

Texts of Terror

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984),

Hagar

Trible describes;

The opening episodes, located in Canaan, highlight Sarah as she deals with Hagar and Abraham; the closing ones, located in the wilderness, feature Hagar encountering the deity. These structural and content parallels between the scenes highlight their differences. For Hagar, the plot of the first story is circular, moving from bondage to flight to bondage, while the action of the second is linear, proceeding from bondage to expulsion to homelessness.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 10.

Scene One: Genesis 16:1-16

Sarai the Hebrew is married, rich, and free; she is also old and barren. Hagar the Egyptian is single, poor, and bonded; she is also young and fertile. Power belongs to Sarai, the subject of action; powerlessness marks Hagar, the object.

16:4b: When she saw that she had conceived, she” looked with contempt” on her mistress;” “despised her mistress” (NIB); “Her mistress was lowered in her esteem(NJV).

Trible interprets;

Hagar acquires a new vision of Sarai. Hierarchical blinders disappear. The exalted mistress decreases while the lowly maid increases. A reordering of the relationship is the point. By giving her to Abram for a wife, Sarai hoped to be built up. In fact, however, Sarai enhanced the status of the servant to become herself correspondingly lowered in the eyes of Hagar. This unexpected twist provides an occasion for mutuality and equality between two females, but it is not to be. If Hagar experienced new vision, Sarai remains within the old structures. Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 12.

Trible sees Hagar’s running away to wilderness as a liberation:

This runaway pregnant maid has fled from the house of bondage to the wilderness. For her it is a hospitable place, symbolized by a spring on the way to Shur, a region at the Egyptian border. There, with water to nourish life, Hagar is almost home.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 14.

“These two imperatives, return and submit to suffering, bring a divine word of terror to an abused. They also strike at the heart of Exodus faith. Inexplicably, the God who later, seeing (*r’h*) the suffering (*’oni*) of a slave people, come down to deliver them *out of the hand* of the Egyptians (Ex. 3:7-8) here identifies with the oppressor and orders a

servant to return not only to bondage but also to affliction. Thus, the ambiguity present at the beginning of this episode finds its resolution in the approval of affliction.”

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 16.

The angel of the Lord gives Hagar an ambiguous blessing:

Gen. 16:10-12: “The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will so greatly **multiply** your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.”...“Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him **Ishmael**, for the LORD has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a **wild** ass of a man, with **his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him**; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.”

Trible contends;

For her unborn child signifies not just comfort but also suffering. The divine promise of Ishmael means life at the boundary of consolation and desolation... Ishmael is to be a wanderer and loner, in strife even with his own people. ..Responding to these ambivalent promises from the heavenly messenger, Hagar ‘calls the name of Yahweh who has spoken to her’ (Gen.16:13a). Hagar does not call *upon* the name of the deity (*qr’bsm yhw*; cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:4). Instead, she calls the name (*qr’ sm-yhw*) a power attributed to no one else in all the Bible. She calls the name of Yahweh ‘ You are a God of seeing (16:13a). Her naming unites the divine and human encounter; the God who sees and the God who is seen.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 18.

Trible reports;

Sarah enjoys power greater than ever because she has born a son. As the life of the mistress has prospered, the lot of the servant woman has worsened. Sarah the matriarch wants to protect the life of hr own son by casing out (grs) Hagar the slave (16:6b). The deity confirms Sarah’s order; ‘everything Sarah says to you, heed her voice (21:12b). To protect the life of her own child, Sarah commands Abraham, ‘Cast out this slave woman and her son..(21:10a). Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 21-22.

Trible explains;

Departing her land of bondage, Hagar knows not exodus but exile. She wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba (21:14). In reference to physical movement, the verb *wander* (*t’h*) connotes uncertainty, lack or loss of direction, and even destitution. In fact, unlike the region of Shur, the territory of Beersheba provides no water at all. Furthermore, it does not border Egypt. Receiving Hagar in forest exile rather than voluntary flight, this wilderness is an arid and alien place. It offers a deathbed for the child.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 23-24.

From ancient times, however, translators have robbed this woman of her grief by changing the unambiguous female verb forms to masculine constructions. Such alterations make the child lift up his voice and weep. But masculine emendations cannto silence Hagar. A host of feminine verb forms throughout this section witness to her tears;

she departed and she wandered in the wilderness; she found a place for the child to die; she kept a vigil; and she uttered the dread phrase; “the death of the child.” Hagar weeps. Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 24.

Trible adds:

Ishmael prospers. For him the wilderness becomes home and provides work. The choice of a wife for Ishmael highlights tension in Hagar’s story. Having at first promised her innumerable descendants (16:20), God later transferred that promise to Abraham (21:13). In her last act, Hagar guarantees that these descendants will be Egyptians. Thus the mother suggests for herself a future that God has diminished.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 27.

Reflections on Hagar’s Story

It yields an abundance of hermeneutical reflections. In many and varied ways, Hagar shapes and challenges faith. Read in light of contemporary issues and images, her story depicts oppressions in three familiar forms: nationally, class, and sex. Hagar the Egyptian is a maid; Sarah the Hebrew is her mistress. Hagar is powerless because God supports Sarah. Kept in her place, the slave woman is the innocent victim of sue, abuse, and rejection.

As a symbol of the oppressed, Hagar becomes many things to many people. Most specifically, all sorts of rejected women find their stories in her. She is the faithful maid exploited, the black woman used by the male and abused by the female of the ruling class, the surrogate mother, the resident alien without legal resource, the other woman, the runaway youth, the religious fleeing from affliction, the pregnant young woman alone, the expelled wife, the divorced mother with child, the shopping bag lady carrying bread and water, the homeless woman, the indigent relying upon handouts from the power structure, the welfare mother, and the self-effacing female whose own identity shrinks in service to others. Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 28.

Trible names Hagar “a pivotal figure in biblical theology. She is the first person in Scripture whom a divine messenger visits and the only person who dares to name the deity. Within the historical memories of Israel, she is the first woman to bear a child. This conception and birth make her an extraordinary figure in the story of faith: the first woman to hear an annunciation, the only one to receive a divine promise of descendants, and the first to weep for her dying child, Truly, Hagar the Egyptian is the prototype of not only special but all mothers in Israel. Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 28.

Hagar foreshadows Israel’s pilgrimage of faith through contrasts. As a maid in bondage, she flees from suffering. Yet she experiences exodus without liberation, revelation without salvation, wilderness without covenant, wanderings without land, promise without fulfillment, and unmerited exile without return. This Egyptian slave woman is stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted for the transgressions of Israel. She is bruised for the iniquities of Sarah and Abraham; upon her is the chastisement that makes them whole. Hagar is Israel, from exodus to exile, yet with differences. And these differences yield terror. All we who are heirs of Sarah and Abraham, by flesh and spirit, must answer for the terror in Hagar’s story. To neglect the theological challenge she presents is to falsify faith. Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 28.

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An Unnamed concubine (Judges 19:1-30).

It is a story of Levite's concubine; Levite has an honored place in society that sets him above many other males; a concubine has an inferior status that places her beneath other females. Legally and socially, she is not the equivalent of a wife but a virtually a slave, secured by a man for his own purposes.¹

“A certain Levite, residing in the remote parts of the hill country of Ephraim, took to himself a concubine from Bethlehem in Judah (Judges 19:1).

He is subject; she, object. He controls her.

But his concubine became angry with at him, and she went away from him to her father's house at Bethlehem in Judah, and was there some four months. (Judges 19:2-3 a).

He went (hlc) after her to speak tenderly to her and bring her back Judges 19: 3a).

The Levite's speaking to the heart of his concubine indicates love for her...He seeks reconciliation. On account of his father-in-law's hospitality he stayed there for four days and on the fifth night he got up and departed, and arrived opposite Jebus (that is, Jerusalem). When they were near Jebus, the master didn't want to spend the night there because it was a city of foreigners, who do not belong to the people of Israel; but He continued on to Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. He went in and sat down in the open square of the city, but no one took them in to spend the night. When the old man saw him he brought him into his house, and fed the donkeys; they washed their feet, and ate and drank (19:4-21).

While they were enjoying themselves, the men of the city, a perverse lot, surrounded the house, and started pounding on the door. They said to the old man, the master of the house, “Bring out the man who came into your house, so that we may have intercourse with him.” And the man, the master of the house, went out to them and said to them, “No, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Since this man is my guest, do not do this vile thing. Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them; but against this man do not do such a vile thing.” But the men would not listen to him. So the man seized his concubine, and put her out to them. They wantonly

raped her, and abused her all through the night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go. As morning appeared, the woman came and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light. (Judges 19:22-26).

As the story unfolds, the old man offered an alternative. To counterbalance prohibition he grants permission. Two female objects he offers to protect a male from a group of wicked "brothers." One of these women is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh, his very own daughter. The other belongs to his guest. Both are expendable to the demands of wicked men. He gives wicked men a license to rape them.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 74.

There is a similar story in Gen. 19:1-29 where Lot persuaded strangers to enter his home... the men of Sodom surrounded his home and repeated what the men in Gibeah did. This time Lot offered her two daughters who have not known men (Gen. 19:8). Lot said to the wicked men "only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof(Gen. 19:8). No male was to be violated but sacrificed females.

According to Trible, these two stories show that rules of hospitality in Israel protect only males. Though Lot entertained men alone, the old man has female guest, and no hospitality safeguards her. She is chosen as the victim for male lust.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 75.

Chilling part is that the Levite, the overnight guest, seized (hzq) his concubine and pushed to them outside. (Judges 19:25b). The one who was seeking out his concubine to speak tenderly turns her over to the enemy to save himself. The woman is betrayed into the hands of sinners (cf. Mark:14:41). No one within the house comes to her aid.

They raped her and tortured her all night until the morning (Judges 19:25d). The crime was not a single deed but rather multiple acts of violence.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 76.

In the morning her master got up, opened the doors of the house, and when he went out to go on his way, there was his concubine lying at the door of the house, with her hands on the threshold. Levite tells her "Get up, we are going." But there was no answer. Then he put her on the donkey; and the man set out for his home. 29 When he had entered his house, he took a knife, and grasping his concubine he cut her into twelve pieces, limb by limb, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel. 30 Then he commanded the men whom he sent, saying, "Thus shall you say to all the Israelites, 'Has such a thing ever happened a since the day that the Israelites came up from the land of Egypt until this day? Consider it, take counsel, and speak out' " (Judges 19:27-30)

Trible laments:

She is property, object, tool, and literary device. Without name, speech, or power, she has no friends to aid her in life or mourn her in death. Passing her back and forth among themselves, the men of Israel have obliterated her totally. Captured, betrayed, raped, tortured, murdered, dismembered, and scattered. In the end, she is no more than the oxen that Saul will later cut in pieces and send throughout all the territory of Israel as a call to war (I Sam. 11:7). Her life is laid down by a man.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 80-81.

This woman was homeless and never came home because there was no home for her on earth. This woman represents all homeless women, who are abused, used, exploited and their bodies and souls are cut up into pieces.

Add the rest of the story P. 82- (Judges 20-21)

Daughter of Jephthah

This story of Jephthah's daughter belongs to the days of the judges. In the eleventh century, when Ammon becomes a kingdom in Transjordan with Rabbah as its capital city, that nation begins to oppress the children of Israel, specifically those living in the territory of Gilead with Mizpah as their principal city. For the Deuteronomic theologians, whose judgment prefaces the Jephthah cycle, this military threat is the work of the Lord, God is punishing Israel for its apostasy (Judges 10:6-16). After confessing their sins, the children of Israel seek a deliverer, one to lead the fight against the Ammonites (Judges 10:17-18).

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 93-94.

When he does see her, Jephthah rents his clothes (Judges 11:35a). It is a gesture of despair, grief, and mourning. 'Ah, my daughter! to be followed, however, by strong words of accusation: 'You have brought me low (*kr*); You have become my calamity ('*kr*; 11:35b). Repeatedly, Jephthah's language triumphs; blame overwhelms the victim. At the moment of recognition and disclosure, Jephthah thinks of himself and indicts his daughter for the predicament. 'I' (*anoki*), he continues 'have opened my mouth to

Yahweh, and I cannot turn back' (11:35c). Faithfulness to an unfaithful vow has condemned its victim. Although his daughter has served him devotedly with music and dance, Jephthah bewails the calamity that she brings upon him. And throughout it all God says nothing. Daughter response;

if you opened your mouth to Yahweh, do to me according to what goes forth from your mouth, since Yahweh has done to you deliverance from your enemies, from the Ammorites (11:36).

In Judges 11: 37-40, the daughter said to her father;

“Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander a on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I.” “Go,” he said and sent her away for two months. So she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made. She had never slept with a man. So there arose an Israelite custom that for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite (Judges 11: 37-40).

According to Tribble, the request is for a respite, a time and place apart from her father and his vow. That time is to be filled with lamentation, not for death, but for unfulfilled life... this particular death defies all the categories of the natural and the expected. First, it is premature; life ends before its potential has unfolded. If King Hezekiah could weep bitterly that “in the noontide” of his days he must depart (Is. 38:3, 10), how much more this child must lament in the morning of her life. Second, her death is to be violent. Death by faire is bitter death, and more bitter still when its author is her very own father. Third, her death will leave no heirs because she is a virgin. What alone designated fulfillment for every Hebrew woman, the bearing of children, will never be hers to know (cf. I Sam. 1:1-20). Truly, with no child to succeed her, she may be numbered among the unremembered, those “who have perished as though they had not lived.” Premature, violent, without an heir: all the marks of unnatural death befalls this young woman, and Here is premeditated death, a sentence of murder passed upon an innocent victim because of the faithless vow uttered by her foolish father

Phyllis Tribble. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 103-104.

Tribble continues;

She adds “I (*anoki*) and my female friends;” at the time of deepest sorrow, the last days of her life, the girl reaches out to other women. She chooses them to go with her to wander upon the hills and lament her virginity. In communion with her own kind, she transcends the distance between daughter and father. After this reference to female friends, she speaks no more. Within the limits of the inevitable she has shaped meaning for herself.

Phyllis Tribble. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 104.

Father grants the request, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months. In the company of other women who acknowledge her tragedy, she is neither alone nor isolated. At the end of two months, the daughter returns to the father (11:39a). He did to her his

vow which he had vowed (11:39b). Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 105.

In the story of the daughter of Jephthah, no angel intervenes to save the child. The father carries out the human vow precisely as he spoke it; neither God nor man nor woman negates it. Though the son (Isaac) was saved, the daughter is slain. Under the power of the vow, the daughter has breathed her last. My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me? Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 106.

Four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite (Judges 11:40): The unnamed virgin child becomes a tradition in Israel because the women with whom she chose to spend her last days have not let her pass into oblivion. They have established a testimony: activities of mourning reiterated yearly in a special place. This they have done in remembrance of her (cf. I Cor. 11:24-25). Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 107.

Trible adds;

Throughout centuries patriarchal hermeneutics has forgotten the daughter of Jephthah but remembered her father, exalted him as an exemplary judge (Judges 12:7; I Sam. 12:11; Sirach 46:11-12; Heb. 11:32-34; But readers, like the daughters of Israel, we remember and mourn the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite. In her death, we are all diminished; by our memory she is forever hallowed.

Phyllis Trible. *Texts of Terror* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 108.

This is another homeless woman who never came home but found home in the hearts and souls of many other women who share pain and grief for the loss of their lives and mourn for her and with her.