

## Women, Gender, and Religion

Edited by Susan Calef and Ronald A. Simkins

### Gender, the Environment, and Sin in Genesis

Ronald A. Simkins, Creighton University

#### Introduction

[1] The relationship of gender and the environment is a uniquely modern question fraught with an underlying essentialism that women have a special relationship with nature. Nature, for example, is viewed as feminine – compare such expressions as “mother earth” or “mother nature,” “virgin soil,” and “rape of the land” – and women’s lived experiences, especially those involving birth and childcare, are viewed as closer to nature. Paradoxically, this “special relationship” has both positive and negative consequences for women. On the one hand, women’s lived experiences provide a repository for insights on how men might better live in harmony with nature. On the other hand, women, as closer to nature, are subsumed into the (male) domination of nature.

[2] This woman–nature essentialism is rooted in the convergence of a dominant nature-culture or nature-human dualism and the assumption of a universal sexual asymmetry. Although he was not the first to argue that the Western tradition is characterized by a human-nature dualism, Lynn White, Jr. did so most influentially and in relation to the environmental crisis. In a seminal essay, White traced the development of Western science and technology – our means of exploiting the environment – to the Middle Ages when humans began conceiving of themselves as masters of nature rather than as part of nature. According to White, this intellectual and spiritual transformation was facilitated by Christianity and its dogma of creation, which emphasized a transcendent deity and ascribed to humankind, who shared God’s transcendence in part, dominion over the natural world.

With its triumph over pagan animism, Christianity provided a worldview in which nature was merely an object to be manipulated and exploited for human purposes. Although White's essay has received criticism from several quarters (see, for example, Barr; Sessions; DuBos), he nevertheless accurately articulates the widely accepted nature-human dualism that has come to characterize the Western tradition, even as he himself offers an alternative.<sup>1</sup>

[3] Whereas White traced the current environmental crisis to the inevitable consequences of the nature-human dualism, others have drawn upon the dualism to explain the culturally attributed secondary status of women in every society. When the nature-human dualism is laid over a sexual asymmetry, human culture is associated primarily with men and women are identified with nature. Thus, Simone de Beauvoir, for example, argued that a woman's physiology enslaves her to the reproduction of the species, whereas a man is able to transcend his service to the species to create the lasting products of culture. Sherry Ortner built on the work of de Beauvoir in a much-referenced essay by arguing that women are viewed as closer to nature, not only physiologically but also socially and psychologically. Because women are universally constructed as closer to nature, women are culturally devalued in relation to men in much the same way as nature is in relation to culture.

[4] The convergence of the nature-human dualism and the assumption of a universal sexual asymmetry finds its fullest expression in the environmental and social movement known as Ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is an open field of inquiry that includes a variety of theoretical stances (see Merchant: 183-210), but all "ecofeminists agree that there is an important link between the domination of women and the domination of nature, and that an understanding of one is aided by an understanding of the other" (Davion: 8). Ironically, by linking the domination of women and nature, ecofeminists reaffirm the women-nature connection that other feminists such as de Beauvoir and Ortner have sought to sever (see the critique of Jackson). The latter hoped to bring equality to women by reclaiming their rightful position within culture, but ecofeminists assert that such a position neglects the pervading ideology of patriarchy that underlies the cultural definition of being human and the exploitation of nature. Because to be human is defined in opposition to nature, a repositioning of women within culture simply leaves unchecked the ideology that is destructive of the environment (Rigby: 28).

[5] Although Ecofeminism need not be essentialist, it exhibits a number of essentialist tendencies, especially in its cultural or spiritual varieties (see Rigby: 29-31). First, there is the tendency to embrace a dualistic framework, especially the nature-culture or nature-human dualism (including its cognate male-female and reason-emotion dualisms). The problem with this dualism is that it is itself a cultural construction; the nature-cultural dualism is not universally applicable (see the many papers in MacCormack and Strathern).

There is no such thing as nature or culture. Each is a highly relativized concept whose ultimate signification must be derived from its place within a specific metaphysics. No single meaning can in fact be given to nature or

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<sup>1</sup> White offered St. Francis of Assisi's harmonious vision of humans and nature, which emphasizes human humility and the equality of all creatures instead of the otherwise Christian emphasis on the limitless rule of humans over creation.

culture in western thought; this is no consistent dichotomy, only a matrix of contrasts (Strathern: 177).

Second, there is the tendency to project the experience of some women onto the experience of all women. If the assumption of a universal sexual asymmetry proves to be true – and there is no reason to think that it is not – the character and configuration of the asymmetry is neither determined nor universal. Even the necessary linkage of the domination of women and nature may serve to obscure particular relationships between gender and the environment.

The idealization of a necessary linkage between women and nature further operates to obstruct analysis of the ways in which *women* are differentially situated in relation to their environment and to environmental issues more generally. There is surely nothing *given* in this relationship, one which is contingent on a variety of social factors, not least among them class and social relations (Molyneux and Steinberg: 100).

[6] The fundamental problem with all essentialist positions, however, is that they assume in general what must be argued in particular. The relationship between gender and the environment is culturally constructed and socially specific. Whether or not women have a “special relationship” with nature in the Western tradition may prove heuristically helpful, but is not determinative of the role of women vis-à-vis men and nature in other societies. In the ancient Israelite society attested in the biblical tradition, for example, women are indeed linked to the natural world in important ways, but so are men. Neither men nor women are able to transcend nature, but both may contribute to cultural products. The dichotomy between nature and culture, and its correlation with a sexual asymmetry, is simply not helpful. Regardless of the lack of a nature-cultural dualism, women and men in ancient Israel were not equal; a gender asymmetry is linked to the different role of each in the environment. Although the gender asymmetry has been characterized as patriarchal, such a label masks the culturally specific particularities of the asymmetry. Instead, what might better be termed an ideology of prestige underlies and structures the relationship between gender and the environment in the ancient Israelite society.

### Gender and the Environment in the Garden

[7] The ancient Israelite understanding of gender was profoundly affected by the Israelites’ experience of their environment. Theirs was a world dominated by rain-fed agriculture so much so that the first human was created as a farmer. In the garden narrative of Genesis 2-3 – a narrative that has played a significant role in shaping Western conceptions of gender – the biblical author, known as the Yahwist, places the formation of the Israelites’ gendered social roles at the beginning of creation. God creates a gendered couple whose particular social roles are shaped by the environment out of which the first man and woman are created.

[8] The Yahwist begins his creation story in typical Near Eastern fashion by noting the state of the world before God begins to create: the world is a barren landscape without pasturage or field crops (see Hiebert: 37) because it lacks rain and someone to work the land. The productivity of the arable land (*'adama*) is tied to both divine (rain) and human (work)

activity. As a result, God begins the creation of the world by creating someone to do what God does not do and what the land needs most: a man (*'adam*) to work the soil.<sup>2</sup> So, out of the dirt of the arable land (*'adama*), God fashions a man (*'adam*), breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man becomes a living being (Genesis 2:7).

[9] Phyllis Trible has argued that the human that God created out of the dirt lacks gender, and that it should best be described as a sexually undifferentiated “earth creature.” It is not until the earth creature is made into man (*'iś*) and woman (*'iśša*) in Genesis 2:21-24 that sexual differentiation and gender enter the story (75-105). Structurally and grammatically, Trible’s argument is plausible. Hebrew *'adam*, while grammatically male, may designate the human species apart from gender, much like English “man” and “mankind.” And the *'adam* does become differentiated into *'iś* and *'iśša*. Nevertheless, following this “sexual differentiation,” the man is always called *'adam* while the woman remains *'iśša*. And although the *'adam* may be a gender-neutral human, the grammatically masculine form of *'adam* and the context in which a man acquires a wife would lead readers to infer that *'adam* is indeed a man (see Lanser; cf. Gardner: 6-7). The trouble with Trible, however, is that she misses the gender relationship that is being constructed between the man (*'adam*) and the arable land (*'adama*).

[10] The Yahwist draws upon common Near Eastern metaphors to present the creation of the man through the pregnancy and birth of the land: the *'adam* is fashioned out of dirt in the womb of the *'adama*, and then is delivered by God who acts as a midwife. Creation metaphors are grounded in actual creative acts, and often those associated with procreation (on this use of metaphors, see Lackoff and Johnson). The forming of humans out of dirt or clay – the predominant metaphor for human creation in the Near East – is a metaphor for the process of gestation, which in the Israelite worldview is an act of God (cf. Psalm 139:13, 15) and may be compared to the work of a potter (cf. Job 10:8-11). God fashions a fetus in the human womb much like a potter forms an elegant vessel, and so God fashioned the first man out of dirt in the womb of the arable land (for a full development of the birth metaphors, see Simkins 1994: 82-120; 1998: 39-44). The wordplay between the *'adam* and the *'adama* – appearing to be grammatically male and female forms of the same word – further highlights this gendered relationship between the man and the land. Moreover, the context indicates that it is a relationship of mutual dependency, though asymmetrical. Because the man is born from the land, he is doubly dependent upon the land in his essence and for his subsistence. The man was created to work the land so that the land might bear the produce necessary to sustain human life; and whatever the man might achieve in life, he will always remain “dirt” and in the end will return to the dirt from which he was created (Genesis 3:19). As for the land, she is dependent upon the man to work her, for without the man’s labor she

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<sup>2</sup> The land’s need for moisture is supplied initially by a stream (*'ed*) that comes up from the earth (Genesis 2:6; on the meaning of *'ed*, see Albright: 102-103; Speiser 1955; Westermann: 200-201). This stream should perhaps be connected with the river that flows out of Eden and branches into four rivers, two of which are the great rivers of Mesopotamia, the Tigris and the Euphrates (Genesis 2:10-14). The Yahwist is placing the first man in the environmental context of the irrigation agriculture that characterizes Mesopotamia rather than the rain-fed agriculture of Palestine, perhaps reflecting the Mesopotamian source material for the Yahwist’s story (see Batto: 41-72). By the end of the flood, however, the Yahwist introduces the seasonal cycle of rain (Genesis 8:20-22) that characterizes the eastern Mediterranean climate.

remains barren and unproductive. Both also are dependent upon God for rain so that the relationship between the man and the land is productive.

[11] The gendered relationship between the *'adam* and the *'adama* is parallel to the complex and more developed relationship between the *'is* and the *'isša*. Following the creation of the *'adam*, God plants a garden and puts the *'adam* in it as its caretaker. In an attempt to find a suitable helper for the man so that he is not alone, God also fashions the animals and the birds from the land, but none correspond to the *'adam*. As a result, God instead takes part of the *'adam* – the rib from his side – and builds from it another creature resulting in a corresponding pair – bone from bone, flesh from flesh. Further correspondence is indicated by the wordplay between *'is* and *'isša*, which are gendered social terms for “husband” and “wife.” So, through marriage, the *'is* and the *'isša* together form the one flesh from which they were taken (Genesis 2:21-24). At this point in the story, the Yahwist has only minimally constructed the gendered relationship between *'is* and *'isša*, and here it reverses in part the gendered relationship between the *'adam* and the *'adama*. Whereas the man was born from the female land, the wife is created from the husband. The woman’s dependence on her husband is emphasized without a corresponding indication of his dependence on her. The Yahwist’s development of the nature of this dependence, however, is linked to the consequences of the human couple’s eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge.

[12] The fruit of knowledge, which was prohibited by God, made the humans “like God.” How the acquisition of knowledge makes the human couple like God is not stated, but the context suggests that it involves at least an awareness of sexuality. Prior to eating the fruit, the husband and wife were like children, unaware of the sexual significance of their bodies, and so felt no shame in their nakedness. After they eat the fruit, however, the human couple, like adults, are aware of their sexual bodies (“their eyes are opened”) and so cover themselves (cf. Gardner: 12-13).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, a newly acquired awareness of sexuality helps to explain the gendered social roles that are a consequence of eating the forbidden fruit. The woman will bear children and the man will work the arable land. Because of their awareness of sexuality, the husband and wife will procreate. The man’s working of the land, however, does not immediately appear to be connected to an awareness of sexuality. Indeed, this connection is much more complex and is dependent upon the parallel relationships between the *'adam* and the *'adama*, and the *'is* and the *'isša*. What unites these two gendered relationships is the man – the *'adam* who is also *'is* – who plays an analogous role in each relationship. In relation to the *'adama*, he is a farmer who tills and sows the land; in relation to the *'isša*, he is a father who sows his “seed” in his wife.<sup>4</sup> The Yahwist has constructed a complex metaphor relating agriculture and procreation. Just as the *'adam* is born from the land that he will till and sow, so also sexual awareness is expressed in terms of procreation for the woman and agriculture for the man.

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<sup>3</sup> The relationship between sexuality and being “like God” is also expressed in the Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. In that story, Enkidu is created out of clay and lives like a wild animal until he has an encounter with a harlot over a period of seven days. At the end of his sexual encounter, he tries to resume his life with the animals, but is no longer able to keep up with them. When he returns to the harlot, she remarks: “You have become wise Enkidu, you have become like a god.” She then clothes him and he begins to live his life as a man.

<sup>4</sup> As in other Semitic languages, the Hebrew word for seed, *zeraḥ*, is also the word for semen and descendants.

[13] Because the woman will bear children, the man is now dependent upon his wife for his reproduction. The woman will become the mother of all living (Genesis 3:20). The husband and wife share a mutual dependency, and like the relationship between the man and the land, this relationship is asymmetrical. The woman is doubly dependent on her husband – first, for her creation, and then, for her husband’s seed so that she can bear children. The man is only dependent on his wife for his progeny. Although not explicitly stated in the creation story, later stories indicate that both the husband and wife are also dependent on God to open the woman’s womb so that their procreative relationship is productive (cf. Genesis 16:2; 25:21; 29:31; 30:2, 17, 22). Although the double dependency of the wife might be viewed as balancing the man’s double dependency in relation to the land, we should note that in both relationships the means of production is the female body, constructing a homologous relationship between the arable land and the wife’s womb.<sup>5</sup>

[14] The asymmetrical relationship between the husband and his wife is expressed most clearly in the last clause of God’s address to the woman in Genesis 3:16: “Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you.” The immediate context of this clause would seem to place the woman’s desire and the husband’s rule within the framework of procreation. That is, the woman will seek sexual intimacy with her husband to procreate despite the labor pangs associated with childbirth, yet the husband controls the procreative process because he possesses the necessary seed. In other words, the husband’s rule over his wife in procreation is simply another way of expressing the wife’s double-dependency on her husband. Of course, the history of the interpretation of this clause has not limited the context of the man’s rule to procreation, and perhaps for good reason. On the one hand, it seems disproportionate to characterize the woman’s dependency on the man’s seed as his rule over her. On the other hand, such an interpretation begs the question of why the woman’s relationship to her husband is framed as “desire”<sup>6</sup> and his relationship to her is framed as “rule.”<sup>7</sup> In the family stories of Genesis, and beyond, wives simply do not desire their husbands, and it is not at all clear how husbands are ruling over their wives, not least of which in the context of procreation. Most of the women in Genesis are barren and dependent upon God to open their womb; their husbands are as powerless as the wives. It

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<sup>5</sup> The homology between women and the land is limited to their womb. In the biblical laws, for example, women are treated like property – that is, like land – in relation to their sexuality or reproductive potential. In all other cases they are treated in the same way as men of a similar status. Thus, if a man sexually violates a virgin, he owes her father the value of the bride-price because he has devalued the father’s property (Exodus 22:16-17). However, if a man curses or strikes his father *or his mother*, the man should be put to death (Exodus 21:15, 17). Similarly, the same penalty accrues if one man is responsible for the injury or death of another man *or woman* (Exodus 21:16, 23-32). Compare also Wegner.

<sup>6</sup> The translation of the rare Hebrew *tešuqa* as “desire” is itself problematic, both here and in Genesis 4:7. Because this will be discussed more fully later in the essay, I have simply used the traditional translation for the term in these verses at this point.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Christoph Aurin argues that Genesis 3:16 is a literary allusion to 3:6, where the woman desires the fruit of knowledge, eats it, and gives it to her husband. In other words, the man allowed the woman to dominate him, and so he shares in the responsibility of the transgression of God’s prohibition. Genesis 3:16 is thus aimed at preventing future misconduct that might be caused by the woman’s domination. Although Aurin’s connection of the woman’s desire in Genesis 3:16 with domination is plausible, his connection of this verse to Genesis 3:6 is not persuasive.

would seem, therefore, that an adequate interpretation of this clause in Genesis 3:16 must reach beyond its immediate context.

### Gender and Sin beyond the Garden

[15] The garden narrative does not stand as an isolated tale in Genesis. Its narrative trajectory continues at least through Genesis 8, where God brings to an end the curse on the land and finally initiates the annual cycle of rain needed for agriculture in Palestine (Genesis 8:20-22). In the story immediately following the garden narrative – the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16) – scholars have noted numerous structural, thematic, and semantic similarities, especially with Genesis 3 (Westermann: 284-87, 292-93, 303; Clark: 195-201; Hauser). Most notable for our purposes is God’s speech to Cain in verses 6-7, where God states in regard to sin, “its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.” Although most commentators have noted the close similarities between this statement to Cain and what God says about the woman in Genesis 3:16 – the statements differ only in terms of the persons addressed – few commentators have interpreted the statements in light of each other.<sup>8</sup> But given the many connections between the garden narrative and the story of Cain and Abel, it seems unlikely that the similarities between the statements in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 are coincidental. Rather, by connecting desire and rule in two different contexts, the Yahwist constructs a complex structural metaphor in which a wife’s relationship to her husband is comparable to Cain’s encounter with sin. In other words, the Yahwist’s narrative raises the question, how is a sin like a wife?

[16] First, God’s statement to Cain must be put in context. The story begins with Adam and Eve procreating with the help of God<sup>9</sup> and producing two sons: the elder Cain, who works the arable land, and his younger brother Abel, who tends the sheep. After a period of time, each of the brothers offers a sacrifice to God from the produce of their labors: Cain offers the fruit of the land, and Abel offers the fat from the firstborn of his flock. Both vegetable and animal sacrifices are acceptable offerings, and indeed, both are expected from God, according to the Israelite laws. Nevertheless, God looks on Abel and his offering, but does not look on Cain and his offering, leading Cain to become angry and his face to fall (Genesis 4:4-5).

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<sup>8</sup> Skinner is suspicious of the verbal resemblances between Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 and suggests that the latter is simply a textual corruption that began when a copyist’s eye wandered to the former, perhaps in an adjacent column (107). Westermann argues that God’s speech in Genesis 4:6-7 is a later addition that was inserted to ascribe full responsibility to Cain for Abel’s murder. The lynchpin for this conclusion is the similarities between Genesis 3:16 and 4:7: “This mechanical citation which gives the words a quite different meaning in the new context . . . is the surest sign that 4:6-7 must be a subsequent addition or modification” (300; see 299-301).

<sup>9</sup> The terse phrase *'et yhw*, which literally means, “with Yahweh,” may be interpreted as “with the help of Yahweh,” or “along side with Yahweh.” The former understanding emphasizes God’s role in procreation, not only in opening the womb, but also in shaping the fetus within the womb. God’s role in the womb is comparable to God’s role in forming the *'adam* out of the dirt of the *'adama* (cf. van Wolde: 27). The latter understanding would imply that the woman has created a man just as Yahweh created a man. This understanding is less likely given the subordinate role that the woman plays in relation to the man in procreation.

[17] The reason for God choosing to give attention to Abel and his offering but not to Cain and his offering has been the cause of much spilt ink in the history of the interpretation of Genesis 4. Readers of this story are wont to understand God's choices as purposeful. But the text itself gives little or no help to make sense of God's actions. One of the most common understandings of the story is that Cain did not offer his best to God, or did so begrudgingly: "Yhwh's regard and disregard for the oblations is shaped by the attitude of the ones presenting the offerings" (Craig: 112; see Wenham: 104). This is possible, but not necessary and certainly not obvious. The silence of the text on the rationale for God's choice needs to be taken seriously. Many commentators today thus acknowledge that the silence in the text is significant and indicates the intentions of the author (see von Rad: 104; Westermann: 296; cf. Spina). At the very least, the Yahwist did not care to explain why God chose Abel over Cain. The important point for understanding the story is that God did so, and the remainder of the story explains how Cain reacts to God's choice.

[18] Cain is understandably angry. His sacrifice, which was presumably intended to honor or petition God, was ignored. But perhaps Cain was angry because God chose to recognize his younger brother over him. Should not the eldest brother be first in God's sight? Does not birth order create a natural ranking of prestige?<sup>10</sup> Perhaps Cain thought so, and was infuriated when God chose otherwise. God's rhetorical questions to Cain and his subsequent actions would support this interpretation (see also Perry).

[19] In Genesis 4:6-7, God speaks directly to Cain, first with three rhetorical questions that should assuage Cain's anger: "Why are you angry? Why has your face fallen? If you do well, will your face not be lifted up?" God assures Cain that there is no reason for his anger. His sacrifice was not rejected; God has no fault against Cain. If he continues to do well, God will be pleased. Note that Cain is angry because of God's choice (God "looked on" Abel), but God responds to Cain in terms of Cain's own actions – that is, Cain must "do well." God's choice of the younger brother is not up for review or discussion. The speech of God then ends with a warning to Cain: "Sin is lying at the door; its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."<sup>11</sup> God's speech is unable to assuage Cain's anger, for he calls his brother into the

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<sup>10</sup> Van Wolde adds to this characterization of Cain's anger that Abel himself was a blunderer, making God's choice of him even more insulting. She bases her interpretation on Abel's name, which means "breath" or "vapor," and assumes that Abel did not amount to much in the opinion of others (29). The meaning of Abel's name, which uncharacteristically is not exploited by the Yahwist, is more likely an indication of his brief and transitory life.

<sup>11</sup> The text of Genesis is probably corrupt here. The Masoretic Text modifies the feminine noun *ḥaṭṭa't* (sin) with the masculine participle *robes* (lying). Moreover, the two masculine suffixes (-o) in the next clause should have *ḥaṭṭa't* as their antecedent. Several solutions have been suggested, the most common of which by Speiser. He argues that *robes* is a predicate nominative, based on Akkadian *rabiṣum*, referring to a demon who ambushes his victims. The masculine suffixes would then refer to the *robes* rather than the *ḥaṭṭa't* (1982: 32-33). This interpretation is favored by many because it makes sense of the Hebrew text without emendation, but its understanding of *robes* is problematic. The *rabiṣum* is a minor Assyrian demon; why would the Yahwist allude to such a minor figure when more significant demons were available? The term *robes* would be used only here with this meaning (Westermann: 300, claims that this unique demonizing of sin in such an early text is difficult to imagine). Finally, this interpretation does not solve the grammatical problems because the masculine suffixes should correspond with the subject of the clause, *ḥaṭṭa't* not *robes*. The alternative solution to this difficult verse is to emend it. *Ḥaṭṭa't robes* can be interpreted as a corruption of *ḥaṭṭa't tirbaṣ* due to haplography of the



field, kills him, and suffers the consequences. God curses Cain from the land that was polluted by his brother's blood; his working of the land will no longer yield produce (Genesis 4:11-12).

[20] Although some commentators (most notably, Westermann) have argued that God's speech in verses 6-7 is secondary to the context of the Cain and Abel story, I argue instead that it provides the primary focus of the entire story. The speech links the social context of Cain's anger (vv. 3-5) and the murder of Abel and its consequences (vv. 8-15) with the message that the Yahwist wants to impress upon his readers – namely, that Cain's sin is under his own control, should he exercise it. Sin is personified, perhaps as an animal, lying at the entrance to Cain's house as a way of indicating that Cain is not inherently sinful; his anger need not result in sin. Instead, if Cain simply rules over the sin – that is, controls his sinful desires – he will not sin. His relationship with God, and consequently with the arable land, will remain productive. Cain's condition is dependent upon his own choice.

[21] Let us return to the question raised at the beginning of this section, now stated more broadly: How is Cain's relationship to sin like a husband's relationship to his wife? At the core of the relationship are the terms "desire" and "rule." The latter is unproblematic in the Hebrew text. It is a common verb (*mašal*) used to express power or dominion over a subordinate or dependent. The meaning of the term translated "desire" (*tešūqa*), however, is not certain. It is a rare term that only occurs in Genesis 3:16, 4:7, and in Song of Songs 7:10. Its etymology is uncertain. Many compare the term to Arabic *šāqa*, which means "to desire" or "to excite desire," but it should probably be connected to Arabic *saqa*, meaning, "to urge, drive, impel." Finally, its use with *mašal*, "rule," in the parallel verses should have a similar force of meaning. For example, the context of the parallel verses could lead one to argue that sin's desire is to seduce Cain much like the wife desires sexual intercourse from her husband to produce a child, but this interpretation distorts the parallelism between the two verses. The "desire" of both sin and the wife may be for intimacy, but their purposes clearly would be different. The wife desires the husband's seed to produce a child, and presumably the husband would be inclined to support her purpose. The purpose of sin's desire, in contrast, would be to control Cain, and Cain should thus resist this. Ultimately, the meaning of *tešūqa*, "desire," must come from the context, but the meaning should be consonant with its use in both verses.

[22] Susan Foh argues for the meaning of *tešūqa* by giving primacy to its use in Genesis 4:7. She reads this verse to imply that Cain is in an active struggle with sin – that sin seeks to possess or control him, and he struggles to master it. Thus, *tešūqa* refers to a "desire to control," and in the context of Genesis 3:16, "The woman has the same sort of desire for her husband that sin has for Cain, a desire to possess or control him. This desire disputes the headship of the husband" (381; she is followed by several commentators, including Wenham: 81-82; Hamilton: 202; cf. Yee: 71). The substance of Foh's argument, however, cannot be accepted. She assumes that the woman's submission to her husband is normative, and thus if Genesis 3:16 implied no more, then it would not be considered punishment.

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double *taw*. The masculine suffixes would then represent an incorrect orthographic modernization (from *-a*, with a *he*, to *-o* with a *waw*) after the feminine *tirbaš* became the masculine *robaš* (see Hendel: 45-46).

Instead, sin, which is understood to be implicit in eating the forbidden fruit, corrupts the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband, leaving an antithetical relationship characterized by domination. Although Foh's interpretation can explain conflicts between husbands and wives in some of the Genesis stories, her analysis is based on a number of assumptions that do not correspond to the narrative. If a woman's submission to her husband is normative, for example, it is stated only in Genesis 3:16 and it is the result of eating the fruit. No prior status of submission is implied in the narrative. Moreover, there is no contextual evidence to suggest that the woman's desire for her husband is to control him, other than, perhaps to seduce him for his seed. Finally, the use of *tešūqa* in Song of Songs also belies this interpretation; in that context, *tešūqa* is clearly positive: "I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me."

[23] Foh's interpretation begins with the assumption that sin's desire and Cain's rule in Genesis 4:7 is antithetical, but this is not necessarily the case. Sin is described as lying at the door, using the verb *rabaš*, which is used predominantly of herd animals, but occasionally of wild animals, resting or lying down. It does not imply conflict or aggression. The key element of this "orientational metaphor" is that sin is located *at the door*, the border between the inside and outside of a house. Sin can remain outside the house where it belongs, or it can enter and take up residence inside the house. The choice is Cain's. If the conflict between sin and Cain is reduced, then another possible understanding of *tešūqa* presents itself. *Tešūqa* may mean "impulse" or "urge" and in relation to *mašal*, it may have the sense of "dedication" or "dependency" (see Deurloo). In other words, sin's impulse is simply to enter Cain's house. The Yahwist is not emphasizing the power of sin to control Cain but rather Cain's power to control sin: sin is dependent upon Cain and is subject to his rule. Cain simply fails to exercise his rule over sin, allowing sin to take up residence in his house and, in the end, to characterize Cain's actions. When this interpretation of *tešūqa* is applied to the wife in Genesis 3:16, the emphasis would again fall on the husband's domination of his wife. Her *tešūqa* for her husband would ultimately be expressed in her obedience to him (this was also recognized by Ibn Ezra, who interpreted *tešūqa* as "obedience").<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the Song of Songs, *tešūqa* would express the mutual dependency between the beloved and his lover; the man's *tešūqa*, "dependency," is toward his lover, who belongs to him.

[24] In the parallel relationships between the husband and wife, and between Cain and sin, the Yahwist is articulating an asymmetrical relationship to which both partners are (or should be) committed (Cain, of course, fails in his role). The husband and Cain act in relation to their partners as the dominant members in the relationship. The wife and sin, however, are not simple passive recipients of their partners' domination; the husband's and Cain's "rule" is not tyrannical nor a unilateral exploitation (though, in the case of the wife, it has the potential to become so). The wife and sin also act in relation to the husband and Cain; their urge or impulse is toward their partner. They seek union, intimacy, and partnership – the possibilities are multiple – but their actions are nevertheless expressed as deference and submission to their partners' will.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn Ezra states: "Thy desire [means] thy obedience. This means that you [the wife] will obey whatever your husband commands you for you are under his authority to do his will" (73).

[25] By constructing a metaphor comparing Cain's relationship to sin with a husband's relationship to his wife, the Yahwist sheds light on the nature of sin. Although metaphors are often constructed to make a comparison in one direction, the effect of the metaphor is to create new meaning through entailments that work in both directions. In other words, a husband's relationship to his wife not only tells us about Cain's relationship to sin, but the latter relationship expands our understanding of the former. In fact, when viewed in light of each other, the two relationships may be characterized as positive and negative examples of the same fundamentally asymmetrical relationship. When the dominant member of the relationship "rules" appropriately, the subordinate member's "desire" or "impulse" is directed or confined within appropriate boundaries. However, if the dominant member fails to exercise rule, as Cain failed with sin, then the subordinate's "desire" may become distorted and sin may result. This relational dynamic is clear in regard to Cain and sin, but how might it be expressed in relation to a husband and his wife? Although not addressed in the Yahwist creation story, one does not have to look far in the biblical tradition to find a fitting example. In the marriage between Israelites and foreign women, illustrated most clearly in Solomon's marriage to many foreign women, the "urgings" of the wife and the failure of the husband to "rule" results in the worship of foreign gods – Solomon's wives "turned away his heart after other gods" (1 Kings 11:4). The Yahwist's use of this metaphor to describe sin thus also indicates that an inappropriate relationship between a husband and his wife may lead to sin.

### **The Ideology and Structure of Prestige**

[26] Finally, the relationship that is constructed between gender, the environment, and sin in the Yahwist creation story leads us to explore the underlying ideology that is at work in this text. All texts produce an ideology that is a complex reworking of the ideologies that produced the texts, which are themselves bound within and stemming from the society's general and literary modes of production. At the level of the Yahwist's creation story, the ideology of the text legitimates the asymmetrical relationship between husbands and wives, it naturalizes the relationship by rooting it in the human couple's relationship to the environment, and it universalizes the relationship by placing its formation at creation. The ideology of this text is commonly referred to as the ideology of patriarchy, but this identification begs the question of the specific ways in which men might rule women, and it slips into an essentialism by accepting the text's own universal claim (see Meyers 1988: 24-46; 2007). As was true about the relationship between gender and the environment, so also here: the text's ideology must be explained in relation to the specific social relations in ancient Israel.

[27] I have argued elsewhere (Simkins 1999, 2004) that the dominant social relations of production during the period of the Kingdom of Judah, the most likely period of the Yahwist's story, were patron-client relations. Patronage is a system of social relations rooted in an unequal distribution of power and goods, and expressed socially through a generalized exchange of goods, services, and intangibles. The structure of these relations is hierarchical. Patrons are those who have access to goods and the centers of power, whereas clients are in need of such access. In ancient Israel, the exchange typically resulted in a material gain for the patron, but the imbalance of the exchange was concealed in part through the patron's

displays of generosity and was compensated by and rationalized with an ideology of prestige, expressed through the values of honor and shame.

[28] Honor and shame are social values that characterize the peoples around the Mediterranean. They represent moral values that structure the society and link issues of gender, sexuality, and power (see the essays in Gilmore). Generally, honor is a person's public reputation and prestige, and shame is a person's concern for reputation. Shame is a positive value by which a person sought to maintain or protect one's honor. Specifically, however, honor and shame take on a distinctive configuration within each cultural group. In the biblical tradition, the concepts of honor and shame are used for both men and women, and shame is predominantly the opposite of honor – that is, dishonor and being ashamed. There is, nevertheless, a gender distinction in terms of honor. Men find honor in terms of their independence, their progeny, their wealth, and their generosity. Women, on the other hand, find honor in terms of their modesty, their deference or submission to their husbands, and their birthing of children. Similarly, men who lack wealth and independence may find honor in voluntary deference to honorable men (see Yee: 40-48, who applies the anthropological work of Abu-Lughod to the biblical tradition; see also Matthews and Benjamin).

[29] In regard to the social relations of production, the patron's honor was a function of his possession and control of resources. A patron was not dependent upon others for his livelihood but gained honor by increasing the number of those who were dependent upon him. His honor was linked to his ability to provision and protect others. A client's honor, in contrast, was a function of his dependence on his patron. As a man lacking the resources necessary for providing for his own subsistence, the client's dependence upon another was expressed through deference; such a man gained an honorable reputation – a measure of prestige – by recognizing his need for others and submitting to another in a patron-client relationship. The client's honor, however, was not entirely his own. By deferring to his patron, the client embedded his honor in the honor of his patron.

[30] The ideology of prestige links the structure of patron-client relations with the structure of husband and wife relations. Both are asymmetrical relationships characterized by dependency, and the ideology of prestige, expressed through the values of honor and shame, creates a homology – a structural resonance – between the structures of power and gender. Indeed, the homologous relationship between patronage and marriage underlies numerous biblical texts in which God's relationship to Israel is framed as a husband's relationship to his wife. Patronage is the root metaphor underlying the biblical conception of covenant. Yahweh is the divine patron who protects and provides for his people Israel. As the client, Israel is dependent upon God, ultimately for its life, and thus gives deference to God through obedience to the covenantal law. In Hosea 1-3, Ezekiel 16 and 23, and other prophetic texts, God's relationship to his people (and his land) is expressed explicitly through a marriage metaphor. God loves and provides for Israel, as a husband does for his wife – he provisions her with clothing and food – but Israel is an unfaithful wife, committing adultery with other lovers. God thus punishes Israel in her body – God strips her naked and hands her over to be abused by others. In the biblical laws, the marital relationship between God and Israel is implicit, expressed foremost through references to God's "jealousy" for his partner. God promises to prosper Israel with a bountiful land and a numerous,

prosperous people. But here too, God threatens his wife with “bodily injury,” if she does not remain faithful (see Streete: 76-100; Fewell and Gunn: 108-16). In all these contexts, God’s honor as a husband is vulnerable to the behavior of his wife Israel, and God’s activity – for blessing and for punishment – takes place in the body of Israel. When Israel is faithful, God is honored and Israel’s body is blessed. But when Israel is unfaithful, God maintains his honor by exposing and chastising the body of his rebellious and shameless wife.

[31] In the Yahwist creation story, the ideology of prestige also underlies the asymmetrical gender relations between the husband and his wife, but here the Yahwist reworks the ideology by connecting the gender asymmetry to the role of each in the environment (cf. Delaney 1987, 1991). The husband’s honor is thus a function of his possession of seed – his ability to impregnate his wife and, by extension, his power to work the land and produce field crops. The wife’s honor is a function of her dependence upon her husband to bear children, as the arable land is dependent upon the man for its productivity. Because the husband is dependent upon the woman for his progeny in that he procreates outside of himself, he must ensure that the child born from his wife is from his own seed. Like the arable land, his wife is indiscriminately fecund and will bring forth a child from the seed of any man that is sown in her. Therefore, just as a farmer marks off the land into a field and guards it against outside intrusion, the husband “rules” his wife by guarding and protecting her, thereby erecting a fence around her fecundity and safeguarding the legitimacy of his paternity. The husband’s honor is consequently vulnerable to his wife’s “desire” or “urge,” which when directed toward her husband through deference, contributes to his honor and her own. Finally, it should be noted that just as the wife’s womb and the arable land are dependent upon God’s activity to be productive, so also God’s punishment for the human couple eating the forbidden fruit also takes place in the female body – the woman’s pregnancies will be painful and the land is cursed so that it does not easily yield its produce.

[32] Ecofeminism argues that the domination of women is linked to the domination of nature by an ideology of patriarchy that undergirds them both. In relation to ancient Israel and the biblical tradition, which is so often connected with the roots and continuing practices of sexism and environmental exploitation, the Ecofeminist insight is only partially true. The bodies of ancient Israelite women are indeed linked to the natural world in a unique way, and men’s relationship to women and the natural world is similar. But this essentialist understanding of the relationship between gender and the environment masks the particularities of the biblical tradition. The ideology of prestige ties issues of gender, power, and the environment into a web of relations that are certainly asymmetrical and may be exploitive, but need not be, because of the dependencies and vulnerabilities that exist in gender relationships, as indicated above. Ultimately, the ideology of prestige serves to frame these asymmetrical relationships – farmer and arable land, husband and wife, patron and client, God and people – as complementary (cf. Abu-Lughod: 79). Each partner in the relationship needs the other to fulfill its role. These relationships, however, do not always work for the benefit of both, and when they do not, the Yahwist would label them sin.

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