

REVISITING A TRADITION WITH NEW TOOLS: FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON HEBREW LITERATURE IN THE 1980S

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Applying feminist theories and sensibilities to Hebrew literature in the early 1980s meant breaking new ground in the study of Hebrew literature. At the time, feminist readings of the Hebrew Bible were already sprouting in the US, yet neither scholars writing in Hebrew nor in English have approached Modern Hebrew literature from a feminist angle. It is no wonder that the first scholarly endeavors in this area were published in the USA, by Esther Fuchs and me, Nehama Aschkenasy; we found ourselves in an academic environment and publishing realities which favored the “new” discipline of feminist studies. This paper discusses a variety of difficulties and dilemmas I encountered in the early 1980s: feminist methodology and theory were at their infancy; the differences between theories that worked within English literary tradition and those I tried to apply to Hebrew literature had to be considered; the need to present the study in a way not “menacing” to male scholars (publishers first sent my manuscript to only male scholars, and therefore I had to claim a reconstruction from an off-center angle, but dissociate myself from any attempt to deconstruct existing interpretations); my own reluctance to condemn a tradition that I had admired and a male cultural voice that I had been conditioned to “buy into”; the “hermeneutics of suspicion” clashed with my innate tendency to defend the tradition. To take a tradition representing the marginalized, oppressed, and persecuted and reveal that it, too, engaged in the same suppression within itself with regard to the female voice was hard to do. Personally and retrospectively, I’ll discuss what led me to this path in scholarship; I was a pioneer in my own school in teaching two courses: “Women in Literature (European and English) to the 1900” and “Women in Literature in the Twentieth-Century,” an experience that motivated and prepared me for the effort in Hebraic literature; why I chose both male and female-authored texts, and why I chose the basically structuralist approach to follow the permutations of female prototypes from their early appearances to contemporary literature, only to break away from it. The reception *Eve’s Journey* had received in the late 1980s in the academic community in the USA will also be discussed.