begun to find their Hebrew roots, and one often hopes that if there is a hidden agenda in deconstruction, it would be revealed at the foot of a familiar Sinai. If language is a verbal representation of being, would silence thus be a non-verbal representation of nothingness? [15]

As a preamble to the discussion of my methodology

(which will be discussed later in the chapter), I perceive this work as a participant in a long filament of commentary that has itself been seen as virtually indistinct from the text it has commented on. The text privileges its reader by making its meaning impassable except by reading through one's cultural conditioning; it is a mode of privilege because whether one traces the thread of one's own conditioning or not, one does so with a text of indeterminate origin. The later prophets speak of "the burden of the word" (ma'asah daber) where the oracle is not only compelled to become an intermediary between the Voice and the crowd, but must stare into the reflection of his own self-consciousness and bring God down where God should not have to be. To amplify a text whose Voice must be experienced as Centre, one cannot do anything but keep that Centre within range at all times.

If I can neither speak about silence nor be silent, then what can this thesis hope to achieve by having silence as a sustaining phenomenon of inquiry? In an essay on Brecht, Walter Benjamin wrote that dialogue "does not abolish the distance between human beings, but brings that distance to life."[16] Perhaps the Bible can be placed in a context of being eternally contemporary by suggesting a similar kind of distance, the distance between text and reader, and, God and Creation. Perhaps silence can be enlivened by conferring upon it an invitation not to be an

abyss to be crossed, but the actual vessel of passage.

The late theologian Arthur Cohen, whose later work tried to rewrite the Jewish experience of God after the Shoah, best articulates this work's stance with regard to silence; in arguing against silence as a metaphor for inaction, he writes,

> What is taken as God's speech is really always [illegible] hearing, that God is not the strategist of our particularities or of our historical condition, but rather the mystery of our futurity, always our possibility, never our acts. His speech and silence are metaphors for our language and distortion.[17]

Other theologians have suggested that God is our agenda, and that it is when we turn from this agenda that we divorce ourselves from God's word and hear the divine silence separate from the word. To explain silence as God's "absence-as-presence" (existence manifested in history) is a theological paradigm which would preclude more than one reading of the text. Passing through silence means that God's existence is not contingent on anything, other than a readiness to listen to the sound of that particular landscape through which one is passing. The inherent pathos of this situation however, is that seldom can the reader emerge from the space as the same person he was when he entered. The Bible sounds this out all the time. But history has different qualitative prohibitions in which the participants have not even emerged unbruised, but annihilated. In the same book, Arthur Cohen speaks of that particular historical event whose expression engenders the

same kind of trembling which the word still brings to bear on some of its dying victims. [18]

For reasons which will become evident in my conclusions, I have chosen Biblical passages for commentary according to how I approach the abyss. By way of justifying my selection, it must here only be stated that I have neither set out to take inventory of silence, nor have I consciously omitted passages which I consider as important as the ones looked at. The cross-section represents episodes in the text which in some way or another pass into a range where the abyss can be questioned. The Event, as it has engorged both history and language, has impinged upon my reading because this is the only way I can approach the Bible: as an eternally contemporary text.

The Process of Commentary: Listening to Abel's Blood

Edmond Jabès, whose contemporary Midrashic questioning provides the thematic architecture for this thesis, directs the relevance of this initial question, (that of "comment taire" -- how to be silent) to the aftermath of literary and spiritual exile.

> "In the night of `commentary'or commentaire, there shines -- utter daring or fierce irony? -- the proud verb taire, `to be silent '...Any commentary must take off from what is silent in the text, what has knowingly or inadvertently been left unsaid."
> Comment? "How?" O insistent question of all beginnings. God was the first to break the silence...It is this breakage we try to translate into human languages.[19]

In my introduction, I hesitate to give a name to my method of commentary. The word "rabbinical" is used several times without really ascribing any cohesive definition to its application. In her book The Slayers of Moses. Susan Handelman offers pathways through this word. The rabbis do not consciously qualify Biblical commentary according to any system other than what the Bible already provides.

> The Biblical text...points not outwards towards images and forms, but inwards towards itself, its own network of relations, of verbal and temporal ambiguities. It calls for its own decipherment, not for a movement away from itself towards vision or abstraction; the word leads inwards into itself, not outwards towards the "thing". What is required is that one "listen" to or read it more intently. [20]

Handelman cites the historiographer Lev Shestov, who, in his book Athens and Jerusalem expresses the rabbinical agenda as the recovery of the innate logic of language. It has its own internal organization and energy according to who rests at its origin.[21] The rabbinic tradition then, which based itself on the principles of multiple meaning and endless interpretability, maintained that "interpretation and text were not only inseparable, but that interpretation...was the central divine act." [22] Polysemy could no more yield to exegetical chaos, than God withdraw the primordial cosmic fiat of Creation in Genesis 1.

In the last twenty years, literary criticism has become obsessively interdisciplinary, employing methods of hermeneutics, semiotics and linguistics in finding new ways of expressing itself. Contemporary literary discourse has

become provocative, but perhaps too reliant on borrowed jargon and confusing lexicons which obscure the texts in question. Deconstruction in particular has taken linguistic analysis to a new extreme, inviting criticism itself to look at the way it uses language to look at texts. This becomes another obsession altogether, such that literary criticism in the 1990's has begun to use psychotherapy as a mode of discourse.

Obsessions aside, it can perhaps be argued that my reliance on etymology (especially Hebrew etymologies) is too strong, such that the English translation is subsumed in the process. Tracing the genealogy of a specific word is useful when a discovery of that word's original meaning can illuminate an especially perplexing passage. As I suggested at the beginning of my introduction, the divine word was understood in Biblical times as an event, not as a symbol or representation of the objective world, but as its cause and ultimate destiny. If I perceive that the English translation of a passage fails to provide an understanding of language in this way, then tracing the word through to its origins becomes a way of re-establishing contact with the word as event. The reader does not need a knowledge of Hebrew. My intention in using Hebrew word etymology is to gloss the translation, not displace it.

As an example, Genesis 4:10 is a passage where a very poetic figure of speech presides over the first instance of

fratricide in the text. God's response to Cain: "What hast thou done? **the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground.**" (kol d'mey akhikha tsoakim elai miyn ha'adamah) It is not only the personification of blood which draws our attention to God's words, but the linguistic form in which this figure appears enclothed. The Hebrew root for "blood" (dam) forms the root of the Hebrew word for "earth" which is of course, adamah. The reason this is important is because the trope "voice of blood" suggests an additional clue as to its possible meaning. "Dam" also forms the root of "damah" which is the Hebrew word for silence. There is no reason to dismiss this as coincidence, if it can help to construct a possibility for commentary: is Abel's actual silence (Abel never speaks in the text) a reflection of Cain's apparent silence, and if so, does the form of God's question elucidate the act of fratricide such that Cain is shown to have figuratively killed himself? In other words, is the voice of Abel's blood really the voice of silence, and in murdering his brother, is Cain compelled to testify to this silence in response to God's question, "Where is Abel thy brother?" If the narrator is as conscious of silence as he is of language, then is Cain's famous response, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (a question answering a question) actually a narrative device to mark the reader's familiarity with this dialogic motif? Although this motif is not necessarily the answering of a question with a question,

its evasion of presence is nevertheless a continuation of the God-Adam dialogue just one chapter before. The figure of speech "voice of blood" becomes an active metaphor for silence, and the mode of evasion becomes a challenging subject for critical commentary. Perhaps this is a leap of imaginative fancy, but as a way of opening up new possibilities for a passage that has been scrutinized for centuries, should it be dismissed as nothing but an elaborate game of word association?

The process of listening for etymological echoes directs attention to the schism that developed between Rabbinism and early Hellenism. The Hebrew word for "word" (davar) also refers to "event" or "thing". The Greek logos resists accounting for any kind of referential simultaneity, and so there is a clear division between word and idea, with a system of correspondence between the two upon which most literary criticism has been based until now. But if the process of rabbinical thought has somehow made its way into contemporary criticism, then listening for echoes between devarim also means listening for echoes between events which **appear** unrelated. By the same token, it should come as no surprise that I have looked at seemingly disparate Biblical events and suggest that a correspondence might be made among them according to the way in which the divine-human dialogue opens in Genesis. [23] In this thesis however, bridges between such events are constructed not only by words but by

the ambiguity that lies submerged within them. It is not a difficult thing to name this ambiguity, but it is an entirely different matter to converse with it. If silence as "damah" is itself a davar -- both word and event -- then listening for Abel's blood also means listening to the voice of the earth (adamah) which is also the voice of their exiled father (Adam). The double exile to which Cain is relegated becomes a multiple-bind for the reader; Cain is distant from God, the narrator is distant from Cain, and the reader is distant from the narrator. To get back to God, the process of commentary attempts to trace the word back to its possible origins, which, in the case of God, is always silence.

Selection of Biblical Passages

The chosen passages reflect variations on a theme; Genesis 3, Genesis 22, I Samuel 1-3 and I Kings 19. In Genesis 3, a paradigm is constructed in which silence becomes defined as a human retreat from the divine Word. An attempt is made to restrain God from returning to Creation after having hallowed the seventh day as a means of active retreat. "Retreat" becomes a notable ambiguity here, because it also carries the meaning of rest and withdrawal. It is not the kind of Adamic retreat seen in Genesis 3; it is the narrator's mediation of language "hearing the voice as it walks towards the cool of the day" which is God's movement

in the Garden. It is this narrative movement through a mysterious anthropomorphic trope, that determines my selection of these Biblical passages.

Who are the players in this hide-and-seek game, and how does dramatic irony function as these human antagonists interact with a Voice that is always God's? [24] Most important of all perhaps, is the extent to which these players grow from linguistic infancy, to a place in which their lives are telescoped into a pronunciation of their names in relation to the Name of God.

By no means do I wish to treat these passages as a progression. The movement from Adam to Elijah is not a conscious movement; as a literary text, the Bible conforms to whatever agenda the exegete wishes, but there should be no exclusive claim made upon the text as a spiritual manifesto or a novel about the beginnings of the Israelite nation. At the same time, patterns do emerge in this text which do nothing else but assure the reader that the redactor(s) who produced the text were acting on the same impulse: God was in their midst, but had stopped speaking for long enough that they might transcribe the Word.

Genesis 3 becomes the model against which subsequent passages are measured; "where are you?" becomes a question directed to humankind that has deluded itself into self-concealment. The commentary must ask itself why like the rest of Creation, Adam is never named by God. By hiding,

Adam draws back from what he perceives as a confrontation with the divine Word. Hiding from the Word becomes a front-line metaphor for what humankind will interpret as God's subsequent silence, but in effect, God has become constrained to speak only when it is determined that the children of Adam are no longer hiding. God never addresses Adam by name, and this is where dramatic irony reflects the link between word and act in the text: Adam is sentenced to exile by walking through the parameters of his name for the remainder of his life. He literally will walk the earth, but not without companionship. Along with his wife Eve, (in Hebrew, Chava means "life") the earth will become enlivened. Both characters will live out their lives according to the meaning of their names.

In subsequent passages, naming becomes an event. In the Akedah, (binding of Isaac) Abraham and Sarah are renamed by God, and Isaac is given a name according to the circumstances behind his mysterious conception. "Hineni" ("Here am I") as the word of presence is uttered for the first time, and it becomes a mnemonic witness to the first time God asks "where are you?" "Hineni" becomes the response to that moment in which God calls man by his name. Abraham's ascent on Moriah bears out his name, and all that his name represents to the future, and it is borne out in a deliberate silence. [25] It is not a retreat from the Word, but an encounter and confrontation between silence and

Silence.

In my chapter on Samuel, I suggest that "hineni" in its various verbalizations becomes subject to certain phonetic inflections which suggest how human presence must be properly articulated. Samuel is named by a barren mother, whose vow to God names Samuel as prayer before he is even born. He becomes a question directed to God, addressed to a lack of "frequent vision" that characterized the troubled beginnings of the first Israelite monarchy. Israel breaches the spiritual architecture of the Mosaic covenant, by insisting that a king reign over it in deference to the nations gathering on its borders. "Hineni" becomes a rejoinder to a nation petrified by its own sudden preoccupation with keeping the land; the word of presence can only be uttered by one who can recall that divine revelation does not occur once we are convinced that we can hide in the world.

Dramatic irony however, does not centre on Samuel in this book, but on Saul. His ascent to the throne after having been anointed appears to be done in rehearsed sincerity; as Samuel gathers the tribes together for them to see their king, Saul is nowhere to be found until God interjects: "Behold, he hath hid himself among the baggage." (I Samuel 10:22) Later in the book, he is as oblivious to his diminishing popularity as he was conscious of the dramatic ceremony surrounding his ascent. Samuel's presence

becomes peripheral throughout the book, but like God, his presence is imminent in each ambiguity, during each moment when Israel is on the verge of destroying itself. He becomes a reminder of the silence of the barren womb of his infancy, or the desert of Israel's infancy.

In the Elijah passages, "hineni" is not uttered even once. In the context of a choice Elijah forces upon the community of Israel, there is return to God's initial question, "Where are you?" In the midst of a long drought, will Israel follow YHVH or Baal? The long silence of God is linked to Elijah's disappearance into the desert, perhaps an oblique metaphor of the way in which Israel frequently reads God's silence as distance. Elijah's return precipitates a contest atop Mt. Carmel, in which the silence of God is juxtaposed to the muteness of Baal. Even though the sweeping fire convinces Israel that God is still with them, Elijah disappears again, this time we are told, because the prophetess Jezebel seeks to kill him. The reader is faced with an ambiguity: why is it that a prophet of the Lord who can stop the rains with his silence, and cause fire to fall when his silence is breached, appear to run from someone whose prophets he has just beaten in a dramatic contest?

This retreat becomes the dramatic irony of the story; it is a retreat into rest, an actual silence into which Elijah must pass in order to apprehend the metaphorical silence (the drought) he had imposed upon the community

because of his absence. The "still smal voice" or "thin voice of silence" is the full expression of Elijah's dramatic situation: first, he is the "voiced silence" and second, he is able to perceive it as such by bearing witness to it as phenomena happening to him. "Hineni" is never uttered explicitly, perhaps because the only thing left hidden from Elijah is what will become of his prophetic mission after he leaves the world. The question "What are you doing here Elijah?" is not a question he answers according to where he is, but where he has been. In a threefold aberration of nature, Elijah is shown where he has been, but God is only present in the aftermath which is where Elijah wishes to be. The aftermath is the ambiguity, and the word of presence is not spoken because it is shown to be sufficient that the ambiguity is not resolved, but simply shared. Elisha will carry on with Elijah's mission, because the mission as it is contrived by God, has nothing to do with time, but with eternity.

If these passages share anything, it is a concern with how silence functions in space and time in the textual landscape of the Bible. Adam's response to God's first question can be seen as a self-deluded masking of his presence. Each subsequent encounter where revelation of presence is the central concern becomes a way of re-approaching language through silence. The central paradox uniting each Biblical passage is the inability of humanity

to respond "Here I am" in the moment of God's call of "Where are you?" Redefining language as a means not of linguistic representation, but convergence of word and act, would hopefully retrieve a sublime moment in which the shibboleth would no longer be necessary.

1. Abraham J. Heschel, "Architecture of Time," To Grow in Wisdom, ed. Jacob Neusner (Lanham: Madison, 1990) 77-78.

2. Abraham Joshua Heschel, Man's Quest For God (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954) 44.

3. Northrop Frye, The Great Code. (Toronto: Academic Press, 1982) xiii. "For my purposes the only possible form of the Bible that I can deal with is the Christian Bible, with its polemically named "Old" and "New" Testaments. I know that Jewish and Islamic conceptions of the Bible are very different, but that is practically all that I do know about them, and it is the Christian Bible that is important for English literature and the Western cultural tradition generally." While this brand of all-inclusive humanism defines Frye's general approach to literature, it yields to a susceptible oxymoron: a biased humanism which by definition ought not to exclude any tradition as claiming priority over another.

4. David Slabotsky, The Mind of Genesis (Ottawa: Valley Editions, 1975) n. pag.

5. George Steiner, After Babel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) 27.

6. George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967) 3.

7. Susan Handleman, The Slayers of Moses (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982) 39.

8. Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 82.

9. Paul de Man, Resistance to Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 101.

10. Jacques Derrida, "Roundtable on Translation," The Ear of the Other, ed. Christie McDonald (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1985) 100.

11. Abraham Heschel, Man's Quest for God (New York: Scribner, 1954) 39.

12. Frye, 230.

13. More recently Wiesel uses the Yiddish "Hurban" or Whirlwind, and sometimes, simply "Catastrophe".

14. Jacques Ellul, The Humiliation of the Word, trans. Joyce Main Hanks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 15.

15. One might suggest that the desert evokes images of silence and desolation, but recent events in Kuwait and Iraq have shown that deserts can be noisy and crowded places capable of being uprooted and decimated. Although we commonly imagine the desert as a place where nothing can grow, it is a fragile environment with an ecological life span.

16. Walter Benjamin, "Understanding Brecht," Gabriel Josipovici, The Book of God (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 168.

17. Arthur Cohen, The Tremendum (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 97.

18. Cohen, 20-21. "The Jews, for reasons no longer curious, have looked into the abyss several times in their long history. Tradition accounts the destruction of the Temple and the obliteration of the Jewish settlement in ancient Palestine as one abyss. There was a caesura. The abyss opened and the Jews closed the abyss by affirming their guilt, denying the abyss, and taking upon themselves responsibility for the demonic. Not "beyond reason" but "within providence" became the satisfactory explanation. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain is accounted another. There was a caesura. The abyss opened and the Jews closed the abyss once again not only by reaffirming their guilt, but more by transforming the event into an end-time of ordinary history and the beginning-time of mystic gnosis in which a new heaven was limned and the unseen order became transparent to mystical understanding. The death camps of the modern world is a third. There was another caesura of the demonic. This time the abyss opened and one-third of the Jewish people fell in."

19. Edmond Jabès, The Book of Questions: El, or The Last Book, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984) 9,15. This suggests the rabbinical idea that God already knows the answer to the Question, but not the response. Vertical dialogue breaks open and is closed within the frame of a sigh, perhaps because God cannot bear to witness man unwittingly suffocate in the breath with which he was formed. The question the reader must ask, is whether this sigh can be affirmed in any way. Abraham Heschel tells a story of a shoemaker whose work on his customer's shoes would frequently take up his night and morning. He would deliver the shoes before the customers arose to go to work, but did not know whether to pray the morning service quickly, or pass it over altogether. "Every once in awhile, raising his hammer from the shoes, he would utter a sigh: "Woe unto me, I haven't prayed yet." Heschel asks us whether this sigh is worth more than

the prayer itself, returning to God a small portion of primordial breath within a sacrificial murmur to help the shoemaker through the day.

20. Handelman, p. 31.

21. Handelman, 21.

22. Handelman, xiv.

23. It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew scriptures, Adam is only mentioned twice outside the book of Genesis: once in Chronicles, and once in Job. Just as the early Hebrews did not dwell upon the human dimension of their beginnings, the first compilers of the Talmud refused to begin the work with a page 1. Each tractate begins as page 2.

24. God has many names, but perhaps the most appropriate one in this respect, is HaShem, "The Name". God is the Name of names and as both a word and a proper name, HaShem is a term that makes God simultaneously immanent and transcendent when addressed in this manner. As the Biblical antagonist learns to pronounce his own name, the passage becomes a rite of passage, that moment in which the child is struck with the simultaneity of detachment and grounding which his parent passes on to him.

25. Whether or not the Akedah typifies dramatic irony is wide open for critical possibility. As I point out initially in this chapter, the Akedah has been appropriated both as a typology for Christians and an open wound for survivors of the Holocaust. The dramatic tension of the story is certainly not compromised for the reader, regardless of whether one argues that Abraham knew the outcome of the drama or not. The narrative is so sparsely crafted, that the ambiguity of the outcome is enough for the reader to bear out the climax.

II. Adam and Eve

GENESIS 3:9 - The Question

> And the Lord God called to the man and said to him: "Where art thou?" [1]

The first word God directs to humanity in the expectation of response, becomes a question that determines the fundamental relationship between the human and the divine. Rabbinical commentators maintain that this particular question is always rhetorical, since there is no question for which God does not know the answer beforehand. For theologians, God is the omniscient narrator of creation; the narrator of Genesis, however, is not omniscient, and the reader is dissuaded from understanding what this question is really asking without first considering the narrator as a mediator and a storyteller. This is not the sort of question from which the narrator can separate himself, since he is recounting the story of exile while in exile.

Of course the same could be said of any narrator of any text, but since this question engages what the western tradition has called the "fall of man", its uniqueness to the Biblical narrator is understood as a universal literary predicament. How does one narrate a "fall" when one is "post-fallen"? If by the question the narrator is called to reveal where he is, the reader might respond, "in relation to what, the text or God"? If he is already outside Eden, does this not imply a longing to return? Perhaps his characterization of God and the figures to whom God

addresses the question, must be shaped by this narrative tension, one side telling the story, one side yearning for a time when it did not yet have to be told.

"Where are you"? is a question that precipitates exile, not just from space and time, but from language. It is the verbal opening of dialogue in the text, distinguished from the other dialogue God has with creation, in which the heavens and the earth respond through the movement of separation. The act of creation locates space and time through their respective divergence, and consequently, language is creative through its divisive energy.

"Where are you?" however, is a question that addresses itself to two characters who have divided themselves from the questioner; it is a question that seeks out a lost unity in humanity, but as a question narrated by an exiled narrator, it also becomes a question directed to all readers of the Bible. As a subject for literary discourse, these initial words address the idea of spiritual exile as a constant motif in the text, one in which all subsequent encounters between God and humanity are hinged.

Unfortunately, the English rendering of the Hebrew "Ayekhah" does not yield a similar ambiguity. Because Hebrew was originally written without vowels, it has always been an interpretive and playful exercise to see how one word pronounced in three or four different ways could amplify the word's life in various Biblical passages.

"Ayekhah" can also be pronounced "Aykhah" which is simply a single question: "How?" The ancient Hebrew commentators compared this question in context to the opening word of the Book of Lamentations:

> **How** doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people.
>
> (Lamentations 1:1)

Jacob Neusner finds this association to be a moving commentary which binds the event of the destruction of the Temple to man's first exile.[2] The rabbinical method of looking at the stationary consonants while listening for the shifting vowels, imputes to the Genesis passage the status of a question anchored in bereavement. Two passages speak to each other across an exilic echo, and for the rabbis, God's question assumes the sigh of a Creator in mourning. Neusner summarizes it in terms of Israel's history as a paradigm for human history, and vice versa. His interpretation of the first " Where are you?" is "How could this have happened?" The rabbis implicit question attributed to God, transforms the opening of divine-human dialogue into a sigh, a foregone conclusion in which creation is tarnished with exile.

The reader understands Adam's response literally, that is, through Adam's understanding that he has concealed himself from God's voice by hiding behind the bush. He answers according to a sense of spatiality. The reader however, can also perceive that Adam hides behind the answer, that it is not merely a spatial hiding but a hiding

behind language, the instrument of creation. What Adam does not see is God's question in context: "Where are you?" means "Where are you in My creation?" The response is an implicit denial of creation in the context of how creation takes place. God creates through division, humanity creates through integration; by hiding, Adam denies creativity, and thus becomes exiled from it.

Genesis 3:1-3 - **The Context of the Serpentine Quotation**

Genesis 3:1-3 depicts a manipulation of speech in which silence is entwined with a screen of subtlety. It is no coincidence that the serpent is called subtle; the Hebrew word for serpent, aram which designates denuding, or "to be made bare." The serpent actualizes Eve's nakedness by altering sensual priorities: attention is diverted from what God has said to what God has not said, and the serpent draws Eve into God's silence by suggesting what this silence could mean.

> And he said unto the woman: "Yea, hath God said: Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden?"
>
> And the woman said unto the serpent: "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said: "Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."
>
> And the serpent said unto the woman: "Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil."(3:1-3)

Eve had not yet been created when God handed down the

prohibition of the tree, and presumably the prohibition was conveyed through Adam. The message was literally hearsay. The importance of this is its structural contrast, because the serpent opens his verbal exchange by incorporating the message as hearsay: he has phrased the question in the form of a quotation. Unlike the narrator who quotes God as God creates: (and God said, "Let there be light" and there was light), which reveals a narrative experience of creation through the immediacy of a performative utterance, the serpent addresses Eve's ability to recollect through time. The serpent compels Eve to become God's narrator, and since the narrative predicament is one in which one must speak across one's own exile, Eve unwittingly enters a dilemma. If what she remembers is the divine word mediated through a human agency, it is not God's direct words she recounts, but their repetition.

It should come as no surprise then, that Eve adds something to God's prohibition, or at least she has **heard** an addition which does not come directly from God. God never says not to touch the tree, merely not to eat from it. Eve claims the former and the latter. Were the reader to assume that Adam added this prohibition, (perhaps it was because he recognized that Eve's touch had a palpability that his own touch lacked [3]), Eve's attributes the prohibition to God, even though God is said not to mention the prohibition of touch. She responds to the serpent's quotation with another

quotation, which in turn is addressed by another quotation. As creative energy, language is denuded into an exchange of hearsay which defers the truth of the tree until it is too late.[4]

Vision and Division

For God, seeing is an act of separation, but for humanity, seeing is an act of integration. Genesis 3:6 emphasizes this dichotomy by using language of external sight and internal perception. Eve is described by the narrator as having both a physical and metaphysical hunger:

> And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; (3:6)

The inner and outer eye set a perceptual paradox into motion, because Eve's external sight and desire for inner vision results in a fig leaf (blinding or masking her creativity) and physical exile. She becomes relegated to the tragic paradox of her own flawed listening, but it is the sight of the tree that is most inviting. The secondary comment, "and the tree was desired to make one wise" suggests Eve's desire for omniscience, but it is mediated through the unlimited omniscience of the narrator. The serpentine predicament is the difference between where Eve is and where she wants to be is: the paradox resides in a veiling of creation, since language is entwined by masking what God says beneath what God does not say. Moreover, sensual priority is given over to vision; the narrator

stresses the dichotomy between hearing and seeing in the next passage.

Walter Benjamin remarked, "Of all beings, man is the only one who names after his own kind, as he is the only one whom God does not name."[5] In the beginnings of Genesis, great emphasis is placed on the distinction between the acts of **naming** and **calling**. Both represent processes of creativity, but is it not ironic that when Adam is created, he is not named "Adam"? He is simply referred to by the narrator as "the man" (ha'ish), and it is not until much later that Adam is referred to by his name, yet even then it is never by God. I would suggest that God's relationship to Adam as a divine parent never finds full expression by virtue of this, since calling by name is always the first stage in forging a parental bond. This provides the dramatic context for Genesis 3:10, since the bond is already defined by a cleavage of sorts.[6]

Without divine nomination, Adam hiding in the world is metaphorically the same as hiding behind his anonymity. To be called by name, is to reveal what lies concealed **behind** the name; the question "Ayekha" then, is a call that not only directs itself to the name, but where that name resides in the world, and the degree to which the name responds to the origin of the caller. How can Adam hide behind the leaves of a tree rooted in the earth of his own name? In other words, the person Adam hides behind the name Adam, a

name that is never spoken, but implicitly invoked as the epitome of creation.

In this moment the name becomes indistinguishable from the terrain: hiding in the world means that the fruit has already sprouted its masking leaves. The question becomes a divine call, (and it happens only once like this in the text), and "Where are you?" is transformed into an accusatory apostrophe.

> And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden toward the cool of the day; and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.
>
> And the Lord God called unto the man, and said unto him, "Where art thou?"
> And he said, "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (3:8-10)

God demands a response that emerges from the present, but Adam responds to God out of the past, a past in which God has played no part. The response is a double-edged concealment, a spatial silence which in fact betrays where he is, but not where God created him to be. The knowledge of his nakedness is the mask, and the masking of his presence reveals an absence of interior stillness: he can no longer be unabashedly naked, and will constantly be on the move in a spiritual exile, separated by fear, knowledge and memory. It is as André Néher calls it, a "missed appointment",[7] a rendezvous in which Adam speaks from the wrong place in the wrong time.

Genesis 3:8 - A Trope by What Name?

> And they heard the **voice of the Lord God walking** in the garden toward the cool of the day..."

It is equally important to turn back for a moment, to understand how in giving legs to God's voice, the narrator invokes his post-exilic awareness of the prohibition against anthropomorphizing God. Retelling the exile means calling the narrator's own exile into account. The narrator depicts God's spatial approach in the Garden through a grammar that carefully balances God's movement and identity. The trope cannot jeopardize the narrator's own relationship to God by speaking carelessly, because this event in the garden is the first movement towards dialogue, and thus a personal relationship. The narrator is discretely conscious of how God moves in creation, but must confront a tension that modifies this movement.

This linguistic barrier is deftly bridged as the narrator draws back from metaphor, and proceeds to articulate his own self-consciousness of the withdrawal. The voice that walks in the garden must be understood in light of this tension, but also in light of how God created the heavens and the earth through the phenomenalizing of language. Before God created the world by releasing the word, it is written, "and the spirit of God (v'ruakh Elohim) hovered (m'rakhefet) over the face of the waters (p'ney hamayim)". It is only when the Voice speaks that chaos is ordered and God becomes separate from what is spoken.

This is however, a human reading of the way language works; our understanding of language is a way for reality to be represented, a distancing of language and reality. This mimetic faculty in turn suggests how verbal intercourse seeks to bridge this distance. For God, separation from creation is enacted only by witnessing its goodness. Implicit silence (bracketed by the narrator's "and God saw that it was good"). follows each creative act. Division makes creation whole by virtue of the word's temporary interruption.

There is movement over the face of the waters, and there is movement of the voice in the garden. Perhaps it is premature to speak of God's simultaneous immanence and transcendence, but this is how the narrator experiences God's phenomenality. The "walking voice" is not exclusively a trope (depicting a voice that substitutes walking for speaking) that somehow defines God's "physical" presence, but an emphasis on the direction in which the narrator draws back from metaphor by using metaphor. It is perhaps an anxious attempt to resist prosopopeia, a "giving face" to God.[8] Although the Hebrew word for "face" (p'ney) can similarly be translated as "presence", the narrator's inhibition does not prevent the reader from recalling that instance where God hovers over the face of the waters.[9] The important element of this turn of phrase, is the fusion of physical movement and God's words: the narrator

apprehends God through language, but language as **event**. God's walking voice is literally defined as physical movement, but unlike the movement **over** the face of the waters, it is a movement **toward** the cool of the day: the conjunctive distinction is between the anthropomorphization of God's relationship to space (the waters), and time (the cool of the day).

It is here where the tenor of the metaphor finds its vehicle. The narrator also hides from God: as God's voice moves towards the "cool of the day," (l'ruakh ha'yom) it is only by inferring from ruakh (wind/breath/spirit) that the encounter is suggested as taking place at the beginning or end of the day. Since the first elaboration of creation contrasts day and evening, it is appropriate that God approaches humanity in the recollection of the first day. If the narrator intends this to be a foreshadowing of a second creation, then "the cool of the day" resonates either as the beginning or ending of a qualitative characteristic of God's voice, or at least, humanity's relationship to it.

If the question "Where are you?" bears out my claim that God's sadness is a hungering for dialogue, then it is underscored in the dialectics of Adam's response. Where does Adam turn, in relation to the voice he turns away from? Perhaps God's original contact with chaos was meant to forestall the necessity of ever having to speak again. But the extension of God's breath is now veiled; Adam has

withdrawn from God, and God will henceforth withdraw from Adam's offspring, his presence concealed as a commensurate response to Adam's concealment. The flesh hides from the breath that enspirited it; Adam withdraws from the process that defines God's creativity -- language as phenomenon -- and in so doing, must draw breath from somewhere else.

Adam's fear emerges as the result of the question heard as a trope. "I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." (3:10) The act of response is itself a contradiction, because one cannot hide from God unless one stays silent. In the fullness of this rejoinder, Adam silences God by hiding behind the question. In effect, God's "Where are you?" is answered with a fearful, "No!" It is not silence, but an apparition of language, a shadow of the word that mimes the serpent's manipulation of the truth about the prohibition.

The oxymoron of Adam's response, spoken in the past tense with three repetitions of the pronoun "I," translates God's question into what I call a "phantom" apostrophe. God addresses Adam and Eve, as though they are not present. Adam responds out of a deluded absence, since he perceives the address as a question, not as a call to proclaim his existential presence. His assumption, that presence can be expressed when the voice answers but the body is absent, is a subtle example of the fruit's effect: it has transformed them into "gods", but the transformation is simply an

embodiment of delusion. In literally reversing the terms of rhetoric by "giving voice" to God, (to whom the narrator resists giving face), Adam metaphorically proclaims a hidden presence. His language is a revelation of concealment, and this manifests itself as a false silence. The narrator depicts him as hearing only the inflection of the question mark at the end of God's question. What the question seeks out in actuality, is Adam's silence, a stillness that would preclude the question from ever needing to be asked.

The corollary to spatial exile is dialogic disjunction. Ariel Halevi notices in a corresponding oxymoron, that Adam repeats the serpent's stylistic manoeuvre, the "lying truth."

> Human reason, which gained a measure of dangerous independence with the advent of the primeval serpent, began slowly to infringe on the domain of the Absolute by claiming that man could work out his salvation without God and even against Him.[10]

Adam's articulation of concealment is true insofar as the serpent correctly anticipates the consequences of the fruit. But just as Eve concedes to the possibility of only one kind of death, physical death, Adam does not realize that in expressing his concealment, he draws attention to himself. The dramatic irony calls the reader into the foreshadowing of exile suggested by the question: how can the narrator and reader mediate this exile after the exile has already happened? Perhaps even more important, can Adam's silence be realized?

Retrieval of the Vertical Dialogue

The "phantom apostrophe" distils a paradigm for the reader, which becomes a point of contrast for all subsequent encounters of this kind in the Bible. In his commentary to the story of the Akedah, (binding of Isaac) André Néher suggests that for Abraham in particular, "encounters with the Word are inevitably "missed appointments".[11] God calls during moments in which human presence will be revealed, not hidden, and yet the call can come at any time. The Adamic concealment becomes a literary leitmotif: the dialogic encounter between God and humanity hinges on a constant return to this first exchange, in which humanity turns away from an ultimate question: "Where are you?"

As a name I have given interior stillness, silence has been replaced with muteness, or the inability to be still. The role of commentary as a "comment taire", is an attempt to articulate how Genesis 3 functions as a focal contrast to other selected encounters in the text. In this context, the only fallen element of Genesis 3:9 is the abandonment of a face-to-face dialogue with God.[12] In other words, covering the creative locus becomes a metaphor for muteness; Adam and his children can no longer speak to God without hiding, nor can they do so without being constantly on the move. A literary delineation of the relationships between revelation and concealment (and language and silence) is actually an attempt to show how the dialogue is mediated through the

cover of the fig leaf.

"Where are you" laments the absence of man in the moment of divine nomination, but it does not invoke closure on the lamentation by sealing it with an elegy. The question can rather be seen as postponed, suspended until such time as man determines the full scope of the inflected question mark. Jabès probes the sinews of such a dialogue, and points the way towards its reclamation:

> There is pre-dialogue, our slow or feverish preparation for dialogue. Without any idea of how it will proceed, which form it will take, without being able to explain it, we are convinced in advance, that the dialogue has already begun: a silent dialogue with an absent partner... Then afterward, there is post-dialogue or after-silence. For what we managed to say to the other in our exchange of words -- or, rather, in our apprenticeship of words -- says virtually nothing but this silence, silence in which we are thrown back by any unfathomable, self-centred word whose depth we vainly tried to sound...Then finally there is what could have been the actual dialogue, vital, irreplaceable, but which, alas, does not take place: it begins the very moment we take leave of one another and return to our solitudes. [13]

Both Adam and God have known solitude, and clearly Adam's solitude was the reason for the creation of Eve. But what of God's solitude? One could conjecture that Adam's birth was a result of divine loneliness, but now that they are estranged from each other, what shape can a mutual return assume for itself?

Mutual return is perhaps anchored in an understanding of the "you" in the question "Where are you?" As I have already mentioned, the narrator refers to Adam as "the man" (ha'ish) but in the passage where Adam names the animals,

the reference to his name is a casual element of the narration. Adam's name is an enspirited manifestation of the earth (adamah) but it is unclear whether the narrator intended a synechdocal relationship between Adam and his place of origin. The narrator makes it clear that God knows Adam through the definite particle, "the" man. This might account for what Adam (or **the** Adam) thinks he hears as God (**the** Lord God) calls out to him. The implied "you" is Adam's ground(ing), but what the reader sees is a narrator's mediation of Adam's metaphorical blindness. If Adam has only ever known himself as "the man", then how else has he perceived himself other than with a definite particle, as an object rather than a subject. If the question "Ayekhah?" is addressed to Adam in relation to his birth (a birth without a name), the burden of a response becomes the burden of his limited self-understanding. By blanking out his own creative locus, Adam has metaphorically covered the earth from its Creator. His future and God's eternality are shrouded in mutual concealment. Dialogue can only happen when each partner truly knows the other's name. Addressing the other by name is an act of sublime generosity, since it confers upon the dialogue an authentic mutual desire to know what lies submerged in the speech and silence of both partners. [14]

For the narrator, divine revelation becomes God calling humanity by name, in the expectation that the call will be

answered without hiding. The continuation of the call rests on the subject's ability to equate existential presence to the hearing of the sound of his name. Abraham Heschel called one of his first books Man: The Ineffable Name of God, suggesting that divine pronunciation resides in our ability to stand pronounced by God. In a recent essay on the work of theologian Franz Rosenzweig, Michael Fishbane links divine revelation to its ultimate purpose: redemption, which in Hebrew means "return."

> The silence and isolation of monologic man is broken by a double receptivity to the call of God. This call, in and through the forms of life, has been seeking man ever since he first construed his freedom as defiance. Absorbed by his mortality, the adamic self remains blocked to God's repeated question: "Where are you?" It is only when this seeking voice calls him by his true name, 'in a supreme definiteness that could not but be heard,' that this solitary self ceases from hiding and responds, 'all ready, all soul: Here I am' to the reality at hand. Accordingly, this divine nomination is an evocation into authentic existence...when man hears himself truly named, he knows himself to be a creature as an "I" that corresponds to God's own presence in the fullness of the world.[15]

Return is a Biblical theme that counteracts the turning away from God in Eden. The response "Hineni," (Here I am) is as much a redemptive utterance for the speaker, as it is a mnemonic for the reader. The Hebrew Bible never refers to Genesis 3:9 explicitly as a referent for those moments where God calls, but certainly "Here I am" is the appropriate response to the question, "Where are you?" Perhaps the dialectic is simplistic, but given that Adam does not answer "Here I am" during the crucial moment, I would suggest that

his failure is crucial to an understanding of other encounters in the text.

Redemption is a theme fully developed in the book of the prophet Jonah. Jonah literally embarks on a vessel for the purposes of concealment from a divine call, and God helps him to hide even more effectively by preparing a fish to swallow him. The vessel of Jonah's refuge becomes an underwater fish. The narrative tells of a great storm, a great fish, recounts a psalmodic prayer from the belly , and all this merely for Jonah to go to Nineveh and proclaim, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." A terse statement of prophetic reportage. Jonah, (whose Hebrew name means "dove") does not view this task with favour, and instead of retracing the pattern of his namesake, he moves in the opposite direction from where God tells him to go.

It is only when God removes the veil from the mirror, that Jonah sees the reflection of human return in the glass of divine return. It is here that Jonah grasps the fullness of his own name, the bird who returns to the ark, which marks the promise of covenantal return. God repents of the divinely-planned evil; Jonah's anger for the withered gourd suggests a spiritual process in which Jonah is given the opportunity to live out the meaning of his name. The shadow provided by the gourd gives rise to what Martin Buber has called the "eclipse of God", a place in which God can be experienced through the cover of darkness. Jonah's silence

at the end of the book recalls an inversion of Genesis 3: Jonah returns to God by being shown the way in which concealment and revelation operate in the context of language.

André Néher calls this episode a game, and recounts a salient Hasidic story. The rabbi's son, who had been playing hide-and-seek with friends, had the misfortune of hiding too well. Hours after his friends abandoned their search, the boy ran crying to his father who grieved, "It is the same with God -- He hides, but nobody comes to seek him."

Hineni -- The Ethics of Orality & Autonomy of Silence

"Hineni" is more accurately translated as "Behold, Me!"[16] Néher explains that

> Silence is the key to this symphony, for it alone guarantees to the encounter of God and man its absolute liberty. The word binds and obligates; it defines the infinite. Only silence leaves being and nothingness their limitless potential. It puts to question without ever replying, and it replies without ever concluding.[17]

The autonomy of silence can be witnessed in the same way that the Sabbath is a day when Creation is released from God's recollection of its goodness. It becomes clear that the narrator does not experience the Sabbath as a day for God to rest; the passage is fraught with active verbs: "God **finished**...and He **rested**...and God **blessed**...and **hallowed** it...because that in it he **rested** from all His work which God in **creating** had **made**. (2:2-3) The seventh day is not merely a time for rest, but an actual process of sanctification. God explicitly refrains from speaking, but silence is characterized by active verbs: it **is** process. It cannot be isolated as something that happens when God stops creating, because Creation does not stop. In the same way, silence must somehow be translated into a "Hineni" of presence, an active cessation of language so that the word is accommodated to the internal stillness of the speaker.

Walter Benjamin locates this paradox as evident before the Tower of Babel is even constructed:

> The knowledge to which the snake seduces, that of good and evil, is nameless...Knowledge of good and evil abandons name, it is a knowledge from outside, the uncreated imitation of the creative word. Name steps outside itself in this knowledge: the Fall marks the birth of the human word...(and) the word must communicate something (other than itself). [18]

"Hineni" is a sublime communication of identity without identification, a greeting perhaps, but a greeting of epiphenomenal proportion. There is no way of referring to presence. One only responds to it, and it must occur during a moment of radical sublimation: "Hineni" must be uttered as though one **was** the still eye of a hurricane, a still centre amidst perpetual phenomenon.

As the title of this work suggests, I call "Hineni" a shibboleth because it is a word that enables the spiritual landscape of Eden to reappear as a context for divine-human dialogues after the exile. It is a word taken from a passage in Judges in which a conflict between two warring Israelite tribes is resolved by a difference in dialect.

> And the Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites; and it was so, that when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said: " Let me go over," the men of Gilead said unto him, "Art thou an Ephramite?" If he said: "Nay"; then said they unto him: "Say now Shibboleth"; and he said "Sibboleth"; for he could not frame to pronounce it right: then they laid hold on him, and slew him at the fords of the Jordan...
> (12:5-6)

The Jordan river is no longer a point of entrance, but of departure. People of the same blood are bilocated, but it is here where the Gileadites fashion a new point of entry, a

linguistic one. "Ford" as a verb (to cross over) and as a noun (the shallow part of a river) play upon this passage; the Ephraimites cannot cross over to take the shallow parts of the river, because they cannot pronounce a word whose meaning is known to them, (either ear of corn or river) but whose externalization evades their lips. I would suggest that as a shibboleth, "Hineni" acts as a similar point of entry and thus liberation. It is a verbal removal of the fig leaf after the exile.

In an address he gave on a Paul Celan poem entitled "Shibboleth." Jacques Derrida's commentary uses this as a critical paradigm.

> The difference (between shibboleth and sibboleth) has no meaning in and of itself, and becomes what one must know how to mark or recognize if...one is to get over a border or the threshold of a poem, if one is to be granted asylum, or the legitimate habitation of language. And to inhabit a language, one must already have a Shibboleth at one's command: it is not enough simply to understand the meaning of the word, simply to know how it should be pronounced. One must be able to say it as it should be said. [19]

It is the contention of this work, that "hineni" becomes such a "pass-word" in re-establishing the vertical dialogue. Its one caveat is its proper bodily aspiration: the Biblical character's revelation represents the potential to undo the limitation Adam imposes on God. If God hears silence the way humanity hears language, then there is no longer a need for the fig leaf.

Shibboleth as Circumcision: Opening of the Word

For Derrida, the shibboleth is a linguistic circumcision, a "cut that divides and defines."[20] As Mieke Bal comments, it is not even a password, but a "pass-not-word." Unlike a proper password, its secrecy relies not on knowledge of its meaning, but on the deftness of the mouth. Bal calls this an "impotence of [the] vocal chords",[21] but her anachronistic digression does not mitigate the importance of the shibboleth as a means of recognition. Even though the word causes a mass slaughter, it sheds light on an element of language that paradoxically unites and divides.

As a metaphor, circumcision brings the reader closer to an understanding of covenantal language, but it neither explains the husk of a word when it is removed from its referent, nor can it resurrect the dancing child who greets the hero as he returns from battle.[22] If God's language is really our silence, perhaps Abraham's heroism is found in hearing God through the absence of self-concern: his future is guaranteed by his silence in the present.

1. The Holy Scriptures (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917) Genesis 3:9. All subsequent references to this text will be designated by chapter and verse in the body of the work.

2. Jacob Neusner, Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis, 2 vols., Brown Judaic Studies 4 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 1: 208-9.

3. Metaphorically, Eve is more human than Adam because she is created out of flesh, while Adam is fashioned from earth and divine breath. "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." 2:23. The sensation of touch would be implicitly emphasized in Eve's additional prohibition, because the tree is off-limits to humanity, and only human beings have the capacity to touch.

4. Eating the fruit means eating the seed within, or at least coming into contact with knowledge which is dislocated from God. Unfortunately, the Midrashists were not feminists; the emendation is ascribed to Eve, and the Midrash claims that after Eve repeated the warning neither to eat from the tree nor touch it, the serpent pushes her up against the tree and once she sees that touching it does incurs no harm, she is assured that eating the fruit would not do her any harm either.

5. Walter Benjamin, Reflections. (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) 327.

6. The name "Adam" is signified only once by the narrator, (2:20) in the passage where Adam names the animals. Naming means dominance over the named, and as the narrator already knows, Adam cannot have authority over God. Had God named the "man" Adam, then Adam's childhood would have been named in a reflective echoing of the earth's creation. The torrent of criticism concerning the two creation stories tries to account for the possibility of the earth having been created twice, but it remains clear that Adam is never named.

7. André Néher, The Exile of the Word, trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981) 122.

8. Arthur Quinn, Figures of Speech (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M.Smith, 1982) 62. Quinn identifies this as a pleonasm, a rhetorical device that emphasizes redundant phrasing. The addition of "voice" to the phrase "the Lord God walking" would therefore be unnecessary, since it is implied that God is identified by his voice.

9. Quinn, 62.

10. Zvi Kolitz, The Teacher: An Existential Approach to the Bible. (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 82.

11. Néher, 123.

12. This finds further expression in Genesis 4:5, where Cain's fall is represented by a "fallen countenance".

13. Edmond Jabès, The Book of Dialogue, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987) 7.

14. Jabès, 60. "To this question of God's, man answered "Hidden." Did he mean to say: "I have hidden my name, suspecting that it was by his name that God called him?" ..."I have, like You, hidden my name, but shall always be visible to you." This is how I interpret Adam's reply, because what he does not admit boils down to: `Twice I tried to get free of Your face, first, by hiding from Your eyes, then, when I could not flee, by avoiding my own.'"

15. Michael Fishbane, The Garments of Torah (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 101.

16. Beholding in the sense of holding Being, being present in the moment.

17. Néher, 50.

18. Benjamin, Reflections 327.

19. Jacques Derrida, "Shibboleth for Paul Celan," Geoffrey Hartman, Midrash and Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 322-3.

20. Derrida, 341-4.

21. Mieke Bal, Death and Dissymmetry (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988) 164.

22. cf. The episode of Jephthah's daughter which precedes the passage.

III. Genesis 22

If literary criticism makes the Bible accessible to the literary reader, then he or she must be prepared to read the text unconditionally. Undoubtedly this is simpler to do with a text whose drama has not manifested the same ideological vortex as the Bible; Adam and Eve eat the fruit and what their newly-opened eyes see is something they immediately cover with fig leaves. **They hide from their own vision,** or capacity to see. The irony in this becomes as much a part of the narrator's cover, since he is already a post-concealed storyteller. In effect, each time an event occurs in the Bible where the narrator tells us that God is testing someone, the reader is led to understand that the object of such a test is the strength of the character's faith. This is a very simple explanation. But literary criticism should ask another question: what does this faith mean as it is translated into language, and is language successful in the translation?

The Jews do not consider the Hebrew Bible a testament so much as an active verb (from the verb "to witness"), a text that calls for a participatory reading. It cannot be read passively, because its objective is to make history eternally contemporary. When readers of different religious traditions read Genesis 22, the tendency is to read it through ultimate events from an historical bias.[1] Literary critics on the other hand, must call on what is there in the

passage, and if Auerbach is to be believed. there is not much:

> ...the externalization of only so much of the phenomena as is necessary for the purpose of the narrative, all else is left in obscurity; the decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasized, what lies between is nonexistent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feeling remain unexpressed, are only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed toward a single goal and to that extent far more of a unity), remains mysterious and "fraught with background."[2]

The Akedah (binding) is about covenantal awareness, but that awareness is never made clear. Christians use the word "sacrifice" in naming the passage, probably because of the typology the story establishes with Jesus. Binding confers a specific meaning, because covenantal awareness becomes something akin to a metaphorical marriage between God and humanity. More specifically, a bond is forged between father and son, the first such bond to occur in the text. But the irony of "binding" as a metonym for bonding is not lost on the reader, who perceives that Abraham is called to untie all bonds to his past, and by slaughtering Isaac, sever all connections to his promised and unrealized future.[3]

Abraham's life is a connected history in which he leaves his home, family and name behind, in order to realize a covenant with God. Abraham's life becomes an abandonment of history altogether, a temporal disordering in which the

catharsis is a trade-off: an effaced past in exchange for a hinted but unrealized future. Herein lies his covenantal paradox: God reveals the unfolding of Abraham's future, but its potential for realization is threatened with fire in a very short chapter. Only the narrator knows this is a test, the key is whether Abraham realizes it.

Inversely, the narrator's knowledge suggests that the test Abraham is to undergo somehow relates to faith, but at the root of faith is whether Abraham is concealing doubt. Implicitly, Abraham is being tested on the validity of his presence, and whether God's presence is perceivable at the centre of a catastrophe.[4] Abraham's whole history in fact, becomes a protracted waiting, one that has him wander from place to place until he encounters the imminent threat of his own metaphorical end.

Abraham ironically finds a homeland in this waiting. The narrator's assurance that God has set out to test him does not alleviate the narrative tension, because the tension resides not in the dramatic resolution of the plot, but in Abraham's capacity to be drawn into this waiting. The only indication the reader ever gets of Abraham's desire to settle anywhere, is when he finally purchases a burial tomb near the end of his story. His life is a paradigm of physical dislocation, and the development of his internal life is must be traced through this phenomena.

Kierkegaard's admission, "Abraham I cannot understand,

in a certain sense there is nothing I can learn from him but astonishment." [5] reflects not only Johannes Silentio's appraisal of Abraham's response to God's test, but focuses attention on what this silence brings to the test: an ultimate dislocation of Abraham as it relates to his temporal life. His silence suggests absolute surrender to God's words, yet it also means a retraction of the covenant he and God have just established. If this test measures the breadth of covenantal response/ability, then Abraham's agenda becomes precisely the ability to respond in a way that reveals his own sense of this temporal dislocation. As I have stated elsewhere, the synchronicity of word and event in the Hebrew understanding of language would shape a response according to a kind of permanent present tense. Abraham's silence then, would suggest an implicit entrance into the permanent present. The event is undertaken without a word, since any verbal response would imply a resistance to this realm of time.

Abraham's initiation into a covenant is patterned after the covenant God makes with him in 15:9. Abraham makes peace with King Abimelech,[6] the monarch in whose land he and Sarah have been sojourning. Abimelech's servant had stolen their well (21:15), and although Abimelech claims ignorance concerning the matter, he is accountable to Abraham because the king is always responsible for the acts of his people. In 21:30, both men swear an oath across the well:

> "Verily these seven-ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that it may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well."

The lambs are offered but consecrated, isolated from the other offerings by virtue of Abraham's utterance. The number seven suggests the spoken covenant as a sanctifying act, like God sanctifying the Sabbath as a day set apart from other days. Once again, word and event are brought together; "to swear" (shaba) by setting apart seven (sheva) lambs, is literally to "seven" an oath, implying that the covenantal participants recollect an integral element of Creation in order to bring all hostilities to rest. Moreover, the Hebrew for "well" (ba'ir) is related to the verb "to dig" (ba'ar), "to clarify." A well determines that place in the desert where a resting-place can be established. If an oath represents a promise (a message sent forth), it must enable the incorporation (or drinking in) of a pause from the perpetual wandering into an uncertain future, so that the wanderer can inhabit a sustained present. As it is sworn across the space of the desert, the oath can seal a rupture in understanding, by recalling the interior stillness of God (the Sabbath) as it impinges on human language.[7]

Before Abraham reaches that place inside him capable of uttering "hineni", he undergoes a temporal transformation which orphans him from his past.

> Now the Lord said unto Abram: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy

> father's house, unto the land that I will show thee. (12:1)

This divine call linguistically refracts the commandment to sever spatial ties, into a temporal inversion of the interior self. In its Hebrew reflexive form, the command "lech lecha" is akin to "get thee out of thyself", a movement which propels Abraham to turn himself outward and away from his past. What this past represents is uncertain, however, Hebrew legend makes Abraham's father Terah a builder of idols, and if patriarchal legacy had any importance in these times, embryonic monotheism becomes a truly revolutionary idea in this context.[8] Particularly as it pertains to the senses, the abandonment of idolatry relocates the vessel of spiritual revelation from the eye to the ear, and it is through hearing that Abraham first encounters God.

"Get thee out" is a call that implicitly reverses the order of a question like "where are you?", because Abraham is really being told to get away from everything he has known or been. "Where are you?" is not a question that can abide a response that emerges from memory, since it demands the total release of the past.

> In order to detach himself from everything, in order to concentrate on his being migrant, Abraham must not have memory. But he establishes the itinerary of a people that will have to repeat with hammering insistence precisely that "remember!"... The tradition -- unthinkable without that origin -- is, instead, memory. If something of this memory is in fact akin to its origin, it is not the words and the interpretations in whose net it is woven, but its emptinesses, the long

periods of silence, the pauses of its discourse. [9]

The underlying paradox of this, is how "get thee out" functions as an indeterminate preamble for a movement that is only apparently vague. The narrator never attempts to second guess God's intentions, but it becomes evident that Abraham's initial call is meant to represent the beginning of the fig leaf's removal: the narrator is cautious to point out, that the change of name from Abram to Abraham (17:5), reflects an emphasis on identity established through the future tense:

> Neither **shall** thy name anymore be called Abram, but thy name shall be called Abraham; for the father of a multitude of nations have I made thee. And I **will** make thee exceeding fruitful, and I **will** make nations of thee, and kings **shall** come out of thee. And I **will** establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant."(17:6,7)

Abraham's identity becomes subsumed in God's promise, an oath that alters his name, and by extension, his spiritual definition. André Néher suggests that

> The promise is defective by its very nature: like forgetfulness, like virtuality, it can only be located and defined by a second term -- memory, consciousness, realization -- the promise is only a **"pro-missus"** (Latin, "something sent out"), a forerunner, a preface; like these, it has meaning only in relation to a subsequent message, to a text which underlines and follows it. It is a thing offered up to chance, having value only if something or someone retrieves it...the promise is only a shadow. It **is** shadow. [10]

To become connected to a host of nations he will never live to know is to forge a metaphorical bond with his unborn children. The nature of this covenant is a bond with the

unknown, unrevealed future. Abraham is called simply to be open to the mystery, through the act of circumcision: an act of opening up the cover to the locus of his creativity. In effect, this covenant parallels Abraham's covenant with Abimelech: the open space in the desert is Abraham's future, and the architecture of the oath is structured on the basis of creativity.

Since Abraham does all that God says, the covenant establishes a context for mutual trust: Abraham symbolically opens and reveals himself through circumcision, and God provides the seed for the promises's realization. But before this even happens, the narrator juxtaposes two events which manifest the art of verbal concealment.

When in Egypt, Abraham tells Sarah to say that she is his sister, to prevent the Egyptians from killing him and to ensure that Sarah's virtue will be kept intact. As the Pharaoh's intentions become clear, God strikes his household with plagues until the truth about Sarah is revealed. The text is not clear about the difference it would have made, had Sarah told the truth about her relationship to begin with, but what is clear is how difference in a relationship is perceived in the eyes of the narrator; marriage is a bond that the narrator portrays the Egyptians as not respecting, but the bond between brother and sister is respected, insofar as the brother holds no rights of authority over the sister. When the truth is uncovered, Abraham's authority is

re-established, and Pharaoh lets them go in peace. Husbandly authority is suspended until the husband perceives that it is safe to tell the truth.

The other event is God's imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, one of the few times in the text God speaks in monologue. There is no audience to God's question,

> "**Shall** I hide from Abraham that which I **am doing**; seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? " (18:17)

yet it does seem to be directed to someone. God's question, which seems to indicate that an aspect of the immediate future should be hidden from Abraham, implicitly denies the whole justification of covenantal language. How can God conceal the future, seeing that Abraham has been defined through the multitude of offspring?

The paradox is only apparent, because God's concern for Abraham is stated in the present tense: the covenantal promise is directed towards the future, but in God's monologue, the covenantal relationship is enfolded both in the past imperfect, and in the intimation of the future.

> "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children...that they may keep the way of the Lord...to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him." (v.19)

The mono'ogue is spoken as God watches Abraham escort the three angelic messengers towards Sodom, a city still inhabited with Lot (Abraham's nephew) and his family. It becomes apparent that this monologue is meant to be

overheard, because the narrator tells us that without provocation, "Abraham stood yet before the Lord" (v.22). It is a euphemistic way of saying that Abraham stops God from proceeding with the plan. In light of the fact that he has not heard the plan, the defense Abraham proposes is less important than his actual physical approach to God. ("And Abraham drew near", v.23) The dual act of "standing before the Lord" and "drawing near" creates a context for dialogic openness, because it is clear Abraham will brook no disregard for the covenant. He has somehow overheard God's words, and, I would suggest, the credit for his perception is grounded in an incident of chapter 13, where Abraham makes peace with Lot ("Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee..." 13:8). He proposes that they divide the land, giving his nephew first choice. Lot surveys the topography, and makes his decision based on good land irrigation, and the Jordan plain's likeness to "the garden of the Lord."(v.10) Perhaps this is not meant to be ironic, but Lot's choice extends as far as Sodom, which the narrator already states as being populated with evil inhabitants. Lot is depicted at looking only at the surface of things, without measuring the inhabitants' behaviour. What emerges is a spiritual difference between textures of being: Abraham yearns for peace, and Lot is concerned only with appearance and immediate practicality. Abraham is depicted as possessing depth, and the capacity to perceive the present

as encompassing the future.

Revelation always contains within it the inverted corollary of concealment. "Shall I hide" is not a question whose intent is genuine, since it serves only to set the context for the following exchange: the question is a test. Perhaps this is why Abraham's repetition of "peradventure" throughout 18:24-32 is a perhaps that amplifies the redundancy of the question mark in, "Shall I hide?" Abraham plays this hide-and-seek game like a Zen master, provoking God with the full resonance of indeterminacy that a word like "perhaps" carries with it.

André Néher believes that "perhaps" is the key word to Jewish thought, the "yes" of silence that represents optimism, potentiality, and power.[11] He recounts how in the Talmud, sages and rabbis weep silent tears for the "perhaps."

> In the course of a touching dialogue with God, who offers to start the whole history of the world again from scratch, without, however, guaranteeing that this time the world would achieve its end, Rabbi Eleazar cries out **Kulei hai ve-efshar**, "Such an upheaval for a Perhaps!" [12]

Abraham forces a dialogue upon God by interrupting a divine monologue. The repetition of "peradventure" (ulei) is complemented by the word "behold" (hinneh) which is the root of the shibboleth "hineni". Abraham assails God with an exclamatory "behold now," and proceeds to make the Judge aware that doing justly entails a full consideration of all possibilities; the future of Sodom is contingent on

Abraham's insistence that God recognize the slim chance that ten righteous men would be enough to save it from destruction. It is difficult to gather from the text why Abraham stops at ten, but this exchange does establish a protocol of divine approach: the covenant will not abide silence if it is threatened with disregard. Until this point, Abraham has carried out God's word without protest, and as a test, the narrator ensures that lack of protest should not be confused with tacit approval. Questioning God is identical to bringing God out of hiding. By prefixing his arguments with "peradventure" and "behold", Abraham metaphorically identifies his covenantal awareness: the undetermined future is contingent upon the capacity for presence. God is also bound to the covenantal promise which encompasses the initial call to "get thee out". God must also "get thee out" and the symbolic tribunal Abraham invokes provides a context for this.

The reader is called to decipher the intent behind dialogue, delving beneath what is actually said to what is really occurring. The imminent destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah articulates the structure of the covenantal relationship. But it also provides a context for the birth of Isaac. Isaac becomes the result of the dialogic pattern that is outlined in chapter 18 between God and Abraham, even though word of Isaac's birth precedes the incident in chapter 17. The contrast with which the narrator sculpts

the respective responses of Abraham and Sarah to God's announcement of Isaac's birth reflects an acute narratological awareness of the intended audience. Abraham and Sarah both hear of Isaac's birth by the same Voice, and although their respective reactions are similar, they emerge from different areas of reception. It is worthwhile to look at them in apposition.

Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed, and said in his heart: "Shall a child be born unto him that is a hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old bear?" And Abraham said unto God: "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!" And God said: "Nay but Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son; and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him." (17:17-19)

And they said unto him: "Where is Sarah thy wife?" And he said "Behold, in the tent." And He said: "I will certainly return unto thee when the season cometh round: and lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." And Sarah heard in the tent door, which was behind him. And Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I am waxed old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the Lord said unto Abraham: "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, "Shall I of a surety bear a child, who am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord At the set time I will return unto thee, when the season cometh round, and Sarah shall have a son." Then Sarah denied, saying: I laughed not;" for she was **afraid**. And He said: "Nay, but thou didst laugh." (18:9-15)

Abraham's laughter is external, accompanied by a gesture of reverence. This gesture is first seen at the beginning of chapter 17, where Abraham undergoes his name change, and if this represents a radical change of identity, then Abraham's internal reaction to God's proclamation is an

ironic move, since God's first words at the beginning of 17: "...walk before Me, and be Thou whole-hearted" call him to open himself up. Instead he falls upon his face and keeps the words in his heart concealed. What he does say, "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee" is actually a subtle question: is the covenant to be established through Ishmael, who is the result of Abraham's union with Hagar, or is Sarah somehow instrumental in the covenantal process as well?

The difference in their respective reactions is noteworthy: Abraham questions his ability to be a father at such an advanced age, at the same time, wondering how Sarah will give birth. Sarah on the other hand, questions the actual process; how can the act of procreation be performed between them, particularly in light of her barrenness which has afflicted her since a young age? Now that her monthly cycle has long passed, how can she be restored to the kind of temporality that enables women to give birth? [13]

Once again, the narrator plays the role of dramatic director, blocking the characters so that minute attention is paid to where each character is internally and externally. Abraham is outside the tent with the three messengers; Sarah listens in from the opening of the tent. Abraham laughs out loud, questioning **in his heart** the possibility of God's words becoming reality.[14] Sarah laughs internally, and expresses the same incredulity as Abraham. God questions Abraham concerning Sarah's laughter, but

Abraham has not explicitly heard her laugh. Sarah denies having laughed, even though she is not the one God is asking. Just as she listens in on Abraham, God listens in on her. Abraham in fact, becomes a passive witness of the exchange, even though he is the one God asks concerning Sarah's internal laughter. This apostrophic inversion is so obvious in the passage, but one wonders why this annunciation scene is so complex.

I would suggest that the movement of language here emerges as a replication of a metaphorical sexual union: God listens in on Sarah and Abraham, and Sarah listens in on Abraham and God. Particularly since Abraham invokes the name of Ishmael ("God heareth"), hearing becomes an act of spiritual penetration, while laughter becomes the mode of conception (external for Abraham, internal for Sarah). Projected within their respective laughter is the affirmation of God's promise: the covenant will take root in Isaac because his name is given both internal and external articulation by his parents, the inner and outer laugh.

If laughter is the sublime moment (or the orgasm) in which Abraham and Sarah are spiritually displaced, then Isaac is named and the covenant realized in the moment of this laughter.[15] The angelic messengers obviously know where Sarah is, and their question is obviously directed to her even though it is apparently spoken to Abraham. He assumes that she is inside the tent, but it is likely that

upon hearing her name, she moves to the threshold of the tent to listen in, or overhear. The relationship between her and Abraham becomes defined through God's address: she is physically removed from the question but is the object of the discourse.

Abraham is the physical audience, but the narrator depicts him as a passive listener, an intermediary between the messengers (now God, in the third person) and Sarah's overheard silence. It is even possible that this abrupt shift in pronouns represents the narrator's emphasis on the movement from division to unity; God becomes singular in the moment of promising Sarah and Abraham their plurality. The irony of this passage is that no real dialogue occurs between God and Sarah, yet the promise of a son is communicated nonetheless through Sarah's response, her laughter. Abraham remains silent through this interchange, even though it is his future that is at stake. His response is narratively transferred to Sarah, whose denial, the narrator interjects, is a result of fear. The reader can only guess at this, but I would suggest that it is fear of being so transparent, so spiritually naked before God, that her denial is her fig leaf, and in God's act of reading her internal laughter, her presence is implicitly proclaimed through a spiritual inversion -- being turned inside out as it were.

The scene at the terebinths of Mamre is depicted in a

setting in which Abraham's hospitality is measured, and it is doled out with such active verbs, that one must wonder at the reality of his old age. He tells the messengers to rest, and he

> **hastened** into the tent unto Sarah...**ran** unto the herd, and fetched a calf...and he **hastened to** dress it...and he stood by them under the tree...(18:7,8)

All of this happens in "the heat of the day", and if this is at all important to an understanding of Genesis 22, then it is in the context of Abraham's past actions that stress **activity** against the backdrop of settings that resist action. [16] Before Genesis 22, Abraham has already erected three altars: the first in 12:7 when God promises the land as an inheritance for his seed, the second in 12:8 after a movement to Bethel where Abraham "called upon the name of the Lord," and the third in 13:18 where he is taken aside after Lot chooses his land, and is told to walk in the land which God will give him.[17] With the exception of the altar in 12:8, each incident reflects an aspect of Abraham's future. Although he is assured of an unconditional future, it is as yet unrealized. In 12:8, "calling upon the name" points ahead to an incident in 21:33 where there is an elaboration of who is called and how.

> And Abraham planted a tamarisk-tree in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. (Adonai El Olam)

Along with many other commentators, Néher points out that El Olam is grammatically related to ne'elam, which

means "hidden" or "concealed."[18] It is the God of the future upon whom Abraham calls, or more accurately, *a* God whose promises have yet to reach fruition. It is in this context that the three altars are reflections of Abraham's concealed future. They appear only to be punctuation marks in his migration, but they nevertheless represent pauses with a mystery attached. It is a detail commentators seem to neglect: these altars never involve an explicit offering. The offering is implied in the altar's construction, and since the narrator never says that the altars were built as a result of God's wishes, the reader must assume that Abraham's holiness emerges from a metaphorically incomplete hospitality. In other words, the sacrifice is concealed behind the altar: is it possible that God wants Abraham to apprehend the altar with his own eyes, to experience the altar's function, along with its paradoxical implications? In the face of all the previous altars that have pointed to his unrealized future, Abraham is charged with offering ultimate hospitality, activating the altar so that the smoke of his future becomes virtually palpable.

The initial words of Genesis 22 then, can be seen as an ultimate boundary where the phenomena of listening in, (perceiving that which is hidden) meets the space where the only thing overheard is absolute inner silence.[19] When God calls Abraham by name for the very first time in 22:1, it is as though their dialogue actually begins for the first time,

an eloquent irony since Genesis 22 contains no dialogue at all between God and Abraham .

There is no "where are you" but the narrator does say that this is to be a test. I would argue however, that the actual test is passed by answering God's call with "Here I am." (22:1)

> Take now **thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac**, and get thee (lech lecha) into the land of Moriah; and offer him there **for** a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." [20] (v.2)

Isaac is only named by God after four qualifying statements. Isaac is named by God only after a thrice-protracted identification which focuses on Abraham's relationship to his son. Like inverted mirror images, Abraham and Isaac are named together in a statement that recalls Abraham's initial divine call, recalling Cacciari's insight into the dichotomy of memory and forgetfulness. [21] Isaac is the fruition of God's promise, but the repetition of "lech lecha" relegates the promise to Abraham's first memory of God: that of being told to forget all prior relationships. His "Here I am" is a "yes" to his own death; the past and the future appear to be completely bracketed, and Abraham utters words of his presence despite his temporal situation.

After the divine call, God does not return to specify upon which mountain the altar is to be built. After three days, Abraham "lifts his eyes" and somehow knows which

remote summit is the designated one. He cleaves the wood, an act of splitting that would facilitate its kindling, but the clue is in the cleavage: cleaving is also the act of joining ("Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh [Gen. 2:24]), and the ambiguity reveals what I have suggested as the structure of covenant and covenantal language: swearing an oath, circumcision, and passing a flaming torch between divided pieces of animals are all symbols of Creativity.[22] Metaphorically, these phenomena represent acts of union through a process of division. Abraham could be gathering or splitting the wood, but insofar as the covenant describes a creative paradox, cleaving signifies a covenantal utterance, a narrative device that emphasizes the full context of sacrifice.

The three days journey to Moriah telescope the ascent into a recollection of the three altars. Upon arrival at the foot of the mountain, the wood is transferred onto the back of Isaac: he is already cleaved to the wood.

> And Isaac spoke unto Abraham his father, and said: "My father." And he said: "Here I am, my son." And he said: Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?"
> And Abraham said: "God will provide Himself (see for Himself) the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son." So they went both of them together."[23] (v. 7,8)

This is the first time Abraham is addressed by Isaac. Their relationship is amplified and the address "My father" draws Isaac into his father's covenant through the

verbalization of his name (father of many), modified with the possessive pronoun. Abraham responds to a fragment of his name (Av(i) from Avraham) and the repetition of "Here I am" articulates presence despite the consequences of Isaac's question; "My father?" is not only a term of address, but a subtle linguistic questioning of just whose father Abraham is. Isaac elicits a statement of presence from his father, but his term of address ironically calls the future into question. The actual question: "Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for the burnt-offering?" binds the present and the hidden future into an implicit: "Behold the fire and the wood, but where am I?" Perhaps this is what Abraham hears, but he resists responding from anywhere other than the immediate future.

In effect, Abraham's response "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering" (literally, God will see for Himself) clouds the future in the same way God has so often clouded the future for Abraham. But just as Abraham has continually been able to see through God's cover, Isaac is able to see through Abraham's. The repetition "so they went both of them together" underlines a bond of silent understanding. What was previously hidden from Isaac is now revealed in language that functions as a blinder: Abraham's response gives Isaac an implicit understanding of what will happen at the altar: the burnt-offering is not their concern, the process through which it will occur is. Issac

is beneath the wood, but when he questions Abraham no more, it is his silence that implies an awareness that it will soon be beneath him.[24]

The physical binding is an act of completion, since the real bond has already been established. Abraham will confront a paradox first by metaphorically pronouncing his own name for the first time, and in the same act, effacing its implications.[25] Out of a common silence, Abraham and Isaac approach the altar, and for once, its construction does not occur at the end of God's revelation, but in the middle of two divine calls:

> And the angel of the Lord called him out of heaven, and said: "Abraham/Abraham." And he said: "Here I am." And he said, "Lay not thy hand upon the lad, neither do any thing unto him; for now I know that thou art a God-fearing man, (atah yadati ki'yireh) seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me." (v. 11,12)

"Fear of God" becomes an expression that means revealing and giving over everything. In Genesis 22, an inversion of all the previous altars is depicted: the altar is implicit in the burnt-offering, not the burnt-offering in the altar. Isaac's presence on the elevated table enspirits the altar with the shared silence he and Abraham carry together in their ascent upon the mountain. God's silence is experienced through the shared silence of father and son. God witnesses the sublimation in Abraham's reaching for the knife; Abraham is named in the act of erasing his own signature, circumcising his own autograph but halted before

the circular cut is completed. The act of division or offering is really a unitive act, enabling divine vision to occur: "And Abraham called the name of that place Adonai-jireh; as it is said to this day: "In the mount **where the Lord is seen.**"(22:14)

Abraham's threefold repetition of "Here I am" corresponds to the three altars that were never completed. the Akedah becomes a metaphorical breath in the vertical dialogue. The impact of his name-change has not reached its full force until this event occurs, because prior to this Abram speaks to God as Abram. The extra syllabic breath enspirited into his name is absent until this time.

> in Hebrew the consonant aleph represents nothing more than the position taken by the larynx when a word begins with a vowel. Thus the aleph may be said to denote the source of all articulate sound...To hear the aleph is to hear next to nothing; it is the preparation for all audible language, but in itself corveys no determinate, specific meaning. [26]

The efficacy of the password "Here I am" hinges on his capacity to utter it in the darkness of a concealed future. For Abraham, this fear consists of being able to speak to a concealed Voice with the assurance that it will not extend the "perhaps" of Sodom to a full human tragedy. It becomes a way to measure Abraham's capacity to carry silence in his heart, without breaking, without denying that he is naked beneath a human language that is capable of clouding reality.

Perhaps the added <u>hey</u> is not merely a breath, but the

anticipation of laughter. Isaac is already present in his father's name, and the binding serves to give Abraham the benefit of giving birth to him all over again. Edmond Jabes said that "Waiting is the leaven to questions." [27] The binding of Isaac is an act of covenantal consummation, where silence as interior stillness is elevated to the status of smoke. If obeying the Word also means abiding the Word, then Abraham rises to the occasion. Word and Event are identical in the space of whole-hearted presence where the Question "Where are you?" is translated into the timbre of his name.

1. Christian terminology has divided the Bible into the "Old" and "New" Testaments, positing a literary historical unity to the Bible, a supposition that Judaism cannot support. Submerged within this mythos, is the belief that we have already waited once, and are waiting again. Presumably, the process of waiting Christianity now experiences has been reshaped by a memory it can validate, with a history adequated to both segments of literary history. For Christianity, both periods of waiting (messianic Judaism before Jesus, and the anticipation of return) define the boundaries of difference; Judaism has had its waiting imposed from outside itself. It was only in the context of its imminent destruction (cf. Arthur Cohen The Tremendum ie. destruction of the Temple(s), expulsion from Spain, the Holocaust) that Judaism has found it necessary to incorporate a waiting anchored within the question, "where are you," because Judaism does not accept a linear notion of history. The Akedah is an excellent example of the resistance against a palpable future based on an historical event. Christians use Genesis 22 as a typology for Jesus carrying the cross up Calvary; Jews have incorporated the Akedah in attempting to consolidate a post-Holocaust theology.

2. Erich Auerbach, Mimesis. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953) 11-12.

3. Harold Fisch, Poetry with a Purpose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 46. There is also a bond between the reader and narrator which parallels the action of the story; in Ezekiel 20:37,38, Harold Fisch locates a play on the Hebrew word for "bond." "And I will cause you to pass under the rod, (masoret) and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge out from among you the rebels..." Fisch links the "masoret" or bond of the covenant with the Masoretic scribes who wrote down and codified the testament after years of oral transmission. The phrase "I will purge out" (ubaroti) is also related to the Hebrew word for covenant (berit).

4. In Hebrew, "faith" is emunah, the word from which "amen" is taken. Since prayer is usually suffixed with this word, then Abraham's faith is actually the conviction that God will always be waiting at the other end of the drama. "Amen" is also a word which universally designates oneness, and since Abraham becomes primarily known in theological history as the destroyer of idols, his test is characterized as an affirmation of monotheism. Historically, human sacrifice was prevalent during his time, and its practitioners were polytheistic. Thus Abraham's test not only signals the end of **ritual** human sacrifice, (there are many other examples of human sacrifice in the Hebrew scriptures) it also defines an ultimate revelation, one in which all that has been concealed by both covenantal partners is now revealed.

5. Soren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954) 48.

6. Perhaps an irony of nomenclature: Abimelech means, "my father, my king".

7. Later in Genesis, Isaac finds a woman drawing water from a well -- Rebeccah -- who will be his wife. Following Abraham's death, Isaac dwells in Beer-lahai-roi ("The well of the Living One who seeth me") which was the place where Hagar fled from Sarah, and promised by God to give birth to Ishmael. In Genesis 26, Isaac has his servants dig three successive wells in battles with the herdsmen of Gerar over ownership of water. As he digs a hole in the desert, the well-digger is placed in the fortunate position to experience a quenched stillness. If the landscape inhabits the well-digger, then anything he experiences outside him will be done in the fullness of what the desert can represent: a place of Encounter.

8. Terah leaves Abraham in charge of the idols one day, as he is called away to tend to some other business. With the exception of one idol, Abraham smashes them all one by one with a hammer. In the hands of the remaining one, he places the hammer. Terah returns home, sees the remains and begins to admonish his son, who replies, "But father, I am not the one responsible, look at him," as he points to the last idol. When his father continues to blast him for such impudence, (Fool! these idols are not real) Abraham gently suggests that his father begin to listen to his own words.

9. Massimo Cacciari, "Black and White," Studies in Twentieth Century Literature 12 (Fall 1987): 76-7.

10. Néher, 129.

11. Néher, 238.

12. Néher, 237.

13. In the chapter on Samuel, I point out that God hears Hannah's silent prayer, and this enspirits her womb with life. It is equally possible, that the inner laugh can be a prayer, a strong exhalation of combined breath and voice upon hearing the unexpected, the impossible.

14. The first time God speaks in his heart is during an event marked by the first burnt-offering made by Noah, a self-stirring movement towards perpetual repentance for mankind. Noah consecrates the day the ark comes to rest, by taking "of every clean beast; and of every clean fowl," and building the first altar upon which sacrifice is given.

And the Lord smelled the sweet savour; and the Lord said

in His heart: "I will not curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing liveth, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. (Gen. 8:21-22)

The process towards redemption is centripetal, moving inward like the whirlwind in the book of Job. Here, the silent monologue individuates mankind, because Creation cannot be held accountable for mankind's irresponsibility. In Lot's case, he is saved from the destruction of Sodom because the individual becomes individuated from the misdeeds of the collective. The movement of repentance slowly closes in from nature to mankind, and it is this movement that Abraham brings to bear on the first words of chapter 22: "And it came to pass after these things, (dibrayim - pl. of davar) that God did tempt to prove Abraham..." (v.1)

15. Aaron Lichtenstein., "Isaac the Patriarch and a Dearth of Mirth in the Bible," Modern Jewish Studies Annual 4. VII (1990): 92-8. Lichtenstein suggests that the Hebrew root for "laugh" (tzehok) stems from the Ugaritic which more properly means "to exult". Exultation has sexual connotations according to Lichtenstein, but he maintains that it also expresses " openness, sincerity, unself-conscious exuberance, [and] and honest manifestation of glorious joy. (p.95-6)

16. The rising smoke of the slaughtered animal was probably seen as a vaporous distillation of the animal's soul, to which the human soul was symbolically transferred as part of the ritual act and prayer. Anthropological scholarship undoubtedly offers much in the way of explanation, but the anthropomorphic underpinnings of sacrifice are still troublesome. God is said to enjoy the scent of the burnt fat, and ultimately the reader is left to decide whether, as a divinely-inspired text, this is accurate or not. If literary analysis posits a narrator (or redactor) at the base of the text, then perhaps sacrifice is an aesthetic attempt to apprehend God in human language.

17. A linguistic pattern can also be traced from one altar to the next: Shechem is a word that means "early-rising", Bethel literally means "house of God", and Hebron can either mean "seat of association" or if spelled with the Hebrew letter ayin instead of hey, refers to the act of crossing over. (cf. Joshua 19:28,) The first altar suggests time, the second, space, and the third, a possible bridge between the two.

18. Néher, 173.

19. The Hebrew word for burden is ma'asah, and it is cognate with the root ni'sah, which means to test; carrying laughter up the mountain suggests that God wants to see whether the word has actually passed through silence, and whether the vertical interchange has thus far stood up against the traffic of possible misunderstanding.

20. Rabbinical commentators note the preposition "for" is used, as opposed to the more definitive conjunction "as". Insofar as the difference is ambiguous, I would suggest at least that "as" makes Isaac the subject of sacrifice, while "for" hints at a process of substitution. In the book of Leviticus, laws of sacrifice are so thoroughly governed and ritualized, that any errant act of substitutive sacrifice (see Leviticus 10) is severely punishable. The Rabbinical thrust is so strong to disprove that God ever commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, that this grammatical difference becomes the basis for an entire argument.

21. It is also the first instance in which the word "love" is used in the Bible.

22. cf. Genesis 15:17

23. The Masoretes chose to vocalize one word in different ways; "hineni" as it is spoken to Isaac is softened here, in contrast to the first time Abraham responds to the call of God. I detail the possibilities of difference in my chapter on Samuel, but in Genesis 22, the softening of the vowels is less clear. When Abraham is called by God, the word is stressed: "hineyni". When Isaac addresses his father, the response is "hinehni". Since syllabic stress can radically alter the sense of a word, perhaps Abraham lays emphasis on his "I" on Isaac's behalf, to assure his son that he is with him in this together, and knowledge of what is to occur would somehow affect the ritual and make it an event rather than process.

24. Edmond Jabès, "The Key," Geoffrey Hartman, ed. Midrash and Literature (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 358.

> "Only dialogue can, for a moment, outwit death. Claimed by two voices, caught between two fires, it half escapes the void. For though they are prey to the same flames, the voices never fall silent together. A moment of survival is always granted the other. Thus we die of a word torn from the word, and live by the silence to which it restores us."

25. Olivier Revault d'Allonnès, Musical Variations on Jewish Thought, trans. Judith Greenberg (New York: George Braziller, 1983) 59,69,99.

d'Allonnès remarks that the final name Abraham comprises the

same consonants as the name of the Hebrews. He traces the genealogy of Hebrew from the Arab "Ibrou" or "those from the other side (of the river)" & "Habirou" "those who come from the desert." As well, "Hebron" as the third altar (and the resting place of the matriarchs and patriarchs) keeps a consonantal consistency with the other two. If Abraham's nomadism has any pattern or meaning at all, it defines the shape of his own name such that the altar represents a kind of breathing space, a "breather" from his desert wandering. Perhaps the fourth altar at Moriah, is a synthesis of the vowels and consonants that form his name, a place where Abraham can see his migration in context.

26. Gershom Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism (New York: Schocken Books, 1965) 30. In the transition of Abram to Abraham, the added letter is not an aleph, but a hey.

27. Jabès, 354.

IV. I Samuel 3

Recent literary and historical scholars like Meir Sternberg and Robert Alter frequently choose for their subjects Biblical narratives whose narrative ambiguities are provocative and ripe for interpretive scrutiny. One such text is the book of Samuel, which contains odd temporal disordering, apparently inexplicable repetition, and subtexts layered upon subtexts. The challenge in situating Samuel's fig leaf in a context of concealment and revelation is notably difficult, but perhaps important in an understanding of the text's more didactic concern: the problem of spatiality, temporality, and where God is in the midst of it all.

The first book of Samuel is historically associated with the rise of the first Israelite monarchy. Most commentaries pass over the characters of Hannah and Samuel, as though each was a peripheral footnote to the rise and fall of King Saul, and the subsequent ascension of King David. One of the assumptions literary criticism must make however, is that nothing is peripheral when textual meaning is sought out. The book of Samuel is virtually an allegory of a dilemma; the spiritual hierarchy responsible for governing the nation has become corrupt, and no provisions were made at Sinai for a political leader to interpret God's governance of his people.

Hannah's vow and Samuel's childhood underpin I Samuel

by retrieving God into Israel's temporal awareness, an awareness that had become preoccupied with administering the land. The image of the fig leaf is perhaps not so easily situated in this book, but I would suggest that the peoples' desire to have a king or figurehead reign over them represents a delusion. Surely if God is with Israel, the people have nothing to fear from the hostile nations who live on their boundaries. The fig leaf is the nation's desire to be like its neighbours, to have something they already have.

In many ways, I Samuel does not work well as a cohesive literary unit, but thematically it functions because of the evolution of what André Néher has called prophetic silence[1]: Samuel is virtually nowhere for most of this book, yet he is everywhere. His main function in the narrative is to anoint a king over Israel, but his reluctance and intermittent presence and absence throughout much of the text convey a much deeper purpose. It is to highlight the fig leaf of an entire nation, building up a monarch whose destiny it is to reflect the uncovering of his people in the context of God's "Kingship".

As I pointed out in my introductory chapter, Heschel suggested silence was

> One, the abstinence from speech, the absence of sound. Two, inner silence, the absence of self-concern, stillness. One may articulate words in (his) voice and yet be inwardly silent. One may abstain from uttering any sound and yet be overbearing.[2]

Since the Hebrew for "word" (davar) refers simultaneously to the verbal word and the deed to which it refers, silence is not only the retreat from speech (according to Heschel), but can also be perceived as a mode of behaviour. How can "hineni" be uttered in "the absence of self-concern" with this in mind? Proclaiming presence without self-consciousness would appear to be a paradox, and perhaps this is why such incidents become ultimate events in the Bible. Samuel's coming of age is marked by such an event, and marked in a way in which silence coalesces into a unity of word and deed **while** he is still a child.

Samuel's Hebrew name resonates with the verb sh'ma (to hear & obey), and is called to lend his voice (and silence) to the Voice, which perceives that its people has abandoned listening. Eli the blind priest, embodies not only a metaphorical blindness but an insensate culpability; he and his priestly line represent a nation that tries to squeeze God into space, forsaking the filament of temporality with which Israel has been endowed. Cultic ritual begins to replace the experience of dialogue; for some reason, inhabiting the land blocks Israel from re-entering that other land, the skyscape or the desert where the Voice is not limited by the boundary of the senses.

Jerome Charyn calls I Samuel a book "about the presence and absence of voices, the history of a tribe that has become tone deaf." [3] God's voice is followed through the

desert by the wandering people for forty years, and perhaps it is necessary that once the people and land are settled, a distinction must be formed between the tone and tenor of God's voice. Once a degree of societal complacency takes place, Israel continues to listen to God, but with only one ear. Late in the narrative, Saul is rebuked by Samuel for having allowed Israel to seize Amalekite booty for the purposes of their own sacrificial cult. Samuel, who began as a Temple officiant, admonishes,

> Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices,
> As in hearkening to the voice of the Lord?
> Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice... (15:22)

One hears the word and performs the deed as though no distance is perceived between them. Since sacrifice is an act that can only be performed in one place with very specific rules and elements necessary for its acceptance, then a relationship with God is endangered by exclusively relegating God to the confines of space. God' voice on the other hand, is only contingent upon the hearer's capacity to hear; for a large segment of the narrative, Samuel is the only character who has God's favour, and I would suggest that this is due to the circumstances of their initial encounter.

It is Samuel and not Saul, who recognizes the relationship between sacrifice and God's intervention in human history. The altar does not become a surrogate object of worship as is suggested by Saul; in a mysterious

incident (13:8), he offers burnt-offerings to God before he is told to do so. For some reason, offering at the altar only becomes as important as the moment in which it is supposed to take place. The "appointed time" is when Samuel is supposed to arrive on the scene of an impending battle. Saul's fear of the approaching Philistines, along with the expectant fear and disunity of the Israelite forces, outmeasures the full meaning of the seven days Samuel tells him to stall the attack. It is not just the waiting that Saul cannot stand, but also that he does not fully listen to what Samuel tells him. This "tone deafness" implies that Saul can hear the tenor of the divine word (as it is mediated through Samuel). but not the tone.[1] Saul aborts the Word; he does not abide it, and he is rewarded commensurately with God's silence.

In the book of Jeremiah, God tells the prophet, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."(1:5) The period of time between gestation and birth is breached by God, whose call to Jeremiah encompasses a time before time. Similarly, Samuel is known to God before being born, but in this case he is made known to God by virtue of a prayer uttered by a barren woman, his mother Hannah. This prayer becomes instrumental in Samuel's spiritual development, because it establishes the context for his initial encounter with God. Entirely remarkable

however, is not the prayer per se, but the dramatic situation which forms a setting contiguous with the words.

With the exception of feminist commentators like Mieke Bal, most readers of I Samuel do not accord Hannah the status she deserves. Hannah uses silence as a means of embryonic consecration which defines Samuel's life, and focuses on her interior space that cries out to be filled. Whether or not she is a metaphor for the barren Israel that whines for a needless king [5] is less important. Her silent vow testifies not simply to her barren womb, but to a stillness that recollects Israel as an ever-sojourning people subject to the divine Encounter in the desert.

I Samuel is commonly called an ark narrative, since a major part of the book is concerned with the loss of the ark of the covenant. To put Hannah in perspective, it is important to recognize the ark as a symbol of God's ever-moving presence with the Israelites through the wanderings in the desert. In Exodus 40:19-29, we are told the elaborate details of how the ark is housed within the tabernacle, and how the tabernacle in turn is veiled behind a screen in the Tent of Meeting. Enveloping the Tent of Meeting is a cloud that prevents Moses from entering the tent, and it is only when the cloud lifts that the tent is open, and the Israelites are able to move through the desert. Physical movement is contingent upon the cloud lifting to reveal a temporarily stationary tent. However, in Numbers 7:89 we

learn that Moses enters the Tent and the Voice speaks to him from "above the ark-cover that was upon the ark of the testimony." Paradoxically, the Voice speaks from behind the cover of the ark, but in order for the Voice to speak at all, the Tent must be pitched and the cloud must enfold it. As a dialogic participant, the reader must consider where Moses stands in relation to this spatial anomaly.

In Deuteronomy 31:15, God appears in the Tent in a pillar of cloud, which stands over the doorway of the Tent. Moses is obviously close to the threshold of the Tent, and inasmuch as the ark exists to transport what is at its centre, (the tablets) the cloud covers the tent so that the God contains the tent, and not vice-versa. His voice cannot be contained within space, but apart from it as recurring phenomena. As a listener, Moses listens in a moveable and covered space that contains God's word but not God. Implicit in all of this is the narrator's attention to a specific spatial context that is redundant when God is speaking. The irony is not apparent, but it creates a useful context for I Samuel as an ark narrative which chronicles the resting of the ark at Shiloh, originally intended as a permanent sanctuary. Its imminent capture is a metaphor prefigured by Hannah, who brings the reader to a recollection of what the ark once was in relation to what it had become, a surrogate object of veneration. [6]

There is a story Jacques Derrida relates, about the

Roman emperor Pompey walking through the ruins of the smouldering Temple. He approaches the Holy of Holies, and discovers what is veiled behind the tabernacle cover: an empty room. According to Derrida, what the Roman psyche could not grasp was the utter conviction and authority with which the Hebrews could situate their God behind an enclosed room that concealed nothing.[7] The interior landscape Hannah endures circumscribes the empty space that is her womb, and crying out from this space not only uncovers her anguish, but also externalizes her womb. The narrator uncharacteristically structures the passage by allowing the omniscient third-person voice to emerge, situating the reader close to where Hannah's silent vow is directed.

Where is Hannah in relation to her empty womb? There seems to be a categorical process that traces words in relation to their place of origin: from Elkanah's point of view there is a narrative movement to the narrator's perception of Hannah's bitterness, and finally to the place that Hannah names as the origin of her sorrow. God closes Hannah's womb, (1:4) the internal space has been shut such that she cannot participate in the fruition of the female temporal cycle. Presumably the monthly cycle is still active and her cycle cannot be interrupted by pregnancy. Hannah is figuratively caught in a time loop: the nexus that exists between God and Hannah is a metaphor that suggests the spatial equivalent of silence, (barrenness) but also a

muteness that is imposed upon the womb.

It is left undetermined whether Hannah's husband is sensitive to her full predicament. It is evident that the narrator wishes to highlight Hannah's grief from two points of view: what the reader assumes is that Hannah's inner torment is not quite the same as Elkanah's perception of it, and the narrator ensures this dualism is not confused with insensitivity.

> And Elkanah her husband said unto her: "Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (1:8) [8]

The structure and meaning of Elkanah's response provide a cover for what is really happening. Hannah empties herself, both through the shedding of tears and by fasting, and this expiation is met by an onslaught of unanswerable questions which only serve to fill her with self-pity. Elkanah's response also appears to be centred from his own ego: "am not **I** better to thee than ten sons?" Perhaps this is merely a ruse to divert her attention, but it also suggests that the husband needs to be mothered, and Hannah's sullen silence also prevents her from being a proper wife.

However, there is another cover to Elkanah's words that hint at an allegorical understanding of Hannah's situation. In a commentary on this passage, Robert Polzin substitutes some words that suggest a more didactic message is in order, "Israel, why do you weep...Am I not worth more to you than ten kings?" [9] If the focus of I Samuel is the predicament

of human and divine kingship, then Polzin's extrapolation conveys a thoughtful revelation; if Israel perceives itself as the target of scorn by its enemies, then its wish to be governed by a human monarch (as a means of political legitimacy) is seen by the narrator as a sign of spiritual weakness. Elkanah's perception of Hannah's interiority, (which is literally empty) manifests as her empty desire to bear children for the sake of avenging scorn.

It remains ambiguous however, whether Elkanah is merely expressing Hannah's actual torment, or whether he has reached the point where an understanding of the situation is inadequate. His question, "why is thy heart grieved?" which in some translations is condensed to "why are you downhearted?" [10] suggests an enclosed heart (lev), and the ancient Hebrews believed the heart to be the innermost organ. Elkanah's understanding is deepened only according to the extent of his own internal dimensions; he is able to speak in terms of her heart's enclosure or emptiness, but he cannot share in it.

Hannah's heart is enclosed, but it also suggests a metaphorical reflection of her enclosed womb. Elkanah reads her grief as an enclosed heart, but the narrator furnishes another possibility:

> now Eli the priest sat upon his seat by the door-post of the temple of the Lord. and she was in bitterness (marah) of **soul**--and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore. (1:9,10)[11]

The narrator reverses the order of Elkanah's vision;

the movement of focus this time jumps from the soul, to the mouth, to the eyes, such that the boundaries of Hannah's desolation move from the inside to the outside.[12] In this context however, we are given a hint in 1:15 that "pouring out the soul" implies an expression of unfulfilled desires. If Hannah's soul is bitter, then it is the only element in this narrative interjection that is not given an opportunity to release itself. The prayer and the weeping involve an externalization of the narrator's perception: the bitterness of soul.

But is the soul to be considered as existing in a spatial dimension even deeper than the heart? Once again, the expression of Hannah's grief by a third party fails to locate the source of her emptiness: like Derrida's Pompey, both Elkanah and the narrator only see a curtain enclosing an empty space -- a foreshadowing of the way God inhabits the sanctuary. If we can also assume that the narrator is limited by his male perception, then Hannah's imminent revelation has concealed yet another dimension to which neither Elkanah nor the narrator have access.

Phyllis Trible chronicles the womb as metaphor in her book God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality. She shows how the womb (rehem) in its plural form (rahamim) means compassion, and in its verb form (rahum) connotes mercy.[13] The word refers both to the mode of being and to the locus for that mode. Here, Trible offers the culmination of a dilemma only

the Voice can hear: the womb is seen

> in the semantic movement from a physical organ of the female body to a psychic mode of being. It journeys from the concrete to the abstract. "Womb" is the vehicle; "compassion" the tenor. To the responsive imagination, the metaphor suggests the meaning of love as selfless participation in life. The womb protects and nourishes but does not possess and control. It yields its treasure in order that wholeness and well-being may happen. [14]

Hannah is unveiled through her heart and soul just as the cloud from Exodus rises from the tent and tabernacle to reveal the ark. Hannah's womb becomes a metaphor for the Tent of Meeting in the desert. Israel has turned away from God and elevated the cultic ritual as its spiritual focus. [15] Hannah's role consequently encompasses the form and movement of spiritual return. Her womb serves a temporal function; although its existence is integral to the perpetuation of life, it is also a reminder that Israel began as a community of sojourners and was given birth to in the most temporary and mutable of surroundings. Hannah's vow recalls Israel from a metaphorically-internalized desert; her monthly cycle will stop, and she will enter a realm of time that is literally creative. To perceive how this empty space can be filled, Hannah must enjoin God to enter the Tent.

The association between mercy and the womb also finds figurative expression in the elaborate construction of the tabernacle. In his translation of the Pentateuch, Joseph Hertz finds that the ark-cover that is described in Exodus

25:17, is translated in the Revised Version of 1884 as "mercy-seat." [16] He also notes that the Hebrew for ark-cover, "kapporeth" has a root which means both "to cover" and "to atone." When God tells Moses in the same passage, that the Voice will speak from above the ark-cover, Hertz suggests that the ark-cover is veiled from sight by the wings of the cherubim. The cover itself is covered. If the mercy-seat can be metaphorically identified with the womb, Hannah's prayer becomes an unfolding veil that accords the empty space a linguistic shape.

Hannah's words are self-referential, in that they beseech God's grace for her to be opened (or uncovered) **at the origin of her emptiness.** The form and the structure of Hannah's vow are dependent upon each other for the integrity of the scene, but the form holds particular interest because it discloses what the reader already knows about Hannah, and what will happen with her son when he experiences his divine revelation.

> "O Lord of hosts, if Thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of Thy handmaid, and remember me, and not forget Thy handmaid, but wilt give unto Thy handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head."
> And it came to pass, as she prayed long before the Lord, that Eli watched her mouth. Now Hannah, she spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice could not be heard; therefore Eli thought that she had been drunken. (1:11-13)

Hannah speaks from bitterness of soul (marat nefesh) but does so in silence. The adjectival root of bitterness

(mar) connotes distillation, so that the tonal silence of this vow acts as an incubating shell for what rests in its centre: the tenor of prayer. What lies distilled behind this prayer is a subtle uttering of Hannah's name: a supplication which asks God to look, remember, and not forget, suggests the first time God looked upon and remembered the afflictions of Israel in Egypt. The pun on bitterness and razor (marah-moreh) confers a structural link upon the passage, linking word and situation. It is a petition in which the consecrated act is offered in exchange for the cessation of deep sorrow.

The vow is enveloped within the prayer, and in the context of self-distillation, Hannah gives over the empty space. It is the empty space that is consecrated, but it is in the form of silence that the consecration of this space occurs. The trope "to speak in one's heart" effectively turns the reader's attention to two figures: Eli the priest, who is watching by the threshold of the sanctuary doorpost, and the narrator, whose attention is directed upon Hannah's lips as they sound out the expression of her heart. The passage calls for the reader to become a reader of lips. The lips mime the heart's desire, and it becomes Hannah's entrance into the realm of divine interruption; her monthly cycle will be stilled and her womb will be opened.

Eli watches Hannah's lips and mistakes her silent prayer for drunkenness. The irony of this is structured

upon who the speaker really is: a priest. It is possible that the narrator is obliquely hinting at his distance from prayer, to the extent that he cannot recognize what Hannah is doing. Like Elkanah, he is limited by a restricted understanding of barrenness, but as a priest, this adds and enhances the irony of his misconception. As a caretaker of the Temple, or the empty space behind the curtain, surely he should be able to recognize a metaphor when it is before him at the threshold of the sanctuary. Hannah's vow is not a mere externalization of anguish, but a process of being emptied, a verbal representation of a fast. It is also important to point out that Hannah is the first to use the name "Lord of Hosts" (El Sabaoth) as a formal address to God, and it is used frequently by the major prophets. [11] God is named according to an attribute of transcendence, but Hannah's promise which is an act of consecration, seems to bring this transcendence and remoteness to bear on her unborn child. But more important than the actual vow, is the form it takes and the apology which follows. Emptying the soul to purge the sorrowful spirit ironically calls into context her entreaty to Eli, "Let thy servant find favour in thy sight."(1:18) Eli is asked to find favour not in what he sees, but in the origin of what lies beyond his scope of vision, the grace that Hannah's name defines. It is also a clever narrative pun of foreshadowing on Eli's blindness; Hannah's name also means "favour" and for Eli to look

favourably on what she has just done, the sentence should more properly read, "Let me find myself in thy sight." Hannah's emptiness is self-actualized in the presence of one who cannot hear, nor, as we are to find out, has the power to see.

Can a nation faced with the possibilities of political empowerment be weaned from the psychic tyranny of space? In a recent work, Olivier Revault D'Allonnès directs attention to the remarkable synchronicity of the Hebrew language. In discussing the ideological history of Israel as a conflict between the nomadic and sedentary life, he finds an important etymological origin for the Ark of the Covenant.

> The interior space of the Ark, that portable place where the Law (Torah) is deposited, is designated by the same word (kerev) used to name the internal space of the human body, that pulmonary, abdominal, vaginal, uterine cavity, the pregnant womb, which each person conveys everywhere with him or herself. Always identical, but never in the same spot. [18]

It is not the Law that has become barren, but its shell and form that have taken an exclusive hold on the people. It is not surprising that Eli's sons (also priests) have been profaning the sacrificial cult by indulging in the flesh of offerings; the flesh has taken precedence over the spirit, and Hannah's response to Eli: "I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit/ I poured out my soul before the Lord" (1:15) is in direct contrast to the reality of Israel's present spiritual life. This is what makes Hannah's vow a metaphor for the nation's encroaching obsession. Scholars mostly agree that

Shiloh was meant to be a permanent sanctuary for the Ark. For the people however, its existence becomes grounded in the space between the desert and Jerusalem.[19]

The reader is left to ponder the loneliness Hannah feels, who has promised to give the child over to the priests once it has been born? If the Biblical process of naming means anything, if it somehow concretizes a person's destiny or vocation, then perhaps Hannah's interior oasis is related to giving this child his future. When Elkanah goes to Shiloh to offer at the yearly sacrifice, Hannah states, "Until the child be weaned, when I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide forever." (1:22) The emotional and physical attachment implied in weaning will be severed according to her vow; "abiding forever" means that Hannah has guaranteed Samuel's immortality, but at the expense of an early cutting of the umbilical cord. Samuel embodies the fruition of a promise to be "lent" to the Lord, a spiritual incubation that mirrors the physical weaning. She brings him to Shiloh, and offers him there where he will wait until the Lord "establish His word." (v.23)

An anonymous man prophesies to Eli that his priestly line is in imminent danger of destruction. In 2:35, "And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in My heart and in My mind" is a statement of prophetic consonance in which Samuel's future role as

prophet/seer/judge will be established in relation to God's anthropomorphized will. Eli is silent at this prophecy, and it is already a foreshadowing of just how remote he is from his vocation. A "faithful priest" is a sarcastic redundancy: the implicit irony is the diseased priesthood which has become deaf to its original agenda, to keep the sanctum sanctified.

Martin Buber points out that Samuel is described as ministering to the Lord in the same way that Joshua was described as minister of the Tent of Meeting. [20] To "minister" (sharat) unto the Lord means to serve the Lord, but its placement in the text suggests that serving the Lord will make Samuel into an overseer of God's silence as a part of the coming catastrophe. Verse 1 couples Samuel's ministry with a narrative pronouncement on this very silence:

> And the word of the Lord was precious (yaqar) in those days; there was no frequent vision.

The "sterility of the oracle" is preceded by the announcement that the Ark will be taken [21]. When something is termed "precious", the value of the object is understood in terms of supply and demand. If God's word has somehow limited itself in terms of all those who are able to hear it properly, then it would follow that this is a narrative comment which assesses the state of Israel's spirituality. In other words, the narrator experiences God's silence as a result of Israel's deafness, a silence upheld despite the imminent abduction of Israel's metaphorical womb.[22]

As was mentioned earlier, Hannah invokes a God whose immanence and transcendence cannot be confined to the parameters of time and space. The silence of the prayer and the emptiness of the womb brings God back to a kind of dwelling place that conforms to an understanding of both phenomena.

Samuel's growth entails being in the landscape of the tabernacle, but what is left undetermined is his knowledge of God. Like the glint of a rare gem in the night, Samuel's theophany occurs not only in the darkness, but in the nearness of the priest whose eyes are dim. Whatever kind of mystery the night brings on, the darkness is both inside and outside the environs of the ark. Light and dark imagery provide a backdrop for the motifs of revelation and concealment; Samuel sleeps despite being a watchkeeper of the Shiloh temple, and this irony does not escape the attention of the narrator.

> And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place -- now his eyes had begun to wax dim, that he could not see -- and the lamp of God was not yet gone out, and Samuel was laid down to sleep in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was... (3:2-3)

Eli's blindness is not brought on by the night, but by his inalterable stance against entering into the darkness. Commentators remark on the ambivalence of "lamp of God," some attributing a metaphorical glimmer of light to Israel's spiritual blindness, others suggesting that the sacramental candles had not yet burned out completely. Certainly it

would appear that Eli has not moved from that same place where he had initially observed Hannah praying; if this represents spatial dormancy, then his night-blindness which is not caused by the night is certainly an appropriate image.[23] His presence is integral to the scene, but peripheral to the actual event. It could be said that he is physically there, but spiritually absent.[24]

As Buber points out, the verb "to lie down" (shakhab) is repeated seven times in this passage. [25] The line of directional demarcation is drawn between Eli and Samuel, in that Samuel rises each time the Voice calls, but Eli is motionless. Samuel sleeps by the ark while Eli is outside the room, and we are told that Samuel "did not yet know the Lord" (3:7) The implication is that Eli does know the Lord, but has never been called. The difference of course is between the "knowing" and the "knowing of". Samuel is in physical proximity to God; Eli is remote.

> ...the Lord called Samuel; and he said "Here am I". And he ran unto Eli, and said: "Here am I; for thou didst call me." And he said, "I called not; lie down again." And he went and lay down. And the Lord called yet again Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said: "Here am I; for thou didst call me." And he answered: "I called not, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said: "Here am I; for thou didst call me." And Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the child. (3:4-8)

Samuel is called three times but mistakes the Voice for Eli. It is interesting to note that the narrator delineates

Samuel's not yet "knowing the Lord" and the as yet "unrevealed word". In other words, the narrator says that Samuel neither knows nor "knows about" the Lord. In contrast to this, Eli is able to perceive **who** is calling Samuel because he does know "about" the Lord, though it is clear he is not the recipient of the divine oracle. He resists telling the child outright, but does furnish him with a mode of responding.

When Eli repeatedly tells him to "lie down again" (3:5-6) (shuv, shakhav) there is both a phonic alliteration accorded the action, and the rhythm of return (shuv) which amplifies the return to God. But once Eli perceives God in the call, the cadence of narration is interrupted by the imperative nature of command:

> Go, lie down; and it shall be, if thou be called, that thou shalt say: "Speak Lord; for Thy servant heareth." So Samuel went, and lay down in his place. (3:9)

The first irony is Eli's directive for Samuel to lie down, following which we are told, Samuel "lies down in his place." These are the exact words that describe Eli at the beginning of chapter 3, but he is by the doorway of the sanctuary; Samuel is actually in it. The narrator is virtually a dramatic director, blocking the characters and focusing attention on where each respective character is in relation to where he moves.

The second irony is Eli's silence, or what he knows in relation to what he is concealing: God will establish His

word with Samuel, and not through him or his corrupt line. The reader must also take into account his memory of Hannah's vow: if he knows Samuel was consecrated at birth through his mother's silent vow, then this vow must somehow be passed on so that the young Samuel will be receptive to the word. Eli knows who Samuel is. Samuel does not.

For Samuel, the irony becomes the knowledge of the priesthood's fate, but he does not want to reveal it. Eli's insistence is his determination to know what is being said behind the veil of the tabernacle, or metaphorically, what is submerged or quietly uttered behind the silent movement of the lips. Samuel's declaration of presence (his hineni) does not elicit God's continuance of the dialogue, because it is never addressed in God's presence. Each time he is called, he runs out of the room, and Eli becomes his spiritual benefactor. His fig leaf (what he hides in relation to what he knows) is God's will not to expiate Eli's house with their sacrifices. The command to return to his place, signals Samuel's spiritual departure. It is his "get thee out", but as it is spoken by a blind priest who has realized what is happening, it really becomes a "get thee back in". The return to God ironically takes place in the moment of departure from the past. Eli's words imply that the restoration of the word means an active and cautious preparation for the rebirth of dialogue. It is Samuel weaned once again, for the very first time.

Eli's response is not a prompting of an explicit hineni, but is essentially a protraction of its meaning. His response offers nothing less than any child's first lesson: he teaches Samuel how to utter his own name. It is the silent vow of his beginnings, merging with the concealed meaning of his name. Sh'ma and El (hear, Lord) together link the act of hearing to the voice of the Lord. Samuel's name becomes the password to a renewed dialogue.

> And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times: "Samuel. Samuel" Then Samuel said: "Speak, for Thy servant heareth." 3:10

What appears to be nothing more than an expectant repetition of Eli's instructions is actually an astounding and subtle echo of recollection. Samuel does not respond to the Voice in his own words, but in the words of a blind man who has overseen the stages of his own gestation. The **act** of repetition contains the unmistakeable silence of Samuel's birth: he mouths the words of someone else in order to receive the Voice. It recalls the event of his pre-birth, when Eli overhears Hannah's vow is unable to discern what is happening. The reiteration of Eli's words also reflects what he cannot hear in relation to what he now cannot see. Hannah's words came literally from within herself; the words Samuel now speaks come from without, although they are spoken from within the same space that his mother stood on when she made her vow. Obviously, where the words are spoken makes a difference: if the doors to the sanctuary are closed

behind Samuel, (and if Eli is on the other side) then Eli's instructions are literally a consecrative act. The blind priest's last righteous deed is a sacramentalization of the word, perhaps suggesting his own desire to return to God.

The reader hears Hannah's heart but not Hannah's voice, Samuel's voice but Eli's words. In that moment of being formed in his mother's womb, the call to Samuel had already been established. His presence in the sanctuary is made existentially complete because his initial "hineni" to God, and is accompanied by an immediate exit from the sanctuary. He repeats this hineni to Eli, who thrice persists in telling Samuel to return to sleep. Such irony! As if this statement of spiritual awakening can be reconciled with a soporific response.

Samuel's fig leaf is his ignorance of who he is; Eli removes it and assumes it himself, thus providing the reader with an implicit act of expiation or sacrifice. Ironically, this is the proper function of a priest, and perhaps Eli's only proper exercise of priestly responsibility in the entire narrative. Samuel is revealed through this priest's memory and carries the silence of his mother's vow back to the ark, He is the expression of a call experienced vicariously by Eli. In 3:15 Samuel opens the doors of the temple. These are the doors of perception, the words Eli cannot hear because he has been deaf to them until now. He can no longer afford to listen with one ear to prophecies of

admonition (cf. 3:11). This time, Eli does call Samuel, and the vocalized hi'neni that signals Samuel's presence is now functional in a landscape and timescape.[26] He is warned not to hide any of God's words, and the "here am I" becomes an utterance of silence. Hineni frames the theophany; speaking his name in this way, Samuel is anchored in silence. In the act of listening to the Lord, he proclaims his presence without letting his "I" get in the way.

If this is a so-called sublime moment, then what precisely is sublimated? I have already stated at the beginning of this chapter, that I Samuel is about the initiation of Israel's first political monarchy. More time and space is devoted to the rise of Saul and the succession of David than to the life of Samuel, yet Samuel is always there, present if not in the narrative action, then as an overseer to what Israel thinks it ought to be in contrast to its neighbours on its borders. In chapter 12, Samuel puts kingship in context before the people; here, what Samuel knows is in contrast to what Israel wants to believe. The didactic nature of the passage suggests that Israel denies God as their Sovereign. The testimony that precedes his chronicling of their history, binds Israel as a witness to God, who is also a witness to Israel. This in turn embraces Samuel's parting hineni with God as the Creator:

> I have hearkened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. Now you have a king as your leader... Here I am. Witness against me in the presence of the Lord and His anointed... The Lord is witness

> against you and also His anointed is witness this day, that you have found anything in my hand. "He is witness," they said. (12:1,3,5)

The formal initiation of the king is in direct juxtaposition to the Samuel's pointedly sharp, "Now you have a king as **your** leader. Samuel reluctantly anoints a king, not because Israel ponders its relationship to its neighbours, but because God has instructed him to as a conciliatory gesture to the peoples' desire. Saul, who has already met with and been chosen by Samuel, is notably absent from the passage. More obvious though, is Samuel's subsequent application of the possessive pronoun in relation to God: The people plead with Samuel "Pray to the Lord **your** God for your servants so that we will not die" (12:19). It is evident the community thinks it needs a king as a hegemonic figure to lead them against the nations on its borders, but the narrator's explicit inclusion of this pronoun articulates the real issue: the people drive a wedge between themselves and God, since they do not believe God can protect them from their enemies. A tempest rumbles on the horizon, and Israel is projected into the still eye of the coming storm.

The sublime moment occurs in verse 16, when Samuel proclaims, "stand still, and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes." In the midst of this storm, Samuel commands the nation to be still, and they "stand in awe of the Lord and Samuel." (12:18) In Hebrew,

fear and awe are designated by the same word (yira). It is not the same fear Samuel feels in having had to communicate the details of his vision to Eli. Here, the awe emerges from the sound of the storm as it comes at Samuel's behest. There can be no explanation for a spatially consumed people, who witness the phenomenality of the word; the great movement of the storm comes only after they are told to "be still."

The parting hineni reflects Samuel's understanding of his people as having deluded themselves by having neglected God's eternal influence upon them. God cannot be caged in the realm of an exclusively personal pronoun; in chapter 12 "hineni" is re-accented as hine'ni, once again placing emphasis on the "I." As Samuel reminds the people that it is the time of the wheat harvest, God is called to restore the people's historic memory as a cyclical greeting of time and eternity. It is Hannah praying from her womb once again, for the sounds and space of the desert to reign in Israel's psyche.

When Samuel is born in God's recollection of Hannah's silent vow (1:19), the reader witnesses a divine response which does not occur in words, but out of the same tenor of silence in which Hannah has made her supplication. Samuel is a corollary to both a horizontal and vertical interchange in which silence is witnessed and thus experienced. We are probably unable to speak of Samuel's fig leaf in terms of something he knows about himself which he is not revealing,

but as a mediator of God's word, he does know something about Israel and Saul that renders half this narrative into a tragedy: Israel and Saul do not manifest that interior stillness out of which "hineni" can emerge. They assume a psyche of settlement, ironically precluding the displacement of self from occurring because self-perception and ego constantly prevent them from doing so. Samuel alone is successful, because his name inhabits the space of receptivity. It is passed down from his mother's side of the family.

1. In his The Prophetic Existence and The Exile of the Word, Néher frequently points to the prophet as carrying language upon a tightrope. What God tells him or calls him to carry out must be translated in such a way so that the community to whom the message is directed can understand it in human terms. The prophetic predicament is that God speaks in language only the prophet can hear, yet he must convey this language so that the community can not only hear but respond to.

2. Heschel, Man's Quest For God 44.

3. Jerome Charyn, "I Samuel," Congregation ed. David Rosenberg (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987) 98.

4. In English, "tenor" comes from the Latin "tenere" or "hold" the general direction or drift of something. The "tone" is from the Greek "tonos" or tension. In contemporary usage, we think of tone as referring to the pitch, quality, or strength in our expression of emotion or sentiment. In this context, Saul and the Israelites have become deaf to that high-tension connection with the divine; tone-deafness is the inability to distinguish the various levels of pitch, and perhaps as a metaphor, the displacement of God from time into space serves as a reflection of the community.

5. Robert Polzin, Samuel and the Deuteronomist (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989) 26-7. Polzin makes feasible metaphorical conclusions, but as a complex character, Hannah is too often overgeneralized as an embodiment of Israel.

6. De Man, Paul. Resistance to Theory. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986. As a moveable object, the ark evolves from a state of mobility to a permanent resting place. The suggestion of assimilation is another motif in the Bible which Judaism resists continuously, not always with success. Contiguous to this in contemporary literary criticism, is the question of objectification and reification of the word. Paul de Man in particular deals with this issue in Resistance to Theory; in various articles, he discusses the aesthetic attempts of literary criticism which attempt to uncover instabilities in language, often succumbing to those same instabilities in the process. It is my own sense, that the text of I Samuel points to a similar dialectic: God is in danger of becoming objectified through an artifice, and it is Samuel's role to restore the ark as a kind of heteronomic construct, necessary for space-consumed people whose aesthetic limitations often prevent God from speaking in words they can hear.

7. Jacques Derrida, Glas, trans. John P.Leavey (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.) 50a.
see also p.49a "The Jewish hearth forms an empty house. Certainly, sensitive to the absence of all sensible form, the Jews have tried to produce an object that gave in some way, rise, place,

and figure to the infinite...Here the ingenuous surprise of a non-Jew when he opens, is allowed to open, or violates the tabernacle, when he enters the dwelling or the temple and offers so many ritual detours to gain access to the secret centre, he discovers nothing -- only emptiness."

8. The movement from eye (weeping) to mouth (fasting) to heart (grieving) are all acts suggestive of emptying or being emptied. Since the Midrash to this passage attributes Elkanah's implied understanding of Hannah's grief to her possible jealousy of Elkanah's other wife Peninnah (who is thought to have borne him 10 sons), it is possible that Elkanah's attempts to comfort Hannah, arises out of an alternative way to give her the fullness (am I not worth more...) of what he interprets as the **value** of giving birth. In other words, it is not the experience or process of childbirth to which Elkanah attributes his wife's grief, but her apparent belief that she is worth less to him than Peninnah.

9. Polzin, 26.

10. "There is nothing as whole so a broken heart." This was attributed to Rabbi Menachem-Mendl of Kotzk, a Hasidic rabbi who contended with melancholy for his entire life. If Samuel is indeed the child of a broken-heart, it is a bond of wholeness and solitude Hannah legates to him as he strives to keep Israel from spiritual fragmentation.

11. Emil Fackenheim, The Jewish Bible After the Holocaust (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 28-29. Fackenheim looks at Exodus 15:22-24 and 17:1-3 and asks what the difference was between the thirsty Israelites at the bitter waters of Marah, and the thirst at Massah and Meribah. He remarks that these are incidents in which Jewish history nearly comes to an end, the distinction however being an inversion of attribution. "At Marah God tries Israel; at Massah and Meribah it is Israel that does the trying, not only of Moses but of God Himself." I would suggest Hannah's bitterness is of the first category, because the implicit resolution of her predicament is obviously at hand; she makes her bitterness work for her, and unlike the Israelites in the desert she does not murmur, but reveals her bitterness (murmuring suggests the rumblings of mutinous thoughts and concealed sentiment).

12. In Hebrew, the soul can have a variety of meanings, and is often interchanged with heart or spirit.

13. Phyllis Trible, God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 33.

14. Trible, 33.

15. Some ancient Midrashists suggest that Moses cast down the tablets of Testimony, because upon seeing the frenzy of the people around the golden calf, he grew fearful that the people would come to worship the stones rather than the Presence that made them possible.

16. The Pentateuch and Haftorahs, ed. J.H. Hertz, 2nd ed. (London: Soncino Press, 1988)

17. The later classical prophets frequently use the term "YHVH Lord of Hosts," and this term of address incorporating the Ineffable Name and God as a commander of angelic armies is an apostrophe that integrates God's transcendental attributes with the qualities of a redemptive deity. The later prophets call God by this name to designate the attribute of a protective shield or rock. Hannah however, omits the Name and simply calls on the Lord of Hosts. In The Talmud, Hannah is said to have prayed "Lord of the universe, of all these hosts that Thou has created in Thy world; is it hard for Thee to grant me one son?" in Genesis 30:2, Jacob demands of Rachel, "Am I in God:s stead, who hath witheld from thee the fruit of thy womb?" (Berachot 31b) Although the term "El Sabaoth" confers upon God the leadership of celestial armies, one should also keep in mind that it has also been given an additional dimension of divine Kingship. Northrop Frye notices in The Secular Scripture, the resonance of the word "sabbath" in Sabaoth, and although there is no linguistic evidence to support this claim, there rests no doubt that Creation continues despite the divine Word being stilled on the seventh day. In the act of naming God as it relates to her barrenness, Hannah calls Creation by its name, but phonetically alters the sound of the day of rest. Perhaps as God is named by rest, Hannah's prayer establishes a mutuality whereby Creation and creation are verbally joined. If God is an angelic commander, then the Talmudists who have Hannah remind God that creating angels is surely more complex than creating a child, suggest that Hannah's initial term of apostrophe brings God back to the role of primordial Creator.

18. Olivier Revault D'Allonnès, 41.

19. Samuel Terrien, The Elusive Presence (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.) 168. Much later in the narrative, the Ark is recaptured from the Philistines, and David wishes to establish the cult and its artifacts in Jerusalem. God tells him that because he has shed blood, it is not for him but for his son, Solomon to build the Temple. Once there, it "acquired the status of permanent visibility ...and moved from the realm of historical time to that of cultic space."

20. Martin Buber, The Prophetic Faith (New York: Collier Books, 1949) 61.

21. Buber, 61.

22. Centuries later the Aramaic "yaqar" (precious) is retranslated as "shekhina", a Hebrew word whose many meanings encompass diverse theological concepts in Judaism. Shekhina (from the root shakhan - to dwell) came to mean an aspect of God's immanence, or more specifically, "self-manifesting presence" sometimes called God's indwelling presence. The rabbis associated the shekhina with the cloud that descended over the Tent of Meeting, and while one should not associate it with the word yaqar too freely, it becomes clear that Samuel's birth and the precious word are metaphorical phenomena that are bound by a common silence. Samuel Terrien also connects yaqar to "yiqrat" or cornerstone. ("Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone." Isaiah 28:16) So far, God's silence is ambiguous; I would suggest however, that a relationship exists between the "preciousness of the word" and the danger of worshipping the word in place of God. If the priesthood has become corrupt, the ministers of the word who are responsible for the stewardship of its home have earned this stony silence. Samuel is as precious to Hannah, and the contrast of his birth to his subsequent removal to the priest's house is pointedly articulated.

23. Eli's character is rife with irony and contradiction: his blindness is both internal and external, yet he is able to discern God's call to Samuel even when Samuel cannot. He is told of the corruption of his sons (who are also priests) yet his weak attempts to admonish them seem little more than bowing to the pressure of his detractors. In some ways, he is remarkably similar to his ancestor Aaron, the first high priest, whose sons die by corrupting a fire sacrifice, and who was ambiguously amenable to the will of the people when they clamoured for the golden calf.

24. Thus providing an inverted reflection of Samuel, who is spiritually receptive to God's word, but keeps running out in the mistaken belief that it is the priest who is calling.

25. Martin Buber, <u>On the Bible</u> (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 131.

26. If we are to believe the Masoretic scribes who put the accents into Samuel's first <u>hineni</u>, the word is first vocalized so that the stress is placed on the "here" or "behold" rather than on the "I." (hi'<u>ne</u>ni) When Samuel runs out of the tabernacle and repeats <u>hineni</u> to Eli, this time it is vocalized with the emphasis on the conjugated "I" (hine'<u>ni</u>). Since it is impossible to determine to what extent vocalization is a result of interpolation, I would hesitate to comment on the varying possibilities of this delineation. But the difference should be noted.

V. I Kings 19

In my first chapter, I discussed the possibility of perceiving the Sabbath as a verb, an active vital retreat not from creativity but from the Word that brings creativity into being. To show how one mysterious turn of phrase, "the voice of the Lord walking toward the cool of the day," might be extended by the prophet Elijah's experience of the "still small voice," is to cajole language into an open challenge of ambiguity. In any event, critics have been struck by the arcane beauty of this phrase, but few have entered into its fullest possibilities as an ultimate ambiguity.

The irony that silence brings to language in this passage is the potential for silence to be verbally articulated by a narrator who seemed to know what he meant by the "still small voice", without providing the reader with any antecedents. What emerges with clarity however, is Elijah's unmistakeable retreat to the summit of a mountain inside a cave, in which his concealment from the wrath of Jezebel after the massacre that has just taken place directly brings him into a particular divine revelation.

In his work The Book of God, Gabriel Josipovici discusses how verbs that describe the state of being still reflect active and fluid syntactical rhythms. [1] The apposition of language and the action that it signifies, brings the narrator into a relationship with the text that must reflect this paradox for the reader. Elijah's fig leaf,

that which prevents him from perceiving the essence that God sees in him, is removed once he witnesses an aspect of God's essence. It is true that God speaks to Elijah in a different way when the two are alone than when Elijah is with the people, but the prophet's predicament (which is a universal prophetic predicament) is his expectation: the people are swayed to God's side on Mt. Carmel, but as long as Jezebels are still alive in the world, Elijah cannot rest.

In direct confrontation with this paradox, he fulfils a specific function in God's agenda and experiences his prophetic mission as a burden. As mediator between God and the community, the prophet walks upon the covenantal arc as one would upon a tightrope; hearing the word and interpreting the word would appear to be two mutually exclusive acts, since the prophet must often assume responsibility for the people who themselves experience the Word only as hearsay. In I Kings 19:4, Elijah does not offer any apparent atonement for the people, but wanders into a cave on the summit of Horeb and laments, "It is enough...take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." To bring the prophet to a point of no return, where he moves to the brink of his own life as part of God's agenda is to offer the ultimate ransom for the return of God's voice. If atonement is an act performed on behalf of the people and a necessary condition for the vertical encounter to take place, then the process becomes a crucial

gesture of return. The edge of Elijah's life becomes a re-enactment of the seventh day, an interior Sabbath where silence as stillness becomes a remote possibility.

Prophetic speech and prophetic silence are bound by a fiery nexus. André Néher suggests how it is incumbent on the prophet to mediate the "davar" (word/deed) between two realms: divine and human.

> the true reply to God's davar is to repeat that davar, to become God's mouthpiece, to extend the inner dialogue to an exterior one, to put the meaning of the davar to a test by introducing it to the world. The prophets are not simply relays. Their experience with the davar acquires a new dramatic role when it is to be transmitted to others. Then it becomes a 'burden', too heavy for them; but they must perform their task, or else it is a fire burning in their chests, a fire which they cannot long withhold. [2]

The prophet lives inside a double exile; when Israel succumbs to the temptations of foreign deities, it is the burden of the prophet to restore God's word to the community. Often, it also falls upon the divine mediator to intercede with God on behalf of the community, and remind God that atonement must be mutual. It is not that God requires creation's help in recalling past words, but he must be assured that the prophet realizes how the word as burden and atonement through silence are intimately connected with one another. This means that the prophet must respond simultaneously to a vertical and horizontal dialogue, a vertiginous movement whose fusion finds expression in the objective of atonement which is mutual return.

In the Elijah narrative, there are echoes which betray not only past theophanies, but also catastrophes that have frequently become the landscape upon which such revelations are grounded. Biblical commentators have already noted the summit of Horeb as a place where God extends the Word to creation. In I Kings, Elijah traverses a circuitous route until he reaches Mt. Carmel, and only then can a straight line be drawn to Horeb. Elijah's movement follows a continuous path to refuge, one that is critically ambiguous, but which establishes a narrative pattern that identifies the character with his story. Refuge is understood in terms of retreat, retreat from the community, retreat from the Word, and ultimately a retreat from God. Were the reader to ask Elijah the question, "Where are you" the answer would be everywhere, except where he should be. As he wanders through the echoes of past theophanic landscapes, it becomes evident that his physical trajectory mirrors his interior movement towards stillness.

Elijah's life is lived through covenantal arc. He assumes the shape of its retrieval and restoration. The narrator manifests a concern for the covenant to be realized in the face of a humanity turned away from God towards political expediency and agricultural security. In this section of I Kings, it is not only the covenant that is in question, but a God recalled through the seven days of Creation. For Creation to endure, it requires an

understanding of the seven days not as a fait accompli, but as an ever-continuous phenomenon.

Elijah enters the narrative while Creation and the Covenant are already in **progress**; the reader joins him not (as with Abraham or Samuel) at the beginning of his life but in the middle, and though the narrator tells us he is a Tishbite, no other formal or familial identification is made. There is no encumbrance of beginning or end in Elijah's story, and perhaps this is where the greatest irony lies: Elijah's youth is only implied, and his death is ambiguous. The reader is virtually compelled to understand his life as process, because essentially there is life and nothing else. [3]

Perhaps the most identifiable aspect of the prophet is to translate the question "where are you?" into action. By definition, idolatry suspends the possibility of God as eternal movement, and physical gesture becomes the means through which the prophet demonstrates the question actively. Similarly, the prophet reaches a point in his journey where the Question must act upon him. As a microcosm of the community, and as one who has been chosen to hear the Word, the prophet is effected insofar as he is a mouthpiece and a listening-piece. The prophet is the catalyst for the storm, but perhaps the question is the extent to which he is affected by its violence.

There is no ceremony surrounding Elijah's entrance into

the narrative. He is not called by God, and this either suggests that he has prior experience of God and has no need to be called, or the narrator has confidence that the reader will recognize the etymological origins of Elijah's name . If there is already a linguistic enfolding of God around Elijah's name, then Elijah's presence in the narrative is perhaps similar to God's. The community has retreated from God, God calls Elijah to retreat from the community, and in so doing God symbolically retreats from the community. The community experiences this absence in the form of a drought in which no literal growth can occur, but the reader senses that it is a different kind of growth that the narrator intends. Droughts, however, have a beginning and an end; Elijah has none. Unlike the other characters I have looked at, Elijah is not preceded by a calling of his name. He is merely told to remove himself from where he is. Critically, it means that Elijah can be placed in a context where one can read the echoes of his story from the past into the future. His first words become a thread of convergence by recalling Creation.

The pronouncement of drought, I would suggest, is a reversal of Creation, a dramatic reenactment of something which happened not long after the first seven days were completed. As a harbinger of drought, Elijah establishes an inverted parallel to Noah. Noah was defined as the only one of his generation to have "walked with God." Noah was not

handed any autonomy with respect to the flood. He builds the ark and is silent for many chapters. But it is his isolation from the rest of humanity that binds him to Elijah's character as a deliverer, but as a deliverer through physical withdrawal; Elijah forces Creation to become contingent on his word.

> As the LORD, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.
>
> (I Kings 17:1)

The downward sweep of the rain and the accompanying condensation which leaves its trace on the landscape become fused to Elijah's silence. In effect, he shows Ahab that God's Creation is linked to its caretaking, and one cannot take care of the earth and be separate from its Origin. It is as if Elijah were saying, "The process of nature will be silenced according to my silence." This silence, however, does not emerge from a benevolent prophet. By holding back water as a source of sustenance for growth, Elijah has by extension reversed the order of Creation, causing its cessation. His word is not exclusively tied to water, but water in motion. The suspension of movement externalizes and emphatically demonstrates to Ahab that God's Creation can become frozen when the word is held back. Herein is the first instance of muteness juxtaposed with silence: the self-imposed silence forms a backdrop for the imminent scene with Baal on Mt. Carmel a few chapters later.

Water not only falls as rain, but also rises as dew. It

is dew that covers and protects vegetation when the rain has been absent. Dew is the condensation and circumscription of water back to its place of origin. Its absence suggests a metaphor for the abandonment of a covenantal consciousness. The Hebrew word for dew (tal) refers to a process of covering, but one that represents nourishment. No dew means no sustenance, no blanketing presence upon which Creation is made contingent. When the cover is removed, Israel will be parched not only with physical thirst but also with spiritual thirst. The earth will be denuded by Elijah's silence, and this silence will be an act of petrification. Neither the earth nor the upper firmament will henceforth be in dialogue with one another.

The oasis of any flood is a dry place. Elijah however, is told by God to hide himself by the brook Cherith, an oasis which by virtue of its name, becomes a covenantal irony. "Cherith" is a body of water whose Hebrew root is cognate with the act of cutting. Since the covenant can be metaphorically defined as a paradoxical unity through an act of division (ie. circumcision), God's words to Elijah suggest an ambiguous movement. In seeking refuge either from Ahab or the ensuing drought, Elijah will live out the covenant by paradoxically concealing himself, or cutting himself off from the rest of Israel in order to turn the community back to God. His actions deepen God's opening words. As he hides himself in order to re-emerge

tempestuously, he mimes God's entrance into the world from concealment to revelation.

Elijah is an exception to the rule because he is not called to proclaim presence at the beginning of the narrative. However, the Voice ironically calls him to do the same thing. He is told to absent himself, and his absence is made immediately conspicuous to the community. The irony in Elijah's absence is that it brings with it a phenomenon that augments this absence such that he is palpably present within it. In other words, Elijah's absence will be felt more strongly as a manifestation of God's presence. The convergence of the muteness of nature and the silence of the prophet will be experienced as a precursor to covenantal return. The password is not spoken, but acted out in a subtle way.

As a password to dialogue with God, the prophetic agenda calls for something else to happen before "hineni" is uttered. The prophet must first become the bridge for the people to cross before he can teach them the correct combination of sounds to bring God back into their midst. The reversal of the pattern shows that the covenant is not nonexistent. Perhaps its dormancy is revealed as an interruption in dialogue in order to suggest that even the closest of partners must draw back from one another before the dialogue can be resumed. For Elijah, to retreat to a place of water suggests that spirituality exists in the

division between the soporific spirit, and the process of dialogic reawakening and refreshment. Just as water might taste better in the desert, God becomes more pronounced through his absence.

Elijah is to be nourished by the cut. The incision of a drought upon the landscape is figuratively shown as a circumcision of the people. In contrast to Elijah being sustained, the imminent drought augments the tone that God is a presence to be hungered for. This part of the Elijah narrative in I Kings also prefigures a feeding motif; The ravens who are commanded to feed Elijah in the morning and return to feed him at night, which not only restores a cycle of the day as the primordial unit of Creation, but also recalls the original raven who was sent by Noah to verify the status of the flood. The ark does not come to rest until the waters subside, so that the raven's one-way journey defers Noah's release from the ark until the right moment. This raven never returns. On the other hand, the ravens who come to feed Elijah resolve his dilemma by flying off into the desert and returning from the landscape in which they thrive with the sustenance Elijah needs to feed his silence. This mode of refuge in turn illustrates a pattern whereby concealment feeds revelation. The prophet hides as a mirror for God's hiding, until Israel is filled once again by the oxymoron of concealed Presence.

The second part of the feeding motif is continued in

Zarephath where Elijah is told he will be sustained by a widow. Biblical commentators seldom resist the temptation to paint this as an allegory. Elijah ends up sustaining the widow by performing a miracle, and brings her dead son back to life through prayer. Her judgement of the prophet, "Now I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord is in thy mouth" (17:24) reveals a change of heart, but one that is contingent upon the visual sign. More likely however, this exchange prefigures the contest on Mt. Carmel by mirroring Israel's identity in relation to a metaphorically widowed God. The widow has been cut off from her partner in creation, and risks losing her only offspring. The widowed woman is thus a metaphor for Israel's predicament: her family is on the verge of disintegration and it is the prophet's task to prevent this from happening by healing the widow's son, who is clearly the only one standing between his mother and her mortal solitude. Elijah's solitude in the face of his community is paralleled by the widow's solitude, bringing God back as a father who wants his family back as it once was. The children have sickened themselves with neglect, and need to re-centre themselves around a properly uttered prayer.

The word of God only returns to Elijah in the third year. His silence is thus implied to have lasted three years. Elijah comes out of this silence when God reverses the prophet's concealment, and says, "Go, show thyself to

Ahab and I will send rain upon the land."(18:11) Here, the difference between the prophet as messenger and as mediator is acted out. Before the rain falls, Elijah's brief encounter with Obadiah acts as a point of contrast: Obadiah has saved a hundred prophets from the wrath of Jezebel by hiding them in a cave. He himself fears for his own life at the hands of Ahab,the Israelite Baal-worshipper, and although the narrator describes him as "fearing God greatly" (18:3), the irony of this statement slips in by virtue of the rambling and repetitious explanation concerning what he has done, and what will happen to him if Jezebel finds him out. The implicit irony in what "fear" means is evident: God-fear is not the same as people-fear, and though Obadiah is a so-called prophet of the Lord, his God-fear is mitigated by his fear of those who have profaned the community's spirituality. Elijah's brief message "It is I; go, tell thy lord: Behold, Elijah is here." (18;8) is in stark contrast to Obadiah, whose words whirl around all over the place:

> Wherein have I sinned, that thou wouldst deliver thy servant into the hands of Ahab, to slay me? As the Lord thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee; and when they said: He is not here, he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest: Go, tell thy lord: Behold, Elijah is here. And it will come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the spirit of the Lord will carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he will slay me; but I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth. Was it not told my lord what I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, how I hid a hundred men of the Lord's prophets by fifty in a cave,

and fed them with bread and water? And now thou sayest: Go, tell thy lord: Behold, Elijah is here; and he will slay me.

(18:9-14)

Obadiah is also a raven, but without a defined direction. His fear of God is compromised by his fear of the office of "nation and kingdom", and even though his act of heroism forms an auxiliary pattern to the feeding motif in the narrative, Obadiah diverges from Elijah according to their respective modes of speech. Unlike Elijah, Obadiah has not cultivated fear of God, grounded in the awareness that one can run from God but cannot hide. Elijah's pronouncement, "Behold, Elijah is here..." (18:7,14) forces Obadiah to become not only a messenger of the word but a mediator It makes him an accessory to Elijah's concealment, and this is what distinguishes the mediator from the messenger. Being a prophet means being involved in binding the word to one's life. Elijah breaks his silence by asking another to announce his presence, thus grounding Obadiah in the relationship between presence and silence.

"Behold, Elijah is here." The irony of a self-announcement in the third person, even in the context of a message directed to another party, imposes a dramatic entrance and return which is absent at the beginning of the narrative. The impending ritual is not a contest between God and Baal, but an attempt to redeem the slopes of the covenantal arc. Rainfall is imminent, and the message preceding Elijah's arrival describes the form in which rain

takes place; rain emerges from the word's return, from the dichotomic return of breath and wind.[4]

It is significant that the ancient Hebrews had no word for "nature". In referring to himself through the third person, Elijah literally stands back from himself, giving his presence meaning both in the present (for Obadiah) and in the future (for Ahab). Elijah brackets himself as the cloud or sign that signals the beginning of the rain, while at the same time implicitly effacing the possibility that nature acts without God's consent. Elijah's prophetic agenda is to restore the rhythm of the rainfall where it was once kept in check by a rainbow, an inverted arc. From the narrator's point of view, it is crucial that nature not subsume the divine word by acting independently of God.

Elijah turns to the community of Israel and calls them to take a stand according to their hearts: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him." (18:21) The ensuing silence is more than a dramatic self-reflection; it reflects a hidden accusation. The community is not asked to stop vacillating between two deities, but between polytheism and monotheism. Rainfall is a primitive but eternal dialogue between the heavens and the earth. The choice Elijah gives Israel in this terse statement is life through dialogue, or putrefaction through monologue. [5]

As I have already pointed out, idolatry implies an

egocentric mode of self-worship. Substituting an artifice as a means of theurgic representation suggests a monologic consciousness. Idolatry becomes the verbal equivalent of talking to oneself. Even the soliloquy is a form which assumes a listening audience, but the silent audience in this case is the god to whom the call is directed. [6]

Deification of the self means that God is displaced from the community's spiritual awareness. The neglect of God physically means that the landscape is frozen according to an aural mirage, the misapprehension that God's silence is the same as God's apathy. Elijah heals this by restoring a silence that is the interlude between two voices. When two voices speak simultaneously, neither can hear what the other is saying. Perhaps the only way to define this interlude is to call it a considered abiding, a considered acknowledgement of an other outside the self. The encounter with God is an amplification of this interlude, the experiencing of the wholly Other as an ultimate experience of the self in dialogue. [7]

What subsequently happens between Elijah and Israel is a ritualizing of the trace marks Abraham left on the sands of the desert: the path of altars which ultimately ends in the experience of Otherness. This kind of dialogue will not only restore the rain, but also clear the fog that has obscured the covenantal arc. The exchange warrants close scrutiny. If Elijah is calling for a firefall to validate

Israel's God, it is not simply an historical devaluation of Baal as a nature god. The narrator creates a soundscape where Israel and God can exist in a mutually-reflective context.

> and the people **answered** him not a word.
> ...and the God that **answereth** by fire, let him be God.
> And all the people **answered** and said: "It is well spoken."
> (the people) called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon saying "O Baal, **answer** us."
> But there was no voice, nor any that **answered**.
> (18:21,24,26)

The unspoken question directed to God is "Where are you." Elijah has initiated a reversal of the call, but this is not to demonstrate to the people that God's presence hinges on a response. The repetition of "answer" emphasizes that for the vertical dialogue to be redeemed, the covenantal partners must return to a relationship of questioning. Elijah has not betrayed a method or a password through which either deity can be called. It is the only element of the contest that is open, but it is this element that will decide the contest.

But in the same way that a pattern has already been established which defines God as the caller and humanity as the called, the reversal is intended to return the people to God by **overturning** the protocol with which God answers. When "answer" is used as an imperative in the last repetition, Elijah has already stacked the contest in his favour. God does not respond to the imperative verb when the appropriate

inner space has not been inhabited. Hebrew commentators who use "covenant" as a verb realize exactly what needs to be opened in order for the Question to re-emerge in the context of mutuality, but the Baalist priests do not "covenant" with their deity. In other words, dialogue does not represent a possibility because there are no words to exchange. Silence and muteness are divided here according to the varying degrees of perception. Silence requires that all visual images be blanked out, that all human constructs of the Voice be effaced. Muteness implies an inability to speak, perhaps for lack of anything to say. [8] The repetition of "answer" in this passage, means that the anxiety of expectation will block the possibility of an answer. As it pertains to language, idolatry is the construction of words for words' sake, self-referential, and endlessly self-consuming.

The people need to be visually astonished: Elijah has vocalized the verbal equivalent of a drought, a natural state in which the forces of nature are not in communication with one another. By responding to Israel's physical thirst, Elijah has created a substitution corresponding to covenantal thirst. To signify divine presence by fire is an act that sanctifies the Mosaic covenant in its temporality. Fire is a powerful metaphor for presence because

> The presence of the Deity is signified to men by a kind of fire which does not correspond to empirical verification. Fire is a symbol of prompt becoming. It suggests the desire to change, to hasten time, to bring

life to its beyondness. [9]

Elijah has set Israel up by creating the question and limiting the substantive quality of the answer to one possibility. Israel has no choice but to move symbolically through the descending flames. Fire is an agent both of purification and cauterization. The contest is not part of a hidden agenda, but an agenda of hiddenness. Having been hidden for three years, Elijah attempts to restore knowledge of a hidden God to a people who have sought refuge from their own fears. In other words, the people are being taught to stop trifling with the concept of nature as a force distinct from God, to affirm themselves in a fear that is awe: God's vision.

The difference between silence and muteness in this passage is phenomenon of divine interruption. The distinction between muteness, which is a condition of being held back or distanced from speech, and silence, which confers a homeland upon language, asserts God's absence as a manifestation of what happens when the people turn away. It is perhaps the most recurrent theme in the books of the prophets: the community turning away from God, God turning away from the community, and the prophet chosen by God to implore and sometimes threaten the community to return so that God will no longer be silent. Perhaps what the people assume to be God's muteness is actually their own refusal to accept silence as their homeland, denying that the word

needs audible space in order to be heard. If idolatry assumes that a deity can be visually represented, then the creator of the idol would necessarily have authority over his creation. It is a self-representation in which he superimposes his likeness onto that of his god.

What kind of dialogic movement happens when the community twists and contorts its spirit by bowing down to itself? Inside the matrix of a sentence expressed as "O Baal, answer us," is an expectation that someone amid the crowd is a rainmaker, or has imbued the graven image with a garden hose hidden in its interior. Baal is mute because the people have created him as a solemn echoing of the people's own muteness. In effect, Elijah has returned to bring the people across the river once again, back into a homeland where silence is interrupted by the Voice, and not the Voice by silence.

The subjection of a mute oracle to an empty interrogation reflects the Baalist prophets' own muteness. The echo of misdirection is externalized by the repetition of the Hebrew root "pasakh" in 18:21 (How long **halt** ye between two opinions?") and in 18:26 (And they **danced in halting** wise about the altar which was made). Dance is not a wholly inappropriate mode of worship, [10] but as a figurative repudiation of the question "where are you?" it is a danse macabre.

André Néher suggests that the idol is mute not because

it cannot speak, but because it cannot answer questions. [11] He does not however, delineate the quality of the question which is at stake. The idol as oracle is already muted because rain is no longer the issue in this contest. [12] The irony of the refrain: "O Baal, answer us" resides in the absence of a posed question. The unspoken question here is not whether Baal really exists, but the accusation directed against the people. Where are they in relation to the divine, and is it Baal's muteness that is identified or the Baalist prophets' deafness?

Just as there is a marked distinction between silence and muteness, there is also a difference between division and fragmentation. The graven image is merely a reflection of an interior collective dissolution. The community has ceased to identify itself as communal. By constructing an altar, Elijah restores not only a channel of integration between God and Israel,[13] but a space for the community to gather **as** a community.

Elijah utters "Come near unto me" (18:30). In doing so, he forges a connection between the repair of the altar, the naming of Israel, and the digging of the trench that circumscribes the altar. Presumably the people gather in a circle around the altar, the circle being a symbol of unity and eternity. The repair and naming are bound up in an evocation of Joshua crossing the Jordan into Canaan. Joshua calls for twelve representatives of each tribe to come and

gather a stone:

> ...that this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask in time to come, saying, "What mean ye by these stones?" then ye shall say unto them: Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, when it passed over the Jordan, the waters over the Jordan were cut off; and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel forever.
> (Joshua 4:6,7)

Passing over the drought reenacts a similar kind of crossover, a transition into a moment where water is divided so that the ark can pass through along with the people. The act of traversing the water to enter the land, resonates when Elijah rebuilds the opening whose stones memorialize the crossover. It is a crossing over into a moment that was sanctified as an eternal moment in the mythos of this community.[14] Just as the waters part to accept the passage of the ark, Elijah initiates the parting of the land to bring back the water. The metaphor is subject to change, but the phenomenon remains the same.

The trench that is dug around the altar forms a circuitous channel that will bear the water. Israel is to be cauterized by witnessing the fire, but bearing witness to the carving of the open space will be an act of purification. The Hebrew root for "trench," (tealah) denotes healing, specifically the bandaging of a wound. God's ruach (breath/spirit) becomes the binding tourniquet that will renew spiritual growth. The abandonment of wholehearted attention to God becomes characterized as a self-inflicted

wound, and the trench suggests a metaphorical artery where wholeheartedness is the objective for this symbolic circumcision. [15]

There is an odd repetition of time rhythm, in which it would appear that Elijah takes a whole day to repair the altar, put the wood in order, and prepare the trench. The mention of an evening-offering is repeated, with the implication that Elijah takes a considered 12 hours to call on God. Four jars are filled with water, and three times the water is poured upon the offering until the trench is filled. The tribal ties to the past are recalled, but it is done in a way such that the people **participate** in the altar ritual. The ritual enfolds the people in a dialectic of witnessing and participation, where seeing and doing become identified. [16] Cutting open the earth so that the trench can be fed fulfils one of Elijah's functions in the narrative: he sustains in the act of being sustained. Israel becomes the trench that surrounds the altar, and pouring the water into it implies that the community has begun to feed itself. The ritual becomes a ceremony of energy transference: Elijah binds himself to the people, and the people return to God.

The silence of preparation which precedes Elijah's prayer allows the moment in which the prayer is spoken to sanctify the altar by naming God; the deed is described in accordance with the word, articulating the status of neglect

that precipitated Israel's turning away:

> O Lord, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, for Thou didst turn their heart backward.
>
> (18:36,37)

The deviation of the patriarchal invocation is characterized by the use of Jacob's changed name. It was a divine visitation that transforms Jacob into Israel, and Elijah's ritual at the altar stresses that part of the ritual that incorporates the process of naming and renaming. It is the Israel that wrestles which the prophet attempts to reclaim, the community that by virtue of its covenant, is sanctioned to name its God according to his ineffability. God's identity is pronounced at the altar, according to the history of a community defined by its capacity to be renamed. God is named not as mediating force between nature and the community, but according to the community's capacity to be present in the moment of being known by God.

After the Baal prophets dance around their altar, Elijah's mocks them by sarcastically identifying Baal with images of their own ridiculous gestures. "Either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened" (18:27). Human attributes are assigned to the deity, actions which all point to Baal's silence in human terms. The anthropomorphization of silence, (giving divine silence a

human face) demarcates the dance around the altar. The physical movement of revolution does not yield an answer from Baal; it is simply an enactment of Elijah's question, a ritual miming of the hopping between two branches. In a recent commentary, Michael Fishbane claims, "One must wonder at the structure of this hopping, and ask how two such branches might stem from one tree?"[17] This narrative episode is just one variation on a common Biblical motif: when God is not given the community's exclusive allegiance, they are fragmented and divided amongst themselves.

Various translations render Elijah's supplicatory words differently. This might not be worthy of consideration, but the imperative commands are important enough to consider. Most English translations juxtapose Elijah's "Hear me, O Lord, hear me." with the prophets of Baal who cry out, "O Baal, answer us." In Hebrew, there is no distinction between the two: the Hebrew "anah" is also used to represent the verb "to answer." [18] But I would suggest that the narrator hears a different quality of voice in each petition that beckons for the deity to reveal himself. The only qualitative difference in each plea is the use of personal pronoun: Elijah's supplication is personal, the Baalists', pluralistic. The difference between the individual and the collective takes shape, and perhaps this points to Samuel Terrien's statement about entering into the proper attitude of theocentric worship. [19] God cannot be wrenched out of

his dwelling place, and perhaps for a translator to use "hear" in relation to the personal pronoun, is to accommodate the prayer into the mechanics of the vertical dialogue. To use "answer" in the imperative voice is to make demands on the deity out of which comes the monologic mind, one that makes no room for the wholly Other to respond.

One must recall the stipulations of the contest: the deity who answers by fire will be God, but through all of this the question "Where are you?" is never spoken. If the question has shifted from "where is God?" to "which god will be God" then Elijah has merely tailored the prayer to fit the unspoken question. The alterations have to be made because although the people have not lost the prayer, they have lost themselves in relation to the words. Elijah does not require God's existence to be validated, but he must re-introduce a relationship of questioning where answering becomes redundant. "Where are you?" is a question whose tenor can change according to context. In this trial by fire, Elijah's question to Israel is actually "Where are you in relation to the fire?" Like a Zen monk given a koan, the respondent is released from the expectation that the question is capable of being answered, and redirected to the internal logic of the question as an end in itself.

The Word becomes relegated to the fire. The firefall is suggested as a contrast to the absent rainfall, and Elijah literally becomes a figure who turns speech inside out just

as the elements are turned inside out. The relationship between Elijah's plea and the pronouncement which elucidates Israel's false conflation of rainfall with the Baalim is demarcated according to where Elijah is in that moment. The phrase "turning their hearts backward" is a trope that attributes the peoples' wayward hearts to God's will.[20] The dialectic of calling and answering, however, redirects the heart towards the proper direction. The prophet fuses the Israel's vacillating heart to the eternal movement of the fire. The point of mediation that Elijah fashions from this moment, is a group of words which binds God as phenomenon, to a people whose stagnant life-force needs to be re-divinized.

The God who answers by fire drinks of the water that saturates the altar and the trench. Witnessing their own thirst as reflected in the desiccated altar, Israel proclaims, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God." (18:39) God and Israel become bound in this moment of falling fire; the slope of the covenantal arc reaches into Israel's heart, but the spectacle is not yet over. The subsequent slaughter at the brook Kishon, which hearkens back to the Levites who rally on the side of Moses after the golden calf, completes the ceremonial resonance of the contest. The narrator's use of the word "shekhitah" (slaughter) suggests that the massacre has ritual significance. The prophets of Baal become their own sin

offering to Baal, muting out the possibility of any further infection that might afflict Israel's fragile spirit.[21]

Elijah's retreat is characterized as a retreat from Jezebel, but is this actually a retreat out of fear, or a retreat towards rest? Elijah's need as a member of the Israelite community does not preclude a repetition of the process of being emptied and filled just as the people were on Carmel. But Mt. Carmel is not the right place. The reason is not apparent, and yet the difference between Carmel and Horeb hints at the kind of revelation Elijah will experience distinct from the rest of the community. There is a clearly traced pattern of Elijah's gradual seclusion: from the entrance of Jezreel to Beersheva, into the wilderness and finally atop Horeb where he wanders into a cave. He is fed by two angels, providing a backdrop to his forty day fast on Horeb. Feeding engenders fasting because internal emptiness will define the context for another degree of nourishment. The mysterious quality of strength in a fast is not only a means of resisting temptation, but heightens spiritual awakening. As a prophet, he symbolically becomes the altar he has just reconstructed, but as the Israelite, he cannot resist looking backward either.

He prays for the end of his life but ironically does so in relation to his past: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers." (19:4) The irony in the sentence rests in a temporary absence of

self-awareness; Elijah has lost track of time as it relates to God's presence in history. He laments the inadequacy of his existence in the present, and asks God to terminate his future because he feels he has not lived up to the past. This prayer effaces the prophet's sense of his own presence in history. The perception of his retreat as refuge from Jezebel is made all the more believable by this death wish, but it seems to come from a generalized weariness of what a prophet means in human history. Perhaps the most important tension the prophet mediates in his lifetime is situating himself as prophet to the Israelites, and as Israelite to God. In his own eyes, he is a mere mortal.

Elijah's refuge in the cave is associated by most scholars with the rock in which Moses is placed as God's presence passes by. [22] The cave functions as a place of concealment or refuge from one's captors. [23] But it is also the means for the concealed God to be revealed to Elijah, in the context of Elijah's own self-concealment. As well, the internal absence provided by the fast is suggested as the beginning of an inner stillness, a place where entering the cave is an approach into refuge, a retreat both from language and from God's expectation of him. But like his initially conspicuous absence from the community at the beginning of the narrative, Elijah's presence in the cave works in reverse. Literally, he is hiding from Jezebel, but by asking God to remove him from the world, he is hiding

from God's understanding and perception of where he **ought** to be, that is, back in the world where his work is not yet finished.

God's question, "What doest thou here Elijah?" (19:9) is perhaps a permutation of the question "where are you?", since it signifies an evocation of Elijah's purpose for being in the cave. This question's universality makes it clear that an entire life can be subject to enquiry. It is as though the incident on Mt. Carmel never occurred, and Elijah's mission had been in vain.

> I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I, only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away.
>
> (19:10)

Has some crucial passage been left out of the text, the community left unpersuaded by the incident on Mt. Carmel? It is despairing that Elijah calls for his own death, and puzzling that the children of Israel are perceived as his pursuers (or are they?). It is Ahab who recounts the event on Carmel to Jezebel, and the latter who subsequently orders that Elijah be found and killed. But what accounts for Elijah's retreat? Is it an ambiguous trail the narrator leaves for the reader, to determine whether Elijah is running from the people or from God? Surely a prophet who has just brought fire down from the skies would have nothing to fear from Jezebel, so it is more likely the narrator intends an irony: Elijah retreats from God to the mountain

upon which God revealed himself to Moses centuries before.

The "jealousy" or vehemence with which Elijah defends his past actions in the Name of God, reflects the last syllable of his name which is cognate with the first syllable of God's Ineffable Name. Certainly in Exodus 20:5, the word "jealous" is used by God in relation to the prohibition against graven images, and if "jealous" is also one of God's names, [24] the resonance of Elijah's answer seems to move towards a joining or rejoining of his name with one of God's names.

The cave on the summit of Horeb is an effective spatial metaphor; the movement for the prophet is literally upward and inward. This passage from one mountain to another is as much a spiritual journey as it is a refuge from the crowd. It brings Elijah to a place outside his familiar world, but he only knows that place by one name, namely death. The repetition of "I, even I, only," defines the prophetic life very accurately, because the prophet is the last thing between the community and its permanent severance from God.

God asks a permutation of the question "Where are you?" and Elijah gives a permutation of "Here I am" couched in an articulation of his own name. In whatever derivative the question "Where are you" is asked, the answer cannot be pronounced according to his familiar world. Elijah has answered the question in terms of the past. Carrying the burden of the Word has become too much for him, the "Lord of

Hosts" (Sabaoth) [25] must relieve him of the load by removing his spirit from the world.

There is a salient division between Elijah's response to Israel and to God: in 18:22, he proclaims "I, even I, only, am left a prophet of the Lord; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men". In 19:10, Elijah leaves out the phrase pattern "prophet of the Lord" because it is assumed that since God elected him as prophet, the self-nomination as prophet is not needed. The narrator has differentiated the pattern, possibly because it is more important to amplify Elijah's humanity. As a prophet of the Lord, there is certainly a stark contrast between Elijah and the rest of the community, but he is nevertheless still attached to the community. It appears evident that the narrator carefully shifts the language, to portray Elijah as a member of the community of Israel, in relation to the transcendent Presence who addresses him. His reaction to God must be structurally similar to Israel's reaction to the fire on Mt. Carmel. The revelation can be no less dramatic, its effects no less awe-inspiring:

> And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire, a still small voice.
> (19:11,12)

Some translators render these last three words as, "thin voice of silence" where there is a grammatical

boldfacing of a paradoxically-voiced silence. These seizures of nature do invoke God's transcendence over nature, but in a contrary way to the revelation on Mt. Carmel. The elemental movement from air to earth is a strong reenactment of the creation of humanity, but fire is the only element left uncontained in this revelation. The rumblings of the wind and earth are described in terms of human understanding, but the fire is not attached to any kind of natural phenomena. The isolation of fire hints obliquely at the variation of this revelation: God's presence passes by according to human disattachment, a displacement of the self (or ecstasy) in a remote possibility of personal transcendence. God's immanence becomes reliant on this transcendence, and if fire is an element that symbolizes an upward movement upon the altar, then its downward movement from the skies onto the altar on Carmel was just as much an elemental aberration. Elijah must come to experience fire in a substantially different way from Israel. Since fire comes last before the "still small voice," it purifies Elijah in preparation for bearing witness to this silence.

God is present in the passing. Just as Israel had to be shown that God and nature are not distinct, Elijah is shown that God's silence and absence in nature are equally indistinct. Silence becomes the aural sign, the way in which Elijah"s prophetic experience is reclaimed. God takes over as prophet in this passage, and Elijah's rite of passage is

a **Sabbathing** of the word. André Néher states that "God is sanctified in the stillness."[26] and Samuel Terrien suggests that silence begins where human context ends, where preparation to hear the Voice turns out be a kind of reparation for the spirit.

> God is not to be closely associated with a given context, a sanctuary ritual, or a stable and localized institution. He is a God on the march. He never ceases from going and coming. In a manner of speaking, his absence is never far from presence, and silence precedes the hearing of his word. (God) is neither manifest in the violent displays of nature nor present in the silence. When silence comes, however, and when man truly hears it and enters into the proper attitude of theocentric worship, God speaks. [27]

If the Word becomes the central focus of one's life and if it cannot be properly pronounced, then by extension it means that life cannot be expressed. The voice of silence becomes a benediction. Silence replaces fire as the mode of revelation because even fire provokes a movement of withdrawal. Silence as a means of sublime dialogue means that Elijah can enter into this revelation, both bearing witness to, and participating in the covenantal awareness he has just regathered.

Water is notably absent in this revelation, but a rainstorm is on the way. Perhaps this four-fold revelation is a reviewing of Creation. The irony lies in the contrast between God's absence in the natural phenomena, and presence in the absence of the Word. If this is a dialogue of silence, it is because Elijah has uttered something God does not want to hear, and God accordingly responds with a

silence Elijah can hear. If, by contrast, God is in the silence by virtue of not being in the threefold storm, then the silent voice emerges as God's response to Elijah's "enough". Elijah makes a correspondence between silence and death, but as he stands in solitude in the face of the still small voice, there is recognition. The question, "what are you doing here Elijah?" is never answered, because the question is itself Elijah's answer, his "to be or not to be".

I do not agree with Terrien that this incident is a repudiation not only of the modes of divine intervention on Mt. Carmel, but also of the possibility that this kind of Mosaic theophany on Mt. Horeb could occur again in later history. [28] Silence does not mean that the era of theophany has come to a close. It means that mode of revelation must be renewed according to prophetic circumstance. Elijah moves to the entrance of the cave, his face wrapped in his mantle (later to be bestowed to his successor Elisha). At the moment he covers his face, metaphor and movement combine as variations on a theme. His face is covered at the same time he moves to the lip of the cave, simultaneously experiencing concealment and revelation in the moment of dialogue. The divine question is repeated, "What are you doing here Elijah?" and although there is no difference in Elijah's response, he is adorned differently. Terrien believes that "the prophet's reiteration of his confessional statement

suggests a dramatic recital of a liturgical character",[29] and perhaps this is how silence becomes webbed inside dialogue. For prayer to be perceptible, it must be accompanied with a gesture consonant with its words. Elijah experiences what it is to be imprisoned by the Word. Mantling his presence means his perception of God as absence-as-Presence. In the moment of this perception, there is release from the prophetic burden of the Word. He can return to the world as a refugee, but at least his movement is graced with the right captor. The shibboleth into silence is not spoken because Elijah **becomes** the shibboleth. The prayer beneath the tree is not bereft of God. To the second question "What doest thou here Elijah?" the response is not "hineni," but a silent "I am silently cloaked at the entrance where I experience your silence after the storm". Silence is expressed as a paradox, a concealment of presence at the threshold of revelation. Elijah's fig leaf is removed as he returns to the world.

1. Gabriel Josipovici, The Book of God (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.) 65. "...this new word, 'rest' (shavat), only articulates the feeling which has been growing in us right through the first chapter, of each new element being made out of a return to a permanent point of rest, a creative centre of stillness."

2. André Neher, The Prophetic Existence, trans. William Wolf (London: A.S. Barnes 1969) 114.

3. Elijah's name is a composite of El (Lord) and the last part of God's four-letter name "Yah", usually signifying (at least in Jewish thought) God's transcendence as opposed to immanence. In J.B. Jackson, A Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names (New Jersey: Loizeaux, 1980) the name is said to literally mean "My God is YHVH". If Elijah's past and future are not literally bound to a set of parents, his only ties are with the land of his origin.

4. In Hebrew, "ruakh" can mean wind or breath.

5. Frequently, the word "hop" is translated as "halt" in this utterance, suggesting that the people are confronted with a question that demands an accounting of its posturing. Whether by halting or hopping, the question carries with it the emptiness of gesture, and to demand that the community ask itself "where are you?" to determine where if at all, idolatry fits into their spiritual and historical identity.

6. Just as important perhaps, is the fact that the Baalist prophets do not actually **say** anything to their god. They are a product of their own delusion: the words "O Baal, answer us" precludes any sense of a question. It is indeed possible, that the narrator's emphasis on the oracular function of God and gods provides a framework for this scene. Even though this is not the only instance in the Bible where God is called on to respond to a human voice, the dramatic stakes are high. As a point of contrast, see Joseph Hertz's commentary to Exodus, where he recounts how the ten plagues inflicted on Pharaoh was a contest "nothing less than a judgement on the gods of Egypt" The plagues fell on the principal divinities that were worshipped since times immemorial in the Nile Valley. see Hertz, The Pentateuch, 400.

7. Martin Buber, Between Man and Man, trans. John Doberstein (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 4. Buber discusses how the word of dialogue can happen "sacramentally" when a word, through whatever psychological barrier, cannot be articulated but can nonetheless be communicated.

8. see 6f

9. Samuel Terrien, The Elusive Presence, Religious Perspectives 26 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 110.

10. cf. II Samuel 6:14,16 "And David danced before the Lord with all his might..." and "[Michal ...saw] king David leaping and dancing before the Lord..." The Hebrew "karar" is used here for dance, and it is an obvious dance of joy which is spontaneous and thus from the heart.

11. André Néher, Speech and "Silence" in Prophecy (Jerusalem: Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora of the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Bible Society, 1969) 14.

12. Rain is also symbolic of a vertical dialogue, and the drought is an appropriate backdrop for divine interruption. The proceeding ritual Elijah performs serves to retrieve this dialogue. Rain is not the primary issue for the prophet, resumption of the dialogue is.

13. In a lecture I attended about ten years ago, Prof. J. Lightstone of Concordia University used to explain the ancient Hebrew understanding of the altar as a spiritual channel between heaven and earth. The ladder in Jacob's dream was seen as a model for this channel, and all subsequent places of altar-worship (especially the two Temples) were perceived as spaces in which cosmic energy flowed through and ordered the chaos of the earth.

14. Oddly enough, entering the land does not claim priority in the chronicling of myths that have lived in Judaism for all these centuries. It has not been as important as receiving the Law, but its thematic resonance in this passage - entering into a sanctified moment in order to reenter a sanctified space - binds the community back into a covenantal consciousness.

15. "Circumcision" involves **at least** three significations: 1) a cut which incises the male sexual member, entering and passing around it, to form a circumvenient ring; 2) a name given to the moment of covenant or alliance and of legitimate entry into the community...3) The experience of blessing and of purification." see "Shibboleth" by Jacques Derrida in Midrash and Literature, 341. Derrida also provides a reminder that in the Jewish ritual Elijah must be present at all circumcisions.

16. It is equivalent to a process of expiation. The purgation of the idolatrous spirit finds an analogue in Exodus, where the wanderings in the desert engender a periodic nostalgia for Egypt where food and water were plentiful. At the onset of thirst, Israel murmurs against God and Moses. Its endurance of thirst suggests an emptying of this nostalgia until Joshua leads them across the river.

17. Michael Fishbane, The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 49.

18. For the most part, Biblical concordances use both words interchangeably, but this does not account for why some translators choose to differentiate between hearing and answering.

19. Terrien, 234.

20. This is a common device in Biblical language. For example, when in Exodus, God is said to "harden Pharaoh's heart", the language suggests that Pharaoh is but a puppet in God's greater scheme to free the Israelites through all the signs and wonders. But the Israelite understanding of human behaviour and even anatomical phenomena (ie. God closes Hannah's womb) was tied to God's will. Even if God does know all the events before they happen, the narrator's understanding would have reflected this correspondence in Biblical language.

21. The rationalization for the slaughter at Kishon is admittedly weak. One might have to deepen one's understanding of how ritual functions critically in the text, or whether the narrator intended to use this as a deliberate echo of the Levites in a renewing of the covenant.

22. see Exodus 33:17-23

23. God is frequently characterized as a rock or refuge in the Psalms.

24. see Exodus 34:14 "...for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God..."

25. At the end of The Secular Scripture, Northrop Frye remarks on the pun between Sabaoth and Sabbath. Since the term "Sabaoth" (as I have pointed out in my chapter on Samuel) refers to God's transcendence, the phonic similarity of these two words suggests that the end of language (in terms of God's silence on the seventh day of Creation) means the beginning of human transcendence. Emulating God's silence means that Creation is sustained through the human capacity to wander beyond its history; since the Sabbath marks not only a division of the week but the separation of language and silence, Elijah's response moves toward this boundary by naming God according to God's transcendence, so that the Sabbath can revitalize Elijah's prophetic vocation.

26. Néher, " Speech and Silence in Prophecy", 15.

27. Terrien, 234.

28. Terrien, 231-2. In Exodus 33:21-22, Moses is placed in "a cleft of the rock" and is covered by God's hand as the "glory" passes by. Moses has reached a similar state of embittered weariness, and it establishes a literary pattern for what happens in I Kings 19:9.

VI. Conclusion: Sabbath on the Sambatyon

"God is like an onion. He is very simple and he makes one cry." [1]

What kind of literary pretext might one have for subjecting the Bible to the same kind of stylistic and formal scrutiny as a work like Ulysses? Critics such as Northrop Frye, Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, Gabriel Josipovici and Michael Fishbane have opened the gates and enabled this kind of discourse to flourish. Literary interpretation of the Bible however, appears to have become more susceptible to the field of hermeneutics, assigning priority to the **process** of reading rather than the elaboration of textual meaning. Interpretation has become fetishized such that the text has become less important than its reception and "decoding". In the case of the Bible, new readings of arcane passages are interesting but are more often occasioned by a reading of the reading. Perhaps these works have great value, but I sense that they end up betrayed by their own literary Onanism. The seed spills and offers wondrous possibilities, but is the reader privileged with new meaning or is the text left unfertilized?

"We weep as we pare away each layer... With each layer, the onion becomes smaller. Is this the same with God?" [2] Arthur Cohen asks this question but also reassures that like an onion, God "...grows under the worst conditions." Perhaps this contemporary reliance on hermeneutics is a blessing in

disguise. If the object of Biblical literary criticism is to elucidate meaning or find the text's centre, then perhaps it is to be found in the same place as the centre of the onion.

A literary pretext need not be exclusively ideological. Since Christianity uses "the Fall" as a centrepiece to its theological exegesis,[3] Christological interpretations of Genesis 3 often become larger than life by reading this passage into the ultimate resolution of other Biblical passages. Judaic interpretation is no less culpable. It is hoped however, that my intention in making the introductory chapter the pivotal one is not similarly perceived. Genesis 3 does not generate the same kind of political (ie. utopian) nostalgia for me, nor does it make this nostalgia a focal point in subsequent chapters. My interest rests rather on a literary examination of silence as a possible metaphorical response to God's first question, one that addresses the reader in a timeless present. External exile becomes internal exile by virtue of the personified earth (Adam) who thinks he can hide from his creator.

> The Adamic circumstance is one of linguistic tautology and of a lasting present. Things were as Adam named and said them to be. Word and world were one. Where there is perfect contentment, there is no summons to remembrance. The present tense of the verb is also that of the perfect tomorrow. It was the Fall of Man that added to human speech its ambiguities, its necessary secrecies, its power...to dissent speculatively from the opaque coercions of reality. After the Fall, memories and dreams, which are so often messianic recollections of futurity, become the store-house of experience and of hope. **Hence the need to re-read**, to re-call (revocation) those

> texts in which the mystery of beginning, in which the vestiges of a lost self-evidence -- God's "I am that I am" -- are current. [4]

Hebrew is a language unfettered by temporal restrictions. Perhaps there is a mimetic predisposition in its ancient psychology that makes it hunger for an approximation of the infinite. The language

> has no "tenses" in the normal sense of the word. Instead there are two "states": the perfect, which expresses any kind of completed action, and the imperfect, which denotes any incomplete action, past, present, and future." [5]

In other words, time is not a factor in the use of verbs, nor is there such a thing as "conjugation" in the normal sense of the word. Therefore, the verb "to be" has no present tense. "Being" in the present tense is always implied and therefore the existential proclamation hineni (Here I am) is more accurately translated as "Behold. Me."[6] If human presence is implied when God calls, then is the existential utterance also a tautological one? Can "being" be defined as an "incomplete action", especially since the call to presence is vocalized from an immediate and timeless Voice?

The Bible is replete with enigmatic repetitions, ambiguity and verbal incongruities, all of which reflect the Bible's arcane beauty as a literary document. In the following passage, Elisha echoes the life of his predecessor and enters into the prophetic vocation with a question whose silence defines God as both hidden and revealed at the same

time:

> He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of the Jordan. And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said: "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah, [even He]?" and when he had also smitten the waters, they were divided; and Elisha went over.
>
> II Kings 2:13,14

The "even he" which the Hebrew includes but which most English translations omit, augments the sense of desolation and loneliness of prophecy. Elijah has taken his leave of Elisha; has God also abandoned him? Verses 13 and 14 are also subject to minute scrutiny. The repetition of Elisha "taking up the mantle" is distinguished only by each respective accompanying action. The first time he withdraws to the bank of the river, the second time, he strikes the water and it divides. The process of his own withdrawal from the water and the river's division replicates the prophetic vocation, using the mantle both as a symbol and metaphor: the mantle is a symbol of Elijah's prophetic vocation, but it is also his cover, one which Elisha will now assume. Striking the water is God's revelation through Elisha's act. God is revealed literally through the cover or the mantle. Elisha's question sounds ambiguous, but it resonates as a solemn invocation: **Where is God?** Perhaps like the mantle, God is articulated in the context of removal and contact. If the covering is handed down from Elijah to Elisha, then surely Elisha's connection to God involves the memory of Elijah's experience.

To be errant is to be human, but this does not entail an abdication of ethical responsibility to the text. George Steiner wrote

> The text is home; each commentary a return...To experience the Torah...as mikra [calling], to apprehend the texts in cognitive and emotional plenitude, is to hear and accept a summons. It is to gather oneself and the...community in a place of calling. [It is a] summons to responsible response. [7]

In other words, is it unethical to leave the onion without an identified centre? [8]

I have cautiously avoided defining silence, to avoid falling squarely into the trap of using words with which to do it. In a recent book on silence and the sacred, E.D. Blodgett notices that in Hebrew, the word dumah (silence) can have the sense of a place. [9] He cites the psalmist:

> The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. (Psalms 115:17)
> Unless the Lord had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. (Psalms 94:17)

It has not been the intention of this thesis to take an inventory of all the places in the text where "silence" is used. Certainly André Neher's wonderful book The Exile of the Word avoids doing this, although his poetic style often draws attention away from the subject at hand. Hineni is not a word that can be silently uttered, however, I have argued that silence must first be inhabited before "Hineni" can be verbalized. "Hineni" represents a way for humanity to be revealed out of its concealment, so that God can reveal himself out of his silence. While there is never evidence to

suggest that the Biblical character is internally silent when he utters "Here I am", I hope that I have effectively shown that the phrase serves as a verbal password to re-establish a broken understanding between the two main characters in the Bible: God and humanity.

There is a place in Jewish folk history, where silence takes the form of an eloquent nexus, a place where time and space merge into a Sabbath of the word.

> According to the Midrashim, the river Sambatyon can only be crossed on the Sabbath. That is the only day its wild current stops flowing, and the rocks and sand it incessantly throws up comes to a halt... For six days its current is strong and it has plenty of water; so strong, in fact, that it throws up rocks as high as a house, so that it sometimes gives the appearance of being a mountain in motion. But on Friday at sunset a cloud envelopes the river, so that no man can cross it, and at the same time the waters come completely to a halt. Then on the Sabbath the waters subside and disappear, and it resembles a lake of snow-white sand, and at the close of the Sabbath it resumes its torrent of rushing water, stones and sand. [10]

The lost tribes of Israel are said to live beyond this river, but they cannot be reached because the river cannot be crossed on the Sabbath. They are hidden from view, and their existence can only be witnessed through the stillness of the water's subsidence. The river is famished for a bridge, and it is through this hunger that silence reveals that which is concealed.

1. Arthur A. Cohen, "Myths and Riddles: Some Observations about Literature and Theology," in Prooftexts 7 (1987): 110.

2. Cohen, 116.

3. The "Fall" is used as a central theme in the praxis of exegetical typology.

4. George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," Salmagundi 66 (1985): 4.

5. R.K. Harrison, Biblical Hebrew (Kent: Hodder and Staughton, 1985) 80.

6. André Néher suggests this as a more suitable translation in The Exile of the Word.

7. Steiner, 7,5. Recently, the leader of an ultra-orthodox political party in the Israel Knesset (Rabbi Schach) publicly pronounced the Holocaust as an event of divine retribution; he attributed its cause to those Jews who had abandoned certain tenets of the Torah (such as the prohibition against pork), consequently anointing Nazism as a messianic idea. This kind of irresponsibility is probably unavoidable as long as there are fringe elements in the polity, but it suggests (at least obliquely) the range of responsibility in the rabbinic patrimony: the Pharisees (who were the first rabbis) initially defined themselves through their exclusive ability to read and interpret the Law. The authority that accompanied this inheritance was incommensurable, but so was the responsibility.

8. In contemporary critical circles, deconstruction's "eternal play of the signifier" has provoked the critics into accusations of its philosophical nihilism. I have not been convinced in either direction, but I do feel that the Bible offers wonderful possibilities for varied interpretation. Rabbinical scholarship is particularly known for its linguistic permutations of key words in the text, thus allowing manifold interpretations of a single passage. Seldom is any one interpretation considered superior to another, and when this does happen, it does not affect either interpretation's inclusion in the commentary.

9. E.D. Blodgett, "Sublations: Silence in Poetic and Sacred Discourse," E.D. Blodgett, Silence, the Word and the Sacred (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1989) 208.

10. Howard Schwartz, Midrashim: Collected Jewish Parables. (London: The Menard Press, 1976) 27.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahamson, Irving, ed. Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel. 3 vols. New York: Holocaust Library, 1985.

Alter, Robert. The Art of Biblical Narrative. New York: Basic Books, 1981.

Auerbach, Erich. Mimesis. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953.

The Babylonian Talmud. London: Soncino Press, 1938.

Bal, Mieke. Death and Dissymmetry. Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1988.

Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1989.

Benjamin, Walter. Reflections. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Shocken Books, 1986.

Blodgett, E.D. and H.G. Coward, eds. Silence, the Word and the Sacred. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1989

Buber, Martin. Between Man and Man. Trans. John Doberstein. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.

Buber, Martin. On the Bible. New York: Schocken Books, 1968.

Buber, Martin, The Prophetic Faith. Trans. Carlyle Witton-Davies. New York: Collier Books 1949.

Cacciari, Massimo. "Black and White." Studies in Twentieth Century Literature, 12 (Fall 1987): 73-79.

Celan, Paul, Poems. Trans. Michael Hamburger. New York: Persea Books, 1980.

Cohen, Arthur. The Tremendum. New York: Crossroad, 1981.

De Man, Paul. Resistance to Theory. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986.

Derrida, Jacques. Glas. Trans. John P. Leavey. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

Ezrahi, Sidra de Koren. By Words Alone: the Holocaust in Literature. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980.

Fackenheim, Emil The Jewish Bible After the Holocaust. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Fisch, Harold. Poetry with a Purpose. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

Fishbane, Michael. The Garments of Torah: Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Frye, Northrop. The Great Code. Toronto: Academic Press, 1982.

Frye, Northrop. The Secular Scripture: A study of the Structure of Romance. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Handleman, Susan. The Slayers of Moses. Albany: SUNY Press, 1982.

Hartman, Geoffrey, ed. Midrash and Literature. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. God in Search of Man. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1955.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. Man's Quest for God. New York: Scribner, 1954.

The Holy Scriptures. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917.

Jabès, Edmond. The Book of Dialogue. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.

Jabès, Edmond. Book of Questions. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1976.

Jabès, Edmond. The Book of Questions: El, or The Last Book. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.

Jabès, Edmond. Book of Questions: Yael, Elya, Aely. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983.

Jabès, Edmond. The Book of Shares. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989.

Jabès, Edmond. Book of Yukel. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1977.

Jabès, Edmond. Return to the Book. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1977.

Josipovici, Gabriel. The Book of God. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

Kafka, Franz. Parables and Paradoxes. New York: Schocken Books, 1958.

Kierkegaard, Soren. Fear and Trembling. Trans. Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954.

Kolitz, Zvi. The Teacher: An Existential Approach to the Bible. New York: Crossroad, 1982.

Land, Beryl. Writing and the Holocaust. New York: Holmes & Meir, 1988.

McDonald, Christie, ed. The Ear of the Other. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

Midrash Rabbah. Trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon. Vols. 1-10. London: Soncino Press, 1961.

Néher, André. The Exile of the Word. Trans. David Maisel. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981.

Néher, André. The Prophetic Existence. Trans. William Wolf. London: S. Barnes & Co., Inc., 1969.

Néher, André. Speech and "Silence" in Prophecy. Jerusalem: Department for Education and Culture in the Diaspora, 1969.

Neusner, Jacob. Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis. Vol.1. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985.

Neusner, Jacob, ed. To Grow in Wisdom. Lanham: Madison Books, 1990.

The Pentateuch and Haftorahs. ed. J.H.Hertz. London: Soncino Press, 1988.

Polzin, Robert. Samuel and the Deuteronomist. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989.

Revault d'Allonnes, Olivier, Musical Variations on Jewish Thought. Trans. Judith Greenberg. New York: George Brazillier Inc., 1983.

Rosenberg, David, ed. Congregation. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987.

Scholem, Gershon. "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbalah." Diogenes 79 (1973): 58-80.

Scholem, Gershom. On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism. New York: Schocken Books, 1965.

Schwartz, Howard. The Captive Soul of the Messiah. St. Louis: The Cauldron Press, 1979.

Schwartz, Howard. Midrashim: Collected Jewish Parables. London: The Menard Press, 1976.

Slabotsky, David. The Mind of Genesis. Ottawa: Valley Editions, 1975.

Steiner, George. After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Steiner, George. Language and Silence. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

Sternberg, Meir. The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.

Strong, James. The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.

Terrien, Samuel. The Elusive Presence. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978.

Trible, Phyllis. God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

Wiebe, Rudy, ed. Silence, the Word and the Sacred. Waterloo: Sir Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1989.

Young, James Edward. Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.