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at the College of William & Mary

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EDITORS' NOTES

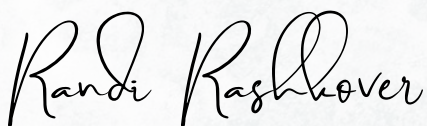
Dear Reader,

As with all of our issues, this spring/summer 2023 issue of *The Judaic Studies Review* highlights the magnificent work and experiences of the professors, students (both undergraduate and graduate), and those guests whom we gladly invite in and, of course, hold in the utmost regard.

We begin with a summation of those great minds who joined the Judaic Studies program for a brown-bag lunch, a few classes, or even a semester. Included in that noteworthy list were: Professors Marc Brettler of Duke University, Edwin Seroussi of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Christophe Rico of the University of Strasbourg, Christopher Silver of McGill University, and Mark Randall James. From here, undergraduate Daniel Brot (whose personal work is featured later in this issue) invites you, the reader, to relive and dissect the brown-bag discussion, 'Witnessing the Recovery: Storytelling and Family Building After the Holocaust' that was led by our very own Professor Mary Fraser Kirsh.

The second part of our issue, dedicated to a presentation of exemplary student work, begins with Harrison Abramson's "Theocratic Federalism as an Alternative to Absolute Monarchy," a rigorous discussion of the separation of religious and secular powers within Ancient Israel that mirrors the conversations of our own nation's founders as those conversations also resonate in our contemporary civil discourse. Next, Daniel Brot guides the reader through a more personal reflection on the Sabbath - and the importance of research to the daily lives of William & Mary undergraduates. In "Mendelssohn, Schleiermacher, and the Secularization Thesis," Ben Frogel draws us into a world seemingly hostile toward religious thought, unearthing how eighteenth-century philosophers rationalized their surroundings and beliefs. Finally, Lilly Tanenbaum, in "Freeing Lilith: Intersections of Lilith, Gender, and Midrashic Narratives & Accompanying Midrash: 'Lilith's Monsters,'" adjusts our understandings of outsiders, monsters, and what we can learn from *the other* in both society and in scripture.

As always, we are incredibly excited for you to read and enjoy the issue!



Nathan & Sofia Gumenick Chair in Judaic Studies
Professor of Religious Studies
Director of Judaic Studies



Murray Family 1693 Scholar
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Visiting Voices:

Guest Lectures from Spring 2023

WHY SHOULD JEWS READ THE NEW TESTAMENT?"

February 13, 2023

Marc Brettler, Duke University

The New Testament is the basis of Christianity and has at different times been weaponized against the Jewish community. Yet, its authors were (likely) Jewish, it serves as one of the most important sources for Judaism of the first century CE, and is an essential book for Jews to know.

Marc Brettler, a member of the American Academy for Jewish Research and the Council of the Society of Biblical Literature, is the Bernice and Morton Lerner Professor of Jewish Studies in the Department of Religious Studies at Duke University. The Dora Golding Professor of Biblical Studies Emeritus and former chair of the Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, he has also taught at Yale University, Brown University, Wellesley College and Middlebury College. He is co-editor of the Jewish Study Bible, first published by Oxford University Press in 2004 (National Jewish Book Award, rev.: 2014). Additionally, Brettler wrote *How to Read the [Jewish] Bible* (Jewish Publication Society, 2006), co-editor, with Amy-Jill Levine, of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 2011), and co-author of *The Bible and the Believer: How to Read the Bible Critically and Religiously* (Oxford University Press, 2015); additionally, Brettler wrote *Biblical Hebrew for Students of Modern Israeli Hebrew* (Yale University Press) and *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel and Reading the Book of Judges* (Routledge). He served as an associate editor of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, and has contributed to all ten volumes of *My People's Prayer Book*, a commentary on the siddur, which won a National Jewish Book Award in 2008. He also wrote the section on "Our Biblical Heritage" in *My People's Passover Haggadah*. To top it all off, Brettler has been featured on National Public Radio's "All Things Considered" and "Fresh Air" with Terry Gross. He is committed to applying innovative methods to classroom teaching, including teaching via the internet, and is the recipient of the Michael A. Walzer Award for Excellence in Teaching, and the Keter Torah Award from the Boston Bureau of Jewish Education.

MUSIC AND JEWISH STUDIES: A PURIM CASE

March 1, 2023

Edwin Seroussi, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

On March 1st, Seroussi – who is currently a Visiting Professor here at William & Mary – delivered a lecture to students and faculty at a 'Brown Bag Luncheon' on the intersection between Purim and his research on both ancient and modern music.

Edwin Seroussi is the Emanuel Alexandre Professor of Musicology and Director of the Jewish Music Research Centre at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. From 2008 to 2013 he was the head of the newly-created School of the Arts at Hebrew University. He is the founder and editor of the Yuval Music Series, the editor of Anthology of Musical Traditions in Israel. He studies Sephardi musical traditions (historical sources and oral traditions) and Israeli popular music.

PAUL AS A HELLENISTIC JEWISH AUTHOR

March 21, 2023

Christophe Rico, University of Strasbourg

In a lecture to Professor Michael Daise's upper-level seminar, 'Paul, Pharisee and Apostle,' Professor Rico dissected his research into the Epistles of Paul. Utilizing linguistic analysis of the Greek language, as spoken and written during the Hellenistic period, Rico believes that we can more confidently attribute Paul's writing to Paul – as opposed to previous scholarship, which was hesitant to do so.

Christophe Rico is a linguist, who received his doctorate at Paris IV-Sorbonne and his Habilitation à diriger des recherches at the University of Strasbourg. Besides having taught French at Hebrew University, he is Professor of Greek Philology at the École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem, as well as founder and Dean of the Polis Institute in Jerusalem (polisjerusalem.org), which employs Ulpan-like methods to teach ancient languages as living languages. Apart from numerous articles and book chapters, Professor Christophe has authored two monographs: *La Mère de l'Enfant-Roi – Isaïe 7,14* (Éditions du Cerf, 2013) and *Le traducteur de Bethéem: le génie interprétatif de saint Jérôme à l'aune de la linguistique* (Éditions du Cerf, 2016), the first translated into Romanian and English (Wipf & Stock, 2020). And his method for learning Koine Greek as a living language (*Polis: Parler le grec ancien comme une langue vivante*, 2009) is in its 2nd French edition, with translations into Italian, German and English.

RECORDING HISTORY: JEWS, MUSLIMS, AND MUSIC ACROSS TWENTIETH-CENTURY NORTH AFRICA

March 22, 2023

Christopher Silver, McGill University

Book Talk: If twentieth-century stories of Jews and Muslims in North Africa are usually told separately, *Recording History: Jews, Muslims, and Music Across Twentieth-Century North Africa* demonstrates that we have not been listening to what brought these communities together for so long: Arab music. With this book, Christopher Silver provides the first history of the music scene and recording industry across Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, and offers striking insights into Jewish-Muslim relations through the rhythms that animated them. This interactive talk will

introduce the William & Mary community to some of the North African musicians who helped define their era.

Christopher Silver is the Segal Family Assistant Professor in Jewish History and Culture in the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University. He earned his Ph.D. in History from UCLA. Silver is the author of numerous articles on North African history and music, including in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and *Hespéris-Tamuda*. He is also the founder and curator of the website *Gharamophone.com*, a digital archive of North African records from the first half of the twentieth century. His first book *Recording History: Jews, Muslims, and Music Across Twentieth Century North Africa* was published in June 2022 with Stanford University Press.

SOCRATIC SCRIPTURE: DIALECTIC AS A PARADIGM FOR RELIGIOUS RATIONALITY

April 26, 2023

Mark Randall James, Independent Scholar

Modern people tend to view religion as irrational because they treat science and math as the highest paradigms of rationality. James identifies a neglected alternative in the works of ancient Christian teachers and Jewish rabbis: the Socratic paradigm of dialectical rationality, which focuses on the clarification and criticism of fundamental beliefs and categories through dialogue. Rather than simply revealing information, Scripture can play the role of Socrates, provoking and guiding the examination of our deepest beliefs.

Theologian, scholar of scriptural interpretation, and UVA doctoral alumni, Mark Randall James Ph.D. is the author of *Learning the Language of Scripture: Origen, Wisdom, and Exegesis* (2021), which showcases Origen's hermeneutics and discusses how Origen's bold and imaginative exegesis is integral to the process of acquiring wisdom by learning to speak the language of scripture. Additionally, James co-edited *Signs of Salvation: A Festschrift for Peter Ochs* (2021) with Randi Rashkover, a collection of essays about his mentor, the philosopher Peter Ochs, including an introduction (with Randi Rashkover) arguing that Ochs's pragmatism is a contemporary renewal of the classical Jewish wisdom tradition. James is currently writing the tentatively entitled *Sabbath Meditations*. James serves as the Children's Minister at Christ Church & Washington Parish in Washington, DC. James also edits the *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, a journal of Jewish philosophy. When not writing, James practices and train others in *Scriptural Reasoning*, a method of inter-faith scripture study.

"Witnessing the Recovery: Storytelling and Family Building After the Holocaust"

Brown Bag by Professor Kirsh

"Man...is the storytelling animal. Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker - buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories. . . As long as there's a story, it's all right"

Graham Swift, *Waterland*

Amidst the relief work in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, two intertwined projects were unfolding in displaced persons camps, orphanages, and hospitals: storytelling and family (re)building. Undertaking this work was a long-overlooked actor: caretakers. Uniquely positioned, caretakers were influential actors in the process of rehabilitation, they were listeners of the stories of their wards, and they were storytellers in their own right. "Witnessing the Recovery" will bring to light the narratives of a nurse, a pediatrician, and an administrator - ordinary people who provided bold leadership and demonstrated ingenuity as they strove to heal, mend, and rebuild, using the power of storytelling.

Mary Fraser Kirsh, visiting assistant professor of Judaic Studies at William & Mary, earned her Ph.D. in modern Jewish history from the University of Wisconsin - Madison. Her research interests include Jewish childhood, memoir writing, and Jewish life in post-Holocaust Europe. Dr. Kirsh has been awarded the Life Reborn Fellowship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Fred and Ellen Lewis Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Archives Fellowship. Publications include: "La politique de placement des enfants en Grand-Bretagne et en Palestine" in *L'enfant Shoah*, "Shattered by Mental and Physical Strain: The Treatment and Assimilation of 'Defective' Child Survivors" in *Life in the Aftermath: Displaced Persons and Child Survivors on the Move*, "Remembering the Pain of Belonging: Jewish Children Hidden as Catholics in World War II France" in *The Young Victims of the Nazi Regime: Migration, the Holocaust, and Postwar Displacement*, and "Storytelling and Family Building, from Belsen to Ireland" (forthcoming). Presently, she is at work on her book manuscript, *Writing the Recovery: Stories of Rehabilitation in the Post-Holocaust Era*.

Fraser Kirsh's Brown Bag: A Review

By Daniel Brot

While the Holocaust is one of the most deeply examined subfields of Judaic Studies, Dr. Mary Kirsch's March 22nd brown-bag presentation did not cover well-trodden grounds. Dr. Kirsch is a William and Mary Alumna and Professor, who specializes in the Holocaust and storytelling. Her presentation, titled "Witnessing the Recovery: Storytelling and Family Building After the Holocaust" brought to life a genre of under-appreciated human stories – that of the caretakers. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust and World War II, these doctors, nurses, and volunteers worked to aid in the recovery and rehabilitation of Jewish orphans. Dr. Kirsch's project was in part inspired by the Covid-19 pandemic during which she saw the great conscious effort needed to appreciate the essential workers who enacted recovery, often at great personal toll. Their work inspired Dr. Kirsch to take a deeper look at the brave caretakers who helped others recover in the wake of the Holocaust.

Dr. Kirsch presented on three caretakers in particular: Muriel Knox Doherty, Dr. Bob Collis, and Olga Epple. As these caretakers helped their charges, they took on many roles. They were active participants in healing, front-row witnesses to trauma, and scribes of history. The first caretaker Dr. Kirsch presented on was Muriel Doherty. For around a year, Doherty served as the matron at Bergen, a concentration camp repurposed to aid the orphans of the disaster it had helped bring about. An important source for Dr. Kirsch's research on Doherty are the letters she sent home to Australia during her time at Bergen. These letters reveal Doherty's focus on practical necessities. Doherty simultaneously had to navigate ensuring her charges were receiving basic necessities like food and lamps while managing their psychological recovery. Even though the letters had a small audience, Doherty understood the importance of sharing the stories of her work and making sure her charges were helped. Doherty believed she was able to make some progress at her time in

Bergen, but feared it would be for naught if warm adoptive families were not found to help the orphans continue healing in a safe environment.

Dr. Bob Collis, Dr. Kirsch's second subject, also worked in Bergen. Dr. Collis is particularly noteworthy for authoring three widely read memoirs on his experiences at Bergen. Feeling great affection towards the charges he helped, Dr. Collis ultimately adopted several children from Bergen. This adoption was in spite of the fact that no legal provisions for adoptions existed in Ireland at the time. While Dr. Collis was able to recognize that these adoptions were only possible due to his role as a privileged outsider, he nonetheless struggled with over-romanticizing his charges' recoveries. Moreover, like Doherty, Dr. Collis was deeply affected by his time at Bergen. In his work on the continent, Dr. Collis developed a bond with one of his coworkers, Han Hogerzeil, and ultimately divorced his first wife to be with her.

Dr. Kirsch's research into her third subject, Olga Epple, was particularly novel. While a quick Google search will return results for Doherty and Collis, Epple's story has been more obscured by history. Dr. Kirsch's research on Epple relied on primary sources such as unpublished letters from UK-based archives. As a young Jewish woman, Epple was deeply concerned with antisemitism persisting after the Holocaust. Epple's work was done in her home country of Ireland, as a part of a program called Operation Shamrock. Operation Shamrock sought to provide better temporary refuge than camps like Bergen by relocating Jewish orphans to Ireland. However, it is particularly telling that because of Irish antisemitism, these children were not given the opportunity to be adopted within Ireland itself, only be housed there until adoptive families could be found in mainland Europe. While taking care of approximately 100 children, Epple and her organization had only a singular year to find adoptive families for the children due to government restrictions. In the meantime, Epple had to deal with staffing problems, the challenges of taking care of children in a medieval castle not intended to be an orphanage, and varying degrees of antisemitism from nearby

villages. Despite these challenges, great amounts of stress, and lack of recognition, Epple helped as many of her charges as she could.

While the motivations and concerns of these three caretakers differed, Dr. Kirsch cogently noted that their work was viewed as life-changing, crucial, and deeply consequential by those they were able to help. They worked in a small time-frame, at high personal cost, and with little obvious rewards. Yet for me, these caretaker's stories brought to life a vivid depiction of history and a reminder of an important lesson that is too easily forgotten; we all should deeply appreciate the caretakers of society, who despite great challenges, do the everyday work of making the world a better place. In ways big and small, we all have caretakers who helped get us to where we are today. In addition to Dr. Kirsch's work being a powerful example of the academic viability of studying care workers, it also served as a reminder to me to thank the caretakers in my life and in society. If you made it this far in my review, thank you for giving me a bit of your time. I would be honored if you also took a second to call an important caretaker in your life and thank them.

If you would like to learn more about the topics in Dr. Kirsch's presentation, her research was drawn from her upcoming book *Writing the Recovery: Stories of Rehabilitation in the Post-Holocaust Era*. *Writing the Recovery* will strive to provide more detailed analysis, greater geographic scope, and a longer temporal frame in its exploration of post-Holocaust caretakers.



***Theocratic Federalism as an
Alternative to Absolute Monarchy***
Harrison Abramsohn

Jewish theopolitics required the strict separation of political and religious life. The fundamental basis of theopolitics was the practical expression of the covenant between the Israelites and God within an earthly polity, "utilitarian in intent" and concerned with "the practical definition of proper modes of Jewish political conduct".¹ To preserve this covenant, the kingdom of Israel had to prevent idolatry while grappling with a "perceived need for the presence of civic instrumentalities".² Dealing with this issue required maintaining a delicate balance between the idolatrous temptations inherent to political power and the anarchism implied by a lack of centralized authority.

The problem resembled that which faced the founders of the American constitution, who were looking for a secular yet similar balance between necessary political functions and freedom. The possibility of combining both political and religious power within one monarch upon whom the responsibility to maintain a strict separation between their own political and religious functions is placed has not been explicitly ruled out. However, the more practical, and thus enduring, solution is an actual separation of powers between the three ketarim, again resembling the American compromise of federalism. In this essay, I examine the monarchy in relation to the priestly and prophetic ketarim and to God in order to prove the separation between their respective spheres of authority.

Politics, a sphere independent of divine law, is something that "gentile[s] and Jew[s] are equal in their need" for.³ In 1 Samuel 8, God granted the Israelite elders a king as long as they accept the warning that said king will "take [their] sons... [and will] take [their] daughters...", redistribute "choice fields" and "a tenth part of [their] grain", among other things. The elders, by appointing a king, abdicated their ability to appeal to God in political matters. God's devolution of power over the non-divine extended to the consequences of power along with the power itself. Therefore, politics was conceived of as a form of agency independent from both free from and unprotected by God.

The Israelite monarch was not a priest. The distinction is outlined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 as well as in BT Sanhedrin 19a-b. In the Deuteronomy text, the king was clearly described as least equal to the priestly class in religious matters as his "copy of this Torah [is] written for him on a scroll by the levitical priests" while "seated on his royal throne".⁴ He had to "observe faithfully every word of this Torah".⁵ In the Sanhedrin text, the priests are clearly separated from the king,

¹ Daniel Elazar, *Kinship & Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and its Contemporary Uses* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 46-47

² *Ibid.*, 66

³ Michael Walzer, *The Jewish Political Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 162.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 133

⁵ *Ibid.*

who is "neither judges, nor is... subject to judgment" from them, and when the priests subordinate themselves to him, they are killed by the angel Gabriel.⁶ Thus, while the king was clearly subordinate to religious law- as was everyone in Israel- he was not accountable to, nor could he hold accountable, the priestly ketarim. Therefore, his political role could not extend over religious matters.

Politics in the Jewish political tradition had a clear limit and did not necessarily encompass, for example, international relations, an aspect integral to modern conceptions of politics. The prophetic ketarim, whose political role was obviously distinct from the monarch's, nevertheless provided some definition to these limits. They are described by Waltzer as being able to see "God's hand behind the empires", arguing against Israel's agency in foreign affairs.⁷

While the separation between domestic and international politics was itself an interesting departure from modern political science, the deeper point is that there was a separation at all. Accounting for this separation requires a deeper analysis on the nature of politics in a theopolitical system. The purpose of theopolitical politics was not the accumulation of further power, in a Machiavellian sense, or even the preservation of Israel, which was delegated to God. Because the Torah was "inapplicable to the ["needs of the hour"]", it was limited- "politics begins where divine law ends".⁸ The matters delegated to the king were only those which avoid the possibility of idolatry. War and international affairs were too potentially glorious to be trusted to a human political agent. Gideon refused kingship because acceptance would have been equivalent to idolatry.⁹ Israelite kings, and indeed all political behavior in the Jewish political tradition, was ultimately relegated within the narrow bounds of day-to-day, practical needs of the hour.

The separation between human politics and religious matters is explicit, and the reason for actually separating these spheres between different ketarim is well-supported by the literature. There seemed to be a consensus that kingship inherently presented Israelite monarchs with a temptation towards idolatry. God threatens even the Davidic kings, for whom he has "steadfast love... always", with punishment "with the rod" if they transgress against him.¹⁰ For Gideon, who espouses an especially radically independent monarchy, the king must still be "strongly admonished not to deviate from [the Torah's] commandments".¹¹ If earthly power alone was enough to inspire such strong notions of accountability over the Israelite king's role, then the implications of combining political power and the religious role of, for example, the priestly ketarim seems obviously counterproductive in preventing idolatry.

⁶ Ibid., 138-9

⁷ Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 101.

⁸ Walzer, *The Jewish Political Tradition*, 162.

⁹ Ibid., 118.

¹⁰ Ibid., 127.

¹¹ Ibid., 160.

Kingship in ancient Israel differed dramatically from kings in other contemporary states. Israelite kings could requisition resources from their kingdom, but never in the service of their own glory or power. They were strictly limited within a narrow set of responsibilities and, in the most extreme cases, would have been entirely excluded from foreign matters- something unthinkable to almost any other executive political leader or sovereign. However, the limits of the Torah and of divine law in tackling the day-to-day issues inherent to any human organization, often referred to as "the needs of the hour", made the king nevertheless necessary for the maintenance of a theopolitical state. Therefore, the total separation of political and religious life between the monarch, the other two ketarim, and God allowed both the needs of the hour and of preventing idolatry to be satisfied.

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- Walzer, M. (2004). *The Jewish Political Tradition*. Yale University Press.
- Walzer, M. (2012). *In God's Shadow: Politics in the Hebrew Bible*. Yale University Press.

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***A Brief Reflection on Researching
the Sabbath Question***

Daniel Brot

Part of the reason I chose to go to William & Mary, now almost four years ago, was that I knew I could complete my degree without ever needing to do research. Ironically, after switching to become a religious studies major, I realized it was not research I did not like but rather my previous major. There is something incredibly exciting about checking out books from the library no one has looked at in ten years and uncovering truths and arguments never before made. In the course of my research, I talked to leading experts in Jewish Studies, traveled to the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, and translated a work which was never published in English. Research is certainly a lot harder than the well-structured guard rails provided in classroom work, but it has also been extremely rewarding for me. I cannot recommend highly enough doing some form of senior research. Due to logistical hurdles, I ultimately was unable to do an honor's thesis, but I nonetheless had a great time pursuing my research interests in the religious studies capstone course and an independent study. I can now also say, with a fair degree of confidence, I am one of the world's leading experts in the very niche area I researched.

The question which was privately driving my research was both simple and indescribably large: "Why do some religious reforms succeed and others fail?" As I consider the possibility of working in the religious world after getting my master's, I wanted to have a working understanding of religious reform. As a bit of a spoiler, I must warn you that I still do not have an answer to that question, although maybe one day I will write a several-volumed-book attempting to address it. Regardless, in this chapter of my academic career, I turned to one of the most innovative periods of my home tradition, The Classical Era of American Reform Judaism.

Classical Reform Judaism lasted from the late 18th century to the beginnings of the 20th century. It grew up in reaction to the optimism and rationality of the Western European Enlightenment, as well as the restriction placed upon Judaism during emancipation. Because of these roots, Classical Reform Judaism emphasized reason, universalism, and individual faith instead of Rabbinical Judaism's intertwined legal and religious system.

While champions of this emphasis on universal morality, which later thinkers would term ethical monotheism, actively sought the de-ritualization and de-legalization of Judaism, Reform Judaism increasingly faced a participation crisis as the Classical Era progressed. Classical Reform Rabbis thought it a necessity for their practitioners to participate in weekly Sabbath services to hear and recommit to Judaism's moral principles. However, during the 19th century, the six-day work week was an economic necessity, legally mandated to run from Monday to Saturday. Furthermore, during the 19th century, there was both a rising popularity of new entertainment and leisure activities and a declining efficacy of Jewish legal and

Contemporaneously, this attendance crisis was called “The Sabbath Question.” In response, many creative solutions were tried in order to revitalize Jewish participation. One such development was the rise of sermons and other liturgical changes to capture the energy of universalism and entertainment. However, the primary reforms I studied sought to address the economic challenge: if working Jews were unable to pray at a traditional Sabbath Saturday morning service, then perhaps the time at which Jews prayed for the sabbath needed to change.

In addition to the group which promoted continuing the status quo Saturday Morning Service as the central moment of weekly Jewish worship, two new groups arose in the Classical Era. More radically were the advocates of the Sunday Service. They argued services on Sunday were an opportunity for Universalism in Christian America, accommodation to the practical

realities of the six-day work week, and harnessing liberal and rational theological energy. The Sunday Service group ranged from those who sought to emphasize a weekday service held on Sunday mornings all the way to those radically advocating a Sabbath transfer (an official reconceptualization of Sunday instead of Saturday to be the Jewish day of ritual and practical rest). Prominent thinkers of the Sunday service camp included Emil Hirsch of Temple Sinai in Chicago and Joseph Krauskoph of Temple Knesseth Israel in Philadelphia. Temple Sinai and Temple Keneseth Israel were two of America’s largest congregations at the end of the 19th century.

The other major caucus advocated for late Friday evening services. Those services would take place at a consistent nighttime hour, after the working day, instead of the traditional Friday vesper service, which varied in time in order to always be soon after sunset. The founder and biggest advocate for the late Friday evening service was Isaac Mayer Wise, the father of American Reform Judaism. Advocates, like Wise, argued the service was a more Jewishly acceptable alternative to the Sunday service that could equally address economic pressures and create a more spiritual service. Despite frequent public animosity over which service was the best solution to the Sabbath Question among leaders of each reform, many congregations chose to host two or even three of the potential sabbath services. Ultimately, many congregations were trying to foster Judaism by whatever means seemed to be successful, emulating and innovating off of each other.

The first attempt at a Sunday Service in America (in 1854) and the first attempt at a late Friday evening service (in 1866) failed after several months. However, Rabbi Wise’s temple successfully instituted a late Friday Evening Service in 1869, and by 1874 Temple Sinai in Chicago had successfully instituted a Sunday service. By the turn of the 20th century, both

services had spread rapidly, with a large majority of American congregations participating in one or both of the innovations. At their peak, Sunday services were being held in over a third of American congregations, and they remained popular until at least the 1920s. Two particularly large moments in the history of the Sabbath Question was Temple Sinai’s 25th celebration of the Sunday Service in 1899 and the Sabbath Question’s multi-year discussion at the

Central Conference of American Rabbis (roughly from 1902-1907). Ultimately, the Late Friday evening service won out, becoming immensely popular in the post-Classical-Reform and post-World-War-Two era of suburbanization.

When I began my research, I knew I wanted to frame my discussion around the debate over whether individuals or trends shape history and the related debate in Jewish Studies over whether religious developments are driven by internal intellectual reflection or external practical considerations. In the case of the Sabbath Question, external practicalities shaped by large trends led to the rise and fall of the reforms. The Sunday Service movement ended as new Jewish immigrants sought more traditional Jewish expressions, anti-semitism eroded beliefs in Universalism, and the great depression led to the development of the five-day workweek.

However, the actions of individuals still mattered. Rabbis in the Sunday Sabbath movement helped their communities develop vibrantly and helped raise another generation of more active Jews. In the end, solutions to the Sabbath Question were driven by external factors (fears of declining attendance) and so external factors played a large role in those solutions' rise and fall. Yet it is noteworthy that the reform which succeeded, the Late Friday Evening Service, blended together intellectual reflection and external considerations. Even if individuals and intellectualism played a smaller role in this debate, they were nonetheless important players. In other reforms they likely are even the shaping forces.

In regards to classifying reforms as either successes or failures, it is likely too simplistic of a heuristic. Most reforms are important in their day, fade in new contexts, but have a shaping influence down the line. Despite it being nearly a century since the peak of the solutions to the Sabbath Question, they are still influencing Judaism today. The late Friday evening service is still the center of weekly worship in American Reform Judaism, and the practice of teaching young Jews at Sunday Schools was in part influenced by the Sunday Service movement.

I would like to briefly thank the many people who helped me undertake my research. The many pages I have written on the topic of the Sabbath Question would have been impossible without the support of my friends and family, my professors, the experts who took time out of their busy schedules to talk with me, and the lovely staff of the American Jewish Archives. For those further interested in the Sabbath Question, I highly recommend Tobias Brinkman's monograph on Temple Sinai of Chicago called "Sundays at Sinai" and Rabbi Kerry Olitzky's work on the Sunday Sabbath movement including his 1980 dissertation titled "The Sunday-Sabbath controversy in Judaism". Lastly, if you are considering doing research at William & Mary in the Religious Studies or Judaic Studies Departments, I would highly recommend reaching out to your professors; it is an opportunity for a challenging but ultimately incredible experience.



***Mendelssohn, Schleiermacher,
and the Secularization Thesis***

Ben Frogel

The worldview typical of secular modernity is mechanistic; it holds that empirical science or autonomous human rationality can explain all phenomena. As such, it leaves no room for religious claims about supernatural forces working in the world. Peter Berger argued that given the inevitable adoption of this mechanistic framework, statements about “the sacred” will not be able to make sense of the world, leading religious believers down the road of either nonbelief or cognitive dissonance. Two thinkers, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786) and Fredrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), exemplify religious thinkers' efforts to justify their respective traditions in a hostile intellectual climate.

Focusing primarily on Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* and Fredrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, I will argue that both men accept the secularization thesis outlined in Peter Berger's *Sacred Canopy*, the notion that religious claims can no longer make sense of the world, and thus religion is no longer relevant to the public square. While Schleiermacher and Mendelssohn attempted to carve out roles for religion, they wrote in an intellectual climate where the Enlightenment and its accompanying modern nation-state demonstrated confidence in universal human rationality at the expense of revealed scriptural traditions. For Schleiermacher, Enlightenment standards for truth encouraged the removal of religion from the realm of objective belief and into that of aesthetics. Mendelssohn faced the same philosophical climate in addition to a modern nation-state for which a politicized Judaism would have meant greater resistance to Jewish emancipation. The conditions that the Enlightenment placed on religious belief led both men, defenders of their traditions, to accept the secularization thesis and argue that religious belief could no longer make sense of the world.

In making a case for religion, Schleiermacher immediately concedes the secularization thesis. His approach to religion's cultured despisers is not to argue against their disbelief but rather to give them nothing to disbelieve. He argues that religion must return science and morality to their rightful domains outside of the bounds of theological knowledge. In rejecting religion's ability to make objective truth claims, he turns the tables on his interlocutors. If religion has nothing to do with practical or theoretical reason, an atheist cannot object to religion on moral or rational grounds. A critique of religion must focus on its real goal, the cultivation of a sense and a taste of appreciation for the infinite, the unity of all things. Schleiermacher's argument makes a claim on every second of human life. His argument that, being parts of the infinite, “all sensations are pious” would indicate that not even the nonbeliever can make such a critique without participating in an act of worship by Schleiermacher's standards. As each person can play her individual song that plays a small part in the grand scheme of music, so too is the relationship of each person's existence with religious life. (On Religion 51) However, for Schleiermacher's argument to get off the ground in the first place, the secularization thesis must be true. If religious

ideas could constitute truth claims that make sense of the world, then religion would have some role beyond the sense and the taste for the infinite. When religious truth claims fail, as the secularization thesis predicts, Schleiermacher waits with open arms to argue that the legitimate role of religion was never for its claims to be true or false. Religion is in the public square for Schleiermacher only on a technicality--all actions are religious, including public ones. However, expressions of the sense and the taste for the infinite must be private "down to the single personality" (On Religion 51), for they cannot be rationally proven or disproven. Religion can help the functioning of society in the same manner as one's cultivated taste in music. It is only relevant to the public sphere through its aesthetic imprint upon those who pursue it privately. As such, Schleiermacher's argument requires an embrace of the secularization thesis in order to clear the way for an aesthetic role for religion. Mendelssohn's treatment of religion in the public square is similar in key respects to that of Schleiermacher: its impact is in how it cultivates its adherents.

For Mendelssohn, the chief good of religious activity is the inspiration of rational knowledge of eternal truths. He seems to partially reject the secularization thesis because, for Mendelssohn, the sacred is involved in making sense of the world. Rational truths about the world are discoverable by the human intellect, but divine legislation enables the community to better reflect upon and discover them. However, the way a Mendelssohnian Jew makes sense of the world still ends up being with non-religious terminology. Furthermore, Mendelssohn's depoliticization of Judaism and insistence that the law is strictly for rational reflection puts the nail in the coffin of Mendelssohn's approach. Every law "was an occasion for a man in search of truth to reflect on these sacred matters or to seek instruction from wise men" (Jerusalem 119). If the Jew has no duties to God and he is only doing the law to be more rational, he will leave shul as soon as it stops helping him be rational. Mendelssohn must account for why his view of religion won't be rendered superfluous by the goods that it promises--a well-intentioned circle of atheists might deliver the goods of conversation and rational reflection. Mendelssohn's argument for God *qua* divine legislator rejects the notion that the sacred plays no role in one's regular life. However, it also rejects the notion that religious language can stand for itself in the public square. To be relevant, it must be tied to the advancement of secular knowledge.

Schleiermacher and Mendelssohn reflect each of their traditions' apologetic arguments towards an intellectual climate less favorable to religious belief than the present. Each thinker redefines away much of his respective tradition outside of what he perceives to be its strongest element. Schleiermacher, writing out of the Protestant tradition, preserves the individual's encounter with the divine in the form of his sense and taste for the infinite. "A revelation of the Infinite in the finite, God being seen in it and it in God" (On Religion 37). Despite Schleiermacher's description of religion being a human-centric act, his argument resembles the highest religious good for a Protestant, one's individual reception of grace. In the reception of grace, the Protestant, in her finite self, experiences the infinite goodness of God. Starting, as he

does, with the individual person, Schleiermacher cannot invoke grace or original sin, but he can mirror the smallness that the individual must feel in comparison to God. The infinite is unchanging and thus does not issue grace in an active sense, but in cultivating a sense and a taste for it, one must stand in awe of something that is greater than one can imagine. Mendelssohn attempts to preserve the notion of legislation. He avoids politicizing Jewish law, seeking to prove that religion can serve as a useful assistant to the secular nation-state. This notion of Judaism breaks with the larger tradition, which had seen *halacha* as the constitution of a good society. However, Mendelssohn preserves law by arguing for religious practice and against religious dogma. Religious dogma is unnecessary for human reason, which can grasp eternal truths. However, religious practice is useful for a community to reflect on those eternal truths that are discoverable by reason. Thus, the law is worth doing.

In summary, neither Mendelssohn nor Schleiermacher pushes back against the secularization thesis. Instead, they make their cases in light of the secularization thesis, embracing the aspect of their tradition that is most relevant to a world in which religion cannot talk intelligibly about the world. For Mendelssohn, religion plays a role in public-square rationality but cannot be rational by itself, in the same way, that one would not eat a toaster. For Schleiermacher, the secularization thesis is not concerned with religion, which has nothing to do with how people make rational sense of the world. Both thinkers reckon with the Enlightenment by placing religion outside the realm of truth claims.

***Freeing Lilith: Intersections of
Lilith, Gender, and Midrashic
Narratives & Accompanying
Midrash: “Lilith’s Monsters”***

Lilly Tanenbaum

There are certain tropes that seem to come up again and again in popular culture: forbidden love, a lonely spinster, a beast saved by a kiss. The danger of a trope is that it can start to seem like reality. People who see themselves portrayed negatively in the media, or not portrayed at all, can be influenced to see themselves negatively. For decades, queer people often were not acknowledged in popular media at all. Once they were, their representation was governed by tropes: the gay best friend, the fetishized lesbians, the dangerous transgender person. In many religious traditions, there is still a lack of representation of queer people. One way to remedy this is to reinterpret existing stories so that people looking to see themselves in stories can find meaning in their tradition. This works well on the character of Lilith, who stems from a Jewish interpretation of the biblical creation story. Lilith has been reinterpreted many times since the character's creation, and she has often been reframed as a feminist figure. These interpretations are empowering, but they still remain squarely within the socially constructed gender binary. Lilith's actions, even in the original telling of their story, can be seen as a rejection of the traditional gender binary represented by Adam and Eve, whether that be the binary itself or the expectations that come with that binary. This midrash considers Lilith's story through the lens of both the binary of male and female and the expectations of "man" and "women," questioning what it means to be a 'monster' outside of society and what outsiders can add to religious understandings.

Jewish tradition has been built upon the study and interpretation of texts, the process of which is referred to as midrash. Scholar Jacob Neusner defines midrash as either paraphrase, prophecy, or parable readings of biblical text. This means midrash either restates scripture, looks to scripture for an explanation of real events, or looks for deeper meaning in biblical stories.¹ Midrash is not just this process of studying biblical texts, but also the product of this study.² This

¹ Jacob Neusner, *What Is Midrash?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 7.

² Rivkah Walton, "Lilith's Daughters, Miriam's Chorus: Two Decades of Feminist Midrash." *Religion and Literature* 43, no. 2 (2011): 115, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23347034>.

“process of interpreting scripture is as old as the Hebrew bible itself,” and its product “eventually received canonical status within the Jewish community.”³ Therefore, the canon itself is partially based on interpretation. These interpretations, especially the oldest ones, were not representative of the whole community which they were affecting. Midrash from the early centuries of the common era was produced by rabbis, who formed a small segment of the population and lived extremely pious lives with other rabbis. Modern Judaism still takes many of its ideas and customs from rabbinic midrash.⁴ Although the rules in the Talmud were written by only a specific group of men, they became the rules that all Jews lived by. Therefore, “to study Rabinnic literature is actually to study men...women’s voices and actions are reflected only through the mediation of male constructions.”⁵ It is important to recognize limitations of midrash that may stem from the views of their creators.

Although existing midrash may have limitations, the power of the midrashic tradition is its adaptability. The genius of midrash is to read meanings into stories that apply to modern problems, and see them not as a new “but simply as another meaning that was lying in wait, just under the surface, to be uncovered.”⁶ New readings of old texts offer ways to maintain a connection to traditions that may feel outdated.⁷ Beginning many centuries ago, it is clear that people have taken different things from midrash depending on the important narratives of their time - in other words, they seem to find in the stories exactly what they are looking for. One story which has adapted to the times of its readers is the Creation Story. Genesis, the biblical book from which the story of creation is taken, seems to be, in a way, set up for interpretation: Genesis provides two conflicting narratives of creation. In one narrative, “G-d created man in His image... male and female.”⁸ In the other G-d creates Adam first, and later decides “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him,” which he does by taking “one of [Adam’s] ribs...

³ Gary Porton, *Understanding Rabbinic Midrash : Texts and Commentary* (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav Pub. House, 1985), 5.

⁴ Porton, *Understanding Rabbinic Midrash*, 10-11.

⁵ Judith Baskin, *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature* (Brandeis University Press, 2002), 11-12.

⁶ Walton, “Lilith’s Daughters, Miriam’s Chorus” 115-116.

⁷ Fiona Darroch & Alison Jasper. “The Ghosts of Lilith: Haunting Narratives of Witness and the Postcolonial Poetry of Shivane Ramlochan,” *Literature and Theology* 35, no. 4 (Dec 2021): 433-448, <https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/frab029>

⁸ Genesis 1:27 The New JPS Translation

material, a contrast to Eve's creation from a piece of Adam's rib. It is for this reason that, when Adam tries to lay on top of Lilith "since [Lilith is] fit for being below and [Adam] for above," Lilith responds that "the two of us are equal." Lilith flees the garden, and refuses to come back even when G-d sends angels after her. She proclaims that she was "only created to sicken babies," and states the conditions under which babies will die.¹⁴ Later interpretations then added to this narrative, writing Lilith as a demon who "kills pregnant women, injures newborn, and excites men in their sleep."¹⁵ Lilith's character is clearly an attempt to explain what would have felt unexplainable and dangerous at the time - babies dying, women wanting independence, and sexual urges.

Although the origin of Lilith's character is rooted in misogyny, the very independence that felt dangerous to its writers is what eventually made it inspiring to feminists looking for representation in the Jewish tradition. Feminist studies within religion "developed in three phases:... critical, historical, and re/constructive." During the critical stage, scholars "examined the long history of androcentrism and misogyny in the field, critiquing both canonical texts and the scholarship that overlooked...sexism in those texts."¹⁶ Many important leaders and thinkers of the feminist movement in the late 20th century had Jewish heritage, but "most of these women regarded themselves as secular Jews and initially did not connect their feminism with Judaism."¹⁷ Faced with traditions that excluded them, these women began to "distance [them]selves from [their] Jewish backgrounds." For feminist critic Susan Gubar, reconsidering traditions to include and celebrate women allowed her to think of herself as a "Jewish feminist" and not just a 'feminist Jew.'¹⁸ This was the third stage, the reconstructive phase, outlined by Judith Plaskow: "Feminists began to ask: what would this tradition... look like if conceived from a feminist perspective?"¹⁹

¹⁴ "Alphabet of Ben Sira 78: Lilith." Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed on March 8, 2023. <https://jwa.org/media/alphabet-of-ben-sira-78-lilith>

¹⁵ Ann Shapiro, "The Flight of Lilith: Modern Jewish American Feminist Literature." *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 29 (2010): 70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41206133>

¹⁶ Judith Plaskow, "Transing and Gendering Religious Studies," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 75-80, muse.jhu.edu/article/690609

¹⁷ Shapiro, "The Flight of Lilith," 69.

¹⁸ Susan Gubar "Eating the Bread of Affliction: Judaism and Feminist Criticism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 13, no. 2 (1994): 293-316. <https://doi.org/10.2307/464112>.

¹⁹ Plaskow, "Transing and Gendering Religious Studies."

the Lord G-d fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman”⁹ who G-d names Eve. Eve is later encouraged by a serpent to eat forbidden fruit, and God later punishes her with the pain of childbirth.

Early interpretations of this creation story illustrate that midrash focuses on what current society is looking to find, namely proof that women deserve a secondary place in society. Midrash has argued that because Eve was created second she is inferior, an idea which was “employed to explain and justify the marginalization of females.” Early midrash said that “only men were created in G-d’s likeness with... implications of potency, dominance,” while “the secondary nature of woman’s creation from man’s rib affirmed her subordinate position.”¹⁰ Rabbinic society, which was built around a hierarchy that placed men above women, thus justified itself. Some rabbinic midrash, however, focused not on gender in genesis, or even on Adam and Eve’s disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit, but rather on the idea of slandering, and focused on “making the point that slanderers in Israel cause the nations downfall, just as the snake caused the downfall of humanity.”¹¹ The writers of that midrash were clearly looking to understand what was important to their society at the time. Thus, there is a precedent in adapting midrash to apply to current issues. It is not the slandering interpretations that stood the test of time, however, but the interpretations of misogyny in the creation story. Midrash continued to diminish women through emphasis on negative traits, particularly in women who dared to have a voice of their own: “midrashic versions... criticize [female] protagonists’ pride and presumption.”¹²

One character known for her pride is the character of Lilith. The story of Lilith originated in the second century CE in a text called the “Alphabet of Ben Sira.”¹³ The “Alphabet of Ben Sira ” incorporates the first, often forgotten, narrative of the creation story in which G-d created male and female at the same time. In the Alphabet of Ben Sira, “G-d created the first man Adam alone, [and] G-d said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone.’ [So] G-d created a woman for him, from the earth like him, and called her Lilith.” In this narrative, Lilith and Adam are created from the same

⁹ Gn 2:21-22

¹⁰ Judith Baskin. “Constructing Eve,” *Midrashic Women: Formations of the Feminine in Rabbinic Literature*, 44-49

¹¹ Porton, *Understanding Rabbinic Midrash*, 82.

¹² Baskin, “Constructing Eve,” 54.

¹³ Darroch & Jasper, “The Ghosts of Lilith.”

Max Strassfield writes that “transing,” or the process of incorporating transgender theory and study into religious studies, holds “the potential for liberation or, put another way, for us to imagine alternate modes of both religion and divinity.”²² Liberation might be a lofty goal, but it is inevitable that in broadening the scope of what we consider in our interpretations we will also broaden the scope of what we understand. This alone is a reason to expand the breadth of the ways Lilith is interpreted. Strassfield references the writer Ryka Aoki, who points out that the question of why “male and female happen” is something that cisgender people do not often wonder “since they don’t tend to question their gender so much. But trans people do.” Just as feminist Jewish women in the 1970s looked to religious texts and did not find answers suited to them, there is little midrash that aims to answer the question “why did G-d make man and woman... why did G-d make sex and gender?” Women like Plaskow might have felt that in patriarchal society “the universe [had] turned against [them],” but people who do not fit a cisgendered binary are left feeling like they “are in a universe that had no room for [them] in the first place.”²³ Transgender and nonbinary people are made to feel as though they are perpetual aliens in their own society.

The midrash accompanying this essay explores this idea of being an outsider that often comes with being transgender or nonbinary in a binary society. In 1994, transgender writer Susan Stryker responded to someone who called her, and everyone who identifies as transgender, a monster. Stryker wanted to reclaim the idea of monstrosity, to “interrupt a narrative, to break apart those scripts that render transsexual bodies outside the bounds of human community.” She relates her experience to the experience of Frankenstein’s monster, created and then abandoned by his creator and all human society.²⁴ Lilith, too, is abandoned by their creator. Writer Joy Ladin writes of her “primal sense of ugliness that, [her] lifelong belief that, as a transsexual, [she] was a

²² Max Strassfield, “Transing Religious Studies.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 37-53. muse.jhu.edu/article/690604

²³ Ryka Aoki, “In Whose Image: Trans and Genderqueer Writers on Magic, Spirituality, and (the Bodies of) G-d: My AWP Talk on Magical Realism Magic, and Trans Identity.” April 10, 2016. <https://rykaryka.com/2016/04/10/in-whose-image-trans-and-genderqueer-writers-on-magic-spirituality-and-the-bodies-of-g-d-my-awp-talk-on-magical-realism-magic-and-trans-identity/>

²⁴ Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage.” *Gay and Lesbian Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (June 1994): 237-254. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-1-3-237>

Characters like Lilith, who could be reconstructed for modern times, provided a way to maintain connection to tradition.

Plaskow herself, along with a plethora of other writers, wrote stories interpreting Lilith through the lens of second wave feminism in the 1970s; this was necessary at the time and provides an important addition to the canon, but the views of the 1970s do not entirely encompass what modern queer people might look for in stories. Plaskow's 1972 story "The Coming of Lilith," begins parallel to "The Alphabet of Ben Sira," with G-d creating Adam and Lilith "from the dust of the ground... equal in all ways." But "Adam, being a man, d[oes]n't like this situation, and he look[s] for ways to change it." He begins to boss Lilith around, but Lilith "[is]sn't one to take any nonsense," so she flies away. G-d then creates Eve, who is generally happy in her subservient position but "occasionally sense[s] capacities within herself that remained underdeveloped." Lilith is lonely outside the garden, where Adam is telling Eve "fearsome stories of the demon Lilith." When Eve meets Lilith, "the bond of sisterhood gr[ows] between them," and "G-d and Adam [a]re... afraid of the day Eve and Lilith " unite to rebuild the garden.²⁰ Plaskow's story has much to offer cisgender women frustrated with the expectations of their gender but not their gender itself; it has less to offer transgender and nonbinary people looking to explore gender identity through midrash. This is no fault of Plaskow; it is simply the nature of feminist thought at the time of writing. Indeed, the topics most often touched on in retellings of Lilith's story originating in the 1970s are "flight from an oppressive patriarchal marriage... or a reconciliation and reaffirmation in sisterhood."²¹ These works are not looking to move outside of the gender binary, but rather to improve the place of women within it.

Thinking beyond the gender binary, as the midrash accompanying this essay aims to do, can deepen the ways in which religion is able to transcend human societal limitations. Midrash like the "The Coming of Lilith" protests that religion is gendered, but midrash that adapts to modern times also must explore the fact that many religious traditions are *cisgendered*. Scholar

²⁰ Plaskow, Judith. "The Coming of Lilith." Jewish Women's Archive. Accessed March 8, 2023. <https://jwa.org/media/coming-of-lilith-by-judith-plaskow>

²¹ Shapiro, "The Flight of Lilith," 70.

monster.”²⁵ Some scholars of gender studies and transgender activities have “called for [the] embrace” of the idea of monstrosity “to restructure the world in such a way that it makes livable what is now deemed monstrous.”²⁶ Stryker does not see monstrosity as an entirely negative thing, although it is undeniably a painful experience. “I assert my worth as a monster,” Stryker writes, “in spite of the conditions my monstrosity requires me to face, and redefine a life worth living.” Stryker wrote to her readers that if stepping outside of the gender binary “is your path, as it is mine... May you discover the enlivening power of darkness within yourself.”²⁷ In fact, although monstrosity is often associated with evilness and cruelty, ‘monster’ can also simply mean “one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character.”²⁸

The idea of shining light onto monstrosity provided inspiration for the title and ending of the midrash accompanying this essay, in which Lilith creates light to remove ‘monsters’ from the darkness that society has put them in. In this midrash, titled “Lilith’s Monsters,” Lilith says “Let there be light” when they perform this action. This is purposefully meant to mimic G-d’s creation of the world, an intention which also appears when Lilith creates a life for herself and rests on the seventh day as G-d does in the original creation story. Portraying Lilith as a creator in their own right speaks to the transgender and nonbinary experience of having to build for oneself things that other people seem to have had created for them, whether that be acceptance or the more literal construction of the body. Physical changes to undergo transition through surgery and hormone therapy are an important part of the transgender experience. These changes, which are what led Stryker to connect herself to Frankenstein’s physically sewn together monster, are not what this midrash focuses on. Rather than transitioning from one binary gender to another, Lilith desires to exist *between* genders. Adam and Eve are used to represent the construction of the binary, which Lilith rejects and exists outside of. Lilith’s identity in “Lilith’s Monsters” would, in today’s terms, be called non-binary.

²⁵ Joy Ladin, *Through the Door of Life* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), 227.

²⁶ Anson Koch-Rein, “Monster” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1-2 (2014): 134-134.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/23289252-2399821>

²⁷ Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein” 245-246

²⁸ “Monster,” Merriam Webster, last modified 8 May 2023. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/monster>

The use of Adam and Eve to represent the gender binary that Lilith rejects is not the only way in which the popular story of Adam and Eve inspires the events of “Lilith’s Monsters.” When G-d creates Adam and Lilith, Genesis says that G-d created “male and female.”²⁹ In the alternate narrative of creation, in which G-d creates Adam and later creates Eve, Adam is called “man” and Eve is called “woman.”³⁰ Therefore, Lilith is referred to as a “female” while Eve is referred to as a “woman.” In modern times, these two terms are understood to mean different things. Female refers to sex, while woman refers to gender identity.³¹ Lilith’s portrayal as nonbinary in “Lilith’s Monsters” thus has biblical justification. There is also a biblical parallel between Eve’s reaching for fruit from the forbidden tree,³² often portrayed in popular culture as an apple, and Lilith discussing their jealousy of the ridge in Adam’s throat, which today is colloquially called an ‘adam’s apple.’ Lilith’s envy of Adam’s body is referenced in the accompanying midrash through their longing to “reach for this bump and take it for their own throat.” Lilith’s forbidden fruit, the thing that earns them eternal suffering, is their gender identity. In the biblical text of the creation story, Eve’s act of reaching for the forbidden fruit appears in the narrative in which a ‘woman’ is made after a ‘man.’ In the chain of events that occurs after Adam and Eve eat from the forbidden tree, the two appear to “forfeit eternal life,” but because “Lilith... takes no part in this,” they may be said to live forever.³³ In “Lilith’s Monsters,” Lilith lives well beyond the time of Adam and Eve.

Lilith’s immortality is accompanied in “Lilith’s Monsters” by the information that Adam passes down negative stories about Lilith to his children; this detail is inspired by narratives that appear in midrashic interpretations of Lilith from the 1970s. In Plaskow’s “The Coming of Lilith,” Adam tells Eve “fearsome stories of the demon Lilith.”³⁴ While Adam is portrayed similarly in Plaskow’s iconic story and the midrash accompanying this essay, G-d is portrayed slightly differently. Plaskow writes that Adam and G-d seem to have more in common than Adam and Lilith, or at least Adam acts like they do. This idea is also seen in a poem about Lilith written in

²⁹ Gn 1:27

³⁰ Gn 2:22

³¹ Plaskow, “Transing and Gendering Religious Studies.”

³² Gn 3:6

³³ Darroch & Jasper. “The Ghosts of Lilith:

³⁴ Plaskow, “The Coming of Lilith.”

the way gender plays a role in modern day society will help people who were once considered dangerous monsters to find meaning within religion. It will also open up religious studies to new ideas and ways to understand G-d.

Lilith's Monsters

I.

In the beginning, the Lord created male and female from the dust of the earth and breathed life into their nostrils.³⁸ G-d called the humans Adam and Lilith, and G-d made for the humans a garden in Eden. Lilith and Adam enjoyed their garden. They took their fruit from a selection of all the trees G-d had made and they walked through the dirt marveling at the feeling of the sun and the earth on their skin. As they talked to each other they taught each other how to be human.

For a time, they lived as equals. Sometimes, Lilith wondered why G-d had made their body different from Adam's. They knew that both bodies were made in G-d's image, and they loved their body - but they loved Adam's body too, and sometimes they felt jealous of the sharpness of Adam's muscles, the ease of his movements. Adam's body cut through the world like a ship through the ocean, while Lilith glided through the world like the waves. There was a ridge in Adam's throat that Lilith did not have, rounded like the apples G-d had created on the trees. Sometimes, as Adam's deep voices echoed through the garden, Lilith longed to reach for this bump and take it for their own throat. When Lilith felt restless and uncontained in their body, they wanted to claw at their skin, reshaping their body into what they wished it was. But Lilith's envy ebbed and flowed, and many days they were content just as they were.

But Adam grew restless. Lilith could see it in the twitching of his fingers, the squint of his eyes, the way his lips turned down as they moved through the trees. They had learned, in their short time as a human, that when people's hearts were filled with feelings the emotions overflowed into the face and body. The face and body then made movements, which Lilith and

³⁸ Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith."

the 1970s, in which the writer mourns that Adam “carried a G-d / around in his pocket ... two against one / isn’t fair!”³⁵ In “Lilith’s Monsters,” G-d *allows* Adam to create a hierarchy but G-d themselves does not have anything to do with the hierarchy or creation of a gender binary. Lilith is still abandoned by their creator, as G-d does not aid Lilith, but the gender expectations that plague Lilith are entirely human constructs. It is Adam, not Adam *and* G-d, who put Lilith in a place they do not want to be in.

Plaskow and other interpreters of Lilith in the 1970s also included the idea that Lilith eventually feels lonely and “attempt[s]... to join the human community in the garden.”³⁶ In the poem “Lilith” by Enid Dame, Dame writes that Lilith sometimes mourns “the man and the G-d / I couldn’t live without.”³⁷ This loneliness is also applicable to the narrative of monsters as it is applied to transgender studies. Stryker’s monster, Frankenstein’s monster, and many modern queer people are forced to cope with loneliness because of what society deems too far out of the bounds of normal.

The character of Lilith began as a way to represent people and events that seemed to threaten society, and in a sense Lilith has continued to be interpreted that way. Lilith is no longer written as someone who kills babies, but they could very easily be applied to modern day conversations about abortion and people with uterus’ choices to not have children. Lilith’s description as a dangerous person outside of society has not changed - what has changed is society’s gradual embrace of what was once called dangerous and monstrous. Lilith’s refusal to submit is what makes them fearsome in “The Alphabet of Ben Sira” and what makes them compelling in “The Coming of Lilith.” The midrash accompanying this essay could still be said to focus on Lilith’s refusal to submit both to sexist standards *and* to the socially constructed gender binary itself. The character of Lilith is malleable because of the tradition of midrash that allows for this malleability. Religion is up to the interpretation of those who desire to practice it, and so religious stories must be allowed to adapt to include their readers. Using these stories to probe

³⁵ Walton, “Lilith’s Daughters, Miriam’s Chorus” 115-116.

³⁶ Plaskow, “The Coming of Lilith.”

³⁷ Enid Dame. “Lilith.” Lilith Gallery. Accessed on March 8, 2023. <http://www.lilithgallery.com/library/lilith/EnidDame-Lilith.html>

Adam called expressions, that gave other people a window into the heart. Lilith did not know why Adam's heart seemed to be turning angry, and they did not know how to ask Adam. Adam began to treat Lilith differently. Instead of helping Lilith to find fruit, Adam ordered them to pick the fruit alone and bring it to him. Adam encouraged Lilith to grow their hair long, and to use pigments from berries to color their face. Lilith did not understand why Adam felt the two of them must look different. After all, they were created from the same earth. Adam divided up the animals in the garden, taking for himself the lions, elephants, hawks, bears and wolves and leaving for Lilith the caterpillars, birds, rabbits, crickets, and deer. Adam was no longer content to share.

On the six hundred and twenty sixth morning, when the sun had just finished gliding upwards in the sky, Adam suddenly moved to lay on top of Lilith. They had never lay together like this. "G-d made our bodies to fit together," Adam said. "And my body must go on top." Lilith was angry. They rose, leaving Adam lying on the ground, and said, "I will not lie below."³⁹ Adam twisted his face in anger, and then twisted his limbs to rise up beside Lilith. For the first time, Lilith noticed that Adam was taller than them. Adam told Lilith, "I, whose head rises closer to G-d, will not lie below, but above." Lilith said to him, "The two of us are equal. We are both created from the same earth." Lilith looked at their feet, both standing in the cool, brown dust from which G-d had created them. "Your head is closer to the sky," Lilith said, "but mine is closer to the earth. And G-d made both the earth and sky." But Adam wanted to be separate, and he decided Lilith's place was below him. Adam seemed to have erected a wall to separate him and Lilith, and Lilith did not want to have to stay on one side of this arbitrary divider. And so Lilith fled the Garden.

II.

Lilith learned how to live outside of the garden. On the first day, Lilith wandered the forest until the sun had faded from the sky and they could not see the roots of the trees or the animals in their path. On the second day, Lilith looked for water to drink and wash themselves. On the third day, Lilith made a shelter like the one they had built with Adam. On the fourth day, Lilith made a bed. They lay that night on the soft leaves, blanketed only by the inky darkness of the sky.

³⁹ "Alphabet of Ben Sira 78: Lilith."

Lilith looked up at the stars. Alone outside the garden, Lilith hoped they could see G-d through the holes of light in the sky. G-d had made them - why should G-d abandon them now? G-d shone through the stars, but did not say anything to Lilith. "Why must I be lonely?" they screamed at the sky. G-d continued to shine, but they did not answer. Lilith simultaneously felt the comfort of G-d and anger at G-d. G-d had created the world and its inhabitants - why could G-d not help them now?

On the fifth day, Lilith hunted animals and gathered fruit. Lilith cut the hair that Adam had encouraged them to grow long, and they felt happier when they saw their reflection in the ripples of the water. On the sixth day, Lilith found a horse to ride and a wolf to protect them. On the seventh day, Lilith saw that this life they had created for themselves was good and they rested.

III.

When many days had passed in this manner and Lilith had still not come back, Adam felt annoyed. Adam turned his head towards the sky to talk to G-d. "That uppity woman you created for me has left me alone."⁴⁰ The Lord knew it was not good for man to be alone, and sent messengers to find Lilith and bring them back to Adam. But Lilith knew that they did not want to perform the expectations Adam had developed for them, and they sent the messengers away. G-d pondered what to do. They had created male and female, different only in the parts of their bodies. But Adam desired not equality but hierarchy, and separation. And so while Adam slept G-d took a part of his ribs and made a companion, a woman G-d hoped would be content with the place Adam would put her in.

Eve, as G-d called her, sometimes wondered why these rules existed to separate her and Adam, but she was generally content to follow the rules. She would come to desire equality, but she was content to take a separate place from Adam. Eve and Adam seemed to follow a very different set of rules from each other. They began to wear clothes, and Lilith was confused by their choice to use these clothes to accentuate the differences in their bodies. Eve covered her chest, Adam didn't. Eve wanted to emphasize the places where her body curved, Adam wanted to

⁴⁰ Plaskow, "The Coming of Lilith."

accentuate his straight lines. Lilith wanted to do some of both. Lilith did not understand why G-d would create them with an identity they were not allowed to fulfill. And they did not understand why this identity meant they must be alone. Lilith asked G-d, and G-d became frustrated. "I have created a monster," Lilith heard him mutter. Lilith did not know what this word meant.

IV.

G-d's Earth went many times around the sun, and Adam and Eve had children and those children had children, all while Lilith continued to watch. Adam passed stories about Lilith onto his children - "a monster, a demon, a witch," he told them. "Cunning, dangerous, ugly" they told their children. Eve's granddaughters fought to improve upon the place Adam had put Eve in, and for a time Lilith hoped there might finally be a home for them within the rest of society. But Eve's granddaughters did not take down the wall Adam had built between man and woman, they just improved the women's side of the wall. Sometimes, Adam's and Eve's descendents felt the same inability to exist under Adam's rules that Lilith had. When these descendents were called monsters for their desires to not have children, to love the same sex, to learn what they were not supposed to, or to change their body so it matched their soul, Lilith came to them. Lilith found meaning with the other people humanity called monsters.

Lilith and their monsters carved a space in between the binary of choices Adam had created between him and Eve. Lilith's monsters found ways to walk on the wall between the expectations for men and women as if it were a tightrope. When he tried to convince Lilith there was no room to exist between men and women, Adam had told Lilith that G-d "made night and day, sea and land, plants and animals, men and women. He made things in twos." But G-d also made sunrise and dusk, places where the sand is wet by the sea, and plants that talk to each other like animals. G-d made in-betweens. "G-d made *me*," Lilith said. Adam called the people who proved the existence of the in-between monsters. Lilith understood by the way he said the word that to be a monster was a bad thing.

The monsters were often banished. Other humans, usually men that reminded Lilith of Adam, pushed the monsters into dark places and told the world they were dangerous. They were given many names: witch, rebel, queer. Sometimes the men called the monsters exactly what the

monsters called themselves, but they sneered the words out with a disgust they reserved for the monsters. “Homosexuals,” they spit out. “Transgender,” they scorned. But monsters were only considered bad because Adam had said they were, and anything looks bad if it is viewed only in oppressive darkness. Lilith and their monsters found ways to create their own light, where they could be seen as they truly were. “Let there be light,” Lilith said. And in this light they saw that the monsters were beautiful.

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An aerial photograph of a river delta, showing a complex network of channels and distributaries. The water is a mix of dark blue and light greyish-blue, with white foam from the waves. The land is a mix of green and brown. In the center, there is a black rectangular box containing the text 'THE JSR'.

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