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Myth and Metaphor in Adele Wiseman's Fiction: A Study in the Relationship Between Ancient Texts and Modern Narrative

Ellen Jean Gordon

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

English

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Abstract

Myth and Metaphor in Adele Wiseman's Fiction: A Study in the Relationship Between Ancient Texts and Modern Narrative

Ellen Gordon

Adele Wiseman's two published novels, The Sacrifice and Crackpot, have as their common central theme the struggles of the protagonists attempting to adjust their familial, old-world values of the Judaic tradition to the realities of twentieth-century, North American culture. However, the novels differ dramatically in characterization, method, and structure. This thesis examines the novels within the context of the two Judaic literary traditions from which they have developed - the myth of Genesis and the metaphor of Lurianic doctrine - arguing that the structure of each novel reflects the structure and the concerns of its literary precursor.

The Sacrifice is discussed as a modern version of the ancient Israelite myth of the binding of Isaac found in Genesis 22. The concerns, structures and literary characteristics of biblical narrative relevant to The Sacrifice are delineated. Wiseman's story of Abraham and his tragic inability to adapt to the new world are studied as they relate to the parameters of his traditional Judaism established in the Torah.

The examination of Crackpot involves defining the ideas and literary characteristics of kabbalistic writings, most specifically the metaphor of the Lurianic doctrine of the breaking of the vessels. Hoda and her approach to life are discussed within the context of the cyclical creation myth which, it is claimed, provides the structure for the novel.

In conclusion, the two novels are compared and contrasted, so that Crackpot is seen as an extension and inversion of The Sacrifice, just as kabbalistic doctrine provided a radical departure from the Judaism of the Torah.

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CHAPTER I

STRUCTURES AND CONCERNS OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Adele Wiseman's two published novels, The Sacrifice and Crackpot, have as their common central theme the struggles of the protagonists attempting to adjust their familial, old-world values of the Judaic tradition to the realities of twentieth-century, North American culture. However, the novels differ dramatically in characterization, method, and structure. They may be examined within the context of the two Judaic literary traditions from which they have developed - the myth of Genesis and the metaphor of Lurianic doctrine - thus establishing the thesis that the structure of each novel reflects the structure and the concerns of its literary precursor.

The mythopoeic faculty, the creating of myths, is a fundamental element of mankind's nature. Men and women shape and understand life's experiences through story-telling or myth; society is educated through myth. Vickery states that the function of myth is to help mankind "endeavour to create a meaningful place for [himself] in a world oblivious to his presence" (Vickery, p.ix). It is not surprising then to find that myth underlies all literature. Any given plot, character, theme, even image, is basically a "displacement of similar events in myths and folktales" (Vickery, p.ix). The functions of myth -- to inform, to entertain, to give meaning -- are

essentially the functions of the novel. Wiseman's novel The Sacrifice uses as its basic structure the myth of the *akedah* (Hebrew for "the binding" of Isaac found in Genesis 22). Other qualities of the myth may be identified in The Sacrifice, such as character types, the use of ritual, and the search for a meaning in life.

As it explores the tenets of Judaism in a modern post-Holocaust reality, Wiseman's novel may be considered a modern form of midrash (an interpretive exposition of scripture) on the Torah's story of the *akedah*. Because of the unique qualities of biblical narrative, it has fostered a rich and continuing literary tradition in the Jewish experience which has allowed for such adaptations to continue to occur millenia after its beginning.

"In the beginning" the Judaic God instructed His chosen people:

> Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Exod. 20:3-5)[1]

Because of this command, the people were forced to symbolize their omniscient, omnipresent, yet invisible God in some form other than the visual arts. Camille Paglia and Neil Postman suggest that it was Moses who provided them with an art form

[1] For the purposes of this paper, all biblical references will be taken from the King James Version.

amenable to God's command and His reality, with the presentation of the Ten Commandments in written form. It is in this way that the Jews became a people of "the word" (Paglia and Postman, p.45). The centrality of "the word" to the Jewish consciousness is remarked upon by Wiseman:

> Among Jews the written word is highly valued. If you want to cast doubt on a statement someone has made, the classic challenge in Yiddish is, "Where does it stand written?". This faith in the written word is the result of subjecting the word itself, in the Holy Books, to millenia of examination and interpretation. It also recognizes the power of the written word to compel belief. (Memoirs, p.15)

The literary forms of the Bible create a heteroglossia of structures and genres, but "Narrative story is ... the most typical of all the Bible's literary forms" (James Barr, quoted by Herbert Schneidau, in McConnell, p.133). That narrative is the preferred literary form for the writers of the Bible illustrates, on their part, a basic understanding of human nature. Narrative is the way in which man perceives the world. As a linguistic being, he is forever weaving his experiences into the story that is his life (Schneidau, in McConnell, p.134). The creators of biblical narrative were well served by that literary form for it provided the flexibility necessary to develop the tension inherent in the biblical stories: that of a free people making choices, often in opposition to the divine plans of God (Alter, p.26).

The form of narrative found in the Bible, as Frye suggests in The Great Code, is most frequently that of the myth, which essentially means a story:

> In its literary context, [myth means] *mythos*, plot, narrative, or in general the sequential ordering of words .... In a story the propelling force is the link between personalities and events. (Frye, p.31)

This is not to suggest that the myth of biblical narrative is simple, for although it basically follows a story line, it is rich in subtleties and nuances which cause it to require and withstand repeated readings:

> The point is that we don't discover a biblical story's principles of order on the first, or perhaps even on the tenth reading. It is repeated exposure to the story -- repeated savouring of its details and incongruities, extended reflection on its preoccupations and obsessions -- that gives us our sense of its structure and meaning. (Rosenberg, in Holtz, p.62)

The memory of the ancient story of God's covenant with the patriarch Abraham and his progeny permeates Wiseman's modern tale of a modern Abraham. In the "preoccupations and obsessions" of the biblical myth are found the foundations of Judaism, for it is the Jews' perception of being a chosen people covenanted with God which is the basis of their religious and cultural identity. It is possible for Wiseman to draw upon the biblical myth for her modern midrash because of its elliptical structure which is "designed not to describe a specific situation but to contain it in a way that does not restrict its significance to that one situation. Its truth is inside its structure, not outside" (Frye, p.46).

The wonderfully captivating opening to the Torah, "In the beginning," has a resonance in the history of that text which makes it a prophetic statement as well as an introduction to the story of a people. The Hebrew Bible was only "the beginning" of the literary tradition of the Jews. Its sparse narrative with its "indeterminacy of meaning" reveals that the Hebrew writers saw reading for meaning "as a *process*, requiring continual revision ... continual suspension of judgement, weighing of multiple possibilbities, brooding over gaps in the information provided" (Alter, p.12). This open-endedness of biblical narrative (or "extratextuality" as McConnell suggests) allows for any number of possibilities in the reader's understanding of the text. The allusive quality of the text as the narrative constantly builds upon what has gone before lends it a multi-layered form. Out of these narrative characteristics of the Bible have come a myriad of "readings" or "midrashim" which have themselves become a part of the Jewish literary tradition.

The stories of the Torah's multi-layered, elliptical narrative are retold in the midrashim, "reflecting each [historical] period's literary norms and its attitude toward the Bible" (Jacobson, p.3). Midrashic writing is a form of exegesis: an attempt to fill in the gaps, the hesitations, the ellipses of biblical narrative. Whereas the narrative of the Torah is open-ended and ambiguous, the midrashim attempt to achieve closure of those very stories (Hartman and Budick, p.X). The embellishments of the midrash, which was "centered

on the Hebrew Bible, yet permeable to the epochs through which it passed" (Hartman and Budick, p.XII), complement the biblical stories and have become part of the Jewish memory.

The allusive quality of the Jews' literary tradition demonstrates how the flexibility of biblical narrative has served them over the millenia of their history. Through the retellings and reshapings of the stories, the Jewish people have dealt with the painful realities of their chosenness. For, if to be chosen in the biblical sense was to be special and set apart from others, to be one of the chosen in the secular world has meant centuries of exile, dispersion and persecution. If to be chosen once meant to be one of the elect, today it may be seen to mean finding a way to deal with one's inheritance and at the same time attempting to survive the vagaries of man's cruel and prejudicial nature.

The continuing reiteration, examination, and interpretation of biblical narrative within the Jewish culture arises out of the people's changing needs and realities. Frye states that the function of myth within a society is two-fold: to entertain and/or to instruct a society as to what is important for it to know and understand. In literature we find:

> Certain themes, situations, and character types ... have persisted with very little change ... to our time. ... This quality of repetition is essential to myth in all its contexts. A society, even one equipped with writing cannot keep its central myths of concern constantly in mind unless they are continually being re-presented. (Frye, p.48)

The central myths of concern in Judaica are those which have identified the Jews as the Chosen People. Their literature illustrates that a basic function of the myth is to inform; a vital function of the retelling is to understand.

The biblical myths have remained extant in the Jewish experience not only due to their literary qualities but also due to a message found repeatedly in the original text. *Zahkor* (Hebrew for remember), the God of the Israelites commands, *zahkor*. One hundred and sixty-nine times the Hebrew Bible exhorts the people to remember (Yerushalmi, p.8). From these exhortations to remember was born the historical, religious, cultural memory of the Jews. The responsibility to ensure that the people did remember fell to the father and the rabbi. Memory was reinforced by ritual and recital so that the ancient writings with their characters and stories were part of the everyday experience of a Jew. Within the texts, time became obsolete. Thus in one midrashic story, Moses can sit in on a second-century class discussing the laws he has yet to deliver to the people from Mount Sinai. Accordingly, the Jews' awareness of their heritage has a timeless quality which makes ancient biblical characters as familiar as present-day figures.

Over the millenia, in an attempt to understand contemporary events and perhaps make them less frightening, the ancient stories were repeatedly recounted, and related to the contemporary situation. For example, in response to the horror of the mass suicide in the Rhineland in the seventeenth

century, the story of the *akedah* was recalled. The paradigm of the binding of Isaac is found in the literature of that time with additions to and rationalizations of the original story. The medieval midrashic stories of the *akedah* include reference to the suicide, saying:

> Who has heard or seen such a thing? Has there ever been an akedah like this in all the generations since Abraham? Did eleven hundred akedot take place on a single day, all of them comparable to the binding of Isaac son of Abraham? (Habermann, in Yerushalmi, p.38)

The story of Abraham and Isaac's experience on Mount Moriah has, over the centuries, accrued numerous titles which reflect the varying interpretations put upon the story. Generally speaking Christians have called it "The Sacrifice," but the Jews frequently refer to it as either "The *Akedah*" (testing) or "The Binding of Isaac." It would seem that the version which Wiseman's character Abraham teaches his family in The Sacrifice is drawn from a fifth-century midrash Bereshit Rabbah as recounted by Jacobson (Jacobson, p.2).

According to Jacobson's discussion of modern midrash, Wiseman's novel may be termed a modern midrash on the ancient story of the binding of Isaac. Like Frye, he believes that modern writers who appropriate and transform biblical stories make "creative and valuable contributions to the vitality of their cultures" (Jacobson, p.7). The new versions of the story keep the cultural heritage alive and accessible to the new generations and educate them in their national identity. In rewriting the ancient stories, the writer may also be "making

use of [her] artistic powers to teach Jews what will set them free from the forces that threaten to destroy them" (Jacobson, p.188).

Wiseman has made similar observations. Reminiscing in her essay "Memoirs of a Book Molesting Childhood," she recalls that as a child who devoured books prodiguously and purposefully, she also learned that books could lie. "Even in the middle of really good stories they lied about Jews and what we did and why we did it and how we lived and what we were like" (Memoirs, p.7). With that realization developed a notion that she had been born into the generation that "would finally put everything right" (Memoirs, p.8). In that spirit Wiseman decided that it would be her vocation and mission to help "correct the vision of the Gentile world" through her writing (Butovsky, p.1). Although she no longer is "absolutely convinced ... that good writing can transform humankind ... nevertheless ... I must proceed always as though what is conceivable may in some way become possible" (Memoirs, p.29).

In her first novel, The Sacrifice, Wiseman employs biblical myth while creating her story of a modern reality. However, she has stated that her greatest interest is not in the facts of her story (beyond their function of providing the structure) but in the *implications* of the facts (Belkin, p.151). In the implications may be found, as Frye suggests, what the reader needs to know, and as Jacobson has suggested,

what may help to set the Jews free from forces that threaten to destroy them.

As a modern novel The Sacrifice resembles the original biblical myth with its multi-layered qualities and textual allusions, while echoing both the biblical and a midrashic rendering of the story. Wiseman's characters, Abraham and Isaac, are character types from the ancient texts but, as is fitting in a modern midrash, are "transformed into new types that reflect the values and experiences of the present" (Mintz, quoted by Jacobson, p.4). The character Abraham is a man who will help us explore what it can mean to be a traditional Jew in the twentieth century. He is a devotedly religious man who believes in God's promise to the Jews and in whom we can see acting the biblical concerns and traditions that are integral to the Jewish consciousness even in the twentieth century.

CHARACTERISTICS OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

It is the flexibility allowed for by the remarkable economy of biblical narrative which has caused it to remain such a compelling and potent element in the Jewish literary tradition. The language and structure of biblical narrative are so masterfully controlled that with only a few words, or more significantly, the omission of a few words, a character may be known, a disaster foreshadowed, a change in tone effected. Although many of the subtleties of modern fiction are found in biblical narrative, the important difference is

that much of the subtlety of biblical narrative is achieved through the economical use of words.

An examination of some specific conventions used in biblical narrative will illustrate how the sparse, economical text can carry such a profound weight of meaning and possibilities.

The structure of biblical narrative is elliptical, ambiguous, and varied. It includes listings, law givings, mathematical measurements, in fact a plethora of information, expressed in a variety of voices, styles, and approaches. While at a first glance some of this information may seem incongruous (for example the long listings of genealogies), biblical narrative only includes what is relevant. When examined in detached segments it can indeed appear to be disjointed. But scholars of biblical narrative have found that there is an overall structure to the Bible, particularly when the text is studied as literature. For it is through the recognition of literary devices that the narrative order may be clearly discerned.

An example of structure in biblical narrative is the use of the listings of geneologies or *toledot* (literally "begettings", Fokkelman, in Alter and Kermode, p.41) in the book of Genesis. The *toledot* are the key to the contribution which the book of Genesis makes to the Torah. They establish the lineage of the patriarchs of the Israelites, first Abraham,

then Isaac, then Jacob and thus the foundation of the nation. The listings of geneologies may function as an introduction to new cycles in the text or at other times as a conclusion to stories serving as a framework around the telling of the Israelites' history (Fokkelman, in Alter and Kermode, P.41). They may also hold foreshadowings of stories to come, as when a barren wife does not bear the essential children while the less favoured wife's children are included in the listings of begats. Or they may contain allusions to stories which have gone before. But their most essential function is to frame and reinforce the theme running throughout the biblical narrative of Genesis: "life-survival-offspring-fertility-continuity" (Fokkelman, in Alter and Kermode, p.41).

The pace of biblical narrative is uneven: it can move amazingly quickly over time and space, then abruptly slow to a careful pace as a central issue or event in the story is related. Focalization thus highlights important myths, laws and themes in the text. As in drama the text concentrates on the human element of the stories; only those properties necessary to the drama are included in the narrative.

Repetition is essential to biblical narrative and is found in a multitude of forms, from the echoing of a root word (*leitwort*) or its derivatives, to the repetition of a motif or concrete image, to the repetition of themes and story lines. Such repetitions are explicit; it is "the small but revealing differences in the seeming similarities, the nodes of emergent

new meanings in the pattern of regular expectations created by the explicit repetitions" that matter (Alter, p.97).

Biblical narrative is saturated with allusions which may be noted in the text's repetitive qualities or in the recurrence of known character types. Words and phrases allude to previous stories or themes; character types mirror earlier prototypes. Moreover, themes and type-scenes (such as a hero's meeting with his future bride at a well) are repeated, creating the weighty "allusive textuality ... which lately goes by the name of *intertextuality*" of biblical narrative (Hartman, p.XI). Intertextuality contributes to the multi-layered or mosaic quality, in that the text "refers to itself, within itself," frequently and in numerous, varied ways. This quality of intertextuality allows for a "gradual accretion of meaning" (McConnell, p.10) and is basic to the narrative of the Bible.

Type-scenes are a narrative convention of repetition using an established sequence of actions by which an event unfolds (Rosenberg, in Holtz, p.49). The reader will be acquainted with the type-scene because it is present in other narratives in the text. Therefore, when there is a divergence in the sequence of events, the reader is alerted. The change could be simply a small omission or perhaps a subtle alteration in the wording of a repeated phrase. Thus the authors use what might appear to be an insignificant change in a type-scene to make a large impact upon the reader. A further function of type-scenes, such as the annunciation of the birth of a child

to a barren mother, is to establish the concerns of God and therefore of the biblical writers. The repetition of type-scenes serves to reiterate God's divinely planned destiny for the people.

The recurrence of a character type comes under the convention of typology. Within the biblical text various "types" are introduced many times and are easily recognizable for the reader. Abraham, for instance, is the quintessential patriarch type, being the first of the fathers of the chosen people. Subsequent patriarchal figures will be recognized and judged by the degree to which they comply with or depart from the standards of behaviour he sets.

An essential element of biblical narrative is seen in its economical presentation. Nothing is "incidental or fortuitious" (Alter, p.113) in the text: anything there is worthy of careful attention. The text itself is utilitarian, but the implications behind the stories are to be discovered not only from what is said but also from what is not said. The use of repetition and recurrence allow for an economical presentation, while making the work of the reader far more demanding in that she must be alert to the intertextuality of the text or miss the implications behind the narrative.

Dialogue, as it is used in biblical narrative, contributes to the text's ambiguity. Exposition in the paradigmatic biblical story is often used simply to establish

the name of the character and familial relationships, locate the geographical setting, or name a moral or physical characteristic of the protagonist. Once the action is initiated, and until the story is completed, the reliance on dialogue is so great that even private thoughts or reported conversations are put within the present time frame and presented as direct speeches. The effect of the dominance of dialogue is to leave the reader to puzzle out the nuances of the speeches and the ambiguities of the silences without a "reliable" narrator to do the thinking for her.

The open-endedness or *extratextuality* of biblical narrative created by its economical presentation lends it an ambiguity which Auerbach has characterized with the phrase "fraught with background" (Auerbach, p.12). Because the text is so sparse, what the reader brings to the reading of her own knowledge and experience must fill in the background. Thus the ambiguity inherent in the gaps, the hesitations, and the ellipses of the narrative allow for its extratextual qualities which in turn have made the traditional text adaptable and contemporary. It may be posited that it is precisely the ambiguity of biblical narrative, requiring constant interpretation and interpolation, which has caused the Hebrew Bible to survive as a living, contemporary work of literature to this modern day.

NARRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN GENESIS 22

Genesis 22, the biblical narrative of the binding of Isaac which echoes throughout Wiseman's novel The Sacrifice, is illustrative of many of the characteristics of biblical narrative. Because there are numerous midrashic versions of the *akedah* it is a clear example of extratextuality.

The ambiguous, elliptical quality of biblical narrative is poignantly evident in the story. For three days Abraham and Isaac travel to the place which God has chosen for Isaac's sacrificial death. During those three days the narrative offers only silence. What was said? What anguish was felt? How is one to understand God's purpose? The reader is left to her imagination. The silence is broken as the narrative focuses upon Abraham's preparation of the altar. Details are carefully related until "Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son" (Gen.22:10). The reader has no more information than does the son, Isaac. Will God allow this, the promised son,to be sacrificed? No, here the narration turns from "problem to solution, or command and execution" (Fokkelman,in Alter and Kermode, p.49), as God's angel intercedes, commanding Abraham not to lay a hand upon the lad.

Repetition emphasizes Abraham's complete trust in God. Three times he expresses his readiness to comply with God's demands with his simple reply "Here I am". Another refrain

line repeated three times underlines the unity of father and son: "They went both of them together" (Gen. 22;6,8,19). Juxtaposed and parallel to this bond between the two is the repeated phrase of God, three times reiterating the vital importance Isaac has for Abraham who is now being asked to sacrifice him. God always refers to Isaac as "thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest" (Gen.22:2,12,16). With God's repetition of this phrase the reader knows that He recognizes the significance of what He asks of Abraham.

The ambiguity and uncertainty of the narrative force the reader to construct a satisfactory reading of the text. Abraham's ambiguous reply to Isaac's question: "But where is the lamb for the offering?" (Gen.22:7) tells nothing of what Abraham is thinking, or of what he *really* means when he says: "God will provide" (Gen.22:8). Is it only a statement of faith in God? Does he expect to find a ram in the bushes? Does he expect God to explain or halt this tragedy? Does he believe God will have him sacrifice this son, his only son?

The elliptical and ambiguous quality of this story has fascinated people since its beginnings. The narrative techniques leave much upon which to ponder, although the lesson of faith and obedience to God is very clear. The story allows for God to reiterate His covenant with Abraham and his progeny, thus giving the myth an intertextual import.

In addition to these literary qualities, a review of the concerns of biblical narrative which embody the basic tenets of Judaism and are essential to Wiseman's Abraham will prepare us for our reading of The Sacrifice. As Fokkelman observes, the driving force of the entire Torah is that of fertility and generational continuity (Fokkleman, in Alter and Kermode, p.42), but this concern can be broken into sub-plots of the themes which support and/or account for it.

CONCERNS OF BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Namings punctuate biblical narrative. Man with his language abilities participates in the establishment of his world by bestowing on the creatures of the earth their names. The ability to name people and things suggests the Hebraic sense that language comprises a form of authority (Hartman and Budick, p.5). This is evident throughout biblical narrative in which names carry a great significance.

When God feels confident that Abram is capable of fulfilling His commandments and that he is worthy of God's blessing He completes His covenant with Abram by renaming him Abraham: "for a father of many nations have I made thee" (Gen.17:5). "The giving of a name ... throughout the Bible always signals a major transition in being and consciousness" (Holtz, p.57). It would seem that a name helps determine the role of its bearer, for not only is Abraham renamed when he assumes the role of patriarch, but Sarah also is renamed when

she conceives the first heir to the covenant between God and His chosen people. Furthermore, God instructs Abraham as to what the child should be named.

Names have meanings appropriate to the role of the bearer. Thus Eve is named "mother of all living" (Gen.3:20) and Sarah "mother of a nation." Names may also be seen to reflect in some way a prime concern of the narrative. In ascribing to the first woman a name meaning "mother of all living" rather than for example "first woman," the narrative reasserts God's and the Jews' concern for progeny and reproduction.

It is through Abram that God makes his descendants, the Israelites, the covenanted people. God proclaims that Abram is to be the progenitor of a great nation: "and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 2-3). Inherent in this speech is the concept of the Jews as a chosen people over whom God will watch and in whom God will take a special interest.

Contingent on God's covenant with His chosen people are the many obligations which they are to fulfill in return. God's faith in Abraham and His conviction that Abraham is the correct man to be the patriarch of His people expresses what He expects of Israel:

> For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement; that the Lord may bring that which he hath spoken of him. (Gen.18:19)

As well as designating the patriarch as the source of family beneficence, inherent in this dictum is a very simple truth for the Jews. If they keep God's laws, they will be blessed; if they fail, they will not have earned God's blessing and, conversely, will be cursed.

The belief that God punishes the evildoer permeates the narrative of the Torah. The direct correlation between action and reward or punishment expresses an essential element of the myths of the Jews and their God. A basic message of the myths is that obedience and faith earn God's blessings; doubt and hesitation earn His curses.

Greenstein's analysis of biblical law suggests that the covenant between the Israelites and their God created a relationship similar to that of a vassal and a mighty king (Greenstein, in Holtz, p.87). The people owed worship and fealty; in return God promised blessings to the faithful. Complications arising out of the covenant are a result of an essential human quality: free will and choice. The tension originates in the contest between "God's will, His providential guidance, and human freedom, the refractory nature of man" (Alter, p.33).

A natural and necessary extension of God's covenant with the people is generational succession. For how are Abram and his descendants to claim God's promise without issue? This requisite provides the tension of numerous biblical stories in which the patriarchs must wander far and labour hard to wed the right wife; there are many precarious pregnancies, and many threatened birthrights so that, as Rosenberg observes, each generation seems to just "squeak through" (Rosenberg, in Holtz, p.69).

Arising out of the concern for generational continuity is a preoccupation with reproduction. A virtue repeatedly extolled in the Genesis story is that of fruitfulness. God admonishes man from his moment of creation to "replenish the earth and subdue it" (Gen.1:28). As God renews his covenant with Abraham's descendant Jacob, He again commands: "Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee and kings shall come out of thy loins, And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it and to thy seed after thee will I give the land" (Gen.35:11-12).

The fundamental and consummate role of the female, as producer of the Covenanted people established in Sarai, is a continuing concern of biblical narrative as God oversees the choice of wives for the patriarchs amd later assures that they bear the required sons.

Birth therefore is a miraculous event. Time and again as the ordained mother of the people is found to be barren, the resulting anxiety and threat to the continuation of the lineage are resolved by God's miraculously "opening the womb" (Fokkelman, in Alter and Kermode, p.43). Thus the birth, particularly of a son who will fall heir to the promises of God, is an occasion for celebration and the recognition of God's limitless powers.

The unfathomable scope of God's powers reassures yet perplexes the patriarchal consciousness. When Abram points out to God that his wife Sarai is barren, has always been barren, and therefore he wonders how his lineage is to profit from God's promises, God replies: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen.18:14). Subsequently, proof of God's statement is seen in the miracle of Isaac's birth. This limitless and mysterious power of God makes miracles a constant palpable possibility, while the abruptness and inscrutability of many of His expectations test man's trust and faith in Him.

A God who will, as was promised Abram, bless those who bless Him and curse those who curse Him is a very personal God. The relationship between God and the first Abram is, in keeping with this Jewish perception of God, an intimate one. Abraham dares to talk to God, even to discuss or almost argue with God as when he expresses scepticism at God's suggestion that Sarai will become pregnant. Later, Abraham has become so bold that he presumes to negotiate with God the fate of Sodom (Gen. 18).

As is appropriate of a personal God, He is a constant reality, a constant presence in man's consciousness. For the Israelites, "God resides among the people, a king in their midst. The people's prosperity and security depend on retaining God's presence" (Holtz, p.89). God's absence brought on by man's disobedience and withdrawal creates a dangerous vacuum: a silence in the continuity of dialogue, into which evil may creep.

BIBLICAL NARRATIVE CONCERNS IN GENESIS 22

The biblical story of the binding of Isaac, upon which Wiseman builds her modern tale, is a watershed in the Israelites' developing understanding of their God. During the test preceding God's revelation to Abraham, the three of them -- God, the father and the son -- are bound together in a circle of trial, trust and faith. Each proves his mettle as Abraham trusts in God to "provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen.2:8), and Isaac trusts his father to know what God will do, and God trusts Abraham to finally prove himself worthy of all God plans for him. In these moments of "heavy silence" (Auerbach, p.11), the reader is free to imagine the bonding which must have occurred between the three, the inexpressible pain and joy experienced by each, and to wonder at the precedent of faith Abraham established for all to follow.

God's command which saves Isaac effectively puts an end to human sacrifice. As Greenstein explains, God has made man

in His image, yet man is set apart in two ways: in that he has a will of his own and in his mortality. "The boundary between God and human is drawn by the lifeline. Only God lives forever, is always living-ness" (Greenstein, in Holtz, p.91). But being all-powerful, God also has put a ceiling on man's longevity; it is for Him to end life:

> Because blood, symbolizing life, is the element of God, and the human is a mortal clone of God, the Torah places the highest penalty on the shedding of human blood: "He who spills the blood of a human, by a human will his blood be spilled, for in the image of God did he make the human" (Gen.9:6) (Greenstein, in Holtz, p.92).

To kill a man is to kill the image of God; thus the taking of life is a crime abhorrent to Judaism.

The lesson which the biblical Abraham has learned over the years of his relationship with God is that of humility and faith. Thus when God commands him to take his only son whom he loves and offer him as a sacrifice, Abraham complies. The implications behind the story are frightening. A God who has established Himself as personally interested in His people and yet who will make such devastating demands upon them is inscrutable. Of a God who can demand such blind obedience, there will also be great expectations. Wiseman's The Sacrifice depicts a character with such expectations of his God struggling with the realities of the twentieth-century post-Holocaust world.

The biblical version of the *akedah* provides only the most basic elements of the myth thus allowing the reader to reconstruct the narrative according to her contemporary situation. It is precisely because of the elliptical form of the original stories that they have survived and are still material of interest to writers of contemporary literature such as Wiseman. Chapter II will develop the argument that, in The Sacrifice, she employs the basic elements of the original myth to create a novel of twentieth-century history and circumstance.

CHAPTER II

THE SACRIFICE AND BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

MYTHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE NOVEL

The mythic qualities of the biblical narrative of the *akedah* provide the basic stucture of Wiseman's novel, The Sacrifice. The character-types found in the myth are those of the novel but, true to her form, Wiseman fleshes out the characters, following their life's experiences with the attention to their development peculiar to the novel. Dorothy Van Ghent states: "The subject matter of novels is human relationships in which are shown the directions of men's souls" (Van Ghent, p.3). The basic concern of The Sacrifice is derived from biblical myth: man's understanding of his relationship with God. While in the mythical form of the story, the reader has only the briefest account of the essential events, characters, and their motivations, in the novel all are developed into a coherent, consistent story which has a beginning, a middle, and, in the end, a resolution.

One of the most vital functions of the novel is to depict the characters in contention with their society: its values and changes, and their place within it. This preoccupation is basic to Wiseman's novel as her protagonist tries to cope with the twentieth century while retaining traditional attitudes towards life. Similar to the myth, which avoids attaching

specific time and place to its narrative, thus retaining its universal truths, so The Sacrifice has no delineated geographical placement. Time too is not specified (the time could simply be characterized as "some time in the modern day"); it is an essential element in that it helps create the sociological and philosophical contexts of the novel.

Wiseman's experiences in her home as a child serve as an illustration of Yerushalmi's argument concerning the impact of the ancient commandment "*zakhor*" (as discussed in Chapter I) at work in modern Jewry. Her easy familiarity with biblical forebearers is evident in her adaptation of the biblical story of Abraham to that of a modern Jew's life experiences. In speaking of her childhood she explains: "Biblical stories seem to have always surrounded me." She feels she has an attitude to the Bible's content which is "familial" rather than formal. She explains: "Biblical characters have always seemed like distant cousins; you knew all kinds of things about them." They were like "relatives who had often one way or another mismanaged [life]. To be told how even great kings and heroes had fallen short both humbled you and made all things possible" (Memoirs, p.19).

Although Wiseman's novel The Sacrifice is a work of fiction with all the characteristics of a modern novel, her main character, Abraham, is still caught up in the ancient traditions and beliefs of his mythic forebearer, so that many of the qualities and concerns of the novel echo those of

biblical narrative. Her novel and her main character, Abraham, illustrate what Yerushalmi argues: for the Jew "the relevant past ... was clearly the remote past. What had happened long ago had determined what had occurred since, and even provided the fundamental explanations for what was still transpiring" (Yerushalmi, p.34).

THE ABRAHAM OF THE BIBLE AND OF THE SACRIFICE

The story of the biblical Abraham is of a man who learns to put his complete trust in God and in doing so is rewarded with God's precious gift to him of his son, Isaac. The biblical story is a lesson in faith and humility before God. Wiseman's modern tale looks at a Jew living in the twentieth century, suffering the persecution and dispersion of God's chosen, yet trying to adhere to the basic tenets of the traditional Judaism found in the orignal story of Abraham and Isaac. In her modern version, Wiseman's devotedly religious Abraham experiences difficulties in adjusting his old world values and attitudes to the realities of a new time and place. His extraordinary belief in the Jew's claim to God's promises, distorted by his great, blinding pride, eventually leads to tragedy. The story is of his failure to have learned the lesson of humility expected of the traditional Jew, modelled by his biblical counterpart, of his failure to face the possibility of evil within himself, and of his failure to understand the cruelty of man exercising his God-given right of free will.

The drama found in much biblical narrative derives from the tension between what may be two opposing forces: the will of God and the will of man. When human "hubris meets divine nemesis" (Fokkelman, in Alter and Kermode, p.39), the final outcome is pre-ordained by definition. But in the unravelling of the tale lies a lesson to be learned and a story to be told.

THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Shalom Spiegel explains in his study of the *akedah*, The Last Trial (Spiegel, p.4), the versions of the binding of Isaac are legion. The version of the sacrifice which Wiseman's Abraham tells his family is a variation on that of the Torah and is seemingly based upon a midrashic version in Bereshit Rabbah (Jacobson, p.2). Throughout her novel, Wiseman has woven the concept of human sacrifice which originated in the biblical myth and has been embellished by the many later versions.

The meaning which the *akedah* lends the novel is found in the Jewish moral idea of the celebration of life which has grown out of the Covenant between God and the Chosen People, an attitude Wiseman learned as part of her heritage: "Judaism ... is life-oriented, [it] celebrates life, because it's all we've got, because beyond life is somebody else's responsibility. We have to do the best we can with life" (Wiseman, in Belkin, p.152). The other aspect of the Jewish moral idea is found in its great reverence and concern for progeny, providing for the

survival of the Chosen People. Abraham is an admirable representative of the attitude and concerns of the covenanted people. He believes: "It is life's miracles that the living must find" (The Sacrifice, p.139). His preoccupation with sons and grandsons and the promise he perceives in the birth of a new child dominate his life. In his entire approach to living he adheres to the Jewish moral idea which celebrates life. But he also suffers from hubris or false pride.

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE SACRIFICE

As described in Chapter I, the Israelites conceived of God as not only a source of power but also a communicator who used the spoken and written word to make Himself known to His people. The value placed upon words and "the word" in the Judaic tradition is obvious in Wiseman's Abraham. His voice dominates his story as it dominates his home, with the ancient stories and songs, with his debates and deliberations. But as the events of his life overwhelm him, Abraham's voice is silenced as he loses his vigour, his love of life, his understanding of his God.

With the death of Isaac, Abraham ceases using words to celebrate life, or even to understand life. He often answers only with monosyllabic sounds. As LoVerso writes in "Circle of Conversation," language, which was once a source of joy, becomes a tool, a weapon of destruction for Abraham; no longer does he sing songs of ancient wonders and possible miracles

(LoVerso, p.175). Now when he speaks he uses words to "tear" people apart (p.287).

In Abraham's silence is also the absence of God. Neher observes that in the original story of the *akedah*, the three-day trip which Abraham and Isaac take to get to Mount Moriah is one of the biblical narrative's silences. No report is given as to conversations or sounds of any kind, only silence. During that silence the reader, Neher claims, holds her breath "Will he or won't he [sacrifice his son]?" (Neher p.23). In Wiseman's story the tension is not whether he will or he won't perform an action, it's **what** will he do? As Wiseman's Abraham wanders aimlessly in his silence the tension is building to a frightful climax which the reader senses must lead to tragedy.

Abraham awaits "the word" (from God). He believes that "the word" will be a command, the silence will be broken, and he will be able to understand again. But there is no word, only the wind (p.293). It is appropriate that Wiseman's Abraham should perceive of his redemption in the form of a word. A literate people such as the Jews, for whom the word (of God) shapes their religious life, would expect a word to be the sign that would lead them through the maze of life. Abraham, being such a vociferous lover of words, naturally anticipates help in this form.

The concerns presented in Wiseman's modern story of Abraham and Isaac are derived from their biblical counterparts.

An examination of these concerns as found in The Sacrifice will illustrate some of the ways in which Wiseman's representations of the fundamental myths of traditional Judaism confront the realities of the twentieth century.

BIBLICAL CONCERNS FOUND IN THE SACRIFICE

The Book of Genesis tells the story of how God made the Israelites the Chosen People. In the Covenant with His people He promises to bless them, to watch over them, to protect them from their enemies. In return for their faith in Him and obedience to Him, He would ensure the survival of the nation. As a result of the Covenant the history of Israelites is of a people who have continued to believe in their central role in the process God initiated with Abraham, "to establish the kingdom of God on earth" (Yerushalmi, p.21).

The Jewish concept of chosenness sets the people apart from others but also establishes for them an intimate relationship with a personal God who takes an active part in their lives. Wiseman's Abraham has no difficulty in understanding why the Jews should be God's chosen people. He explains to his son: it is "our faith, our grand desire ... it is for this we are chosen" (p.133). To be chosen one must have the drive to attempt anything and to succeed at it. To be chosen one must have a boundless faith. Abraham believes he has both. He knows he is chosen and that his family is marked for special things. God takes a personal interest in Abraham

and his family. Otherwise, Abraham reasons, why would God have saved Isaac from the typhus fever that threatened to claim Abraham's one last hope? Isaac's survival is for Abraham a renewal of the covenant with God, a "miracle, the reiterated promise" (p.23). He knows not what is "ultimately intended" for Isaac (p.41); it is simply his part "to accept, to rebuild, and to wait" (p.23). As Rosenthal suggests, it seems Abraham comes to see himself as "the chosen of the Chosen People" (Rosenthal, in Stephens, p.80).

Though Wiseman's Abraham claims to accept God's role in his life, he does not always trust Him to make the right decisions. He feels on such an intimate level with God that like his forefather he does not fear to argue with Him, to attempt to persuade or bargain with Him. Realizing that Sarah will die he begs in his prayers, "A while longer," but this vague humility quickly gives way to supplication when he points out: "Sarah had received so little joy in life. Did she not deserve a few more years at least to see the child grow up, to see whatever it was that He, the Lord -- and Abraham could not presume to prognosticate" (p.139). In this conversation with God, when Abraham feels he has not presumed to prognosticate, the reader knows that he has indeed already attempted to tell God what He should do. The speech establishes Abraham's difficulty in submitting to God's will.

The key to Abraham's downfall is found within this error of presumption. A man "at home with miracles" (p.123), he is

truly unaware of his lack of humility. He loses sight of the fact that although the Judaic God is a personal God, it is not for Abraham to advise or instruct Him.

Abraham's expectation of great things for his family has grown not only out of a false sense of his importance but of his attempts to understand God. In this way, Abraham may represent the traditional struggle of the religious Jew in his desire to retain his people's perception of a personal, loving, and omnipotent God, while at the same time attempting to deal with the realities of the modern world. For Abraham the reason for all things must be found in God. The best he can do to reconcile the loss of his sons with his perception of God is to believe that their death was God's test, and that he has suffered enough so that now he has earned greatness for his family. But Wiseman's story illustrates that within the context of his religion, Abraham's perception of his chosenness, his intimate relationship with God, has become dangerously presumptuous.

As discussed in Chapter I, because Genesis is the story of the establishment of the Israelites as God's Chosen People, the source of the narrational tension becomes linked to generational succession. A similar tension is found in The Sacrifice as generational succession continues to be the central concern of the family.

In Abraham's family, due to the loss of Isaac's two older brothers, continuance of the patriarchal line becomes an obsession. With their deaths, it falls upon Isaac to fulfill all of his father's wishes and dreams. As Isaac's wife Ruth says, Abraham seems to expect Isaac to be all three of his sons in one person (p.290).

Isaac, too, is aware that Abraham has "always known that something extraordinary was going to happen in [his] lifetime" (p.53). He knows that Abraham believes that in his son is his future. He knows that his father believes as did the Abraham of old that it is the son's responsibility to carry on his father's work. So when Abraham talks of the promise of a new child, of the destiny of the people, of their chosenness; when he tells the story of the binding of the biblical Isaac and says to his son, "You must have this feeling too sometimes [of great things intended], in spite of the fact that you like to argue with your father. You in particular ..." Isaac is left "with a sense of discomfort, almost of fear" (p.132).

The influence that Abraham and his religious-cultural heritage have on Isaac is reiterated again and again as Wiseman's narrative causes the ancient texts to speak through her text of the responsibilities of a Jewish son. Isaac, the good Jewish son, knows that he must live for his father, that he is his father's life (p.60), and so he constantly strives to fulfill his father's dreams.

The metaphor Wiseman creates to illustrate Isaac's entrapment within the smothering sphere of his father's expectations: that of a plastic bubble pressing inward on him and threatening to crush him, is an inversion of the bonding circle of the trinity. Repeatedly Isaac dreams of the bubble closing in as he fights, bracing himself, pushing outward to prevent his death. The immediate cause for the bubble dream is Isaac's illness following his sacrificial race into the synagogue to save the Torah. But it is an old dream and as an extended metaphor illustrates the struggle Isaac has fought since that fatal Pesach, years before, when his brothers were murdered. As the bubble threatens to smother him:

> Sometimes, in a burst of energy and desire, he pushed out and outward, expanding his sphere, stretching his limbs beyond any length they had ever achieved, so that the tips of his toes and fingers alone touched its surface, and he poised in the ecstasy of effort, certain that one final burst of strength and will would stretch the bubble to its limits and he would break through. (p.197)

Isaac has stretched all of his life in his attempt to fulfill his father's dreams, but the final stretch does not yield him freedom on earth; he bursts through the bubble to death. The irony, the waste and futility of Isaac's courageous act and subsequent death originate in the inappropriate dreams of Abraham for his family and its greatness. Isaac fulfills his duties to a fault but, Abraham, in his self-absorption, has expected too much of his son and has lost him.

Another threat to generational succession in biblical narrative is conflict between generations resulting in banished

sons, murders, and disinheritances. Generational conflict is part of the relationship between Wiseman's Isaac and Abraham. Not only is the conflict due to the difference in age between father and son but it also arises from the fact that Isaac, son of an immigrant, is managing to assimilate into the new world's social order. He is a modern man who is able to understand Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest and who must "wrestle" with his father, a man of the old world, who only responds to the romance of ancient tales of sacrifice and obedience to God. Isaac's new ideas and adaptations to the new world become a source of conflict and confusion between father and son. The struggle between them extends even to the next generation as Abraham strives to exert his control over the birth, naming, and nurturing of his expected grandchild, in spite of the resistance of the prospective parents.

The most serious conflict between Abraham and Isaac involves Isaac's attempt to establish his right to his own view of the world. Isaac takes a rational approach to life, while Abraham is locked into a poetic, mysterious, miraculous perception of the world. This is particularly evident when Abraham tells the old tales. He experiences a "moment of happiness before the beginning, a rising up, a reaching. This is ours" (p.173). The sense of such a rich history excites a reverence in him. Conversely, Isaac feels he must analyze that in which his father exults. He must resist the powerful attraction the heritage of his fathers holds over him. For Isaac, at least one of those stories (the *akedah*) represents a

threat to his very life, so that he must fight its magnetism and seemingly fight his father at the same time.

The stories of the Torah illustrate that differentiating and choosing between good and evil are of vital importance to the Jew if he is to please God and thus inherit His promises. Abraham and Isaac's differing perceptions of the world -- Abraham's poetic and mystical, Isaac's scientific and rational -- are reflected in their understanding of good and evil. Their differing attitudes to moral issues reveal their differing levels of awareness of the realities of the twentieth century and Abraham's inability to cope with the complications and nuances of modern life.

While Abraham, in his simplistic ways, experiences no difficulty in determining what is right and wrong, Isaac, the thinker, finds a puzzle in most of life. Wiseman attributes this uncertainty to Isaac's loss of innocence the day he recognizes the family's prized samovar in the kitchen of their "protectors". On that day he discovers the possibility that both good and bad qualities may exist in the same person. Isaac has to face the possibility that Nikolai and Manya had saved them, and yet had participated in the plundering of their home. Maybe they even helped to hang his brothers, Jacob and Moses. Until that moment he has not fully realized that his brothers are dead, and as a result of that moment he can never again find life so simple and easily understood.

Unlike Isaac, Abraham, who also sees the samovar, has the skill of ignoring and forgetting. So he manages to escape the pain that the presence of that samovar raises in Isaac. In this way Abraham is successful in holding onto his innocence and his ability to see everything in absolute terms. For him the torture of the grey areas does not exist. Unfortunately, Abraham's innocence leaves him ill-prepared to cope with life and its dichotomies, particularly when he meets Laiah, in whom he can detect both good and evil.

While Abraham lives out so many of the values which are part of the Jewish moral idea of the sanctity and the promise of life, Laiah encompasses many of the opposing attitudes towards life. She pretends to be what she isn't, both physically and morally; she fraternizes with the goyim and brags about it; she flirts with the criminal world; she is unfaithful to her husband; she would work only to fill in the time and to stave off boredom. But worst of all in Abraham's assessment, she does not fulfill her role as a woman. "The only burden a woman should bear" (p.109), Abraham contends, is life. Laiah, however, has "denied creation, and to deny is to annihilate" (p.261). The role of woman as seen in Sarah and Eve, as ordained by God, as wholeheartedly celebrated by Abraham, is denied in Laiah. She is the negation of life, the negation of the Judaic moral idea. For Abraham she is evil.

Although Abraham believes her choice in life is the wrong choice, from his first encounter with Laiah, he is both

attracted and distracted by her. As Laiah intrudes upon his thoughts and consciousness, Abraham even experiences a stirring of sympathy for her in her childless state. In Laiah, Abraham finally faces the kind of questions which tormented Isaac all of his life: can a person be both good and evil? Is it possible that good can be found in the bad? For a man who has always thought in simplistic terms this is a puzzle. Abraham's confused musings are similar to those of Isaac when he lost his child's view of the world. Abraham finds his simple code of right and wrong does not work where his understanding of Laiah is concerned.

As Abraham attempts to cope with the tragedies in his life, again the simplicity of his attitudes is inadequate to the realities of his existence. The deaths in his family build to a crescendo that causes Abraham's hubris and expectations to finally and fatally collide with the Jewish reverence for life. The first tragedy is the loss of two gifted and dutiful sons to which Isaac, Abraham, and Sarah must accommodate their lives. Then there is the death of Sarah which leaves an emptiness impossible for either Abraham or Isaac to fill. Finally, there is the sacrifice of Isaac to which Abraham cannot accommodate his perception of God's plans for his family.

For Abraham, who believes that God is behind all that befalls man, accepting the loss of his sons and of Sarah with grace truly represents a sacrifice on his part. He does not allow for man's free will which can lead to inhuman treatment

of others such as in the death of his sons. Rather, in Abraham's understanding of God, it is God, not man's cruelty to man, who has taken his sons and his wife from him. That Abraham can accept this magnanimously is indicative of his belief in a God, who like the God of the Torah, is all-powerful and who works in mysterious ways. But each loss causes his expectations of God, and God's agent, Isaac, to grow as he anticipates his reward for all he has suffered.

With the death of Isaac, Abraham is distracted, wild, confused and desperate. He can no longer say to God: "Very well." He cannot accept Isaac's death as part of God's plan. He needs to understand why he has lost Isaac, the son who he had thought was a reiteration of God's promise. He had thought he knew: that Isaac had been spared to replace his lost sons. Now he knows nothing. What now can give meaning to his life? "Where is God? What is it that He knows? What was it that he lived for now?" (pp.232-233). All of his sons are gone, and all he knew now stands in the shadows of his doubt. Abraham has lost his innocence, his relationship with God, and in its stead is an emptiness, an echoing silence, indicative of Abraham's isolation from both God and man. The continuous dialogue between the God and Abraham of Genesis has, up to this point, been paralleled in Wiseman's novel. The absence of that discourse, as in biblical narrative, signifies Wiseman's Abraham has lost his God.

BIBLICAL NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE SACRIFICE

Rosenberg points out in his discussion of biblical narrative that the multi-layered texture of the Torah indicates that one story anticipates another while at the same time building upon ideas from one already told (Rosenberg, in Holtz, p.42). McConnell compares the biblical text to geological strata, for with each addition to and variation on what has gone before, is found a gradual accretion of meaning (McConnell, p.10). In Wiseman's novel a similar effect is noted as Abraham tells the stories of the Torah which seem to anticipate the story of his little family. Wiseman's voice joins the others as they "contribute mutually toward the creation of a single utterance which shall be an utterance of a whole world-view" (McConnell, p.9).

The mosaic texture of Wiseman's narrative all comes together around what Rosenberg calls the type-scene of the sacrifice (Holtz, p.49). Scenes pre-figuring the final sacrifice of the novel contribute to it an understanding of Abraham's emotional and spiritual condition which bring about the murder of Laiah.

Scene One: Abraham's First Experience of the Sacrificial Rite.

Abraham's first personal encounter with the sacrificial ritual of Judaism occurs when he is apprentice to a butcher. The fear which he experiences when forced by his master to perform the ritual duties of the *shoichet* (the ritual

slaughterer) makes a permanent impression upon him. The moment of the killing of the living creature is also a moment of revelation for Abraham. He senses that in taking life one stands "on the brink of creation where life and death waver toward each other" (p.303) and where "only God can understand him" (p.37). Abraham feels that the irreverence and greed of the butcher in orchestrating such a situation for a boy beholden to his master's wishes totally exonerate him from all guilt. However, in participating in the sacrificial ritual, Abraham tastes a modicum of the frightening power of the slaughterer. Accompanying this is a sense of bonding with the Creator and Destroyer of life which Abraham continues to associate with the experience. As he recalls the incident from his youth decades later, his fear seems displaced by his fascination with the power of the experience. He has "wondered since [the incident] if that is what our forefathers felt when they made their sacrifices to renew their wonder and their fear and their belief" (p.38).

Scene Two: Abraham's Version of the Akedah

Abraham retains the sense of oneness with God which he experienced during his participation in his first ritual sacrifice. Its profound effect upon him is evident as he tells the biblical story of Isaac's near sacrifice. But it is the modern Isaac who best articulates the depth of the bond formed between the father, the son, and God at the moment before death. It is an idea which attracts Isaac and appeals to his

imagination. In that instant of life meeting death, he feels the three are bound together as one.

Although the version of the binding of Isaac which Abraham has taught his family contains the basic elements of all the stories of the sacrifice (humility, obedience, faith in God), in some aspects it differs from Genesis 22, reflecting its midrashic source (see Chapter I). The important elaboration in Abraham's version resides in the stated desire of the son to be bound tightly lest he should squirm and ruin the sacrifice for his father. As Abraham explains: the obedient, loving Isaac begs his father "bind me tightly lest I struggle and spoil your sacrifice" (p.177). The emphasis put upon the desire of Isaac to participate in his own sacrificial death and not to ruin the act for his father carries a frightening message for the son of Wiseman's Abraham.

In an attempt to resist the incredible pressure of his father's expectations, Isaac tries to see the story of the biblical Isaac who was prepared to subjugate himself to his father's purpose in the light of rational thought. The modern rational Isaac reasons that perhaps the biblical Abraham, being a bright man, arranged a scenario to excite his countrymen's imagination, leading to the outlawing of human sacrifice: "Who's to say that it's not just an excitement of the imagination?" (p.179) This rational but cynical interpretation of the story by Isaac is necessary, for his burden is great enough without his also succumbing to the message of total

submission inherent in the Abraham/Isaac story of old. " 'Yet' muses Isaac, 'it's strange how, whether or not you believe it, there's something in the idea itself'" (p.179).

Abraham concludes his version of the *akedah* with the words: "Let your son live. In him is your future!" (p.178), thus revealing what for him has the greatest import in the story. The lesson of humility before God and complete faith in His mysterious ways is basic to the story Abraham relates, yet the emphasis he gives the story is on the promise seen in the son. Nor does Abraham seem to recognize that the story is an exemplum of how the Israelites came to view the sacrificial ritual as simply symbolic of one's offering of one's life to God. The lesson Abraham wishes his story to communicate is "In one's son is one's future." Just as the Isaac of old was suddenly saved from death by God, thus ensuring the survival of the Chosen People, so Abraham believes his Isaac's escape from death as a child is indicative of God's special plans for the family.

With each telling of the *akedah*, Wiseman's discourse also reiterates Abraham's idea of a moment when he believes man may re-discover God, when he can stand "on the edge of creation" (p.37) and be part of a circle which will "enclose him in its safety, in its peace." (p.303)

Scene Three: The Sacrifice of Isaac

The repeated motif of human sacrifice builds a tension in Wiseman's novel. Isaac's struggle for personal autonomy is threatened by his desire to fulfill his father's needs. As he has been subconsciously preparing himself for a final definitive test of his value to the family and as a member of society since the day his brothers died, so Wiseman's multi-layered text has been preparing the reader for it with a resonance similar to that of a biblical narrative.

The penultimate test does finally present itself, and Isaac has the opportunity to make his sacrificial offering for Abraham. He responds as only his father's son could respond, as he has been preparing to do all of his life, as did the Isaac of his father's stories. The rational, modern Jewish son succumbs with no struggle, in the same selfless attitude of Abraham's Isaac of old. The fascination of that awful moment when the three of them -- father, son, and God -- are bound together (p.179) has a stronger hold on Isaac than his new scientific reasonings. Performing a super-human act that the community proclaims a miracle, he emulates his biblical father and walks in the flames of the Lord (p.175), saving the Torah. In doing so he gives Abraham the gift he has awaited. Something truly spectacular has come out of Abraham's family. In spite of his son's resulting illness and the two voices in Abraham -- one that sings and the other that is dismayed -- he cannot help but feel pride in Isaac's act as "a thing to be able to look back on in joy!" (p.201).

Abraham fails to see what Isaac realizes soon after the whole debacle: that it was a senseless, empty act. Men will use it to achieve their own ends, and he may die for the effort. Abraham's reaction, his burgeoning familial pride, illustrates his failure to understand the true significance of the story of the *akedah*: that of humility and faith before God. Isaac's death reveals finally and irrevocably that although Abraham pays lip service to it, he has never truly accommodated the humility that is expected of him as a devout Jew.

Scene Four: The Sacrifice of Laiah

The final scene in the sacrificial mode is that of the death of Laiah. Everything in Wiseman's intricately and carefully crafted novel has worked to the moment of denouement, as everything in Abraham's confused consciousness conspires to bring him to the point of murdering Laiah.

Following the death of Isaac, and as Abraham becomes more alienated from God, he moves closer to Laiah. His relationship to her is indicative of his loss of direction. Ruth in her raging verbal attack causes him to consider that he, in asking too much of his son, drove Isaac to his death. Abraham is ripe for this idea. As he follows the thought to its logical conclusion, he believes he has found the answer for which he has searched. His sons have been taken from him because in "pride ... he had dreamed his sons into heroes, so that he could boast that he was the father of such marvels" (p.292). Now he has no sons, only dead heroes.

Abraham, forced to examine his soul, is frightened by the possibility that he, the man of God, proponent of all that is good and right in life, may also harbour evil in his soul. As the realization of this possibility grows, Abraham finds himself even more drawn to Laiah. The vital attraction she holds for him is found in his growing predilection to identify himself with her. Unwittingly, she encourages his sense of their connection: "Here Abraham, is your life," she says reading their tea leaves. "Trace it out in the dregs of your empty glass. See, here's my cup. It's empty too." (p.245) Two empty people.

In identifying himself with Laiah, whom he has always conceived as representing evil -- the denial of life or even death itself -- he enters a private wilderness of isolation from God and all that he has known. He feels he is like a "tiller of the soil ... [and] that everywhere he has passed the earth is seared, as though an invisible destroyer has followed, malignant, in his path" (p.259), for he has killed his sons. Abraham's search for the answer as to why God has made him suffer so, has led him finally, irrevocably, to believe that he and she are one.

Abraham, the man who knows only two polarities in life, good and evil, cannot accept the fact that he can be good and yet wrong at the same time. The evil and guilt which he senses may live in him, he transfers onto Laiah, whom he has presumed to judge as evil. She becomes an extension of him and all that

is wrong in him, all that has caused his sons to be taken from him. She is the sacrificial animal, the scapegoat for all of his sins, sent by God. "He saw her as something holy as she lay back, a willing burden, to offer, to receive" (p.303). As Abraham stands on the edge ready to perform the sacrificial ritual, he is accutely conscious that he is "almost on the point of some wonderful revelation" (p.303).

As he awaits "the word", Abraham is lost to reality. His dream-like trance lends a familiarity to the moment reminiscent of his childhood experience.[2] As he brings the knife to Laiah's throat he is not only re-enacting his first sacrificial rite, but that of his namesake, the Abraham of old. His Master will give "the word", as did his master who commanded that he perform the sacrifice all those long years ago, as did God who commanded Abraham of Genesis. But this time Abraham's Master will be God and He will have "the word" that will complete the circle uniting God with man in understanding.

The knife flashes over Laiah, the willing sacrificial animal, and "the word" is heard, but, alas, too late. Just as the God of old denied human sacrifice and showed himself to be a loving God, so Abraham's God does not desire human life be squandered to please Him. "Life" cried Abraham's son Isaac. "'Life!' pleaded Jacob ... 'Life!' chanted Moses " (p.304) so that even as Abraham feels the weight of the lifeless Laiah in

[2] LoVerso points out that in assuming this dream-like quality, Abraham is reverting back to his youth when he did not have to take the responsibility for his actions in performing the sacrificial killing (LoVerso, p.181).

his arms, he knows he has heard "the word" and "the word" is "life."

REVELATION AND RETRIBUTION

In his tragic misunderstanding, in his blinding pride, Abraham who has always honoured life has now destroyed life. "The word" which God has for him is no revelation for Abraham. It is the ethos by which he has always lived. The real revelation for Abraham is the lesson in humility. "All my life I wanted only to build, to grow, to understand ... that is what I thought." He continues: "I was not content to be, as He willed it. I wanted more. I had to be creator and destroyer" (p.326). In taking life in his own hands, Abraham has appropriated God's rights. For the rest of his days Abraham will do penance for his sin of pride which drove him to this end. Only a man as strong as Abraham could withstand it. He wishes "to suffer what they suffered; to pay, perhaps to atone ... [but] it would be too easy, too merciful [to die]" (p.327), and so he will pass the rest of his days seeking to atone.

CHARACTER TYPES IN THE NOVEL

As in the biblical stories, it would seem that the names of the characters of The Sacrifice embody their destinies. Four character types contribute to our understanding of the novel:

1. Abraham: The Patriarch

Among the stories which are told and retold in the home of Wiseman's characters are those of their namesakes. Abraham teases his wife that possibly he and Sarah will again act out the story of their ancestors and produce a son in their old age. " 'What's your name little one - not Sarah? And mine's Abraham! What a coincidence! So, we may yet have an extraordinary event at a hundred years, eh?' he jokes. 'We will have strange events to distinguish our lives' " (p.97).

Abraham's joking illustrates that, true to his namesake, he aspires to be a patriarch, to be the father of great people through whom God acts and for whom nothing is impossible. He sees his family as a promise from God, the promise of a future of untold miracles. For Abraham, each new child represents a renewing of God's promise to his people. What that child might one day achieve "for our people" (p.59) is a constant source of wonder and expectation. Wiseman uses the images found in Genesis's Garden of Eden to represent the promise Abraham sees in a fruitful life. His sons are the fair fruit of his choice in life; they will grow "stretching out like the arms of some fine tree, reaching upward" (p.229).

2. Isaac: The Son

When Abraham loses his two older sons to a pogrom, all of his dreams are focused upon his only surviving son, Isaac. As in the relationship between the biblical Abraham and Isaac, it is assumed that Isaac will subvert his needs and wishes to

those of his father. Wiseman's Isaac wrestles daily, trying to reconcile his Jewish heritage and role as surviving son with his needs as a modern autonomous being. In this struggle we see what the expectations of a father can do to a son. The cold chill of "fear tug[s]" (p.160) at Isaac's heart often as he attempts to fulfill his father's dreams of greatness. It is a heart which has not been strong and healthy since the death of his brothers. This ailment is a physical manifestation of the burden Isaac must bear for his family.

3. Laiah: Lilith, the She-Demon

Wiseman's Laiah has many of the characteristics of the she-demon, Lilith. The first record of Lilith dates c. 2400 BC, when she appears in the Sumerian king's list as a succuba[3]. Originally she is barren and has no breast milk, but most of her history tells of her giving birth to as many as one hundred children a day. True to her evil, life-negating nature, she gives permission for those same children to be murdered day after day. She is beautiful and sexually attractive but she is deadly. A slayer of children, a seducer of men, an enemy of pregnant women, a threat to men left alone at night, she represents the antithesis of the Jewish celebration of life. She appears only once in the Bible in Isaiah 34:14, but she has been a constant in the Jewish consciousness as chants, amulets, charms, prayers of protection from her have been recorded up to the nineteenth century.

[3] Raphael Patai presents a thorough study of Lilith, the She-Demon in his book entitled The Hebrew Goddess which has been used as a resource for the discussion of Laiah in this paper.

Raphael Patai states in concluding his extensive study of Lilith:

> there can be little doubt that a she-demon who accompanied mankind ... from earliest antiquity to the threshold of the Age of Enlightenment must be a projection, or objectivication, of human fears and desires. (Patai, p.252)

Wiseman's Laiah represents for Abraham the qualities of the she-demon Lilith. He has always recognized Laiah as seductive yet dangerous. Like Lilith, she is a temptress, inviting sexual liaisons, yet never producing children. In spite of her easy sexual familiarity, her life-style seems to be life-denying and for Abraham the negation of life. Yet in his disoriented and desperate state, due to their sense of kinship and the very animal sensuality which Abraham feels he should disdain, he is drawn to her hoping she will help him find "the word" which will once again give his life meaning. Laiah is, as was the Lilith of antiquity, the focus of Abraham's confusion, denials, and fears.

4. Moses: He Will Show the Way

Wiseman has created in her Abraham a Jew of the old world transplanted to a new place and time. In keeping with the religious ideas of her character, Wiseman presents Abraham's values as a basic construct of her novel. Her character and his story adhere to the tenets of Judaism. Because Abraham believes in a God who expects humility, obedience, and faith in the face of adversity, because Abraham holds to the precepts of redemption and atonement, the story of his inevitable humbling

is accepted by the reader. Abraham's perception of the tenets of his religious beliefs as absolutes allowing for no nuances or subtleties or adaptations is the source of tension in the novel. For to live in the modern world as a functioning contributor, The Sacrifice suggests, the old must be reconciled to the new. This is the role of Moses, son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham. As did his forefather of biblical narrative, he will lead his family out of the wilderness of mis-conception into modernity. In Moses the reader may recognize the possibility of reconciling the old with the new.

The legacy that is left Moses is a sad one. "I have built a crooked house for you" (p.342) Abraham says to Moses, and it is true. Moses has had to deal with his grandfather's murderous act throughout most of his growing years. But the initial bond which was woven out of Abraham's love for his grandson survives all of the years of separation and humiliation, doubt and rage. It isn't only the love that makes it possible for Moses to endure the stormy years intact, it is also his strength of character inherited from his grandfather. Even as a youth, Moses learns to take pride in his heritage and possess confidence undaunted by the jibes of others. Thus Moses's inheritance from Abraham need not become a burden as it was for Isaac, but rather it will be a blessing in his life. The strength of Abraham will not be lost to the world; it resides in Moses.

The optimism that characterized Abraham and sustained him through so many crises is part of Moses's make-up too, helping to sustain him. In spite of living in the knowledge that his grandfather is a murderer, Moses has always felt optimistic that "a day would come when things would be changed again" (p.306). When he meets Aaron, the one who will, in accordance with his biblical namesake, accompany and assist Moses in his life's mission, he is motivated to take control of his life and choose "the day" on which he will visit Abraham: Yom Kippur.

That Moses should choose Yom Kippur to visit Abraham is significant, as it is the Jewish Day of Atonement, the day of reconciliation between God and man. On this day in Abraham and Moses's life each will experience some healing of the old wounds. All of these years Abraham has paced and beat his chest and prayed preparing for this Day of Atonement. Now that he has found true humility before God and is paying for his sins in suffering, finally he can experience some reconciliation through Moses, his grandson.

Though Moses had thought he could be very controlled, perhaps even throw his anger and hurt at Abraham as retribution for all he and Ruth have suffered since the murder, the visit stirs in him emotions that threaten to overwhelm his resolve. The sensitivity he has inherited from Isaac his father causes him to experience pleasure that his grandfather recognizes him, pity for Abraham's pain, and tenderness for an old man so frail yet so strong. The reconciliation between grandfather and

grandson is symbolized for Moses by their two very different hands clasped together. "It was with the strangest feeling of awakening that he saw their hands fused together" (p.345), the hands of a butcher, swollen and gnarled with years of labour, and the hands of an artist, "effeminate, white and cared-for" (p.345). But really not so different: as he gazes at their two hands and feels the warmth of his grandfather's grasp he feels their two hands becoming as one (p.345). The two hands as one, the old and the new, are representative of Moses's role in life, to nurture the good of the old traditions, making them valuable and viable in the new world.

When in the generosity of his love and youth Moses reaches over and squeezes Abraham's hand with his own, "his grandfather's face ... wore an expression of joy" (p.345). Moses has granted Abraham forgiveness, and Abraham has renewed Moses's sense of identity, his belonging to the ancient family.

THE ARTIST AS SYMBOL OF HOPE

In a moment of expansive pride in his family and their potential, Abraham had once pronounced, "my grandchildren won't be butchers or tailors" (p.90), and in Moses, the artist, he is proven correct. As The Sacrifice closes, Moses is a modern man who may not "believe" (p.335) but who is at peace with his family history and heritage. His artistry with the violin may be seen as representative of the old-world artistry with which he is achieving recognition in the new world. Moses will, as

Abraham had predicted, have the opportunity to develop his artistry and not be shackled to the kind of life his father and grandfather had to live.

Perhaps one of the more significant attributes of Moses is his artistry, for as Wiseman has expounded in her book on her mother's artistry (Old Woman At Play), the artist creates consciousness in her audience, a sense that they could somehow be better (p.60). An artist must be a "receptive-creative" person who in her work may express "the shared emotional and intellectual" life of her society (p.130). Moses, the violinist, part of the new generation of artists, may be seen as a surrogate for Wiseman, the writer, the new generation of the receptive-creative person. Wiseman's texts are the product of her artistry and contribution to her society, for as Jacobson claims, those who appropriate and transform traditional Jewish narratives "make the most creative and valuable contributions to the vitality of their culture in the present and future" (Jacobson, p.7).

The conclusion of The Sacrifice also suggests to the reader that Moses, while representing the modern man, will retain the positive qualities he has inherited from a strong, vigorous, life-giving grandfather -- personality traits and attitudes that will inspire life, hope and strength in others. "With a gesture that was vaguely reminiscent of his grandfather of another time, Moses ... straightened up in his seat, and looked curiously about him at his fellow men" (p.346).

Using the structures found in the texts from which that character has emerged, Wiseman has told the story of Abraham, a man rooted in the ancient attitudes and ideas of Judaism. His view, simplistic and inappropriate to his time, is one of straight-forward cause and effect, of explicit delineation between good and evil, of expectations that are known, accepted quantities.

With the novel's optimistic conclusion portraying a modern Moses "vaguely reminiscent of his grandfather" the reader may assume that the story of Abraham's family breaking into the twentieth century will be continued with Moses. Wiseman's second novel, Crackpot, may be seen to continue the exploration of the realities and adjustments required of a first-generation Jew in the new world.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURES AND CONCERNS OF KABBALISTIC LITERATURE

Adele Wiseman's novel Crackpot opens with an epigraph paraphrasing the kabbalistic legend of creation from Luria[4]. Her capsulation of the legend evokes wonderful images of a "Holy Radiance" so rich with divinity that the vessels intended to hold it crack, burst, and scatter the holy sparks throughout the universe (Crackpot, p.7). The threads and strands of the life experiences of Hoda, Wiseman's main character, illustrate the stages and effects of the breaking and restoration of a human vessel unable to contain the divinity but always striving to mend the leaking pot. An understanding of the origins, structures, and ideas of kabbalistic thought and literature will aid in the discussion of the use of myth and metaphor in Wiseman's second novel.

Kabbalah is an element of the Judaic religio-literary tradition which developed in the twelfth century with the writing of the *Bahir (Book of Light)*[5] followed by the *Zohar (Book of Splendour)* and continued into the sixteenth century with the writings of Isaac Luria. The Hebraic term Kabbalah refers to a tradition received or passed down (Fine, in Holtz,

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[4] Isaac ben Solomon Luria, a sixteenth-century mystic, lived in Safed, Galilee following the Spanish Expulsion. He developed several basic doctrines which had a profound influence on Kabbilism. Two of his doctrines which this paper will argue provide the basic structure for Crackpot are *Shevirat* (the breaking of the vessels); and *Tikkin* (the restoration to original harmony).

[5] All italicized words first appearing in this Chapter on The Lurianic Myth can be located in the Glossary.

p.308). As the kabbalistic tradition is based on mysticism, the knowledge which a kabbalist gains cannot simply be taught, read, or accommodated through study or intellectual activity, though these are part of the experience. Essentially, it must be grasped intuitively.

Changes in the attitudes, philosophy and structures of the Judaic religion prior to Kabbalism had substantially altered the complexion of the religious experience for the Jews so that it no longer satisfied their needs. As Scholem[6] explains, the rabbinic and philosophical movements had removed from Judaism its mythic element which was an essential aspect of its origins as noted in Chapter I. Because Rabbinic and philosophical Judaism had separated the idea of the law from the idea of God, God Himself had become so pure and removed from daily intercourse that in Him was found no comfort. Kabbalism may be seen as a reaction to, and a correction of, these religious trends. The differences noted between rabbinic and kabbalistic Judaism may be recognized in Wiseman's differing characters: Abraham and Hoda.

The Kabbalists gathered their ideas from many diverse sources, took over these ideas and made them into a new radical system, retaining God as creator and life-giver, but making Him accessible to the people both through religious attitudes and

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[6] The work of the historian Gershom Scholem (1897-1982) in his study of Jewish mysticism is considered by scholars to be groundbreaking and definitive (Holtz, p.13). Two of his works, On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism (Commentary Classics, 1965) and Kabbalah (Quadrangle, 1974), were used for this paper. A condensation of his work on the Kabbalah and mysticism may be found in the Encyclopedia Judaica.

acts and through awareness of the divinity within one's self. As Scholem explains, Kabbalism made God once more meaningful:

> Inevitably men of intense religious feeling were drawn to the full, rich life of the Creator, as opposed to the emptiness, however sublime, of a pure and logically flawless theological formula. (Scholem, On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism, p.89)

As with any religious movement Kabbalism grew out of the historical experiences and needs of the Jewish people. A watershed of the Jewish experience was the Spanish Expulsion. The Rabbinic tradition could offer the people very little for comfort at the time of this devastating occurrence. In the countries of the diaspora the Lurianic creation myth, with its element of God's exile from Himself, flourished, for its mythic, symbolic qualities supplied an answer to the search for some meaning in the exile of the people (Fine, in Holtz, p.342). Scholem is the first modern scholar to conceive of the Lurianic Kabbalah as a Myth of Exile (Bloom, p.33). With his analysis of the Lurianic myth the profound significance of kabbalistic thought to the Jewish nation may be recognized. Fine, in the context of the Lurianic creation myth, explains:

> The external realities of history, most recently the tragedy of the expulsion, were viewed as having their parallel in the life of God. Just as the people Israel had been dealt a severe blow, sent once again into exile, so too God Himself had suffered a rending. (Fine, in Holtz, p.343)

Scholem does not however confine the myth of exile from one's God to the history of the Jews but sees it as part of the universal human experience.

The Gods of the Kabbalah and the Torah differ on a basic level. The biblical God, the creator of the universe and of man, is tremendously interested in His creation and cares for it. However He is not a part of it. As it was shown in the discussion of Wiseman's Abraham, God, in being apart and separate from creation, is beyond man's comprehension, yet He concerns Himself with humanity. Kabbalist doctrine also begins with an element of God, *Ein-Sof* (infinite or without end), which is unknowable to man, and known only by God Himself. However, for a kabbalist *Ein-Sof* is only one aspect of God. The ten *Sefirot*, or the essential elements or emanations of God through which He may be known by man, are mirrored or paralleled in man and not separate or apart, so that a character such as Hoda may be seen to have the sparks of divinity which she shares with others in her "leaky" state.

Genesis speaks of man being made in God's image. This suggests that man, unlike any other creature, has the capacity to think and make choices, a capacity which separates him from, and puts him above, the rest of creation. This does not suggest that man is like God or the same as God. According to the concepts of Kabbalism, man's soul is actually made of the same "stuff" as God's (Fine, in Ho tz, p.327). Therefore, man may find God within himself, not apart and beyond himself. Fine emphasizes the audacity of this conception when he recalls the biblical concept of God:

> Nowhere is the idea that humanity is created in God's image understood to mean that there is an actual *identification* with God. While we can find

> passages in rabbinic literature in which the soul is said to resemble God in that it is invisible, ... the soul is never identified as being divine in nature. (Fine, in Holtz, p.327)

The biblical/rabbinic tradition taught man to seek God outside of himself, his most significant act being an act of faith, as in the story of the *akedah* and as seen in Wiseman's Abraham. The kabbalists gave man more control over his own spiritual life by locating divinity within man himself, just as Wiseman's Hoda draws within herself to find new strength.

As man is imbued with divinity, his soul made of the same "stuff" as God's, it follows then that for the kabbalist, God's life is affected by men's acts. The explanation for this power that man may have upon God is found in the creation myth of the Kabbalah which establishes that God Himself is in exile (from Himself), as is the Jewish nation. Man may help restore the unity of God and all of His elements, just as he may restore his own soul's unity through proper acts.

God had always been conceived as a patriarchal figure by biblical/rabbinic theologians, but for the kabbalists, God had a distinctive feminine element and was understood often in terms of man's own sexuality.

In the Torah, Israel (the community) was often spoken of in female terms. Israel was God's bride, Israel was the Ecclesia, the community of Israel (Scholem, p.107). In the Kabbalah, Ecclesia is identified with the element of God called

Shekhinah (the feminine element of the emanations of *Ein-Sof*). Therefore, being representative of the commnuity of Israel which was treated as feminine, the *Shekhinah* too becomes feminine. But the *Shekhinah* is an element of God, not apart from God; therefore God comprises a feminine element. Scholem claims through this identification the feminine is introduced into the sphere of the divine (Scholem, p.106). Furthermore, the *Shekhinah* was considered the residing place of the soul, so that the soul had its origin in the feminine found within God. Thus Wiseman's choice of a female protagonist, who sees within herself the potential to heal humanity with her loving embrace, may be seen to be very appropriate and congruous with the Lurianic doctrines.

THE LURIANIC MYTH OF CREATION

There are three stages to the kabbalistic myth of creation which is, as is all the symbolism and writing of the Kabbalah, consumately intricate and difficult. The basic ideas given below will help in the discussion of the structure and imagery of Wiseman's Crackpot.

Tsimtsum (withdrawal)

In the beginning (or what man may comprehend as the beginning), there was *Ein-Sof*, the Infinite. To make room for other than Himself, *Ein-Sof* withdrew, contracted, creating primordial space, *tehiru*. Left behind following the *tsimtsum* in *tehiru* was just a little of *Ein-Sof*, the divine, rather like

the drops of oil left in a jar of fragrance or a perfume found still in an empty container.

Shevirah (the breaking of the vessels)

Ein-Sof beamed out a single ray of His divine light, thus creating the first form ever produced, that of primordial man, *Adam Kadmon*. In turn, from *Adam Kadmon*'s eyes, nose, mouth and ears burst forth the lights of the *Sefirot*. The divine plan was that these lights should become differentiated as the many facets of *Ein-Sof* thus making Him accessible to man and that these emanations should be contained in vessels which also were composed of light. However the plan went astray (some say *Ein-Sof* had so planned it). The first three emanations, *Keter* (Crown,, *Binah* (Understanding), and *Hokmah* (Wisdom), were contained within their vessels with no mishap. But the remaining seven *Sefirot* were too heavy for their vessels so that the vessels shattered into countless splintered shards. The light, too, shattered into sparks of divinity, and all fell into the realm of the demonic *kelippot*. The *kelippot* (shells) were a residue of the primordial kings from an earlier attempt at creation which had not been successful. Now the divine sparks mingle and mix with the evil *kelippot* to this day, for nowhere do we find the good without the bad, nor evil without good.

In spite of the catastrophe (if it was a catastrophe) the *Sefirot* have their essences of *Ein-Sof*, and though the vessels

are broken, man has the opportunity and challenge of mending them.

Tikkun (restoration: everything assuming its ordained position)

As a result of the breaking of the vessels nothing is in its proper place; everything is where it should not be. It is for man to assist *Ein-Sof* in righting this exile. Every good and proper act which man performs brings some of the sparks of divinity home, performs *tikkun*.

According to the Lurianic myth, an important aspect of *shevirah* is that from the chaos which the breaking of the vessels creates good may result. As the divine emanations leak they mingle and combine with evil or that which is not divine, perhaps lending it a new possibility of divinity. The mending of the vessels will result in reuniting the elements forced into exile by the catatrophe. Achieving *tikkun* is the joint responsibility of God and man. For in *shevirah*, the *Shekhinah*, the soul of man (and the divinity which it contains), has become separated from the nine other elements of *Ein-Sof*. As all other divine elements may reach man and the lower world only through *Shekhinah*, until restoration is accomplished the chaos will continue. *Tikkun*, or the mending of the vessels, helps to heal God's rending from Himself while also reuniting man with his own elements of divinity.

The story of *tikkun* is also a story of the balancing of two polarities encountered in life. As in the life of God's

emanations *Din* (justice) and *Hesed* (mercy), a balance is needed so that one quality does not overrule the other. In the *Sefirot*, it is *Hesed* which must temper *Din* to keep the world in equilibrium and keep evil (which is justice unrestrained) at bay. Nevertheless, sometimes evil does outweigh mercy or sneak in from some other source, and so both evil and good are seen to be facts of life.

The catastrophe which occurred with *shevirah*, the resulting dispersion of the essences of *Ein-Sof*, and the possibility of the healing *tikkun* are mirrored in man. What the *Ein-Sof* experiences, man experiences. The cycle of Lurianic myth -- *tsimtsum*, *shevirah*, and *tikkun* -- is the on-going process and experience of life, the cycle being repeated continuously. In Wiseman's Crackpot, the broken vessels, the divine sparks, the light, the dispersal of the sparks (*shevirah*), and the gathering in of the sparks (*tikkun*), all are essential elements, as in the myth of creation.

LITERARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KABBALAH

The narrative structure of the Kabbalah consists of a portrayal of an idyllic lifestyle in that the narrators wander about the countryside from one village to another and at the least provocation will sit down beneath a tree and expound on the myths and doctrines of the Kabbalah. However, in spite of this seemingly aimless wandering and unstructured philosophizing, in the attitude of the listeners, there

develops a sense that each word spoken is of great significance. Fine explains:

> There is, in the *Zohar*, a very strong quality of drama, a sense of the importance of the present, of every word spoken. Every moment is an opportune one for mystical conversation, each word is spoken and listened to as if the fate of the universe depended on it. (Fine, in Holtz, p.312)

As the quality of drama and immediacy combine with the air of mystery, Kabbalistic writings have a tone of magical possibilities and wonder at the simplest occurences in life. The same quality is found in the attitudes of Wiseman's characters in Crackpot.

The Kabbalah employs an expository form of myth or story-telling which is heavily symbolic. It is a genre constructed with metaphorical language. The message and weight of the symbolism are to some extent personal, and may be lost if over-intellectualized, so that an intuitive grasp is a requisite in assimilating the text. In the Kabbalah's presentation of a symbolic conception of God, creation, and man's place within it, Scholem states: "it would be accurate to say that [the Kabbalists] delight in images and carry them as far as possible." (Scholem, p.97)

Although Kabbalists seek God in their religious practices, they believe that some of God may be found within themselves. Thus their mysticism becomes not simply involve attaining mystical union with the Other, but it also contains an important element of self- awareness.

KABBALAH AND LANGUAGE THEORY

As discussed in Chapter I, the Torah teaches that God made Himself known to His people through "the Word". The Kabbalah also represents God's self-revelation as linguistic. In his book Kabbalah and Criticism (1975), Bloom argues that the writings of the Kabbalah constitute theories of language and the process of all creativity. Because the Kabbalah considers the Torah to be language itself -- the alphabet -- Bloom contends that in giving man the Torah, God gave man writing.

Of great interest in the development of Bloom's thesis that the Kabbalah is a theory of language is the possibility of creativity he sees in the myths. The creative process, begun by the *Ein-Sof* with *tsimtsum*, is continued by the *Sefirot* emanating from primordial man, *Adam Kadmon*. The flashes and sparkings thrown back and forth, bouncing and reflecting off one another, provide a dialectic model of all other kinds of creativity. The final act of creation, *tikkun*, in which man is a vital participant, represents the "potential for response" in the lower world (Bloom, p.78). The lifting up and gathering together of the divine sparks brings something absent into being, so that the Kabbalah presents creation as an act in which man plays a significant part.

Bloom's argument, that the Kabbalah is the essence of a theory of language, is of particular interest in continuing the

idea of creativity suggested at the conclusion of Chapter II and in applying it to Crackpot. Inherent in the growing self-awareness of the novel's protagonist, Hoda, is her growing fascination with words and their use, which in turn may reflect upon Wiseman's creative artistry with language. It also serves to support Jacobson's claim that the appropriations of the traditional texts by the modern writer may result in a healing act for the people (Jacobson, p.7): an act of *tikkun*.

In Wiseman's Crackpot, the metaphor of the breaking vessel originating from the Lurianic myth is a basic element to the developing, restorative self-knowledge of Hoda. The stages of creation (*tsimtsum*, *shevirah*, and *tikkun*) are employed by Wiseman to trace the development of Hoda as a person who is able and anxious to cope with the realities of her life. With Hoda's story, Wiseman has appropriated the myth and metaphor of an ancient text and created a modern tale: a tale which depicts pain and suffering understood and dealt with through the self-knowledge that comes from looking inward and finding the divinity within one's self.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELATION OF CRACKPOT TO KABBALISTIC LITERATURE

The main character of Wiseman's second novel is Hoda, the only child of Danile, a blind man, and Rahel, a cripple, who were forced into marriage in the old country. Because her physically impaired parents were considered by their fellow villagers to satisfy the demands of a local superstition, they were forced to marry, thus saving the village from the plague. The miracle of a marriage which saves a village was compounded for Danile and Rahel by the joy of the birth of Hoda.

Living in the new world to which they immigrate, Danile, Rahel, and Hoda continue to live on the periphery of society, not fully understanding its values or systems. With the premature death of Rahel, Hoda becomes responsible for the well-being of her father. Quitting school, she quickly slips into prostitution as a means of financially supporting both herself and Danile.

The innocent dreams of Hoda are shattered when she gives birth to a son whom she immediately gives up to the community's orphanage. A further blow to her dreams occurs when she finds herself in the preposterous and threatening situation which necessitates accepting her own son as a customer to her services as a prostitute. Due to her strength of character and sense of self, Hoda survives the bizarre relationship with her son. However, her opportunity to be a mother is lost twice:

first when she gives him up at birth and again when he leaves the area permanently.

The passage of years provides for Hoda's escape from innocence and ignorance, but they also see her establish herself as a source of stability in the community. Her attendance at the community's rites of passage becomes a legend and her services to many young men of the area renowned.

Lazar, survivor of the Holocaust, enters her life at a time when Hoda feels she has everything in its proper place. She knows the truth about life, has been disappointed by it, but she still can respond to others and find pleasure in living. Lazar is not the prince of whom she has dreamed, nor does he offer to rescue her from her life, but he does offer the love and companionship for which she has longed. Hoda accepts Lazar into her "magic circle," and the novel ends on a positive note, true to the character which Wiseman has created.

The locale in which Hoda moves and lives is not clearly delineated. Rather, it is a world in which the reader and the author can explore the parameters of what the Lurianic metaphor of the breaking of the vessels could mean, when applied to a protagonist dealing with the painful realities within the social confines of her "outer life" and the expansiveness of her private "inner life". This is not a novel of social realism, yet elements of "real life" are present to give the story shape. Any attempt to read the novel on a literal level

may result in disbelief and frustration. However, reading the novel as an allegory or a myth or a sustained metaphor also causes difficulties in that the two levels of awareness become confused and at times seem to be incompatible. The reader may sense she is juxtaposed between the "real world" and the world of the metaphor. Herein lies the tension of Wiseman's novel: the dichotomy of Hoda's response to life which entails the tug and pull of two levels of awareness -- the literal and the symbolic. When the demands of one become too great, the other rescues her; thus Hoda, as well as the reader, straddles the two divergent realities of life in Hoda's world and learns to function in both. In creating a richly fertile "inner life" for Hoda which often must contend with the harshness of "outer life", Wiseman captures a duality of soul and body common to most life experiences.

Because mysticism is knowledge that cannot be directly communicated, it is best expressed through symbol and metaphor. These elements, which are inherent in the kabbalistic myth Wiseman uses, contribute a mystic quality to her novel which is also best appreciated when approached as symbolic and accepted at some levels intuitively rather than intellectually. Hoda, who perceives the world intuitively through the medium of her feelings, may be Wiseman's argument for achieving a balance in the world between sensibility and intellectualism[7].

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[7]. The presence of irony in the novel must not be discounted as it establishes the distance apparent between the author and her character. Hoda, as the central metaphor, is in herself an ironic conceit. However, as this thesis concerns the novel's structure, a fuller discussion of irony is not part of this argument.

THE ROLE OF MYTH IN CRACKPOT

Danile: Mystic and Myth-maker

Hoda's father Danile qualifies as a mystic. He interprets the world through the eyes of a mystic in touch with the essentials of life, both God and nature. That he is physically blind only serves to make him more intuitive, sharpening his other faculties so that he may recognize the wonder of goodness in even the simplest accidents of life. The lop-sidedness of the front porch of their home is "a very fine thing" because it is moving, making room for a tree to grow. And even more wonderful, Danile and his daughter can "feel the verandah heaving ever so slowly beneath [their] feet ... [making way] for the tree that was giving it a ride" (Crackpot, p.35). Inherent in Danile's perception of life is a sense of mystery or awe, even a magical overtone reminiscent of the myths of Kabbalism. He possesses the indefatigable ability to colour his myth-making with a mystical quality, suggesting universal implications. The baskets he makes are bottomless and could contain the universe. His "heroic" resistance to Uncle Nate becomes a "legend."

The function of myth to fulfill one of man's most fundamental needs, the need to find meaning in an uncaring universe, has been discussed in Chapter 1. Crackpot is a book about the creation of myths that give life form and a frame of reference. Throughout the novel myth serves to give some coherence to the lives of both Hoda and her father as they

weave a story of their living. Myth provides them with roots, a sense of continuity, belonging, and personal value. Danile is creator of myths and legends. It is his proclivity for story-telling and myth-making that serves to instill in Hoda the staggering assurance of her specialness and thus the ability to rise above the repressive elements of their life while maintaining a sense of humour, a sense of worth, a sense of heritage.

For Hoda the tales of her parents, the saviors of their village, and of her birth and survival, which seem as a "signal of victory for the forces of virtue" (p.33), become the foundation upon which she builds an understanding of herself and her place in the community. Danile has carefully taught her that she and her family are special, and this, as a child, she believes wholeheartedly. Hoda learns well from her father, for while the old myths serve as a touchstone, she too becomes a myth-maker, a spinner of new legends. As she struggles to give her life shape and meaning, to understand her role in a life which certainly does not fit into the scheme of Danile's tales, Hoda must develop her own myths. Later, her son David will follow in his mother's and grandfather's tradition of self-creation through myth- making. Thus Crackpot is a book of the myths of Hoda and her family: Hoda, the whore; Hoda, wife to half the world; Hoda, the leaky vessel.

The myth which Danile creates out of Hoda's beginnings, of the marriage of the two outcasts saving the village, like

the myths of Isaac Luria, suggests how good may come of evil, chaos, and catastrophe.

Danile's myths are constantly reiterated throughout the text, while Hoda's myths change to reflect her growth from innocence to maturity. Her stories respond to and expand with her experiences whereas Danile's are closed and repetitive. In his blind wisdom, he represents the old world and its roots, while Hoda represents the new world in her growing ability to accommodate her private "inner life" with the public "outer life" of society.

Hoda: Her "Loving" Myth

As a young girl struggling to balance her needs, her feelings and society's censure, Hoda develops her own personal myth of love. Following the pattern of contraction, breaking, and mending of the Lurianic myth, with each new and painful contact with society Hoda retreats, revises, and renews her myths of love and herself. She weaves a story of her life to give her the strength and stamina to do what she must in order to survive in an uncaring, meaningless world. Following the lead of her feelings, she stumbles into her profession. If it feels good, then it must be good, Hoda reasons. But she soon discovers that there is a discrepancy between "feeling good" and society's idea of good.

She demands of her first schoolboy client that he tell her "I love you" as he performs the sexual act:

> Then say 'I love you!' cried Hoda. Say 'I love you.' 'I love you I love you I love you!' gasped Morgan. And he meant it! He really meant it! She knew he meant it! (p.149)

Thus Hoda develops her personal version of "loving" the boys: each of the boys "loves" her and it makes them "feel good", therefore it must be good.

Hoda's myth of love allows her to continue with the "love-making" and at the same time make enough money to keep Danile and herself out of the public institutions with which Uncle Nate has threatened them. The myth Hoda creates, born out of her ignorance, becomes the myth which she must finally and unequivocally unravel in order to be a whole person. As the process of the creation of Hoda progresses, and her innocence is replaced with a fuller understanding of her two worlds, she must adjust her love myth.

Hoda finds that the boys with whom she "fools around" are "unreliable". After she has made them feel "real good" and they have given her "their present", then they seem not to care so much for her (p.151). They may even seem angry and impatient with her. This does not fit in with her understanding of love, so that when she begins to realize that she too does not love them all the time, she must create a new version of her myth to accomodate her new knowledge.

Hoda's concept of love is problematic in two respects. The first is one of semantics for she equates lust or sexual

excitement with love. Compounding her disappointment, following the initial "good feelings" love gives her, are the bad feelings which follow. And this is Hoda's second problem, for she believes in a "forever- love" which certainly is not the short-lived "love" she experiences with the boys. Thus she justifies what she continues to call "loving" the boys by considering that love to be an "in-the-meantime-love"(p.152). It would help her know when the "forever-love" came along and in the meantime give her "a foretaste and a reminder so she wouldn't lose heart and would go on searching" (p.153).

Hoda dreams that one day a prince will come and rescue her and Daddy. Maybe by then she will be "thin and beautiful like everyone else" (p.113) or maybe "the Prince might discover that the one he really wanted to love forever was a fat girl after all" (p.178). The dream of such a love, "the simple dignity, the immense promise, the foreverness" (p.178), stays with Hoda until she is forced to realize that this myth too is not functional in the real world. She gives up on that "soup/ stuff" (p.225) the day the Prince of Wales visits town but doesn't look her up. Next, the fading dream becomes transposed to a possible client who "might really like her, even in secret, the other way too" (p.223). When this hope too seems futile, she continues to believe that "in the endless folds of time that were yet to unwrinkle before her, were hidden all the correct solutions to all her problems" (p.236).

The love and fantasy myths Hoda weaves help her until she outgrows them, but the other more fundamental myths of Danile's recounting her beginnings, telling of good that can come from catastrophe, of the joy, of the miracle one may find in all of life, continue to support her.

Hoda chooses to consider her work as good and a service to the community. In fact her myth of "loving" the boys becomes more a reality as the years pass and she truly does open her generous loving arms to her clients for a few moments of comfort and respite which encompass more than just sexual pleasure. She tells David how she might report her life's work to God. God might say " 'All right, Hoda, what have you been doing all these years?' And I'll say, 'Well, Lord, I made a little love.' And he'll say, 'Not bad, Hoda. I ain't done much more myself.'" (p.336).

Even as Hoda's personal, private myths have to be revised over the years, she herself becomes a legend in her own time. Her services to the men of the community become renowned, and the men can always be sure of finding an accommodating, warm, and satisfying experience when visiting Hoda, the whore. Only infrequently does an event occur to throw into jeopardy Hoda's mythical version of her place in society. At such a time she rationalizes her vocation as only a stage in her evolution:

> Just because that was how she was making a living now didn't mean that was all she was ever going to be. ... And even then, when she was right up there and didn't have to do it for a living anymore, she wasn't going to quit just because others wanted her to anyway, only if she felt like it. (p.244)

LANGUAGE THEORY IN CRACKPOT

In an inversion of the reverend respect for God's Word seen in The Sacrifice, it is God's Word turned upside down that gets Hoda and her family safely into the new country. Just as Danile's Bible is upside down, just as kabbalistic teachings turned rabbinic Judaism upside down, so Crackpot turns many assumptions about language into questions. What is more important, feelings or words? What comes first? What good are words without feelings? Are not some things better understood intuitively? As Hoda ruminates, "Words and their threaded links were merely a pretty game you played compared to real knowing" (p.274). Man, it sometimes seems to Hoda, has a dubious gift -- the ability to express thought and feelings through language.

Hoda learns from Danile to believe in feelings, to trust and follow them. But when she and Danile must deal with the realities outside of their private personal world, they constantly find that feelings slam into the disapprobation of words:

> The feelings working against the words, smashing at the formal combinations of sound which tried to give them shape, cries merging with unheard cries, emotions dissolving in a chaos of emotion, the three of them baying in deaf unison of distress. (p.103)

Hoda's use of language to describe her feelings seems to arrive at three words: love (or "liking"), mean, and nice. Daddy was always so **nice** to her, taking all of his things into his bedroom when she had "students" over. People were mean to her, "saying **mean** things as if she had no feelings" (p.121); and the boys "didn't care that she was fat, when they were **liking** her" (p.108).

In spite of her limited vocabulary, Hoda does acquire language skills and learns to play with words, using them to her advantage when she so pleases. But as she gains control over words, she also comes to mistrust them still more:

> Why was it that words never told you exactly what was being said? Why was it that sometimes all of a sudden you didn't want to know exactly what was being said? Why did your imagination always have to jump to imagine that maybe more was being said than the words were saying? (p.415)

Hoda develops a healthy fear of the power of words as she gradually learns they may be used as weapons. Her suspicion of, frustration with, and disdain for words are obvious during a conversation with a companion about medical progress. "What is this progress anyway? A word, that's all, a word for what happens, and a word for what should happen, and a word for what doesn't happen as well" (p.291).

Hoda is well aware of the magical properties of words for words shape the myths which have told the story of her life. But significantly, it is the feeling evoked by the words which sustains Hoda, not the stories themselves. Wounded by the

shattering of her private world, first by giving birth to her son David, and subsequently by the incestuous sexual episodes with him, Hoda repeatedly turns to Danile and his stories for comfort. However, even as she begs her father to repeat the stories, she fears that perhaps the words, the stories her father had told of her specialness, had been the source of her betrayal. Perhaps she might be unable to ever enjoy the stories again, but the feelings evoked by the stories restore her faith in them:

> She simply felt the old stories, felt her emptiness filled with resonance, transformed to resonance. She saw the old stories, saw through the old stories, saw beyond the old stories to what the man her father was and what the woman her mother must have been; she heard the stories and knew them all, and gathered them back into herself and knew herself as well, not as she had once known herself, in a sudden, comprehensive flash of revelation, a simultaneity of multitude of Hodas, but as she flowed in the sequence of her days. (p.362)

LoVerso claims that Hoda is unable to cope with society because she has never been taught society's language and to understand a language is to understand the society. He notes her misuse of the word "love" to back his argument. With the conclusion of the novel when Lazar gives Hoda a lesson in linguistics, LoVerso feels she undergoes a "verbal moral rebirth" and is now prepared to "become a more complete moral person" (LoVerso, 1984, p.93). But this should not suggest that with one lesson in verbal morality she will cease to believe in the primacy of feelings. In fact the solution she believes will help Lazar make his present nightmares his past, is not words or therapy or the writing of a diary, it is a

wall-to-wall mattress. Hoda is a woman who has proclaimed the superiority of feelings her entire life. One lesson in linguistic ethics will not make her a priestess of language. Hoda will continue to proclaim: "What was talk compared to the feeling?." (p.267)

THE STRUCTURE OF LURIANIC MYTH IN CRACKPOT

The structure of Crackpot, based on Hoda's forays, retreats, and re-entries into the realities of living, is reminiscent of the kabbalistic myth of creation. Hoda's turning in on herself, locking herself in her bedroom and "gritting her teeth against the almost uncontrollable impulses which assaulted her in unremitting waves, to go jumping out of bed and running off into the darkness" (p.262) could comprise the contraction into a vessel (*tsimtsum*). This receding into herself following a blow administered by life allows Hoda the time and space to rebuild her reserves of generosity and love before facing the world again.

The most important source of her regenerative powers rests in Danile, the repository of the myth of her special inheritance and the old stories set in the homeland of her heritage. The new forays into society, following the contraction, parallel the breaking of the vessel and the leaking out of the spark of divinity residing in Hoda (*shevirah*). The acts of generosity, the re-establishment of connections with others, comprise redemptive, restorative acts

as in *tikkun*. As the novel concludes, the family unit which Hoda, Danile and Lazar hope to create will help to heal them. At the same time it will restore to God the original wholeness of his light, thus fulfilling man's role in the scheme of the myth.

This cycle of the breaking of the vessels, the spilling sparks of divinity, the resulting chaos and confusion, followed by the gathering together of life's forces, results in the reunion of the soul with its source, as seen in the character of Hoda. She is the metaphoric vessel which breaks and leaks the elements of divinity found in her. The sparks of divinity may combine with other elements in her world as their goodness is shared with others. When Hoda withdraws from her gregarious ways, retreats into the safety of her private world, she takes with her the emanations of divinity. Once within the vessel, regeneration occurs, and Hoda once again is ready to share with those around her.

The cycle gives a spiral shape to Crackpot, as opposed to the linear progressive form seen in The Sacrifice. As is conventional in a novel, through the progression of its main character, growth and harmony are achieved. This is so in Hoda as she grows into a fuller self-awareness. However, rather than a continuous forward movement, Hoda's self-knowledge derives from a peeling away of layers of confusion to arrive at her core. With each critical *shevirah* (breaking of the vessel) in her life she gradually and painfully arrives at an

understanding of herself in relation to her world. Bloom's description of the pattern of the Lurianic creation myth applies to the recurring pattern of Hoda's growing self-awareness, her creation of her true self:

> In Luria, creation is a startlingly regressive process, one in which an abyss can separate any one stage from another, and in which catastrophe is always a central event. Reality for Luria is always a triple rhythm of contraction, breaking apart, and mending, a rhythm continuously present in time even as it first punctuated eternity. (Bloom, p.39)

The rhythm of contraction, breaking, and mending Bloom delineates is the rhythm of Hoda's life. With each cycle, Hoda sheds some of her innocence while gaining a greater understanding of herself and her place in society. But the essence of Hoda --her sense of self, her respect for feelings, her heritage -- withstands each shattering of the vessel.

First Shevirah: Hoda's Specialness Not Recognized

Hoda has known always that she is special. Danile's myths have assured her of her value and probable capacity to serve her community, as did her parents. Therefore the reaction of Miss Boltholmsup to her family's story astonishes and shocks Hoda, who views the telling of the story as the giving of a gift to the listeners. As Hoda discovers that others do not share her conviction of her specialness, the first layer of innocence is stripped away, creating the need for her to withdraw and search out a way in which she can cope with the world of others.

She vows that she will never again let the story "sneak out". Her sparks of divinity, her gift which she has been willing to share with others have been rejected. She has betrayed her specialness and, in an act of *tsimtsum*, she decides: "Nobody was going to get another chance to spoil it" (p.145). Hoda's withdrawal takes the form of truancy from school and her indulgence in good feelings (letting the boys "love" her).

Second Shevirah: The Birth of a Son

The second major shattering of Hoda's world is prefigured by the toledot, or begettings (Fokkelman, in Alter and Kermode, p.41), which opens Crackpot. "Out of Hoda, Pipick came, Pipick born in secrecy and mystery and terror, for what did Hoda know?" (p.9). Hoda's ignorance seems complete as she moves through her last months of pregnancy unable to ascertain the meaning of the tummy aches, the jumpings in her belly. The birth "tears her insides apart" (p.208), and only once "it" is "torn" from her does she realize that she has given birth.

This *shevirah* throws Hoda into a state of total chaos. Not only must she deal with the unexpected, illegitimate child, but she must also deal with her loss of innocence. She must reassess her whole perception of life. Again the sustaining power of the myth establishing her specialness comforts Hoda. In the harsh light of reality she foregoes her fantasy of being found by a prince, but the belief in her heritage is abiding:

"If they only knew who [her son] really was, and understood who they were, she and Daddy." (p.224)

Following the trauma of David's birth, Hoda's new apprehension of life threatens her sanity but at the same time makes her more whole. She begins to "know" something: "It didn't make Hoda feel better to know what she knew; it made her feel awful when she let herself think of it, but at the same time she felt as though there was somehow more of her, on the inside" (p.227). She escapes her cocoon, but her new knowledge is frightening. "Could a butterfly know what Hoda knew?" (p.226), she wonders. The breaking of the vessels has resulted in a loss of innocence, a step in the growth to maturity.

As Hoda fights with the emotions and the unpleasant realities that threaten to overwhelm her subsequent to the birth and relinquishing of David, a wild fantasy grows in her to attempt to nullify all that has occurred by going backwards through the nightmarish events of that ordeal. This is what Bloom terms the "regressive progress" (Bloom, p.78) of the Lurianic myth employed in modern fiction. She dreams of "rolling it up out of existence and finding at last that it had never been" (p.312). But, ever the realist, the responsible one who can't afford the luxury of abandoning herself even to such fantasies, Hoda decides "backwards won't help ... Backwards! What was the matter with her, was she crazy of something? " (p.313), and so she faces reality. *Tikkun* is achieved as Hoda puts herself back together again. Yet, there

is still another major Shervirah which Hoda must survive; the balance of the dualities that comprise Hoda is still not achieved.

Third Shevirah: Hoda's Gift to Her Son

As with Abraham of The Sacrifice, Wiseman causes her main character to test society's moral code by breaking one of its most sacred taboos. Abraham murders; Hoda has an incestuous relationship with her son. Wiseman states that she writes of crises which push a character to the boundaries of possibilities because she wishes to explore the "best possible reason for the worst possible deed" in society's moral structure (Butovsky, p.20). She wishes to understand what happens behind the facts (Belkin, p.151), to "find out how it works" (Butovsky, p.8). Wiseman sees all stories as morality tales, showing her how to act, what to do "if". She is "trying to find out more about the reality of human existence" (Belkin, p.151).

The retrospective fantasy of undoing the birth of David by re-enacting the night backwards, which Hoda consciously discards, is later accomplished figuratively and unconsciously, by Hoda and her son. In her desperate frenzy at the time of David's birth, Hoda ties his umbilical cord awkwardly with numerous knots, leaving him with the legacy of a strange, slightly protruding belly- button. This not only contributes to the legend that is David's and earns him the nickname of Pipick (Yiddish for belly-button), but also becomes a source of

embarrassment to the boy out of all proportion to the disfigurement. While a frantic Hoda is trying to discourage her son from engaging unwittingly in incestuous sex with her, she repeatedly knots the kimono cord tight, with angry movements. Later, once she has chosen to give the only gift she can give her son (her silence as to their true relationship) and he is fumbling to undo the cord, she says through gritted teeth, "Tear it darling" (p.352), thus evoking the same animalistic action she performed that night fifteen years before.

Hoda knows that she has come to the edge of her own sense of right and wrong as she rages and slams about in her mind, searching for a way to cancel the contract she has in all innocence made with her son. The reality which she has to face though is that what is wrong for her may be right for David:

> Oh she knew it was wrong all right, in all her flesh, wrong for her ... if she chose to do it again, it was for a reason, and because she was a person, and had a debt, an enormous, inerasable debt, and because it was the only thing she could think of that she could do, that maybe she was fit to do for him. (p.352)

It is significant that at this point Hoda's boundaries adhere to those of society, but her conclusion as to how to handle her situation is of her making alone. She is able to reach deep within herself to find the answer required by the crisis and face retribution for her past ignorance. A true indicator of her maturity and acceptance of responsibility is

her ability and willingness to make her own decisions with no attempt to blame anyone else.

The gift that Hoda makes, believing it may stengthen her son's feelings of self-worth, and fearing that if she turns him away she could further harm him, is a threat to her sanity but at the same time an act of redemption. She is responsible for David's pain, for his sense of shame which focuses on his perceived physical defect, the crudely knotted navel, but encompasses far more. In taking David once again into her body, Hoda acts out her fantasy of going backwards. The incest parallels the breaking of the vessels and the leaking of sparks of divinity into the universe. The leaking vessel has the essence of love of the deepest, most sacrificial, platonic nature. In accepting David as a client Hoda performs an act of restoration by healing David as much as she is able, but at the same time gains atonement for her mistake. Adhering to the central metaphor of Crackpot, Wiseman causes the most abhorent of social crimes to become an act of *tikkun* -- of attempting to put things back to rights -- a returning of the Divinity to the vessel.

Hoda's giving of herself to David though an act of *tikkun*, is also an act of *shevirah*. She has accomplished some retribution but she is also a shattered vessel. She realizes that "even until this moment, though she had suffered some, she had been innocent' (p.349). The painful shards of her shattered being threaten to send her over the edge of sanity.

However, she denies herself "that privilege of loss of responsibility in suffering, which is a gift of madness" (p.357), for her father needs her. Once more she turns to Danile and his stories for the source of her healing. She has for "the first time in what seemed a long time, an acute and tender awareness of his existence" (p.357).

Lazar enters Hoda's life at the point when she has established a living pattern that suits her needs, when she has finally shored her psyche up against the onslaught of life's disappointments. "From the early pain of realization that nobody really wanted to know her, had grown her pride that nobody did know her, not really, not who she was, underneath ... That's the way it had been, and by now, that's the way she liked it" (p.409-410). But Lazar challenges her "*tsimtsumic*" state, asking her to "forget the past and begin a new life together" (p.420). This proposal frightens Hoda and leads her into a diatribe on the realities of one's past and the impossibility of forgetting it. She finally expresses the bitterness that she has had to keep to herself over all these years as she has coped with her responsibilities the best she could:

> "I didn't want any of it but it's mine, and I've got to live with it and I've got to die with it ... Maybe I didn't want it and maybe I hate it but it's mine, and it's the only thing I've really got, inside of me, that's mine". She was weeping again now, quietly and bitterly, squeezing out that hot, silent thing inside of her. (p.421)

Thus Hoda, herself, has answered the question "What did Hoda know?" (p.9). She knows herself, her history, and its legacy. She knows life is ambiguous, full of dichotomies, just as is she herself. But in spite of all this knowledge, the final *tikkun* of the novel reveals Hoda is still a leaky vessel, she still can share her essence with others. But, Lazar cries too. They are two flawed, cracked vessels leaking their feelings, reaching out to others for help in trying to make sense of life.

LURIANIC SYMBOLISM IN CRACKPOT

Crackpots

While the myth of *shevirah* and *tikkun* provide the structure for Crackpot, the metaphorical functions of the characters reflect the symbols of the myth. As the title of the novel suggests, Hoda is a cracked pot. Not only does her essence constantly leak out, uncontained by form or convention, but she is considered by her clients to be a little crazy. All of her customers, in fact the whole community, know for certain that her father is a little "cracked". They are a family of cracked pots and Hoda is the crackpot, who leaks her feelings and laughs at her own craziness: "She had to laugh. That's what they were like. Crazy. All of them, the whole world. What more could you expect?" (p.425)

Hoda is a vessel through which the emanations of Ein- Sof may flow. What Hoda leaks, the essence of her character, are

feelings, good feelings, feelings which have guided her in life from earliest childhood when, if she was hungry or bored, she simply needed to give a little wail and her physical and emotional longings were fulfilled. Even as an adult, the divine sparks spill out of her constantly. She also is a vessel which may actually shatter, creating flashes and sparkings and chaos, leaving a residue of sharp shards of the fractured vessel which float about in her being, causing pain. In order to restore her equilibrium and become again only a leaky vessel as opposed to a shattered vessel, Hoda must, as *Ein-Sof* did in *tsimtsum*, draw within herself, to allow reconstruction, recreation of the vessel of Hoda.

Shekhinah

It is important and significant that the main protagonist of Crackpot should be a female. One of the more radical aspects of the *Sefirot* of *Ein-Sof* rests in the sexual nature of their interrelations and in the concept of God's feminine potencies. Hoda is not only a female but a whore. As a whore, Hoda is a social outcast, one who flaunts and defies the social mores of her community. *Shekhinah* may be seen to symbolize the community of Israel (see Chapter III). So too Hoda comes to represent the community exiled from the other emanations. But it is the task of humanity to reunite the soul with *Ein-Sof*. Through many social rites and services Hoda seems to do just that. She attends all of the weddings "she got wind of" (p.173). She initiates "just about every mother's son of them" (p.199) into the mysteries of love. And she mourns at

everybody's funerals. She finds some society, some sense of belonging, in attending all of the community's rites of passage and, in the process, she establishes herself as a legendary figure in the community, just as had Danile and Rahel before her.

Wiseman, the myth-maker, in spinning her tale of Hoda, suggests the great importance of retaining one's cultural identity as one copes with modern life. The sad, barren, lonely end of Hoda's assimilated Uncle Nate serves as a contrast to the possibilities of the rich life Danile, Hoda and Lazar may enjoy as the novel closes.

Hoda does not gain her special notoriety through pious acts, although as the reader knows, much of her life is sacrifice and a giving of herself at substantial personal costs. But as the novel concludes Hoda has become, simply through her presence, a kind of solid fixture in her community inspiring a sense of security for the inhabitants and fulfilling the same type of need that her father's stories have done for her over the years. Hoda has indeed become a mythical figure in her community:

> If you told one story about Hoda someone was bound to try to top it. It was by this time her fate to have been part, even if only fragmentarily, of the past of such a great segment of the community that she was something of a vested memory, as much to those who would not admit to having had any personal contact as to those who boasted innumerable encounters, and every story, new or old, in which she distinguished herself by being somehow still unrepentantly out of pitch with the rest of humanity

> was as welcome as the fragile daily illusion that nothing is really changing. (p.400)

As much as her secret awareness of her specialness alienates Hoda from the larger community during her schooling years, it also allows her to develop into an adult who knows how to locate her roots in traditional ritual. The confusion and chaos of rapid change in modern society may create in a community a sense of rootlessness and the need to hold onto "the fragile daily illusion that nothing is really changing" (p.400). So as an adult, Hoda's dependable eccentricities, rather than offending the community as a whole, reassure it that life does follow some identifiable pattern and plan.

Broken Vessel

The metaphor of the broken vessel is sustained throughout the story of Hoda's struggle with life. Shards and pieces of Hoda break and scatter, sharing the Divine sparks with the world, but in the process cutting, shearing, breaking Hoda, yet never mortally. As she keeps her business bargain with David she wonders: "Into how many pieces does one break and still bother to count the pieces?" (p.353) Afterwards her "head was so full of cutting fragments that she had, for the moment, no notion of what [David] was talking about" (p.354). Still later as she turns to her father and his stories for comfort she rages at her fate: "If I'm broken, why hasn't all feeling leaked away? If I'm broken at least let me be empty" (p.360) .

Emanations of Light

The emanations from the *Ein-Sof* and later *Adam Kadmon* are characterized as rays of light and sparks of divinity. Similarly, Hoda's divine essence, which constantly leak, but at times of intensity shoots out of her, also takes the form of radiating "orbs of light" (p.137). The emanations of Hoda are of joy, of sympathy and wonder (p.134). The sustained metaphor of Hoda's beaming rays during her telling of the family myth at school underline the depth of the sense of sharing she experiences. In times of anger Hoda's emanations are as "smouldering sparks shooting from her eyes" (p.242). Even in her choice of clothing Hoda's light is shared with others: "She was able to blaze forth in dresses, all adazzle" so her friend, Limpy would announce: "Gentleman, here come the Northern Lights! All of them!" (p.391).

Born of a father who stole the light from the sun, Hoda too experiences and interprets life in metaphors of sun and light. She teaches David about love, explaining how even a little flash of love may provide enough illumination to understand much of life:

> Sometimes all the love you get even though you're making like crazy is just a shiverful, a flash of feeling between you. You know that radium stuff that you hear so much about? How hard it is to get, and how little of it you get in all them rocks up North? But look how worthwhile it is. With that little bit you can see right through everything. (p.336)

Perhaps the greatest revelation of Hoda's life came with her realization that the acts which Yankl, the butcher, had

encouraged her to perform just for a few scraps of meat, were a crime in society's eyes and need not have happened. "It had simply never occurred to her before. 'He could have given me the scraps. You don't do that to children'" (p.278). This epiphany hits Hoda like a lightning flash, causing her to achieve a "lost wholeness" in the "instant of illumination". Like "an electrocution" it brings all the shards of the fat, hungry little girl abused by Yankl into focus (p.277).

Magic Circle

The gathering-in of what must be saved following a catastrophe is symbolized in Crackpot as the formation of a circle. In Hoda's life the circle's enclosing, embracing, and protecting, harken back to the superstitions of Danile's stories and the magic circles drawn by the villagers in an effort to protect themselves from the plague. Hoda in her generosity and caring for the world fantasizes that she might save all the men whom she services during the war by drawing a magic circle tightly round them: "She was determined; everyone who had ever lain in her arms belonged in her circle of safety" (p.384). Unhappily, Hoda comes to realize her magic cannot save the world, but the desire to create a circle of love and safety abides. Lazar and his love cause her to believe it will be possible to form a magic circle which will protect her and her loved ones in life.

The novel comes to completion with the joining of Hoda and Lazar, mirroring the union of Hoda's two flawed

progenitors: Danile and Rahel. Renewal has already commenced as Lazar rests peacefully beside Hoda, while she dreams of the hurts that have been her life coming together to make her whole. Out of the past dreams emerges the new dream: a child with Danile's name. The final pronouncement in Hoda's dream made by her son, David -- "Backwards, she occupies her past; she inhabits her life" (p.427) -- comments on Hoda's knowledge of and peace with her self. Hoda is what she is, she knows what she is, and whatever she may become she will never deny her past. She draws "the magic circle around them, showing all she knew. Soon, she promised extravagantly, in the ardour of her vision, they would all be stirring the muddy waters in the brimming pot together" (p.427). Still the recognition that life is "muddy", still the ardour and enthusiasm, reside in the vessel Hoda, but now she will not over-flow the brimming pot of feelings alone; she and her family will stir the pot together.

Wiseman concludes her story of the repetitive cycles of opening to others, of contracting into one's self for renewal, of once again proferring one's self to the world while sharing one's sparks of divinity, on this strong affirmative note. Even as Hoda acknowledges the muddiness of life, she continues to straddle reality and mystery, drawing a magic circle around her loved ones. With this conclusion, Wiseman seems to ask the reader, as well, to allow instinctive feelings and the possibilities of myth- making a place in the stirrings of the pot.

CHAPTER V

SIMILARITIES AND CONTRASTS IN WISEMAN'S NOVELS

The similarities and contrasts of Wiseman's two novels cannot be missed by the reader. The relationship of the novels has been described by Russell Brown as mirror images of each other[8]. Helen Rosenthal also writes of their differences. She describes The Sacrifice as "dignified, austerely balanced," while Crackpot is "alive, daring, tempestuous" (p.115). Rosenthal suggests: "One might say [she] has written a Jewish book in English" because of its mixture of "mystical reverence ... tender irony ... biting satire ... earthy humour ... allowing her heroine to be intimately experienced in all her inner riot of feeling and emotion"(p.116).

The Sacrifice moves in a straight-forward, linear fashion, forging on, one event leading inevitably to the next, to the ordained conclusion. In contrast, Crackpot may be seen, like Danile's upside down Bible, as an inversion of The Sacrifice, or as a leaky vessel bursting with images and emotion, then withdrawing into a new creative structure. The cyclical, inward spiralling shape of Crackpot captures the chaos of Hoda's life as experienced through her emotions. The

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[8] In his article "Beyond Sacrifice" (*Journal of Canadian Fiction*, XVI (1976), pp. 158-162), Russell Brown suggests that Wiseman's second novel is "like a mirror image [to the first] where right is left" (p. 158). For example while a "breakdown into craziness" is for Abraham "death-dealing madness," for Hoda it "can be life-affirming." (p.159)

structure of the novel moves from its point of origin, Hoda and her family, out into their community and back into the inner circle of family after each hurtful experience with society.

Wiseman speaks of the distinctive characteristics of myth and metaphor: "A myth ... involves an entire already delineated story ..., metaphor is an encapsulated poetic suggestion about the world, out of which one can then, perhaps, produce a myth or a series of myths" (Wiseman, in Belkin, p.150). Her perception of the relationship between myth and metaphor is evident in her novels. In The Sacrifice, she begins with an ancient myth and writes a modern, midrashic version. Crackpot, however, is centered upon the limitless possibilities of the metaphor of the Lurianic myth of creation. The motif of the broken vessel, leaking divinity throughout the universe, is woven repeatedly into the intricate pattern of the story of Hoda's life, as Wiseman explores the many possibilities of the metaphor.

The story of these two immigrant families begins with the same kind of catastrophe, a pogrom. But from this point of departure, Wiseman chooses to take very different directions. The result of the pogrom in Abraham's family is death, in Hoda's family it is marriage and birth. These two beginnings reflect the differing tones and directions of the novels. Crackpot, like Kabbalah or like Danile's upside down Bible, inverts the structure of The Sacrifice and biblical narrative.

This predeliction to turn it all upside down is evident in a comparison of Kabbalism with rabbinical literary expression. The kabbalists took the notions of the old traditions and reinterpreted them to fit a new view of God. Doctrines such as man made in God's image were redefined to reveal both God and man made of the same "stuff." So, too, in the novels, the conceptions of God are radically different. The God of the Torah and The Sacrifice is ambiguous and inscrutable and, in these qualities, may even seem perverse. The God of the Kabbalah and Crackpot is on man's side: not a vengeful Being. As Danile tells Hoda, "Study things, study and you'll see. God only seems to punish" (p.13).

The two literary traditions of Judaism which may be identified in Wiseman's novels are as radically different in style as in doctrine. The God of biblical narrative is a creator who, though concerned with his creation, is nevertheless distinct and apart from it. Man must seek God outside of himself, and this search is reflected in the linear shape of The Sacrifice. Conversely, Kabbalistic thought centers upon God, the creator whom man may find within all of creation including himself. To find God, man must search within himself for the good, the divinity which resides there. Thus the shape of the text, like man's experience, is cyclical or, as Bloom says, a "regressive process" (Bloom, p.39), a turning in, a returning to discover and recover.

According to Kabbalistic teachings, rather than being dependent on God for mercies, man shares with God a responsibility for the quality of his and God's life. In biblical teachings, God is found outside and beyond one's self; so when Abraham withdraws into himself he is separated from God and lost in a vacuum. Hoda, however, may withdraw from society to recover from the hurt of life and find God or divinity within herself, thus gathering new strength to rejoin society.

Further to the suggestion of the inversion evident in the two novels is the recasting of Laiah, the dangerous, worldly, she-demon, into Hoda, the generous, other- worldly, earth-mother figure. The barren, empty Laiah, who participates in the procreative act and yet does not produce, who seduces men but is perhaps not actually selling her favours, is transmuted into a new life as Hoda, the fat whore. The contrast between the two women parallels the other contrasts in the novels, for Hoda is Laiah writ happy.

The stories with which Abraham and Danile impart a sense of heritage and personal importance to their families reflect the basic difference in the two literary and religious approaches to God. Abraham's stories are the old ones shared by the Jewish community, known to all, making the listener a part of the community. Danile's stories are intensely personal, so personal that Rahel cringes as he talks of pre-marital examinations and conception. They are stories

shared only by the family, and are rejected by society as Hoda discovers when she attempts to share them with her classmates. In this way they determine Hoda's need to look into herself for an understanding of herself, whereas Abraham's stories impose on Isaac the expectations of the father and the community which has been a part of the Jewish son's responsibility for millenia.

Abraham and Hoda share many personality traits. Both characters are larger than life. As true celebrators of life they approach it with exuberance, noisy in their enjoyment of the little things of life. Abraham doesn't say hello to his friends when he meets them, he booms hello, he makes the house echo with his songs, he dominates conversations with his stories and wisdom. Hoda too is loud, takes a lot of space and is strong in her presence. She is fat and flashy and demonstrative. But their differences are more revealing.

The tone of the two novels reflects these differing attitudes and concerns of Abraham and Hoda. Crackpot is sardonically self-deprecating in its dry wit. There is a pervasive sense of an opening of the arms to life, a generous, humourous approach even to the darkest of moments. Hoda believes in a sense of humour, for even as she prepares to enter into an incestuous relationship with her son, risking her own sanity, suddenly afraid lest by some grotesque accident she should enjoy him, she reassures herself that "if God so willed,

it was within the range of her sense of humour to bear that too" (p.353).

The Sacrifice has a pervasive tone of sadness as the characters struggle to deal with the tragedies of their past and the difficulites of their present. Though Abraham embraces life with exuberance, he takes life very seriously and has the air of a rabbi. He inspires respect in others due to his special aura of traditional values and attitudes. Hoda doesn't know how to take life seriously. For Hoda, life should be pleasurable. Having been taught no moral or social systems by which to live in the new world, she improvises and creates her own as she goes through life. Abraham lacks that flexibility and creativity. His understanding of God through the biblical stories is, as Wiseman says, of myths "already delineated" (Wiseman, in Belkin, p.150).

The contrast between these two characters in their approaches to life and their expectations thereof reflects the concerns of the religio-literary traditions out of which they have been developed. Abraham is obsessed, in the tradition of the Torah, with generational succession, with sons and grandsons who will do great things for their people and in the process, for him. He perceives the world in terms of fecundity. His sons are "fair fruit"; women are like trees patiently waiting for men, the wind, to blow over them and impregnate them. In spring everyone, even the cat, is

pregnant, and for Abraham this is a miracle: "The young buds swell and strain and puff themselves out in the sunshine ... and where the blossom is, the fruit will follow" (p.106)

Hoda's expectations of life are centered in her fantasy of finding the "forever-love." In keeping with the growth potential inherent in the metaphor of the breaking vessel, Hoda changes and develops as she gains self-knowledge and an understanding of societal mores. She is far more capable than Abraham of flexibility and of adapting to the realities of her life.

The structures of the novels may also be recognized in the method the characters employ to handle problems. When Abraham is unhappy with the choices others are making, he simply attempts to override their decisions and impose his wishes upon them. Hoda, on the other hand, turns away from thoughts that bother her, looking for a way to deny them by creating a new scenario in her private world. Her solution is to exercise her story-telling faculties to "think it into something good" (p.121). Abraham forges forward, negating others' needs; Hoda turns inward, creating new stories to explain away her problems.

The crises in the stories of Hoda and Abraham each involve the loss of innocence as they face the results of the choices they have made in life. Until the death of Isaac,

Abraham manages to avoid dealing with life's ambiguities and the subtle repercussions of his imposition of will upon others. This enables him to leave to God the responsibility for the unfolding of his life. Thus when Ruth suggests that he, Abraham, may be the one responsible for having consumed his sons in his ravenous appetite for something great to result from his progeny, the realization of such a possibility sends Abraham reeling. He loses touch with reality, with himself, with God. Unlike Hoda, he cannot turn inward to find God, but continues to look outside himself for an answer: some surcease, for his pain.

The loss of innocence or, more accurately, the acquiring of self-awareness and responsibility in Hoda, is a gradual, recursive process in keeping with the breaking-withdrawing-mending cycle of the novel. The total loss of innocence therefore does not take her completely by surprise. Though the shock of her encounter with David as a client threatens her sanity, unlike Abraham, she manages to hold onto reality with a tight determined grip.

Wiseman's characters are brought into conflict with society's mores through their innocence -- in Abraham his devouring hubris, in Hoda her blind hedonism -- by committing two of the most heinous crimes of modern society. As the significance of the crimes and the multitude of errors antecedent to those crimes grows in Abraham and Hoda, they recognize the necessity for atonement and retribution.

Abraham's punishment, which he endures with the magnanimity of a character with his strength and determination, must be undergone in an asylum for the insane on Mad Mountain. Abraham may not participate in a society to which he has been unable to adapt. He spends his days in prayer, preparing for his atonement. His experience of retribution is religious and solitary, whereas Hoda, the more modern Jew, suffers her retribution not apart from society but as part of it. She must endure, while hiding the pain of her punishing knowledge, the irrevocable loss of her son and of her dreams, while she continues to care for her father and perform her duties as the local whore.

The methods of achieving redemption for each are in keeping with the religio-literary tradition which has generated them. Abraham is removed from society and through prayer and devotion finds God, while Hoda remains within the maelstrom of society and, in searching for answers within herself, also performs a healing role for her community. Through Hoda, to some extent, *tikkun* is achieved for her community.

Hoda succeeds in achieving an understanding of life in a meaningless universe and becomes an integral part of her community. Abraham fails in reconciling his perceptions of what life should be with the realities of modern life. The significant factor in Abraham failing and Hoda succeeding need not indicate that the myths and heritage of Abraham were inadequate to modern life or that Hoda's myths caused her to

prevail. Rather the failure and success are a reflection of their approaches to life, their self-awareness and, in the process, the adeptness of the characters to relate their myths to the reality of their lives. Abraham is incapable of looking inward, to accept the dichotomies of life, even within himself, and learn from them. Abraham transposes the evil he glimpses in himself onto Laiah, and only following his crime is he able to realize that she could not have personified pure evil, nor could he be completely devoid of evil. Hoda recognizes from an early age that both good and bad may be found within one being or one experience. She spends a life-time learning to balance the dichotomies of existence and the dualities of her private and public self.

The two Judaic literary traditions which contribute to the structure of each of these novels serve Wiseman well in the representation of her characters. Abraham may be characterized as the old world meeting the new. Because of his immutability and inability to turn inward, his narrative has a straightforward story-line of incremental mistakes on his part. In the end his perception of the old fails completely to deal with the new. But hope resides in Moses as the reader recognizes in him the possibility of a balancing of the old world with the new. The dualities of Hoda are not of the old in conflict with the new, as much as they are the inner private needs of an individual confronting the expectations of society on the public persona.

Hoda manages to reconcile the two, as her story follows a spiral pattern of gradual self-knowledge, allowing her to retain her sense of the old world heritage while establishing a place for herself in modern society. Always at the root of her being are the old-world stories of Danile, but like the

metaphor of the breaking vessels, out of the old will burgeon the new.

Even following retribution and atonement, Wiseman's two protagonists continue to live on the edge of society. Abraham is on the outer edge on Mad Mountain for he cannot function within society; Hoda is only precariously on the inside of society, for still she must draw the circle of protection round herself and her family. In this, of course, she is everywoman, for the struggle to balance the self with the demands of an ever-changing society is the universal experience of humanity. But if we can continue to re-weave the myths of our traditions to reflect upon the demands of our realities, as does Hoda, we may find a way to reconcile our past with our present and make meaning of our future.

Wiseman's two novels themselves may be viewed as two treatments on the theme of the old meeting the new. The Sacrifice, employing the structures of biblical narrative, and Crackpot, using a cyclical, mystical narrative structure, allow Wiseman to mirror the struggle to achieve a balance between the

two worlds. The act of her writing the novels in itself represents assimilation into the new world. The concerns and literary beginnings of the novels are solidly rooted in her old world heritage of the religio-literary Judaic tradition, yet they are written in English, the language of the new world. Wiseman, the artist, in offering the old in a new context, has obeyed the ancient command "*zakhor*" and in obeying has done her part to educate and heal her community.

GLOSSARY OF THE HEBRAIC TERMS OF THE LURIANIC MYTH OF CREATION

Adam Kadmon Primordial man.

Bahir Book of Light -- kabbalistic writing of the twelfth-century religio-literary tradition.

Binah Understanding -- one of the first three emanations of *Ein-Sof*.

Din Justice -- an emanation of *Ein-Sof*.

Ein-Sof The Infinite.

Hesed Mercy -- an emanation of *Ein-Sof*.

Hokmah Wisdom -- one of the first three emanations of *Ein-Sof*.

kelippot Shells -- a demonic residue from an earlier attempt at creation which had failed.

Keter Crown -- one of the first three emanations of Ein-Sof.

Sefirot The ten essential elements or emanations of Ein-Sof.

Shekhinah The tenth emanation of the *Sefirot* -- the feminine principle.

shevirah The breaking of the vessels -- a shattering which occurs following *tsimtsum* (withdrawal) because the vessels cannot retain the emanations of *Ein-Sof*

tehiru Primordial space.

tikkun Restoration -- when everything resumes its rightful order, following the chaos of *tsimtsum* (withdrawal) and *shevirah* (the breaking of the vessels). *Tikkun* may be achieved through man's efforts and good works.

tsimtsum Withdrawal -- this may be viewed as an act of

generosity on the part of *Ein-Sof*, as in withdrawing He made room for the creation of *Adam Kadmon* (primordial man).

Zohar Book of Splendour -- a kabbalistic writing which followed *Bahir* and preceded the writings of Isaac Luria.

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